Slavery's Soldiers: Armed Resistance in the Anglo-atlantic, 1676-1823

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Enslaved people resisted Atlantic chattel bondage in violent ways since the development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. They also served as soldiers for White owners in various conflicts that also furthered White interests. Scholars of slavery and resistance in the Atlantic world have long held the belief that enslaved people in early America and the United States did not resist the Atlantic chattel system in the same ways or as frequently as other bond people in the Caribbean or Latin America. Moreover, enslaved soldiers are often portrayed as loyal subjects who fought in war and armed conflict to advance imperial interests including slavery. This dissertation examines how enslaved soldiers interpreted violent upheavals and compares their response to conventional incidents of slave insurrection and marronnage throughout the Atlantic. The comparative analysis offers new insight into how enslaved Black people interpreted several conflicts in early American history, and contributes to recent scholarship that has re-conceptualized our understanding of the nature of slave resistance and connections to warfare.
This project employs five case studies in the British and U.S. regions of the Atlantic world to show how enslaved people and Maroons took up arms and participated as soldiers in conflicts traditionally thought to have been fought over colonial or imperial interests. These conflicts include Nathaniel Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia in 1676, the Yamasee War in South Carolina in 1715, the “Ethiopian Regiment” in Virginia during the American Revolutionary War, the Eighth West India Regiment mutiny in the British Caribbean colony of Dominica in 1802, and enslaved participation in several connected conflicts in the Gulf Coast borderlands of northern Florida and southern Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi from 1812 to 1823.

These conflicts illuminate in different ways how enslaved soldiers fought for their own interests in the Anglo-Atlantic and enable me to assess how armed resistance shaped the lives of Black people of all sorts as they struggled to survive, obtain freedom, or just live during the rise and fall of the Atlantic slave system. I use legal records, contemporary accounts, newspapers, administrative and military correspondence, and personal papers from British, French, and Spanish colonists in North America and the Caribbean from various archives in the United States and abroad. Where Black voices are missing, I use records that describe the actions of enslaved people and Maroons that help me infer Black interests and perspectives. My work shows that opportunities to attack the chattel slavery system were far more frequent in early America than previously thought, and many enslaved people and Maroons did not hesitate to seize upon them. Indeed, slave resistance throughout early American history became increasingly militarized throughout the eighteenth century and well into the Age of Emancipation.
SLAVERY’S SOLDIERS: ARMED RESISTANCE IN THE ANGLO-ATLANTIC, 1676-1823

BY
JUSTIN IVERSON
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
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FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Doctoral Director:
Aaron S. Fogleman
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Shortly before my scheduled deployment to Laghman Province, Afghanistan, in 2010 I suffered a severe traumatic brain injury from a parachuting accident north of Tampa, Florida. I was medevac’d to St. Joseph’s Hospital where I stayed in the intensive care unit for several weeks. Just hours from certain death, I underwent emergency brain surgery to treat several bleeds in my brain and intracranial pressure. I am forever grateful to Dr. Gabriel Gonzales-Portillo who saved my life with this procedure and whose surgical precision and discretion gave me the opportunity to recoup much of my cognition that the injury depleted. I am forever grateful to the other wonderful medical professionals at St. Joseph’s who also cared for me during this crisis, many of whom I will never know their names or the full extent of their tireless efforts. My special thanks to Stuart Crook there as well, who connected me to mutual military acquaintances that stretched across the country and which made a lengthy stay in the hospital much more tolerable.

I am also grateful to the professionals at the James A. Haley VA Hospital in Tampa, where I stayed between brain surgeries and where I began a long road to recovery. Like the staff at St. Joseph’s, there are many at the Haley VA whose names I never learned or those that I have since forgotten that I would also like thank for their assistance in my recovery. Among those whom I do recall, Mike Rohr, Linda Picon, Adam Kajanksi, Dr. Patel, Dr. Marissa McCarthy, and Dr. Angela Eastvald were pleasures to work with, while Abby Chiovaro and Jamie Kaplan provided the right amount of sarcasm to make months of hospitalization bearable. I would also like to thank the team of therapists at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago who also led me
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interests has been unwavering. For that I am forever grateful.
DEDICATION

To the medical and military professionals devoted to caring for traumatic brain injury patients
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NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

I have taken care to use the adjectival phrase “enslaved” instead of “slave” to refer to the unfree people of the African diaspora featured in this work. Conversely, I have tried to refer to people who owned enslaved people as “slave owners” or “slave holders” instead of the term “master.” I believe it is important to highlight this power dynamic and restore agency and humanity to people kept in bondage in the Atlantic World. However, out of sheer preference for greater lexical and stylistic diversity, I do use the terms “slave” and occasionally “master” throughout this work. Additionally, while the term “rebel” typically refers to enslaved people who were resisting their own enslavement featured in this work, in Chapter Two I occasionally use this term to refer to Nathaniel Bacon’s forces more broadly, which contemporaries and historians since have often employed. Finally, the soldiers and slave rebels that I examine in this work were both African and American born. Some were also biracial (see especially this discussion of the Gulf Coast borderlands Maroons in Chapter Six). In cases where it is probable that some slave soldiers were born in Africa, the Caribbean, or mainland North America, I therefore use “African” and “African American” to denote their origin. I do not, however, use these terms to signify acculturation or creolization among these people. More broadly, I also use the terms “Blacks” or “Black people” interchangeably with “African” and “African American.” The term “Whites” is also used generally to refer to European colonists and American born people of European descent.
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INTRODUCTION

Enslaved Black people took up arms and fought in nearly every colonial conflict in early British North America. They fought in Nathaniel Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia in 1676, in the Tuscarora and Yamasee Wars in the Carolinas and Georgia in the second decade of the eighteenth century, in Florida during the War of Jenkins’ Ear in 1740, in Virginia and Pennsylvania in the French and Indian War from 1754 to 1763, and throughout North America and the Caribbean during the American Revolutionary War, among many other conflicts. They fought in several other armed engagements elsewhere in the British Atlantic in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, as well. They helped attack enemy positions in the sixteenth century, and they helped defend Caribbean colonies from French, Spanish, and Dutch attacks as early as 1640. They helped colonial militias fight Maroons by the early eighteenth century in Jamaica, and they routinely helped slaveholders fight against slave insurrection. By the early nineteenth century, there were thousands of enslaved soldiers in the British Army who fought in North and South America, in the Caribbean, and in Africa for various interests of the British Empire. They often fought for their owners as ordered or in hopes of being manumitted for faithful and good service. Others were sometimes forced to fight, and some used the opportunity that violent conflict produced to run away from slavery. Still others turned coat and fought for their masters’ enemies.¹

¹ Karen Ordahl Kupperman, Providence Island, 1630-1641: The Other Puritan Colony (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 170n72; Jerome Handler, “Freedmen and
Slave soldiers fought for every other European colonial empire in the Atlantic as well, and they took part in some of the first conquests in the Caribbean and the Americas. During the rise of Atlantic slave trading, they also helped guard European slave forts along the Atlantic coast in Africa, and they fought to protect the developing slave trade. Yet they also fought against the slave trade in Africa, and many were enslaved due to war and armed conflict in Africa. Their role with respect to White empires built on Black slavery in the Atlantic has thus perplexed historians for decades, and historians have questioned how and why enslaved soldiers participated in conflicts that seemingly reinforced White colonization and Black slavery throughout the littoral.²

Historians have long been familiar with some of these soldiers’ exploits since as early as the mid-nineteenth century when abolitionists like William Cooper Nell wrote some of the first histories of enslaved people’s contributions to early American war efforts. Nell thought that if he demonstrated how enslaved Black people fought to secure American independence, he could undercut slave holders who wanted to preserve slavery in the United States. He therefore highlighted Black contributions to the war effort to promote emancipation. By the early twentieth century, W.B. Hartgrove and Benjamin Quarles produced comprehensive histories of Black

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soldiers in the American Revolution and in the colonial militia. Their efforts were responses to racism during the period and White ideas that Black people had not fought for American independence. By showing that free Black and enslaved Black people had fought and sacrificed for the American republic, they could improve race relations and contribute to the fight for Civil Rights. Since the modern Civil Rights Movement, there has been a steady surge in research on free Black and enslaved soldiers in early America, and scholars have sought to demonstrate how Black soldiers contributed to American military history. In more recent years several scholars have also more closely examined the practice of arming slaves in the Atlantic world, in which they build on these earlier histories of Black soldiers.3

Conversely, throughout the history of slavery in North America, enslaved people took up arms to rebel against Atlantic chattel slavery and attack their owners. While successful rebellion was a rare exception, during insurrection some rebels successfully ran away and formed Maroon communities in outlying swamps, mountains, and forests, where they could evade their former owners and escape the horrors of chattel slavery. Scholars have studied slave rebellions and Maroons in the Atlantic world for almost a century to better understand the nature of Atlantic slavery and to assess its impact on the people who endured it. Initial assessments of these violent episodes of resistance underscored how rare they were in the present-day United States compared to the Caribbean, and how their apparent absence reflected the benignity of American slavery. But these first investigations were also marred by racist notions of White scholars in the early twentieth century and reflected the biases of southern historians like U.B. Phillips, who believed that masters treated their slaves well enough to inhibit mass insurrection. By 1943, Herbert Aptheker forcefully rejected this notion and enumerated approximately 250 slave insurrections in U.S. history in *American Negro Slave Revolts*. By enumerating so many slave rebellions, Aptheker believed he dispelled earlier racist and apologetic histories of slavery in the United States. The fact that many enslaved people collaborated with poor Whites during these movements suggested to Aptheker that class tensions were also elevated in early America and

the United States during the rise and fall of Atlantic chattel slavery. Since then, historians who tend to stress class tensions in the Atlantic world have produced influential works that also demonstrate the collusion of Black slaves and poor Whites. Notably, these works include Eugene Genovese’s *Roll Jordan Roll* in 1976, and Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s *The Many Headed Hydra* in 2000. Although these more recent interpretations of slave resistance follow in Aptheker’s footsteps, they are no longer attempts to dispel slavery apologetics, but instead to critique coercive labor and social inequality tied to the rise of modern capitalism in the Atlantic world.⁴

Another school of thought emerged in the 1970s that followed the important debate on the survival of African cultures in the Americas between Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits in the 1940s. Historians and anthropologists in this camp have used slave revolts and Maroon communities to measure the presence of African idioms and to gauge the development of African-American culture among enslaved people in the Atlantic littoral.⁵ Since runaway slaves fled to isolated areas to form Maroon bands, some scholars thought that their contemporary descendants offered evidence regarding the destruction or preservation of African


cultures among enslaved people during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. For scholars studying slave revolts, drawing out African idioms expressed during rebellions has been a way to demonstrate when African-American culture developed and to better understand why and how enslaved Africans resisted. In these ways, we get a better sense of how slavery transformed culture, and how slavery continued to influence race relations well after abolition in the nineteenth century. Notably, Gerald Mullin has argued that unlike recently arrived African slaves, those who were acculturated in Virginia were more likely to run away than participate in a rebellion. Meanwhile, James Sidbury has argued that Virginia slaves appropriated White Virginian identity that they expressed in Gabriel’s conspiracy in 1800, while John Thornton and Walter Rucker have repeatedly identified Africanisms in the South Carolina Stono Rebellion in 1739, in the 1741 New York conspiracy, in the Haitian Revolution in 1791-1804, and as late as Nat Turner’s Virginia 1831 insurrection. For them, rebellions and conspiracies provide substantial documentary record to measure and demonstrate the survival and influence of African culture in the diaspora.6

Notwithstanding these studies, a new wave of scholarship has emerged in the last twenty-five years that seeks to re-conceptualize the frequency and scope of slave rebellions and Maroon

societies and has tied resistance in both to warfare. This school has challenged historians to reconsider the nature of resistance and what slave participation in warfare actually meant. Hugo Leaming and Sylviane Diouf have demonstrated more broadly that *marronnage* in the United States was not uncommon, while Nathaniel Millet, Daniel Sayers, and Timothy Lockley have all demonstrated that large Maroon societies existed in northern Florida, the Great Dismal Swamp in North Carolina and Virginia, and in various locations in South Carolina. This explosion of research in America’s Maroon communities is also tied to the new trend of uncovering slave insurrections in warfare. First informed by the works of Africanists like Philip Curtin and Paul Lovejoy, Sylvia Frey argued in *Water from the Rock* in 1991 that the flight of thousands of slaves in South Carolina and Georgia during the Revolutionary War was a type of slave revolt. Notably, Larry Rivers has argued that the Black Seminole Maroons involved in the Second Seminole War from 1835 to 1842 were part of the largest slave rebellion in American history in terms of size, scope, and intensity, while Steven Hahn has repeatedly argued that the participation of enslaved people in the American Civil War equated to the largest slave rebellion in modern history. For many scholars in this school, slave resistance was even more frequent.

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than previously thought and it was an inherently political act, which also underscored a longer trajectory of how African Americans fought for political and civic equality in the United States.8

While some scholars have found slave revolts in conventional warfare, others have asked what slave rebellions meant for enslaved Africans and have tied rebellion to war by highlighting how enslaved rebels fought like soldiers. John Thornton, Vincent Brown, and Manuel Barcia have demonstrated that slave rebels utilized firearms and employed West African military tactics, techniques, and procedures during the Stono Rebellion in 1739, in Tacky’s Rebellion in Jamaica in 1760, in the Haitian Revolution from 1791 to 1804, and in rebellions in Cuba and Brazil in the nineteenth century. In all these revolts, rebels relied on their military experiences in Africa to fight against White armies and for their own freedom. Meanwhile, Matt Childs has also shown how rebels in the 1812 Aponte Rebellion in Cuba were members of the Black militia who used their military experience to prepare the insurrection. These episodes thus revealed that slave

resistance could be acts of war against slavery, and that enslaved Africans repeatedly made war against the Atlantic slave system. In sum, military histories of early America and the British Atlantic, histories of slave rebellions and Maroons, and interpretations of warfare in the African diaspora and trans-Atlantic slave trade remain disconnected, but scholars have begun to flesh out warfare in enslaved resistance movements, while also finding resistance in times of war and armed conflict. Thus, an emerging wave of scholars seeks to further our understanding of the relationship between resistance and war and how slaves interpreted and acted on these opportunities.\(^9\)

This work contributes to this new wave of scholarship to show how slave soldiers interpreted these violent upheavals in ways that challenge us to reconsider how we think about large-scale armed conflict and Black resistance. It brings these three streams of thought together to show that slave soldiers and plantation slave and Maroon rebels were sometimes one in the same. It examines how slave and Maroon soldiers in early America and the British Atlantic turned colonial and imperial warfare and rebellion into opportunities to achieve and preserve their own freedom. It examines how these goals or methods of slave soldiers involved in “armed resistance” changed over time from the early period of establishing the Atlantic slave system to the Age of Emancipation. It looks at whether or not armed resistance differed in the British

Atlantic based on geography, or if it differed in conflicts involving Native Americans. It investigates if armed resistance differed when other European imperial powers were involved.

This work examines approximately 150 years of enslaved people taking up arms in times of war and rebellion to resist the Atlantic chattel slave system. It investigates five cases in early America and the British Atlantic in which slaves took up arms and participated as soldiers in conflicts traditionally thought to have been fought over colonial or imperial policy or as “Indian wars.” In each conflict, slave soldiers took up arms for Anglo-Americans and served as soldiers to fight for them to serve various interests in the British Empire. But in each conflict, they also fought against their owners. We know a lot about these conflicts from White and Native American perspectives, but we know much less about how enslaved Black soldiers and Maroons interpreted them. Yet each case captures a moment of “armed resistance” in the Anglo-Atlantic and shows how enslaved people viewed soldiering. In each case, slave and Maroon soldiers used military conflict as an avenue to challenge the slave system and turned war and rebellion into battles about Black liberation. They thus give us a better sense of the relationship between war and slavery. They give us a better sense of how slavery influenced war, and how war can transform slavery. They give us a better sense of how soldiering intersected with other forms of resistance by enslaved people. Examining enslaved soldiers also gives us a better sense of how people living in difficult or desperate circumstances mobilize for conflicts unrelated to them, and a deeper understanding of the meaning and experience of slavery and war altogether.

This work uses case studies to examine how slave soldiers fought in early America and in the British Atlantic. Each case represents a different type of armed conflict that slave soldiers used to fight for freedom in various places in the Atlantic world. These conflicts included
internal imperial rebellions, wars with Native American allies and enemies, and conflicts with other European allies and enemies. Each case also represents a different type of military service that slave soldiers used in various places in the Atlantic world. They fought in colonial militias, in professional armies in times of crisis, and in professional armies during times of peace. The cases provide comparative analytical value in and of themselves, and part of the contribution this work makes is with its comparative Atlantic analysis. I compare and contrast each case to other incidents of slave insurrection and Maroon warfare throughout the Atlantic littoral and over time. This helps us to understand how armed slaves did or did not parallel concurrent slave resistance movements during the period of study. Although there are some general patterns across time and space, I try to compare each case to incidents of rebellion and *marronnage* that were closely related in terms of both geography and temporality. This allows for a closer comparison of militarized slave revolts and Maroon warfare with enslaved soldiers, and how their efforts were similar or different.

I examine cases only in the British realm of the Atlantic world because military slavery and the manner in which Whites were willing to arm free and enslaved Black people differed in the Anglo-Atlantic than elsewhere in the littoral, or in the rest of the British global empire. Indeed, historians have shown that, unlike the Spanish, Portuguese, French, and others, British colonists and imperial authorities were reluctant to permit free Black and enslaved people to take up arms and serve in military units in the Atlantic world. While every European empire employed enslaved soldiers on the coast of Africa to protect slave forts and defend their slave trading operations, British colonists became reluctant to employ slave soldiers on the other side of the Atlantic and to develop independent free Black and slave military units like their European
counterparts. Enslaved soldiers participated in Spanish conquests in the Americas in the sixteenth century, and formal all-Black militias were formed in almost every Spanish colony by the seventeenth century. Aside from protecting Spanish colonists from Native American, British, French, and Dutch attacks, they also fought Maroons and tracked runaway slaves. Similarly, enslaved soldiers fought for Portuguese interests in all Black units like the Terço de Gente Preta in northeast Brazil in the mid-seventeenth century. Enslaved soldiers were also used to fight the Palmares Maroons as early as the 1640s. The Dutch too employed slave soldiers in the mid-seventeenth century in Brazil, and they even considered conscripting African veterans to serve in the militia in Curacao near the end of the seventeenth century. Slaves were definitely serving in the island’s militia by the first decade of the eighteenth century, while they also served in militias in Suriname in the early eighteenth century. Slaves and free Blacks served in their own militias in the French Atlantic by the early eighteenth century as well, such as in the Maréchausée in Saint Domingue in 1721. A permanent free Black militia existed in French Louisiana by 1739. The Danish also established an all-Black “corps” on St. John as early as 1721.  

But in the British Atlantic, colonial authorities more often prohibited free Black and enslaved people from arming or serving in colonial militias. To be sure, English privateers like Sir Francis Drake relied on Maroon soldiers for help fight against the Spanish in Panama as early as in the late sixteenth century, and in times of crisis English colonists did enlist the help of enslaved soldiers by the mid-seventeenth century. By 1640 slaves helped the English defend Providence Island near present-day Colombia from a Spanish attack, and some slaves helped the English fight in Santo Domingo in 1654. In the 1660s slaves were first incorporated into the Barbados militia in what may be the earliest case of slave soldiers in the British Atlantic. The 1681 Militia Act in Jamaica also required Blacks to help defend the colony, while Deputy Governor Charles Lyllton proclaimed Maroon leader Juan de Bolas to be the leader of some sort of Maroon “militia” in the 1660s and 1670s. But all too often enslaved people did not serve as soldiers but as military laborers, and they were often prohibited from carrying firearms. All too often they returned to their previous status once peace returned, and permanent free Black and slave militias did not develop as early or as widespread as they did in French, Spanish, Portuguese, or Dutch colonies. “Black Shot” slave soldiers who fought against Maroons in Jamaica did not muster until the 1730s during the First Maroon War, but Jamaican colonists still recruited Indians to fight the rebels throughout the conflict. Once peace was reached with the Maroons, the Maroons essentially made Black units obsolete since the Maroons promised to

provide military assistance in case of foreign invasion and slave insurrection. While Maria Bollettino has recently demonstrated that English colonists were willing to use slave soldiers earlier than previously thought, the general pattern persists that British colonists only used slave soldiers in times of crisis and conflict throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This contrasted significantly with other European imperial forces in the Americas, who had been using large numbers of enslaved Black people for military purposes since the late seventeenth century and seemed to have less reservations about it. Indeed, it was not until the end of the American Revolutionary War that the first permanent peacetime enslaved army developed in the Anglo-Atlantic with the establishment of the West India Regiments, which also became the largest professional slave army in the Atlantic world.\footnote{11} Thus, the ways in which slave soldiers served and took up arms in the Anglo-Atlantic were unique in the larger Atlantic world. In addition, while Black slaves served in British military units around the world, the nature of chattel slavery and slave resistance was unique in the Atlantic world, where conditions for enslaved Black people were worse and where slave insurrection was not uncommon.\footnote{12}


\footnote{12} Resistance strategies among enslaved Black people differed in other systems of slavery. For example see Edward Alpers, Gwyn Campbell, and Michael Salman, eds. Resisting Bondage in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia (New York: Routledge, 2007) 2;
Finally, while this work examines enslaved people who used military service and took up arms, it excludes Black sailors, including pirates, those who served for merchants, on slave ships, and those who eventually served in the Royal Navy, all of whom were ultimately part of a different story. Indeed, Europeans of all sorts relied on Black sailors since the beginning of Atlantic history to support trade, colonization, and slavery, and there did not appear to be the same reservations about their military use than their concerns about slave soldiers on land.13

While I examine cases of slave soldiers only in the British Atlantic, I have also used legal records, contemporary accounts, newspapers, administrative and military correspondence, and personal papers from English, French, and Spanish colonists in North America and the Caribbean for my comparative Atlantic analysis. Judicial records that include testimonies and official reports provide substantial documentation of slave insurrections and Maroon warfare, and are the foundation for assessing rebellions in comparative Atlantic perspective. Administrative reports from colonial bureaucrats and military correspondence held in the War, Colonial, and Foreign Offices at the National Archives in Kew, United Kingdom, also highlight the nature of enslaved fighting and provide data to establish rebel demography and composition for my comparative analysis. Manuscripts in the British Library in London have also been valuable to determine patterns of marronnage in Jamaica to use for the comparative approach. In addition, Court of General Sessions minutes, planter journals, the Daniel Parish transcripts of material on slavery in the British Public Record Office, and rare books in the New York Public Library and New York Historical Society have been important to determine patterns in other

slave rebellions throughout the Atlantic. Black voices are paramount in these records, but I have also been careful to scrutinize documents that promote White authority and slave owner power, and I acknowledge that enslaved people also created a private dialogue to critique that power. When Black voices are missing in these accounts or correspondences, I rely on White and Native American accounts that describe the actions of enslaved people, which enables me to infer Black interests and perspectives. I read against the grain in these sources to further draw out these perspectives.  

My findings show that slave resistance in the British Atlantic and early US republic was increasingly militarized, by which I mean that enslaved soldiers, Maroons, and plantation rebels together relied on military methods, institutions, and operations to achieve their goals. Enslaved soldiers relied on military service to attack the slave system, and Maroons and plantation rebels used martial tactics, techniques, and procedures as well to do the same. Military violence increasingly became their *modus operandi*. The militarization of slave resistance increased significantly in the mid-to-late seventeenth century and continued to rise throughout the eighteenth century and well into the Age of Revolution. It surged with the rise of the Atlantic chattel slave system, and it survived the first assaults on slavery that revolutionary ideology wrought. It surged in conjunction with other resistance efforts like running away, work slowdowns, and other day to day acts of insubordination that were also parts of the much larger story of resistance to slavery. It surged even after the abolition movement along with others who relied on non-violence and the rhetoric of revolution to promote Black freedom. Enslaved people

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took up arms and became soldiers in various conflicts in the British Atlantic, and they turned them into conflicts about Black liberation.

This story of armed resistance begins with Nathaniel Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia in 1676, what most historians describe as a revolt by lower-class White settlers against their superiors and against Native Americans. Bacon’s Rebellion marked the first major conflict in British North American history in which enslaved Africans and African Americans took up arms as a group and participated in a major, lengthy, violent conflagration. It may have also been the first time in British Atlantic history in which Black slaves revolted in the midst of a White rebellion. As one of the most seminal events in seventeenth-century English colonization of North America, examining how enslaved Black people participated and interpreted the rebellion sheds more light on what it actually meant for all early Americans and what it meant for the rise of chattel slavery in mainland North America. As a case study, the conflict also shows how enslaved people began using military service and military methods to resist the chattel system, and how they used an internal-imperial military conflict to further their own agendas. It shows how enslaved soldiers began turning armed conflict into struggles about slavery. To assess slave involvement in Bacon’s Rebellion I examined narratives, personal grievances, and the Royal Commissioners’ report produced shortly after the rebellion that have since been published or are held in the Colonial Office in Kew. I have also used traveler accounts and bureaucratic correspondence to assess the state of Virginia before the rebellion and if slaves were responding to conditions that promoted insurrection. I have otherwise used the official correspondence of Secretary of State Henry Coventry held in the Library of Virginia in Richmond to determine how slaves participated in Bacon’s army and how they fought. During the conflict, slave soldiers
mobilized to fight for Bacon against Governor William Berkeley and imperial authorities, and they were among the last soldiers to surrender. The participation of enslaved Black soldiers in the rebellion reveals that the slave system was well in place before Bacon’s Rebellion. For slave soldiers in Bacon’s Army, this conflagration in Virginia was a *slave rebellion*.\(^{15}\)

The story moves further south in Chapter Three to South Carolina in 1715, where armed conflict erupted between colonists and the Yamasees. The Yamasee War from 1715 to 1717 shows how “Indian war” affected Black armed resistance and how it operated differently in the Lowcountry than in the Chesapeake in the early eighteenth century. Transcripts from planters in the *British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina 1663-1782*, Spanish colonial reports, and military correspondence from the John Batterson Stetson Collection and the Santo Domingo Papers at the PK Yonge Library in Gainesville, Florida, detail how slave soldiers participated in the conflict. Here too, slave soldiers served in colonial militias and used war as an opportunity to fight for Black freedom, and dozens if not hundreds ran away and fought with Yamasee and Spanish soldiers in the conflict. But a more developed and liberal militia system in South Carolina, as well as the presence of Spanish and Indian rivals in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida, presented slave soldiers with more options than forty years earlier in Virginia. In this case, they could run to Indian communities, seek refuge with Spanish allies at St. Augustine, or protect their masters and earn their freedom via loyal military service. The chapter also shows that slavery and resistance in British North America was becoming more militarized than it had been decades before. More enslaved people could serve as soldiers for colonial interests, and

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\(^{15}\) Edmund Morgan long ago argued that the rebellion transformed Virginia by promoting White unity at the expense of Black slavery. The rebellion thus facilitated the rise of the Black chattel system in the colony. See Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton & Co. Inc., 1975), 345, 368-369, and 386.
more could serve as soldiers to fight for freedom against British colonial interests. A more developed militia system in South Carolina enabled more enslaved people without previous military experiences to learn martial tactics, techniques, and procedures. The presence of the Spanish at St. Augustine did the same for slave soldiers who ran away to join them in Florida.


Source: Map created by the author.
Chapter Four returns to Virginia in 1775 and 1776 to examine Lord Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment and how revolution affected armed resistance and slave soldiering. It examines how slave soldiering may have changed since 100 years earlier when enslaved people fought in Bacon’s Rebellion. I have used newspapers, planter records, and edited collections of military documents to investigate the fighting in Virginia in 1775 and 1776, as well as the Book of Negroes and other official British military correspondence available at the William L. Clements Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, to identify individual slaves involved in the fighting and to track their movement throughout the Revolutionary War. The Book of Negroes and British military reports are important to identify from where and when slaves joined the Ethiopian Regiment. Whereas slave soldiers in 1676 Virginia and 1715 South Carolina served in colonial militias, soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment became official members of the British Army in North America. The chapter shows how revolution further militarized slave rebels, as fighting for the British Army during the Revolutionary War became the most viable option to attack slavery for enslaved rebels in early America. It also shows how the Revolutionary War transformed soldiering and led to the professionalization of slave soldiers who served in the British Army, instead of in colonial militias. The success of Black Loyalist soldiers during the war, like soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment, led to the creation of the first permanent peace-time professional slave soldiers in the British Atlantic with the Carolina Black Corps and then later the West India Regiments. Slave soldiers were thus learning how to use professional military service to advance their own agendas. Revolutionary conflict was also opening more opportunities for enslaved people to fight for freedom.
Slave soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment also appropriated revolutionary ideology and linked their military service to republican ideas of freedom and liberty, which happened to slave soldiers throughout the Atlantic littoral during the Age of Revolution. The Age of Revolution produced more war and conflict that also opened more opportunities for enslaved people to serve as soldiers, and more opportunities to resist the chattel system. Thousands of slaves served as soldiers in various armies during the period, and they became critical actors in wars for independence as they fought for both royalist and rebel forces. The period also opened more opportunities for enslaved people to serve in growing professional armies.

The British professionalization of slave soldiers that developed in the American Revolution leads to Chapter Five, which addresses slave soldiers in the 8th West India Regiment who mutinied in Dominica in 1802. The West India Regiments became the largest peacetime slave army in the Atlantic world, and they primarily saw military action in the Caribbean. Thus the chapter moves from mainland British North America to the Caribbean to examine how armed resistance operated elsewhere in the Anglo-Atlantic. It also explores slave soldiers who did not


take up arms in times of crisis or military emergency such as in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. It explores how slave soldiers learned how to use permanent military service to advance their own agendas. Slave soldiers took up arms throughout the littoral, but the practice was less restrictive in the Caribbean than on the mainland due to manpower shortages, a greater Black-to-White population imbalance, and because of the near-constant threat of imperial attack. The chapter therefore explores how these conditions influenced slave soldiering, and how slave soldiers interpreted their service in the West India Regiments. It investigates the 1802 mutiny because it was one of only three mutinies in the West India Regiments before emancipation in the British Atlantic, and it was the only mutiny before the 1807 Mutiny Act that made all slave soldiers in the British Army free for all intents and purposes. I have relied on official trial records, correspondence, and military reports concerning the mutiny held in the War Office, Colonial Office, and Foreign Office at the National Archives in Kew. These records show that slave soldiers, most of whom were African-born, mutinied in April 1802 because they feared they were about to be disbanded and transformed into plantation slaves. They did not view military service itself as a safety valve from chattel slavery, which was often the case for enslaved soldiers in professional armies elsewhere in the Atlantic during the period. Nor did they seemingly appropriate revolutionary ideology like their counterparts in Virginia two decades earlier.

I return to the mainland in Chapter Six, which traces the development of Maroons in the Gulf Coast borderlands of northern Florida, southern Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi Territory in the second decade of the nineteenth century, thereby showing how runaway slaves turned imperial warfare among competing imperial powers and Native Americans into
opportunities to fight against slavery. Like the parallels in Virginia from 1676 to 1776 in Chapters Two and Four, Chapter Six examines developments in slave soldiering in some of the same areas as soldiers involved in the Yamasee war 100 years earlier examined in Chapter Three. To determine how fugitive slaves fled to Florida at the start of the nineteenth century and how they armed themselves and fought against their former masters, I have used several other manuscript collections held in the PK Yonge Library to include the Greenslade, Cruzat, and Cochrane Papers. Military correspondence between American soldiers and Spanish officials, as well as soldiers’ diaries have also been useful to document the Maroon involvement in the fighting in Florida. The Bartram Family Papers and the McCall Family Papers at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia provide more accounts of the Black-Indian alliance in Florida and describe the Maroon villages in the area. The Birch Family Papers also document the fighting at Prospect Bluff, which was a significant battle involving Maroons during the First Seminole War. Military and colonial correspondence in the East Florida Papers and in the Kenneth Wiggins Porter collection at the New York Public Library also document the nature of fighting in Florida in the early nineteenth century and the nature of the Black-Seminole and Black-Creek alliances there. The David Brydie Mitchell Papers at the Newberry Library also provided insight into how slaves and Maroons fought in Florida. In the borderlands, runaway slaves joined Seminole and Creek Indian allies to form the largest Maroon society in United States history. These Maroons participated in continuous warfare from 1812 to 1823 to prevent U.S. Americans from invading their territory and forcing their re-enslavement. As the fighting unfolded, the Seminole Maroons also allied with the Creek, Seminole, British, and Spanish Armies and took up arms with them to resist American imperial ambitions in the area. The
chapter shows that the fighting was actually one long Maroon war from Maroon perspectives, and it explores how Maroons took to soldiering in comparison to enslaved people in Chapters One through Four. It shows how Maroons fought in a borderlands area among several imperial rivals in the Age of Revolution.

By the end of 1823, Native American power in the Southeast had been substantially diminished while the Spanish and British had left territory belonging to the present-day United States altogether. There were no longer European imperial rivals to affect slave soldiering in British North America. For these reasons, this work stops with the developments of Maroon soldiers in the Gulf Coast borderlands examined in Chapter Six.

The Age of Revolution created more war and conflict that also provided more opportunities for slave soldiers to serve and to turn more conflicts into events that supported their own agendas. Militarization of resistance thereby increased due in part to these developments. As slave soldiers relied on military service to challenge the slave system, Maroons and plantation slave rebels concomitantly attacked the system with some of the same methods. In many cases the two types of rebel soldiers were one in the same. Armed resistance became one of the most significant approaches to achieve emancipation. From Black perspectives, the world changed dramatically during the Age of Revolution and Emancipation, when slavery expanded in some areas and contracted in others. As war and revolution advanced, opportunities to take up arms and to attack chattel slavery advanced as well, and slave soldiers seized those opportunities time after time. By doing so, they became a part of the larger abolition movement in the British Atlantic that finally culminated in emancipation in the Caribbean by 1838 and in the United States by 1865.
While this work focuses on five cases in which enslaved soldiers took up arms to fight for
various causes, it is important first to assess the larger Atlantic context of resistance during the
150 years of study, from armed resistance to “conventional” acts of slave revolt and maroonage.
Thus, in each chapter I compare the actions of enslaved soldiers to those who chose more
conventionally-recognized types of resistance such as slave revolt and maroon warfare. But what
exactly did these two types of resistance look like in Atlantic perspective and how did they
compare to moments when enslaved soldiers took up arms? A brief anatomy of Atlantic slave
revolts therefore gives us a better sense of some general patterns of slave insurrection and how
they fit cases of armed resistance analyzed throughout this work. I do not wish to create another
typology of resistance or slave rebellion, for which there are several already. Instead, I wish to
examine broad patterns of militarized slave revolts to show how slave soldiers who used armed
resistance were similar. In addition, while I wish to examine several patterns of slave revolt that
existed during the rise and fall of the Atlantic slave system, a general anatomy of revolt does not
dismiss how slave revolts changed over time, including how goals and ambitions of enslaved
people changed, how creolization may or may not have affected rebellions, or how enslaved
rebels did or did not appropriate revolutionary ideology. Instead, I believe that there are several
features of slave rebellion that remained static throughout Atlantic history that help us to better understand the Atlantic chattel slave system and the human response to it.¹

**ANATOMY OF A SLAVE REVOLT**

*Revolt Feature 1) Collectivity*

For many scholars, slave rebellions and conspiracies have a certain character about them that also make them easily identifiable from other conflicts or other acts of slave resistance. Obvious plots or rebellions like Gabriel’s 1800 conspiracy, Denmark Vesey’s plot in 1822, and Nat Turner’s rebellion in 1831 have all been standard bearers for historians accessing slave insurrection in US history. Yet aside from these obvious cases, there has been some debate on how to categorize and quantify slave insurrection. In 1943 Herbert Aptheker established a method for historians to count and discover slave rebellions in the United States. Aptheker combed through newspapers that described incidents involving at least ten enslaved people who fought for their freedom and that contemporaries described as revolt or insurrection. By this measure he counted at least 250 cases of slave insurrection or revolt in United States history.²

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² Aptheker, *Slave Revolts*, 11, 12, 13, and 167.
To determine if there was a difference in scale or significance among “insurrection,” “revolt,” “uprising,” “rebellion,” “mutiny,” or “revolution,” Aptheker also relied on a U.S. Senate document from the Adjutant General’s Office that focused on federal aid to domestic disturbances in 1903. Critically, the report considered anti-governmental activity and did not address the activities of enslaved people decades earlier. Thus at the time, there was not a standardized definition for scholars to use to assess the scale of enslaved people’s collective action to resist chattel slavery. With the exception of “revolution,” Aptheker used these terms interchangeably as have most scholars who have assessed slave resistance ever since. Nevertheless, we are left with the idea that Atlantic slave revolts must involve the collective action of enslaved people and that revolts involve more than just one or two people. Still, scholars do not agree on how many people at a minimum constituted slave rebellion, and perhaps more importantly, neither did contemporaries throughout the Atlantic littoral. For example in North Carolina in 1741, legislators defined slave insurrection as involving “any number” of enslaved people, but they ultimately defined revolt as incidents that involved at least three or more conspirators. Meanwhile, the Brazilian government in the nineteenth century defined a slave rebellion as involving twenty or more slaves who intended to secure their freedom by use of force. Thus we are left with an idea that revolts require collective action of enslaved people, although the degree or scale of collectivity and its connection to the participation of free Blacks and even some Whites in revolts remain unclear. But were their patterns of collective participation throughout Atlantic slave revolts?

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Exactly how many people joined a slave insurrection varied throughout Atlantic history. Historians can never know exactly how many people joined conspiracies that never materialized into full rebellion, while it is unclear how participation rates can be evaluated and what those rates even mean. For example, is it significant that 90 percent of slaves on one plantation decided to join an insurrection even if they represented less than 10 percent of the enslaved population in an entire county or state or colony? Or is it significant that a small minority formed a rebellion to only later gather momentum and capture the majority of enslaved people as the movement spread? What about vice versa? What is clear is that in general a relatively small minority of the enslaved population decided to participate in slave rebellion when they erupted. Their decision to do so was based on a multitude of factors, not in the least being their desire to use violence and to risk their lives. Slave revolts almost always failed and resulted in the deaths of most rebels. Leaders could expect to be tortured before execution, and for many enslaved people these risks were probably too great and discouraged them from participating. Still, many did rise up and revolt.

In St. John in 1733 approximately 10 percent of the island’s slave population actually took part in the massive insurrection there, while in 1739 probably close to 3 percent of slaves in St. Paul’s Parish South Carolina joined the Stono rebellion. The rates were even less than that for

slaves involved in the 1712 New York revolt. In 1811 census data show that approximately 8 percent of the German Coast enslaved population actually participated in the large insurrection outside New Orleans. In Demerara in 1823, roughly 11-15 percent of enslaved people joined the rebellion there. If João José Reis’ population estimates are accurate, then about 2 percent of the enslaved population in Salvador revolted in the Malê rebellion in 1835. Perhaps as much as 14 percent of slaves on board the Creole actually participated in the mutiny with Madison Washington in 1841. A more recent analysis of Nat Turner’s rebellion shows that roughly 10 percent of Southampton County slaves were involved, and estimates range from 1-10 percent of slave ships experienced an insurrection during the Middle Passage. If the mass flight of slaves during the American Civil War can be considered a rebellion, then approximately 10-25 percent of slaves in the Border States, and roughly 12 percent of slaves in all Southern states participated.4

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Similarly according to Frey, as much as one-third of Georgia’s enslaved population and one-fourth of South Carolina’s enslaved population fled to British lines during the Revolutionary War. But in some cases, enslaved participation was greater. In the 1763 rebellion in Berbice, nearly two-thirds of all slaves in the colony joined the fray, representing one of the largest, most all-encompassing rebellions in Atlantic history. In Barbados in 1816, as much as 30 percent of male slaves on the island took part in the insurrection. In 1735 in Vera Cruz almost one-third of the enslaved population rose up in revolt. According to David Geggus during the British occupation of Haiti, the highest number of slaves involved in the rebellion amounted to 45 percent. Years later, roughly 10 percent of the Haitian population joined Toussaint Louverture’s army against the French. In other cases, slave participation was lower. The hundreds of slaves who joined Tacky’s revolt in Jamaica in 1760 still represented less than 1 percent of the enslaved population on the entire island. Approximately 16 percent of slaves in Curaçao participated in the revolt there in August 1795. In sum, while there does not appear to be a precise pattern of collective slave participation rates in Atlantic revolts. In almost all cases only a small minority of enslaved people decided to revolt. In many cases the participation rate hovered around 10 to 20 percent. What these numbers also show is that the proportional rate of participation in Atlantic slave insurrections varied around the littoral, but was generally low. Thus, in terms of the proportion of the larger enslaved population, group participation rather than the scale of participation, was a greater defining feature of Atlantic slave rebellions.5


5 Frey, Water From the Rock, 86, 142; Alvin Thompson, “The Berbice Revolt, 1763-64,” In Winston McGowan, James Rose, and David Granger, eds., Themes in African-Guyanese
What these figures do not show is how slave insurrection was a process and how enslaved people became rebels as revolts matured. For example, even if almost 10 percent of Southampton County slaves decided to fight with Nat Turner in 1831, we know that only seven men were actually present at Cabin Pond to discuss the insurrection and to commence the violence. Indeed, leaders often planned on recruiting more people as their movements gained momentum and the prospects of success seemed more favorable. In many other cases, rebels also coerced others to join in anticipation that some people would be difficult to mobilize for violence. Moreover, some rebels plotted or conspired to revolt over a longer period of time before an insurrection actually broke out. For example, rebels involved in the 1736 Antigua conspiracy reportedly plotted for months before it was detected. Gabriel had also planned his rebellion for several months before it unraveled. Others never seemed to lose their rebellious ambitions and participated in multiple revolts and conspiracies over an even longer period. One conspirator named Will, who was involved in the New York plot in 1741, was believed to be involved in the 1733 St. John rebellion and then the 1736 Antigua conspiracy, escaping execution each time by testifying against others involved. Another man named Sam Hector or Qvau, was also involved in the Antigua conspiracy and then plotted again in St. Croix in 1759.

Still others joined spontaneously as the circumstances dictated. No matter when rebels became involved, they became rebels once they actively plotted or participated in insurrection with other conspirators.6

In a similar vein, how enslaved people became soldiers was also a process. It is entirely possible that many of the people who took up arms and became soldiers in colonial militias or professional White armies may have also been former soldiers in Africa. Many had experienced war and armed conflict in Africa and became prisoners as a result of those conflicts, which led to their enslavement and transshipment to the Americas. In the cases examined below, enslaved people became soldiers once they took up arms, joined military units, and began participating in the fighting. Some may have been formally trained before they fought, while others mobilized during exigent circumstances. Some may have joined British military units such as in Bacon’s army, Lord Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment, or in the 8th West India Regiment, while others joined Native American or Spanish military units such as the people who fought with the Yamasee and Seminoles in Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Becoming a soldier also had implications for a slave’s freedom. Some were technically not freed upon enlistment into military service, while others escaped from their owners to fight against them with Native or European

enemies. Even for slaves who responded to various emancipation proclamations to fight, if they were captured in battle or if they were ultimately defeated, they faced an immediate return to slavery. In this way, some slave soldiers were similar to collective groups of conventional plantation slave and maroon rebels. In their acts of service and resistance, they were technically free from their former owners’ control, but if they could not win their battles, they would be returned to slavery. Regardless of their transient and fragile freedom, soldiers like conventional plantation rebels also formed collective bodies that typified Atlantic slave insurrections.

Revolt Feature 2) Material Deprivation

Precisely where, when, and why slaves revolted has been the subject of great debate, but most historians of slavery in the Atlantic, Ottoman, and Indian Ocean Worlds now agree that material deprivation was a significant impetus if not a precondition for slave rebellions. Most enslaved people in the Atlantic were less integrated into society like in other slave systems, and when masters shifted the economic burden to their slaves or increased their work requirements, they were more likely to rebel. If war or natural disasters destroyed homes and crops, or when enslaved people were starving they were more likely to rebel. If they endured more physical abuse or maltreatment from their owners, they were more likely to rebel. The absence of some of these conditions in the Ottoman and Indian Ocean Worlds helps explain the absence of major slave insurrections in those regions, unlike what happened in the Atlantic littoral. Thus material deprivation was often present before Atlantic slave revolts occurred. To be sure, material suffering was relative, and historians can find numerous cases in which the conditions for enslaved people had not bottomed out before insurrections occurred. For example, several
insurrections broke out during holidays when enslaved people were often on reduced work schedules or enjoyed more generous food rations.\(^7\)

Yet, the list of slave rebellions in the Atlantic world that occurred during times of material deprivation is stunning, and a few examples demonstrate how significant material deprivation was in many cases. In 1639 in St. Kitts, slaves conspired to rise up because they were upset about the “brutal treatment” they had received. A violent storm destroyed hundreds of homes and killed many people in Barbados in the summer before the conspiracy there in 1675. In 1691 and 1692 a disease “swept away” sailors, planters, and slaves in Barbados and there were reports of unseasonably heavy rain. There were high mortality rates and the “condition of the people was truly deplorable” before the 1692 conspiracy. Before a massive insurrection on St. John in 1733, the island had endured a sustained drought, while a hurricane destroyed crops and food sources there as well. A dysentery epidemic ravaged Berbice before the rebellion there in

1763. On the eve of Gabriel’s conspiracy in Virginia in 1800 enslaved people endured more strenuous labor, as despoliation and industrialization reoriented Virginian agriculture. A transition to the sugar economy with imperial trade restrictions and decreasing prices facilitated a depression in 1823 in Demerara just before thousands of enslaved people revolted there as well. On the eve of Nat Turner’s revolt in Southampton County, Virginia, in 1831, cotton prices were inflated and supply exceeded consumption after another depression in the Tidewater plantation region. Soil exhaustion also contributed to economic stagnation in Virginia before Turner’s revolt, possibly contributing to poor working and living conditions for slaves as planters looked to stretch their profits. In Jamaica before Sam Sharpe’s rebellion in 1831, sugar prices were their lowest in a hundred years. In Bahia, Brazil, slaves and free Blacks also endured economic hardship, as food prices rose 68 percent and wages fell during the previous decade. Unemployment for free Blacks rose sharply, just as many of them joined hundreds of slaves and revolted in the Malê Rebellion in 1835.8

Deprivation could also be a personal motivator to start or join an insurrection in ways that differed from general economic conditions. For example, Gabriel in part began planning his rebellion after he was punished for fighting an overseer who had caught him stealing a pig. Additionally, there is circumstantial evidence that Nat Turner may have been motivated to rebel because he had been separated from his wife years earlier. What is at least clear is that personal factors could contribute to greater trends of deprivation that facilitated many Atlantic slave revolts. These cases also represent just a drop in the bucket of the thousands of Atlantic slave insurrections, but they comport with a general feature of Atlantic slave revolts also shown below in each chapter. Conditions were harsher for enslaved people in the Atlantic world than in other systems of slavery around the globe, which encouraged insurrections that were unique to the Atlantic littoral. When these conditions worsened even further, either generally or personally, rebellions were often more likely to occur. This was true too for enslaved people who took up arms and became soldiers to resist the chattel system.9

Revolt Feature 3) Goals and Objectives

Another feature that characterized Atlantic slave rebellions was, of course, the objective of slave rebels. The most obvious goal for rebels was to achieve some level of freedom or at least relief from the chattel system, either for themselves on an individual basis or to larger ends. In many cases enslaved rebels articulated these goals during rebellions or afterwards during trials. For example, rebels in the Stono rebellion “called out” for liberty as they marched from

University Press, 1993), 11, 18, 20; More on this theory see Craton, Empire, Enslavement, and Freedom, 187.

9 Sidbury, Ploughshares into Swords, 56; Allmendinger Jr., Nat Turner, 67.
plantation to plantation in South Carolina in 1739. Similarly, Gabriel and his followers planned on carrying a flag with the words “death or liberty” inscribed on it in Virginia in 1800.

According to Eugene Genovese, the earlier revolts in the eighteenth century that led to the creation of Maroon societies in places like Jamaica, Haiti, and Brazil were attempts by rebels to remove themselves from the slave system and restore African societies or statehoods. Yet these too were attempts by enslaved people to remove themselves from the harsh life of plantation slavery. But not all slave insurrections were attempts to achieve freedom or emancipation for individuals or for an entire society. Notably, rebels involved in the massive 1823 Demerara insurrection reportedly demanded their “rights,” and sought more free days and wages instead of total emancipation in the colony. David Geggus has also shown that many rebels during the Age of Revolution revolted because of rumors that a king proclaimed more free days for slaves rather than full emancipation. Thus, it can be said that slave rebels sought better working and living conditions at the very least, while they often revolted for their own freedom from chattel slavery.

Some even revolted in hopes of achieving emancipation for everyone. In the vast majority of militarized slave revolts, rebels like slave soldiers, fought to achieve freedom for themselves, and in some cases for everyone in the immediate area.  

Revolt Feature 4) Tactics and Methods

Exactly how enslaved people sought to achieve freedom, broad emancipation, or improved working conditions varied in time and space. Historians are often quick to point out how violent slave insurrections were in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Indeed, rebels often conspired to kill their owners and most White people in the region, and many attempted to use force to coerce other enslaved people to participate. In some cases violence was also limited, and at times some rebels simply ran off into the woods to form or join existing Maroon groups, while others demonstrated substantial restraint from violence such as in Barbados in 1816, in Demerara in 1823, and in Jamaica in 1831.\textsuperscript{11}

But militarized rebellions generally followed a basic pattern that relied on military violence to achieve rebel goals. Enslaved rebels usually met in advance to rise up. Even spontaneous rebellions required some degree of coordination. Once they banded together, they usually killed a planter and White overseers on one plantation and ransacked the house to gather weapons. In most cases, acquiring firearms or even cannon at these early stages of insurrection was vital for militarized slave rebels. On a few occasions, rebels were able to effect these initial objectives simultaneously on multiple plantations. Once the rebels were fully armed, either with firearms or other weapons such as farm implements, knives, and lances, they moved to nearby plantations to recruit more slaves and to kill more enemies. They often moved in military formations and used military tactics and procedures to further their goals. Military violence also became central to accomplish their objectives. In most cases, they forced other enslaved people to join them by threatening to kill them or destroy their homes if they did not participate. In

\textsuperscript{11} David Brion Davis, \textit{Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 220.
many militarized revolts, rebels also relied on military oathing ceremonies that also solidified allegiance and commitment to combat. Such oaths were often rooted in African military traditions.\textsuperscript{12}

If oaths or the prospects of success could not mobilize enough followers, militarized rebels frequently resorted to coercive recruiting tactics to gain more followers. Plotters in the 1675 conspiracy in Barbados threatened to kill other enslaved people who did not join in the killing of their owners. Enslaved people who refused to participate in the 1733 St. John revolt were to be kept as slaves by the (A)mina rebels if they had succeeded. In New York in 1741, conspiracy leader John Hughson threatened to murder bondpeople who were reluctant to join his plot. Slaves also reported being forced to join Tacky’s rebels in Jamaica in 1760, while reports indicate that during Bussa’s Rebellion in Barbados in 1816 enslaved people were threatened at gunpoint to join, and those who refused would also have their homes burned. Reports indicate that coercion was used to recruit rebels and that ringleaders threatened to shoot slaves who would not join the German Coast Rebellion outside New Orleans in 1811 and Nat Turner’s Southampton County uprising in 1831. In Cuba as well in 1812, Captains Barbier and Estanislao Aguilar threatened to “cut off the heads of anyone who did not join them,” while leader Antonio Aponte reportedly made similar threats and ordered sentries to stand guard along roads to kill

anyone who might betray the plot, slave or free. In Bahia that same year, slave rebels killed several Black women and even a small boy who refused to join them.13

Once mobilized, if the rebels were lucky they could fight their way to mountains, forests, or swamps to escape White retribution. If they weren’t, they often faced White militias in pitched battles that resulted in the utter destruction of the rebel forces. In many cases, slave rebels enjoyed an initial military victory over White forces and some rebels may have even forced pro-slavery forces to retreat. But in the vast majority of militarized revolts, slave rebels were defeated and suffered staggering casualties compared to government forces. In many ways militarized rebellions often shared many characteristics with how slave soldiers chose to resist the chattel system, which I will show in greater detail throughout this work below.

Revolt Feature 5) Unwilling Participants and Loyal Slaves

As the discussion of coercive recruiting tactics and participation rates above makes clear, many enslaved people simply chose not to join slave insurrections including those that were militarized and those that were not. Their decision not to join rebellious movements did not necessarily mean they had an affinity towards enslavement or their owners, or that slavery was relatively benign in some zones in the Atlantic world. Instead, their decision usually reflected how difficult it was to mobilize people for violence generally, and more specifically to mobilize people for violence against the staggeringly poor odds for success in the face of White military power and control in Atlantic slave societies. Indeed, while historians still debate how to measure the success of slave rebellions in terms of creating Maroon societies, forcing the issue of emancipation, or abolishing slavery altogether, the Haitian Revolution is frequently cited as the only slave revolt in Atlantic history that led to the total destruction of a slave society and created an independent state in which Black people were completely free from chattel slavery. Enslaved people were also aware of this fact, which influenced their decision to rebel. For example, in New York in 1741 a slave named Cataline reportedly warned others about what might happen to them should their plan not succeed. He reminded them of the 1736 Antigua conspiracy and that they were “fools to do here as they had done in the hot country; for they all burnt and hanged for it in the hot country.” Thus it is not surprising that some people were unwilling to join insurrections, and many others chose other methods to resist chattel slavery. To be sure, enslaved conspirators were often willing to give false confessions to save themselves when revolts failed, and many rebels probably lied about how they were forced to join a revolt. But White authorities
also accounted for perjury in courtroom testimonies, and they were not always so blinded by hysteria that they could not see when enslaved people fabricated their stories.\textsuperscript{14}

Aside from enslaved people who chose not to join insurrections, it was also typical for still other slaves to betray revolts and even take up arms to defend themselves and their owners. For example, in St. John in 1733 several Creole slaves defended their owners from the (A)mina rebels and helped their masters escape. Despite the depravity and brutality of slave owner Thomas Thistlewood in Jamaica, enslaved people took up arms and helped defend his plantation and those surrounding it during Tacky’s revolt in 1760. Aside from loyal slave soldiers in Grenada who fought against rebels in Fédon’s rebellion in 1795, others also helped defend their owner’s plantations from rebel attacks. Although a significant part of Barbados was encompassed by Bussa’s rebellion in 1816, “a very large proportion of the slaves” remained loyal. Indeed, the list goes on. The fact that some enslaved people not only abstained from insurrections but also actively fought against them reflected their desire to avoid brutal punishment from retributive slave owners should an insurrection fail, and the fact that they might gain favor or rewards from their owners or White authorities for helping suppress rebels. No matter their motives, unwilling participants and dissenters were a common feature of Atlantic slave revolts and were an obstacle for militarized rebels to accomplish their goals.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} Horsmanden, \textit{A Journal of the Proceedings}, 209.

Revolt Feature 6) Other Diverse Participants

Another common problem that historians have encountered when analyzing slave resistance and uncovering slave rebellions has been the participation of other people in these movements. For example, even if enslaved people formed collective groups and seemingly fought for their freedom, should their actions count as a slave rebellion if Whites or Native Americans were also on their side, or even outnumbered Black slave rebels? Moreover, what should we make of moments when enslaved people followed the orders of or came to the calls of White slave owners instead of mobilizing at first on their own? What about movements that Free Blacks and mixed race people led, including those who owned slaves? What should we make of enslaved Black people who came to the calls of White or Native abolitionists? However, another survey of Atlantic slave insurrections shows how diverse rebellions often could be, and that enslaved rebels often found common ground with other free and unfree people to fight against the chattel system.

As noted above, historians have long known that poor White people like indentured servants, convicts, sailors, and pirates were willing to collude with Black slaves to challenge elite authority. Often these people were not abolitionists and coordinated with Black slaves for their own motives, but they still joined slave conspiracies and revolts in which Black slaves were motivated to earn their freedom and undermine chattel slavery. Yet Native American slaves were also willing to join insurrections with enslaved Black people to obtain their freedom too. Indeed, Indian slaves were implicated in revolts and conspiracies in 1690 in New Jersey, in South Insurrection which took place in the island of Barbados on Easter Sunday April 14, 1816,” 2, New York Public Library MssCol 2483.
Carolina in 1700, in Long Island in 1708, in Virginia in 1709, in New York in 1712, and in Louisiana in 1732 among many others. Native Americans were almost always important elements of early Maroon societies as well, including those formed in the aftermath of a Black slave revolts.  

In addition to these groups, there were some instances when slave owners also colluded with Black slaves in movements that became slave rebellions. George Boxley had once owned slaves before he became an abolitionist and led a slave conspiracy in Virginia in 1816. Thomas Jeremiah was a free Black man who also owned slaves in Charleston when he led a conspiracy to cooperate with the British Navy in 1775 as well. Free Mulatto Julien Fédon owned ninety-six slaves before his insurrection in Grenada in 1795. Even Toussaint Louverture had once owned slaves in Saint Domingue before he eventually became a prominent leader of the Haitian Revolution. Both Chatoyer and his brother Du Vallée, leaders of the Black Caribs in St. Vincent, owned slaves, while Windward Maroon leader Nanny was also believed to have been a slave owner when she arrived in Jamaica. Moreover, it was common for Maroons to own slaves in their own communities until Emancipation in the nineteenth century. The presence of these individuals in Atlantic slave rebellions reveals how mercurial Atlantic slave rebellions could be, and that they were not always simple moments of Black slaves versus free Whites. They often had diverse actors involved while not all participants shared the same motivations or goals that

the main body of insurrectionaries developed. Nevertheless, they were still often a main component of insurrections throughout the littoral.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{CONCLUSION}

Slave revolts were complicated moments in Atlantic history. They were only one part of the larger story of slave resistance, but they materialized when collective groups of enslaved people worked together to reject their status and to reject the chattel system that controlled their lives. They could take years to develop, or they could erupt in minutes when the right opportunities arose. They were responses to the harsh life of Atlantic slavery, and they were often responses to worsening conditions both generally and personally. Insurrections could develop within other movements and could involve other actors not interested in Black freedom or emancipation. They almost always involved a minority of the entire enslaved population, and they often involved people who were forced to join against their own volition. Militarized rebels used martial tactics, techniques, and procedures to resist chattel slavery, and they increasingly used military violence to achieve their objectives.

Militarized revolts rose by the end of the seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth century well into the Age of Revolution. As rebels increasingly turned to these tactics

in the eighteenth century, slave soldiers also increasingly took up arms and used military service as an outlet to rebel. Acting concomitantly throughout the eighteenth century, slave soldiers and plantation rebels contributed to the rise of the militarization of slave resistance during the period. This process was in its incipient stages in Virginia in 1676 when enslaved people took up arms in Bacon’s Rebellion.
Early in September 1676, Virginia planter Nathaniel Bacon led 136 armed followers toward the colonial capital at Jamestown, Virginia, where Governor William Berkeley and his army of loyal supporters anxiously awaited the rebels. To deter desertion among his ranks and to possibly recruit more soldiers while marching, Bacon issued an emancipation proclamation for all Black slaves and White indentured servants who already served in his army or who would join him in his fight against Berkeley. The proclamation apparently worked, as the rebels continued to advance toward the city recruiting hundreds of followers along the way. According to one account, enslaved people and White servants “chiefly formed his army” by then and when they arrived outside the city’s wooden palisades, Bacon ordered all of his men to build trenches and prepare cannon to bombard Berkeley’s Loyalist supporters. His soldiers worked under cover of darkness on the night of September 17 to build the bulwarks, while others also helped Bacon sneak into the city. In fear of the upcoming attack, all but twenty of Berkeley’s followers deserted and slipped through the siege lines on the evening of September 18 to watch how the town might react as it faced imminent destruction. The following morning, Bacon and his soldiers entered Jamestown unopposed and burned it to the ground, including the church, the statehouse, twelve new brick houses, and several wooden framed homes. From sloops on the
James River Loyalists watched the flames light up the evening sky as the settlement was in flames.¹

The fall of Jamestown in September 1676 represented the height of Bacon’s power in his eighteen-month rebellion against Governor Berkeley from 1675 to 1677. The assault also represented how much Bacon’s Rebellion had changed since its beginnings in July 1675, when colonist Thomas Mathew killed several Doeg Indians in retaliation for the theft of his hogs. Tensions between White planters and Native Americans escalated, which led to murder and retaliatory raids between the colonists and Indians in late 1675. By March 1676 Governor Berkeley declared war on the Natives. But the governor also refused to grant Bacon a military commission to attack Indians, as Berkeley thought that Bacon’s unrestrained strategy would cause a massive conflict similar to what New England colonists endured in King Philip’s War. As a consequence, the governor’s refusal to support Bacon’s aggressive strategy enticed a new wave of dissent from planters who supported Bacon’s cause and who bore the brunt of Indian attacks in Virginia. To the poorer frontier planters, the elite governor’s refusal was representative of the class tension in the colony as Berkeley also enforced British trade policy and taxes in Virginia. His refusal exemplified elite oppression against them, and by the end of June 1676 many Virginia colonists had mobilized with Bacon to continue to fight Native Americans and to attack Berkeley’s Loyalists. In just a year a White-Indian frontier conflict morphed into a

colonial rebellion fought over issues of class and colonial administration, among other things. The fighting did not end even after Bacon’s death from dysentery in October 1676. Only after more troops from London arrived in November did peace appear near, and by January 1677 British Captain Thomas Grantham secured the surrender of the last of the rebels, which included eighty Black slaves and twenty White indentured servants who were heavily armed with muskets, gunpowder, and cannon.\(^2\)

Despite the presence of enslaved people taking up arms against their owners, they have often not been the main subject of historical inquiry for scholars studying Bacon’s Rebellion. Scores of studies have argued that Bacon’s Rebellion was a civil war among English colonists, an Indian War, a sectarian conflict, or some sort of revolt that challenged imperial rule. To be sure, most who have examined the events of 1675-1677 have noted that Black slaves and White servants fought in Bacon’s army, including most notably Edmund Morgan, who long ago argued that the rebellion transformed Virginia and facilitated the rise of Black chattel slavery in the colony. Their role in the rebellion, as it related to Morgan’s thesis, has since been subject to great debate. John Coombs has pushed back against Morgan’s thesis, and in a more recent study Mathew Kruer has argued that English and Native emotions of grief and terror fed on each other and sparked racial divisions that influenced how the English began to racialize Black chattel slavery in Virginia. Bacon’s Rebellion was thus not a consequence of the shift, but a product of it. Even with these studies, most historians of slavery have not considered enslaved rebels in Bacon’s army as engaged in slave insurrection, excluding them from broader analyses of

resistance and insurrections. Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have briefly suggested that the rebellion might be divided into an Indian war and a slave revolt, though they have not fully analyzed the possibility of the latter. In short, although a number of historians have acknowledged the presence of enslaved people in the ranks of Bacon’s army and noted their potential importance, no one has fully investigated the meaning of their presence from Black perspectives, or how their activities compared to those of other enslaved people in the Atlantic world to gain insight into their activities and motives.³

This chapter explores the Black rebel experience in Bacon’s army, and contributes to recent scholarship that reconceptualizes the participation of enslaved people in armed conflict. What did Bacon’s Rebellion mean for the enslaved soldiers who participated in it? Were they

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loyal soldiers concerned about Indians and British imperial strategy, or were they trying to accomplish something else? Unfortunately, no direct evidence produced by enslaved Africans or African Americans themselves has been discovered that might shed light on Black perspectives in the rebellion. This chapter addresses this evidentiary problem in two ways: first, actions sometimes speak louder than words, and British imperial correspondence, petitions and grievances, accounts, and official reports do describe the actions of enslaved Black colonists. Second, this chapter employs a comparative Atlantic approach, in which the conditions, interests, and actions of enslaved Black people elsewhere in the Atlantic world during rebellion and war are used to help interpret the nature and meaning of Black soldiers in Virginia. This approach includes taking the African backgrounds of the participants into account. The result is a deeper understanding of Black perspectives and interests during Bacon’s Rebellion. This chapter focuses on Bacon’s Rebellion because it was the first major conflict in British North America in which enslaved Black people took up arms as a large group and participated in the fighting. This early conflict also allows the chapter to assess slave soldiers at the beginning of the rise of the Atlantic chattel slave system and how slave soldiers took up arms during internal imperial conflict. It thus offers a glimpse into how slave soldiers perceived military status in the seventeenth century, and into the beginnings of the militarization of slavery and slave resistance in the Anglo-Atlantic. Using this approach, this chapter argues that while Bacon and many of his White allies fought in an imperial rebellion, enslaved Africans and African Americans marching in Bacon’s army were also engaged in a slave insurrection to secure their own freedom.4

REBELLION WITHIN A REBELLION

Precisely when African and African American slaves became involved in Bacon’s Rebellion is not clear in the historical record. There is no direct evidence that shows enslaved people joined Governor Berkeley’s army, though some were taken by Berkeley’s supporters during attacks on Baconite plantations. According to John Harold Sprinkle Jr., White servants were probably ordered to fight in Berkeley’s army too. Notwithstanding these orders, reports appear to confirm the fact that most servants joined Bacon’s army during the rebellion and took advantage of the “looseness and liberty of the times.” In the spring of 1676 Bacon had mobilized several hundred followers, most of whom were male landowners who lived on the frontier. Though treated as the “scum of the country,” and a “rabble of the basest sort” by Loyalists who overwhelmingly came from the Virginia elite, several Baconites did own slaves and a few were fairly wealthy, including Nathaniel Bacon himself. Together they marched against the Occoneechees and then the Susquehannahas, before they petitioned Berkeley to gain Bacon a

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military commission, which Berkeley denied him. By June 5 Bacon went to Jamestown again with about forty followers and after a small altercation with the town’s militia Berkeley declared Bacon a rebel. Captain Thomas Gardner captured him just days later, but Berkeley pardoned Bacon and released him on parole. Weeks later, he returned to Jamestown again with nearly 500 supporters to again demand a commission, but by June 25 both Bacon and Berkeley left Jamestown after news that Indians had killed eight White colonists in the area. Campaigns in July and August were also directed at Indians and at Berkeley’s supporters as Bacon’s soldiers chased Berkeley to Gloucester and Accomack Counties. By then Loyalists took up arms, attacked the Baconites, and destroyed their homes. It had become clear that the fighting was no longer just about an “Indian War.” It is unclear if enslaved people had taken up arms yet in the rebellion, although they were clearly caught up in the plantation raids and attacks.\(^5\)

By September 7 Berkeley returned to Jamestown and reclaimed it from rebel control. Upon his return, the governor offered to pardon the rebels and set servants and slaves free if they deserted Bacon, and if others not involved “would (in Arms) owne the Governours cause.” Berkeley also promised to give Baconites’ land and exempt taxes to anyone who would fight for

the governor. This was the first time during the rebellion in which either side called on servants and enslaved people to fight for either cause. But fearing mass desertion and potential defeat, Bacon responded with his own emancipation proclamation, the exact provisions or details of which are unknown except that he promised “‘liberty to all Servants and Negro’s,’” and that many servants “and other persons of desperate fortunes” ran away from their owners to join the rebellion “upon the invitation and encouragement of libertie.” According to Berkeley, Bacon bound his followers with “a most horrid oath” in which he declared that he would not give quarter to the enemy. Bacon also administered loyalty oaths near present-day Williamsburg, in which he demanded Virginians to join him or return to their homes upon the arrival of reinforcements from London. They were also prohibited from assisting Berkeley. He also demanded they swear that the governor had been acting illegally. By the time Bacon reached Jamestown to lay siege on it, his forces had nearly doubled, indicating that servants and slaves likely joined his ranks. According to one account, enslaved people and servants “chiefly formed his army” by the time Bacon’s forces burned Jamestown. The proclamation was the beginning of a turn from a White rebellion to a Black slave rebellion. It is possible that slaves were not with Bacon for the sacking of Jamestown given the limited details of when they joined Bacon’s army, but it is reasonable to believe that they would have joined by then given Bacon’s emancipation offer. Indeed, as Wim Klooster has shown, enslaved rebels responded similarly to rumors of emancipation throughout the Atlantic for nearly two centuries starting as early as 1669. According to Steven Saunders Webb, servants and slaves made up two-thirds of Bacon’s forces after the burning of Jamestown, and according to one contemporary account, they were part of Bacon’s army since at least Berkeley left Jamestown shortly before Bacon’s assault. Before
Bacon ordered the siege on the settlement on September 15, 1676, Bacon’s rebels kidnapped Loyalist women to use as human shields as they prepared fortifications and fixed guns on the city. The origins of such a tactic remain unknown, but accounts of the rebellion made it clear that Loyalists were “not well acquainted” with that “method in war.” The tactic, which also humiliated Loyalist women and their husbands, was subject to intense scrutiny in petitions and grievances after the rebellion. Four days later, Bacon and his soldiers razed Jamestown, and homes inside the city were destroyed or burned to the ground. Though many residents suffered from the destruction of the city, among the more eminent victims were Colonel Thomas Swann, Major Theop. Hone, and Mr. William Sherwood, all of whose homes and provisions were burned. With the Loyalists on the run, Bacon moved on to Gloucester and Charles City Counties and continued to plunder Loyalist plantations.

Rebel distaste for Loyalists was evident in the destruction of plantations and homes. The rebels burned houses and barns, and stole as much provisions as they could carry. Among the important supplies that the rebels took were weapons and ammunition as they armed themselves and prepared for more attacks against Berkeley and his supporters. The rebels destroyed much of what they could not take with them. The plunder was also a method to recruit more slave rebels to join the movement and Bacon and his men “carried away” at least a handful of slaves as they plundered. The rebel approach to individual plantations was both a terrorizing and liberating experience for enslaved Virginians. On the one hand, enslaved people confronted a violent, angry, and well-armed mob whose members wanted to destroy plantations in their path. On the other hand, the rebels were offering a pathway out of bondage and at the very least slaves could use the chaos as an opportunity to flee from their owners. Faced with these options, many enslaved people chose to join.\(^7\)

After Bacon’s proclamation, slaves were also probably involved in the fighting on the Elizabeth, York, and James Rivers, and on the Chesapeake shore where sailors in the Royal Navy arrived in September 1676 to help suppress the rebellion. They were possibly among Bacon’s forces that fired at Captain Robert Morris near Newport News at the end of the month in an attempt to entice the enemy to land and fight. They were also possibly among those who

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engaged Captain Thomas Larrimore’s sloop on September 29. A handful of them may have even been the “runaways” captured in the fighting on the Elizabeth River just days later in early October. The rebels continued to battle Berkeley and the Royal Navy near Newport News, Elizabeth City, and up the Hampton River in Southeastern Virginia for the rest of the month. Enslaved people even continued to join the rebel forces even after Bacon’s untimely death on October 26. Just a day after his death, Captain Morris moved to Nansemond to cut off the remaining rebels, and by November 4 he arrived at Craney Island to prepare for peace. More rebels were captured later in November, though the fighting still continued. By December 28 rebel garrisons were on the run and the end appeared near.\(^8\)

Further inland, enslaved soldiers were definitively among Bacon’s last rebels. After Captain Grantham secured the surrender of a large rebel faction at West Point on January 2, he marched three miles to Colonel John West’s house, where he found 400 Black and White rebels who were upset about the previous capitulation. Grantham noted that some of the enslaved soldiers “were for shooting me, and others for cutting me in pieces,” and he surrendered himself to them to calm them down. He later recalled that he had to reassure the enslaved rebels that they would be pardoned and freed from slavery to keep them calm. Indeed, the Royal Commissioners investigating the rebellion believed that Grantham was “in jeopardy of beinge killed by the Negroe slaves who were dissatisfied with the said Treaty beinge in distrest of their hoped for liberty.” Presumably out of fear of either being returned to bondage to vindictive owners, or executed for participating in the rebellion, the enslaved soldiers knew that surrender without the

\(^8\) Journal of the Ship Young Prince, Robert Morris, Commander, in CSP, 9:450-455. It is possible that slaves took part in this action since this happened after Bacon captured Jamestown and before the last enslaved rebels in Bacon’s army surrendered.
promise of freedom was not an option, and they threatened to kill if their demands were not met. In order to further assuage them, Grantham promised the remaining White rebels that they could return home with their arms if they wished to keep fighting enemy Indians. He also promised that masters would be compensated for every servant and slave who was discharged from their bondage. For most of the rebels these assurances were enough, and they marched back toward their homes.⁹

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⁹ “Character of the Severall Commanders of Shipps Togeather with a Particular account of their respective Services to his Majestie in the time of the late Rebellion in Virginia,” in Wiseman’s Book of Record, ed. Oberg, 276; Grantham to Coventry, November 21, 1677, Henry Coventry Papers, 77:301-302.

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Map 2. Map of Virginia During Bacon’s Rebellion, 1676

Grantham successfully took control of the garrison, capturing approximately 500 muskets, powder and shot, and three large cannons. But eighty remaining Black slaves and twenty English servants refused to surrender. Thus Grantham cajoled them to board his sloop and promised that he would deliver them to the Brick House Garrison downriver from Colonel West’s house. Probably betting that this might be the best position to preserve their own goals, the slaves and servants finally agreed to board and Grantham ordered his men to treat the rebels “civilly.” But it became apparent soon thereafter that Grantham did not intend to keep his promise once he refused to land them on shore. Instead, he kept them onboard while he left for another ship, and once he was safe from rebel retaliation Grantham aimed four pieces of cannon on the remaining rebels, telling them he would fire if they did not submit. Facing surrender or death, the rebels chose the former. Reneging on his promises, Grantham returned the slaves and servants to their owners just days later. Rebel suspicion had been well-founded. Further south, British infantry and cavalry landed in January to pursue remaining rebels, and they handed rebel forces a sizeable defeat on January 16. Just three days later Captain Morris and his crew rendezvoused again with Berkeley with fifteen or sixteen of the principal rebels in tow as captives. By the end of the month government forces had ended the rebellion.  

Clearly enslaved people were involved in the rebellion, most likely to gain their freedom as individuals, but were they also challenging the entire slave system? Underscoring that freedom was fundamental to enslaved people involved in the rebellion, Governor Berkeley first offered to pardon and free any rebels who would desert Bacon and fight for the governor. In return, Bacon himself proclaimed all slaves and servants who fought in his army free as well.

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When Captain Grantham met the rebels in the field, he noted that they wanted to kill him and that he had to restate Berkeley’s offer repeatedly and promise enslaved people their freedom to get them to surrender. Additionally, Berkeley’s officers seized slaves and servants from other rebels, ostensibly to prevent them from revolting with the rest. In fact, freedom was so important for this rebellion that even King Charles II issued an emancipation proclamation to enslaved rebels in October 1676, in hopes that it would end the insurrection. Only slow communication and Berkeley’s reluctance rendered the King’s Proclamation irrelevant by the time it reached Virginia shores. So many slaves fought in this rebellion that they threatened to destroy planter authority and wealth, and nearly did destroy Virginia’s largest settlements Although they may not have initially intended to overthrow the slave system, eventually so many enslaved people joined the revolt that they did, indeed, threaten it.  

**ATLANTIC CONNECTIONS IN VIRGINIA: AFRICA**

An assessment of the African background of enslaved participants helps us understand their participation in Bacon’s Rebellion and why enslaved people took up arms in the conflict. Privateers brought the first recorded shipment of African slaves to Virginia – some “20. and odd Negroes” – in 1619. These first Africans in Virginia were probably enslaved and taken across the Atlantic by the Portuguese, who traded for slaves in Angola. Slave names in Virginia in the 1630s and 1640s also reflected Iberian designators, which suggest that English traders

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transshipped them from colonies that relied on Portuguese and Spanish slave traders who brought enslaved people from West Central Africa. Given that direct slave imports from Africa to Virginia were rare in the seventeenth century, the first generation of Africans was probably a somewhat coherent ethnic group from West Central Africa, but who, as Linda Heywood and John Thornton have described, were also a group of Atlantic Creoles. However, the supply of African slaves in the English Atlantic shifted in the 1640s, as British colonists began to import more Africans using Dutch traders working on the Gold Coast at Elmina.¹²

English slave traders themselves began to look to the Gold Coast by the mid-seventeenth century as a substantial source of African slaves as well. The people who lived in forested regions in the Gold Coast were accustomed to clearing trees that planters in Barbados and Virginia needed felled. People in the region had also developed a tobacco-smoking culture and were growing the crop by the 1640s, which suggests that they had some knowledge of the plant and its cultivation that would make them valuable slaves in Virginia’s burgeoning tobacco economy. Not surprisingly British colonists in Virginia imported a significant number of Akan slaves from the Gold Coast during the period. Of the nearly one thousand Africans directly imported to Virginia before 1676, 316 came, in fact, from the Gold Coast. Direct African imports accounted for almost half of the enslaved African population in Virginia by 1676, and this does not include African-born people imported via the Caribbean, especially Barbados in the

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intercolonial slave trade. While people from various ethnic and linguistic groups embarked from Gold Coast slave forts during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Walter Rucker and John Thornton have shown that the Gold Coast underwent significant Akanization starting in the mid-seventeenth century, and most of the enslaved population embarking from Gold Coast slave forts spoke Akan or Twi. Gâ speakers from the region could also understand Akan as a lingua franca, which helped them communicate with each other in the Americas. Moreover, British colonists preferred to import Akan people as slaves in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Importantly, this led to Coromantee or (A)mina ethnogenesis among enslaved people in places like Barbados and Virginia, and Virginia colonists probably imported even more Akan speakers from Barbados in the intercolonial slave trade. Describing the slave conspiracy in Barbados in 1675, Governor Jonathon Atkins blamed the “Cormantin negroes, who are much the greater number from any one country,” while also noting that ringleaders of the rebellion had Akan day names. The Akan ringleaders also hoped to establish their own Akan polity in which they would elect a king named Cuffee to rule the island. The plot made clear that there was still a large Akan population on the island that Virginians probably imported through the intercolonial slave trade, thus transferring more Akan language, social, and political practices to the mainland before Bacon’s Rebellion.\(^\text{13}\)

Unlike Virginia, Barbados had a small Creole generation in the early years and a somewhat diverse enslaved population in the early seventeenth century. According to the trans-Atlantic slave trade database, almost a quarter of the nearly 18,000 people enslaved and sent to the island from 1665 to 1675 came from the Gold Coast, and a little more than another quarter came from the Bight of Biafra. During the same period in Jamaica, Gold Coast Africans constituted about 6 percent of the enslaved population while those from the Bight of Biafra made up 32 percent. People from unspecified regions of Africa still represented the largest group sent to the island at 39 percent. Taken together and in conjunction with other islands, approximately 18 percent of the more than 27,000 enslaved people in the British Caribbean came from the Gold Coast from 1665 to 1675. This was second only to Africans from the Bight of Biafra and the Gulf of Guinea who represented 29 percent. In total, almost four in ten Africans sent to the British Caribbean embarked from unspecified ports. Notwithstanding the data from the trans-Atlantic slave trade database, there is reason to believe, as both Kwasi Konadu and David Eltis

have shown, that there was probably a larger Gold Coast presence in Barbados and Jamaica during the period, and in early Virginia more generally. Gregory O’Malley has also shown that unscrupulous traders and interlopers had a tendency to transship slaves from the Bight of Biafra away from the main markets, and that ethnic groups from that region were probably less prominent in Barbados and Jamaica than what data from the trans-Atlantic slave trade suggest. 14

According to O’Malley, we also know that some of these people from the Gold Coast were transshipped to mainland North America in the intercolonial slave trade. In the same decade before Bacon’s Rebellion, traders transshipped almost 2,800 people from Jamaica and Barbados alone. British planters and traders were also quite willing to transship Gold Coast people to other colonies in the Americas during the period even though they thought they were valuable slaves to keep in the British Caribbean. At the very least, Governor Atkins indicated that it was better policy to send “refractory, dangerous, and bad Negroes” to Spanish traders in Cuba in the 1670s. It is also clear that by the early eighteenth century Virginia planters demonstrated a preference for slaves from the Gold Coast and that they were reluctant to purchase Africans from West Central Africa. Taken together, these policies indicate a substantial Gold Coast presence in Virginia at the time of Bacon’s Rebellion. 15


The surge of the Akan and others in the Chesapeake and Barbados by the time of Bacon’s Rebellion also coincided with political developments in West Africa in the seventeenth century as well. As the Akan states became integrated with Europeans in the Atlantic world by the fifteenth century, they underwent transformations in political and commercial ties. Trade with the Europeans gradually eclipsed trading relationships to the Sahel and trans-Sahara as Europeans came to the Akan for gold. Initially a net importer of slaves, warfare and political expansion by the mid-seventeenth century turned the Gold Coast into a significant slave exporter, and Europeans eventually built thirty-two slave forts in the area to accommodate the supply.\textsuperscript{16}

The economic transformation of the Gold Coast into a major slave export center brought increased warfare to the region in ways that had consequences in Virginia. A series of wars and large conflicts rocked several Akan polities in the 1640s and again in the 1660s, involving Akyem, Akani, and Fetu. For most of the century, the Denkyira and Akwamu clans were the greatest political powers in the region, and they successfully defeated many of their rivals. Notably, Adanse was so weakened by war with Denkyira that many people emigrated to Ashanti and Kotoku, Akim-Abuakwa and other regions south to escape more conflict. Those who were captured in battle were often taken as slaves and sold to European traders at Elmina. By mid-to-late seventeenth century and with the rise of the Ashanti confederacy, continued warfare and Ashanti expansion displaced even more people in the region, while even more captives were taken and sold on the coast where Europeans eagerly waited. Many of these people were taken to

Virginia as slaves before Bacon’s Rebellion began. Thus much of the enslaved population of Virginia on the eve of the rebellion probably had a warrior background and was quite familiar with the dynamics of war, slavery, and freedom, having most likely experienced them all in their Gold Coast homelands.\(^{17}\)

When the last enslaved rebels in Bacon’s army surrendered, they were heavily armed with muskets, powder, and even artillery. Their use of firearms in Bacon’s army strongly suggests previous military experience in Africa, since enslaved people in Virginia, Jamaica, and Barbados were all prohibited from using firearms in the previous years before Bacon’s Rebellion. The introduction and incorporation of firearms in Africa, in conjunction with patterns in the trans-Atlantic slave trade to Virginia and the British Caribbean, might give some clues regarding from where, more specifically, enslaved rebels in Bacon’s army came and learned these martial skills. Firearms were not as common in the Gold Coast in the first half of the seventeenth century because Dutch and Portuguese traders were prohibited from selling them to African merchants, although Gold Coast armies fielded musketeers by the 1620s and 1630s. By the 1650s Dutch and English traders and interlopers developed a booming market for guns, which they sold on the open market to traders on the coast, who in turn brought them further

inland. From 1658 to 1661 the Dutch East India Company alone sent more than 5,500 muskets and gunpowder to the Gold Coast, while roughly 75 percent of all guns and gunpowder that English traders sent to West Africa went to the Gold Coast. It is not surprising that there were thousands of musketeers in service by the 1660s.\textsuperscript{18}

At the same time, armies on the Gold Coast experienced a shift from shock tactics, hand to hand combat, and smaller campaigns to much larger and wider ranging offensive operations that led to the rise in far more common soldiers. Missile tactics also became pervasive, and military service expanded as royals and elites called on more people to fight and spent more money to field them. Firearms became a major weapon of war by 1660, and by the 1680s more commoners in Akan polities used muskets than ever before, although they still carried basic weapons like axes, clubs, hatchets, and even wooden knives and javelins. Artillery too had become popular and were used in Accra.\textsuperscript{19}

To be sure, the Gold Coast was not the first, nor the only region in Atlantic Africa in which firearms influenced war and the slave trade. Dutch and Portuguese traders and merchants introduced European firearms in Angola and Benin as early as the sixteenth century, but shipping

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records do not point to a significant amount of enslaved people from these regions imported to Virginia in the 1660s or 1670s. Europeans did bring firearms to the Bight of Biafra by the seventeenth century, but accounts differ on how pervasive African soldiers used them with some European accounts noting their relative absence in the early eighteenth century. It is clear that firearms were not important trade items in the region until the eighteenth century, and that some people in the region did not widely incorporate guns until the nineteenth century. Indeed, it seems probable that firearms did not become a significant component of war in this region until the very end of the seventeenth century after Bacon’s Rebellion. Further inland in the Niger delta, cavalries made firearms ineffective for much of the seventeenth century, and soldiers did not readily incorporate muskets in their arsenals. Perhaps more importantly, there are no indications that large-scale conflicts occurred in the region that produced a significant amount of enslaved people exported to European traders before the eighteenth century. In Gambia, firearms were used only by elite professional soldiers and guards by the late eighteenth century. They were scarce in Futa Jallon by the late eighteenth century as well. Dahomeans did not substantially incorporate firearms either until the early eighteenth century. Although there is room for error, these developments in warfare, firearm use in Atlantic Africa, and shipping patterns in the trans-Atlantic slave trade suggest the Gold Coast was likely an important source of knowledge in firearm use for enslaved people in Virginia. Enslaved soldiers in Bacon’s army most likely came from the Gold Coast in the immediate years before the rebellion and were familiar with changes in war in the region that also had an impact on their response to slavery during Bacon’s Rebellion.  

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20 Ray Kea, “Firearms and Warfare,” 185; Thornton documents the incorporation of
LIKE OTHER SLAVE REBELLIONS IN THE ATLANTIC: AFRICAN AND CREOLE

The manner in which enslaved people fought in Bacon’s Rebellion suggests that developments in Akan state expansionism and in the trans-Atlantic slave trade may have influenced the fighting as in other mostly Akan-led and militarized slave rebellions during the period. Planters had already enacted new laws to punish servants and slaves who ran away together in Virginia for more than a decade before they revolted in 1676, while servants and slaves also conspired to revolt together in Barbados in 1647, 1675, 1686, and in 1692. Colonial accounts also detail Bacon’s army marching toward Jamestown and then dividing itself into multiple wings in the frontier, which suggests organized military training. If slaves were present for the attack on Jamestown, they were perhaps among the six soldiers who probed the town’s sentinels and fired at them before retreating back to safety, which paralleled how Akan rebels employed fire and withdraw tactics against Europeans in revolts in Jamaica and in St. John in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Furthermore, the rebels used firearms, cannon, and other weapons effectively in battle, and they apparently provisioned themselves when they razed Jamestown and nearby plantations afterwards. They also dug trenches and built siege lines fire...
when they surrounded the settlement in September. The military character and utility of firearms in Bacon’s Rebellion bears a striking resemblance to the 1675 and 1692 Akan plots in Barbados, the 1673, 1685, and 1690 revolts in Jamaica, the Coromantee-led revolt in New York in 1712, the Akwamu-led 1733 St. John revolt, and the Kongo-led Stono Rebellion in South Carolina in 1739. Ray Kea and John Thornton have demonstrated that the rebels in Jamaica and in St. John, and the Stono rebels were probably former soldiers in West Africa as shown by their use of firearms and military tactics. Similarly, the military organization and use of firearms by enslaved rebels in Bacon’s army also suggests that they probably had previous military experience on the African continent as well. Just as enslaved people were prohibited in South Carolina and St. John from carrying weapons, planters in Virginia legally prohibited bondpeople from arming themselves as early as 1640, and they were excluded from militia service in that same decade. Enslaved people in Barbados were also prohibited from handling weapons by the 1650s as were slaves in Jamaica in the late seventeenth century, which indicates that enslaved rebels in Bacon’s army could not have acquired knowledge of firearm use on those islands before transportation to Virginia. Given this, and the fact many enslaved West Africans sent across the Atlantic in the Middle Passage were warriors captured in battle, it is possible that many of the slaves in Bacon’s army were experienced warriors who employed their expertise in the rebellion much like former soldiers did in the other slave insurrections.21

A further comparison of Bacon’s Rebellion to other African-led revolts in the Atlantic world suggests further how the African backgrounds may have played a role in how these bondpeople fought, just like how enslaved experiences in Africa informed how rebels fought in other rebellions. Enslaved soldiers in the Virginia Rebellion fought much like the “Amina” slaves during the 1733 St. John rebellion and the Akan rebels in Barbados and in Jamaica at the end of the seventeenth century. As they had done in 1675, Akan slaves again led a rebellion in Barbados in 1692 and hoped to elect a king. The rebels planned to seize control of British ships and then infiltrate the main fort at Bridgetown with the help of several Irish servants. After taking control of the magazine and arming themselves, the rebels would move toward the remaining fortifications on the island, and once all shipping and communication were under their control, they would kill the colonial governor and appoint themselves rulers of the island. They had also timed their rebellion with the departure of British soldiers from the island, which would ensure military success. In Jamaica in 1673, 200 Akan rebels rose up on Major Lobby’s

planted, killing him and twelve White men before they seized arms and ammunition and fled to the mountains for safety. Similarly in Jamaica in 1685, approximately 150 Akan slaves rose up at Widow Grey’s plantation at Guanaboa. The rebels immediately seized at least twenty-five firearms from Grey’s house, and they killed every White person they encountered. The rebels at first evaded a White counterattack, and they retreated into thick forest where they knew mounted soldiers could not reach them. They broke into two or three groups, and at least one faction fought off the first counterattack launched by the White militia. They continued to raid plantations before they disappeared into the mountains for safety. By the end of the revolt, several hundred laid down their arms and surrendered. Those who did not were captured and executed. Likewise in 1690, nearly 500 Coromantee rebels on Sutton’s plantation and seized nearly 50 muskets and even four pieces of field artillery. They were also willing to fight pitched battles against the British and they also elected military leaders. In St. John in 1733, Akwamu rebels also used cannons to ambush planters, and they successfully engaged French and Danish forces for months. They too elected a king and they planned on establishing their own government had the rebellion succeeded. Like these other rebellions, enslaved soldiers in Bacon’s army colluded with White servants to accomplish their goals. In military fashion, they also attacked major settlements in the colony, seized arms and ammunition, and they attempted to install a new leader. They also used military violence to achieve their goals.22

Much of these tactics also reflected transformations in warfare in the Gold Coast that rebels applied to other insurrections. By the 1650s and 1660s, Gold Coast armies developed fixed wing and flanker formations and changed column and file formations to adapt to advents in missile strategies. Cannon were used, and coastal armies utilized porters, administrative personnel, logistical troops, and even blacksmiths. Campaigns could last for weeks or months and covered large chunks of territory, much like what occurred in St. John in 1733 and during Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia. Pitched battles and plunder become fairly common. Of course, many of these practices were similar to European methods in war during the period too, and it is entirely possible enslaved soldiers followed White rebels as they fought in the rebellion. We must also consider that the opposite may have occurred as well.23

Like these other Atlantic slave revolts, only a small fraction of the enslaved population in Virginia actually chose to join the rebellion. Counting only the last enslaved rebels at the end of the rebellion, at least 4 percent and perhaps as much as 10 percent of Virginia’s approximately 2,000 African slaves participated in the rebellion. Perhaps like other rebels in the Atlantic, many territories thereon depending, from the earliest account of time to the year 1742,” British Library, [Hereafter BL], ADD. MSS. 12415, 136, 145, 146; James Knight, “The Natural, Moral and Political History of Jamaica, and the territories thereon depending, from the earliest account of time to the year 1742,” BL, ADD. MSS. 12419, 49; Oldmixon, The British Empire in America, 53, 287; Orlando Patterson, “Slavery and Slave Revolts: A Socio-historical Analysis of the First Maroon War, Jamaica, 1655-1740,” Social and Economic Studies 19, no. 3 (September 1970): 297, 298.

probably knew the odds were stacked against them. Some probably knew of previous insurrections that had failed, and others may not have been willing to die or face severe punishment for their participation. Still others may not have been easily mobilized to face violence that most revolts usually entailed.

A general pattern thus emerged in the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries in mostly Akan-led and militarized slave revolts in the Atlantic, and the behavior of enslaved soldiers in Bacon’s army conforms to that pattern. On multiple occasions in Barbados, Jamaica, and in St. John, rebels organized themselves militarily, and used firearms and even cannon to attack the fortifications in the area. After seizing control of the primary military threat, rebels planned to kill White authorities and then appoint their own rulers to create their own political state. Recruits were enlisted with coercive practices as the revolts developed, and those who refused to join faced violence from the rebels. Rebels also attacked the main population centers, and burned and ransacked their masters’ homes. Bacon’s rebels also marched into battle with him at Jamestown, Williamsburg, and then in the frontier. They too used firearms and cannon to fight Governor Berkeley and their former masters. They also drove Berkeley out of the capital, and the rebellion as a whole was a clear attempt to unseat authorities in the colony. We know that Europeans behaved in similar ways in colonial rebellions during the period too, and that Europeans and Africans revolted together in Virginia. But should we not pay more attention to African perspectives, not just the European? Should we not assume that all of the critical influences and interests here were European?

The development of law in Virginia after the rebellion also indicates how enslaved rebels had threatened the slave system, which was the case after militarized slave rebellions elsewhere
in the Atlantic world, like in colonial South Carolina and Barbados. As was the case in other revolts and conspiracies, authorities often passed new legislation to restrict slaves in hopes that they could prevent future insurrections. These laws were often immediately implemented after insurrections, such as the “Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes” that planters in South Carolina passed in May 1740, just months after the Stono rebellion. But sometimes enslaved rebels influenced legislation several years after they revolted, as was the case in Barbados in 1677, when planters continued to pass new restrictions on slaves following the 1675 conspiracy on the island. In Virginia, the Royal Commissioners recommended new laws that would address runaway “servants” in the colony and that they should “serve as a public Servant and Slave of the Colony.” The House of Burgesses therefore passed “An Act Concerning Servants who were out in rebellion” in 1677 that added time to servants’ contracts for their desertion during the rebellion. Perhaps because of the larger servant to slave population ratio in Virginia the House took a few more years to address Black rebels also involved. In 1680 the House passed “An Act for Preventing Negroes Insurrections” in June 1680. The new law prohibited enslaved people from carrying weapons of any kind, and restricted their unsupervised congregations. The law came four years after Bacon’s Rebellion, but the timing of its adoption suggested that lawmakers were still concerned about Bacon’s enslaved rebels. Authorities in Virginia did not detect another plot to rebel among servants and slaves in the colony until 1687 in the Northern Neck, and records do not otherwise indicate that planters were concerned that enslaved people were becoming increasingly rebellious or agitated in 1680.24

24 April Lee Hatfield makes this connection too in Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century, 159; The Commissioners’ Resolve in Oberg, 193; An Act concerning servants who were out in rebellion, The Statutes at Large, ed. Hening, 2:395; An act
As noted above in Barbados in 1675 and 1692 and in St. John in 1733, material deprivation of enslaved people often preceded militarized slave revolts during the period. Likewise, material deprivation also affected enslaved soldiers in Bacon’s army, which also demonstrated how similar slave soldiers were to conventional militarized slave rebels. Rebels in Bacon’s army in 1676 did face economic loss and deprivation. Tobacco prices in Virginia had fallen, and Governor Berkeley increased taxes to help pay for colonial expenditures. Furthermore, tobacco overproduction and navigation acts decreased tobacco prices, while war with the Dutch in the 1660s and 1670s increased colonial debt. Underscoring how financially strained the colony was, Berkeley stated to the king that because the previous year’s crops were so bad and because tobacco prices had fallen, he and his advisors did not think they had enough money to adequately fund an army against Bacon or hostile Natives. At the very least, it is clear that economic decay was present in the colony in 1675. Warren Billings described it as having probably affected all segments of Virginia society and made living at even subsistence levels difficult. More importantly, Virginia colonists and their slaves suffered substantial threats to food security leading up to Bacon’s Rebellion. In October 1675 Barbados Governor Atkins described his frustration in a letter to Sir Joseph Williamson about the lack of provisions on the island, as English ships sent supplies to Virginia that had “been in a starving condition.” In two other

letters to Williamson that same month, R.I. Watts and Nathaniel Osborne observed that ships returning from Virginia reported that the colony had lost a great amount of its Indian corn and tobacco crops, and that the majority of pigs and other livestock were dead. Furthermore, New Englanders enforced high prices on foods that they exported to Virginia, which further strained Virginia’s fiscal stability. Osborne reported to Williamson in April 1676 that sailors returning from Jamestown described an illness wreaking havoc in Virginia. The outbreak, which some sailors believed was similar to the plague, caused fever, head and stomach aches, and colds before killing many Virginia men, women, and children. To make matters worse, colonial reports indicated an abnormally hot summer and autumn, and a colder than average winter during the rebellion. Indeed, conditions in the colony were very poor, as both planters and enslaved people suffered more from pestilence, crop failures, and mortality rates in 1675 and 1676 than they ever had in the colony since the Starving Time in 1609. Aside from disease and a threatened food supply, it is also likely that the Virginia planters who endured substantial economic stress passed more of the burdens down to their slaves just as planters did elsewhere in the Atlantic, including in the many cases in which enslaved people responded by rebelling.25

Aside from economic loss, starvation, and disease, planters passed a series of acts in the House of Burgesses in the early 1660s that worsened living conditions for slaves. New

legislation in March 1661 required that White servants who ran away with enslaved Africans and African Americans would serve additional time of service in their contracts, and that they would be fined if any enslaved person was lost or died in flight. The intent of the law was to deter collusion between servants and slaves and make it more difficult for enslaved people to resist. Planters passed another law that same month that prohibited colonists from trading with servants and slaves without their owner’s consent, which limited potential transactions among servants and slaves. Given that an enslaved person’s ability to trade food and goods often increased bondpeople’s standard of living and that surpluses could help them purchase their freedom, the new restriction undermined their material comfort. It also limited their ability to escape bondage. Perhaps more importantly, another 1661 act proscribed colonists from keeping Native Americans as slaves and ordered Indians to serve sentences no longer than English servants of the same age. White Virginians continued to hold Indians as slaves despite the law, but the legislation itself suggests the beginning of a labor transition, as planters shifted toward black slaves instead of Natives as a labor source. Additionally, an act passed in December 1662 declared that the status of Black children would be inherited according to the condition of the mother. Establishing a life-long condition of bondage, the act made enslaved children bondpeople for life, and contributed to the worsening conditions for enslaved people in Virginia leading up to Bacon’s Rebellion. Furthermore, another act in 1667 ensured that baptisms among slaves would not change their condition in bondage. Christian slaves would remain slaves. The Black chattel system was already in ascendance in the colony before enslaved rebels mobilized in Bacon’s army.26

26 See Act X All persons to be armed except negroes in, The Statutes At Large, ed.
Where Bacon’s Rebellion differs from most Caribbean insurrections is in the absence of Black leaders in the historical record and Bacon’s own leadership role. Although some White people colluded with enslaved Black rebels and in a few cases even served in leadership roles, the overwhelming majority of insurrectionary leaders were obviously Black. Rebels in Barbados and St. John expected to appoint Black men to prominent leadership positions, while Black men and women like Kofi, Queen, Tacky, Cécile, Nat, and Nanny led other insurrections from the very beginning. There is no account in Virginia in 1676 that hints that rebels were trying to do the same there. The historical record also does not permit us to know who attained mid-level leadership roles in the enslaved faction, though several English servants did become influential military leaders during the rebellion. Importantly, John Page and John Digby rose in the ranks to become colonel and captain respectively, and given servants’ and slaves’ familiarity in working together against their owners during the period, it is possible that these individuals had some leading influence on the enslaved rebels. If they did not, Bacon’s Rebellion was a case in which enslaved Africans and African Americans made a rebellion that was part of a movement that White people led for other reasons as happened during the American Revolution or the American Civil War.27


27 “The Names and Short Characters of those that have bin Executed for Rebellion,” in ed. Oberg, 114.
CONCLUSION

By taking an Atlantic approach and by incorporating the perspectives of the Black slaves involved, a revised interpretation emerges of Bacon’s Rebellion. While Whites continued to fight each other and local Indians, dozens if not hundreds of Black slaves revolted for their liberty in one of the largest slave insurrections in British North American history. Consistent with other militarized slave insurrections in the Atlantic, slaves endured material deprivation connected to the rise of the Black chattel system at the onset of Bacon’s Rebellion, and were more likely to rise up against those at the top of the system. The rebellion was not a cause of the rise of Black chattel slavery in Virginia, but rather a symptom of it already developing and many White and Black people were prepared to resist it violently. In addition, Bacon’s enslaved rebels fought collectively and proportionately as other slaves did in revolts throughout the Atlantic world. The rebels, both Black and White, threatened to destroy the planter regime in colonial Virginia. They fought alongside servants as they had done earlier in Barbados, and they razed, plundered, and fought like rebels in many other revolts in the littoral.28

Moreover, and like other Akan-led slave insurrections in the Atlantic, enslaved soldiers in Bacon’s army demonstrated how their experiences in the Gold Coast informed the rebellion. Developments in trade and state expansion in the Gold Coast during the period were accompanied with warfare in which many Akan people, some who were soldiers, were captured and imported to the Americas as slaves to work on British plantations. Like the rebels in Barbados, Jamaica, and St. John, enslaved soldiers in Virginia used firearms, marched in unison,

and responded to oathing practices that possibly reflected their military experience in West Africa.

Finally, like other enslaved rebels across the Atlantic, the rebels in Virginia fought in order to escape bondage. Notably, enslaved people were among the last holdouts who kept fighting Captain Grantham well after Bacon had died. In distress that Berkeley and Grantham might renege on their pardons, the enslaved rebels refused to give up and forced Grantham to promise them their freedom. By doing so, servants and slaves also made Bacon’s Rebellion a conflict about slavery itself. Slavery in Virginia continued for almost 200 more years, but revolting slaves in Bacon’s army demonstrated that they could confront their masters with the issue of emancipation. In fear that the insurrection would intensify, Berkeley’s men seized servants and slaves before they could join in the fight, while servants and slaves also forced Bacon, Berkeley, and King Charles II to consider their freedom in order to end the fighting. The rebellion was the first major conflict in British North America in which slave soldiers fought in large numbers and were able to push the issue of emancipation. It was also one of the first major conflicts in which enslaved people used military service to challenge the chattel system.

In Bacon’s case, a slave revolt was part of another war, and while enslaved people fought in the conflict, the cause and character of their fighting was distinct from that of other belligerents involved. Although affected by White-Indian frontier warfare, Virginia slaves had a more important goal: they wanted their own emancipation. Their ability to raise the specter of emancipation among Virginia planters demonstrates the power and negotiating space that enslaved rebels held, but it also attests to how much influence slave revolts had on promoting Black emancipation in the Atlantic. The wedge that Bacon’s enslaved soldiers created for
themselves would also be one of the first of many attempts in which enslaved people used warfare in slave societies and the practice of arming slaves to challenge their bondage and promote their freedom. They were, indeed, reliable slave soldiers, but soldiering was also a form of violent resistance and enslaved soldiers would revolt again in Virginia one hundred years later under similar circumstances when Lord Dunmore offered freedom to slaves, convicts, and servants who would join his standard, along with the thousands of other bondpeople who fought in wars for freedom throughout the littoral. Thus from Black perspectives, Bacon’s Rebellion was much more than an Indian conflict or resistance to government policy. It was the beginning of a series of armed slave revolts that were part of the history of slavery in the Anglo-Atlantic. It was part of the history of the militarization of slave resistance in the Anglo-Atlantic.29

Approximately forty years after enslaved soldiers rose up in Virginia as part of Nathaniel Bacon’s army, enslaved people further south also seized the opportunity that violent conflict offered to achieve emancipation. Whereas rebels in Bacon’s army joined the fray in an Indian-imperial conflict in Virginia, in South Carolina violence flared up when the Yamasee Indians rebelled against English colonists in the spring of 1715. The ensuing Yamasee War from 1715 to 1717 was one of the largest and most violent Indian wars in early American history.

For many years, historians focused on the White and Native American experiences in the conflict. Long ago Verner Crane situated the war as an Indian revolt against the Carolina trading regime in a broader history of British expansion and imperial contestation in the Southeast. Similarly, Chapman Milling and John Swanton attributed the conflict as a Native American response to English demands for Indian slaves and a surge in Native American slave trading. In his influential work on the Indian slave trade, Allan Gallay argued that the Yamasee War was a watershed moment in early American history. While the desire for Indian slaves helped drive the war, it also shattered the Native American slave trade and forced British colonists to turn to enslaved Africans for their labor source in its aftermath. Several more recent works have built on
these perspectives and have stressed how the Yamasee War shaped the South Carolina slave society thereafter.¹

Others have forced us to reconsider how the conflict altered Native American societies and to acknowledge the diversity of Indian perspectives regarding the war. Steven Oatis called it one of the most serious challenges Native Americans posed to colonial society, and John Worth thought the war changed Yamasee communities, as refugees began to intermarry with people from other linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Meanwhile, in his comprehensive study of the Yamasee War William Ramsey argues that the war rivaled King Philip’s War as the deadliest Native American-White war in early American history. Proportionately, hundreds of English colonists died from the conflict, while White towns laid in ruin, much like what happened to colonists in New England in 1676. But Ramsey also thinks that the war codified racial ideology tied to Indian and African slavery in the colony. When English colonists redeemed Tuscarora slaves during the Yamasee War, colonists made the conflict one also about Indian liberty in the developing slave society. Some Native American slaves would be freed while others fought to fight enslavement. When the war was over and the Indian slave trade shattered, colonists increasingly turned to Africans for labor on their plantations.²


Both Oatis and Ramsey have also challenged historians to explore multiple perspectives regarding the conflict, and diverse motivations for the many people who fought in it. Steven Hahn has also stressed a diverse array of Native perspectives regarding the war, and that the war influenced the development of the Creek nation in the Southeast. Similarly, contributors to Denise Bossy’s edited collection further stress Yamasee diversity, and how Natives developed cultural and political cohesion to preserve the Yamasee Confederacy and protect their sovereignty.

Notwithstanding the many works analyzing how the conflict affected Native American slavery and a turn to Black chattel slavery in South Carolina, some scholars have sought to understand how enslaved Black people experienced the conflict. As early as 1779 historian Alexander Hewatt noted how the war affected Black slaves in South Carolina and that the colony suffered as a result of the violence. Crane and Milling also acknowledged that the English armed trusted slaves to defend the colony during the war. Meanwhile, Kenneth Wiggins Porter noted how the role of enslaved Africans and African Americans in the Yamasee War was not so distinctly one-sided. Porter questioned if some of the loyal slave soldiers in South Carolina had later joined the Yamasee and Spanish at St. Augustine, and if the slave soldiers began raiding British plantations where they had once lived. Despite Porter’s suspicion, no work has shaped

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3 Steven Hahn, *The Invention of the Creek Nation 1670-1763* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 83.

historians’ understanding of enslaved Africans in the Yamasee War more than Peter Wood’s influential *Black Majority*. Wood argued that Black slaves in South Carolina “never played such a major role” in any conflict before or after the Yamasee War. He contended that they had been loyal enslaved soldiers and that they helped their White owners protect the colony from deadly Indian attacks. Despite their prominence in keeping the British colony afloat, Wood also recognized that enslaved people readily joined British enemies in every conflict in South Carolina in the eighteenth century. Enslaved people ran away to the Tuscaroras in 1711-1712, and he believed that the same situation during the Yamasee War “must have recurred.”

Like Wood, John Tepaske has broadly considered enslaved soldiers in Carolina as loyal to their owners, despite their great value at the same time to Spanish diplomatic strategy in the South. Since the Spanish had lost the battle for Native alliances, they turned to English slaves to help defend Florida. Curiously, despite their putative loyalty as soldiers to British causes in 1728 and in 1740, the Spanish could still rely on fugitive slaves to soldier for them and against their former English masters at other times. Ramsey too has shown the potential for both loyalty and rebelliousness, and that Black slaves were cooperating with Indian raiding parties. On the other hand, Oatis noted how enslaved people served in the militia during the war, but also that the vast majority of South Carolina’s slaves carried on their daily lives during the conflict. It was neither

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an opportunity to convey loyalty nor one to seize the initiative to fight for freedom. More recently, Jane Landers has argued on several occasions that the war did provide a chance for Black freedom, and as her biography of prominent Black soldier Francisco Menéndez shows, some enslaved people in Carolina did recognize “the chance for their own liberation,” and joined the Yamasees in “revolt.”

Thus we know that the Yamasee War offered enslaved Black people in Carolina an opportunity to defend plantations and earn their owners’ good favor. We are also beginning to understand that the conflict additionally offered enslaved people an opportunity to run from or even fight against their owners as they allied with warring Yamasees who also sided with the Spanish in Florida. But we still do not fully know what this conflict meant to the enslaved Black people who chose from these options, and especially not how the activities of enslaved people compared to those of other enslaved people in the Atlantic world in times of war and rebellion. For the enslaved people who decided to fight with the Indians and Spanish, we do not know how

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their actions compared to other cases of Black resistance. We do not know how slave soldiers used military service in the Carolina Lowcountry to challenge the slave system.

This chapter moves from Virginia to South Carolina to examine how slave soldiers in the Lowcountry experienced war and armed conflict, and how armed resistance compared there to the Chesapeake. It examines the Yamasee War to further assess how slave soldiers used armed resistance decades after Bacon’s Rebellion and in the early eighteenth century. While Jane Landers has shown that some slaves in Carolina were willing to join the Yamasees against British colonists, this chapter goes deeper to examine the range of options slave soldiers had in Carolina in 1715-1717. Additionally, part of its original contribution is its comparative Atlantic analysis that assesses slave soldiers in Carolina to other militarized slave rebels elsewhere in the Atlantic. The Yamasee War was also a conflict in which several Native American groups fought each other, British colonists, and in which Spanish imperial rivals were heavily involved. Thus, it also offers insight into how slave soldiering worked in the British Atlantic with so many competing interests and actors at play, especially the presence of imperial rivals that were absent in Virginia in 1676. How could and did enslaved people exploit such circumstances, which recurred frequently in the Atlantic world, to further their own goals? What did the Yamasee War mean for the enslaved soldiers who participated in it, and what were slave soldiers trying to accomplish by participating in this conflict? How did they compare to other incidents in which enslaved soldiers participated in armed conflict in the Atlantic? How did slave soldiers interpret military service when Native Americans and European rivals offered other alternatives?

As with Bacon’s Rebellion, there is little direct evidence produced by enslaved Black people regarding their experiences in the Yamasee War; however, their motives can be inferred
from written documentation produced by Yamasee, British, French, and Spanish imperial correspondence, letters, and accounts that describe the actions of enslaved people. Comparing their actions to those of enslaved Black people elsewhere in the Atlantic during “Indian war” and slave rebellion also helps to interpret the meaning of slave soldiering in South Carolina in 1715 to 1717. Using evidence acquired from these approaches, this chapter argues that while British colonists and Yamasee Indians were engaged in a frontier war in South Carolina, significant numbers of enslaved Africans and African Americans took to soldiering to achieve something else. For those who took up arms with the Yamasees and Spaniards in Florida, the conflict morphed into something similar to what happened forty years earlier in Virginia despite some important differences from the Chesapeake. Instead of an internal imperial rebellion like Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia, in Carolina enslaved soldiers exploited an Indian war and took advantage of a White imperial rival in Florida to fight for something else. For them, taking up arms was about challenging their owners and fighting for freedom, and the manner in which they did so bore striking resemblances to how militarized slave rebels created insurrections in the Lowcountry and elsewhere in the Atlantic in the early eighteenth century. Thus, in Carolina in 1715-1717, warfare and soldiering became another opportunity to strike at chattel slavery, and demonstrated a rise in the militarization of slave rebels.

**SOUTH CAROLINA AT THE OUTBREAK OF WAR**

South Carolina society at the outbreak of war in 1715 helps to understand why enslaved soldiers made decisions to stay loyal or rebel during the conflict. On the eve of the Yamasee War, South Carolina’s White and Black population was growing rapidly. By the end of the first
decade of the eighteenth century, there were almost 10,000 Black and White people living in the colony, including more than 3,900 free White men, women, and children, more than 100 White servants, 4,100 enslaved Black people, and 1,400 Indian slaves. By 1715 there were roughly 6,000 White people and 8,000 Black slaves living near the Yamasees, Creeks, Cherokees, and Uchees. From 1700 to the end of the war, a little more than 1,400 enslaved Africans arrived via the trans-Atlantic slave trade, of which a little more than 56 percent and 43 percent were imported from the Gold Coast and Senegambia respectively. However, many of the enslaved people living in South Carolina had been imported via the inter-colonial slave trade from Barbados, Jamaica, and Antigua. In the first twenty years of the eighteenth century, Carolina planters imported a little less than 900 enslaved people this way, of which more than 500 were transshipped from Jamaica and Barbados. Ninety-nine more came from Antigua. During the same period, enslaved people from the Gold Coast constituted almost 45 percent of the people brought to Jamaica, Barbados, and Antigua via the trans-Atlantic slave trade, while people from the Bight of Benin represented the next largest group at almost 29 percent. Taken together during this early period of Carolina history, a large faction of the enslaved people in South Carolina who were not American-born were probably Akan or Twi or Gā speakers from the Gold Coast, who were likely taken as prisoners during the many wars that erupted in the region during the period.8

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8 Extract of Letter, September 17, 1708, in A Sketch of the History of South Carolina: To the Close of the Proprietary Government by the Revolution of 1719/with an Appendix Containing Many Valuable Records hitherto Unpublished, ed. William Rivers (Charleston: McCarter & Co., 1856), 232; Ivers, This Torrent of Indians, 6; Governor and Council of Proprietors to Board of Trade, September 17, 1708, in The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views, 1697-1774, ed. Roy Merrens (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), 32-33; The Intra-American Slave Trade Database. http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/search; The trans-
By English estimates there were 1,215 Yamasees, including 413 men, 234 boys, and 233 girls living in the region. There were also 214 Apalachicolas, 638 Apalatchees, 233 Savanas, 400 Euchees, 2,406 Ochesees or Creeks, 1,773 Abikaws, 2,313 Tallibooses, 770 Alabamas, and 9,992 Cherokees, among many others, totaling 28,041 Natives within 700 miles of Charleston, many of whom could fight against white planters if they wanted to. The Cherokees alone had about 4,000 warriors in more than thirty separate towns in the Carolinas, Georgia, and in present-day Southeastern Tennessee, while the Catawbas northwest of Charleston could mobilize more than 500 soldiers spread out in seven towns. The Apalachees near Augusta, Georgia, had almost 300 soldiers, and the Yamasees themselves had more than 400 men who could fight.9

Tensions between the British colonists and Yamasee and Timucua Indians had been simmering for decades before the war erupted. Long before the Yamasees challenged British expansion in Carolina, the Timucuas also fought back English encroachment in North Florida and Southern Georgia. Like the Yamasees, the Timucua had faced English aggression in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, which forced them to flee to the Spanish at St. Augustine who relied on them as allies against other Indian nations. As John Worth, Alan Gallay, and William Ramsey have shown, English expansion in Carolina also encouraged a rise in Indian slave trading in the region. English slave traders targeted Natives who were not British

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Atlantic slave trade database; for warfare in the Gold Coast and ties to the slave trade, see Chapter Two. It must be noted that these are ballpark estimates only given the fact that the trans-Atlantic slave trade database does not consider inter-land slave trading patterns and that embarkation regions do not necessarily indicate ethnic or linguistic origins.
allies, and they worked with Native American allies to secure more people to keep as slaves. For a brief period the Yamasees themselves served English traders in this way and against the Spanish in Florida. However, shortly before the Yamasee War, Westo Indian slave raiders who were allied with the English led a series of raids and attacks in Carolina that drove many Indian groups further south to avoid enslavement. It was these refugees that joined the nascent Yamasee Confederacy in the last decades of the seventeenth century. By the 1680s there were over 300 Yamasees living in the mission towns along the St. Johns River watershed and near St. Augustine. By 1711, a census showed that there were more than 400 Native Americans living south of St. Augustine with the Spanish, a significant reduction from previous decades. By the time the rebellion actually started, the Yamasee confederation consisted of five different groups including the Lower Creeks, Apalachicolas, Apalachees, Savannahs, and Yuchi. It was these people who fought against the British colonists in 1715.10

Most English accounts of the Yamasee War periodize the conflict as starting on Good Friday, April 15, 1715, when Yamasee warriors ambushed English commissioners and traders William Bray, Samuel Warner, Thomas Nairne, and John Wright at the Yamasee village Pocotaligo near Port Royal in South Carolina. The White men had visited the town four days earlier after colonists became alarmed that the Natives were upset and were plotting an uprising against them. When the Yamasees told them they were upset about English traders threatening to enslave Yamasee women and children and that they wanted to meet Governor Charles Craven, Bray and Warner returned to Craven, who sent the men back to Pocotaligo to set up a more

formal meeting. The traders had arrived there on a Thursday to assure the Yamasees that their concerns and demands would be satisfied, but in the next morning the Natives ambushed them. While the commissioners and traders slept, Yamasee warriors attacked with hatchets and muskets and captured nearly all of those they did not kill. Seymour Burrows was able to escape despite being wounded, and he fled to John Barnwell’s plantation on Port Royal Island to alert everyone else. Thereafter planters prepared for war as the Good Friday Massacre morphed into a much larger conflict between the Natives and English colonists.11

Map 3. Distribution of Indian Tribes in the Southeast about the Year 1715, (enlarged).


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According to at least one English account, some colonists even told the Natives before the massacre that the colonists would make war on them, which inculcated the idea among the Yamasees that they had to preemptively strike the English to survive. These rumors were part of a longer history of Yamasee grievances against the traders and Whites in South Carolina decades before. In 1711 and in 1712 the Yamasees repeatedly complained about White encroachment, settling debts, and Indians taken as slaves. The Natives also resented English traders who tracked runaway slaves all the way to St. Augustine in 1714 where people were supposed to be safe from re-enslavement.¹²

According to four Yamasee Caciques who petitioned Spanish Governor Francisco de Córcoles y Martínez for help at St. Augustine later in 1715, they believed the conflict erupted in part due to the Indian slave trade. The four men, Ysiopole, Yfallaquisca or Perro Bravo, Alonso, and Gabriel, informed the Governor that they understood Carolina traders were increasingly upset over the Indian slave trade. Yamasee raiders were apparently not providing enough slaves to feed the English plantation system, and when the Yamasees could not satisfy the planters with other goods, the traders threatened to make the Natives slaves themselves, including women and children. Thus they had prepared to make war against the English, and they thought a preemptive strike at Pocotaligo was the best course of action. The chiefs also complained about the

¹² Journal of George Chicken, 1714, in Yearbook...City of Charleston, South Carolina 1894, ed. Langdon Cheves (Charleston: Walker Evans & Cogswell Co. printers, 1894), 334, 335; A.S. Salley Jr. ed., Journal of the Commissioners of the Indian trade of South Carolina September 20, 1710-April 12, 1715 (Columbia: Historical Commission of South Carolina, 1926), 13, 36, 46, 86.
destruction of their towns from English attacks, and that they and a confederation of 161 Indian
towns had given their name to Spain and would execute the orders of the governor.¹³

Immediately after the Good Friday massacre the Yamasees moved on to Port Royal
Island and plundered the plantations there on Saturday and Sunday. There they killed about sixty
White colonists before the rest escaped on canoes. The Yamasees and fleeing White survivors
exchanged a round of gunfire, resulting in three Natives being killed. Approximately 200 White
settlers escaped. After the attack on Port Royal, Governor Craven ordered troops to counterattack
the Yamasees at Pocotaligo. In about a week a force of about 200 men marched to the Indian
town, but they were spotted by Yamasee warriors near Captain Woodward’s plantation and a
small skirmish ensued. On April 21 or 22 a major battle occurred at a Sadkeche Town in which
the Yamasees fled despite nearly trapping Craven’s detachment. According to Craven
approximately eleven militiamen were killed and twenty-one were wounded in the early
engagement. Several Yamasee warriors were also killed and wounded in the fight. After this
small defeat, the Yamasees retreated into the woods and swamps where White soldiers struggled
to pursue them. The rest of the colonists then spent their time fortifying several positions along
the frontier. In the process they armed several Black slaves in the colony to assist in the colony’s
defense. By this point, Black slaves were probably both eager and reluctant to join the fray. They
were undoubtedly affected by Yamasee raids near Port Royal that also threatened their safety and

¹³ Governor Francisco de Córcoles y Martínez and Salvador Garcia de Villegas, Autos
regarding the Arrival of the Yamasees, May 28-29, 1715, trans. in Worth, “Razing Florida,”
305; Landers, “Yamasee-African Ties,” 173, 174; Testimony of Four Caciques attached in
Governor Córcoles y Martínez to the King, January 26, 1716, Archivo de Indios 58-1-30, Stetson
Collection, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville [Hereafter PKY]; Amanda Hall,
“San Antonio De Pocotalaca: An Eighteenth-Century Yamasee Indian Town in St. Augustine,
security, which probably motivated them to take up arms to defend themselves and even seek revenge. On the other hand, others probably disdained having to serve for their White owners, and still others viewed the Yamasees as a potential ally against White colonists in Carolina. Given these options, enslaved Black people began taking up arms in the conflict.\textsuperscript{14}

A few weeks later on May 15, 1715, militia Captain Thomas Barker moved with 90 White and 12 Black militiamen toward Hearn’s plantation along the Santee River north of Charleston. Just a day earlier Indians attacked and killed Hearn unbeknownst to Barker. On May 16, his Black and White battalion arrived near the Santee River under the guidance of an Indian scout named Wateree Jack. Wateree Jack then betrayed the battalion and fled. Barker and his men subsequently moved along the river through a beaten path devastated by a recent hurricane. As they marched, Indian warriors hidden behind the felled trees and bushes ambushed them. Despite the advantage of complete surprise, the Natives possibly attacked too soon, which enabled the Black and White militiamen to return fire. After a short exchange of gunfire, the Black and White soldiers forced the Yamasee warriors to flee, although more than two dozen militiamen were dead, including Barker. Ten were also taken prisoner.\textsuperscript{15}

Just days after Barker’s defeat, Natives continued their march south toward Thomas Broughton’s plantation, where one of his slaves named Jemmy served in the militia to defend it. By June 5, 1715, northern Indians approached Schenkingh’s Fort under pretense of peace. Inside


the fort, Commander Redwood entertained ideas of a peaceful meeting and he allowed the warriors to approach. When the Natives suddenly attacked, at least one enslaved soldier named Wallace who belonged to Benjamin Godin helped fight back before he escaped. Wallace was probably aware of potential rewards for good service, and sure enough Wallace later earned an award for his role. Slave soldiers also helped repel an Indian attack near Charleston that same summer.\footnote{Ivers, 90, 91; Klingberg, \textit{The Chronicle of Le Jau}, 161; David Corkran, \textit{The Carolina Indian Frontier, Tricentential Booklet no. 6} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 21.}

Enslaved soldiers also marched with Colonel John Barnwell and Colonel Alexander Mackay, and helped ambush the Yamasees to retaliate for the Good Friday Massacre. This Black, Indian, and White force attacked several Yamasee towns and helped take at least one prisoner. Later that summer, several enslaved soldiers marched with Colonel John Fenwick against hostile Indians along the Combahee River, and they marched with him to Pond Bridge and to Jackson’s plantation where one enslaved soldier was wounded. About 100 enslaved soldiers marched with Governor Craven during an expedition across the Santee River in 1715. They had decided to march with him to counterattack their common Indian enemies, while later that same year a company of Black soldiers under the command of Captain John Pight marched with Maurice Moore against the Cherokees.\footnote{Samuel Eveleigh to Messrs Boone and Beresford, October 7, 1715, \textit{CSP}, 28:296-302; Porter, “Negroes on the Southern Frontier,” 57; Kenneth Porter Papers, 42:6; Crane, 181; William Willis, “Divide and Rule: Red, White, and Black in the Southeast,” \textit{The Journal of Negro History} 48, no. 3 (July 1963): 167}

That same month, Captain George Chicken and his men marched to the Ponds, a plantation also known as Weston Hall northwest of Charleston, where the Black and White and
enslaved and free militia force would guard against further Indian attacks on the northern frontier. At this point, enslaved soldiers saw multiple military options in the conflict. Some continued to serve White commanders, but at least two enslaved soldiers, Pope and Pompey, had joined the northern Indians against the English. By June 12, Chicken led his 120-man battalion to the Ashley River, where he divided his men in a pincer movement to surround the enemy. Among the men serving in Chicken’s battalion were forty Black and seventy White soldiers. On the next day, Chicken had hoped to ambush the Natives but they discovered him early, and he was forced to attack too soon. After several hours of close fighting that afternoon, Chicken’s men killed several dozen warriors and took two prisoners. As the Indians fled into the swamps Chicken’s men gave chase, but the warriors were able to evade them under cover of darkness. Nevertheless, they had left their weapons and plunder behind them. Chicken’s men were also able to rescue several captives from Schenkingh’s Fort. Enslaved soldiers were fighting with alacrity and were willing to sacrifice for the colonial cause. Chicken lost two men, including Thomas Broughton’s enslaved soldier named Jemmy. He apparently died loyal to his owner despite opportunities to run away and turn coat as others like Pope and Pompey had done.¹⁸

Despite Chicken’s success in June, the fighting caused great consternation among Carolina planters in late spring and early summer. In May the General Assembly of South Carolina supplicated to King George I that they wanted to declare war against the Indians, and that he should issue a royal edict to the other British colonies in North America to come to the aid of the South Carolinians, especially rich Virginia. That same month Governor Charles Eden

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of North Carolina called on volunteers to rise and help their neighbors to the south. But their help was not enough and by July Governor Craven sent emissaries to Virginia and New England for more assistance. By then the HMS *Valour* had arrived in Charleston with 160 small arms, ten barrels of gun powder, and twenty-five casks of shot. That same month Virginians finally agreed to send Captain Arthur Middleton and 120 men to South Carolina, while New Yorkers pledged one hundred muskets. The violence that the summer of 1715 brought also encouraged leaders in South Carolina to raise more troops, including enslaved soldiers, who could help defend the colony from hostile Indians. By August 1715 the Commissioners of the Commons House Assembly advocated raising 1,200 White and Black soldiers for the task.19

Enslaved soldiers continued to serve as the fighting raged on. Colonel Maurice Moore marched with sixty White soldiers and sixty Native soldiers against the Northern Indians where he was joined with Governor Craven and Thomas Broughton in late July who were accompanied by 100 White soldiers and 100 enslaved Black and Indian soldiers. Once Governor Craven marched to the Santee, he forced the Indians to flee over the Ponpon Bridge, though they killed four or five White colonists and burned the crossing. To the south, the Yamasees continued their attacks on plantations near Port Royal and New London, destroying most near the latter. In St. Paul’s Parish, they destroyed at least twenty plantations and turned the parish into a deserted

frontier. Later that summer, Captain William Stone sent one hundred militiamen to Port Royal to cut off Indian canoes and chase the enemy into the woods. On at least two separate engagements in August and September, the English defeated the Yamasees in the area. In late summer or early fall 1715, Colonel John Fenwick marched up to the Pond Bridge and met the enemy Indians at Jackson’s house near a ferry. Upon attacking them at dawn, the English killed nine Natives and took two prisoners, while one White militiamen and one Black soldier were wounded.  

The summer of 1715 was disastrous for English colonists in South Carolina. Six to seven hundred Yamasees laid waste to English plantations in the colony. They attacked and destroyed all the settlements near Port Royal and along the Combahee River, the plantations south of the Edisto River, and all those on the Santee River felt the blow of the Yamasees. They had burned plantations on their way to New London, where they burned even more upon arrival. Almost all the plantations in St. Bartholomew and St. Helen’s Parishes were destroyed during the war. Port Royale Island was also abandoned. Approximately 100 colonists were killed in St. Bartholomew’s Parish in the first Southern attack alone. As the Yamasees moved through the Southern parishes, some colonists and their slaves were barely able to escape. In St. Helen’s

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Parish, English ships had to carry the colonists up to Charleston as they narrowly escaped the attacks.\textsuperscript{21}

However, in New London a garrison of fifty to sixty militiamen stopped the Indian advance and forced them to spread out along the Stono River, where they resumed more plunder elsewhere. The Yamasees were so easily able to plunder the southern plantations because whites had not detected them, so Governor Craven raised 700 men to march to the Wincaw River and meet Colonel Moore in the North. By then the \textit{Success} had arrived from Virginia with thirty more Virginian soldiers and eighty White and sixty Indian fighters from North Carolina. The South Carolina Assembly also passed an act to pay for the forces and to raise several White officers, 600 rank and file White soldiers, and 400 enslaved Black soldiers that were divided into sixty-man companies to go after the Indian threat. By November colonists reported that the enemy Indians had resorted to bush fighting and that they had not been seen in full force for quite some time.\textsuperscript{22}

Late 1715 and early 1716 marked a change in the conflict. The Cherokees turned on the Yamasees and agreed to fight with the English against them. The Cherokees’ superior numbers in the region marked doom for the smaller Yamasee Confederacy, and the English-Cherokee alliance pushed the Yamasees south and out of Carolina. The Yamasees stayed near the Spanish

\textsuperscript{21} David Humphreys, \textit{An Historical Account of the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts: containing their foundation, proceedings, and the success of their missionaries in the British Colonies, to the year 1728} (London: Joseph Downing, 1730), 93, 94, 98.

\textsuperscript{22} Commissioners to Boon and Beresford, August 25, 1715, \textit{CSP}, 28:299; Letter to Carolina Agents, July 19, 1715, in Cheves, 323; Mr. Molyneux to Mr. Popple, November 30, 1715, \textit{CSP}, 29:251.
in Florida as refugees. In the meantime, English planters rebuilt several plantations and constructed new forts to protect the shattered frontier. Enslaved soldiers probably helped staff the garrisons along the new line of defense. With the expulsion of the Yamasees and the turn of the Cherokees in 1716, the war was all but over although official peace treaties were not formalized until 1717. By March 1716 the war had already cost the colony £140,000.\(^{23}\)

Although there were still skirmishes in 1716 and 1717, including some that resulted in the deaths of Major Henry Quintyne and several of his men at the Port Royal Fort in July 1716, as well as the deaths of planters near the Edisto River in 1717, much of the fighting had dissipated. By April 1717 Secretary of State Joseph Addison informed the Council of Trade and Plantations that the enemy Indians had killed about 200 people in South Carolina in 1715 and that the colony was paid or owed more £200,000 in the war. More than 400 White South Carolinians had died by war’s end, or about one in forty living in the colony. Many enslaved people had died or were captured, and several others had fled to St. Augustine, as well.\(^{24}\)

The Cherokees’ intervention also changed the tide of Indian diplomacy in the region. The Creeks, who had associated themselves with the Yamasees during the war, had gained a new enemy in the Cherokees, and were forced to cool relations with the English as a result. Subsequently, they signed for peace in 1717. Meanwhile, the Cherokees, were reduced to 10,000 people, while the Northern nations were left with 2,500 people. Smaller tribes like the Congerees, Santees, Seawees, Pedees, Waxaws, and Corsaboys were wiped out entirely. In the

\(^{23}\) Ivers, 141; Crane, 184; Assembly of South Carolina to Boone and Beresford, March 15, 1716, CSP, 29:50.

\(^{24}\) Ivers, 143, 151; Extract of Letter from South Carolina, March 29, 1717, CSP, 29:50; Addison to Council of Trade and Plantations, April 30, 1717, CSP, 29:291.
South the Alabamas, Apalatchees, Yamasees, and Creeks seemingly solidified their alliances with the French and Spanish against the English despite their losses and displacement in the war. Many of them actually emerged from the war in better diplomatic and strategic positions. They had received gifts without developing new and strict alliances with the English, and they could continue to pit European imperial rivalries against themselves for Indian interests. The Yamasees were significantly dispersed after the conflict, and more than 500 survivors had to flee further south to the Spanish at St. Augustine. Their numbers continued to decline in the ensuing decades, which left a void in the area that the Creeks would fill. 

The war also changed the military posture of the colony as it related to enslaved soldiers and fugitive slaves in its aftermath. Planters established garrisons at the Congaree River north of Charleston, another barracks forty miles from there, one at Savannah, and another at Port Royal to prevent enslaved people from deserting and reaching St. Augustine via inland water passages. Planters also put two scout boats and twenty men on patrol to prevent these desertions, and they also built garrisons at Johnson’s Fort on James Island for the same reason. The new garrison system, especially the patrols at Port Royal clearly demonstrated that some enslaved Black people in the colony had turned against their masters during the war, and that they might continue to rebel in the future and flee to St. Augustine to meet their Indian and Spanish allies.

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Some enslaved soldiers remained loyal to the colonists during the war, but some took up arms against English interests in the colony.  

Carolina planters also resented the Spanish who had built a fort at Apalatchee, where they could support their Apalatchee and Creek allies. English colonists were angered that 300-400 Indian soldiers whom the Spanish armed and who fought in the Yamasee War resided in four or five villages near St. Augustine. Black slaves had also apparently joined them. The warriors’ main task was to help defend Spanish Florida from English counterattacks. Indeed, from English perspectives, the Spanish appeared well-positioned after the war. They continued to produce pitch and tar with the “help of the Negroes plundered by the Indians from Carolina.” Although enslaved soldiers had defended plantations and fought in the British militias, it was also clear that some enslaved Black and Indian people and free Natives had used the conflict to support the Spanish, and in its aftermath they helped produce for them in ways that hurt Carolina trading interests. Spanish encouragements for the Yamasees to “murder” and “plunder” South Carolina planters, and their “harbouring rebells, fellons, debtors, servants, and Negro slaves,” forced Carolina planters to keep large garrisons on guard at a great cost to the treasury. It seemed that the only solution would be to drive the Spanish and their Black rebel allies out of the continent if the Carolina plantation system were to survive.

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26 Governor Johnson to Council of Trade and Plantations, January 12, 1720, CSP, 31: 301-302.

STEADFAST SLAVE SOLDIERS:

As the discussion of the fighting above makes clear, some enslaved soldiers were loyal during the Yamasee War and their service in the defense of the colony was significant. They served in some of the first engagements of the war in 1715, and some earned rewards for their valiant efforts. They demonstrated to British slave owners that they were crucial for the defense of the colony by 1716, as well. In 1717 there were other indications that enslaved soldiers served with distinction for their English owners. Further south and west in Florida in September, Spanish Lieutenant Diego Peña met several Indians who informed him that twelve Englishmen and one enslaved Black man had arrived in the area as a consequence of the Yamasee War. The Indians reported to Peña that they wanted to take these people to the Spanish governor at St. Augustine for good favor. The Black prisoner also confessed that he had left Charleston in June 1717 on a boat and two canoes with English militiamen in pursuit of Yamasee fighters. He was apparently willing to chase Indians far from English territory and into a region in which he might have found refuge with English enemies. The enslaved man’s account demonstrated that even on forays into Florida to track enemy Indians, enslaved people in the Yamasee War proved themselves loyal soldiers to their English owners.28

After the fighting had died down and Governor Robert Johnson reported that peace had “concluded” by July 1716, he also recognized that the colony’s Black and Indian allies were absolutely critical for the Yamasee defeat. Not only had the Cherokee and other Indian allies provided provisions that helped to defeat the Yamasees and Creeks, but Black slave soldiers

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were reliable and Johnson noted that to “be able to upon any great emergency to arm their negroes,” planters in South Carolina would be “impowered to resist a greater force than the Indian enemy will in all humane probability be able at any time to bring against them.” Slave soldiers who remained loyal in South Carolina would have a strengthened role in defending the colony from future Native and Spanish aggression. Notwithstanding their valorous efforts in the war, most of the enslaved Black people who did serve in the militia during the war returned to plantation work after it ended. However, a handful did receive some benefits for their fealty. As noted above, Wallace of Benjamin Godin received a shirt and a hat for his service defending Schenkingh’s Fort. Meanwhile, at least three other Black slaves who were captured and taken to Saint Augustine during the war or shortly thereafter were rewarded for their return to Carolina. Buff Moore, who belonged to Captain John Woodward, escaped from Saint Augustine in 1716 and the Commons House approved his freedom upon his return to Carolina. Similarly, a man named Harry who belonged to Widow Perry, escaped from Saint Augustine in 1721 and was given at least £5 for his return. An enslaved man named Coffee received £10 for his return in 1728 as well. At least two Indian slaves were freed for their service in the war as well.29

The Yamasee War was not the first time in which enslaved soldiers fought for their owners in Carolina. It was also not the first time that the English decided to raise more slaves to serve as soldiers for the colony’s defense. As early as 1704, South Carolina legislators passed an act to muster “trusty” slaves who could be used as soldiers to defend the colony. The Act also required freeholders to make a list of Black, biracial, and Indian slaves who could serve for this

29 Robert Johnson to Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, July 24, 1716, SCBPRO, 6:230-231; Oatis, 170; Ivers, Torrent, 90, 119, 123, 151, 152.
purpose, and that officers could summon slave owners to show why certain enslaved people were chosen for service. Additionally, owners would arm enslaved soldiers with a lance, hatchet, or a firearm, and with sufficient ammunition for them to report to their units ready to fight. If slaveholders refused the summons, they were required to appear before commissioners themselves to explain why, and if they refused to send their enslaved people or give them arms during times of alarm, they would forfeit £5 to the militia captain or a different value appraised by nearby freeholders. The Act also stipulated that if enslaved soldiers were killed or maimed in service, the public would pay their owners, but not a soldier’s family, a fair value for the loss. A similar act in 1708 renewed the earlier law with much of the same mechanisms, except that militia officers were required to arm enslaved soldiers themselves. More importantly, the new act allowed for rewards for valiant service of enslaved soldiers, and if any enslaved soldier killed or took an enemy soldier prisoner, verified by a White comrade, they could earn their freedom. Their owner would be compensated for their manumission. In addition, if an enslaved soldier was wounded or disabled due to military service, they would also be set free at the public’s expense.\textsuperscript{30} These provisions encouraged enslaved loyalty and assuredly enslaved people in Carolina understood military service as a potential avenue to escape chattel slavery in the colony.

The Act also prohibited freeholders of military age from travelling outside the colony at risk of a £50 fine. Owners were also paid £2 per month for each month of service that their enslaved people provided in the militia. Despite these articles that rewarded loyal military service and renewed older legislation to raise enslaved Black soldiers in the colony, the 1708 Act

\textsuperscript{30} Thomas Cooper and David McCord, eds., \textit{The Statutes at Large of South Carolina} 10 vols. (Columbia: A.S. Johnston, 1836-1873), 7:347-351.
also considered what to do if enslaved soldiers were disloyal or chose to resist their enslaved status. If any slave soldier deserted or would “run over to the enemy,” their owner would be compensated. These acts, passed during Queen Anne’s War, reiterated the dire need to raise enough soldiers in defense of the colony, and that Black slaves could be used against Spanish, French, and Indian enemies nearby. While they incentivized loyal Black military service, they also put safeguards against Black rebellion in place, which demonstrated that enslaved soldiers were willing to betray their owners, or at least that White planters suspected that they would. By 1708 the colony had a militia force consisting of approximately 950 White men spread out through sixteen companies and two regiments. There were also two companies of enslaved Black soldiers who could carry firearms and lances into battle.31

The decision to use Black slaves as soldiers in the Yamasee War also reflected insufficient White military manpower. Governor Craven had informed Lord Townshend that he simply did not have enough White men in the country to match the numerically superior Yamasees, so he ordered about 200 “stout negro men” to muster and to march with White soldiers and Indian allies against the hostile Indians. The Lords Proprietors agreed and they petitioned King George I in 1715 reiterating that they did not have enough White men or enough arms and ammunition “for their negroes” to defend the province, which would result in the loss of the colony if the Crown did not react swiftly. Needless to say, all these issues point to the fact that enslaved soldiers served admirably during the Yamasee War for their owners and for various

31 Cooper and McCord, eds., The Statutes at Large, 7: 350, 351; Ivers, 20; Milling, 146; Extract of Letter, September 17, 1708, in A Sketch of the History of South Carolina: ed. Rivers, 232; Governor and Council of Proprietors to Board of Trade, September 17, 1708, in Merrens, ed., South Carolina Scene, 32-33.
incentives. It was also clear that Carolina planters understood how valuable and reliable enslaved soldiers were, and in February 1719-1720 the South Carolina Assembly passed an “act for the enlisting such trusty slaves,” who could be mustered for the colony in “time of alarms” not unlike what they endured during the Yamasee War. The more developed militia system in Carolina compared to what existed in Virginia forty years earlier gave more options for enslaved soldiers and mitigated Black armed resistance.32

Why enslaved people willingly fought for their owners when they shared potential Spanish and Indian allies deserves some attention. It is reasonable to believe that some enslaved people preferred to serve as loyal soldiers and that they resented Indian attacks. Indeed, several slaves in Port Royal and Saint Bartholomew Parishes suffered from Indian attacks, while Catawba and Cherokee raids on the Santee region also resulted in enslaved casualties. After the Battle of Schenkingh’s Fort, Huguenot Reverend Mr. Richebourg wrote that the trusted Indians betrayed colonists “by burning a plantation and killing negroes in our settlement” in St. James Parish.33 Undoubtedly some enslaved people were shaken by the violence that this conflict produced, and many were probably hurt during plantation raids or were even separated from

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32 Governor Craven to Lord Townshend, May 23, 1715, CSP, 28:228; Lords Proprietors to King George I, 1715, CSP, 28: 361; “An Act for the Enlisting,” in Nicholas Trott, ed., Laws of the province of south Carolina: in two parts: the first part containing all the perpetual acts in force and use, with the titles of such acts as are repealed, expired or obsolete, placed in the order of time in which they passed: the second part containing all the temporary acts in force and use, to which is added the titles of all the private acts and the two charters granted by King Charles II to the Lords Proprietors of Carolina and also the act of Parliament for establishing an agreement with seven of the said Lords Proprietors for the surrender of their life and interest to His Majesty 2 vols. (Charlestown: L. Timothy, 1736), 1:336.

33 Oatis, 172; Society for the Propagation of Gospel, B Series vol 4 # 48, as quoted in Edgar Legaré Pennington, “The South Carolina Indian War of 1715, as Seen by Clergymen,” South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine 32, no. 4 (October 1931): 263.
friends and family members. The unknown of what life would be like in Florida, or what punishment their British masters might mete out to them should the Spanish and Yamasees collapse probably also factored into how enslaved people made decisions in 1715-1717. For some they may have liked the prestige of military service, or understood the laws in place, which they knew they could earn recognition and maybe even manumission for their good service. Perhaps some even hoped they would be disabled in war, thus rendering them free from bondage. We cannot know all the motives behind why slave soldiers chose to fight for their English owners, but it was also clear that many enslaved people in South Carolina saw the large-scale conflict as an opportunity to escape from their owners and to join their owners’ Indian and European imperial rivals to undermine slaveholding power in South Carolina.

INSURGENT SOLDIERS

Despite loyal military service that enslaved soldiers rendered to the English during the Yamasee War, we also know from English, Indian, and Spanish accounts that enslaved people in Carolina also fled from their masters to fight with the Yamasee and Spanish and to fight their former owners. Curiously, during the Yamasee War English authorities declared the Native Americans engaged in a “revolt” or an “insurrection of many nations of Indians,” but they did not do the same for the Black slaves who fought in the war with the Yamasees. Planters and authorities did acknowledge that Black slaves were also actively running away during the war and were siding with the Yamasee and Spanish enemies at St. Augustine. Hugh Bryan was captured during the conflict and reported to authorities in Charleston once his Yamasee captor returned him as part of a peace negotiation. After he had been captured and taken to St.
Augustine and a nearby Creek village, Bryan relayed that he heard the Spaniards in Florida tell the Yamasees to kill the English colonists, and that they would furnish the Indians with “whatever they wanted to carry on the war” against the Carolinians. According to members of the Assembly of Carolina, the Spanish at St. Augustine were therefore violating the recent Treaty of Utrecht in which Great Britain and Spain agreed not to arm or encourage hostile Natives to attack each other. According to the Assembly members, Spanish behavior at St. Augustine also directly encouraged the Yamasees to take enslaved people from English plantations. Authorities reiterated Bryan’s report that there was an “abundance of slaves taken from us by the Yamasees and carried to Augustine.” But they also acknowledged that this was not just a case of enemy Indians stealing passive plantation slaves to take to the Spanish. Indeed, they acknowledged that “many more run away to that place,” which demonstrates that many had chosen to run away with the Indians and to join the Spanish.\(^\text{34}\)

Since most plantations in South Carolina were adjacent to waterways that Carolina Indians used for travel, their location ensured that enslaved people in Carolina, both African and Indian, had close contact with free Indians on frequent occasions. Their work tracking cattle and pathfinding also gave them more mobility that encouraged interaction with free Natives in Carolina. Such a set up ensured that enslaved people frequently saw and understood who their

\(^{34}\) Lt. Gov Alexander Spotswood to Mr. Secretary Stanhope, May 27, 1715, CSP, 28:226; Governor Hunter to the Council of Trade and Plantations, April 30, 1716, CSP, 29:65; Board of Trade to Secretary Stanhope, September 16, 1715, National Archives, Kew, UK, Colonial Office Papers [Hereafter CO] CO 5/1335; Anonymous letter, August 6, 1716, SCBPRO, 6: 239; Landers, “African-Yamasee Ties,” 167.
potential allies and enemies were, and what paths they might take if they chose to desert or rise up in rebellion. For many this meant running away on their own accord.\textsuperscript{35}

As noted above, English accounts of enslaved interactions with the Yamasee demonstrated both a belief that Black slaves were captives of Indian and Spanish raiders, and that they willingly took up arms with the Indians against Carolina planters. In one incident English authorities reported that some plantation slaves “taken” to St. Augustine flocked to diplomatic agent Major James Cochran when he visited the Spanish fort to “have liberty to go home with their master.” Yet they also reported that the Spanish authorities in Augustine refused to deliver any enslaved person who had made it to the Fort, which also encouraged “a great many more lately to run away to that place.” While we cannot discount the possibility that some enslaved Black people were taken to Florida against their will, we should also be suspicious of White accounts that expected enslaved fealty at all times. To many enslaved people the Spanish fort had become a place where they could escape the evils of the British plantation system in South Carolina. English planters also noted that the “negroes plundered by the Indians from Carolina” during the Yamasee War helped bolster the Spanish garrison at St. Augustine. The fact that Carolina slaves stayed with the Spanish in Florida and strengthened the Spanish fort there must have also angered Carolina planters, especially since the Yamasees had just as recently as 1712 agreed to “restrain all slaves belonging to any White men from going to war.” Their

\textsuperscript{35} Ramsey, “A Coat for ‘Indian Cuffy,’” 59;
reneging on the agreement and alliance with enslaved people and the Spanish both undermined English power in the Southeast and strengthened Spanish power in Florida.  

As Jane Landers has shown, some Carolina slaves fought vigorously with the Yamasees and against the English during the war, as was the case for Francisco Menéndez. Menéndez had potentially served as an enslaved soldier in the Carolina militia a decade before the Yamasee conflict broke out during Queen Anne’s War, but he decided that his best chance for freedom was to side with the rebel Indians later on in life. For three years Menéndez willingly fought with Yamasee Chief Jospo, though another Yamasee leader named Perro Bravo claimed ownership over him when they visited St. Augustine. Years later Jospo claimed that the Yamasees allied with enslaved Black people, and that the Black slaves helped the Yamasees fight the English in Carolina. The Spanish at St. Augustine eventually sold Menéndez to Don Francisco Menéndez Marquez due to a fear of English reprisals against Florida for taking Carolina slaves. Though Spanish officials had denied Menéndez his hard-fought freedom after the Yamasee War, he did not give up on these dreams and he successfully petitioned for his manumission decades later. Notwithstanding his new Spanish owners, Menéndez undeniably understood he lived under better circumstances with the Spanish in Florida, which seemingly transformed this enslaved rebel soldier into a loyal one. Menéndez later served as the leader of the Black militia at the

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36 Anonymous letter, August 6, 1716, SCBPRO, 6: 239; Committee of the Assembly of Carolina to Messrs. Boone and Beresford, August 6, 1716, CSP, 29:218; Governor Johnson to Council of Trade and Plantations, January 12, 1720, CSP, 31: 304; W.L. McDowell, ed., *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade September 20, 1710-August 29, 1718* (Columbia: South Carolina Archives Department, 1955), 36.
Spanish fort. Although he still petitioned for his freedom, something he did not achieve until 1738, he does not appear to have ever revolted against his Spanish owners as an enslaved soldier, like he did against the English during the Yamasee War. In his case the Yamasee War was a conflict that could turn the loyalties of enslaved soldiers. He had revolted against the English in 1715, but stayed loyal to the Spanish thereafter.

Indeed, Carolina colonists understood the potential for enslaved loyalties to change during the Yamasee War, and they used great caution when they decided to let enslaved soldiers fight. When Carolinians reached out to Virginians for reinforcements during the war, Virginians refused outright to send soldiers and bartered for their service. They first demanded that the Carolinians send them one Black woman for each White Virginia soldier sent to Carolina. At first delegates in the Carolina Assembly found such a measure impracticable as breaking up enslaved families might anger the Black husbands who remained in South Carolina, “wch. might have occasioned a revolt also of the slaves.” William Pulteney reported in July 1715 that the French and Spanish were both assisting the Yamasees, who were already too numerous for the South Carolina planters and Black slaves to withstand, who Pulteney pondered, could be armed for the colony’s defense but who could also use arms to “become our masters.”


comments certainly encapsulated the nature of enslaved soldiers in the conflict. They could be both loyal and rebellious.

When the conflict affected Virginia to the north, trader Henry Atherton deposed that he had met with a former slave of Carolina traders who had joined the Yamasees. The Black rebel had also informed Atherton that unscrupulous traders in Virginia had stirred up the Catabaws to wage war against Virginians during the conflict. The Council of Colonial Virginia dismissed any evidence that Virginia traders were provoking Indians to war against the colony because the only evidence that was presented came from a “renegado negro who is now actually engaged with the Indians against his Majesties Subjects.” Virginia Lieutenant Governor Alexander Spotswood also informed the Virginia Council that the Catawba and Cheraw Indians were willing to side with the English because of Yamasee aggression, and that they were in the process of delivering the two Black “rogues” Pope and Pompey, who along with a White indentured servant in South Carolina, “had taken up arms with the Indians agt the People of that Province.” Runaway slaves also fled west with the Yamasees during the war and in its aftermath, including to Pallachocola Town near present-day Columbus, Georgia. An English traveler spotted at least one Black fugitive accompanied with a Spaniard there. The area would later develop as a safe haven for Maroons.39

Similarly, there were other reports of Black and enslaved soldier rebelliousness during the war. George Duckett, a shipwright from Port Royal, deposed that he saw several of his

neighbors’ slaves at St. Augustine, where he had made several voyages to during the war. More specifically, he reported that the slaves of Major James Cochran, James Patterson, Colonel Barnwell, Mrs. Ford, Mr. Dicks, Mr. Graham, Mr. Adams, and one of his own bondmen were all present at St. Augustine and under Spanish possession. Moreover, the Yamasees had assured him that the Spaniards supplied them with gunpowder and musket balls when they asked for them in exchange for the plunder they brought back to St. Augustine. There were also indications that Black and Indian slaves attempted to seize the Charleston magazine after the first Yamasee attack. In 1723 South Carolinian authorities listed how many Black and Indian slaves that were “taken,” and “carried” to St. Augustine during the Yamasee War and then again in 1720-1721. During the war at least ninety-eight enslaved people moved from South Carolina to Florida, though it is unclear how many were Black or Indian. Most of them came from plantations owned by John Barnwell, John Cochran, Robert Graham, William Bray, and others from Port Royal. The Yamasees also captured Mrs. Borrows and took her to St. Augustine. Her husband later travelled there to ensure her return and reported back to Governor Johnson that the Spanish had ordered the Yamasees to “spare no white man, but to bring every negro alive to Augustine.” The Spanish bounties encouraged the Yamasees to continue plantation raids and attacks and bring back enslaved Black people as captives or those who willingly left their owners in Carolina. 40

But, other reports also indicated that quite a few enslaved people willingly chose to run with the Indians and to join the Spanish instead of being “taken.” By 1718 Lieutenant Governor

40 Deposition of George Duckett, enclosed in Certificate of Robert Daniel, August 13, 1716, CSP, 29:225; Oatis, 173; A List of the Negro and Indian Slaves Taken in the Year 1715 and Carryed to St. Augustin, 1723, SCBPRO, 10:39; Hewatt An Historical Account, 1:241.
of Bermuda Benjamin Bennett informed Mr. Popple that the Trial had arrived in South Carolina, but that its commander Captain Willington had relayed that South Carolinians were “very apprehensive that the Cherokees Indians in conjunction with the negros (many haveing already run away from their masters into the woods) would invade them.” Captain Willington’s information clearly demonstrated that enslaved people on South Carolina plantations had already fled collectively en masse by the end of the Yamasee War, and in collusion with local Native Americans. Perhaps underscoring how important Black rebels involved in the war were, planters in South Carolina struck peace with the Creeks in 1717. With the new peace treaty, the Creeks agreed to return “all the Negroes and horses they have taken during the War,” and all the Black slaves who were “in possession” of the Chickasaw and “Western Indians” as well. English authorities believed that they had less than forty enslaved Black people with them, but the treaty made clear that the enslaved people had not just run to the Yamasees and to St. Augustine during the war. They were also living in rebellion among other nations on the frontier.41

If there were any doubts about the role of Black rebels involved in the Yamasee War, British planters in South Carolina passed a series of new laws to crack down on the enslaved

population. New laws in 1717 targeted White servants who ran away with Black slaves, prohibited interracial marriages, and codified the blackness of biracial Indian-Black children. These measures certainly suggested that repressing rebellious slaves, and their potential Indian and White allies, were very important in the aftermath of the Yamasee War. These measures were also similar to laws that planters used to regulate enslaved people in the aftermath of conventional rebellions and maroon wars.42

Why some enslaved Black people decided to take up arms with the Yamasees and for the Spanish also merits further discussion since many also chose to stay loyal to their owners. As the Yamasees approached plantations and raids and plunder ensued, while some enslaved people found the experience terrorizing or antagonistic, others must have thought of it as liberating. Natives offered a way out of bondage to Carolina planters, while the chaos that the conflict and plantation plunder produced at least offered an opportunity for enslaved people to flee from their owners. They potentially thought the Yamasee warriors were stronger than the Carolina militia, while they also probably heard about the Spanish decree that gave safe haven to Carolina slaves in Florida. As the warriors moved from plantation to plantation and killed White colonists and took livestock, enslaved Black people perhaps thought they might be killed too if they did not join the Indians. Since crops and livestock were taken or destroyed, perhaps they chose to run away with the Natives to secure their own food source. It may have been their best chance for their survival. Even if the Natives did not give them an option, they were perhaps willing to exchange one owner for another, and hoped that their new Indian or Spanish masters would treat them better than their English owners had. In any case, they were willing to take the risks

42 Ramsey, Yamasee War, 169.
associated with leaving their plantations and fighting with allies to undermine English planter power in Carolina.\textsuperscript{43}

While English colonists armed “trusty” enslaved people as a defense mechanism against European imperial rivals and hostile Native Americans, the Spanish decision to arm the Yamasees, and any fugitive Black slaves who fought with them or who ran to St. Augustine followed decades of precedent as well. The precedent also helped militarize slave resistance in Carolina by encouraging so many Black slaves to take up arms for the Spanish. Spanish Authorities hoped that their allies would defend Florida but also undermine British settlement in the Southeast. By 1683 Black militiamen served at the fort and also joined in attacks against South Carolina in 1686. They also took in runaways from South Carolina to reduce British influence on the mainland. The first recorded runaway slaves from the colony arrived at St. Augustine in 1687. Just six years later, Spanish King Charles II decreed Florida a religious sanctuary for British slaves from the Carolinas. They could be free if they arrived at the doors at the Spanish Fort. Some would later serve in the Black militia, and some of these Black militiamen fought against English planters during Queen Anne’s War from 1702 to 1704.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43} Francis Yonge, \textit{A Narrative of the Proceedings of the People of South-Carolina in the Year 1719; And of the True Causes and Motives that Induced them to Renounce their Obedience to the Lords Proprietors, as their Governors, and to Put themselves under the immediate Government of the Crown} (London, 1726), 7.

Even after the Yamasee War came to an end, enslaved rebels refused to return to their owners or leave their Indian and Spanish allies in Florida. British colonists in South Carolina still complained about the Spanish arming and supplying the enemy Yamasee Indians, who in turn plundered plantations for enslaved people. Governor Johnson complained in late June 1718 that despite peace with the Creeks, they had still moved further South toward St. Augustine, and that the Spanish had still encouraged the Yamasees already there to plunder plantations and bring Black slaves to the fortress in Florida. Even worse, Johnson complained that “servants, slaves, robbers, and debtors frequently escape from hence there,” and that the Spanish authorities at St. Augustine refused to return enslaved people who ran to them or those who had potentially served as soldiers with the Yamasees in the recent conflict. The fact that there was only one dubious English account of collective attempts for enslaved people to return to their English owners further suggests that most were willing to stay with the Spanish in Florida. More than six months later Johnson still complained that the Spanish were encouraging the Yamasees to “murder and plunder” Carolinians, and that they were harboring “rebells, fellons, debters, servants and negro slaves,” which forced colonists in Carolina to maintain an armed force to defend the frontier; a costly venture. These problems persisted well into the 1720s. Others like George Rodd, Governor Craven, and Captain Chicken also suspected the Spanish and even the French at Mobile were more involved in instigating the Black-Indian rebellion and to “knock” the English on their heads. South Carolina trading agents Joseph Boone and Richard Beresford reiterated these concerns that the Spanish were arming the Yamasees, which enabled the Natives to plunder
English plantations and “rob” them of their slaves and livestock, which “they carry to St. Augustine and are there openly bought by the Spaniards.”

These accusations came on the heels of a long history of imperial rivalries, which included French fears at Mobile that the English in South Carolina were instigating enemy Indians to attack them in the decade leading up to the Yamasee War. The fear, real or imagined, encouraged the French in Louisiana to order their Choctaw allies to “plunder” all the English traders living nearby. By September 1715 Governor Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville further ordered his Indian allies to kill more English traders and bring in more captives. It is not clear if the French were encouraging plantation slaves to rebel or that Carolina slaves sought refuge or assistance from French officials, but the French were in effect actively supporting British enemies in South Carolina much like the Spanish in Florida were doing, and it is possible some enslaved people were “taken” or joined forces with Indians also allied to the French during the Yamasee War. By encouraging Native allies to attack British colonists in Carolina, it is possible that the French in the Lower South may have also contributed to further militarized slave resistance in Carolina during the Yamasee War.

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46 Governor Bienville to Count of Pontchartrain, September 1, 1715, in Mississippi Provincial Archives 1701-1729 French Dominion, eds. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey, 5 vols. (Jackson MS: Press of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 1929) 3:187-88; Governor Bienville to Count of Pontchartrain, October 12, 1708, in Mississippi Provincial Archives, eds. Rowland and Godfrey, 2:39; “Tobais Fitch’s Journal” in Travels in the American Colonies, ed. Mereness, 184.
For their part, the Spanish at St. Augustine denied that they were arming any rebellious Indians involved in the Yamasee War and any Black slaves caught up in the fighting. Governor Córcoles y Martínez informed Lt. Governor Spotswood in 1716 that he was abiding by the Treaty of Utrecht and that he was not permitted to give arms or ammunition to the rebellious natives or Black slaves. Yet he also warned Spotswood not to punish any who came to Florida, and threatened Spotswood that if Carolina planters kept attacking Yamasees who approached St. Augustine, perhaps including those who brought enslaved rebels with them, he would “punish” the White “aggressors” in the future. In August 1717 the new governor of Florida Antonio Benavides Bazán y Molina continued to supply Indian war parties with firearms and ammunition and other supplies, including one party that attacked Henry Mushoe’s plantation in Colleton County and took back ten enslaved people. According to Governor Benavides, the end of the Yamasee War was only a culmination of European imperial rivalry in the Southeast in which the English and Spanish were constantly fighting each other and were encouraging Native Americans to attack the other.47 Any enslaved person who wanted to join their war effort was openly accepted. If they did not want to, then they might be conscripted.

Despite Spanish acceptance of rebel slaves in Florida, it was clear there were also differing visions of Black freedom near St. Augustine and how the fugitive slaves would be treated. Chief Perro Bravo brought several Black slaves with him to Florida during the war, and together they stayed in Sergeant Major Juan de Ayala y Escobar’s home near the fort. Perro

Bravo later petitioned Governor Benavides that the Sergeant Major refused to pay him for some of the plantation fugitives he brought back from Carolina. Because he stayed at Ayala’s house, he gave an enslaved Black woman to him for his gratitude, but he expected to be paid for the three other enslaved Black people whom he brought. Perro Bravo even threatened to kill them if the Sergeant did not pay his debt, which Governor Benavides later ordered to be paid. The incident underscored Ayala’s corruption, whom Benavides also ordered incarcerated for other charges. It also illustrated the competing visions or ideas of enslaved Black participation in the Yamasee War and against English colonists. While the Spanish had promised safe haven for runaway slaves from Carolina since 1693, some Spaniards contravened the royal decree and “purchased” fugitives whom the Yamasees brought. In addition, it was clear that not all Yamasees necessarily viewed enslaved Black people as equal allies or peers in their rebellion against the English. Leaders like Perro Bravo tried to sell them at St. Augustine and even threatened to kill them if he did not get paid. Whether or not enslaved Black people were aware of these differing visions upon their arrival at St. Augustine is not clear even though many chose to run to the Spanish during the war anyway. Many took the initiative themselves and fled in hopes of freedom despite this risk. They were only betrayed once they reached St. Augustine by unscrupulous Spaniards and Indians. Those who were betrayed could still petition for their freedom later on like Francisco Menéndez did years later.48

Black slaves were also not the only enslaved people working on Carolina plantations, and nor were they only ones who decided to rebel against White planter power during the Yamasee War. In 1713 St. Thomas Parish had an enslaved population of little more than 1,000 people, of which at least sixty were Indians, and according to one estimate, as much as 25 percent of the enslaved population in the entire colony was Indian. It is not clear how many ran away during the fighting, but the Journal of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade noted that Catawba slaves were escaping from Carolina plantations during the war in 1717. Many of these enslaved people were probably better off than their Black counterparts. If they successfully escaped, they could more easily reintroduce themselves back into their nearby communities and reconstitute their ties to friends, family members, and kinship networks.49

No matter the reasons why enslaved people chose to rebel, their decision to do so perhaps informed a second wave of rebels that chose a similar path in the 1720s. In 1720 White planters detected a conspiracy among slaves who aimed to reach St. Augustine just like those who ran away during the Yamasee War. Planters believed the principal conspirators were Mr. Persevall’s slaves, who hoped to kill all the White planters and then use a Creek Indian to be a pilot and sail them down to St. Augustine for refuge. The episode was thwarted only when the garrison at Savannah Town stopped the slaves, and when the starving Creeks nearby refused to be pilots. However, White South Carolinians acknowledged that the Yamasees were still sending pirogues

49 McDowell ed., *Journals of the Commissioners of the Indian Trade*, 177.
to St. Augustine, which encouraged enslaved Black people to go to the Spanish fortress. Planters also believed that it encouraged them to engage in more plunder and be “rogue[s].”

There can be no doubt that enslaved Black people in South Carolina increasingly viewed St. Augustine as a refuge from British planters shortly after the Yamasee War. In the 1720s several reports indicated that Black slaves continued to collude with Native Americans and flee to the Spanish in northern Florida. By 1727 there were several Black slaves living at the fort who had deserted from South Carolina, including at least 10 who had joined a Black—Indian force with Black and Indian commanders. The fact that plantation rebels increasingly fled to Florida in the aftermath of the Yamasee War underscores how parallel their motives, objectives, and methods were to the slave soldiers who did the same during the Yamasee conflict. It also demonstrated a rise in the militarization of resistance in early America since Bacon’s Rebellion decades earlier as more and more rebels took to military service or formed militarized slave insurrections to resist the chattel system.

**Yamasee Rebels Like Other Atlantic Slave Rebels**

In some ways, the Black experiences in the Yamasee War and the ways that slave soldiers fought in Carolina were similar to how enslaved rebels rose up against their owners in several other militarized slave insurrections in the Atlantic during the period. Coromantee rebels in New York in 1712 led a violent insurrection. On March 25 several dozen enslaved people

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50 Humphreys, *An Historical Account*, 104; Ramsey, “A Coat for ‘Indian Cuffy,’” 48; Boone to Unknown, June 24, 1720, SCBPRO, 8:24-26; Letter to Mr. Boone, June 24, 1720, *CSP*, 32:57.

conspired to kill their White owners and participated in an Akan oathing ceremony to solidify their commitment to the plan. Less than two weeks later the rebels met again at John Crooke’s orchard, where they gathered guns, knives, and tools that they could use for their assault. Then Cuffee and a creole slave who belonged Peter Vantilborough named John, set fire Vantilborough’s house in East Ward on fire while the rest of the rebels lay in wait. When several White men arrived to put it out, the armed rebels ambushed them. Augustus Grasset, Adrian Beckmen, Joris Marschalck, William Asht, Henry Brasier Jr., John Corbett, Johannes Low, and John Cure were all shot, stabbed, or bludgeoned to death. The rebels wounded several others. After a few men of the fire team were able to escape to warn the others, Governor Robert Hunter mustered the militia and chased after the rebels, who retreated into the woods. Some committed suicide instead of surrendering. In the end, more than forty enslaved people were tried for their participation in the revolt, and eighteen were executed. Like the rebels in South Carolina, the rebels in New York used military violence, firearms, and military tactics to attack White owners.52

The size and scale of the 1712 revolt was much smaller than what rebels in Carolina were conducting, but in both cases enslaved people participated in coordinated and militarized attacks against their owners. As had been the case in South Carolina three years later, the enslaved rebels in New York used weapons, including firearms to fight their owners. While predominately led by enslaved Africans, at least two Indian slaves were also involved, much like the Black-Indian cooperation in Carolina in 1715. Both cases were also militarized in character. The rebels in New York

York employed ambush tactics and demonstrated skilled use in weapons. Meanwhile in South Carolina, rebel soldiers clearly demonstrated an ability to engage English forces in conventional battles and with guerilla tactics.  

It is unclear if rebel enslaved soldiers in the Yamasee War were practicing any martial tactics, techniques, and procedures that they may have learned as soldiers captured in war in Africa like the militarized revolt in New York in 1712, or in other revolts such as Barbados in 1685, Jamaica in 1690, St. John in 1733, or Stono in 1739. It is highly unlikely some African tactics were tolerated in the Carolina militia, in which loyal enslaved soldiers served, and other than Menéndez and a few others, we do not know how many enslaved militiamen turned coat during the Yamasee War and who may have used their militia training against their former owners. Details of how rebel soldiers fought are not precise. One thing is at least certain: Until 1712 enslaved people in South Carolina were permitted to use firearms to hunt for themselves and their owners. Moreover, though owners faced punishment if they permitted access to firearms for their enslaved people thereafter, they also faced reprimands if they did not raise enough enslaved people to serve in the militia. All this indicates that many enslaved people in Carolina had some familiarity with firearms before the war, and that they probably drew from their experience as slaves in South Carolina to fight against their owners during the war. It is also possible; however, that those who chose to join the Indians used their knowledge of war from their experiences in Africa to fight English colonists in Carolina. It is also possible that they adopted Native American techniques and procedures as they fled from plantations and tried to reach the Spanish. Some may not have even tried to fight or use martial techniques at all and

simply ran away together to reach Florida. The records do not currently permit us to know with certainty.\footnote{Wood, 127.}

The actions of enslaved people in the Yamasee War probably most paralleled the actions of enslaved people during the Natchez Revolt in Louisiana in 1729-30, which demonstrated that despite loyal slave soldiers, scores of rebel combatants also emerged. Moreover, the rebels used their military experience to attack slavery during war and armed conflict. Much like the Yamasee War, the Natchez Revolt demonstrated two types of enslaved soldiers: loyal and rebel. The beginning of the Natchez Revolt was also similar to how the Yamasee conflict erupted. French colonists suspected an uprising among the Natives, and Monsieurs Bailly, Ricard, Bourbeaux, and Ducoder all travelled to the Natchez to confirm the rumor, which the Natchez at first denied much like the Yamasees before the Good Friday Massacre. As was the case with the Yamasees, tensions between the French and the Natchez escalated in November 1729 when White colonists demanded more from the Natives. Situated on the Lower Mississippi River at Fort Rosalie, Commandant Sr. Étienne De Chépart demanded land from the Indians to build his own estate. The French also gave the Natives an ultimatum to deliver up the lands, and by the end of the month Monsieur Jean-Daniel Kolly and his son met with the Natives to trade. That same day, Commandant Chépart travelled with Sr. Bailly and warehouse keeper Ricard to the Grand village of the Natchez to trade. The men enjoyed a fun night of eating and drinking with the Natives,
although they were tipped off about an upcoming attack. Chépart refused to believe it and on his return to Fort Rosalie the next night he went to sleep without sounding any alarms.\textsuperscript{55}

Inside Fort Rosalie, there were twenty-five White soldiers and 280 Black slaves charged with defending the post, much like enslaved soldiers charged with defending garrisons along the South Carolina frontier during the Yamasee War. On the morning of November 29, the Natchez left their villages and arrived at the French post at nine o’clock in the morning, ostensibly to trade before a hunting trip. The Natchez chief came into Fort Rosalie with thirty men and they brought poultry, deerskins, and corn with them, along with a calumet to symbolize their peaceful intentions. They also asked to borrow firearms from the French colonists, and promised to give them back when they returned. They walked into Chépart’s residence by 9:30, where he warmly greeted them. Suddenly violence erupted. Warriors on the river’s shore attacked a trading boat, which signaled to the Natchez inside Rosalie to attack the others. Bailly was killed in his sleep, and even as the fighting died down quickly, the Natchez executed Chépart. Most of the French men were killed, while the Natchez left alive women, children, and Black slaves. Instead the Natchez “made certain of several negroes,” and assured them that “they would be free with the Indians,” to encourage their participation and cooperation. In all, only twelve Natchez fighters died during the ambush, while almost 250 French colonists were killed.\textsuperscript{56}


The initial attack was over by four o’clock in the afternoon. Thereafter, only twenty
White men and five or six Black slaves escaped to New Orleans to warn other settlers. Some of
the enslaved people caught up in the Indian attack chose not to flee with their owners, and they
stayed inside the French houses. By the end of January they were still living with the Indians at
Rosalie. They were similar to the Black slaves still living with the various Indian groups in
Carolina and Florida during the Yamasee War. It is intriguing to wonder if these enslaved people
were actually captives of the Natchez, or if their decision to stay behind and not follow their
French owners who fled from the Natives was an act of rebellion in and of itself. By January
1730 the Natchez continued to attack French colonists, while they also demanded ransom for the
Black slaves, women, and children whom they had captured. Like the Black slaves that the
Yamasees brought to the Spanish at St. Augustine, it is reasonable to believe that some of these
enslaved people were not just passive captives to Indian warriors, but instead chose to stay with
the Indians against the interests of their former White owners. Like Perro Bravo in St. Augustine
who tried to sell Black slaves who accompanied him, the Natchez were also willing to deliver
Black slaves back to White owners for the right price, and it is unclear in both cases if Black
rebels were aware of these designs. In any case, the French were more successful than the
English in recouping enslaved people, and at the end of January 1730 a French-Tschaquetas
Indian force successfully attacked the Natchez by surprise and retrieved the women and children
and more than one hundred enslaved people.57

57 de Ville, Massacre at Natchez, 11, 16; Sayre, and Zecher, eds. The memoir of Dumont,
245; Périer to Maurepas, December 5, 1729, in Provincial Archives, 1:54; Diron d’Artaguette to
While these slaves may have been Indian captives, it is clearer later on in the rebellion that French colonists understood their Black slaves to be cooperating with the Natchez much like the English did with their slaves cooperating with the Spanish during the Yamasee War. Some accounts pointed to enslaved Black people carrying merchandise from White homes that the Natchez plundered during the rebellion. Nearly 300 Black slaves were taken or fled to the Natchez, and they helped the Indians escape French counterattacks in January 1730 as well. By June 25, 1730, Natchez defector Taotal visited Monsieur Henri de Louboëy who was leading a French counterattack. Taotal came with several of the French women and Black slaves “captured” in the fighting. French officers noted that it was especially difficult for the Native man to deliver the Black slaves, who were “very much attached to his people, and who had fired at us.” They had also been cannoneers and were more “stalwart” than the Natchez themselves. Without a doubt these Black slave rebels used the Indian revolt as an opportunity to flee and to join with the Indians to attack their White owners. When they faced being returned to their masters, they tried to resist again though unsuccessfully. Others even committed suicide before their White owners could re-capture them.\textsuperscript{58}

At the end of the rebellion and after the Natchez defeat in 1731, the French were able to recover the enslaved Black rebels still with the Natchez, including “those who had taken part against us.” French colonists punished “the most mutinous negroes those who had been most outspokenly for the Natchez,” and they gave three of them to the Choctaws to burn alive. This punishment inflicted “such a horror of the Indians,” that the French believed it made enslaved people docile and loyal. 59 Aside from the gruesomeness of the punishment, the penalty also demonstrated that like the Yamasees further east, enslaved Black people in the Lower South readily took up arms during Indian wars or rebellions and used the conflicts as opportunities to fight for freedom for themselves. In Louisiana, to do so meant soldiering with Native Americans against their White owners.

But some enslaved people stayed loyal and served as soldiers for their French owners like Carolina slaves did during the Yamasee War. At Tunica near New Orleans Lieutenant Jean-Francois-Benjamin Dumont de Montigny later wrote that the Natchez had “found a way to win over our negro slaves and convince them to murder us and make themselves masters of all.” A “plot” was uncovered when dozens of Natchez Indians offered peace to Commandant General Étienne Périer. Périer feared the Indians would be able to recruit Black slaves to further fight against White planters, so he had the Black ringleaders, two men and one woman, burned at the stake to make an example of them to other slaves. Périer also discovered that the plot was more widespread than just at Tunica, and slaves as far as the Chaouacha Concession were implicated.

To ensure enslaved loyalty, Périer ordered his own enslaved soldiers there to attack a small
group of about thirty Indian men, which they did, killing eight or nine men and several women.
Périer’s intent was to sew division among Black slaves and potential Indian allies. Périer was
also pleased with his enslaved soldiers, who executed the task with “a respectable attitude.”
Slave soldiers probably feared facing brutal treatment like the rebels who were burned at the
stake, so they fought with alacrity to appease Périer. He believed he could use them again to
destroy all the smaller nations along the Mississippi River in case they too might “cause our
negroes to revolt as we see by the example of the Natchez.”60 Périer’s comments underscored
how in the Southeast, enslaved soldiers were a double-edged sword. With the right
circumstances and forceful White orders, they could be successful combatants who could
discourage other enemies, namely Native Americans, from resisting White power. With the
wrong encouragement, namely from rebellious natives, enslaved people could turn on their
White owners just as easily and cause utter destruction.

There were other reports of loyal enslaved soldiers during the revolt, just like the
Yamasee War too. During a French counterattack Commandant Sieur Baron de Cresnay led three
battalions of marines, militia, and engineers. Black slaves served some auxiliary function on
board the force’s boats on the Mississippi River. In July 1730 approximately 100 Natchez
fighters attacked about twenty Black slaves and eleven White guards working nearby Fort
Rosalie, killing all but two guardsmen and five enslaved people who escaped. There was also
one spectacular report of enslaved loyalty in which an enslaved man escaped the Natchez attack

60 Sayre and Zecher, The memoir of Dumont, 250; Charlevoix in Jesuit Relations, 6:90;
Balvay, , La Révolte des Natchez , 135; Périer to Maurepas, March 18, 1730, in Mississippi
Provincial Archives, 1:63.
with his Canadian owner. Together they fled from the Natives and even ambushed a party chasing them. The full account of this, which also described the men killing at least ten Indians and the enslaved man killing a bear, is specious, but it is probable that in the heat of the Indian attack, enslaved people did side with their owners or chose to flee instead of face an unknown Indian adversary much like what some plantation slaves did during the Yamasee War.\textsuperscript{61}

But the affair also underscored how similar the Natchez revolt was to the Yamasee War. Enslaved people served as soldiers in both conflicts. As had happened in South Carolina in 1715-1717, enslaved Black people in Louisiana both fought for and against their White owners in a conflict that historians have characterized as a typical White-Indian frontier war. But for the Black slaves involved, it was something more. Enslaved soldiers could prove their loyalty and earn the good graces of their owners by fighting the enemy Indians. Or they could resist in another way and join Indians against White power. For those who chose to do so, the Natchez revolt was an opportunity to fight for freedom in Louisiana.

Similar to New York City and the slave soldiers involved in the Yamasee War, Black rebels elsewhere in New York and in Virginia during the period colluded with Natives to challenge the slave system as well. In Newton, Long Island, in 1708, enslaved rebels broke out and attacked their owners, killing seven of them. In its aftermath, four enslaved rebels were executed including three Black rebels and one enslaved Indian rebel. Similarly in 1709 in Surrey, James City, and Isle of Wright Counties, several Indian and Black slaves reportedly conspired together to escape from the country and kill their owners. For unknown reasons the plot

\textsuperscript{61} Charlevoix in Jesuit Relations, 6:108; Périer to Maurepas, August 1, 1730, in Mississippi Provincial Archives, 4:37; de Ville, 11, 12, 13.
unraveled and the ringleaders were severely whipped for their role. Not much is known from these smaller revolts and they do not appear to have been militarized like the cases in Carolina and Louisiana, but both incidents demonstrated how Black and Indian rebels were already working together to undercut White power elsewhere in North America much as they had done in South Carolina. It is therefore not surprising that similar alliances developed between Indians and Africans during the Yamasee War.62

Aside from the cases in New York, Virginia, and Louisiana, how enslaved rebels participated in the Yamasee War was of course remarkably parallel to other rebellions in South Carolina in the early eighteenth century. Enslaved people in the colony were without doubt agitated and on many occasions surrounding the Yamasee War they attempted to earn their freedom by attacking White planters. In 1713 planters in Goose Creek detected a plot among the enslaved people. Twelve to fifteen enslaved Black people living along the Cooper River were arrested for conspiring to get “liberty by force.” The ringleader was executed, while two others were punished. Similarly, several years after the Yamasee War ended, Black rebels in Charleston conspired in 1722 to kill their masters and take control of the country. In both these conspiracies, Black slaves desired to obtain liberty and even take control of the colony before and after the Yamasee War.63

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Decades after the Yamasee War, enslaved rebels in Carolina were still trying to reach the Spanish in St. Augustine like the rebel slave soldiers in 1715--1717. There were several group attempts in Carolina to flee and reach the Spanish in the 1720s as noted above. At least four enslaved people did this in 1726, and ten more in 1727. In 1739 four or five slaves belonging to Captain Macpherson took several horses and ran away to the woods, wounding Macpherson’s son and killing another man in the process. Like the Black rebels who joined the Yamasees before them, they desired to reach the Spanish at St. Augustine, where they knew they would find refuge.\footnote{Examination of John Pearson, October 28, 1727, SCBPRO 19:127, 128; Arthur Middleton, June 13, 1728, SCBPRO 13:61-67; An Account of the Negro Insurrection in South Carolina, October 1739, CSP, 45:200.}

The most notable incident of these attempts was the Stono Rebellion in 1739, which was also militarized and involved slave rebels who fought like slave soldiers in the Yamasee War. On September 9, 1739, roughly twenty rebels assembled under the leadership of a man named Jemy. They then attacked Mr. Hutchenson’s warehouse and killed Mr. Robert Bathurst and Mr. Gibbs, taking guns and gunpowder stored there. Afterwards they marched south to reach St. Augustine and attacked planters on their way except for Mr. Wallace who was “a good man.” But they also attacked Mr. Lemy’s plantation killing Lemy, his wife, and child. At Mr. Rose’s house they were joined by several more enslaved people, and together they marched with military colors, beat drums, and “called out” for liberty. They attacked several more plantations along the Pons Pons road on their way to St. Augustine, growing in strength from sixty to one hundred in number. After continuing the rebellion for ten miles, a White militia mustered and attacked them, killing several and causing many rebels to disperse. At least thirty escaped and one detachment
continued south another thirty miles before planters were able to attack them again and finally defeat them. The Stono Rebellion was one of the largest slave rebellions in early American history, but the actions and goals of the enslaved rebels were not new. They were following decades of precedent in which enslaved people in South Carolina understood they could use military violence and martial tactics, techniques, and procedures to fight for liberty and achieve it if they could only reach the Spanish at St. Augustine.  

Unlike Stono in which planters immediately restricted slave importations to limit the potential for another revolt, during and after the Yamasee War, African slave importations skyrocketed. There were eighty-one enslaved Africans imported in 1715, and sixty-seven in 1716, but in 1717 573 were brought into Carolina, and in 1718 529 more. There were similar numbers in 1719, and importations for the decade peaked in 1720. With harsh slave codes already in place, the spike in importations probably reflected the collapse of the Yamasee population and Indian slavery as a result of the war. With a new labor shortage, Carolina planters further turned to African slaves to fill the void even if the risk of rebellion also rose.

Not only were the methods, tactics, and objectives of rebel slave soldiers in the Yamasee War similar to other militarized Atlantic rebels, but the conditions that they responded to were also similar to conditions before other militarized slave revolts that rebels also confronted. As noted above, most scholars agree that when conditions were harsh or worse, enslaved people were more likely to rise up and challenge the system, and we know these conditions were present

65 An Account of the Negro Insurrection in South Carolina, October 1739, CSP, 45:200.

just before enslaved people revolted in Barbados in 1675, in Virginia in 1676, and in St. John in 1733 among many others. But we also know these conditions were present for rebellions similar to the Yamasee War as well. Queen Anne’s War from 1702 to 1713 produced some economic hardships in New York by 1712, particularly heavy debts, a trade deficit, and a maritime labor shortage that affected the Black slaves there. Further “hard usage” of enslaved people in the city preceded the rebellion there that year. The city also had one of the largest slave populations in the northeast, which encouraged Black and Indian slaves to rebel against White owners.

In Louisiana before Black slaves revolted with the Natchez Indians in 1729 and 1730, the colony underwent a surge in slaveholding. Throughout the 1720s there was a significant rise in African slave imports into the colony, and as Gwendolyn Midlo Hall has noted, enslaved people suffered from sickness and disease upon their arrival in Louisiana. The rise of African imports also helped create a Black majority conducive to slave rebellion. In Natchez specifically, the African slave population increased to 280 people from 1726 to 1729, which was a little more than one hundred fewer people than French colonists who lived there. The population boom in the 1720s also strained the food supply and although there is no indication of a food shortage in 1729 immediately before the Natchez revolt, there were shortages in the few years preceding it.

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67 See this discussion in Chapters One and Two.

Meanwhile exports in slave-produced crops in the colony also surged, which indicated how hard planters pushed their slaves to produce for their own profits. Indeed, planters felt pressured to produce as much tobacco as Virginia to feed the demand in France. All these signs indicate that the Black chattel system was surging on the eve of the Natchez rebellion, which favored conditions for revolt like it did elsewhere in the Atlantic.⁶⁹

Similar conditions were extant in South Carolina shortly before the Stono Rebellion erupted in 1739. As was the case in Louisiana, the South Carolina plantation system was surging before the rebellion, and a large Black slave population developed that significantly outpaced White population growth. Demand for indigo and rice intensified slave labor in the colony, which made life harder for enslaved people. Moreover, the colony experienced two waves of small pox and yellow fever in the summer of 1739. The epidemics probably hit White planters harder than Black slaves, but the diseases indicated that all people in the colony were suffering. Enslaved people’s material conditions were deteriorating. Perhaps most importantly the timing of the Stono Rebellion was probably tied to the upcoming implementation of a new Security Act in which White people were required to carry firearms to church on Sundays. The Act reiterated planter concerns about the growing enslaved population and that slaves might soon challenge White planter power. It was also a step toward further cracking down on the Black population,

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and enslaved rebels probably understood that their conditions would worsen after the Act took effect. Their best chances for success were probably before the Act could be implemented.70

Like these other revolts, the Black chattel system was worsening in South Carolina in the years before the Yamasee War, which demonstrated worsening material conditions for enslaved people like in other rebellions. Like Louisiana before the Natchez revolt, South Carolina exports to Great Britain surged in the 1710s, and the colony ran significant trade surpluses with Great Britain. The healthy trade balance for planters in South Carolina suggested that the plantation system was working, which meant enslaved people likely faced more strenuous labor conditions. Moreover, in 1712 the colony’s General Assembly passed a new act that missionary Francis Le Jau called “very severe.” The 1712 “Act for the Better Ordering and Governing of Negroes and Slaves” was the fifth iteration of similar laws that were in place as early as 1690 to regulate and monitor enslaved people in Carolina. It reiterated that all “negroes, mulatoes, mustizoes, or Indians” who had been sold or bought as slaves were to be kept as slaves for life. The 1712 version also ensured that enslaved children inherited the condition of their mother. Enslaved people who travelled without a pass could be whipped, and if they resisted arrest they could be killed. Another Article required slave owners to search slave quarters for maroons and weapons every fourteen days. People who stole goods and contraband with slaves would be punished, and enslaved people were not allowed to carry firearms outside plantation limits unless ordered by

70 Wood, 309, 313, 314.
their owner and in possession of a certificate. Planters who did not punish their slaves enough would also face fines.\footnote{Klingberg, \textit{Chronicle Francis Le Jau 1706-1717}, 121; Cooper and McCord, \textit{The Statutes at Large}, 7:352, 353; Susan Carter, ed., \textit{Historical Statistics of the United States} millennial ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).}

Furthermore, the Act required planters to hide firearms or restrict access to them, and constables in Charleston were permitted to deputize men to patrol the city on Sundays and on holidays when enslaved people travelled to markets there. Those who refused a constable’s summons would be fined twenty shillings. Enslaved people were also required to carry a ticket to travel to the city, and if they were convicted of murder, burglary, robbery, arson, or lesser crimes such as stealing livestock or trespassing, they could face the death penalty. They could even be mutilated for petty larceny. Any enslaved person who participated in mutiny or insurrection would be put to death unless they confessed or gave good testimony. The Act also demonstrated planter fear of imperial rivals influencing enslaved people, and Article Fourteen of the Act enforced a fine for any person convicted of taking enslaved people out of the colony. Another Article mandated the death penalty for runaway slaves who attempted to reach rivals such as the Spanish in Florida. If a slave hit a White person they could be whipped and if they did it more than twice they could be put to death. Any enslaved person over the age of sixteen who ran away for more than twenty days would be whipped. Upon a second offense, they would be branded with the letter R on their right cheek, and could have their heels cut for further offenses.\footnote{Cooper and McCord, \textit{The Statutes at Large}, 7: 354-359.}

The Act also significantly cracked down on enslaved resistance. Militia captains were permitted to raise patrols to track runaways and to take them dead or alive. White patrolmen
could even receive disability pay if injured while tracking and apprehending runaways and maroons. Any plantation slave that harbored a runaway could be whipped, but if they delivered them to their owners they could receive twenty shillings. Enslaved people could also face punishment for working together in a “disorderly way,” while plantation managers were required to live within six miles of their plantation. Unlike what planters enforced in 1701 in which at least one White person was required to live on a plantation, pen, or stock house, the 1712 Act tightened White control and required at least one White person to oversee six plantation slaves. The 1712 Act further strengthened the legal separation of White and Black people, and much of the draconian punishments were harsher than earlier iterations of the legislation such as in 1690 and 1701.73

Curiously, the Act also created a public welfare fund to care for the poor. Half of the monies paid from violations of the Act were to go to the church wardens or overseers of the poor in the parish where the perpetrator lived. This was a change from the 1701 legislation in which fines were to support a public account to purchase gunpowder and ammunition to be used in defense of the colony. Strikingly, planters in Carolina created an early welfare system in which poor White people could be taken care of at the expense of violence directed at enslaved Black people. Welfare and disability funds were also raised at the expense of even killing Black people who resisted the system.74

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Just two years after the Act was passed, Carolina legislators added additional legislation to further monitor and regulate the liberties of enslaved Black people in the colony. Article Nine imposed a tariff for every enslaved person over twelve years old imported into the colony, and Article Eleven prohibited masters from allowing their enslaved people to plant provision grounds of corn, peas, rice, or keep livestock at a £20 penalty.\(^{75}\) These provisions demonstrated that conditions for enslaved people in South Carolina were worsening on the eve of the Yamasee War, while planters were also increasingly concerned about the rapidly increasing enslaved population. In both cases, these stipulations reiterated that material deprivation and a higher Black-to-White population ratio that often precipitated revolts elsewhere in the Atlantic were in place just before enslaved people in Carolina joined the Yamasees and revolted against White planters.

Even as the Yamasee War raged on, legislators ratified additional acts to the 1712 slave code. They reiterated the harsh measures of the earlier code, but also imposed even heftier tariffs on imported slaves, which demonstrated growing White fear of the large Black slave population. Unlike in 1714, in which enslaved children could still be imported tariff free, the 1717 amendment imposed a tariff on all enslaved people imported. Perhaps this reflected a concern that even the youngest of enslaved people could pose a threat during rebellion and war, or that they could at least learn how to rebel as they watched in action during the Yamasee conflict. A few years after the war ended, legislators seemingly acknowledged that the draconian parts of the 1712 Act had encouraged slave rebelliousness. Legislators thus passed a more balanced slave code by 1722, although they still prohibited enslaved people from certain activities, particularly

\(^{75}\) Cooper and McCord, *The Statutes at Large*, 7:367-68.
from keeping or selling horses because of their perceived ability to use them to carry intelligence, engage in insurrection, and reach the Spanish in Florida as had happened during the war.\textsuperscript{76}

Separately from legislation that made conditions worse for enslaved people at the start of the Yamasee War, a hurricane in the autumn of 1715 hit the colony and laid waste to the landscape, similar to how a hurricane made conditions worse for enslaved people on St. John before the rebellion there in 1733. In Carolina the hurricane felled trees and destroyed several structures. Preacher Gideon Johnston wrote to the secretary of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in December 1715 that the hurricane destroyed a local church. The church was already in debt and parishioners could not rebuild it because of the great costs that the war had produced. The fact that planters could not rebuild also demonstrated that they were strapped for cash and probably passed down their economic hardships to enslaved people as they had done elsewhere in the Atlantic. Certainly enslaved people bore the brunt of losses from plantation raids and attacks during the war, and for those who did not immediately leave plantations with Indian warriors they would have faced the arduous tasks of rebuilding and repairing the plantations where they lived. Moreover, these losses scared investors, and in Charleston prices rose and merchants declined to lend credit. As was frequently the case elsewhere in the Atlantic, Carolina planters probably passed down these worsening economic conditions down to their slaves, as they would have less money to spend on food, healthcare, and shelter for enslaved people. These policies made clear that material conditions in South Carolina were worsening

\textsuperscript{76} Cooper and McCord, \textit{The Statutes at Large}, 7:370; Rugemer, 102.
during the Yamasee War, which likely prompted more enslaved people to flee or rebel as the conflict matured, like other Atlantic slave rebels did in similar circumstances.77

The Good Friday Massacre was also not the first sign of conflict between White Carolinians and the Yamasees, which also produced favorable conditions for slave revolt. Indeed, just a few years earlier in 1713 there was a conspiracy among the Yamasees in which they wanted to “cut off and utterly destroy” the English planters in the colony. The conspiracy forced the governor to declare martial law, place an embargo on vessels in port, and draft White and Black men into military service on December 18. The fact that enslaved people on South Carolina plantations might soon be enlisted to go to war against the Indians, that trade vessels were stopped from moving, and that there was a potential war on the horizon all reflected worsening living conditions for enslaved people in the colony in the years before the war actually erupted. At the very least, these tensions surely demonstrated to enslaved people that White planters were vulnerable, even more vulnerable than normal, which could have also encouraged them to rebel once the war began.78

In Carolina in 1715 White power was clearly under threat during Indian attacks, and colonists faced both Spanish and French imperial threats from Florida and Alabama. Even early on during the war, some authorities in South Carolina showed little confidence in Governor Charles Craven’s ability to govern and they were divided on how to handle the conflict. Lieutenant James Fellow complained in August 1716 that Craven seemed “to take very little notice” of the Indian movements in both the northern and southern parts of the colony, and that


78 South Carolina Commons House Journal, December 18, 1713, in Wood, 127n124.
the prosperous colony would be lost unless King George I would take control of it and send a “prudent Governor, a man of resolution,” with soldiers to save it. Other colonists also thought the Carolina proprietors acted too slowly against the Yamasees, while some even called for the king to take control to save Carolina from Indian destruction.\textsuperscript{79} These conflicts clearly showed division among Whites in the colony at the onset of the Yamasee War, which paralleled the division that was present in Virginia years earlier and would be present again in Virginia in 1775-1776, and in the Gulf Coast borderlands in 1812-1823. Such division was common in many Atlantic slave revolts as well, militarized or not.\textsuperscript{80}

CONCLUSION

For enslaved soldiers involved, the Yamasee War was more than just a White-Indian frontier conflict that typified early American society. While they experienced the violence in many of the same ways as Native Americans and European colonists, the conflict also presented unique opportunities for enslaved soldiers in the emergent Carolina slave society. Slave soldiers were presented with two options: serve as loyal soldiers for their owners and protect themselves and the chattel system in Carolina, or betray their owners and flee and fight for the Yamasees and Spanish in Florida to undermine slaveholding power in the English colony. While this was not the first time they were presented with these choices in the Lowcountry, the Yamasee War was so large a conflict that it presented even greater opportunities to fight or flee for slave

\textsuperscript{79} Lt. James Fellow to Mr. Burchett, August 3, 1716, CSP, 29:160-161; Hewatt, 1:225.

soldiers. Fighting their owners threatened to undermine the slave system in Carolina, and running away to the Spanish in Florida undermined the slave system in Carolina. For slave soldiers who chose to fight and run, the Yamasee War became a militarized slave revolt not unlike others in the Atlantic during the period.

Enslaved rebels joined collectively in groups to run from and fight their owners just like thousands of enslaved rebels did throughout the long history of slave rebellions in the Atlantic world. While we do not know precisely how many did this, we know at least a hundred enslaved rebels left Carolina for Spanish Florida. Like the 1712 New York revolt, the Natchez revolt in 1729, and the 1739 Stono Rebellion, enslaved rebels in Carolina endured conditions that made them more likely to rise up against the planter class. A Black plantation slave majority was developing at the start of the war, and Black slaves in Carolina suffered material deprivation associated with the rise of the Black chattel system in the colony before the war began. As the war raged on, they suffered worsening conditions which encouraged them to confront their owners.

Importantly, some enslaved soldiers fought for their freedom in the war. They ran away to fight with Indians, they fought their former owners, and they fled to the Spanish safe haven at St. Augustine where they knew they would be declared free. Importantly, slave soldiers in Carolina were establishing a method to use warfare, flee, and connect with the Spanish in Florida that would last for another one hundred years. Their case in Carolina was not unlike the slave soldiers in Bacon’s army in Virginia just forty years earlier. They had been able to morph a White-Indian frontier conflict into one about Black emancipation. They had done so in the Lowcountry much like what other rebels pursued in the Chesapeake. Slave soldier rebels in the
Yamasee War show that armed resistance could operate in the same ways in the Lowcountry as it did in the Chesapeake, despite a different kind of “Indian War” and despite the influence of European imperial rivals. Enslaved soldiers were willing to join Native and European allies against English slave owners, despite the option to fight for their own and potentially earn manumission. As the Atlantic chattel slave system was tightening, slave soldiers increasingly used militarized methods to challenge it.

But there were also important differences between the Carolina slave soldiers and rebels in Bacon’s army years earlier. The conflict they joined was primarily an “Indian war” heavily influenced by European imperial rivalries instead of a Native American-White conflict turned into an internal-British imperial rebellion. They could fight for freedom, but they would have to leave Carolina and live with the Natives or the French or Spanish to achieve it together. In Bacon’s Rebellion, they would have stayed in Virginia had they defeated Berkeley’s Loyalist forces. The presence of strong imperial rivals in the Lower South also encouraged more armed resistance than what was possible in the Chesapeake decades earlier. The Spanish in Florida and to a lesser extent the French near Mobile could promote slave soldiers to turn coat, fight with Natives, and flee from the English. Once in Florida, slave soldiers were provided with even more support to include arms and ammunition and the opportunity to serve as soldiers for the Spanish garrison at St. Augustine. Militarized resistance in Carolina could therefore be turned and slave soldiers’ loyalties could be flipped.

The conditions in Carolina also affected slave soldier loyalties in a different way. Whereas rebels in Virginia fled predominantly wealthy loyalists in Berkeley’s army, there was a substantial amount of enslaved people who soldiered for their owners in Carolina during the
Yamasee War. Temporary yet structured military policies in the colony permitted slave soldiers to fight for their owners and earn their own individual freedom. For those who were conscripted into militia service for British colonists, their desire to turn coat for Natives or Spanish rivals and fight against their owners diminished. Thus, armed resistance could be diluted. Nevertheless, the militarization of slave rebels surged in the early-eighteenth century as enslaved people increasingly used the military and militarized tactics against their owners to challenge the slave system. In the end, the Yamasee War was another episode of Black armed resistance that followed several incidents before it in Carolina and Virginia, and it was an episode that set the stage for even greater moments of militarized Black resistance that would spike again at Stono in 1739, in Virginia in 1775, in Dominica in 1802, and in the Gulf Coast borderlands in 1812.
Preparing to depart from New York City for Nova Scotia in August 1783, British inspectors identified Jane Thompson aboard the ship L’Abondance. Cataloged in the Book of Negroes, the massive ledger that the British Army used to record Black Loyalists being evacuated at the end of the American Revolutionary War, Jane was listed as seventy years old and described as “worn out.” She was travelling with her five-year-old grandson Peter to Nova Scotia where the British Army was sending thousands of runaway American slaves who were attached to the British Army. Jane had fled from her owner Robert Tucker of Norfolk, Virginia, in 1776 after Virginia Governor John Murray, the fourth Earl of Dunmore, promised to free slaves from Patriot owners if they joined his “Ethiopian Regiment” to fight American rebels. She was certainly anxious to leave New York given rumors that Patriot masters were coming to recoup their fugitive slaves.¹

Jane was one of almost 800 enslaved people who fled from their owners in 1775 and 1776 to join Lord Dunmore and become part of his newly-formed Ethiopian Regiment. The

Regiment was comprised entirely of slaves and free Blacks under the command of White officers, and Dunmore formally mustered the Regiment in late 1775 after months of dozens of runaway slaves had already served as ship pilots and helped raid and pilfer Patriot plantations along the Virginia coast. Although he aimed his emancipation offer only at slaves and servants who could bear arms, many elderly people, women, and children ran to him to escape bondage too. As they reached British lines, those who were not combatants served as washer women or in other various auxiliary roles in support of the Regiment and Dunmore’s Loyalist followers. In almost a year of fighting along Virginia’s shore, these runaway slaves razed Patriot settlements, recruited more enslaved people to flee, and fought against and even captured their former owners in combat. The few like Jane and her family who were not captured or who did not die during the war embarked for Nova Scotia in 1783 to take their hard-fought freedom.

Historians have examined the exploits of enslaved people and free Blacks in the Ethiopian Regiment for more than a century, even after most histories of the American Revolution in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries excluded Black people entirely. Early histories of Black experiences in the Revolutionary War fell under the umbrella of African American military history. William Cooper Nell provided a brief pamphlet of loyal Black service in the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 in 1851 to promote abolition, while in 1916, W.B. Hartgrove examined Black Patriots in the war to demonstrate Black contributions to American Independence. Later in 1961, Benjamin Quarles addressed Black experiences during the war as he argued that slaves and free Blacks fought for whichever side offered the best opportunities for
Quarles also contended that Virginia slaves viewed Dunmore as a liberator. Yet like Nell and Hartgrove, Quarles did not view Black military participation in the War as resistance.²

Quarles’ work remained the standard on Black involvement in the Revolutionary War until Sylvia Frey provided sweeping examinations of Black experiences in “Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American Revolution” in 1983 and in Water from the Rock in 1991. For Frey, the Black liberation movement during the American Revolution was pivotal for the revolutionary struggle in the South. Especially in the southern colonies, thousands of enslaved people fled during the war, which Frey considered to be a type of slave revolt. However, Frey also argued that slave flight was unorganized during the war, and that the British military recruited too many potential Black leaders who would have otherwise organized conventional slave rebellions. Black Loyalists therefore militated conventional acts of rebellion. Moreover, while the British Army actively recruited slaves, officers largely employed them as laborers and in auxiliary roles working under miserable conditions that made it clear that the redcoats did not support abolition. Thus, slaves “found little hope or encouragement for rebellion,” she concluded. Although Frey believed there was an absence of major slave uprisings in mainland North America during the Revolutionary Era, she contended that the issue should not obscure the high degree of Black resistance that occurred at the time. Similarly, Douglas Egerton has argued that White revolutionaries’ construct of liberty was at odds with the more tangible opportunities for freedom for enslaved people, and while Black soldiers were not quite

like plantation slave rebels, later movements like Gabriel’s 1800 conspiracy were unsuccessful
codas to the American Revolution. Meanwhile, historians who have focused exclusively on
Black Loyalist experiences during the American Revolution generally agree with the broader
works on Black military units and rebellion. In short, they believe that enslaved people who ran
away and fought in the British military fit into broader social histories of the Revolutionary War
and not into analyses of slave resistance.³

³ Sylvia Frey, “Between Slavery and Freedom: Virginia Blacks in the American
Revolution,” The Journal of Southern History 49, no. 3 (August 1983), 375-398, quotation 398;
Frey, Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age (Princeton: Princeton
University Press, 1991), 4, 48, 87, 127; Douglas Egerton, Death or Liberty: African Americans
and Revolutionary America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 13, 260; Woody
Holton, “‘Rebel Against Rebel’: Enslaved Virginians and the Coming of the American
Revolution,” Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 105, no. 2 (Spring 1997): 190. Many
others have followed these broad approaches and do not view Black soldiers through the frame
of slave insurrection during the revolutionary period. See also Alan Gilbert, Black Patriots and
Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence (Chicago: University of
Chicago Press, 2012); Alan Kulikoff, “Uprooted Peoples: Black Migrants in the Age of the
American Revolution 1790-1820,” in Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American
Revolution, ed. Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 143-
171; Philip Morgan and Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, “Arming Slaves in the American
Revolution,” in Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age, eds. Christopher
Leslie Brown and Philip Morgan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 180-208. See also
Michael Lee Lanning, Defenders of Liberty: African Americans in the Revolutionary War (New
York: Citadel Press, 2000); Simon Schama, Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the
of the Invention of America (New York: Hought, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2010), 199-238; and Jim
Piecuch, Three Peoples, one King: Loyalists, Indians, and Slaves in the Revolutionary South,
1775-1782 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013). Gerald Mullin contends that
slaves in Virginia never rebelled during the Revolutionary War in “British Caribbean and North
American Slaves in an Era of War and Revolution, 1775-1807,” in The Southern Experience in
the American Revolution, eds. Jeffrey Crow and Larry Tise (Chapel Hill: University of North
Carolina Press, 1978), 235. James Walker contends that no mass slave insurrection occurred,
while Cassandra Pybus does not consider slave insurrection as she traces runaway enslaved
people who fought against their former owners during the war. See James W.S.G. Walker, The
Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870
(Halifax: Dalhousie University Press, 1976), 1, 8; Cassandra Pybus, Epic Journeys of Freedom:
Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and Their Global Quest for Liberty (Boston:
Conversely, Graham Russell Hodges considered Black soldiers fighting in the Black Brigade in New Jersey and New York to be slave rebels, and that they were participants of the largest slave revolt in the two colonies in the eighteenth century. Likewise, Charles Carey Jr. suggested the same idea with the Ethiopian Regiment, which he also argued was some type of slave revolt.4

Thus we are left with the idea that enslaved people ran away during the Revolutionary War, and that many joined either Patriot militias, the Continental Army, or the British Army in some hope that they could use their military service to obtain freedom. But we do not fully know what serving in units like the Ethiopian Regiment really meant for enslaved soldiers, or how enslaved people in the Chesapeake viewed the militarization of resistance near the end of the eighteenth century and during the Age of Revolution. Nor do we know how slave soldiers who fought in the Ethiopian Regiment compared to other slave rebels in the Atlantic littoral during the period, or how soldiering for a professional army compared to service in colonial militias. We do not know how militarization affected men, women, children, and Black families that all joined the Ethiopian Regiment in 1775-1776. This chapter examines these issues and returns to

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Virginia at the start of the American Revolutionary War to assess slave soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment. Black experiences during the American Revolutionary War were diverse, and this chapter uses the Ethiopian Regiment as a case study because it captures one of the earliest moments of slave soldiering and armed resistance during the war. Soldiers in the Regiment were not hermetically sealed from enslaved people elsewhere in the continent, and nor was their case the only act of armed resistance during the war. But as I will show below, their case was mostly localized to the Chesapeake, and was one of the first incidents during the war in which professional slave soldiering became an option. It was also one of the clearest cases in which professional military service was tied to slave rebelliousness during the war. Finally, it offers a glimpse into how slave soldiering in Virginia had changed from the end of the seventeenth century to the end of the colonial era.

British military reports, newspaper accounts, and planter correspondence in 1775 and 1776 allow examination of these issues, while an analysis of the Ethiopian Regiment through an Atlantic lens that compares it to militarized slave revolts throughout the Atlantic world also allows for a better understanding of the Regiment’s history and the nature of revolutionary fighting in the Chesapeake during the period. Unfortunately, there are no known narratives or memoirs written by members of the Ethiopian Regiment that show how they left slavery and eventually made it to New York or Nova Scotia like those written by other Black Loyalists such as Boston King or David George. Nevertheless, extrapolating the accounts of Black Loyalists from other units in the British Army including successor units to the Ethiopian Regiment can help show how enslaved people ran away and joined the Regiment, their overall military experiences, and their motivations to fight. A closer look at the Regiment’s Black leaders
through this lens also furthers our understanding of the organization of militarized resistance. Furthermore such an approach sheds more light on enslaved experiences during the American Revolution, the broader study of slave resistance in the Atlantic world, and on slaves taking up arms. From these perspectives, it appears that while Whites battled each other at the start of the Revolutionary War, runaway slaves who joined the Ethiopian Regiment used military service to challenge slavery in Virginia. For perhaps the first time in the Anglo-Atlantic, slave resistance became professionally militarized as Revolution expanded the pathways for slave soldiers to test the system as they joined the British Army. The militarization of resistance reached its peak in the eighteenth century during the American Revolutionary War. The new and peculiar conditions in Virginia early in the war gave enslaved people the first chance to attack slavery in large numbers while in uniform, as part of a professional army.  

SLAVE SOLDIERING IN THE ETHIOPIAN REGIMENT

As early as September 1775 Captain Mathew Squire skirmished with Patriot forces on the Virginia shore. On board the *Otter*, Squire patrolled the Virginia coast and runaway slaves served as pilots to help him navigate. After another ship under his command, the *Liberty*, ran aground on the Back River in Elizabeth County due to a hurricane, Patriots from the nearby town of Hampton seized much of the supplies on the ship, including several firearms, cutlasses, powder, and ammunition. Patriots accused Squire of leading runaway slaves and British sailors on plunder and pillaging operations in the area. They told Squire that they would not provide

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restitution for lost supplies unless Squire met a series of conditions, the first of which included returning slave Joseph Harris and other Black fugitives who had worked for Squire to pillage plantations of livestock under the cover of darkness. Harris had reportedly “applied [to the British] for protection,” after Patriot slave owners discovered that he was slipping intelligence to the British and helping them navigate the small rivers that fed into the Chesapeake. Harris and the other fugitive soldiers were probably terrified that they would be returned to Patriot owners for their role in the fighting.

But Squire refused to return the fugitives, and with the issue unresolved Squire continued raiding plantations in the area with enslaved soldiers serving with him. On October 26 slave soldiers with Squire attacked Hampton with a small force of six vessels. Despite their efforts, enslaved rebels with Squire lost the battle against the Patriots. During the small engagement, slave soldiers were forced to retreat after intense volleys of Patriot fire for more than an hour and even after the capture of the Hawke, which had also run aground. On board the ship were at least two Black rebels, while Patriots also found two more with Lieutenant Wright who had jumped overboard and went on shore. As the men fled for their lives, at least one was shot from a distance by a Patriot marksman. In the end, nine slave rebels were killed in the fighting, along with several British regulars, and several others were captured. Although the Battle of Hampton

was a military engagement, Patriot planters in the area also called it “an insurrection of our slaves” orchestrated by Dunmore and officers in the Royal Navy near Norfolk. The threat of a slave insurrection in the area, albeit one with ties to the British military, prompted the Virginia Committee of Safety to prohibit travel to Norfolk or Portsmouth without special permission. Slave soldiers were making Southeastern Virginia too dangerous for Patriot slave owners.⁷

**Figure 1:** Original Uniform for the Black Pioneers Regiment, 1776. (Ethiopian Regiment successor unit)


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The next major confrontation involving Black rebels-turned slave soldiers occurred at Kemp’s Landing on November 15, 1775, just several miles south of Norfolk. The slave soldiers and British Regulars initially targeted the village of Great Bridge on the Elizabeth River, but they found no Patriot resistance there and moved to the town of Kemp’s Landing nearby. At the town on November 15, 1775, fugitive slaves led British forces to Patriot fighters, and drove the Patriots deep into a swamp as they retreated. Unwilling to let their masters flee, former slaves of Patriot commander Colonel Joseph Hutchings pursued him as he retreated. As the enslaved soldiers approached Hutchings, he refused to surrender and shot at them, but they successfully captured him, along with Major Robert Lawson and several others. The victory at Kemp’s Landing was decisive for the rebels in the Ethiopian Regiment, who killed several Patriots and took several others prisoner despite being outnumbered. It also helped recruit more followers and within just weeks after the battle, “the whole countys of Norfolk and Princes Ann to a man [had] come in to the standard.” The movement was surging and more enslaved people ran to Dunmore to take up arms against their Patriot owners.8

8 James Johnson to Unknown, November 16, 1775, in “HW.R. Curle, “ Intercepted Letters of Virginia Tories, 1775,” 342; Edmund Pendleton to Richard Henry Lee, November 27, 1775, in Mays ed. The Letters and Papers of Pendleton, 1: 132; Colonel William Woodford to the President of the Convention at Williamsburg, Return of Prisoners Taken After Great Bridge, 12 December 1775, in Revolutionary Virginia: The Clash of Arms and the Fourth Convention, 1775-1776, A Documentary History, eds. Robert Scribner and Brent Tarter (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 5: 118. It is possible that Hutchins’ slave Joseph Dickson was responsible for this at the battle. He is one of Hutchins’ two slaves listed on the Book of Negroes, and he is the only male; James Brown to William Brown, November 21, 1775 in The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 14, no. 1 (July 1906): 135; Unknown to Jack, November 20, 1775, in Curle, 345.
Map 4. Map of Southeastern Virginia where the Ethiopian Regiment Fought

Source: Peter Wrike, The Governor's Island: Gwynn’s Island, Virginia, During the Revolution (Gwynn: Gwynn’s Island Museum, 1995), 11.
Map 5. Map of Revolutionary Virginia, 1775-1776.

Even after slave soldiers engaged in conventional pitched battles with Patriot forces, they continued to raid and plunder plantations along the Tidewater in December 1775, further infuriating Patriot slave owners. Slave soldiers had sensed that they had great strength, and they fought relentlessly to keep their momentum. As had become the custom, slave soldiers in the Regiment burned houses and took on new recruits to advance their cause. Robert Carter Nicholas even complained to the Virginia Delegates that British ships were wreaking havoc on local plantations due to the help of runaway slaves, who recruited more followers as they went. Moreover, after success at Kemp’s Landing, Dunmore had great confidence that he could further suppress Patriot resistance and slave soldiers moved to build a small fort on the northern end of Great Bridge, near the southern branch of the Elizabeth River twelve miles from Norfolk. Dunmore’s soldiers, Black and White, had also burned several homes near the river before the Patriots could mobilize. From there they confronted more than 200 Patriot soldiers under Lieutenant Colonel Charles Scott by November 28, 1775. Within a week Colonel Scott probed the rebels and redcoats across the river with a party of 100 men in a midnight operation. The British force at Great Bridge, whom Scott noted was “chiefly negroes,” engaged Scott and his men as they approached their camp. Approximately eighteen Black rebels were killed in the fighting during that week. When regulars in the 14th Regiment mounted an attack on the bridge in the morning on December 9, Patriot cannon decimated the troops attempting to cross it, killing dozens within a few minutes.9

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Figure 2: Portrait of Great Bridge, 1775.


Even after the battles at Kemp’s Landing and Great Bridge, enslaved people continued to run to Dunmore and participated in plundering local plantations. More had wanted to become slave soldiers. As they ran away, they risked significant danger and potential punishments for their service. In early spring 1776 in Stafford County, Virginia, five slaves hid themselves
aboard a small ship and then forced two White men to steer them toward the Coon River, presumably to get closer to British forces. The White men, Ralph and John Grissoll foiled the attempt, however, and took the slaves to Maryland for capture. The five enslaved men, Kitt and Charles of George and Robert Brent, Charles of Mr. Thompson, and Mason and Harry of John Ratliff, were ordered to be transported to the West Indies and sold for their crime. After officials deemed it too impracticable to ship them south, they instead sentenced the men to hard labor in the colony’s lead mines. At the same time, Christopher Calvert’s slave Davy was suspected of planning to escape to Dunmore, and he too was sent to the lead mines as punishment.\footnote{Deposition of Ralph and John Grissoll 2 April 1776, in Scribner and Tarter, \textit{Revolutionary Virginia}, 6: 305, 317; Fifth Virginia Convention Proceedings, May 29, 1776, in Scribner and Tarter, 7 part 1: 300.}

In a similar incident later in Northampton County that same year, when a Black slave and a White indentured servant discovered four enslaved people hiding in the cabin of a small vessel, the bondsmen cut the ships’ cables and fled to the James River before Patriot soldiers captured them near Mobjack Bay. Since White authorities believed that the men took the vessel to “effect an Escape to Lord Dunmore, than any other Design of committing a felony,” they condemned the men to be executed. Running away to Dunmore became a felony charge of conspiracy, and punishments that potential slave soldiers faced increased to include death and work in the salt or lead mines. In other cases, some captured slaves died before they could even be tried. William Smith was shot for refusing to surrender to Patriot forces, while Arthur Boush’s slave Harry, was captured, but died from wounds before his trial. By December 15, 1775, the Virginia General Assembly declared that “all negro or other slaves, conspiring to rebel or make insurrection, shall suffer death,” and that “all slaves who have been, or shall be seduced, by his lordship’s
proclamation…shall be liable to such punishments.” If enslaved people wanted to become soldiers for Dunmore, they would be treated as slave rebels. Slave soldiers probably expected this response, and they ran away to join Dunmore regardless of the risks.

In Elizabeth City County in 1775, runaways who had made it to Dunmore’s lines and were recaptured at Hampton were deemed too dangerous to keep in the colony, and they were transported to Antigua to be sold. Several days before the Battle of Great Bridge Colonel William Woodford wrote to Edmund Pendleton concerning the treatment of slave soldiers already captured. While he ordered his men to accord them the treatment laid out by the rules of war, he noted that his officers unanimously wanted to “make an immediate example of them.” Presumably, they wanted to execute them. Woodford was able to calm his officers down, and slave soldiers captured during the Battle of Great Bridge were sentenced to transportation and resale in Honduras for their “crime,” even though several of them had been exonerated from having ever borne arms in the Ethiopian Regiment. According to Frey, only after compensation claims to owners whose slaves were executed became too costly for the colonial government did Virginians shift punishments to transportation and hard labor in the mines. The shift reduced costs and still kept slaves, whom Whites considered rebellious, under strict and constant supervision and sequestered from others in a way that inhibited the organizing of insurrection.

After a declaration published in mid-December 1775, only slaves who returned to their owners without appearing armed would be pardoned and saved from brutal punishment. Punishments that slave soldiers in the Regiment faced were seemingly harsher than what Patriots meted out to other Loyalists and Tories in the area. 12

The intensification of punishments for potential slave soldiers was also seemingly tied to talk of slave insurrection among planters and soldiers in Virginia in these early moments in 1775 and 1776. There was talk that slaves who ran to the British and who took up arms with the British Army were engaged in slave insurrection. William Bradford warned James Madison in January 1775 that Madison’s “fear” of an “insurrection being excited among the slaves seems too well founded,” because of word that “gentlemen” in England might declare slaves free if they took up arms against the Patriots. Madison concurred that the Patriots would “fall with Achilles” if enslaved people were willing to take up arms with the British. Some Virginia Tories too were worried about Dunmore’s Proclamation and that it would become a slave insurrection. John Johnson thought that Dunmore’s offer would probably mobilize planters for the Patriot cause in order to “suppress any Insurrection amongst the slaves,” which delegates mentioned to the Virginia Convention in Richmond in August 1775. 13 Even before rebel slaves participated in


13 William Bradford to James Madison, January 4, 1775, Bradford Family Papers, series 2 volume 10, Historical Society of Pennsylvania [hereafter HSP]; Madison to Bradford, June 19,
these major battles in the Chesapeake, Virginia planters pondered if runaway slaves joining
British officers in the area and who were joining in on attacks on the shore and pillaging Patriot
plantations were involved in “actual rebellion.” Curiously this question even begged the same
planters to wonder if it were time to arm their own slaves in their defense.\textsuperscript{14}

Many planters and slaveholders in the area resented that so many enslaved people had
fled to Dunmore and were attacking Patriot soldiers. On Wednesday, June 26, 1776, Landon
Carter detailed in his diary at Sabine Hall how eleven of his nearly 500 slaves ran away the night
before. The eleven slaves, all men, snuck into their master’s quarters and stole his son’s gun, a
bag of bullets, gunpowder, and a stack of clothes before absconding on a petty auger.
Presumably they joined enslaved people from the neighboring Robinson plantation in the night
and were on their way “to be sure, to Ld. Dunmore.” They stayed on the run for several days
until they were detected by Patriot militia aboard a small ship. They took heavy fire from the
White soldiers and they were forced to land and flee by foot. As they ran they were fired at
again, resulting in the death of three and the surrender of five more. The rest remained at large
and the putative leader of the escape, Moses, never returned to Carter’s plantation despite
Carter’s efforts to recapture Moses for several months. The group was remarkable on Carter’s
plantation for their attempt to reach Dunmore and to fight, which apparently did not happen
again throughout 1776 and 1777. Other people on his plantation did runaway, but they did not
join British military units. They ostensibly took advantage of the chaos and confusion that war

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{Virginia Gazette}, (Pinkney), Williamsburg, July 13, 1775.
wrought and escaped to somewhere else. They did not steal firearms or ammunition as they fled, they did not attempt to join British units in the Chesapeake, and they were not shot by Patriot militias. In many ways Moses and his followers were treated more seriously than others on his plantation, suggesting that both Blacks and Whites understood the Ethiopian Regiment to be a grave threat to slavery in the colony. The Virginia Committee of Safety even reported that Dunmore was “exciting an insurrection of our slaves,” while one planter opined in John Pinkney’s *Virginia Gazette*, “Are not the negro slaves, now on board the Fowey, which are under the g------’s protection, in actual rebellion, and punishable as such?” Indeed slave holders throughout the Chesapeake believed that the Ethiopian Regiment was engaged in insurrection, and they punished runaways trying to join it as such.\(^{15}\)

To be sure, British strategists never wanted to incite an actual slave insurrection, but they knew that slave soldiers had enormous strategic value. But even talk of Dunmore and slaves taking up arms for the British Army in spring 1775 alarmed colonial planters who feared that it would lead to slave insurrection. To add to this fear, when Dunmore moved to seize the gunpowder at the Williamsburg magazine in late April 1775, Patriots worried that it was an attempt to undermine their ability to thwart slave insurrections in the colony, which had seemingly intensified that year. Fear of slave insurrection may have even been a grievance in the Declaration of Independence in the next year. Enslaved people also seemingly understood the

opportunity in similar ways, and attempts to fight for freedom and rebel increased with the rhetoric of potential slave armies forming. At least two slave conspiracies were detected in Norfolk and Prince Edward Counties in early 1775 before Dunmore’s Proclamation, and a couple more were discovered in the James River watershed at the same time.\(^\text{16}\)

The punishments administered to slaves trying to reach the Regiment were also consistent with what militarized slave rebels in the Atlantic endured at the time. In both South Carolina and Jamaica in 1775 and 1776, enslaved people plotted insurrections in conjunction with the presence of the British military. In Charleston, leader Thomas Jeremiah was executed for his conspiracy in 1775, and so too were the ringleaders of the conspiracy in Hanover Parish, Jamaica, in 1776. Others who were implicated were transported. In addition, planters passed six new laws in Jamaica after the Hanover conspiracy in which they raised fines, strengthened militias, and ordered more restrictions on runaway slaves and maroons, similar to how Virginia planters reassessed how they would treat runaways and rebels flocking to Dunmore. Rebels who were not killed or executed in Tacky’s rebellion in Jamaica in 1760 were transported to the Bay of Honduras, which Jamaican authorities believed to have even harsher living and labor conditions than Jamaica. Gabriel and many of his co-conspirators were executed after their plan unraveled in Virginia in 1800, while several others were also transported out of the state. Indeed, in so many cases across the Atlantic littoral, slaves conspiring to rebel or who actually revolted

were either executed or transported much like the runaways who joined the Ethiopian Regiment in 1775 and 1776.\textsuperscript{17}

Despite this risk of intensified punishments, enslaved people continued to run away and serve as soldiers for Dunmore in the Chesapeake. Though defeated at Great Bridge, one of the more destructive phases of the fighting began at the start of 1776 as slave soldiers and plantation slaves took part in the burning of Norfolk on New Year’s Day 1776. As one of Virginia’s major cities, it was of great strategic value to hold for both the British and the Patriots, and Dunmore’s forces initiated an artillery barrage from the sea between three and four o’clock that day. After more than twelve hours of firing, Dunmore landed a small amphibious assault force to set fire to houses and destroy the city’s wharves the next day. In an attempt to deny the enemy the important city and harbor, Patriots inside the city also set wooden structures ablaze. To be sure, the Patriots were responsible for most of the damage as only a few dozen homes were destroyed by slave soldiers, even though more than 1,300 structures were ruined in the city. Nevertheless,

\begin{footnotesize}
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enslaved people, both those who had already joined the Ethiopian Regiment and those who had remained with their owners, were caught up in the destruction.\textsuperscript{18}

Although Dunmore and his Loyalist supporters razed Norfolk to start the New Year in 1776, the defeat at Great Bridge had essentially made anything more than plantation raids and coastal harassment untenable for British soldiers in the Chesapeake and in Southern Virginia. Moreover, Dunmore’s 100 ship flotilla that included civilian Loyalists needed substantial military assistance to protect it from Patriot attacks and to supply the non-combatants with food and water. By late May 1776 Dunmore and his soldiers dropped anchor off the coast at Gwynn’s Island, a small four-square mile island south of the mouth of the Rappahannock River. As part of the invading force, enslaved soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment took the island with very little opposition. They began to build earthworks to protect Dunmore’s newly-established headquarters on the island from Patriot artillery that was only a few hundred yards away. Along with Royal Marines, soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment worked every day to fortify the island under constant harassing fire by Patriot fighters on the mainland just across the Millford Haven channel.\textsuperscript{19}


Map 7. Sketch Map of Gwynn’s Island by Thomas Jefferson, undated.


By then slave soldiers in the Regiment were already suffering from smallpox and a fever that made its way through the ranks. Just a week earlier in Norfolk, British surgeons had suggested that it was already time to inoculate the soldiers in case the illnesses should spread. Their caution was prudent as the illnesses did spread and began to wreak havoc on both Black and White soldiers occupying the city. Nearly 200 slave soldiers died just on the voyage from Norfolk to Gwynn’s Island alone. Though the Regiment continued to recruit more runaway slaves, approximately six to eight each day, mortality rates from the fever were so high that there were hardly any “effective men” who could actually fight. Slave soldiers were suffering and
dying. Within a week British officers noted how dire the situation was becoming as provisions like food and fresh water were also scarce. By early July conditions did not improve and Dunmore employed his Loyalist forces, both Black and White, to make inroads onto the mainland to forage for food and fresh water. Some Patriots even suspected Dunmore sent sickened Black rebels onshore to infect the enemy in an early attempt at biological warfare.²⁰

Patriots had also made note of fugitive slaves joining the Ethiopian Regiment and Dunmore’s presence on Gwynn’s Island, and they planned to attack the enslaved rebels as soon as reinforcements arrived. In the meantime they fired harassing shots at the Loyalists on a daily basis for nearly six weeks. At approximately 10 o’clock in the morning on July 9, slave soldiers in the Regiment felt the first shells from Patriot artillery. They took cover as two eighteen pound cannon and four nine pounders began hammering their positions. The barrage lasted for nearly two hours and did substantial damage to British ships patrolling the island nearby including Dunmore’s flagship *The Dunmore*, which had to be towed away. But a shortage of gunpowder and landing craft prevented a Patriot amphibious assault until the next morning. Slave soldiers likely knew the battle would be a defeat, but they returned fire nevertheless with muskets and a six-pound piece of cannon. Unfortunately for them, their fire had little effect, and Dunmore noted how useless it would be to stay on the island while taking on such heavy casualties. He therefore ordered his followers to evacuate. The Patriot delay also enabled Dunmore and his soldiers, free and enslaved, to flee later that night under cover of darkness. Likely anticipating

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the Patriot attack, the Black soldiers were probably anxious and eager to leave the island. At the very least, they knew it was better to leave the disease-ridden place than to stay there.\textsuperscript{21}

\textbf{Map 8.} Gwynn’s Island In the Chesapeake Bay.

\textit{Source:} Adapted by the author from Environmental Systems Research Institute, \textit{ArcGIS Online}.

The next morning roughly 250 Patriots onboard thirty canoes crossed the channel and made landfall on Gwynn’s Island. They faced little opposition as everyone who could fight had left, and those who were left behind were mostly non-combatants or were too sick to resist.

Patriot Captain Thomas Posey took part in the assault and would later describe how tattered much of the Ethiopian Regiment was on Gwynn’s Island. He wrote that he

“never saw more distress in my life, than what I found among some of the poor deluded Negroes which they could not take time, or did not chuse to carry off with them, they being sick. Those that I saw, some were dying, and many calling out for help; and throughout the whole Island we found them strew’d about, many of them torn to pieces by wild beasts—great numbers of the bodies having never been buried.”

Other slave soldiers were buried on the island, totally devastated by illness. At least 150 were buried, while twelve more were dead, “lying in the open air,” from a “dreadful fever amongst them.” Perhaps as many as 400-500 slave soldiers died on the island, along with 150 Whites. One Patriot officer who was also part of the attacking force recorded in his journal how “deplorable” the situation was for Black rebels who were sick and were left on the island. He found many of them on the island “dying of the putrid fever; others dead in the open fields; a child was found sucking at the breast of its dead mother. In one place you might see a poor wretch half dead making signs for water, in another, others endeavouiring to crawl away from the intolerable stench of dead bodies lying by their sides; in short it was a shocking scene.” Yet another officer noted that he found 130 shallow graves on the island and that even commander Major Thomas Byrd fled from the island sick too. “In short, such a scene of misery, distress, and cruelty, my eyes never beheld.” Like other Black Loyalists who contracted small pox during the conflict, they had perhaps spent entire days lying on the ground “without any thing to eat or drink.” In their desperate state, slave soldiers were unable to kill a single Patriot soldier during

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the invasion. They were too sick to care and those who could fight had left them behind, along with the six-pound piece of cannon, baggage, cables, anchors, iron, and fifty head of cattle.  

Although many enslaved soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment had died on Gwynn’s Island or were left behind, those who escaped with British forces carried on their fight further north in the Chesapeake. The rebels sailed to St. George’s Island at the mouth of the Potomac River to find fresh food and water again. Even more plantation slaves fled to their standard and joined their ranks. Once again, Black rebels on the island received harassing fire from Patriot fighters nearby on a daily basis. They also did not find an adequate supply of water on the Island, and Dunmore ordered Captain Andrew Hamond to go further up the Potomac in search of more and to harass Patriot planters. Once again, members of the Ethiopian Regiment took part in the fighting and joined Hamond’s 108-man expedition. On board the HMS Roebuck, Hamond led the excursion nearly 100 miles before reaching William Brent’s plantation. Aside from an opportunity to plunder the Patriot’s property for supplies, nearly 300 Patriot soldiers had assembled at the plantation and a successful Loyalist attack could boost morale after the disgraceful defeat at Gwynn’s Island.

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Soldiers with Hamond first cannonaded Brent’s house by sea before making landfall, driving away the Patriots harbored inside. Once on land, the Black rebels and British Regulars burned the house and slave quarters on the plantation. Approximately four or five men were wounded, while they also found three dead Patriots on site. The skirmish amounted to little more and the rebels returned to St. George’s Island to reorganize and continue plantation raids elsewhere, which Hamond complained decided “nothing” for the broader British military strategy.\(^{25}\)

In the end, the fighting near St. George’s Island also proved largely unsuccessful for the Ethiopian Regiment and the British Military. Provisions were still hard to come by, while fever and illnesses continued to wreak havoc among the ranks. Dunmore’s fleet departed St. George’s by August 2, and sailed south to evacuate the Chesapeake entirely. When the last of his forces sailed past the Virginia Capes on August 6, only one-third of his soldiers were actually healthy enough to fight. The British had lost twenty vessels in the summer of 1776 in the fighting, while Dunmore reported that he had taken or destroyed at least thirty Patriot ships. But close to half of the men and women who joined the Ethiopian Regiment and Dunmore’s fleet had perished. Those who were still alive would continue to suffer as they reached New York, and there was not a ship in Dunmore’s fleet “that did not throw one two three or more dead overboard every night.”

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\(^{25}\) Dunmore to Germain, August 31, 1776, NDAR, 5:1313; Master’s Log on *HMS Roebuck*, August 1776, NDAR, 6:68.
They had left Virginia free, but many did not live long enough to enjoy their hard-earned liberty.\footnote{Narrative of Captain Andrew Snape Hamond, July 23, 1776, NDAR, 6:173, 174; Captain Hamond to Hass Stanley, August 5, 1776, NDAR, 6:68; Dunmore to Dartmouth February 18, 1776, in K.G. Davies, ed. \textit{Documents of the American Revolution 1770-1783} (Colonial Office Series) vol. 12 (Dublin: Irish University Press, 1976), 62; Robert Howe to the President of the Convention, January 2, 1776, in Anderson, ed. \textit{Richmond College Historical Papers}, vol. 1 no. 1:148; Colonel William Woodford to the Virginia Convention, January 21, 1776, in Anderson ed. \textit{Richmond College Papers}, vol. 1 no. 1: 154; Edmund Pendleton to James Mercer, March 19, 1776, in Mays, 1: 160; Edmund Pendleton to Thomas Jefferson, July 29, 1776, in Mays, 1:189; Diary of Miguel Antonio Eduardo, July 15, 1776, NDAR, 5: 1346; Dunmore to Germain, February 25, 1776, CO 5/1373, 25; Dunmore to Howe, September 4, 1776, CO 5/1373, 31.}

The intense and somewhat vengeful nature of the fighting in 1775 and 1776 is not surprising given how slaves in the Regiment fought after it was disbanded in summer of 1776. One member of the Regiment, Titus or Colonel Tye, led bloody raids and retaliatory strikes against Patriot masters in New Jersey in 1779, with several attacks directly targeting the slaves’ former owners. Tye and his followers even killed Patriots as retribution for the death of Black Loyalists in battle. Relentless in fighting as state-sponsored rebels, Tye and the surviving Regiment’s soldiers avenged their bondage and punished their former owners for their maltreatment. Underscoring the intense personal and vindictive nature of the fighting that slave soldiers in the Regiment participated in, they wore “Liberty to Slaves” inscribed on their uniforms as they fought their former owners. As noted above, some of the first skirmishes at Hampton and in the Chesapeake in 1775 were also \textit{about} the slave soldiers themselves, and they
assuredly used all means that they had to thwart their owners and from taking them back as slaves.  

Black Loyalist accounts in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone years later also indicate that slave soldiers were concerned about undercutting Black unfreedom where they had lived. David George later recounted in Sierra Leone that White authorities in Freetown had treated the Black veterans “as bad as though we had been slaves,” and that they would “be made slaves again” if they ran away from the fledgling settlement. Similarly, others petitioned the Sierra Leone Company in London that their freedom seemed fragile at best, and under threat at worst. They wrote that they wanted to make their “children free and happy after us,” but if the directors of the company continued to deny Black leadership of the settlement, that their “children may be in bondage after us.” The Veterans also petitioned against Governor William Dawes, whom they claimed “seems to wish to rule us just as bad as if we were all Slaves which we cannot bear.” By 1794 and 1795, survivors of the Ethiopian Regiment like Moses Wilkinson appealed further that Freetown had become “A Town of Slavery,” and that they were tired of being “empressed upon with Tyranny and Emprision.” They were determined to “Enjoy the privileges of Freedom,” which they had fought for so vigorously in North America years earlier.

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28 “An account of the life of Mr. David George from Sierra Leone in Africa / given by himself in a conversation with Brother Rippon of London and Brother Pearce of Birmingham” in Joanna Brooks and John Saillant, eds. *Face Zion Forward*, 187, 188.

29 Settlers’ Petition to Directors of Sierra Leone Company, 1793, in Christopher Fyfe, ed. ‘Our Children Free and Happy’: *Letters from Black Settlers in Africa in the 1790s* (Edinburgh:
RUNNING AWAY TO BECOME A SOLDIER: REGIMENT COMPOSITION

Issued on November 7, 1775, Dunmore’s Proclamation caused widespread and spontaneous slave flight in the Chesapeake. Enslaved people who ran to Dunmore and joined the Ethiopian Regiment thereafter created their own community. Whether or not they fled as individuals or in groups, they came together for a united cause as the Regiment formed. Additionally, whether they left alone or in groups by the time they reached Dunmore’s lines, many had formed collective bands. One man named George claimed to have escaped from Norfolk with fifty-five other Black men and two White men after he was captured and interrogated by Patriot forces in late 1775. His comrade, a man named Ted from Kemp’s Landing, told Patriot officers that he had fled Norfolk with twenty other Black men and a few White men as well. Indeed, Dunmore’s call to arms was causing rampant flight throughout the colony. Within a week, the Virginia Committee of Safety estimated that almost 100 enslaved people had already joined Dunmore, while by mid-February 1776 Dunmore estimated that he could have as much as 3,000 slaves within his ranks. Those who could not reach the British by land stole canoes and small boats and approached by water. Many fled in family groups, like Jane Thompson and her grandson Peter, although there is evidence that family flight to Dunmore was sometimes incremental. Fathers and husbands generally fled first when their families were unsure about joining the rebellion, and after British officers reassured them, the men offered intelligence about Patriot masters and returned to their plantations to bring back their partners and children. Some also returned with food and new recruits to join the Regiment. Nearly half of

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Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 37, 38; Petition to John Clarkson, November 19, 1794 in Fyfe, 44; and Petition to Governor and Council of Sierra Leone April 22, 1795, Fyfe, 48.
the estimated runaways who fought in the Regiment and who survived the war were from Norfolk County, and the vast majority of the Regiment came from Norfolk and Princess Ann Counties. Considering the slave population in the two counties, approximately 25 percent of enslaved people closest to Dunmore actually fled to Dunmore’s lines.30

Despite Dunmore’s Proclamation that assured enslaved people their liberty if they reached his forces, running away was still a dangerous and frightening endeavor for many slaves in the Chesapeake in 1775 and 1776. While members of the Ethiopian Regiment left no account describing their fear or obstacles in reaching Dunmore, Boston King recounted his path to freedom in South Carolina in 1780, which was probably similar in many ways to how members of the Ethiopian Regiment reached Dunmore and British forces. King had at first ran away to escape the harsh treatment of his owner, and when he escaped to Charlestown he “began to feel the happiness of liberty.” As liberating as it must have felt, King was still “much grieved at first,” having left his friends behind and being forced to live among “strangers.” Escaping from slavery could result in the temporary and even permanent losses of friends and family members. Moreover, what life would be like with the British Army during a violent war was unknown. Notwithstanding these uncertainties and the potential loss of kith and kin, like King in the Low

30 William Woodford to Edmund Pendleton, December 5, 1775, in Rhodehamel ed. The American Revolution, 89, 90. Pybus, Epic Journeys of Freedom, 20; Virginia Committee of Safety to Virginia Delegates in Congress, November 11, 1775, in Scribner and Tarter, 4: 379-80; Dunmore to Dartmouth, February 18, 1775, in Davies ed. Documents of the American Revolution, 12:59; Deposition of William Barry, June 11, 1776, in Force ed. American archives, 4th Ser., 6:811. Landon Carter also describes a typical attempt to reach the British by boat when Patriot militia discovered ten slaves near the Middlesex Shore on June 29, 1776 in Greene ed. The Diary of Landon, 2: 1052; Carey Jr., “Dunmore’s Ethiopian Regiment,” 2, 81. By my count, almost all of the slaves were from Norfolk city, while Portsmouth featured heavily in the Book of Negroes, as well.
Country, enslaved people in the Chesapeake fled to join the Ethiopian Regiment to earn their freedom.\(^{31}\)

Returns of the Ethiopian Regiment on Gwynn’s Island, which the Regiment occupied for the better part of six weeks in the summer of 1776, indicate that at least a few enslaved families were part of or followed the Regiment. Phillis Thorowgood was at the Mill Point camp on the island with her daughter also named Phillis, as was Patience Butt who was listed with a child. Meanwhile, Sergeant Curry served in Dunmore’s own company with his unnamed son. The enslaved soldiers and camp followers were otherwise listed by their owners’ surnames, but it is reasonable to speculate that several other enslaved family groups were on the island given the simple fact that enslaved people formed their own families on Virginia plantations, and that several enslaved men and women from the same owners were listed present on the island. It is possible that many ran away to British lines much like David George and his wife Phyllis did in Georgia years later. When George’s master left the plantation to escape British advances, George, Phyllis, their two children, and more than fifty other enslaved people left to reach British soldiers near Savannah. While they were in British lines, Phyllis served as a washerwoman for General Henry Clinton before they eventually evacuated Charleston for Nova Scotia at war’s end. Women who ran away to the Ethiopian Regiment served in similar roles as did Phyllis further south.\(^{32}\)

To be sure, only Robert Tucker and Bristoll Mitchell are listed on both the returns at Gwyn’s Island and in the Book of Negroes as having fought in the Ethiopian Regiment. But it is

\(^{31}\) “Memoirs of the life of Boston King,” in Brooks and Saillant, 212.

\(^{32}\) *Virginia Gazette*, (Dixon and Hunter), Williamsburg, August 31, 1776; “An account of the life of Mr. David George,” in Brooks and Saillant, 182, 183.
also clear that other people not listed at Gwynn’s Island joined Dunmore in family units. Others like Jane Thompson ran away to Dunmore with young children by their side. In a few cases, grandparents also joined the movement. One Hundred and Twenty-Eight people are listed in the Book of Negroes who probably served with the Ethiopian Regiment at some point. Eighteen are listed as having served with or came to New York with Dunmore, while the others fled from parts of the Chesapeake where the Ethiopian Regiment served and when the Regiment took action in 1775 and 1776. While this method has its limits, it offers a glimpse into who comprised the Regiment at the start of the Revolutionary War. Sixty percent of those who probably served were male, and 40 percent were female. The ratio may have even been closer to one half female by other estimates. Most male members were in their twenties when they joined, but sizeable amounts were teenagers or in their thirties and forties. Meanwhile, almost half of the women were teenagers, and almost a quarter were older and in their twenties. At least fourteen enslaved people listed in 1783 were under the age of ten when they escaped with their relatives in Virginia, and survivors took little time to build and expand their families living within British lines for the rest of the war. Now that they had earned their freedom and had the opportunity to rekindle relationships with partners or start new relationships altogether, these likely survivors of the Regiment had another thirty-one children by the time they evacuated New York for Nova Scotia in 1783. Their numbers also paint a different picture than what was reported after Dunmore’s forces evacuated Gwyn’s Island, in which close to two-thirds of the enslaved people on the island were men.\(^3\)

\(^3\)Pybus, 20; Holton “‘Rebel Against Rebel,’” 182. Holton appears to base this figure on Sarah Stroud’s “Tracing Runaway Slaves from Norfolk County, Virginia, During the American Revolutionary War (Seminar Paper, Randolph-Macon Woman’s College, Fall 1995), which I
The somewhat-balanced sex ratio in the Regiment is striking, considering the broader history of runaway slaves in the United States in which nearly 80 percent of runaways were male. The ratio also attests to how important it was for mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives to participate in the Regiment, even though they were excluded from carrying firearms in the British Army. That so many of them joined also shows how militarized resistance was increasing during the American Revolutionary War. Whereas before slave soldiers in Virginia in 1676 and in South Carolina in 1715 were exclusively men, in the Ethiopian Regiment women and children could participate in more roles than ever before. In the case of the Ethiopian Regiment, women and children could use military service to attack the chattel system, which was an option that they did not have access to in earlier cases.  

Table 1: Members of the Ethiopian Regiment on Gwynn’s Island by Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>% of Known</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male:</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female:</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown:</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adjustments were made for rounding errors.

Source: Virginia Gazette, (Dixon and Hunter), Williamsburg, August 31, 1776.

Table 2: Estimated Members of the Ethiopian Regiment Who Survived the War, by Age and Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Men: n</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Women: N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unk:</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Unk:</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Total | Men: 76 | 100% | Women: 52 | 100% |

Note: Adjustments were made for rounding errors.


Despite these hundreds who responded to Dunmore’s immediate call, others were already fighting with him or were contemplating joining him before he made his intentions public.

Notably, slaves Aaron, Johnny, and Joe Harris were already aboard the British tender Otter with Captain Mathew Squire by the summer of 1775, with Harris earning a reputation as a skilled pilot during the fighting at Hampton Roads. Judith Jackson had already been on the run for two years before she decided to join the Regiment as a washer woman. Similarly, Robert Brent’s slave Charles fled just after Dunmore issued his proclamation, but Brent assumed that his flight was premeditated. Nor was Dunmore’s reach limited to Virginia. Titus, a slave of John Corlis in Monmouth County, New Jersey, ran away only a day after Dunmore issued his proclamation, and it was impossible for him to have heard the news so rapidly. Furthermore, while Dunmore’s
Proclamation caused mass flight, not all slaves in Virginia fled to Dunmore to fight their former owners. Of John Willoughby Jr.’s eighty-seven slaves who ran away during the war, only fourteen actually joined the Ethiopian Regiment. The others simply took advantage of the chaos of war and fled.\textsuperscript{35}

It is difficult to discern potential African ethnic demographics of the Regiment since most enslaved people listed on military returns, the Book of Negroes, and land applications for Sierra Leone in 1791 have Anglicized names and do not precisely point to specific ethnic or cultural regions in Africa. Embarkation data from the trans-Atlantic slave trade database also do not necessarily reflect African ethnic groups. Notwithstanding these issues, Virginia planters continued to import nearly 1,000 African slaves per year in the twenty-five years before Dunmore’s Proclamation, but most slaves in the Chesapeake were American-born. There was no African ethnic majority in Virginia by that time, but Africans from the Bight of Biafra, the Gulf of Guinea Islands, and the Windward Coast accounted for the largest groups sent to the colony during the period (see Tables 3 and 4). In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Virginians also relied on the inter-colonial slave trade, importing thousands of Gold Coast Africans from Barbados and Jamaica.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Deposition of Archibald Campbell, Angus Fisher, and George Gray, 4 September 1775, in Scribner and Tarter, 4:69-70; Selby, \textit{The Revolution in Virginia: 1775-1783}, 58. Tom was a runaway from Carolina for nearly 2 years before he joined Dunmore. See Woodford to Pendleton, December 5, 1775, in Scribner and Tarter, 5:57-58; Gilbert, 24; Joyce Lee Malcolm, \textit{Peter’s War: A New England Slave Boy and the American Revolution} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 123; \textit{Virginia Gazette}, (Alexander Purdie), Williamsburg, November 17, 1775; \textit{Pennsylvania Gazette} (Benjamin Franklin), November 22, 1775.

It is also unclear whether slave soldiers in the Regiment used tactics and knowledge of warfare that they might have known as warriors in Africa, as they may have done in other rebellions. Approximately 6 percent of Virginia’s black population in 1775 was African-born, while Dunmore complained that maybe only one tenth of the rebel slaves who fled to him were actually capable of bearing arms, and that they “hardly ever made use of the gun,” which suggests that few, if any, had prior military training or experience in Africa. More likely, rebels who joined the Regiment and who stole firearms in the process probably knew how important seizing them were as tools of rebellion just like other militarized slave rebels throughout the Atlantic. While they could raid and plunder plantations without any formal military training, they did receive formal British military instruction once they joined the Regiment and they fought alongside British regulars following European conventions of war.

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Table 3: Slaves Imported from Africa to Virginia, 1750-1776

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Departure in Africa</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>1,479</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windward Coast</td>
<td>5,038</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>1,755</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Benin</td>
<td>608</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea Islands</td>
<td>5,418</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central Africa and St. Helena</td>
<td>3,999</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Africa</td>
<td>4,160</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>22,457</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note*: Adjustments were made for rounding errors.


Table 4: Slaves Imported to Virginia, 1701-1776

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region of Departure in Africa</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senegambia</td>
<td>10,500</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>1,852</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windward Coast</td>
<td>2,591</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gold Coast</td>
<td>5,237</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Benin</td>
<td>1,745</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea Islands</td>
<td>28,494</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Central Africa and St. Helena</td>
<td>10,600</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean Islands</td>
<td>1,767</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Africa</td>
<td>32,088</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>94,874</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note*: Adjustments were made for rounding errors.


Rebels involved in Tacky’s revolt, Thomas Jeremiah’s conspiracy, and Gabriel’s conspiracy all planned to seize firearms.
Though Dunmore inspired many of the Ethiopian rebels to join him, and while they were technically under the command of white Loyalist Major Thomas Byrd, Black leaders did emerge during the fighting. Returns of the Regiment on Gwynn’s Island show that there were at least four Black non-commissioned officers, including Corporals Crouch and Curry, and Sergeants Britain and John Royal. But little more is known of them and there do not appear to be any runaway slave advertisements published for their return from potential owners. They may have even been free.\footnote{\textit{Virginia Gazette}, (Dixon and Hunter), Williamsburg, August 31, 1776; Gilbert, 31; Lathan Windley, ed. \textit{Runaway Slave Advertisements: A Documentary History from the 1730s to 1790} vols. 1, 2 (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983).} More is known of enslaved people who likely joined the Regiment and who led other Black units later in the war or even survived it and migrated to Nova Scotia. Among the first to surface was Moses “Daddy” Wilkinson of Miles Wilkinson in Nansemond County. Moses attracted dozens of followers in 1776, and he survived the war to eventually embark from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone in 1792. At the time of his flight, he was twenty-nine years old, and was described as blind and lame in the Book of Negroes. Not a fighter, Moses was a Methodist preacher and a skilled orator who could communicate and appeal to religious beliefs. Moses remained a leader in Nova Scotia with other Black Loyalists, and in Sierra Leone when the last slave rebels attempted to start a new life in Africa. Aside from Moses, other Black preachers gained prominent leadership positions within the Regiment’s successor Black units during the war, suggesting how important religious figures were for slave soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment while they were in combat. David George, a Baptist preacher and runaway from Georgia, had also gathered a large congregation in Nova Scotia like Wilkinson, drawing followers from the original pool of Ethiopian rebels. As did Boston King, who escaped to the
British near Charleston and served in the British Army in mostly noncombatant roles. It is unclear if these individuals preached rebellion to their followers during the war or tied soldiering to the plight of Jews in the Old Testament like other religious leaders of slave rebellions in Atlantic history. In Nova Scotia, John Marrant, Boston King, and David George all preached the New Testament, and converted several Black Loyalists living with them there. The three appeared to favor preaching the Synoptic Gospels, while King also found John 9:25 “so suitable” to his own experience that he was “encouraged to exercise fresh faith.” Regardless of their message, it is clear that Black preachers obtained considerable roles as leaders of former members of the Ethiopian Regiment.40

In addition to the religious leaders of the Regiment, Nathaniel Snowball and James Reid were also likely emerging military leaders. Described as “stout,” Nathaniel ran away from Mrs. Shrewst in Norfolk in 1776 and later became a captain in the Company of Black Pioneers, one of the Regiment’s successor units. Similarly, James Reid, a slave in Norfolk, also rose to the rank of captain by the end of the war, and was among the Black leaders placed in charge when the Black Loyalists arrived in Nova Scotia. Titus from New Jersey was also assuredly a strong developing military leader in the Regiment. Not much is known about Titus or Tye in Virginia,

but he led punishing raids against Patriot slave owners in New Jersey in 1777 and 1778 and rose
to the rank of colonel. Tye was only twenty-one and approximately six feet tall when he ran from
his master John Corlis to join the Regiment, but he was an astounding tactician and was
acknowledged as such before his death in New Jersey in 1780. Patriots feared Tye after the
Battle of Monmouth, where he captured Captain Elisha Shepard and dragged him back to New
York City. He was “justly much more to be feared and respected, as an enemy, than any of his
brethren of the fairer complexion.” He was one of only a few former slaves to attain the rank of
colonel during the entire war, a significant title, considering the fact that the British did not
commission Black men. Tye may not have been the chief Black leader of the Ethiopian
Regiment, but his honorific title and success only a year after the Regiment left the Chesapeake
indicate that he probably emerged as a significant figure in Virginia. While these men were, of
course, not the only military leaders in Virginia in 1775 and 1776, the prominence of other Black
commissioned and noncommissioned officers and preachers after the war and with the remaining
Regiment survivors indicates that the soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment valued these two types
of authority figures as they fought for freedom.41

Though it is not known if these men were in fact the prominent leaders of the Regiment
in 1775 and 1776, evaluation of subsequent leaders in charge of surviving Regiment members
allows for a closer examination of the characteristics that the Ethiopian rebels probably valued in
their figureheads in Virginia. Upon their arrival in Nova Scotia, the remaining Regiment

41 Hodges ed. The Black Loyalist Directory, 85, 196; Mary Louise Clifford, From Slavery
to Freetown: Black Loyalists After the American Revolution (Jefferson: McFarland & Company,
1999), 44; Book of Negroes, Book 3; Hodges, Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North, 97;
Pennsylvania Gazette (Franklin), November 8, 1775; The New Jersey Gazette (Isaac Collins),
Trenton, April 4, 1782; Egerton, 67.
members were under charge of Colonel Stephen Blucke, successor to Colonel Tye. Town plots were also divided by company captains, including James Reid and Nathaniel Snowball. It is unknown if Blucke actually fought with the Regiment, but he seemingly possessed some of the same leadership characteristics as Tye and the others, which would suggest a strong possibility that soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment valued a certain set of qualities for their commanders. From Barbados, Blucke was a man of talents and was literate, suggesting that he was probably educated, which was a rare feat for Black men in the British West Indies. Like Blucke, Thomas Peters also emerged as a leader of the remaining slave soldiers from the Ethiopian Regiment at the end of the war. Peters was one of only two Black sergeants in the Regiment’s successor unit the Black Pioneers, and he was elected to be Speaker-General when the Black Loyalists arrived in Sierra Leone in 1792. People thought Peters was sensible, cunning, and intelligent, as well as a passionate and eloquent speaker. These similarities with Blucke, Tye, and Wilkinson, as well as the fact that he led surviving soldiers from the Ethiopian Regiment in Africa, supports the view that the soldiers valued a set of personality characteristics in leaders regardless of religious status.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{THE REGIMENT IN GREATER ATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE}

The plundering of plantations and razing of crops in Virginia by soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment was at least in part the product of a violent and intense war. But their actions also

resembled militarized slave rebels elsewhere in the Atlantic world pursuing similar objectives. The hundreds of slaves who joined Dunmore matched the nearly one thousand who fought for Tacky in his massive Jamaican rebellion in 1760, and they exceeded the dozen or so slaves tried for conspiracy with Thomas Jeremiah in Charleston in 1775. They were larger than the group of more than 100 slaves implicated in the Hanover Parish conspiracy in Jamaica in 1776. They were at least as large as the hundreds of Coromantin rebels who rose up in Jamaica in several insurrections in the late-seventeenth century as well.

Aside from their numbers, soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment followed similar methods, tactics, techniques, and procedures to achieve their goals like militarized slave rebels. At the onset of Tacky’s Revolt in St. Mary’s Parish, Jamaica, slaves captured muskets and gunpowder and then set fire to the sugar works and cane fields on the Heywood-Hall plantation. As they progressed through Jamaican parishes, they circled individual plantations and recruited more slaves step by step. They planned to live on plantation provisions that they plundered to sustain their movement and recruit more rebels. More than 100 rebels joined in the first phase of insurrection and they killed at least a dozen Whites. In most attacks, plantation houses, estate buildings, and sugar cane fields were all destroyed and burned, just like several of the Ethiopian Regiment’s attacks on Patriot plantations. Rebels also fought White soldiers in several large engagements on the island. When a new faction of rebels rose up in Westmoreland Parish in late May 1760, they routed White militias dispatched after them, and successfully defended fortified positions. Their successes on the battlefields also enabled them to capture more firearms and ammunition to sustain their cause. Like the soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment who recruited more slaves as they moved through the Chesapeake and as word spread of Dunmore’s
Proclamation, more enslaved people in Elizabeth, St. James, St. Johns, St. Dorothy’s, St. Thomas, Clarendon, and Hanover Parishes attempted to join the fighting during Tacky’s Revolt. While Gabriel and Thomas Jeremiah were unable to raze plantations during their conspiracies in 1775 and 1800, they had planned to do so while rebels also set fire to plantations and plundered livestock for provisions during militarized revolts and conspiracies in New York in 1741, in Saint-Pierre, Martinique in 1811, and in Jamaica in 1776 among many others. Indeed, these tactics were common in militarized revolts across the Atlantic. 43

The soldiers in the Regiment were probably most similar to rebels who conspired in Thomas Jeremiah’s plot in South Carolina in 1775 and in Jamaica in 1776. Jeremiah’s conspiracy, either real or imagined, was uncovered in mid-August when some enslaved people betrayed the plot and informed their owners. Though Jeremiah was a wealthy free Black in Charleston, he reportedly solicited an enslaved man named Jemmy at Prioleau’s Wharf to steal gunpowder and to give it to a fugitive slave in town to help the incoming British. Jemmy’s testimony was corroborated by another man named Sambo who stated that two to three months

43 Long, 2: 446, 447, 448, 452, 453; Lt. Gov. Henry Moore to Lords of Trade, June 9, 1760, CO 137/32, 7; Minutes of Jamaica Council, April 10, 17, 1760, enclosed in Lt. Gov. Moore to Board of Trade, April 19, 1760, CO 137/60, 296-299; Real Admiral Charles Holmes to John Cleveland, June 11, 1760, Admiralty Papers, National Archives [Hereafter ADM], ADM 1/236, 41, 42; Holmes to Cleveland, July 25, 1760, ADM 1/236, 51, 52; List of White People Kill’d Since the Commencement of the Rebellion in Westmoreland, May 25, 1760, enclosed in Holmes to Cleveland, July 25, 1760, ADM 1/236; For further discussion on revolt participation rates, see Chapter One. See also Vincent Brown, “Slave Revolt in Jamaica, 1760-1761: A Cartographic Narrative.” 2012. http://revolt.axismaps.com; Thomas Hutchinson to Council of Safety, July 5, 1775, in , in David Chesnutt, James Taylor, Peggy Clark, David Fischer, Jean Martin, and George Rogers Jr. (eds.), The papers of Henry Laurens vol. 10 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985), 207; Magistrates to Basil Keith, July 29, 1776, CO 137/71, 240; Extract of a letter from Port Royal, Jamaica, August 16, 1776, Public Advertiser, October 25, 1776.
earlier Jeremiah had approached him at Simmons Wharf and asked him about the upcoming war with the British. He told Sambo that such a conflict would benefit Blacks and that Sambo should escape to a schooner and set it on fire, after which he could swim to the British and join the army. The plot was remarkably similar to how some slaves managed to join Dunmore’s forces early on, although nothing materialized and Jeremiah was executed. Similarly, the rebels who conspired in Hanover Parish, Jamaica, in 1776 were also armed with cutlasses and were timing their rebellion based on British military movements. They wanted to start the rebellion with the departure of the 50th Regiment for mainland North America. Once British soldiers were to leave the island, the rebels planned on running to the woods to rendezvous with the Leeward Maroons who would assist them in gathering arms and ammunition for continued engagements against White soldiers. They understood, like the Ethiopian Regiment soldiers, that they could turn a war of empire into something else for themselves.\textsuperscript{44}

Though the combatants in the Ethiopian Regiment were all men, the roles of women and children attached to the Regiment were also consistent with other militarized resistance

\textsuperscript{44} I believe that Jeremiah’s plot was real and that he was principally involved in it. William Campbell to Earl of Dartmouth, August 19, 1775, in William Ryan, \textit{The World of Thomas Jeremiah: Charles Town on the Eve of the American Revolution} (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 162, and Ryan, 50; Campbell to Dartmouth, August 31, 1775, in Records in the British Public Record Office Relating to South Carolina [hereafter: SCBPRO], 35:198; Campbell to Dartmouth, August 31, 1775, SCBPRO, 35:202; Arthur Middleton to Henry Drayton, August 4, 1775, in “Correspondence of Hon. Arthur Middleton and Joseph Barnwell,” \textit{The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine} 27:3 (July 1926), 121; William Harris, \textit{The Hanging of Thomas Jeremiah: A Free Black Man’s Encounter with Liberty} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 97; Campbell to Dartmouth, August 3, 1775, SCBPRO 25:191-216; John Drayton, \textit{Memoirs of the American Revolution: From its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive, as Relating to the State of South-Carolina and Occasionally Referring to the States of North-Carolina and Georgia} (Charleston: A.E. Miller, 1821), 62; Magistrates Letter, CO 137/71, 276.
movements occurring at the time as well. Black women throughout the Revolutionary War served as cooks and washer women for male fighters, while children were employed to smother fuses and carry shells to soldiers on the frontlines. Though the British military sponsored their activities in these roles, they were not significantly different from what slave rebels did elsewhere on their own as Marjoleine Kars and Vanessa Holden have recently shown for rebels in Berbice in 1763 and in Virginia in 1831. In addition, enslaved women helped carry provisions and baggage in Jamaica in 1760 during Tacky’s rebellion. They also helped prepare food and dressed victuals for rebel fighters in the massive insurrection, and even after Tacky’s death fighters allegedly appointed a queen named Cubah to replace him. Women performed the same auxiliary and logistical positions in rebel forces in Haiti and Guadalupe at the end of the eighteenth century as well, and they carried ammunition, food, and nursed the injured too. Notably, female Haitian rebels even prostituted themselves to French soldiers to steal ammunition and gather intelligence for Black fighters. Undoubtedly and despite their young age or position as auxiliaries in the British Army, enslaved women and children actively joined and supported the Ethiopian Regiment in Virginia and contributed to Black Loyalist success by the end of the war just like rebel women and children did all around the Atlantic.\(^\text{45}\)

Soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment shared other experiences with slave soldiers in the Haitian Revolution. In Haiti, insurgents first took up arms in late August 1791 with Dutty Bookman near Cap-François. After a voodoo ceremony at Bois Caïman, the rebels attacked the manager of the La Gossette plantation. As the rebellion gained momentum, insurgents marched from plantation to plantation in the Plaine du Nord Parish. They attacked every White person they encountered and any Black slave who stood against them. In just days, thousands of rebels joined and the parish was in flames. As the fighting unfolded, insurgent forces were filled with African veterans who utilized their military experience to sustain the movement. Later on and much like the soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment who attacked and plundered Patriot plantations, insurgent soldiers in Haiti also attacked plantations and towns that slave owners and enemy forces controlled. By the end of the conflict, thousands of slave soldiers had mobilized to fight for Haitian Independence and for freedom from slavery.46


Conditions for enslaved people to take up arms and rise up with the British Army in Virginia in 1775 and 1776 were also consistent with other militarized resistance movements in the Atlantic during the period. Undoubtedly the planter class was divided in Virginia by the time the Ethiopian Regiment mustered. Whites in Virginia had already been weakened by war with the Shawnee Indians in 1774, and tensions were rising between colonists on proper British imperial policy in the colony. Loyalist and Patriot factions were already in place by 1775, and it was clear that enslaved people were well aware of the political tensions and start of the Revolutionary War. By the time Lord Dunmore removed the gunpowder from the Williamsburg magazine in April 1775, Patriot and Loyalist camps were entrenching and political cohesion in Virginia had eroded.47

In addition to the deteriorating situation that divided White Virginians, a powerful hurricane in August 1775 hit the Chesapeake and caused substantial damage to the region. Itinerant preacher Francis Asbury noted late that month that several ships had been washed up on shore and that houses, docks, and bridges had all been destroyed. Trees and crops had also been lifted from the ground. While planters suffered the inclement weather too, they probably passed the burden on to their slaves, who were left with repairing the damage and who suffered the most from the deterioration of shelter and the poor food and water supply. These conditions were similar to conditions present for other militarized slave rebels who challenged the master regime elsewhere in the Atlantic. Just as had been the case in Virginia for the Ethiopian rebels, slaves who followed Thomas Jeremiah in Charleston exploited the disruptions of war and political

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division in 1775 too. So too did the slaves in Hanover Parish, Jamaica, in summer 1776 who also suffered from a food shortage after provision lines were cut off from mainland North America, and who waited to rebel until British soldiers and ships left the island and made planters vulnerable. The trade embargo during the Revolutionary War also severely limited provision supplies to Jamaica and prices skyrocketed. Enslaved people on the island were nearly starving. Enslaved creoles who conspired with African-born slaves in August 1776 also waited for British military forces to leave the island for North America. They reportedly believed “that the mother country was too much employed in America to be able to assist Jamaica,” and that “the English were engaged in a desperate war, which would require all their force elsewhere.” White planters were vulnerable with the Empire at war on the mainland. Similarly, sixteen years earlier on the island Tacky’s followers took advantage of the Seven Years War to challenge their masters. Thus, it is clear that slaves in Virginia in 1775 endured unusually difficult material conditions as the Ethiopian Regiment mustered that were also similar to conditions that preceded several militarized slave rebellions during the period. White authorities were also divided and vulnerable much like the conditions present for other rebels during the period. 

Though members served as soldiers in the British military during the Revolutionary War, they fought for freedom in a way that resembled militarized slave rebellions throughout the Atlantic world. Common preconditions for militarized rebellions were also present in Virginia in 1775 and 1776, as soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment endured harsher conditions and witnessed the master class divide at the onset of Dunmore’s Proclamation. As was the case elsewhere in the Atlantic, slave soldiers also fought collectively and proportionately along Virginia’s shore, and planters, officials, and militiamen thought they were committing rebellion and treated them accordingly. Unlike their Patriot masters who would remember the fighting as a revolution for independence, slaves remembered the Ethiopian Regiment as part of a longer movement to attack the chattel system. In Nova Scotia and in Sierra Leone, veterans of the Ethiopian Regiment refused to be treated like slaves and they feared they were being turned into slaves again in Freetown. In Virginia just a little more than two decades after the Regiment disbanded, Gabriel had planned on waving a larger banner in Richmond with the words “Death or Liberty” inscribed on it, just as the Ethiopian rebels had fought with “liberty to slaves” emblazoned on their uniforms. Their experiences also point to how differences between war and rebellion were sometimes blurred for slaves in the Atlantic World. Slave soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment used military service to attack the chattel system during the Revolutionary War, but they also fought like militarized slave rebels elsewhere in the Atlantic during the period. Plantation rebels who succeeded them linked their own rebellions to the cause of the slave soldiers in the Regiment.49

49 Trial of Gabriel, 6 October 1800, in Schwarz ed. Gabriel, 152; Egerton, Death or Liberty, 271.
The Regiment also demonstrated a surge in militarized slave resistance during the Age of Revolution. The Revolutionary War brought new ideologies and strategies to early America, and slave soldiers became an increasingly better military option for both the rank and file and for commanders at the top. But the expansion of options for enslaved people during the Revolutionary War also increasingly militarized enslaved families as more roles became open to women and children serving in slave units, and as more enslaved women and children took these opportunities to challenge their status. A Professional army gave more enslaved people an opportunity to use military service to challenge the chattel system. In many cases, if they did not choose militarization, families could be separated and divided. In other cases, slave soldiers, be they men, women, or children, formed new ties and strengthened existing ones based on their military service during the war. In mainland British North America, the militarization of slave resistance in the eighteenth century had reached its peak. In the broader British Atlantic, Revolution bolstered it and helped lay the groundwork for its apex in the early nineteenth century with the development of permanent, peacetime, and professional slave soldiers and the West India Regiments.

What is further remarkable about the Ethiopian rebels was their success. Though hundreds died due to a small pox epidemic on Gwynn’s Island where they were headquartered, approximately 250 enslaved people still evacuated with Dunmore in the summer of 1776 and were free from their owners and the abuses of White planters in Virginia. 128 slaves appear on the Book of Negroes who likely served in the Regiment and were evacuated to Nova Scotia in 1783. Many of them had married runaways from other parts of the country and started new families since they left Virginia. As many found life in Nova Scotia unappealing, at least 19 of
these likely Ethiopian rebels applied for land in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where the British prepared a settlement there in 1792. Among those who made it were Moses Wilkinson, Chloe and Henry Walker, Captain Nathaniel Snowball, Violet Snowball, Bettsey, Henry, Abigail and Lydia Newton, Robert, Jane, and Hannah Jackson, Jenny Bush, Hannah Blair, and Judith Evans. Patrick Henry’s slave Ralph and George Washington’s bondsman Harry were also among those who reached Sierra Leone more than a decade after leaving their masters in Virginia. In a revolution in which Patrick Henry proclaimed “Give me liberty or give me death,” and in a war in which General Washington fought to secure American liberty from British tyranny, their slaves had fought for their own liberty from the tyranny of their owners and they were prepared to die if they did not obtain it.50

Soldiers in the Ethiopian Regiment had successfully challenged the slave system in Virginia. Their success on the battlefield and utility in the Revolutionary War led to the creation of more slave soldier units in the British Army during the war with which slaves could further challenge slavery in early America. While they did not succeed in ending slavery in the mainland, many had at least escaped from it and found new lives elsewhere. Their success during the American Revolution was remarkable for enslaved soldiers who fought elsewhere in the British Atlantic for their freedom. Not only did they earn victories against their former masters, they were also able to help successive waves of plantation slaves flee and join the Regiment and other units in the British Army during the war. With the help of an uneasy ally in the British Army, many were also able to successfully evacuate at war’s end, and move to safe havens in

London and Nova Scotia before eventually reaching Sierra Leone. They were able to integrate themselves into the broader Atlantic world no longer as slaves, but as free former soldiers who had earned their liberty by taking up arms. Their ability to do this was matched only by rebels involved in the Haitian Revolution just years later.

Their success also altered slave soldiering in the Anglo-Atlantic. It eventually led to the development of the West India Regiments, which became the first permanent peacetime slave army in the Anglo-Atlantic a decade after the Revolutionary War finally ended. But freedom did not come with service in the regiments and during times of crisis. Enslaved people could no longer just take advantage of exigent circumstances and take up arms with Native or European enemies to fight for freedom. After the American Revolution slave soldiers in the West India Regiments were still shackled to the chattel system. They were therefore forced to take other options to keep attacking slavery.
Travelers who visit Cabrits National Park in Dominica can also visit the restored remains of the famous garrison and ramparts of Fort Shirley, which was the center of European defenses on the island in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Fort is a UNESCO world heritage site, and both UNESCO and tourism partners with Dominica’s Ministry of Tourism advertise the Fort as a site of both scenic and historic significance. Importantly, it is a place where a “revolt by African slave soldiers in 1802” led to the “freeing of all British slave soldiers in 1807.” Since restoration efforts in 2007 visitors to the fort can also read a commemorative plaque dedicated to this revolt, or mutiny, in which soldiers of the 8th West India Regiment “were killed or executed in their fight for freedom.” Slave soldiers in the West India Regiments became part of the largest professional slave army in the Atlantic world that the British built in the wake of the American Revolution. The plaque in part further reads, “As a result of their action here some 10,000 slave soldiers in the British Army were freed in 1807. It was the first act of mass emancipation in the British empire.”

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It is surprising, given the mutiny’s significance to the history of Dominica and to slavery in the British Empire, as well as its UNESCO recognition, that the mutiny of the 8th West India Regiment in April 1802 has received scant attention from historians studying slavery and resistance in the Atlantic world. David Geggus has considered the mutiny to be a borderline case of insurrection because of the somewhat ambiguous free—slave status of soldiers in the Regiment. Moreover, in his influential work on resistance in the British Caribbean, Michael Craton considered the mutinous soldiers to be in an intermediate stage or lull between two major types of resistance. To him, it was a “serious episode” on a continuum of resistance stretching from Amerindians to Creole slave uprisings that were tied to emancipation and abolition.²

This is not to say that historians studying Dominica or those examining the history of enslaved soldiers in the West Indies are unfamiliar with the mutiny. Renowned Dominican historian Lennox Honychurch has detailed the mutiny more than once in his comprehensive histories of Dominica and the maroons who lived on the island. But despite his leadership in restoring Fort Shirley and commemorating the 8th WIR’s history as agents of abolition, he has not situated the mutineers in broader discussions of slave revolts in the Anglo-Atlantic. Similarly, in his comprehensive history of enslaved soldiers, Peter Voelz has argued that the mutiny actually differed from typical slave rebellions because not all the soldiers who were involved in it were executed like rebel slaves often were, and in his classic Slaves in Red Coats, Roger Norman Buckley likewise considered the mutiny a mere “disturbance.” Following in his

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footsteps nearly two decades later, Brian Dyde conceptualized the mutiny as an act of insubordination by soldiers, but not necessarily slaves. Although there has been a flurry of new research into enslaved soldiers and the West India Regiments, including the special issue “Africa’s Sons Under Arms” in *Slavery & Abolition* in 2018, only Tim Lockley has provided a closer look at the mutiny in his article for the British Library. Yet he does not see it as an event similar to other insurrections undertaken by enslaved people.3

Thus we are left with an understanding of the mutiny as a significant episode in terms of slavery and emancipation in the British Empire, but not an event that scholars of slave resistance have fully explored. What exactly did the mutiny mean to the slave soldiers who participated in it? Moreover, how did it compare to other incidents in which enslaved people rose up and challenged the Atlantic chattel system, and how did it compare to other cases of armed resistance in mainland British North America? This chapter explores these questions and examines the

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mutiny in comparative perspective. It also assesses the professionalization of slave soldiers in the West India Regiments to contextualize the conditions that would compel soldiers to mutiny in 1802. Using court martial records and colonial and military correspondence regarding the mutiny, this chapter then examines how professional slave soldiers in the 8th WIR understood their status as soldiers, and how soldiering could be used to achieve emancipation.

By focusing on the 8th WIR mutiny, this chapter also moves from mainland British North America to the Caribbean to better evaluate how armed resistance operated elsewhere in the Anglo-Atlantic. While slave soldiers took up arms in British armies and militias throughout the Anglo-Atlantic, the practice operated differently in the Caribbean than in mainland North America. Because of White manpower shortages, large enslaved Black populations, or the constant threat of imperial enemies, British colonists more readily armed slave soldiers in the Caribbean compared to mainland North America. As early as 1640 enslaved soldiers helped British colonists defend colonial possessions in the Caribbean, while by the 1660s enslaved soldiers were incorporated into the Barbados militia. Some mainland colonial authorities such as in Massachusetts considered requiring free Black people and slaves to serve in militias as early as 1652, but generally these ideas were short-lived. In other colonies like Virginia enslaved people were prohibited from serving in the militia as early as 1639. As the seventeenth century progressed several colonial legislatures barred Black people from military service, which became a trend well into the eighteenth century. Although in a few places enslaved people were permitted to take up arms in times of crisis as noted above in Virginia and South Carolina, they were still excluded from serving during the French and Indian War in many places, and the specter of permanent and independent Black units did not rise until the American Revolutionary
War. Indeed, colonists in the Caribbean were seemingly less restrictive when it came to enslaved people serving in colonial militias while permanent, independent all-Black units also developed.4

The West India Regiments became the largest professional slave army that Europeans wielded in the Atlantic world in the early nineteenth century, and this chapter examines professional slave soldiers in the 8th WIR instead of those who took up arms in militias or in times of emergency such as in Chapters One, Two, and Three, which offers greater insight into how the professional militarization of slaves affected armed resistance. It also examines the 8th WIR mutiny because it was one of only three mutinies in the West India Regiments before total emancipation, and it was the only mutiny in the West India Regiments before the 1807 Mutiny Act that declared all enslaved soldiers who served in the British Army free for all intents and purposes. The mutiny thus captures a unique moment in British Atlantic history in which professional armed slaves challenged their owners. In addition, the 1802 mutiny helps to better understand armed resistance that occurred after the American Revolution. Thus it helps to understand how the Age of Revolution influenced how slave soldiers took up arms to fight for freedom and emancipation, and to better understand the impact of the professional militarization

of slaves during the Age of Revolution. The 8th WIR mutiny was yet another militarized slave revolt in the Anglo-Atlantic, one not unlike others in which enslaved soldiers took up arms to fight for Black liberation. African soldiers involved in the mutiny did not seemingly appropriate revolutionary ideology to further their own cause, while the mutiny also shows that professional slave soldiers in the 8th WIR did not interpret military service itself as a vehicle for freedom and emancipation.

**SALTWATER SLAVE SOLDIERS: RECRUITING STRATEGIES AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE 8TH WEST INDIA REGIMENT**

How the West India Regiments developed, how slave soldiers were recruited, and how they lived, trained, and fought in the Regiments helps to explain why soldiers in the 8th WIR mutinied in Dominica in 1802. As demonstrated in Chapters One, Two, and Three, British authorities had long understood the utility of loyal enslaved soldiers, and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, colonists and colonial officials frequently employed slaves in military functions. Yet the success of Black Loyalists during the American Revolutionary War, and subsequent units like the Black Rangers and Carolina Black Corps who helped the British defend St. Vincent, Tobago, and Grenada from French attacks at the end of the eighteenth century, reinforced the notion that a larger and permanent free Black and enslaved fighting force could be used to great effect in the Caribbean. By the 1790s, the British Empire in the Caribbean was also under crisis. The French had made great military strides against the British in the region, and they had successfully employed a large enslaved military force to achieve their imperial goals. By 1794 and 1795, War Secretary Sir Henry Dundas and Commander of the
West Indies Sir John Vaughan agreed that the security situation in the West Indies was “critical” and that they needed more troops or else they risked losing British possessions in the Caribbean.  

Officials initially wanted to recruit 9,000 slaves from British colonies in the Caribbean to serve as soldiers, which could be raised by enforcing recruitment quotas on each island. Vaughan also had the authority to take more recruits if a governor refused or did not reach his quota. But mustering several thousand enslaved people to be soldiers in the plantation colonies raised fears among planters that they could agitate the larger plantation slave population. Planters were also concerned about how loyal some slave soldiers would be, while if Black slaves were treated as equals to White soldiers in a permanent military unit, they could undermine ideas of White supremacy. 

British military leaders also decided to raise Black troops based on their ideas of science, race, and the Caribbean environment. More than half of the British troops sent to the West Indies from 1793 to 1801 died from tropical diseases in the area, and it was a long-held assumption among White authorities, planters, and travelers alike that Africans and Black Creoles seemed better at tolerating hot temperatures and tropical maladies than Whites. Conscripting enslaved Black people to serve in the military would thus cut down on White casualties and promoted stability and security for British colonists in the Caribbean. Officers also thought the move would

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5 Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 1, 4; Remarks on the Establishment of the West India Regiments, 1801, enclosed in General Thomas Hislop to the Duke of York, July 22, 1804, UK National Archives, War Office Records [Hereafter WO], WO 1/95, 194, 195; Henry Dundas to Sir John Vaughan, no. 14 April 17, 1795, WO 1/83, 118.

6 Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 24, 25; “West India Committee, Standing Committee Minutes,” June 27, 1795, The British Library [Hereafter BL]. I follow much of Buckley’s assessment regarding how the West India Regiments were raised.
be more politically popular than sending more White soldiers from Great Britain, and it would alleviate what would be a “vast drain” on Great Britain’s White population if Black people were not used. In Dominica especially, Governor Andrew James Cochrane Johnstone claimed that he would save many White lives by raising units of Black soldiers to serve on the island. Initial returns of saltwater slave soldiers in the Regiments demonstrated that these ideas were not accurate and that African soldiers were actually more susceptible to illness than White soldiers. But over time and after proper inoculations and seasoning, enslaved Africans in the West India Regiments did become a relatively healthy body of combatants who supported British military ambitions in the region.⁷

Even before the West India Regiments could be raised, Governor Johnstone employed mostly creole and some African slaves in another military unit known as the Loyal Dominican Rangers. Some of the men were later absorbed into the West India Regiments when they first mustered in April and May 1795. The 8th WIR rose to full strength by September 15, 1795 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Skerrett in Dominica. Soldiers in the 8th occupied Fort Shirley at Prince Rupert’s Bay in Dominica, which was the strongest military position on the island. The Bay was on the northern end of the island and adjacent to the Cabrits, an extinct volcanic rock formation that jutted out of the sea (see Maps 9-13).⁸

Each West India Regiment consisted of approximately ten companies with ninety-five privates, along with officers, staff, a quartermaster, adjutant, surgeon, and chaplain. Even though some of the Loyal Dominican Rangers were absorbed into WIR service, taking enslaved recruits from the islands and from oppositional planters presented an obstacle to raising the intended recruitment goals of the West India Regiments altogether. Manumitted soldiers could not be used since they would raise the specter of emancipation. British military authorities also thought that

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Africans were better for the job. They were cheaper to purchase than creoles, and they had not yet endured the harsh conditions of plantation slavery, which made them better suited to military discipline. As “New Negroes” they were also “unacquainted with and uncontaminated” by Creoles. Despite their reputation for tenacity and militarization in previous Caribbean slave revolts, officers also believed that Africans in general, and specifically Coromantee, Fante, and Angolans would be the best soldiers to serve in the Regiments.  

The British Army thus resorted to purchasing African-born slaves directly via the trans-Atlantic slave trade to fill the ranks of the West India Regiments. Though these African soldiers were not skilled or seasoned like Creoles, they could be cheaper and Army officials could avoid confrontation with obstinate planters. Enslaved Africans had to be purchased in secrecy; however, as men like Secretary Dundas did not want the public to know that the British government was directly involved in procuring enslaved people from Africa as the abolition movement was gaining momentum. By 1798 Governor Johnstone reported that the Army purchased 340 enslaved people to serve on the island at a cost of £22,465. Two hundred and ninety-five Africans purchased for £66 each had been inspected and were deemed worthy of their cost, while ninety-one more Creole slaves were also purchased for £73 each. African slaves were predominant in the regiments during these early years, and in some regiments they outnumbered creole slaves by more than ten to one. It is probable that more than half of all the soldiers in the

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9 Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 20, 23; Dundas to Vaughan, no. 14, April 17, 1795, WO 1/83, 122; “Remarks on the Establishment of the West India Regiments,” 1801, enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, July 22, 1804, WO 1/95, 194, 196, 197; General Cornelius Cuyler to Henry Dundas, March 8, 1798, WO 1/86. Description and Succession Books for each West India Regiment held in the War Office detail the state or ethnicity of slave soldiers, but Succession Books for the 8th WIR have not survived. See Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 30.
West India Regiments were African-born although the precise locations are unknown. The 8th WIR was particularly known for how many enslaved Africans were purchased for service in the unit.  

Acquiring enslaved people solely for military service on a scale as large as what British officers were thinking was not an easy task. Government regulations limited officers from spending more than £75 per person, and they could not compete with planters who were willing to spend much more for bulk purchases. Brigadier General Thomas Hislop also thought that purchasing enslaved women was a good idea so as to encourage marriage as a benefit for enslaved soldiers. Women would also help run garrisons smoothly, while more importantly, the children they had with enslaved soldiers would become property of the British government. Hislop imagined a breeding operation in which young enslaved boys could be “trained to arms” as “excellent soldiers” who could replenish British forces when their fathers died or grew too old to fight. Enslaved girls could also be trained to undertake the same duties as their mothers and help the West India Regiments operate efficiently.  

The recruitment project also envisioned keeping enslaved soldiers busy so that they would not “cause trouble” in towns, as well as a support system for elderly soldiers to ensure their cooperation in supporting the chattel system. Finally, Hislop and others believed that

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11 “Remarks on the Establishment of the West India Regiments,” 1801, enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, July 22, 1804, WO 1/95, 197, 198. According to Brian Dyde, only six out of every one hundred men were actually allowed to marry. See Dyde, *The Empty Sleeve*, 44-45.
enslaved soldiers would have to be subjected to a different set of rules than their plantation slave counterparts. If they were treated the same as plantation slaves the great experiment would never work and soldiers would be disobedient. Accordingly, officers wanted their soldiers to be subject to the Mutiny Acts like White soldiers and not Caribbean slave codes. Doing so would help reinforce their elevated prestige and status over plantation slaves that would earn their loyalty, while it would also protect them from Caribbean planters who did not like the idea of thousands of enslaved Black soldiers living among them.12

The Army developed a bureaucratic apparatus for purchasing, examining, and then training the enslaved recruits. Once they were purchased, enslaved people marched in front of officials who examined their bodies to make sure they were healthy and capable of bearing arms. They had just survived the Middle Passage and were now put through a gauntlet of tests and examinations to determine their fate. Recruits had to be at least sixteen years old and five feet three inches tall. They were not supposed to have family members. One can only imagine the fear and chaos that potential recruits experienced during this early process. They were young, separated from friends and family, and they had no idea what White inspectors were examining them for. If they were cleared for service, officers marched them to regiment training depots for further drill. According to Richard Wyvill who served as a major in the 1st West India Regiment at the turn of the nineteenth century, upon arrival into the unit as fresh recruits African soldiers were given a white piece of paper to hang around their necks, and they were taught to understand different command words as they drilled. This type of seasoning was probably just as traumatic as it was for enslaved people sent to work on plantations in the West Indies. From 1795 to 1808

12 “Remarks on the Establishment of the West India Regiments,” 1801, enclosed in Hislop to the Duke of York, July 22, 1804, WO 1/95, 200, 201, 203.
the British Government purchased 13,400 enslaved Africans for a total of £925,000 in this way. This group of slave soldiers represented 7 percent of all British slave imports during the period. Civilian magistrates were legally required to hear recruits’ attestations of enlistment in the Caribbean per the 1694 Mutiny Act, but there is no record of enslaved soldiers testifying to do this in most places in the British Caribbean. Officers generally avoided the practice to ensure that magistrates would not block recruitment. Slave soldiers generally had to serve for life.  

The Problems of Language and Legal Status Among Slave Soldiers

While it was clear that African slaves were purchased in the trans-Atlantic slave trade for service in the West India Regiments, as Buckley has shown, the actual slave-free status of these soldiers was ambiguous and contested in the British Caribbean for many years. In part, their ambiguous status contributed to the mutiny in April 1802 when slave soldiers believed their privileged status was being reduced. Exploring their legal status therefore helps us understand why slave soldiers mutinied in the first place. Before the mutiny commanders and military officials were deeply concerned what the men in the regiments would think about their status and how they related to other enslaved people in the Caribbean. If the men did not think they were any better than plantation field slaves, then the Regiments could be dangerous as slave soldiers

would disobey White commands. Instead, officers wanted the men to think that they were “superior” to plantation slaves to ensure their loyalty and excellence in service. Thus, slave soldiers were treated in the same hospitals as White soldiers, they were paid the same wages as White soldiers, and they wore the same uniforms. They enjoyed many of the same allowances and privileges as well. These privileges were intended to ensure obedience and loyalty. But how slave soldiers could be punished differed somewhat from White soldiers. White British soldiers had long been subject to two different legal codes; both military and civilian since they were both soldiers and citizens. In most cases commanders in the British Army used the Mutiny Acts, a series of renewed acts passed by Parliament to regulate and fund the Army, to discipline White soldiers. If any free White soldier disobeyed or refused orders, he could be punished under the Acts, but once enslaved Africans enrolled in the Army, officers were confused on how to handle any potential disciplinary actions. Black soldiers including enslaved Africans purchased in the trans-Atlantic slave trade were not citizens. What to do of them then? Should they be subject to military jurisdiction that regulated so many other British soldiers in the Caribbean? Or should they be treated in the slave courts just like thousands of other enslaved people in the British Atlantic? Moreover, what should they do with slave recruits once they retired or were released from military service and integrated with the rest of the enslaved community?¹⁴

Colonial authorities in the British Caribbean had always treated enslaved people in slave courts for their crimes or witness testimony, and many believed that WIR soldiers should be no

¹⁴ General Bowyer to Dundas, September 6, 1798, War Office, WO1/86, 731; Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 70; Bowyer to Colonel Robert Brownrigg, September 6, 1798, enclosed in Duke of Portland to Attorney and Solicitor General, November 12, 1798, WO 1/86; Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats*, 65; Buckley, “Slave or Freedman,” 87.
different. In 1799 the Attorney General of St. Vincent declared that slave soldiers in the
regiments were subject to colonial police regulations, which ensured that they would go to the
Petty Sessions Courts much like their plantation slave counterparts. While Army Officers sought
to protect recruits from the slave courts, there was only so much they could do. They could try
enslaved recruits in military courts while in service, but those who became too old or infirm and
who absorbed into the rest of the enslaved community were somewhat beyond the reach of Army
officials.\(^{15}\)

This issue of whether or not service in the West India Regiments made enslaved people
free or free from colonial—slave jurisdiction was settled over a series of legal opinions that the
Law Officers of the Crown rendered in the years shortly before the 1802 mutiny. In three
opinions that were essentially reiterations of each other, the justices ruled that military service in
the West India Regiments did not free Black soldiers from slave laws and slave court
jurisdictions. Secondly, they ruled that enslaved soldiers could be manumitted only by the
jurisdiction of colonial slave laws on each island where each slave soldier served. Cementing the
opinion, the justices ruled in 1801 that West India Regiment soldiers did not become subject to
the Mutiny Act like other soldiers because of their military service, and that “‘they remain to all
intents and purposes slaves, and that their condition as slaves is in no respect altered in
consequence of their being engaged in military service.’” These decisions were not amended
until the 1807 Mutiny Act that made the enslaved soldiers free. Thus, on the eve of the 8th WIR
mutiny in 1802, soldiers in the Regiment were clearly still legally slaves. Even if they were paid,

\(^{15}\) Buckley, “Slave or Freedman,” 97.
clothed, and fed like White soldiers, if they ever so much as raised the ire of a planter, they could face the humility and terror of colonial slave courts anywhere they were stationed.\textsuperscript{16}

Language barriers were also a substantial obstacle to how slave soldiers in the Regiments understood themselves and their soldierly status leading up to the mutiny in 1802. Despite being conscripted into service and learning how to soldier per English customs, it was clear that many of the African slaves serving in the West India Regiments did not speak English or understand much of the orders that their officers gave. An Army surgeon in the 1st WIR illustrated this problem clearly when he garnered the affection of new African recruits because of his demeanor and more importantly, his ability to speak multiple West African languages. During inspections of the 6th WIR in 1806, one officer observed that “‘Half these Men cannot speake an intelligible Language, and as their Ideas of time are different from ours, it is extremely difficult at present to make them comprehend what they have a right to in money matters.’” Another commented four years later in Guadeloupe that men in the 4th WIR had “so slight a knowledge of the language of their officers” since so many were African-born and caught up in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Given the legal complications and the substantial language hurdle in the West India Regiments, enslaved African soldiers in the Regiments, especially those who just survived the Middle Passage, probably did not fully understand their liminal status in the British Army. If “New Negroes” understood they held a somewhat privileged status over plantation slaves, they probably did not initially know how long it would last. They at least knew the alternatives of field labor that they witnessed outside their garrisons every day. They were probably not aware of the apprehension among the highest officers in the Army in how to legally discipline slave

\textsuperscript{16} Buckley, “Slave or Freedman,” 98, 99, 100, 101, 113.
soldiers, but they likely understood colonial opposition to them as armed soldiers in slave societies. It was this understanding and this strange status that contributed to their mutiny in Dominica on April 9, 1802.¹⁷

**Mutiny!**

Enslaved soldiers in the 8th WIR broke out in a rebellion of “the most serious and melancholy nature” on April 9, 1802 at Prince Rupert’s Bluff in Dominica. The rebellion purportedly started around nine o’clock at night when mutineers approached the officer barracks and shot through the window shutters. The gunfire was at first astonishing, and a second volley confirmed that the first was no accident—something else was happening: a mutiny. The rebel soldiers immediately surrounded and killed several White commissioned and non-commissioned officers that they approached. As some officers lay dead or wounded, others scrambled in terror to save their lives, but were cut off from escape by sentries posted at entrance and exit points. The rebels had thought their plan out well in advance, they understood the avenues and escape routes to Fort Shirley, and they knew how their commanding officers would react. As they shot at and chased the officers from the barracks, they bayoneted and mutilated those like Lieutenants Mackay and Westerneys whom they caught. The initial confrontation was chaotic and terrifying, but success appeared palpable. Only a faction of soldiers in the Regiment remained loyal, but they tried to save the officers whom they liked. Men in Captain Allan Cameron’s company were especially angered by the mutiny. They had tried to protect him from being taken captive, and

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¹⁷ One occasion that illuminates this understanding best was when soldiers in the 1st WIR were required to carry a dying runaway slave back to his quarters. The man, “in the agonies of death” died along the way. See Handler, ed., “Memoirs of an Old Army Officer,” 25, 27; Buckley, Slaves in *Red Coats*, 113.
when he was shot to death they reportedly executed the mutineer who killed him. But they were the minority, and the mutiny spread like wildfire. By the time commander Major John Gordon could bring some order to the situation, there were only approximately 120 men who remained loyal to him. Together they launched an immediate counterattack against the rebels at Fort Shirley, but the rebels were ready and fought back fiercely. The mutineers ambushed the loyal force and wounded several men, forcing them to retreat.\textsuperscript{18}

As they took several officers captive, including Captains Barr and Cassin, the rebels told them they were angry about not being paid to drain a 90 acre swamp next to the fort, and that they feared they were being turned into plantation slaves. Sergeant Dodds had reportedly spread the rumor among other mutineers that they were to be used on sugar estates and that “bill hooks were put into their hands for that purpose.” Another unnamed mutineer, a grenadier, told Lieutenant Alexander Cameron that the men understood they were to be sold to work on Governor Johnstone’s estate adjacent to the fort. As the fighting continued, the rest of the White soldiers inside the garrison fled to the hills to get help.\textsuperscript{19}

By ten o’clock in the morning, Governor Johnstone learned of the mutiny. He immediately imposed martial law, and he summoned White soldiers in the 68\textsuperscript{th} Regiment garrisoned at Morne Bruce and the St. George’s Militia to march out and attack the rebels. The


\textsuperscript{19} Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry, National Archives, Colonial Office, [Hereafter CO] CO 318/19, 26, 27, 28, retrieved from the British Library; Johnstone to Lord Hobart, , no 14, April 4, 1802, CO 71/34; Lockley, “Mutiny!”
mutineers terrified the planters that they were trying to spread the rebellion to plantation slaves on the island, and that together they would kill all the White people. Meanwhile in Prince Rupert’s Bay, Commodore Stopford and Captain Giffard laid in wait aboard the *Excellent* and *Magnificent* as fighting on the island unfolded. Their presence was assuredly worrisome for the mutineers who did not have the ability to effectively engage the vessels at sea. From Fort Shirley nestled in the Cabrits, rebel soldiers fired at the men of war, but did little damage. The fighting then came to a standstill temporarily. Later that evening Governor Johnstone departed from Prince Rupert’s aboard a French ship, and sailed to Point Round where he met with Commodore Stopford and the St. George’s Militia. Together they devised a strategy to take down the mutinous slave soldiers.20

The following morning Johnstone informed Commander of the West Indies General Sir Thomas Trigge of the serious events. The Mutineers were threatening to destroy slavery in the colony, and Johnstone supplicated Trigge to send reinforcements: “for God’s sake send us every assistance you can, and all the Men of War possible to Prince Ruperts.” Johnstone’s tone underscored the terror and panic that the mutineers aroused, and how deadly the rebellion was. If they could succeed, they would undermine the slave system in the colony. Indeed, they probably knew they were close and Johnstone wrote that the rebels had “threatened the existence of this colony if longer allowed to continue.” The mutineers were pushing White authorities to take extreme measures to suppress the rebellion. Later that morning Johnstone’s forces sent an officer to Fort Shirley under truce to garner the rebels’ surrender, but the mutineers refused such

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20 Anonymous. *Sketches and Recollections*, 105, 106, 107; Johnstone to Hobart, April 17, 1802, no. 15, CO 71/34.
overtures and took the man captive. Subsequently, the rebels watched the militia maneuver through the swamp below the fort and they began to engage the militiamen. While still defiant, the rebels must have known their situation was getting bleaker. They were now outnumbered and out-supplied, and Johnstone had placed the militia near the swamp to prevent the rebels from escaping. Still, they fought on and they fired musket shot and artillery rounds into the swamp to dislodge the militiamen. Their volleys had little effect.21

As this fighting continued, the Magnificent returned to Johnstone with reinforcements. Major Paxley arrived with approximately 200 White men, who combined with the more than 350 soldiers in the 68th Regiment under Majors Scott and Hamilton, Johnstone’s 150 marines, and 400 militiamen from St. George, the 400-500 mutineers faced more than 1,000 White soldiers ready to attack. These staggering odds prompted the enslaved rebels to send a flag of truce with their captive Lieutenant Alexander Cameron to Johnstone in hopes they could prevent utter defeat. The rebels wanted Johnstone to enter the fort alone and unarmed, which was a proposal that Johnstone refused. In turn, he ordered them to come to the parade grounds for a meeting to “deliver up the perpetrators of the horrid murders,” and he would “listen to them with attention and redress them.” The rebels probably resented Johnstone’s orders, but they accepted them in order to garner peace in a rebellion that increasingly grew bleaker. With a meeting set for later that evening, Johnstone started marching to Fort Shirley by two o’clock in the afternoon and the

21 Johnstone to Trigge, April 10 1802, enclosed in Trigge to Brownrigg, 16 April 1802, WO 1/95, 29; Johnstone to Trigge, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 36; Anonymous. Sketches and Recollections, 107; Johnstone to Trigge, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 33.
rebels allowed him to enter the garrison at 4 o’clock. He ordered the rebels to meet him at the parade grounds and lay down their arms.\textsuperscript{22}

At that moment the tension reached a peak. The rebels had agreed to meet Johnstone and they allowed him to enter within their defense lines. While there was not total silence, the temporary truce certainly contrasted with the bursts of gunfire and artillery rounds that had characterized much of the mutiny thus far. Most of the rebel soldiers complied with Johnstone’s orders and they presented their arms to him. Still, they did not trust him as he approached to address them and convince the remaining holdouts to lay down their weapons. He then ordered the rebels to walk three feet toward him and from their weapons so that he could speak to them without fear of being shot. His command was too much to tolerate. It was met by an unknown soldier’s dread, reportedly a sergeant, who broke the tension with a loud yell. The man encouraged the rebels not to relinquish their arms and that Johnstone would “‘cheat them.’”\textsuperscript{23}

The yell shattered the fragile truce, and White soldiers accompanying Johnstone fired at the rebels. Soldiers from the 68th and St. George’s Militia followed suit. After just three volleys, chaos reigned, and the rebels scrambled to try and stay alive. From that point on, they certainly knew that the mutiny was a lost cause. At best now all they could do was shoot and run for their lives. Perhaps they could make it to the swamp and hide out for a few days to later disappear among plantation slaves. Maybe they could run as far as to the mountains and forests to the

\textsuperscript{22} Anonymous. \textit{Sketches and Recollections}, 108, 109; Johnstone to Trigge, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 33, 34; Richard Gott, \textit{Britain’s Empire: Resistance, Repression, and Revolt} (New York: Verso, 2011), 150; Johnstone to Hobart, April 17, 1802, no. 15, CO 71/34.

\textsuperscript{23} Anonymous. \textit{Sketches and Recollections}, 109-110; Johnstone to Trigge, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 34; Johnstone to Hobart, April 17, 1802, no. 15, CO 71/34.
southeast and find asylum with Maroons. Some probably thought that they would at least fight to their deaths. Johnstone and his detachment chased the rebels into the Inner Cabrits, while Majors Schott and Hamilton pursued others to the Outer Cabrits. The rebels were probably afraid as they saw the White men approach with bayonets. The rebels fired back but also retreated in a panic. They had let the enemy come too close and they knew there was little they could do to mount a successful defense. They returned fire, but some scrambled up to the Outer Cabrits and perhaps as many as 200 or 300 jumped down to the sea. A few died from this fall, but dozens more died in the gunfire on the parade grounds. Several men in Johnson’s force were killed, including two or three officers, while at least a dozen were also wounded. Unfortunately for the mutineers, the battle was lopsided.24

Others continued to fire from their positions in Fort Shirley. They still commanded the artillery battery there and they fired grapeshot on their enemies. Unfortunately for their cause, their actions did little damage to the opposing forces, and several were killed in the fighting. The rest retreated from the fort and fled across the adjoining swamp in hopes to escape capture. They were shot as they fled. Sergeant Curry, who was one of the “most violent mutineers,” died as he ran. Still others not killed by the militia were taken prisoner. A few were able to abscond into the countryside without their guns undetected, including one private Hypolite, who disappeared into the foothills near Morne Diablotins and joined the Maroons living there.25

24 Anonymous. Sketches and Recollections, 110, 111; “The Mutiny of the 8th West India Regiment from the Papers of a Veteran Officer,” United Service Magazine no. 275, (October 1851), part 3, 209; Johnstone to Trigge, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 34; Johnstone to Trigge, April 12, 1802, WO 1/95, 31.

As the militia retook Fort Shirley they uncovered one last act of defiance among the rebels. They had laid a train of explosives down to blow up the assaulting force. This ambush could have been suicidal if it had ever been carried out. The rebels were probably ready to accept that, but for whatever reason it did not happen. As the battle ended, Johnstone reinstalled his headquarters and established a plan to care for the wounded. According to him, the fighting was
over in about a half hour. As the last mutineers scrambled past the militia in the adjacent swamp, they fought desperately to escape. Consequently, at least one militiamen was killed and six more wounded in those final moments. In total, Johnstone lost a few men killed, and 24 wounded, while the mutineers lost more than 100 men killed and wounded.²⁶

Map 11. Prince Rupert’s Head (Enlarged)


²⁶Anonymous. Sketches and Recollections, 112; Johnstone to Trigge, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 34, 35.
Map 12. Prince Rupert’s Head

Source: Plan of Prince Rupert’s Head, 1802, CO 71/34.
Map 13. Cabrits at Prince Rupert’s Head

Source: Plan of Prince Rupert’s Head, 1802, CO 71/34.
Commanding officer Major John Gordon, Captain Cassan, and Ensign Greenshields, all of whom who were taken prisoner during the rebellion escaped the final battle alive. Others like Lieutenants Alexander and Westerneys, and Captain Allan Cameron were killed. Westerneys was bayonetted to death, while the rebels also mutilated acting quartermaster Lieutenant Mackay. Sergeant Major Broughton was also killed in the fighting, as was a bombardier and another lower enlisted member in the 68th Regiment. Two White sergeants in the 8th were also injured.27

AFTERMATH: CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES

Initial reports after the rebellion indicated that one ringleader, a sergeant, had been the cause of the mutiny. The unknown conspirator had reportedly ordered others in the regiment to fall in for duty before eight o’clock and inculcated the idea in the rest that they were going to be sold into plantation slavery to dig sugar cane holes. It was this fear of being returned to regular field work and plantation slave status that was central to rebellion within the Regiment. Slave soldiers did not want to be reduced to plantation slaves, and they were willing to fight to prevent it. Around the time of the mutiny General Trigge knew that employing the soldiers in such manual labor was dangerous and he did not give Governor Johnstone his permission to do so. Trigge was also convinced that continued work draining the swamp, and without pay, had “immediately and understandably” produced the mutiny. Just a week before the rebellion broke out, Trigge predicted a mutiny would occur if slave soldiers were used to drain the swamp and

not paid like white soldiers performing the same task. He thought it would be “not only impolitic but hazardous,” and that the distinction made by not paying the soldiers “would be invidious and could not fail to occasion great discontent if not desertion and very possibly mutiny.” Trigge also reported that he stopped Johnstone from a similar scheme with the 9th WIR in Dominica two years earlier, which he thought would have probably encouraged another rebellion.28

The court martial testimonies after the mutiny confirmed the idea that slave soldiers in the Regiment were deeply concerned about the unit being disbanded, that they were to be reduced to plantation slaves, and about their continued work draining swamps for sugar cane cultivation without pay and rations. Initial fears about disbandment of the 8th WIR surfaced when peace with France was reached with the Treaty of Amiens the year before. Now that war with France was over, slave soldiers in the regiment believed that the British officers no longer needed so many of them in their current capacity. While officials were still debating how to use these soldiers during peacetime, the 8th WIR was indeed among the six corps slotted for disbandment that year, and it was unclear if commanding officers were ever able to assuage soldiers’ fears of what would happen to them should the reduction occur. This fear was strongest among the African soldiers who had been born in freedom, and who were recently purchased in the trans-Atlantic slave trade for service in the unit. When White soldiers from the 68th Regiment visited the African soldiers in the swamp at Prince Rupert’s the night before the

28 Johnstone to Trigge, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 35; Trigge to Brownrigg, April 23, 1802, WO 1/95 , 37, 38; Extract of letter Trigge to Lord Hobart, April 2, 1802, WO 1/95, 43; Trigge to Brownrigg, May 4, 1802, WO 1/95, 57.
mutiny, slave soldiers believed that the White soldiers were there to apprehend them and divide them up to work on sugar estates.  

If their fear of being reduced to harsher life of plantation slavery was not enough, a faction of the recently-purchased African mutineers had also endured more austere conditions in the months leading up to the mutiny. Life at Fort Shirley was miserable for men in the 8th WIR. The swamps near the Cabrits were the largest on the whole island, and the wetlands substantially inhibited colonial development in the nearby town of Portsmouth because of the difficult environmental conditions. People complained that there were too many mosquitos and both civilians and soldiers alike in the area suffered from malaria and yellow fever. Underscoring how unhealthy Prince Rupert’s was for soldiers in the 8th WIR, commanders like Lieutenant General Henry Bowyer advocated draining the swamps nearby not only to ease evacuations if necessary, but also because they produced stagnant water and a state of “putrefaction.” Indeed, Governor Johnstone reported that Prince Rupert’s Bay was the “most unhealthy part of the island.” But draining the ninety-acre swamp was also grueling work for the soldiers, who did not like fatigue duties that were often done by field slaves. Thick brush and vegetation had to be cut. Trees had to be felled, dams built, and soldiers had to dig several trenches and ditches that could be as wide as twenty feet in order to properly drain the swamp. All this was to happen in a deadly environment at Prince Rupert’s in which several soldiers had already died in the last two years before the mutiny.  

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29 Buckley, “Black Man,” 61, 62, 63; Trigge to Brownrigg, April 23, 1802, WO 1/95, 37; Corporal Balisle Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 65; Stuart’s Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 66.  
30 Johnstone to Trigge, April 22, 1802, WO 1/95, 47; Arlington James, Freshwater Swamps and Mangrove Species in Dominica (Roseau: Forestry Division, Ministry of
These conditions compounded the already hard life of a soldier in the British Army during the period. Mortality rates were high for soldiers in the British Caribbean, and service was tough. Service commitments generally were for life, while pay was also low and rations often insufficient. Regular soldiers needed permission to marry, and they were otherwise expected to be celibate. Officers also utilized severe corporal punishment to ensure discipline and obedience, to include sometimes fatal flogging.31

If their hard work was not enough, withholding pay was also an issue for the soldiers before the mutiny. According to Sergeant Pinkett in Captain Barr’s company, the mutineers were also upset about irregular pay and that they had not received their pay for some time despite their grueling work in the swamp. Sergeant Ramsey reported that some men had not been paid for nearly five months. Similarly, Corporal Shova testified that once the men had cut bush wood in the swamp, they complained that they had not been paid for their hard duties. An enslaved soldier named Quash who served in Captain Arbuthnot’s company and who did not mutiny also testified that he asked mutineers during the rebellion why they resisted. They told him that it was for money. Corporal Davey from Captain Cameron’s company reported much of the same. The men “had complained of want of their subsistence,” after working in the swamp for some time and not receiving recourse for their labor. They had “adopted an idea that they were to become field negroes.” What further exacerbated their concern was that Governor Johnstone had

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purchased the swamp privately and with the intention to change it into a profitable sugar plantation. Many of the enslaved rebels were apparently concerned that they were to be used to build houses on the budding plantation and then plant sugar cane for Johnstone, a massive deviation from their soldierly backgrounds.\(^32\)

Sergeant Gold in Captain Hammond’s company testified that soldiers in the regiment had been working in the swamp for nearly three weeks before the mutiny. They worked from dinner to sunset daily, cutting down thick brush wood in the swamp that was also infested with mosquitos. According to Gold, the swamp, and the grueling work associated with it, “imbibed” the idea in the slave soldiers that they would join plantation slaves working next to the swamp very soon. Creole Sergeant Romeo verified Gold’s testimony that enslaved soldiers had worked in the swamp for nearly three weeks before the mutiny and that their pay and rations were irregular, which further reinforced the idea among them that they were soon to be sold into plantation slavery. One soldier named Stuart also testified that daily work in the swamp for at least two weeks had been a growing grievance among the soldiers in the Regiment. They had complained that they had been “worked too much,” which also reinforced the point that soldiers’ material conditions immediately before the rebellion were deteriorating.\(^33\)

\(^32\) Johnstone to Trigge, April 22, 1802, WO 1/95, 47, 48; Sergeant Pinkett Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 64; Sergeant Ramey Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 64; Corporal Shova Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 65; Quash Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 66; Corporal Davey Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 65; Corporal Domingue Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 64

\(^33\) Sergeant Gold Testimony in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 63; Sergeant Romeo Testimony in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802,
Lieutenant Allen Cameron also testified that the soldiers were apprehensive of Governor Johnstone’s estate plans, and that they “did too much work.” Captain Barr echoed this sentiment and that after he was captured by the rebels, Sergeant Church told him that the cause of the mutiny was “too much work.” Captain Cassin also testified that the mutiny broke out because the soldiers had not been paid, and that cutting brush wood in the swamp adjacent to the fort compounded their understanding that Governor Johnstone had plans to create a new plantation. This reinforced the idea that their service would be a “prelude” to plantation slavery. They had reportedly observed, that “bill hooks were put in their hands, hoes would soon after: that they had carried firelocks for some time, and would not now use hoes.” These officers also confirmed that the enslaved soldiers had not received their pay, and that some were unaware if Johnstone or Major Gordon had any intentions of paying them at all. Major Gordon himself testified that he had “never” heard that the soldiers used to clear the swamp were paid, and that no one kept a list to record the men for their work. Instead, Gordon testified, Governor Johnstone ordered quartermaster Lieutenant Mackay to give the soldiers an extra ration of rum the week before the mutiny erupted. Paymaster Seward confirmed the mutineers’ accounts that they were upset about their pay, which he noted they had not received in January, February, and most of March before the rebellion.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{34} Lieutenant Allen Cameron Testimony, in Proceedings of the Court of Inquiry, April 28, 1802, WO 1/95, 76; Proceedings of a Court of Inquiry, CO 318/19, 25-31, retrieved from the British Library.
Dozens of other soldiers in the Regiment testified and affirmed these ideas. Enslaved soldiers complained about working in the swamp, which was exhausting and dangerous. It was also humiliating working next to adjacent plantations and in view of plantation slaves performing the same work. They complained about not getting enough rations to do this work, and not being paid for it either. They were also suspicious that they were working for Governor Johnstone’s private side project. Why were they being used to clear land for sugar when the Governor could just as easily buy plantation slaves or hire out others to do the dirty work? Who was going to work on the plantation right next to their garrison? Why weren’t they being paid for their work? All these factors converged to create the idea that they might soon become regular plantation slaves and that they were to be sold into plantation slavery very soon.  

The testimonies reveal how slave soldiers in the Regiment perceived themselves. It was clear that they knew they were not free, but they also believed that they were better than how other enslaved people were treated. They rejected any attempt to treat them as if they were regular plantation slaves, and the notion that they could be converted to do field work permanently terrified and angered them. Their belief that their status was under attack fueled an armed uprising.

At least seven of the mutineers, including Congo Jack, Cuffy, Manby, Liveley, James, Genius, and Pedro were convicted and executed for their role in the mutiny. At least 300 more waited for transport to Barbados, where General Trigge ordered another court martial since so many more soldiers were implicated in the rebellion. Eleven were executed for their role, and

35 Testimonies of King, Burke, Shell, Essex, Bestonian, James chattel, in Proceedings of the court of Inquiry, WO 1/95, 66, 67, 68, 73; Proceedings Summary Conclusion, WO 1/95, 81.
seven were whipped for their participation. Five more were acquitted of the charges. Governor Johnstone was recalled back to England after the mutiny, while the 8th WIR was disbanded. 148 enslaved soldiers were transferred to the 1st, 3rd, and 4th WIR to continue serving as soldiers, while 206 more were reclassified as pioneers, split into smaller groups, and sent to work for Whites as laborers. They had lost their prestige as armed combatants.36

Major Gordon was also court martialed in the aftermath of the rebellion as investigators learned more about the cause of the mutiny. For the most part the charges against Gordon related to one of the main grievances that the rebel soldiers expressed after the mutiny: not receiving pay. Gordon was charged with embezzling money designated for baking bread for the regiment, and falsifying pay lists. Whereas he swore just days before the mutiny that the men had been paid up to Christmas Eve 1801, at least two companies had only been paid to October 24 and another two up until November 24. The total amounts Gordon was accused of falsifying amounted to more than £1,000. These charges were directly related to the deprived condition of enslaved soldiers in the Regiment, which facilitated their rebellion. The remaining two charges were related to Gordon’s conduct after the mutiny. He was accused of embezzling compensation funds for the officers killed in the mutiny, as well as fleeing to Barbados to escape punishment. Though he was acquitted of all charges, the court found Gordon negligent in his duty and ordered him to make full and accurate reports of the Regiment’s accounts.37

36 Trigge to Brownrigg, April 30, 1802, WO 1/95, 51; Adjutant Council Report, CO 71/34; Lockley, “Mutiny!”

37 Johnstone and Dundas, To the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Melville, 20, 21, 22, 74; Proceedings of the General Court Martial in the Trial of Major John Gordon of the Late 8th West India Regiment (London: E Lloyd, 1804), 2, 298.
But there were other indications that Gordon and Johnstone were negligent officers in charge of the 8th WIR in ways that further contributed to the mutiny. From January to July 1801 a detachment of about eighty men quartered at Governor Johnstone’s residence were put to work performing manual labor and other works on his lands for his personal benefit, and he did not pay them for their work. These conditions set the precedent for Johnstone’s order to have others cut wood and clear the swamp near Prince Rupert’s months later, which was a tract of land that he hoped to convert for his own profit. These reports showed that enslaved soldiers in the Regiment had withstood more than just a few weeks of clearing a swamp, but more than a year of manual labor in which they thought their work was only benefitting Governor Johnstone. Surely they thought by April 1802 that a renewed order to clear the swamp meant that their lives as soldiers were over. Despite these misgivings, Johnstone still wanted to use WIR soldiers to drain the swamp even after the mutiny. Trigge also admonished Johnstone that he did not have Trigge’s permission to employ soldiers as he did, and that he did not authorize continued work in the swamp after the mutiny with the 8th WIR.  

General Trigge also issued a new general order at the end of April to allay men serving the West India Regiments who had similar fears like the men in the 8th WIR. He informed his enslaved subordinates that the idea that they were to be “sold as slaves” was “entirely without foundation.” Moreover and to ensure that the rest of the slave soldiers in the other West India Regiments understood, he ordered commanding officers to read his order at least three times to the men so that they understood it clearly and fully. He wanted to make sure that no other

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38 Cochrane and Dundas, *To the Right Honourable*, 75, 76, 188; Trigge to Brownrigg, April 30, 1802, WO 1/95, 51; Extract of letter, Trigge to Johnstone, April 25, 1802, WO 1/95, 53; Trigge to Johnstone, April 17, 1802, CO 71/34.
soldiers would start another rebellion over this fear. It is not clear if enslaved soldiers received this order or if they understood it any more than before. Trigge also ordered the surviving rebels to be sequestered from the rest of the West India Regiments. He did not want them “contaminating the rest” and make them feel like “victims as themselves.” Trigge thought that the idea of Black rebellion might spread among the thousands of enslaved soldiers in the West Indies, so he wanted to ensure that the conspirators from Dominica did not get a chance to advance their cause to others in the British Caribbean. He also wanted the Regiment to move to Barbados where there were far more White soldiers on the island than in Dominica. In case enslaved soldiers felt the need to rise up again, they would face even more soldiers against them and a White-Black population proportion unfavorable to slave rebellion. He also did not think that the rebels could ever again be trusted to handle firearms, which was a concern that others echoed. Nevertheless, although Trigge had lost faith in the 8th WIR rebels, he did not lose confidence in the remaining regiments or in their ability to help defend the British Caribbean from foreign adversaries and slave revolts. Despite the rebellion, his view in their value was relatively unaltered. How slave soldiers in the Regiment viewed these orders or moves remains unclear. They probably resented the move to Barbados and their sequestration from other regiments. The fact that they were taken from Fort Shirley and isolated from other regiments probably only exacerbated their fear of being reduced to plantation slavery.

LIKE OTHER MILITARIZED SLAVE REVOLTS

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39 New General Orders by General Thomas Trigge, April 27, 1802, WO 1/95, 55, 56; Trigge to Brownrigg, April 16, 1802, WO 1/95, 25, 26; Trigge to Brownrigg, April 23, 1802, WO 1/95, 41, 42; Pierre Franc McCallum, Travels in Trinidad: During the Months of February, March, and April 1803 (Liverpool: W. Jones, 1805), 26.
The mutiny reports and court martial testimony show that several men in the Regiment mutinied because they were enduring harsher material conditions, and that they expected those conditions to worsen in the immediate future. They had suffered hard work in an unhealthy environment, they had not been paid regularly or paid at all, and they believed a rumor that they were to be transformed into plantation slaves. As noted in Chapter One, scholars of slavery in the Atlantic, Ottoman, and Indian Ocean Worlds broadly agree that the severity of slavery as an institution as is measured by inhumane treatment toward enslaved people, their material conditions, and their relative physical health generally help predict when and where slaves might rise up and challenge their status among other factors. It is clear then that slave soldiers in the 8th WIR match this broad pattern before they mutinied in 1802. But how else did they compare to other rebellious slaves in the Atlantic during the period? Did they take arms and fight like other rebels and were the conditions right for insurrection in other uprisings like the 8th WIR mutiny?

By comparing the 8th WIR mutiny to other mutinies of enslaved soldiers in the West India Regiments and to militarized slave revolts in the British Caribbean, we get a better sense of how similar armed resistance in Dominica in 1802 was to militarized slave insurrection in the Atlantic. We get a better sense that it was indeed much like other militarized slave revolts in the littoral.

Like the 8th WIR mutineers, slave rebels in other major slave insurrections in the British Caribbean near the time of the mutiny endured material deprivation. Rebels in Bussa’s Rebellion in Barbados in 1816 were subjected to falling sugar prices and a general economic downturn tied to the end of the Napoleonic Wars in Europe. Meanwhile, when slaves rose up during Fédon’s Rebellion in Grenada in 1795-96, French privateering efforts led by Victor Hugues captured
trading vessels attempting to reach the island. Supply lines were thereby cut off, which contributed to a provision scarcity among the slave population on the island. Moreover, there had been a drought in the early months in 1795 shortly before the rebellion broke out, which further strained the island’s food and water supply. Enslaved people on the island were also experiencing a subsistence crisis brought on by the French Revolutionary Wars. Conflict rearranged trade patterns and led to sharp increases in the prices of food. In turn, enslaved people suffered malnutrition and starvation and increased mortality rates while planters were forced to re-allocate land to produce more food and supplies. These shortages contributed to the insurrection, while rebels also laid waste to plantation crops, livestock, and homes. Aside from utterly wrecking the Grenadian economy, the destruction assuredly made conditions worse for enslaved people who had not already joined the months-long rebellion and primed more to rise up as it progressed.40

Likewise conditions were also extant at the onset of two other mutinies of enslaved soldiers in the Anglo-Atlantic near the time of the 8th WIR mutiny. In September 1805 Black Chasseurs in Suriname rose up against British authority at a small outpost called Oranjebo along the rainforest frontier. The mutineers killed all the White soldiers in the area, and marched to

other nearby garrisons with the aim to kill all the White people inside them. By the time they were finished, plantation slaves and Maroons had joined them. As was the case with the 8th mutineers, the Chasseur rebels were angered about irregular pay. They were also concerned about the recent British conquest of the colony and some had believed that they would be reduced to plantation slave status with the colonial changeover. Just three years later, recently emancipated slave soldiers in the 2nd WIR in Jamaica also mutinied after facing similar material circumstances. Like the mutineers of the 8th WIR, the rebels in the 2nd WIR were stationed near a swamp at Fort Augusta in Jamaica. The swamp was also infested with mosquitos, and soldiers had also complained about illnesses that the insects spread.41

In many ways Black experiences during the 1802 mutiny were also like how enslaved rebels fought in other militarized insurrections and mutinies during the period. For example, how enslaved rebels in Bussa’s rebellion in Barbados fought in 1816 paralleled how the soldiers in the 8th WIR mutinied in many ways. Driven by a putative rumor of emancipation tied to the 1815 Registry Bill, rebels rose up on the island on the night of Sunday April 14 in St. Philip Parish. As the rebels moved through the area to the neighboring Parish of Christ Church, they were armed with firearms, pikes, hatchets, and other blunt force weapons. They destroyed sugar cane fields, houses, provision grounds, and work houses on each plantation estate. They burned household furniture, crops, and rum. They too fought in open field engagements with the White militia, and the Black soldiers in the 1st WIR mustered to suppress the rebellion. These engagements paralleled the counterattacks on Fort Shirley in Dominica in 1802 led by White

41 Governor William Hughes to Lieutenant General Sir George Beckwith, November 31, 1805, CO 318/28; Hughes to Secretary John Windham, WO 1/150, 190; Hughes to Beckwith, November 2, 1805, WO 1/149; Buckley, The British Army in the West Indies, 74.
soldiers in the 68th Regiment and St. George’s Militia participated, as well as those Black soldiers in the 8th WIR who did not mutiny. Bussa’s rebels were also well organized and coordinated, and they took control of half the island as separate factions challenged Whites in different parishes. At least 1,000 rebels were killed in battle, while another 144 were executed in trials after the rebellion was suppressed. Like the WIR mutineers in Dominica who ambushed militia forces approaching Fort Shirley, Bussa’s rebels utilized ambush tactics in sugar cane fields to attack the 1st WIR.42

The mutiny of the 8th WIR mirrored developments in Grenada in 1795 and 1796 when thousands of enslaved people and free Blacks rose up against British control. The revolt began on the night of March 2, 1795, when free Blacks and slaves conspired at a free Black man named Julien Fédon’s plantation Belvidere. From there the rebels moved to Grenville and Gouyave and took control of the two towns. The rebels were armed with muskets, bayonets, and swords and they took prisoner several White planters and authorities. As they plundered, the rebels also stocked up on ammunition, livestock, and provisions in order to advance their movement. When they approached the town of St. Georges, they reportedly wore helmets inscribed with “la mort ou la liberté” or “death or liberty” on them. To achieve liberty, they fought fiercely in pitched

battles against White soldiers and laid waste to the island, burning sugar cane fields, buildings, factories, and homes thereby turning the island into fire and ash.  

But as the revolt matured, the rebels were beaten back and forced to flee to the woods and hilly terrain for refuge, similar to the mutineers who fled to the forests and hills of the Cabrits in Dominica. Though they had requested substantial arms and assistance from Governor Victor Hugues at Guadeloupe, French support was insufficient and the British Navy was able to blockade the island. By July 1796, most of the insurgents were dead or captured. The uprising only came to an end when the last holdouts, including Fédon himself, jumped down the sides of Mount Quaco where they had held out and refused to be taken prisoner.

Both Bussa’s and Fédon’s rebellions also underscored a rise in militarized slave rebellions during the Age of Revolution also tied to the 8th WIR mutiny. Although more peaceful rebellions occurred in which slave rebels promoted ideas of liberty and citizenship and rebels chose less violent means to further their agendas during the period, ideas of republicanism and liberty also promoted violence. It also created more opportunities for slaves to become soldiers and use military service and military tactics to effect their goals. Bussa’s and Fédon’s rebellions also underscored how, like soldiers in the 8th WIR, not every slave joined rebel causes during Atlantic slave insurrections. Not every enslaved person in Barbados joined Bussa’s

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movement, while WIR soldiers fought to suppress the insurrection. Of the nearly 25,000 slaves in Grenada at the time of Fédon’s rebellion, approximately 8,000 rose up with Fédon. But hundreds also helped defend British plantation owners. In the first week of the rebellion, Lt. Colonel McDonald and James Campbell had mustered “trusty” slaves to help defend the colony. Eventually five companies of sixty men each armed to defend the British on the island. At least 200 Black Rangers fought for British authorities during the massive rebellion, and they were there for the final moments when Fédon finally surrendered at Mount Quoca. When the rebellion was over, more than 7,000 slaves and 1,000 Whites were dead. More than three dozen ringleaders of the rebellion were executed, and hundreds more were banished to Honduras. While much larger in scale than the 8th WIR mutiny, Fédon’s rebellion still engulfed an entire island like the 1802 mutiny, while enslaved people rose up and fought for freedom in a similar fashion. In both cases, loyal slave soldiers also pushed back. They understood that they had better chances at freedom by remaining loyal, or that they could gain more favor or privilege by remaining loyal. Others were probably unwilling to join what seemed like an unwinnable movement.45

The 8th WIR mutiny also shared some general characteristics of a conspiracy and short-lived insurrection in Dominica that occurred approximately a decade earlier in 1791. Early that year African Maroons collaborated with free Blacks and Mulattos to attack the colonial administration and to strike for freedom. While at first organized by plantation slaves and

Maroon leaders like Pharcelle, the conspiracy evolved to include the participation of creoles and eventually men like Jean Louis Polinaire who became the figurehead of the revolt and whose name the revolt was named after. As early as December 1790, Maroons and plantation slaves learned of an alleged rumor to permit enslaved people to work three days a week on their own, which had not yet been allowed. Much like the soldiers in the 8th WIR, Maroons and enslaved people in Dominica believed that they needed to take action to fight for a better life. Maroons in particular encouraged plantation slaves to fight for full emancipation instead, and rebels rose to the occasion. By then, it was estimated that as many as 250 conspirators had been involved, while at least dozens actually marched with firearms, swords, and other weapons toward Whites in the town of Rosalie. Their goal was to “kill all the white people.” Just as slave soldiers rose up in 1802 on the island, Maroons and enslaved people in 1791 led a militarized revolt against White people in Dominica to fight for their freedom. They marched “in a warlike manner” with battle colors, and they fought open engagements with White soldiers garrisoned on the island. As the revolt began to unravel, the rebels fled into the woods for refuge, much like the mutineers in the 8th WIR fled to the swamps and Cabrits after 1802. Just like the mutineers, they had wanted to kill the White people and take control of the island. They had wanted total emancipation. Unfortunately and just like their successors in 1802, their rebellion did not succeed and they were crushed within two weeks. Dozens were tried and executed in the ensuing months, including Polinaire, but many maroon leaders survived the fracas to fight another day. They would still live in the woods of Dominica when soldiers in the 8th mutinied in April 1802. How
they may have influenced the mutineers’ decision or assisted them during the rebellion is unclear.\footnote{Neil Vaz, “Dominica’s Neg Mawon: Maroonage, Diaspora, and Trans-Atlantic Networks, 1763-1814,” (PhD Diss., Howard University, 2016), 122-143; Honychurch, \textit{In the Forests of Freedom}, 101.}

Aside from these conventional militarized slave insurrections that the 8th WIR mutiny paralleled, the 1802 rebellion was also similar to several other mutinies of enslaved soldiers in the West India Regiments, some of which should also be analyzed as slave insurrections. Saltwater slave soldiers in the 4th West India Regiment were implicated in a conspiracy to overthrow their officers in St. Kitts in the summer of 1797. Details of the event are sparse, and unlike other mutinies, White authorities discovered the conspiracy at St. Kitts and it did not materialize. It does not appear that there was an effort to kill all the Whites or return to Africa in the plot like other mutinies, and the Regiment was transported from the island soon thereafter.\footnote{Minutes of the Privy Council, enclosed in King to William Huskisson, December 11, 1797, WO 1/769.}

The 8th WIR mutiny also resembled the Black Chasseurs in Suriname who revolted in early September 1805. The slave soldiers, who were first organized by the Dutch years before the British conquered Suriname, began their mutiny on September 6 at a small outpost in Oranjebo on the upper-Commewijne River when 20 enslaved rebels took control of the post. They killed all the White people inside the fort and moved on in the frontier. As they maneuvered, the mutiny spread to other posts and eighty more chausseurs joined the cause before fleeing into the forests with local Maroons. Several dozen plantation slaves also joined the soldiers in rebellion. At Imotapi north of Oranjebo, rebels shot a White sergeant and mutilated
his corpse. The Black rangers then plundered the warehouses and moved on to the Marowijne River and attacked Post Armina where they killed White colonists there. At Armina the rebels were joined by even more enslaved soldiers inside, and together there were more than eighty rebels involved. After Armina, the rebels moved to the forests and built their own village near an old Boni Maroon settlement called Ingi Pule Seton. In the course of their rebellion, the slave soldiers had become Maroons themselves, though some authorities suspected that Maroons had already infiltrated their ranks before the mutiny even began.48

After several months the rebels settled along the Lawa and Tapanioni Rivers and closer to the Ndjuka Maroons living nearby. In a subsequent peace treaty with the British in 1809, the Ndjuka maroons agreed to keep the Black soldiers-turned-Maroons under control. But the Ndjukas did not capture these new soldier-Maroons and in another decade they had grown in number to perhaps as much as 800 people. White officials who investigated the mutiny afterwards concluded that the rebellion erupted due to the infiltration of Boni maroons into the corps since the late eighteenth century. As noted above, the Chasseurs were agitated about pay and what would happen to their status after the British conquest, and they understood they had a real chance to strike for freedom with so few White soldiers available to challenge them. Thus they joined with plantation slaves and Maroons to achieve that freedom.49

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48 Chartrand, 253; Wim Hoogbergen, *The Boni Maroon Wars in Suriname* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 184; Hoogbergen, 184, 185; General Hughes to Windham, September 25, 1806, WO 1/150, 301; Court of Inquiry Proceedings, WO 1/150, 167.

49 Hoogbergen, *Boni Maroon Wars*, 185, 186; Hughes to Beckwith, November 11, 1805, CO 318/28, 354; Hughes to Beckwith, November 31, 1805, CO 318/28; Hughes to Windham, WO 1/150, 190; Hughes to Beckwith, November 2, 1805, WO 1/149.
One of the most similar incidents to the 8th WIR mutiny was the mutiny of the 2nd WIR at Fort Augusta, Jamaica, in 1808. As the rest of the Regiment had gone to parade at sunrise on May 27, a detachment of twenty-eight recruits walked from the fort with fixed bayonets. They had together come from the same nation in Africa identified as “Rio Chambo,” and they were the newest recruits purchased for service in the Regiment. They approached their commander and the acting adjutant and fired at them. Their gunshots created “astonishment” among the rest of the soldiers, who responded to the gunfire to “avenge” the deaths of the men much like the loyal soldiers during the 8th WIR mutiny. In the ensuing mêlée, fourteen mutineers were shot and killed and five more wounded while a few more ran away to the mangrove swamps for refuge. Twenty-four more were taken prisoner. Some would later confess that they had plotted the mutiny just three days after joining the Regiment and that they believed that if they could kill all the officers, they could “return to their own country.”

Like the Dominica mutineers, the Jamaican slave soldiers were angered about living conditions near a swamp at Fort Augusta. They also believed that if they were successful, they could return to their lives in Africa and avoid hardship in Jamaica. Unlike the previous mutinies and conspiracies; however, a significant difference to the 2nd WIR mutiny was that it occurred shortly after the 1807 Mutiny Act was passed. The Act broke from previous precedent in which the Law Officers of the Crown ruled that soldiers in the West India Regiments were still slaves despite their service in the military. The 1807 Act reversed course and declared all soldiers in the West India Regiments free so long as they continued to serve. Soldiers in the regiments were no

50 General William Villettes to Lord Castlereagh, June 15, 1808, CO 137/123. 61; General Hugh Carmichael to Castlereagh, August 12, 1808, CO 137/123; Savannah Republican: And Evening Ledger, July 23, 1808 (Savannah Georgia); Dyde, The Empty Sleeve, 82, 83.
longer slaves. Yet the fact that the newest recruits in the Regiment were the culprits behind the 2nd WIR mutiny, and that they began plotting the uprising just days after their enlistment provides some insight into how soldiers in the West India Regiments perceived their liminal status and how it related to mutinies in the ranks. By joining the 2nd WIR after the 1807 Mutiny Act, they had technically achieved their freedom from plantation chattel slavery so long as they stayed in active service. The fact that they still pushed for mutiny despite this suggests that slave soldiers in the West India Regiments were not well-informed about their status from high commanders and administrators in the metropole. It further suggests that slave soldiers in the West India Regiments during these early years considered mutiny as an act like conventional slave insurrection. It is likely that the life-long and permanent nature of service in the West India Regiments encouraged slave soldiers to attempt mutiny or desertion compared to those who ran away to British Lines and who served in the British Army in other conflicts during the period. Soldiers in the Carolina Corps or Ethiopian Regiment did not have a certain future like soldiers in the West India Regiments. They only knew that if they served they could escape their masters. But soldiers in the West India Regiments only knew that if they served they could escape the lowest rung on the ladder of plantation slavery, at least until they were too infirm to serve and retired.

Similar to the 2nd WIR mutiny that occurred after slave soldiers were emancipated, the mutiny of the 8th WIR also paralleled to a mutiny in 1836, when enslaved soldiers in the 1st WIR rose up in Trinidad. Like soldiers in the 8th and 2nd WIR mutinies, those who decided to

51 Villettes to Castlereagh, June 15, 1808, CO 137/123, 61; Buckley, The British Army, 74.
reject British military service were recently enslaved Africans, intercepted by British ships regulating the illegal trans-Atlantic slave trade. In September that year, approximately 200 soldiers under their leader named Dâaga, supposedly a former prince who had helped enslave many of the men with whom he now sided, decided that they could return to their homes in Africa if they could attack all the white men in the Regiment.\(^{52}\) The fact that the mutiny was generally confined to Africans who had just survived the Middle Passage and who did not speak English, and that they wanted to go back to Africa paralleled other African slave mutinies in other regiments. What differed in this case but was similar to the 2nd WIR mutiny was that these men had been legally free in the British military since the 1807 Mutiny Act, and that chattel slavery had been abolished in the British Caribbean since 1833 and enforced in 1834. Although they were willing to use military violence, tactics, techniques, and procedures to fight for freedom, they technically did not need to do so since they were legally free. Notwithstanding this issue, both subsequent mutinies in the 2nd and 1st WIRs illustrate how slave soldiers in the West India Regiments did not necessarily view soldiering as an immediate act of emancipation. Instead, they would need to use their service as a vehicle to further fight for freedom, not unlike other plantation slaves. These latter cases also point to how closely related mutinies among slave soldiers in the British Army were to conventional acts of slave resistance throughout the Anglo-Atlantic.

Not only was the 8th WIR mutiny similar to other slave revolts, but they were also linked to other enslaved people and maroons who were resisting the chattel system at the time. When

some of the mutineers in the 8th WIR fled the final battle, they escaped into the woods and swamps of Dominica. At least one soldier named Hypolite found refuge with the island’s Maroons for a time. Years later another private named Hypolite deserted from the 4th WIR stationed in Dominica and fought with Maroons against the Royal Dominica Rangers and other Black soldiers during the Second Maroon War in 1814. Likewise, a peace treaty with the Djuka Maroons in Suriname in 1837 required Maroons, some who were involved in the 1805 Chasseur mutiny, to avoid combat against Whites. They also agreed to help White colonists fight the remaining mutineers who still lived in the rainforests. Additionally, after the 2nd WIR mutiny in 1808, plantation slaves in Kingston were apparently inspired by their attempts for freedom and they conspired with surviving mutineers to rise up again. Mutineers Burgess, Watkins, and John were all implicated in the later conspiracy, and while Burgess was pardoned for his betrayal of the plot, Watkins and John were both executed. For them, their long history of resisting slavery inside and outside the British military came to an end in spring 1809. These incidents demonstrated how slave soldiers in the West India Regiments perceived mutiny as militarized slave insurrection.⁵³

CONCLUSION

For mutineers of the 8th West India Regiment, their movement was more than just a revolt against British military authority. Instead, it was an opportunity to fight for freedom and to achieve Black liberation in Dominica. It resembled many militarized slave rebellions in the

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Atlantic world, in which plantation slaves rose up against their owners and ran away to woods, swamps, or mountains to fight for emancipation, to join existing Maroon communities free from White control, or to create their own societies where they could avoid chattel slavery. But their cause was also like the mutineers in the Black Chasseurs and the 2nd and 4th West India Regiments, in which enslaved soldiers rose up against their officers and fought to protect their status. They fought to guard against any possibility of them being reduced to plantation slavery. They had suffered conditions of slavery that often encouraged slave insurrection elsewhere in the Atlantic, and when they finally did rise up against those conditions, they fought like other militarized slave rebels in Dominica in 1791, in Grenada in 1795, and in Barbados in 1816. Militarized slave rebellions were on the rise during the period, and slave soldiers used their military experience to fight for some of the same goals as rebels elsewhere.

The liminal status of slave soldiers in the West India Regiments also reflected the changing nature of slavery and freedom as it related to military service in the British Atlantic during the Age of Revolution. Before the American Revolutionary War that led to the development of permanent peacetime slave armies, slave soldiers in the Anglo-Atlantic would never confront such an ambiguous state of bondage. Instead, they would have understood that they still faced unfreedom despite their military service in emergency situations. Only in a few cases could they expect their own personal manumission for exemplary conduct. The rebels in the West India Regiments confronted something else entirely. They served in peacetime and revolution seemingly created a new kind of slave soldier. They were still slaves, but they were elevated and privileged compared to field slaves, and they expected to maintain this higher status. Revolution had also seemingly solidified the permanent professional militarization of
slave soldiers in the British Atlantic. Slave soldiering was no longer predominantly a phenomenon involving colonial militia and professional armies caught up in exigent circumstances.

The case of the 8th WIR mutiny is also one in which enslaved soldiers did not seize the opportunity in which armed conflict produced for them to advance the cause of emancipation. Instead, it was a case in which they themselves initiated armed conflict in order to achieve these goals. True enough, the Caribbean had become a volatile region of military activity during the Age of Revolution, but Dominica in April 1802 was relatively peaceful. There were no large-scale military campaigns that made slavery particularly vulnerable, and there were no conflicts that produced chaos that enslaved people could easily take advantage of, as in Bacon’s Rebellion in Virginia, the Yamasee War in South Carolina, or the southern colonies during the American Revolutionary War. Instead, Dominica was a relatively stable slave society with a large corps of enslaved soldiers serving to protect it. And still, slave soldiers found a way to challenge the Atlantic system.

The 8th WIR’s insurrection was also a case of armed resistance in which the rhetoric of the American, French, or Haitian Revolutions did not seemingly influence the rebellious soldiers. There were no reports of slave soldiers appropriating revolutionary rhetoric or any indication that they were fighting for Republican ideas of citizenship or equality. More accurately, the African ringleaders of the mutiny were fearful that they would be reduced to plantation slavery, and they were willing to risk everything to stop that from happening. At the very least, if they could take control of the island, they could prevent White officers from turning them into field slaves. Thus,
it would appear that the influence of revolutionary rhetoric on slave soldiers may have been somewhat attenuated.

Lastly, this was a case that illuminated how even authoritarian military discipline and regimen could not contain disaffected people from below. No matter how well trained slave soldiers were to obey White officers, to defer to White planters, and to defend the British Empire, if the right incentives were not in place, or if the wrong policies were implemented, they were not afraid to push for what they thought was right. Slave soldiers had found another way to exploit White military and imperial ambitions in ways that could advance Black emancipation. They found a way to use their commanders’ trust in them as loyal soldiers to attack the very system that made them slaves. They found a way to drive a wedge between the British Army and chattel slavery in the British Caribbean colonies.
In September 1812, a “large body of Negroes and Indians” ambushed the provision lines of two companies of militiamen under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Adams Smith in northern East Florida. The Black-Native American force attacked the Georgia soldiers to drive them out of East Florida and prevent further American expansion into Florida during the Patriot War of 1812-1814. In October 1812, Colonel David Newnan, Adjutant General of the Georgia militia, came to Smith’s aid, and the Black and Indian soldiers attacked him and his 250-man force too. There were many Black warriors living in the area, and they fought for survival, since they were runaway plantation slaves from Georgia who had found refuge in Spanish Florida from American chattel slavery (see Map 16 below). They knew that if they let the Patriots, some of whom may have even been their former owners, take control of East Florida that they would be returned to the harsh life of plantation slavery again. About a year later and further west in Mississippi Territory, runaway Black slaves fought with Creek Indians against U.S. soldiers in the Creek War (see Map 17 below). They fought U.S. soldiers on several occasions, and after the battle of Echanchaca, Lieutenant Joseph Morgan Willcox described them as “the most desperate foe.” Willcox noted that approximately 120 Indians and runaway Black slaves defended the village. So many of these asylum seekers gathered in Echanachaca that a
Creek agent called the place a “reptackle” for them. From there they fought fiercely alongside Indians to defend themselves and their homes “with the expectation of being free.” But it was a losing effort as Americans took control of the region, which doomed the efforts of the Maroons to preserve their freedom, at least in this part of the borderlands.¹


¹ Niles Weekly Register, (Hezekiah Niles), Baltimore, November 5, 1812, December 12, 1812; James Cusick, The Other War of 1812: The Patriot War and the American Invasion of Spanish East Florida (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 11; Joseph Willcox to Father, 1 January 1814, in A Narrative of the Life and Death of Lieut. Joseph Morgan Willcox who was Massacred by the Creek Indians, on the Alabama River, Miss. Ter., on the 15th of January 1814 (Marietta, OH: R. Prentiss, 1816), 5; Theron A. Nunez Jr., “Creek Nativism and the Creek War of 1813-1814 Part 2 (Stiggins Narrative Continued),” Ethnohistory 5, no. 2 (Spring 1958): 170, 171, 172.
Runaway enslaved people continued to fight U.S. soldiers uninterruptedly in the Florida and Mississippi territories as both British and Spanish authorities gave refuge to the slaves to counter American expansion in the region. The most notable instance of this occurred during the War of 1812, when hundreds of runaway slaves and Indians took up arms with British Lieutenant Colonel Edward Nicolls in the Florida Panhandle and helped him defend a fort on the Apalachicola River near present-day Tallahassee. Prospect Bluff, which Whites called Negro Fort because of the runaway Black slaves who occupied the position, was still a significant threat to White American merchants and frontier plantation owners even after the British defeat and their evacuation in the early months of 1815. So long as hundreds of these Maroons and their Indian allies defended the Prospect Bluff stronghold, they could recruit more runaways on the border and stand up to American incursions into the area. The spectacular destruction of Negro Fort and the death of almost 300 Maroon warriors at the hands of American soldiers under General Andrew Jackson on July 27, 1816, was celebrated as an important American victory, even though it did little to quell the Maroon violence that factored heavily in the First Seminole War. Indeed, the battle did not stop runaway slaves from pouring into Florida to augment the large runaway Maroon communities existing both independently and attached to Seminole Indians living there (see Map 18 below). Though the Maroon defeat in the battle for Prospect Bluff represented a significant setback for the runaway slave soldiers, it was still only one battle in what became a prolonged Maroon war for liberation that lasted another seven years.

Nearly a year after the battle at Prospect Bluff, Maroons continued raids on plantations and attacked White planters on the border. American trading agent Edmund Doyle wrote to his partner John Innerarity that the Maroons still threatened their company’s merchant house in
Pensacola and that they “would put (and expect to do still) me to a cruel death if they dared.” Others complained about Maroon raids and the enslaved exodus to Maroon and Indian villages in Florida. The persistent threat of Black Maroons and their Seminole allies in Florida in 1818 prompted General Jackson to invade the Spanish territory once again to destroy remaining Seminole Indian towns and to capture or kill the Maroons living nearby. Pursuing Maroons was thus a central objective in the First Seminole War, much as it had been during Colonel Newnan’s campaign six years earlier. Conversely, stopping American soldiers from destroying Maroon towns and capturing Maroon soldiers had been the central Maroon objective during the same period.²

Despite the substantial Maroon presence in the Gulf Coast region and their relationship to the Creek and Seminole Indians, historians disregarded their story for more than a century after the fugitives and their Seminole allies agreed to peace with the United States at Moultrie Creek in 1823. Only in the 1940s did Kenneth Wiggins Porter address this issue with a groundbreaking study, in which he argued that the Maroons, as part of the Seminole Nation, challenged White imperialism in Florida in the first half of the nineteenth century. In recent years historians have examined this group of Maroons (often named Black Seminoles) and have detailed how their story fits into broader narratives of Native American history, imperial warfare, slave resistance, and White-Indian frontier conflict.³ With notable exceptions like Jane Landers and Nathaniel

² Edmund Doyle to John Innerarity, 5 June 1817. Mary Taylor Greenslade Papers, Box 2, Folder 4, P.K. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville [Hereafter PKY]; Niles Weekly Register, (Hezekiah Niles), Baltimore, January 16, 1819.

Millett, because of the large Indian and imperial presence in the fighting, scholars have stressed the fighting between White planters and Native Americans in Florida. Enslaved Black soldiers have received much less attention, except for their notable role at Negro Fort in 1816.

Howard, we now know quite a bit about the “Black Seminoles” and their roles in the Second Seminole War from 1835 to 1842 and their migration west thereafter.⁴

We now also have a better sense of the Black-Indian relationship, including Indian slaveholding in Florida and how it operated in a greater Atlantic perspective. Additionally, William Sturtevant, Rebecca Bateman, Nathaniel Millett, and Mulroy have all shown that the Black-Indian relationship in Florida was similar to typical Maroon societies elsewhere in the Atlantic world. Indeed, they have shown that the “Black Seminoles” should actually be seen as Maroons. Thus, I follow Mulroy and Nubia Kai in calling the Black-Indian group the “Seminole

Maroons,” and I agree that the development of Seminole Maroon ethnogenesis was remarkably similar to a pattern of Maroon development elsewhere in the Atlantic world.\textsuperscript{5}

But we still do not fully know how Maroon soldiers who fought in Florida and in the rest of the Gulf Coast borderlands interpreted the various conflicts in the 1810s and early 1820s. We do not know how their role in the fighting compared to other Maroon wars in the Atlantic, in which increases of plantation raids led to White expeditions to eradicate the Maroons who were challenging colonial slave societies. From the perspectives of these Maroons, what exactly were they fighting for from 1812 to 1823? What exactly did the nearly constant conflict during this period actually mean to the Maroons involved, and what can it tell us about Maroon fighting in borderlands areas of the Atlantic world? What can it tell us about how Maroons became soldiers and how they interpreted armed conflict generally? How did it compare to other Atlantic conflicts in which maroons also participated? How did the Seminole Maroons use armed

resistance to stop chattel slavery, and how did slave and Maroon soldiers in the Lower South militarize resistance after the American Revolution? This chapter addresses these questions and uses a comparative approach to offer a more comprehensive understanding of the fighting in Florida. The borderlands area also offers a unique glimpse into Maroon warfare in the Atlantic world, in which three White/European imperial powers were competing for the same territory and vied for Maroon assistance. It can thus tell us more about how intense imperial conflict in borderlands areas affected armed resistance and slave militarization.6

There is, unfortunately, no definitive Maroon account regarding these borderlands conflicts, but Native and White records do describe Maroon actions. Thus I use newspapers, traveler portrayals, Maroon and Indian accounts, as well as American, British, and Spanish military reports and government records. I also draw on planter diaries and correspondence, as well as military reports throughout the Atlantic littoral to help assess Maroon warfare and to analyze the Seminole Maroons within a comparative Atlantic approach. I argue that seen in this context the fugitive slaves and Seminole Indians in Florida comprised a typical Atlantic Maroon community, who were engaged in a “Gulf Coast borderlands Maroon War” against primarily

White planters and their former owners in the region that lasted from 1812 to 1823. Instead of several discrete White-Indian and imperial conflicts, their fight was one long continuous war, similar to other Maroon wars in the Atlantic. Not only did their demographic composition and foundation follow an Atlantic Maroon pattern, they armed, fought, and made peace just like other Atlantic Maroons did in similar conflicts involving European imperial rivalries. From this perspective, they fought American slaveholders continuously for more than a decade in a struggle over slavery and freedom in their region. Ultimately for the Seminole Maroons, it was a war for liberation. This Gulf Coast borderlands Maroon War further demonstrated how militarized slave resistance had become in the Anglo-Atlantic. Plantation slaves became Maroon soldiers to fight a war against the expansion of slavery in Florida. In doing so, they also played on White and Native imperial rivals and allied with Native and White armies sympathetic to their cause, including British officers who promoted outright abolition.⁷

**Freedom, Race, and Culture Among Atlantic Maroons**

Though Black slaves fought their former owners in Georgia, Florida and Mississippi Territories, scholars have been reluctant to identify them as Maroons because of their affiliation and close relationship to the Seminoles and Creeks in the area who were also involved in the fighting. Indeed, race and identity are central to the problem of this interpretation of Maroon warfare from the Creek War through the First Seminole War, and historians cannot easily discount Native Americans involved in these conflicts. As Christina Snyder as shown, it is

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⁷ Edward Nicolls, Robert Henry, and George Woodbine were noted radical abolitionists who mobilized slave soldiers for the British Army during this period. See Millett, “The Radicalism of the First Seminole War,” 165, 170, 175.
difficult to precisely label Africans and African Americans living among Seminole Indians in Florida in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Those who lived on their own in Seminole territory still paid tributes to Seminole chiefs and were in effect vassal-like members of the Seminole chiefdoms in Florida. In short, how can the fighting be Maroon warfare if belligerents were both Indian and African American? Were the runaway Black slaves who fought throughout this period in the region attached to the indigenous Seminole and Creek Indians? Did they live separately from the Indians? Did they marry and have children together? Was race even a marker of Maroon identity, or how important was it? What was the true nature of this Black-Indian alliance, how did the Maroons identify themselves, and how did their identity shape the fighting? Were African American and Indian objectives necessarily mutually exclusive? From White perspectives, did frontier planters think they were fighting runaway slaves in a conflict over slavery, or were they engaging Indians in another frontier conflict over indigenous sovereignty? Did they think that their enemies were racially distinct and separate? Undeniably, the problems of race and identity complicate how scholars organize non-White people in the region and how to assess what they fought for. Yet analyzing who exactly the Seminole Maroons were in the Gulf Coast borderlands helps to better understand their objectives and how they contributed to the longer militarization of slave resistance in the Anglo-Atlantic.

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Scholars have long tried to address these problems of race and identity among Maroon groups in the Black Atlantic. Spurred on by the great debate between Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits on retentions of African culture in the Americas, historians and anthropologists have long debated how much African culture survived in Maroon groups in the Black Atlantic. Many have emphasized how important African culture and ethnic identity was for Maroon formation too, but other researchers have demonstrated that ethnic affiliation was not always important to Africans in the Black Atlantic, especially Maroons, and that racial identity changed over time. Moreover, numerous studies have also shown that Native Americans were often part of developing Maroon communities, which highlights how Maroon groups were not entirely Black or African to begin with. More recent studies have identified these problems with the Maroons in Florida as well. Rebecca Bateman has shown that African-derived names were prevalent among the Seminole Maroons who were removed to Indian Territory after the Second Seminole War, which suggested that fugitive Black slaves did live independently of some indigenous Seminoles or that they at least did not follow indigenous Seminole naming practices. After a recent excavation of Pilakikaha, a Seminole Maroon town built between 1813 and 1836, archaeologist Terrance Weik concluded that the village was self-sufficient and did not follow the typical nineteenth-century indigenous Seminole homestead model. Moreover, the village appeared to reflect a high degree of creolization among White, Black, and Indian cultures. While I cannot settle the questions of Maroon race and ethnogenesis definitively here, this chapter does put Seminole Maroon demography into a broader perspective that can compare them to the Maroons elsewhere in the Atlantic. Such a comparison better explains Black-Indian relations
within the Seminole Maroons during their development and how they resisted the Atlantic chattel system.⁹

While William Sturtevant first suggested that scholars study Black fugitives in Florida as another group of Atlantic Maroons after consultation with prominent Maroon scholar Richard Price, little was made of such an Atlantic comparison for more than a decade. In more recent years Kevin Mulroy has reinvigorated the concept, and I follow Mulroy in calling the Black-Indian group the Seminole Maroons because I believe this name adequately addresses who they were: both Black people evading enslavement and indigenous Seminole Indians. I also agree with Mulroy that the development of Seminole Maroon ethnogenesis was remarkably similar to the development of Maroons elsewhere in the Atlantic, which almost always included intimate Indian interaction. While scholars have noted that the term “Black Seminole” tends to conflate a racial distinction between African Americans and Indians, as I will show below, this distinction was not always clear in Atlantic Maroon societies and especially not so in their incipient stages,

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which the Seminole Maroons were during this period of study. Furthermore, while I will stress that both Native American and African American groups were part of the Maroon fighting from 1812 to 1823, I do not deny that the Seminole and Creek Indian Nations existed independently of the Black slave presence in the Southeastern United States, and that at times they fought their own battles based on their own grievances against White planters, colonists, and even the Maroons themselves. Because Seminole and Creek Indians were present does not mean that Black people and biracial Black Seminole people were not Maroons. Because Black people were present does not mean that there were not independent indigenous Seminole and Creek peoples too.  

By the time of the Gulf Coast borderlands Maroon War in Florida, Whites in the Atlantic world held generalized racial views of Maroons. While anyone who had non-White racial heritage, including Indians, were described as mulattos on censuses and tax records in the United States, White planters around the Atlantic still believed that runaway African and African American slaves differed from the indigenous population based on predominant physical features. They also held this belief despite the fact that Black and Native American people often intermarried and had children together. French soldier Alexandre Moreau de Jonnès best illustrated this point of White concepts of Maroon race during his travels in the Caribbean. When he arrived in St. Vincent in 1795 he recalled meeting the Maroons there and identified them as two distinct Carib tribes, one “red” and one “black.” He also noted that the Black Caribs were

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entirely different from the indigenous Caribs, writing that “Instead of a lanuginous hair, an
enlarged nose, a gaping mouth, bordered with large lips turned away, they had the features of the
Abyssinians: flat, long black hair, analogous to a mane; their nose was straight, starting from the
forehead, slightly curved towards the point, and as one never seen from Cape Bon to the Gulf of
Guinea.”

Similarly, botanist Jean-Baptiste Thibault de Chanvalon highlighted racial
differences among the Caribs during his travels to the Caribbean in the mid-18th century, as well.
Chanvalon thought that although the Black Caribs had adopted indigenous mores, they still lived
“confused with them.” Jonnès’ and Chanvalon’s comments also reflected how Whites used racial
categories to classify Maroons as part of a larger project of determining who was not White in
the Atlantic World.

The problem of pinpointing Maroon identity is also complicated by the fact that White
colonists and planters sometimes misidentified Indians and Black people too. Importantly, up
until the late seventeenth century, Europeans did not distinguish Africans living among Indians
in the Caribbean. In Florida, traveler William Simmons noted how fugitive slaves in Seminole

11 “Au lieu d’une chevelure lanugineuse, d’un nez épaté, d’une bouche béante, bordée de
grosses lèvres retournée en dehors, ils avaient les traits des Abyssins: des cheveux plats, longs,
noirs, analogues à une crinière; leur nez était droit, partant du front, légèrement recourbé vers la
pointe, et comme on n’en a jamais rencontré depuis la cap Bon jusqu’au golfe de Guinée.” See
Alexandre Moreau de Jonnés, Aventures de Guerre au Temps de la république et du consolat
volume 1 (Paris: Pagnerre 1858), 246. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

12 Jack Forbes, Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution
of Red-Black Peoples second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); “Il y a parmi
les Caraïbes des Antilles un autre peuple qui a adopté leurs moeurs & leurs usages, qui vit
confondu avec eux.” See Jean Baptise Thibault de Chanvalon, Voyage à la Martinique:
Contenant Diverses Observations sur la Physique, l’histoire naturelle, l’agriculture, les moeurs,
& les usages de cette isle, faites en 1751 & dans les années suivantes; lu à l’Académie Royal des
territory lived apart from the Indians, but that they dressed, carried firearms, and planted crops just like the Natives did. He also noted how they spoke Indian languages and sometimes appeared more like Indians than Black plantation slaves. Moreover, when a body of Patriot soldiers was attacked in 1812 at Twelve Mile Swamp near St. Augustine, the soldiers reported that it was an Indian attack. However, after the assault Spanish military correspondence suggests that the Patriots were mistaken. Governor of East Florida Sebastian Kindelán y O’Regan wrote to Captain General Juan José Ruiz de Apodaca that the real attackers were runaway Black slaves whom the Spanish had armed. The Patriots only mistook the Black Maroons for Indians because “they wear the same clothing and go painted.” At other times the Black Maroons also wore moccasins, leggings, smocks, shirts, belts, turbans, and shawls per Seminole custom. In combat, the difference between fugitive slave and Native American was often hardly noticeable. Further complicating the matter, biracial Seminole Maroons also fought on the front thereby challenging planters to identify them as either Black or Indian.\(^\text{13}\)

Other contemporary accounts also differ as to how independent some Black fugitives were and whether or not they lived alone and separately from the Indians, who were sometimes both their allies and their enemies. By the end of the War of 1812, Seminole Chief Kinache

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attempted to distance himself from the runaways at Negro Fort, not wanting to be any longer “the head of a band of rebellious rogues as blacks are.” His son George Perryman would later describe hundreds of African Americans parading around Indian villages, which suggested that the two groups lived with each other on somewhat equal grounds. Likewise, Captain Hugh Young described several hundred runaway slaves living in villages on the Suwanee River. He claimed that they had a form of government similar to the Seminoles. Right before peace at Moultrie Creek in 1823, William Simmons noted that some Black fugitives were still living freely and independently of their Indian neighbors. Diplomat Horatio Dexter agreed and observed that even the Maroons “possessed” by the Indians still lived apart from them and had the liberty to do as they pleased.\(^\text{14}\)

But while depictions of the Maroon towns suggested Black independence from Indian oversight, other reports noted how many of the runaways appeared to have been owned as slaves by the Indians, as well. General Superintendent of Indian Affairs Benjamin Hawkins wrote to Spanish Governor of West Florida Mauricio de Zuñiga that many of the Black fugitives were slaves to the Indians, and that Black Maroon commander Nero was reportedly a slave to Seminole Chief Bowlegs as well. Hawkins also reported how complex Black-Indian relations were in Florida, noting that some Indians were willing to capture and recover Black fugitives to

\(^{14}\) Rosalyn Howard, “Black Towns of the Seminole Indians” in *Africa in Florida*, 111; "y separado enteramente del Fuerte, no queriendo estar mas tiempo á la cabeza de una banda de pícaros levantados como son los negros.” Felipe Prieto to Edmund Doyle, September 17, 1815, Cruzat Papers, 2:8, PKY. See also Hugh Young, “A Topographical Memoir on East and West Florida with Itineraries of General Jackson’s Army, 1818,” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (October 1934): 100; and Horatio Dexter, Observations on the Seminole Indians, in Mark Boyd, “Horatio Dexter and Events Leading to the Treaty of Moultrie Creek with the Seminole Indians,” *Florida Anthropologist* 11, no.3 (September 1958): 84.
preserve their own autonomy from White aggression. Perfectly summing up how complex the role of slavery was inside the Seminole Maroon community, Hawkins wrote to Zuñiga in April 1816 that “if they [Indians] can take the negroes from among them and deliver them up to their masters, who are Americans, Indians, and Spaniards they will do an act of justice.”

Yet the presence of Native Americans and their connections to fugitive Black slaves was also in accordance with patterns of Maroon development throughout the Atlantic world. Since their inception, Maroons absorbed the local native population as a challenge to White oppression. The sex imbalance of the Atlantic slave trade alone was enough to encourage the predominately male African slave population to seek Native women as sexual and marital partners. Conversely, the dramatic decline of Amerindian populations due to European diseases and European enslavement of Indians also encouraged Natives to seek enslaved Africans as sexual partners as well. Though often pitted against Indians in European strategies to divide and conquer, runaway Black slaves often found an ally in local Indians as well. The Maroons in Ecuador in the sixteenth century allied with the natives to combat White aggression, and when the Dutch attacked the Palmares Maroons in Brazil in 1644, they took thirty-one prisoners of war, several of whom were Tupis Indians and biracial *Mulaetjens*.

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A recent archeological survey of the Great Dismal Swamp in Virginia suggests that enslaved Black people joined with Native Americans there in the early seventeenth century in what has been considered one of the largest Maroon communities in British North America.

Indian women lived with Gaspar Yanga and his Maroon band in seventeenth-century Mexico as well, while runaway Black slaves in the Saamakas and Djkas Maroon groups in Suriname also married with Natives since their inception in the 1680s. When the Dutch signed for peace with the Saamakas in 1762, there were still several Indian groups living among the Maroons, including the Arawaks, Akurio, and Tunfinga. Runaway Africans formed Maroon groups with the Kalingo Indians in Dominica in the late seventeenth century as well. New archeological evidence suggests that the Windward Maroons at Nanny Town in Jamaica also cohabitated with Taíno Indians throughout the seventeenth century and even into the start of the First Maroon War in the 1730s. Recent DNA analyses of the Accompong Town Maroons in Jamaica also show that the Leeward Maroons have Native American ancestry, which most likely came from indigenous women who partnered with enslaved Black men in the early stages of Maroon development on the island in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries. DNA analyses of the Garifuna have found similar results among these Maroon descendants in Belize, St. Vincent, and Honduras. Even by the end of the eighteenth century in Cuba, one leader of a palenque, or Maroon village, near Jaruco was a Yucatecan Indian. Indeed, throughout the Atlantic Native Americans helped found and were important constitutive members of Maroon groups. The Seminole Maroons fit this Atlantic pattern in the early eighteenth century and then again as they forged larger communities in Florida by the turn of the nineteenth century.17

Surviving Maroon groups throughout the Atlantic have also wavered on how they identified themselves then and how they continue to identify themselves racially to this day, making it difficult for scholars to assess Maroon history. Claudio Saunt has shown that a Black Maroon leader of a village near Columbus, Georgia in 1790 identified as a Creek Indian. There is also some evidence that Seminole Maroons without any Indian ancestry still adopted Native American culture and identified as Indians once they arrived in Oklahoma after the Second Seminole War. Anthropologists have interviewed the descendants of Seminoles in Florida, Oklahoma, Texas, Mexico, and the Bahamas, as well as Maroon groups elsewhere in the Atlantic with mixed results. Seminoles of both Black and indigenous Indian descent who now live in the Bahamas claim unconquered indigenous status casting aside their Black ancestry. Seminole
descendants in the United States appear even more divided. Though an 1866 treaty with the federal government affirmed the right of Seminoles with African American ancestry to identify as full members of the Seminole Nation, they lived away from other Seminoles and in their own separate towns in Indian Territory. Though a few elite Black leaders were included in the indigenous Indian clans, most Black members were excluded and never participated in indigenous Seminole language, society, and culture.\textsuperscript{18}

By the 1990s, Seminole leaders voted to block anyone of African American ancestry from tribal membership to prevent them from receiving $56 billion in federal compensation. In the last two decades the Bureau of Indian Affairs has also questioned the idea that members of predominant African American descent were Seminoles, first denying them certificates of degree of Indian blood cards in 2003, before changing course and issuing them later that year. But these issues are common to many Maroon communities in the Atlantic world too. As the descendants of the Black Caribs in St. Vincent, the Garifuna in Honduras were accepted into the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1992, though recent interviews with members of the group show that they favor their African heritage when they self-identify. Moreover, DNA testing of various Garifuna communities in Belize, Honduras, and St. Vincent show that several of these communities, descendants of the Black Carib Maroons in St. Vincent, have significant Native

American ancestry as well. Clearly modern concepts of scientific race and cultural identity have become important elements of Maroon identity, though it is unclear if Maroons abided by distinct racial notions that made Africans different from Indians. At the very least, Maroons have historically demonstrated the ability to navigate racial boundaries to their benefit, which may suggest that constructs of biological race may not be the only marker that they used and still use to identify themselves. The Seminole dispute also demonstrates how complicated racial identity has been for the descendants of the Seminole Maroons, and reiterates how scholars cannot simply apply current conceptions of race and identity to the past.¹⁹

The issue of slavery within the Seminole Maroon community also presents a number of difficulties for scholars identifying Maroons in the Gulf Coast borderlands. Were the Black fugitives actually Maroons since some accounts document them as slaves to the indigenous Seminoles themselves? Moreover, can Maroons who resist slavery still be considered Maroons if they themselves owned slaves? Like many other Native groups in the Americas, the indigenous Seminoles practiced a form of slavery independent of Black chattel bondage, but they also adopted Black chattel slavery by the end of the eighteenth century, and early reports document the rise of Black settlements affiliated with Seminole villages. Yet in the broader Atlantic, slaveholding had not been a disqualifying factor in identifying other Maroon groups, and it

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should not be in the case of the Seminole Maroons in Florida. Like the indigenous Seminoles and the Seminole Maroons, Palmarian Maroons in Brazil owned plantation slaves in their settlements in the seventeenth century, and the Leeward and Windward Maroons in Jamaica also owned plantation slaves until British emancipation in 1834. The Saamakas did in Suriname as well, and both Chatoyer and his brother Du Vallée personally owned slaves as leaders of the Black Caribs in St. Vincent at the end of the eighteenth century. Palmarian Maroons in Brazil and Maroons in southern Mexico in the early seventeenth century prohibited their slaves from leaving their communities too. Seen in Atlantic context then, though Maroons were notorious for challenging European slave holders, they frequently owned plantation slaves themselves, just like the Seminole Maroons did in Florida. Owning slaves did not disqualify them from Maroon status. In short, in Florida and much of the rest of the Atlantic world, Maroons owned slaves and intermarried with Native Americans.²⁰

ON FIGHTING IN FLORIDA: INDIANS, MAROON PATTERNS, AND ARMING SLAVES

While part of the Seminole Maroon story entails navigation through complicated webs of race, culture, identity, and slavery, much like other Maroon groups in the Atlantic, the rest of

their tale shows that they also fought like other Maroons did in a continual struggle against their re-enslavement to White owners from 1812 to 1823. This prolonged period of violence that finally came to an end in 1823 marked what might be labeled as a “Gulf Coast borderlands Maroon war.” This war demonstrated how plantation slaves became maroons and used military violence and military service to attack the chattel system in the Gulf Coast borderlands. In many ways they were following the footsteps of their predecessors in the Yamasee War one hundred years earlier.

It was clear that Maroons were heavily involved in the fighting in the Gulf Coast borderlands as noted above, but did they fight like other Maroons in the Atlantic world from 1812 to 1823? What was Maroon warfare, and how would we know when we, as historians, or contemporaries at the time saw it? At first glance, contemporaries did not easily define or demarcate Atlantic Maroon wars. During the First Maroon War in Jamaica in the 1730s, White planters and colonial authorities more often described the violence as a “rebellion” and called the Maroons “rebels.” During the Second Maroon War in Jamaica in 1796, contemporaries described the conflict as a “maroon revolt,” or a “dangerous rebellion,” similar to how American planters and officials described the Seminole Maroons in Florida. During the First Carib War in St. Vincent in 1773, newspapers and chronicler William Young described the fighting as a “war,” but Young also called it an “insurrection of the Black Charaibs.” Needless to say, we should not expect to find White records describing the fighting in the Gulf Coast borderlands as a “maroon war,” since Maroon wars were so often not described as such elsewhere in the Atlantic. More to the point, planters in the South rarely described Maroons in North America as such, instead referring to them more often as fugitives or rebels. Additionally, Maroon records of these events
are scarce if they exist at all, and Maroon oral tradition sometimes differs from White records on when exactly these wars started. For example, some Jamaican Maroons believe the First Maroon War began when the British took possession of the island from Spain in the mid-seventeenth century.21

What then to make of Atlantic Maroon warfare generally, and how did it stack up against what the Seminole Maroons were doing in the Gulf Coast? As Wim Hoogbergen has shown, Maroon warfare could be typified by the intensification of plantation raids in which Maroons killed White planters and took supplies and slaves. These raids prompted Whites to raise military forces and send patrols to find and capture Maroons and to destroy their villages, which might attract more runaways.22 In addition, Maroons used guerilla tactics and the terrain to their

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advantage to stop White invasions. Finally, peace treaties between Maroons and colonial authorities formally ended these conflicts.

During the First Maroon War in Jamaica, Maroon raids on plantations were so successful that planters in Elizabeth, Hanover, and Cabarita Parishes stayed off roads to avoid ambushes, while others abandoned whole parts of the island entirely because they feared that more plantation slaves would join Maroon camps. The Jamaican response was similar to planters in Alabama like Thomas Powell, who removed his enslaved people from the Tombigbee River settlements in 1815, and Edmund Doyle who refused to send his slaves to Pensacola because he thought that they would flee to the Seminole Maroons in 1817. Additionally and like the Seminole Maroons who raided plantations for supplies and slaves, Maroons in Jamaica, St. Vincent, and Suriname all raided plantations to capture slaves and to gather supplies. The Black Caribs captured plantation slaves in 1777, as did the Trelawney Town Maroons in Jamaica in 1796. In 1789 nearly 150 Boni Maroons in Suriname surrounded and attacked the Clarenbeek Plantation, and they killed several White workers before absconding with firearms, provisions, and thirty-three slaves to add to their community.23

After plantation raids and attacks, imperial authorities usually raised military forces to find and destroy Maroon settlements and kill and capture any Maroons they found. British forces attacked and burned provision grounds in Jamaica during the First Maroon War in the 1730s, and

they destroyed several Maroon camps during the First Maroon War in Dominica in 1785-86. White soldiers also destroyed the Baku Maroon town during the Boni Maroon War in Suriname in 1768. These attacks were similar to Patriot expeditions in Florida in 1812 and Jackson’s campaign in 1818 in which American soldiers hoped to destroy Maroon camps to break up Maroon power.24

Like other Atlantic Maroons, the Seminole Maroons relied on their expertise in guerilla warfare to fight their White enemies, while they also used terrain features to their advantage when they fought. The Jamaican Maroons were renowned for their use of mountainous terrain and thick rainforest to defend their communities, and only “steep, rocky, and difficult” paths could reach them. The Black Caribs in St. Vincent also controlled “almost impenetrable woods,” and so too did the Maroons in Dominica. In Suriname, it took weeks for White soldiers to cut through forests to reach the Saamakas and Djukas, while the Boni Maroons lived so deep in the rainforest that they disappeared entirely for over a decade after the Second Boni Maroon War ended in 1793. In all these places, when Whites approached, Maroons ambushed them and used fire and withdraw tactics to escape. The use of terrain and guerilla tactics that Atlantic Maroons used paralleled how the Seminole Maroons used swamps and thick pine forests to attack White invaders like Colonel Smith’s forces in Florida and when they ambushed Captain John Williams’ detachment of U.S. marines at Twelve-Mile Swamp on September 12, 1812. They also used swamps, creeks, and thick forests surrounding Negro Fort to prevent American advances. When

24 Governor Hunter to Duke of Newcastle, October 20, 1733, CSP, 40:222; Hunter to Lords Commissioners, September 20, 1732, CO 137/20, 104; Captain Lambe’s Journal, September 22, 1732, CO 137/20, 112-114; Lennox Honychurch, In the forests of freedom: The Fighting Maroons of Dominica (London: Papillote Press, 2017), 88; Hoogbergen, 52; Porter, “Annexation Plot,” 17; Niles Weekly Register, January 16, 1819.
the first U.S. troops did approach the Black bastion, the Seminole Maroons ambushed them on their approach and then retreated to safety within the Fort’s walls. Thus it was clear that throughout the Gulf Coast borderlands Maroon War, Seminole Maroons used terrain features much like other Maroons in the Atlantic.

Maroon fighting in the Gulf Coast borderlands intensified in 1812, which marked the start of the Maroon war. Patriot ambitions in Florida could be traced back to 1810 with the development of the Patriot War, when the Patriots, planters turned rebels who resented Spanish authority in Florida and who feared Spanish cession of Florida to France, first conspired against the Spanish crown in Baton Rouge. Early plans to attack Spanish garrisons in East and West Florida were generally abandoned; however, former governor of Georgia General George Mathews became involved in the conspiracy, and he refused to give up on opportunities to seize East and West Florida for U.S. annexation. By March 12, 1812 Mathews had mustered enough fighters, along with U.S. Army gunboats, to invade East Florida and Patriot forces captured Fernandina and Amelia Islands, and laid siege to St. Augustine by the end of the month. War for the Maroons thus began in 1812 with the invasion. The Patriots destroyed several plantations in the area, razed crops, and released livestock. By May the Spanish counterattacked and by June Spanish reinforcements arrived. That same month the United States declared war on Great Britain, a Spanish ally, thus linking the Patriot War to the larger War of 1812. By September the
Spanish successfully broke the siege of St. Augustine. Notwithstanding Patriot ambitions for more land in Florida, Maroons were heavily involved in the fighting and from American planter perspectives in the area; Seminole Maroons were a significant threat and were key actors during the Patriot campaign.26

Though fugitive slaves poured into Florida in the aftermath of the American Revolution, hostilities between them and their former owners remained relatively unremarkable for several decades. Evidence points to the slaves being part of frontier conflicts against Whites in the Southeast during the Early Republic period, but significant and sustained violence between slaves and planters was somewhat limited. Slave flight from Georgia to Spanish Florida remained constant for decades, but Maroons also had to be cautious that the Spanish might comply with Pinckney’s Treaty in 1795 in which the Spanish vowed to help protect Americans from Indian attacks. Despite ostensible Spanish support, the growing Maroon population in Florida, along with their Indian allies presented a greater challenge to increasing American concerns of tranquility on the border, and expansion into Florida over the turn of the century. Georgians recognized that the state was not well defended against potential enemy attacks, while Maroons in Florida could incite a slave insurrection that might destroy American planter prosperity in Georgia. Governor Mitchell complained that the Spanish had armed too many Black men and runaway slaves, and that if they “‘suffered to remain in the province, our

The southern country will soon be in a state of insurrection.’” General Mathews even hoped that the Seminoles would invade Georgia on behalf of the Spanish government at St. Augustine, as it would “‘afford a desirable pretext for the Georgians to penetrate their country, and Break up a Negroe Town: an important Evil growing under their patronage.’” Rumors also spread among the Patriots that the Maroons were taking up arms with the British and Spanish to attack the Patriots. Lieutenant Colonel Smith even believed that the English would send a detachment of Black troops to occupy East Florida and stop Patriot advances. When the Patriots finally invaded in 1812 to take over East Florida, defeating the Indians and hundreds of Black slaves in the territory was critical for their conquest. Thus the goal to destroy Maroon settlements was part of the decision to invade Florida and go to war with the Seminoles. Colonel Newnan’s account of the expedition in 1812 also made these objectives clear, as well as how central Maroons were in the fighting, calling them the “best soldiers.”

Indeed, the Maroon soldiers on the border had wreaked havoc on the Patriots in 1812. Even before Newnan’s expedition, Seminole Indians and Maroons made frequent raids in Florida and Georgia and attacked Patriot plantations. On July 25, 1812 they raided near the St. Johns River and killed eight or nine settlers before capturing a large amount of plantation slaves to add to their community. That same month a Black man from St. Augustine visited the Seminole

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Maroons at Alachua and encouraged them to fight harder against the Patriots or else they risked losing land and becoming enslaved. His encouragement potentially influenced more attacks. In August Archibald Clarke reported that the Seminoles killed two Patriots in one skirmish, and on the same day they attacked L. Kingley’s plantation, killing three plantation slaves but also “carrying off” twenty-nine more. These attacks galvanized the support of 120 volunteers from St. Mary’s to join Newnan’s expedition. Combat seemed unavoidable, and on September 12, two dozen Seminole Maroons, along with free Black militiamen under a leader named Lieutenant Prince ambushed Captain John Williams’ detachment of U.S. marines at Twelve-Mile Swamp near St. Augustine and killed several, including Williams. One intelligence report from Newnan’s forces noted that there was “serious alarm” as a “consequence of the conduct of the blacks” near St. Augustine. In August, Lt. Col. Smith reported that “the blacks assisted by the Indians have become very daring,” and that the forces he sent out after them were always “unsuccessful.” The Maroons were clearly still strong in northern Florida even after Newnan’s expedition. They knew what was at stake if they were defeated.28

Continued Maroon attacks instilled fear in planters along the border. In September near St. Augustine, Maroons and Natives killed at least ten Patriots under the command of Smith. In another case, after Patriots destroyed Maroon farms near St. Augustine, they also threatened to re-enslave Maroons living there who were once slaves in Georgia. This was the case for Thomas Primus and his wife and children, who sought to avoid being turned over to Primus’ former

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owner Lucia Braddock Fitzgerald. Benjamin Hawkins informed Governor Mitchell about the apprehension of fugitive slaves later in December 1812, indicating too that some were captured while attempting to reach Seminole Indian towns. Hawkins had also reported earlier to Judge Tomlin that the Seminoles of Alachua had “a great number of negroes,” including a handful of former slaves belonging to Patriot owners. But many were not captured and runaway enslaved people continued to reach Maroon villages and take part in Maroon attacks. These attacks provoked fear of slave insurrection in 1812 and 1813, and Creek Chief and Major William McIntosh complained to Secretary of State James Monroe that Patriot slaves were “excited to rebel” and that “an army of Negroes raked up in this country” would “bring about a revolt of the Black population of the United States.” By the end of the year volunteer Willie Blount reiterated these concerns to William Eustis that there was “‘disaffection among the blacks, and incitement ‘to commit murder and depredations.’” In early 1813 several plantation slaves had deserted their masters near the border and fled to St. Augustine via the St. Johns River. 29 Maroons could hardly have failed to sense the growing fear among White planters and the threat they posed to the slave system in the region.

By spring 1813, Maroons in northern East Florida continued to attack Patriot fighters and raided plantations along the Georgia border. Buckner Harris, the President of the Georgia Legislative Council, complained to Governor Mitchell that American planters on the Florida border were still exposed “to the menaces of free negroes and the slaves” that the Spanish protected. Indians and the Seminole Maroons still attacked Patriot fighters, and Buckner appealed to Mitchell to loan the Patriots money to enable them to defend themselves against the Maroons, who had “the weapons of death placed in their hands for the destruction of the patriots.” Underscoring how central the runaway slaves were in the fighting, Spanish planters threatened to reinvigorate the long-held Spanish policy that made Florida a safe haven for British slaves from Georgia. The threat came after a Patriot expedition in East Florida in November 1813 in which Patriot leader Charles Harris burned several Spanish plantations and stole several slaves. Jose Hibberson reminded Harris that if the Spanish retaliated, “half of the negroes of your sea coast” would cross the St. Mary’s River into Florida and supplement the existing Maroon population there. Even without Spanish help, by the end of the month Georgia slaves fled to East Florida en masse to join the burgeoning Maroon population there. The Maroons were gaining momentum in Florida and plantation slaves sensed it too. If they kept up the pressure, they might possibly stop American expansion of slavery into Florida.30

30 Buckner Harris to David Mitchell, May 24, 1813, in “East Florida Documents” The Georgia Historical Quarterly 13, no. 2 (June 1929): 154-155; Jose Hibberson to Charles Harris, November 19, 1813, in “East Florida Documents” The Georgia Historical Quarterly 13, no. 2 (June 1929): 156-157; Charles Harris to Governor Peter Early, November 29, 1813, in “East Florida Documents” The Georgia Historical Quarterly 13, no. 2 (June 1929): 158.
Meanwhile, to the west in Mississippi Territory another group of Maroons fought U.S. soldiers from 1813 to 1814 in a conflict known as the Creek War. While also a civil war among the Creeks, American planter expansion onto Creek lands along the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers sparked Native-White hostilities. Like the Patriot War, the fighting spilled into the larger

**Map 16**: Map of Patriot Settlements and Seminole Towns

*Source: Chris Monaco, “Fort Mitchell and the Settlement of the Alachua County.” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (Summer 2000): 4.*
War of 1812, and Americans believed that both the British and Spanish were advising and arming Creeks and runaway slaves to attack U.S. outposts. Runaway slaves, mostly from Georgia, had both found refuge among the Creeks and had been enslaved by others in the area for decades. Still others lived in their own camps independently in Creek territory. Initially these Maroons maintained separate communities along the Apalachicola River and further south in Florida. There were minor skirmishes and frontier battles throughout 1812 and 1813, but the fighting escalated when Creeks and their Black allies attacked Major Daniel Beasley and a contingency of roughly 120 militiamen at Fort Mims on August 30, 1813. \(^{31}\)

The attack at Fort Mims sparked widespread outrage and launched a wave of American reprisals against settlements in the Alabama and Tombigbee River watersheds. The American attack on the Creek town Echanachaca was part of this reprisal campaign. When soldiers surveyed the damage after the battle, they found letters from Spanish Governor of West Florida Mateo González Manrique congratulating the Creeks and the Maroons on the massacre of Fort Mims. The correspondence eliminated any doubts that the Maroons in Spanish Florida were involved in the conflict in Alabama. It also reiterated to the Americans how serious a threat fugitive slaves were to their settlements in the region. Creek Indians posed a legitimate fear for Whites living near the Tombigbee and Alabama Rivers in 1813 too, but Black Maroons were also involved in the fighting, and targeted White plantation owners. The Maroon-Creek alliance

in the area prompted some planters to flee and others to remove their slaves from the region altogether, fearing that they might join the Maroons and destroy the planters. Planter Thomas Powell reportedly took his slaves from the Alabama and Tombigbee settlements in the summer of 1813 because of this fear. By November 1813 U.S. commanders near the Alabama River noted that Major Thomas Hinds had killed several Indians and Black Maroons in the skirmishing, and took several other runaway slaves as prisoners.  

Map 17: Map of the Creek War.

Source: Creek War, Educational Technology Clearinghouse, University of South Florida, 2009. Original in Robert Labberton, New Historical Atlas and General History (New York: Townsend MacCoun, 1886), plate LXVIII.

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The geographical separation of these Maroon groups involved in the Gulf Coast Borderlands War resembled Maroon warfare elsewhere in the Atlantic. Although the leaders of the Leeward and Windward Maroons in Jamaica may have been family members, the two groups lived on different sides of the island during the First Maroon War in the 1730s. Other smaller Maroon groups not affiliated with the Leewards or Windwards were also engaged in the First Maroon War. Similarly, there were at least three independent Maroon groups who fought in the Boni Maroon War in Suriname at the end of the eighteenth century. There were also several different Maroon camps, each with their own leader, during the First Maroon War in Dominica in 1785 as well. Despite their geographical and political separation in each region, Maroons in these wars shared the same goals: to protect Maroon autonomy and stop White encroachment. To this same end, Maroons who first lived with the Creeks or in Mississippi Territory during the Creek War demonstrated that they shared the same objectives as those who lived further east and south in Florida. As they became enmeshed with the War of 1812, some of these Maroons also fled to Florida, where they joined existing Maroon groups or helped build Prospect Bluff. Still others probably became slaves to Lower Creek Indians who sided with Americans.  

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Map 18: Gulf Coast Maroon Settlements, Movements, and Battles, 1812-1823

Source: Adapted by the author from Environmental Systems Research Institute, ArcGIS Online.

Maroons found refuge in this western part of the borderlands, and they had the support of the Spanish in Florida and some Creeks in the region. Other campaigns against the Seminoles and Seminole Maroons in Florida in 1813 revealed how large the growing Maroon population was becoming. One expedition documented that American soldiers burned 386 houses and nearly 2,000 bushels of corn, and that they destroyed hundreds of livestock animals. The Maroon population had swelled so much that Governor Mitchell wrote to Secretary of State James Monroe that the Maroons threatened to incite a rebellion among plantation slaves in the United
States. Additional military force was needed to stop them, as they now took up arms and supplies from both British and Spanish officials.\textsuperscript{34}

American raids on Creek and Seminole villages pushed more fugitive slaves and their Indian allies further south to the Gulf Coast and in the hands of British Lieutenant Colonel Edward Nicolls, where they became even more intertwined with imperial warfare during the War of 1812. Nicolls continuously appealed to the Creeks and Black slaves in the area that the Americans had treated them unfairly with the treaty at Fort Jackson, in which the Creeks ceded a large swath of land to the United States to end the Creek War. Nicolls especially appealed to Creek anger involving the cession, and he welcomed them and runaway slaves to a post along the Apalachicola River, where he was building what would become known as Negro Fort to American planters and soldiers. Nicolls also appealed to Black slaves, whom he promised would be free and would receive land if they enlisted with him. As they fled to his ranks, he proclaimed “you Men of Colour...you are truly [heroes?] for you have dared to be free/exert yourselves to the utmost...you will unrivet the Chains of Thousands of your Colour now lingering in Bonds.” Nicolls also reiterated that though military service would be hard, that it would be temporary, and that the Maroon soldiers would “have the comforts of enjoying rational liberty, soldier property with the rights of a British Man.” Enslaved people’s responses to Nicolls’ proclamations and emancipation offers made clear that the Maroons in the Gulf Coast borderlands were fighting for freedom during the conflict in a way that was divorced from White concerns of empire. Using military violence and military service were key principles for

\textsuperscript{34} Mulroy, \textit{Freedom on the Border}, 13; David Mitchell to James Monroe, January 1813, as quoted in Saunt, 245.
plantation slaves and Maroons in the area to resist chattel slavery. Before Nicolls eventually evacuated the continent and left the Maroons, he issued discharge papers that reiterated their freedom. Those who evacuated to the Bahamas and their descendants would also place great emphasis on these papers to show their free status within the British Empire.\(^{35}\)

Lt. Col. Nicolls originally arrived at Fort San Carlos de Barrancas in Pensacola in 1814, bringing only about sixty men and a few artillery pieces to help protect Spanish colonists there from American invasion. Recruiting the Indians and Seminole Maroons would help Nicolls augment his small fighting force, and under Nicolls’ command the multiracial group formed the Third Battalion of Royal Colonial Marines. The force would also help the British Army prevent American expansion. Vice Admiral Alexander Inglis Cochrane reiterated these strategic points in a letter to the Indian leaders in July 1814 in which he expressed a desire to “engage to arm” any warriors the Chiefs might provide. He also told them to “encourage also by every means the emigration of Negroes from Georgia and the Carolinas.” In addition to fugitive Black slaves, almost 800 Creek Indians joined Nicolls, and they were eager to have a strong ally help them fight their common American enemy. Nicolls was eager to take them on as he quickly offered a proclamation to provide security to anyone who would join him or for those who would not resist his presence in the area. White Americans understood Nicolls’ proclamations in Pensacola to be invitations for runaway slaves, Native Americans, pirates, and “all traitors to their country” to wage war against the United States. By October approximately 300 Black slaves had fled to Nicolls including women and children who absconded on barges and canoes in Pensacola Bay.

Importantly, the British Indian allies assisted in creating confusion to help enslaved people sneak away. Approximately 200 Indian warriors also fought to stop the American pursuit across the Perdido River.\(^{36}\)

Though the British and their Indian and Black allies would suffer a defeat in the hands of American soldiers north of Pensacola in 1814, their expedition did succeed in razing several American plantations, destroying scores of livestock and crops, and in recruiting many more plantation slaves along the way who joined on the retreat back to Pensacola. Others followed British Captain George Woodbine and Nicolls from the west near Mobile Bay, as they and their Indian allies plundered plantations and readily took on new enslaved recruits, livestock, gunpowder, and provisions. Though Nicolls and Woodbine recruited American slaves to assist the Spanish in defending Florida from U.S. invasion, they also readily took on Black slaves who ran away from Spanish planters in the area as well. If any planters protested, Woodbine ordered his men to “shoot at anyone who should attempt to take them” as the slaves departed with British soldiers and Indian warriors from the wharf in Pensacola Bay.\(^{37}\)

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\(^{37}\) Inhabitants of Pensacola to Governor of West Florida, March 1815, Greenslade Papers, 5:1, PKY; Deposition of Mayor in Relation to Deportation of Slaves in Pensacola 1854, Greenslade Papers, 2:2, PKY; File of Witnesses, Juan Galguera, Cruzat Papers, 2:8, PKY;

Source: UK National Archives, CO 700/24.

If the British officers could not entice slaves themselves with emancipation after six months of military service, it was incredibly easy for enslaved people to simply walk to the

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Edmund Doyle to John Innerarity, June 5, 1817, Greenslade Papers, 2:4, PKY; File of Witnesses, Peter Gilchrist, Cruzat Papers, 2:8, PKY; File of Witnesses, Joseph Urcullo, Cruzat Papers, 2:8, PKY; File of Witnesses, Antonio Collins, Cruzat Papers 2:8, PKY.
British garrison at Pensacola before they could be taken to Prospect Bluff on the Apalachicola River. Others simply absconded on small watercraft overnight and crossed Pensacola Bay to reach their new ally. The chaos that the fighting caused in the bay also made it easy for slaves to escape from their owners to join their British ally. At least a hundred more enslaved people joined Woodbine and Nicolls in Pensacola in this way, while many more fled to the British officers once rumors spread that General Jackson was marching en route to destroy the British garrison there. Pensacola slave owners enumerated 136 slaves who joined the British and who were still at Prospect Bluff in spring 1815, including thirty-eight of John Forbes’ slaves. Their list made clear that Black women and children became involved in the war and that joining the Seminole Maroon community was often a family endeavor. Several enslaved mothers belonging to Forbes fled with their young children, including Polly and her three children of unknown ages. Likewise, another enslaved woman named Nelly belonging to Eugenio Sierra fled with her daughter, while Saly of Pedro Senal departed with her two sons. Though not entirely clear if they were actually partners, at least six family groups with at least eleven children fled from Pensacola to become Maroons further east in Florida. Much like the women and children who joined the Ethiopian Regiment decades later, the Age of Revolution opened military service and the militarization of resistance to more enslaved women and children. 38

Residents in Pensacola claimed that two-thirds of their slave population had fled to join the growing Maroon body in 1814 and 1815, including women and children. Edmund Doyle also

38 Narrative of the Operations of the British in the Floridas, 1815, Cruzat Papers, 2:8, PKY; File of Witnesses, Pedro Suarez, Cruzat Papers, 2:8, PKY; File of Witnesses, Don Pedro and Don Joseph Noriega, Cruzat Papers, 2:8, PKY; Pintado to Soto April 29,1815, and Petition of Slave Owners from Pensacola May 6, 1815, Papeles de Cuba, PC File 1796 reel 117, 586-624, PKY.
noted to British Captain R.C. Spencer that Woodbine arrived at Prospect Bluff with at least twenty slaves of both sexes, indicating that couples ran away together. The planters’ petition also documented how some enslaved families fled together. Men and women fled to them separately as well, but couples were also listed among those who ran to the Seminole Maroons. Like Polly and Saly, Elize fled with her two children, and two more enslaved women named Mary and Sophy ran with their sons, one named Sam of an unknown age. At least forty-five of John Innerarity’s slaves had joined the Maroons by 1814, including several enslaved families who escaped to Prospect Bluff like Billy and his wife Lally with their four children Cressy, Flora Beck, Cynthia, and Nero. Stephen and his wife Cynthia also joined the Seminole Maroons together as well. At least ten women of unknown ages were among the group of Maroons at Prospect Bluff whom British Captain Robert Henry returned to Spanish Lieutenant José Urcullo as the British prepared to evacuate North America in 1815. Henry’s decision to return the women was peculiar as it pertained to the Maroon community at Prospect Bluff. They represented less than a tenth of the fighters still there, and though Henry claimed that he could not identify all of the Spanish slaves whom Urcullo pursued until Colonel Nicolls returned to the garrison, he also feared that an attempt to return all of the fugitives would produce a Maroon uprising against British soldiers, whom the Maroons significantly outnumbered. Henry also asked Maroons who would return, and those who volunteered probably at least knew the Spanish had little power against the British to take them. Remarkably Mary, Elize, and Sally were among those who returned with Urcullo, though it is unclear if their children came back with them. Perhaps they had been separated from their children and no longer wished to continue fighting. Perhaps they returned as a sacrifice to protect their family members who were still living in refuge. Perhaps
their family members had died in what was by all accounts a bloody war. British officers like Nicolls had also encouraged them to return as they prepared to evacuate, reiterating that it would be better to return than allow Indians to capture them for bounties and rewards. In any case, most who volunteered at first reneged on their offer, and several more disappeared before they could reach their former owners.39

These Maroon families had endured significant hardships in their war of resistance, and some were rewarded as they evacuated North America with the British in 1815. At least forty-two Maroons arrived in Bermuda aboard the Ruby in November, the vast majority of them former slaves to American trader John Forbes from Pensacola. A list of slaves on the ship also indicated that several women and children participated in the Gulf Coast borderlands Maroon War and that they successfully fled to safety as family units. Eight women and eleven children were among those who arrived, representing nearly half of the group on board. Just like soldiers reported finding women and children in Maroon villages during their raids to obliterate them, Maroons fought as families and some evacuated from Florida with family units still intact. Some were fortunate enough to escape death or re-enslavement by migrating to the West Indies. Their

fate was somewhat of an anomaly to most Maroon societies who suffered defeat in the Atlantic. With the exception of the Black Caribs and Trelawney Town Maroons whom the British transported to Honduras and Sierra Leone respectively, most Atlantic Maroons who suffered defeat either died in battle or were re-enslaved and put to work on plantations.\footnote{List of Florida Refugee Negroes on board the \textit{Ruby}, Lockey Collection of Documents Related to the History of Florida, PKY, 1:17; Andrew Evans to J.W. Croker, November 24, 1815, Panton, Leslie, & Company Papers, Microfilm (reel 20), NBL.}

After the British retreat from Pensacola, Captain Woodbine moved to Apalachee and then to St. Augustine by the end of 1814. Though Governor Kindelán informed Woodbine that the neutral Spanish government could not support a campaign against the Americans from Florida, Woodbine nonetheless recruited more plantation slaves in the area, leaving with at least eighty more people in his ranks. Woodbine denied encouraging Spanish plantation slaves to join his ranks, and that he understood Spanish apprehensions that the Maroons might incite slaves to rebel against Spanish owners. But he also reiterated his authority to Kindelán to obtain deserters from the United States in the area to serve British military interests during the war. As he moved west and through several Seminole towns, at least seventy more Black Maroons “belonging” to Chief Bowlegs and other Indians joined him on the Florida-Georgia border.\footnote{Woodbine to Kindelán, December 30, 1814, \textit{ASFR}, 4:493.}

But Woodbine also encouraged Bowlegs to take in more Maroons and to raid American plantations for even more enslaved people. Together, Woodbine and Bowlegs’ campaign to capture more plantation slaves to augment the Seminole Maroon population became a major point of contention for Americans in the borderlands. Benjamin Hawkins even went so far as to order the Upper and Lower Creeks to put an end to the practice. He commanded them to attack
and kill all White and Black people in arms, and take all Whites “encouraging the blacks to mischief” as prisoners and bring them to him. If anyone resisted, Hawkins wanted the Creeks to kill them. Hawkins even tried to turn the Creeks by stating that the Seminoles and Maroons with Woodbine were stealing cattle intended as Creek provisions outlined in the Treaty at Fort Jackson. If these were not strong enough incentives, Hawkins informed the Creeks that they would be paid bounties of fifty dollars for each Maroon captured who had a White owner, and that they could keep any Maroon without an owner. Despite these commands, the Maroon population continued to grow. Far to the west, as the British evacuated Louisiana in 1815 they also moved scores of plantation slaves east into Florida as well, adding even more fugitives to the burgeoning Florida Maroon population. By the end of the year, there were an estimated 2,000 fugitive slave soldiers in central Florida. Nicolls’ and Woodbine’s recruitment of fugitive slaves from New Orleans to St. Augustine attested to how central the Maroons were in the fighting in that region in 1814 and early 1815 and that the Maroons were critical actors in the southern campaigns during the War of 1812.42

Enslaved people who ran to Nicolls and to existing Maroon groups became Maroons themselves by the time the War of 1812 ended. Most scholars follow Gabriel Debien’s distinction between two types of Maroons: grand and petit. The former included enslaved people breaking from their owners to live free in refuge with the intention of not returning. They created powerful communal bands and wreaked havoc on planters. The latter included enslaved people who deserted from plantations for short periods of time as another form of protest. Enslaved

42 Enclosure to Tustunnoggee Hopoie and Tustunnuggee Thlucco in Hawkins to Andrew Jackson, August 30, 1814, in Grant, Letters, Journals and Writings of Benjamin Hawkins, 2: 694; Perkins, Historical Sketches of the United States, 98.
people who revolted from their owners to fight for Nicolls and the Maroons at Prospect Bluff certainly demonstrated that they had no intention of returning, and that they were participating in grand marronage. As they ran away and fought together they began to form their own community. Over time they joined other groups of Maroons in Florida and they formed even more powerful communities near St. Augustine, the Suwannee River, and at Prospect Bluff. With British evacuation by the end of the War of 1812, only Maroons and some Creeks and Seminoles were left in these communities.  

Giving Maroon soldiers arms had become a low-risk British strategy to challenge American expansion into the Gulf Coast Region, which was also part of the larger British strategy to entice American plantation slaves to leave their owners throughout the continent. Doing so served British imperial interests in two ways: it reduced manpower and sowed unrest on the domestic front in the United States, and it could also be claimed as a small victory for the growing abolitionist movement in Britain. By April 2, 1814 Vice Admiral Cochrane proclaimed that anyone who wanted to emigrate from the United States would be taken on by British ships and would be sent to other British possessions as free settlers. Plantation slaves near the Florida border eagerly accepted the offer and ran to British lines in hopes of freedom. The British were happy to oblige and take them in their lines. The British were also content with taking in Spanish fugitives in Florida, and they did little to return or recapture them despite Spanish requests.

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44 Alexander Inglis Cochrane Proclamation, April 2, 1814 Bermuda. Lockey Collection, 16:1, PKY; Manrique to Cochrane January 25, 1815, and Cochrane to Manrique, February 10,1815, Cruzat Papers, 2:7, PKY; John Greves to John Innerarity, May 5, 1815, Cruzat Papers, 2:7, PKY; Narrative of the Operations of the British in the Floridas, 1815, Cruzat Papers, 2:8,
This was neither the first nor the last time in which Maroons allied with one imperial
time to fight another in the Atlantic. When two imperial powers vied for control in a
power to fight another in the Atlantic world, it enhanced Maroon diplomatic leverage and military
borderlands area in the Atlantic world, it enhanced Maroon diplomatic leverage and military
position in the area. Perhaps the first time Maroons collaborated with Europeans at their rivals’
expense occurred in 1571 when they helped British privateer Sir Francis Drake invade the
Isthmus of Panama. Maroons had been in hiding from their Spanish owners, and they happily led
Drake and his men toward Spanish settlements to attack them. They were happy to “wreak their
wrongs on the Spaniards.” Their expertise in guerrilla warfare and their knowledge of the terrain
in Panama was of great value to Drake, who wrote highly of them. Conversely in Jamaica,
Maroons were happy to ally with the Spanish against the British shortly after the British
conquest of the island in 1655 and for several decades after. There were reports as late as the
First Maroon War in the 1730s that the Spanish were still supplying Maroons with arms and
ammunition from Cuba as Maroons continued to fight British planters.  

Two centuries after Drake, after the British annexed St. Vincent from the French in 1763,
the Black Caribs sought the assistance of French officials in nearby Martinique and St. Lucia.

PKY; Cochrane to Henry Bathurst, February 27, 1816, Lockey Collection 17:1, PKY; Cochrane
to Lambert, February 17, 1815, Admiralty Office, National Archives [hereafter ADM] ADM
1/508, 24.

John Hampden ed. *Francis Drake Privateer: Contemporary Narratives and Documents*
(Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1972), 72, 82; James Knight, “The Natural, Moral,
and Political History of Jamaica, and the Territories thereon depending, in America, from the
first discovery of the island by Christopher Columbus to the year 1746. By a Gentle-man, who
resided above 20 years in Jamaica,” British Library [Hereafter BL] BL, Additional Manuscript
12419, 47; Knight, “The Natural, Moral and Political History of Jamaica, and the territories
thereon depending, from the earliest account of time to the year 1742,” BL, ADD. MSS. 12415,
51, 303.
The first attempt at a peace treaty with the strong Maroons was thwarted when the Black Caribs met with the French Governor of Martinique, who suggested that they reject it. Several years later in 1769 the British also intercepted Maroons at sea, as they attempted to bring back French supplies of firearms and kegs of ammunition. The Franco-Maroon alliance lasted for more than a decade, as the Black Caribs allowed French spies on the island to reconnoiter in the 1770s and fought with them during a British invasion in 1780. During the same period the French had also made peace with the Boni Maroons in Suriname, and they refused to let the neighboring Dutch venture into French Guiana and lead military expeditions against them. While there is no evidence that the French intervened with the Trelawney Town Maroons in Jamaica at the outbreak of the Second Maroon War in 1795, Jamaican officials feared that French officials were trying to help them, attesting to the fact that European colonists knew it was always a potential problem.46

Similarly, Europeans relied on Maroons to help suppress the Haitian Revolution. While the role of Maroons in the revolution is still hotly contested, it is clear that some Maroon bands on the island did partake in the fighting and some for various White allies. While insurgent Maroon camps sprouted once the revolution started, republicans sometimes struggled to recruit them on their side as some preferred to stay on the periphery and work White diplomacy and politics to their advantage. The Dokos Maroons attacked plantations belonging to Gens de Couleur in 1793 after White encouragement, and they also fought for Spanish and Napoleonic

46 Young, An Account of the Black Charaibs, 48, 60, 105, 106; Philadelphia Daily Evening Advertiser, April 13, 1795, (John Frenno); Charleston City Gazette, august 23, 1796, (Peter Freneau and Seth Paine); Hoogbergen, 105, 116; Dallas, The History of the Maroons, 1:168; Lt. Gov. Morris to Earl of Dartmouth, May 24, 1775, CO 101/18, 141, 142.
forces throughout the war. Spanish authorities in Santo Domingo armed and supplied Naranjo and Le Maniel Maroons on the border of St. Domingue to encourage French plantation slaves to run away. Francophobia and property rights on the island also encouraged the Spanish to support the Maroons as a way to weaken the French on the other side of the island.47

Notwithstanding the fact that Seminole Maroons took up arms for European powers similar to how Maroons participated in imperial warfare elsewhere in the Atlantic, Maroons still survived when their imperial allies left them, and their war was not over with the fall of British power in Florida. Even though most British soldiers departed the Gulf Coast, they left arms and ammunition with the Seminole Maroons, along with Negro Fort on the Apalachicola River. In spite of American petitions to restore runaway slaves who joined the Maroon community via British assistance during the fighting, it had become clear in 1815 that British officers had no intention of doing so. Indeed, Secretary of War William Crawford informed General Jackson that the Maroon presence at Negro Fort had gotten stronger by the end of March 1815, and Benjamin Hawkins suspected that the Maroon population at Prospect Bluff would even grow over the summer. Inside and around the Fort, the Maroons were seemingly doing very well too. Aside from the supplies the British left, they farmed crops and were not in want of food. Jackson himself informed Governor Zuñiga that Prospect Bluff had been getting stronger and that the Maroons there threatened the peace on the border. Though the British had left, Americans

complained that the Spanish in Florida were doing little to stop the Maroons or stop plantation
slaves from Georgia from adding to their community. By February 1816, at least two dozen more
Black slaves from Georgia crossed the border and fled to Prospect Bluff, which Americans
estimated held more than 300 Maroons by then. They knew they needed to maintain pressure on
American planters if they were to keep their freedom, and they remained a significant threat in

Further east near Jacksonville, Maroons had “openly declared their Independence,” while
more runaways found refuge among the Indians to such a scale that Major General John Floyd
thought their presence demanded “the adoption, of decisive, and energetic measures” to stop
more slave flight. Floyd believed that the Maroon presence encouraged emancipation, and with
the help of foreign enemies, the “banditti” were capable of jeopardizing “the tranquility of our
frontier,” let alone destroying property and land value. By then, American leaders like Andrew
Jackson realized that the situation was no longer tenable and that the Maroons and their Indian
allies were forcing a confrontation. Jackson opined to General Edmund Gaines in spring 1816
that if Prospect Bluff harbored fugitive slaves from Georgia, and that if the Maroons there
induced more slaves to desert their American owners, that “the fort must be destroyed.” Such
was the threat of Prospect Bluff to American planters that Crawford believed it would continue
to encourage plantation slaves to flee, and “excite irritations” among the “neighbouring settlements” that “may ultimately endanger the peace of the nation.” The Maroons at Prospect Bluff had become a national security issue. Months later, United States forces invaded Florida once again.  

It is unlikely that the Maroons in Florida wished to provoke a large-scale U.S. invasion into their territory. Raiding plantations for more supplies and more recruits was part of the Maroon survival strategy, as was the case with Maroon communities elsewhere in the Atlantic world, whose members also found themselves at war with colonial forces when they did so. Perhaps the Maroons at Prospect Bluff and in northern Florida thought they were strong enough or had enough support from their Spanish allies to withstand such an attack. Perhaps they thought that if they projected strength, they could avoid a large-scale U.S. invasion. But the withdrawal of one major imperial power in the region weakened their position, and when the Spanish proved unwilling to prevent a U.S. invasion, their position weakened still further. Jackson was well-aware of these new circumstances when he led United States forces into Florida once again in pursuit of the Maroon menace.  

By July 1816, Maroons continued to stay within their stronghold on the Apalachicola River, and they continued to prepare for armed conflict in case American soldiers would attack. They were effective and experienced soldiers after years of fighting, and they knew they could not let their guard down. Later that month, General Edmund Gaines ordered Colonel Duncan

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49 John Floyd to David Brydie Mitchell, April 12, 1816, Digital Library of Georgia, http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu; Andrew Jackson to Edmund Gaines, April 8, 1816, in Bassett, Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, 2:239; William Crawford to Andrew Jackson, March 15, 1816, in Bassett, ed. Correspondence of Andrew Jackson, 2:236.
Lamont Clinch to approach Prospect Bluff from the north from nearby Fort Scott to undermine Maroon power in the area. Prospect Bluff also blocked U.S. supply lines to Fort Scott on the Flint River, and it was important to destroy the fort if U.S. military operations in the area were to be successful. Clinch embarked with a force of 116 White soldiers, while Major McIntosh and another 150 Creek fighters joined Clinch on the approach. From the south, sailing master J. Loomis and his men reached the mouth of the Apalachicola with two gunboats by July 10 to resupply Clinch in preparation for the attack. Loomis sent a water party on shore near the Fort seven days later, but forty Maroons and Indians from the fort ambushed them and killed five. The Maroons also made one sailor a prisoner. The detachment retreated after the attack, and Clinch did not arrive close to Prospect Bluff until two o’clock in the morning on July 20, but he delayed the assault since he believed the final approach was difficult. Indeed, the hundreds of Maroons there were protected by swamps and thick pine forests on their flanks, while they were also armed with several heavy artillery pieces and howitzers. The Maroon soldiers inside also reportedly held 500 rifles, 800 pistols, 500 swords, and hundreds of pounds of powder. Throughout the Atlantic, Maroons used mountainous terrain, thick forests, and expansive swamps to defend themselves, and the Maroons at Prospect Bluff were no exception. They too used the natural terrain to their advantage and to form a staunch defensive position. Swamps and thick forests prevented the American attackers from placing their own field artillery in position to counter the Maroons’ twenty-four inch pounders, and the Americans could only really approach the fort by sailing upriver on the Apalachicola in the face of Maroon artillery.  

The Maroons had also promised Lt. Col. Nicolls to prevent any White person from passing the river, which ensured a fiery defense. A little later, Clinch and McIntosh finally met Garçon who was Nicolls’ successor and the Black leader at Prospect Bluff in late July. Clinch was astonished at how Garçon treated him and his soldiers. Far from obsequious, Garçon reportedly chastised the Americans and demanded that they and their Creek allies surrender. His Maroons also waved the British Flag at the fort in defiance of American and Spanish masters. Surgeon Marcus G. Buck and other U.S. soldiers later recalled that the Maroons refused peace terms and that they wished to fight. Surrendering was apparently not an option, likely because the Maroons suspected it would lead to their re-enslavement. U.S. soldiers were convinced that the Maroons were determined to fight to the death. The Maroons started receiving American artillery fire in the early morning of July 27. As the fighting ensued, one lucky American cannon shot hit the fort’s magazine, detonating its stores of gunpowder and ammunition and causing a massive explosion. Disaster struck in an instant. The blast killed most of the soldiers inside, maiming almost everyone who survived. Now that the fort was thoroughly destroyed, Clinch’s men moved in to sweep the area and assess the damage. His Creek allies found Garçon, who had survived the inferno, but they promptly executed him. The battle was over.  

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51 Kenneth Wiggins Porter, unpublished manuscript “Freedom Over Me,” Porter Papers, Schomburg Center, New York Public Library, 23:5; Colonel Duncan Clinch to Colonel Butler, August 2, 1816, in James Grant Forbes, Sketches, Historical and Topographical, of the Floridas: More Particularly of East Florida (New York: C.S. Van Winkle, 1821), 200-203; Niles Weekly Register, August 31, 1816; Niles Weekly Register, September 14, 1816; Thompson Smith, Letter from the Secretary of the Navy, Transmitting, in Obedience to a Resolution of the House of Representatives, of the Twenty-Sixth Ultimo, Sundry Documents Relating to the Destruction of the Negro Fort in East Florida, in the Month of July, 1816 (Washington DC: E. De Krafft,
The destruction of Prospect Bluff was a disaster for the Maroons. Approximately 200 people died, while seventy more were seriously maimed. But some escaped, and their war was not yet over. Some fled further south toward Tampa Bay and joined an existing Maroon community there known as Angola, until its destruction in 1821. Others scattered elsewhere in Florida and were aided by British agents including Captain Woodbine. Still others fled to the Seminole Indian towns along the Suwanee River and linked up with British traders George Arbuthnot and Robert Ambrister. They still posed a threat to American planters, and Governor Mitchell expressed his concern to President James Madison about what might be done to protect Georgians. Mitchell successfully convinced the Madison administration that the Maroons were still dangerous, and Madison and Secretary of War John Calhoun relayed back that instructions would be given immediately to move an armed force to the southern border to “keep the hostile Creeks, Seminoles, and Negroes in check.” By February 1817 Woodbine had returned to the Apalachicola River to stir up the Seminole Maroons still in the area, while Arbuthnot and Ambrister enticed both Indian and Black leaders to prepare for war against the Americans, as they continued to trade at the Seminole towns along the Suwanee River in north-central Florida. There was seemingly little military action for a few months after the fort’s destruction, and U.S. soldiers evacuated several frontier forts nearby and on the Georgia border. However, the interlude was very short-lived, and hostilities between Indians, their Maroon allies, and White planters in the area quickly resumed.\(^5^2\)

Maroons feared additional American attacks as they linked up with Seminole and Creek Indians who resisted American expansion. Despite the devastating blow at Prospect Bluff, they still instilled fear among U.S. Americans in the borderlands, especially slave holders. These fears underscored how central Maroons were to the fighting at the onset of the First Seminole War. In Georgia, several former slaves of planter L. Kingsley were among the Maroons at Negro Fort during its destruction, and more than forty of them had fled to the Seminole Maroon towns between the Suwanee River and Tampa afterwards. Similarly, eight to ten of trader Timothy Barnard’s slaves fled to Prospect Bluff, and more had fled to St. Augustine. Other plantation slaves near St. Mary’s also fled to Negro Fort before its destruction, while another forty-nine found refuge with the Seminoles after the fort lay in ruins. In 1817 more than 400 Maroons lived in the area. The defeat at Prospect Bluff seemingly did little to stop Maroon resolve to keep fighting. They simply would not give up.

In spite of the defeat at Prospect Bluff, Maroon refusal to surrender or stop offering asylum to runaway slaves, as well as their continued raids on U.S. plantations still influenced U.S. policy and military strategy in the region. In a speech in the U.S. House of Representatives, Virginia Congressman Charles Fenton Mercer even traced the beginning of the First Seminole

War to the U.S. invasion of East Florida in 1816 and the destruction of Prospect Bluff. Moreover, he believed that the United States could not tolerate enemy Indians harboring Maroons, many of whom had escaped from planters north of the border. Other congressmen proclaimed that military force was needed because the Spanish were assisting runaway slaves from Georgia and were inviting them to insurrection. Even worse, they charged that Ambrister and Arbuthnot were organizing the Maroons to make the “horrors of a savage negro war.” These problems required military intervention.\footnote{Speech of the Honorable Mr. Mercer in the House of Representatives on the Seminole War, January 25, 1819, 10, 16; Annals of Congress, House of Representatives, 15\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session, 836, 1039.}

Edmund Doyle complained to John Innerarity in June 1817 about the plundering of their company’s trading houses and of how fearful he was for his life. Doyle was “surrounded with outlaws & murderers, runaway negroes, all of whom [sic] would put (and expect to do still) me to a cruel death if they dared.” Doyle also reported that less than two weeks later the Maroons living near the Suwanee River would have to be dealt with very soon, and that they were ready to decamp from their position as soon as an American expedition entered the country. Doyle would later send Joseph Perryman as a messenger to the Seminoles near the Suwanee to offer them a pardon and protection for the Black Maroons living among them. But Doyle was also unwilling to send his remaining plantation slaves to Pensacola to safeguard them. He suspected that the minute the opportunity presented itself they would flee to the Seminoles, as had already
happened to one of his female slaves and her brothers Isaac, Steel, and Chester, along with her sister and her children.\textsuperscript{55}

The Indians, with their Maroon allies, prompted yet another U.S. invasion of Spanish Florida. In late December 1817, John Calhoun ordered Jackson to march from Nashville to Fort Scott with 500 regular soldiers, 1,000 militiamen, and 1,800 Creek allies. Jackson’s forces arrived on March 9, 1818 and quickly began attacking the Seminole Maroon towns. He also informed Governor Zuñiga that he had presidential orders to enter Florida to “‘chastise a savage foe who combined with a lawless band of Negro brigands, have for some time past been carrying on a cruel and unprovoked war against the citizens of the United States.’” Other accounts also stipulated that southern planters needed border security against the Maroons in Florida, which in part instigated the U.S. attacks. The hundreds of Maroons now living with Seminole Indians along the Suwanee River continued to raid their former owners, and Jackson had to break up the “hostile collections of Indians and negroes” to maintain border security in the area. Thus it was clear from American planter perspectives that the Seminole War, was as much about eradicating Maroons as it was about removing the Indian threat to Florida and Georgia. The fact that hundreds of Maroons living with the Seminoles on the Suwanee kept up the pressure, seemed to justify U.S. policy, as officials hurried to raise more troops to stop them. Because the Maroons would not stop their raids and attacks on the borderlands, U.S. forces invaded.\textsuperscript{56}

As fighting in 1818 raged on, Americans continued to charge British and Spanish officers with aiding the Maroon enemy. There were rumors that the British might invade Florida with the

\textsuperscript{55} Doyle to John Innerarity, June 17, 1817, Greenslade Papers, 2:4, PKY; Doyle to John Innerarity, July 11, 1817, Greenslade Papers, 2:4, PKY.

\textsuperscript{56} Perkins, 98, 102, 104; John Mahon, 64, 65.
West India Regiments and 14,000 soldiers that would pay bounties for plantation slaves and Maroons who would join them similar to how the Black regiments fought in Florida a few years earlier. Although Nicolls and Woodbine had left, British agents Arbuthnot and Ambrister stayed behind in Florida near the Seminole towns along the Suwanee River and provided the Indians and Maroons with more arms and ammunition to keep fighting. They even helped plan an attack at St. Marks on the Florida Panhandle before American forces could arrive. Frustrated with the inability to quell the Maroons and their Seminole allies, President James Monroe told Congress in 1818 that the First Seminole War was due to the inability of Spain to honor Pickney’s Treaty in 1795 and to protect American vessels from attack. He was also frustrated that Spanish colonists would not stop arming Indians and Maroons in the territory that enabled them to attack American planters to the north. Similarly, John Quincy Adams explained to diplomat George William Erving that Jackson’s campaign in 1818 was geared towards attacking Seminole Indians “and the banditti of negroes combined with them.” An anonymous officer involved in the Seminole Campaign reiterated that these concerns drove the U.S. invasion of Florida during the First Seminole War. Indeed, he proclaimed that “the gauntlet was thron,” and that because British and Spanish authorities in Florida had recruited “disaffected Indians, absconding negroes, and vagabond adventurers” who “continued a predatory warfare on the borders of the U. States,” the United States could not stand by. U.S. forces had to invade.57

General Jackson and the Committee of Military Affairs echoed similar sentiments after Jackson led expeditions into Florida against the Seminole Maroons and captured Arbuthnot and Ambrister. The Committee first declared that Jackson’s decision to invade Florida in 1816 reflected the “necessity” of destroying Maroon towns to protect American planters, while the committee also noted that the conflict ended only after Jackson had captured Pensacola, where the “Indians and fugitive negroes were effectually deprived of all possible means of continuing their depredations, or screening themselves from the arm of justice.” Jackson himself was pleased about the executions of Ambrister and Arbuthnot in 1818 for inciting and supplying enemies of the United States. In his view they were “exciters of this Savage and Negro War,” and he hoped that their punishment for “exciting Negroes & Indians in East Florida to war against the U States” would serve as a deterrent for American rivals in the future. Earlier that year, he made similar claims to Governor of West Florida José Masot that runaway slaves from the United States had found refuge among Creeks and Seminoles living in Spanish-held Florida territory, and that they had all united and had “raised the Tomahawk & in the character of savage arfare have neither regarded sex or age helpless women have been massacred and the cradle crimsoned with the blood of innocence.” Congressmen too went so far as to proclaim that Georgia militiamen “were, in fact suppressing an insurrection of slaves, aided by an Indian force, all assembled and armed for purposes hostile to the country,” and that Arbuthnot and Ambrister were at the head of the rebellion. U.S. forces were needed to quash the rebels.\footnote{\textit{Niles Weekly Register}, January 16, 1819; Andrew Jackson to John C. Calhoun, May 5, 1818, in \textit{The Papers of Andrew Jackson}, 4:198; Jackson to Jose Masot, May 23, 1818, in \textit{The Papers of Andrew Jackson} 4:20;.; Annals of Congress, House of Representatives, 15\textsuperscript{th} congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} session, 1040, 1113.}
Regardless of their alliances with Maroons, Seminole and Creek chiefs also believed that the Maroons played a large part in the reason why the Americans attacked Indians in Florida from 1812 to 1818. General Edmund Gaines complained to Seminole Chief Kenhagee that the Seminoles were malicious and harbored his Black slaves along the Suwanee River in 1817. He promised the Seminoles that if they would let him pass through their territory to attack the Maroons, he would not harm them. Kenhagee responded that he did not harbor any plantation slaves, and that the Black Maroons who fled to the British during the War of 1812 were a matter for “white people to settle.” Chief Bowlegs affirmed Kenhagee’s view in a letter to Governor of St. Augustine José Coppinger, saying that the Americans had attacked him for no reason, as “we have none of their slaves, we have taken none of their property since the Americans made peace
with our good father King George.” Chief Cochean also believed these were matters for Whites to settle, and he refused to fight for them because his nation was “confused” about the proper policy regarding the Maroons. Some Creek Chiefs expressed their grievances and kept on fighting after the fall of Negro Fort in 1816 because they were frustrated with American traders harassing and disturbing their brethren who were living with the Seminole Maroons, while they had also lost a significant amount of supplies and provisions inside Prospect Bluff when it exploded. Others sided with Jackson but still noted that Maroons were critical for their involvement in the fighting. Lower Creek Tustunnuggee Hopoy stated in April 1816 that Agent Hawkins had told him and his warriors to “go down to the fort of the blacks, and take them out of it, and give them to their masters.” By 1818 Chief William McIntosh noted that even after attacking rival Creek factions fighting U.S. forces, he and his warriors continued to march with General Jackson to wipe out the Maroons in the Suwanee villages. It is unclear if Maroon leaders were aware of these diplomatic conversations, although they probably were given their prominence as skilled interpreters during the period. They probably appreciated statements from leaders like Kenhagee and Bowlegs that gave Maroons cover from White ambitions.  

59 Kenneth Wiggins Porter, “Freedom over Me” Porter Papers, Schomburg Center, New York Public Library, 23:5; Edmund Gaines to Kenhagee, 1817, and Kenhagee to Gaines, no date, ASFR 4:586; Forbes to Zuniga, August 11, 1816, Panton, Leslie, & Company Papers, Microfilm (reel 20), NBL; Bowlegs to Don José Coppinger, no date, in Message from the President of the United States, transmitting in pursuance of a resolution of the house of representatives such further information in relation to our affairs with Spain (Washington: E. De Krafft, 1819), 152; Creek Chiefs to Governor Charles Cameron, no date, in Message from the President of the United States, 138; Little Prince to Commander of US Forces in the Indian Nation, April 26, 1816, Panton, Leslie, & Company Papers, Microfilm (reel 20), NBL; William McIntosh to David Brydie Mitchell, April 12, 1818, Digital Library of Georgia, http://galileo.usg.edu.
For their part, the Spanish denied giving any assistance to the Maroons in Florida by that time and that they too feared rebellious Black slaves and Indians living there who threatened the safety of colonists living near Pensacola. Fort St. Marks was also weak due to supply demands that Maroons and Indians put on the commandant there. Perhaps in an attempt to save face with Jackson, Governor Zuñiga informed him that although the Maroons at Apalachicola were legitimate inhabitants of Florida and could become subjects to the Spanish King, Zuñiga declared them “insurgents, or rebels against the authority,” and denounced them for their actions. He also blamed Nicolls and Woodbine for “seducing” plantation slaves to join the Maroons and for assisting them years earlier before the British withdrawal. Zuñiga’s assurances made clear that although both the British and Spanish had assisted the Maroons, or at least neglected to attack them to serve their imperial ambitions against U.S. expansion, the Seminole Maroons also created diplomatic problems for European authorities in Florida, as the Maroons gave the stronger and larger U.S. forces in the region legitimate reasons to invade Spanish territory and drive out Spanish colonists still living there.\textsuperscript{60}

In the end, the Maroons fought hard in a gradual withdrawal south to the Suwanee River, with US American forces hot on their trail, destroying several settlements including Fowl Town. In November 1818, however, the Maroons regrouped and counterattacked. By the end of the month, Maroon, Red Stick Creek, and Seminole warriors attacked an American boat moving slowly down the Apalachicola River that carried forty U.S. soldiers, seven women, and four children. The Black-Indian force ambushed the ship from a swamp, and killed everyone on board.

\textsuperscript{60} A Concise Narrative, 27; Congressman Bassett, \textit{Annals of Congress}, House of Representatives, 15\textsuperscript{th} Congress, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Session, 1109; Mauricio de Zuñiga to Andrew Jackson, May 26, 1818 in \textit{Message from the President of the United States}, 57.
except for four men and one woman. They also attacked five other boats shortly after and inflicted heavy casualties. Additionally, they captured traders William Hambly and Edmund Doyle to punish them for the destruction of Prospect Bluff. Despite avenging the loss of the fort, the Maroons were under pressure to scatter and evade U.S. soldiers still searching for them in Florida, and they moved further south. By 1820 there were still at least sixty-five Black “gunmen” living with the Seminoles in central Florida, but others had moved to West Florida and Tampa.61 Imperial dynamics in the Gulf Coast borderlands had changed with the British withdrawal, and it was not a coincidence that Maroons began losing after the British left and Spanish strength weakened. They were no longer able to play on three imperial rivalries, which weakened Maroon diplomatic and military positioning.

Peace finally came for these Maroons in 1823 when Maroon, Seminole, and U.S. diplomats met at Moultrie Creek near St. Augustine to formally end the violence. Peace with Spain came years earlier with the Adams-Onis Treaty in 1819, which was ratified in 1822. Spanish colonists were forced to evacuate Florida, and the United States formally annexed the territory. The Maroon’s European allies were finally gone, and they now faced only Americans. Rumors that Spain was ceding Florida to the United States understandably provoked Seminole concerns about how their own lands would be treated. Although hostilities had effectively eased, General Jackson advocated for Seminole and Maroon removal from Florida to west of the

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Mississippi River. Governor Mitchell had also relayed to the Creeks that the United States was not likely to buy land in Florida from the Seminoles, since it cost “a very great expense” to subdue them. Instead, Mitchell told the Creeks that according to Secretary Calhoun, the Seminoles had forfeited their right to land claims and Mitchell advised the Creeks to help remove Seminoles onto Creek lands, promising them “liberal compensation” for their help. By April 1823, Secretary Calhoun appointed Colonel James Gadsden and Bernard Segui, among others, to make a peace treaty with the Seminoles, which was to be done at a crossing over Moultrie Creek four miles from St. Augustine. Reiterating how important securing Maroons in Florida was on the eve of peace, Governor of Florida William Duvall instructed diplomat Horatio Dexter to make note of and round up any of the runaways he encountered on his way to Moultrie Creek. At the time, Dexter also recorded how many remaining Maroons lived in the area and with Seminole Indians in north-central Florida. In all, Dexter counted 430 Black Maroons living among 1,395 Native Americans. Although the war was ending, the Maroons lived on and hoped to avoid re-enslavement to American planters.  

**Peace at Moultrie Creek**

The manner in which Maroons solidified peace with Whites in Florida followed the longer pattern of Maroon warfare and how White imperial and colonial forces fought and armed Maroons in the Black Atlantic. Though American plantation owners successfully rid themselves of the Spanish presence in Florida with the Adams–Onis Treaty in 1819, the treaty did not fully

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address the hostile Amerindian and Maroon populations in the territory. Formal peace with the Florida fugitives and the Seminole Nation would not come until September 18, 1823 when the United States came to terms with the signing of the Treaty of Moultrie Creek.

Approximately 425 Florida Natives were present at the signing of Moultrie Creek, and thirty-two Seminole leaders signed the 1823 treaty, seventeen of whom can be positively identified. Although the only known account of the treaty meeting does not make a reference to Seminole Maroons being present at the signing, at least a handful of Seminole Chiefs who were present presided over communities that included the Black settlers, including Chief Philip, Chief Oponney, and Chief Emoteley. Even more importantly, at least one signatory of the treaty was a Black Seminole Maroon named Vacapachasie or Cow Driver, whom Americans called Mulatto King. King was once at Prospect Bluff before its destruction, and curiously, he was one of the “six principal chiefs of the Florida Indians” who also signed article Eleven of the treaty that promised the six chiefs that they could stay on their lands instead of move to a reservation. King was able to stay with his Maroon community near the Apalachicola River.  

Composed of eleven articles, the treaty reflected planter ambitions for more land in Florida and other boundary concerns. The treaty greatly extended the boundary for White settlement from what the Seminoles and Creeks previously agreed to in Georgia in a treaty in 1790. Articles One and Two gave all of Florida to the United States except for land that was allotted to the Seminoles, who would also receive livestock and farm implements to sustain their villages. Importantly, American diplomats forced the Seminoles to agree to help capture black

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Maroons and destroy the surviving communities, a point that further underscored how central the Maroons were to the fighting and peace-making process. Article Seven stipulated that Indian chiefs and warriors be “active and vigilant in the preventing the retreating to, or passing through, of the district of country assigned them, or any absconding slaves, or fugitives from justice; and further agree to use all necessary exertions to apprehend and deliver the same to the agent.” It was this article that was most unique to the treaty.  

In contrast to Article Seven in the 1823 treaty, there was no provision in the 1790 agreement for the Natives to continue to capture and return Maroons still living in their midst or who might later join them, which matched treaties that the Seminoles’ predecessors and many other Indian nations agreed to throughout American history. Instead, Natives in 1790 were obligated to restore enslaved people who fled to them or whom they captured during the fighting. This practice followed a general pattern of Indian treaties throughout early American history, in which Indian nations almost always agreed to return Whites and Black slaves whom they had captured in previous campaigns. The Creeks agreed to restore runaway slaves and slaves captured in war in South Carolina in 1717 and in Georgia and Florida in a treaty in 1774, as did the Hurons, Shawnee, and Delaware in 1764 in the Northeast. The Cherokees agreed to restore Black slaves in South Carolina in 1751 and again in 1762. So too did the Chickasaw and Wyandot nations in the mid-eighteenth century. To be sure, several nations in the Southeast also agreed to return runaway slaves as a general policy to appease White colonists in the absence of armed conflict. This was the case for the first treaty James Oglethorpe made with the Creeks in Georgia in 1733. In Ogelthorpe’s case, colonists and Creeks were not at war with each other, but

Kappler, ed. *Indian Affairs*, 2:204.
Whites could not afford to have the Natives unite with Black slaves in South Carolina and so they offered to pay Creeks bounties for each Maroon captured and returned to White owners. Even earlier in Maryland, several tribes agreed to capture Maroons in an agreement in 1666. Successive settlements in that colony continued the practice as the Naticokes agreed to return fugitive slaves in 1668 and in 1678, the Piscataways, Mattawomans, and Chopticos in 1692, and Natives along the Indian River as late as 1742.65

But in no other cases were Indians required to continue to capture and return fugitive slaves still living with them or in their territory after armed conflict. Indeed, the runaway perpetuity clause in Article Seven of the Moultrie Creek Treaty differed substantially from other Indian treaties that colonists in British North America and that the United States had previously secured. To be clear, the presence of Maroons at Moultrie Creek and Article Seven does not mean that the treaty was not also an Indian treaty. However, the perpetuity clause in Article Seven did more closely resemble a long history of Maroon treaties in the Atlantic, and the fact that Maroons were present at the signing of the treaty suggests their interests were also reflected in its design. As early as 1608 Europeans recognized that they were not able to completely destroy Maroon groups in their American colonies. Maroon strength and power forced colonists to pursue peace so long as Maroons agreed to help them maintain the slave system. That year Spanish colonial officials came to peace terms with a large Maroon group in New Spain and its leader Gaspar Yanga whom they could not defeat. The treaty decided Maroon autonomy and

territorial boundaries, and obligated the Maroons to return Black slaves who fled from the Spanish ports. It also stipulated that the Maroons would be paid twelve pesos to track and return new runaways in the future. Further south in Brazil, the Palmares Maroons briefly agreed with Portuguese authorities to return fugitive slaves in exchange for their own free state in 1663 and again in 1678.66

By the eighteenth century, Europeans continued the pattern to settle for Maroon autonomy in exchange for their assistance in returning runaway slaves and suppressing slave rebellions. Similar to the Seminole Maroons in the 1810s, by 1768 British colonists on St. Vincent recognized how strong the Black Caribs on the island had become and they pursued peace knowing they could not defeat them without substantial costs. The peace treaty comprised of fifteen articles and allotted land on the island for permanent Maroon settlement. Moreover, the treaty promised that the Maroons would have five years to build new homes on their allotted territory, and that the proceeds from the sale of their old lands would be paid to them in two equal payments. The Maroons also had to swear a loyalty oath to King George III, while the British also promised the indigenous Red Caribs that the colonists would help separate them from the Black Carib population if they so desired. The provision was an obvious attempt to sow division among the Maroon population, and not surprisingly the Maroons rejected the treaty. Continued Maroon raids on plantations on the island eventually led to a large Maroon war in

1772-1773 in which the Caribs secured another peace accord more to their liking. Like the other Maroon treaties in the Atlantic and the 1823 treaty at Moultrie Creek, the Caribs were allotted lands to protect their communities and they were obligated to acknowledge a European king as their sovereign. Moreover, they agreed to return runaway plantation slaves living among them, and to seek and apprehend others in the future. Those who refused and harbored runaways would forfeit their lands. Finally, they were obligated to defend the island against British enemies, and to help quell plantation slave rebellions.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most notorious Maroon conflict in all of the Black Atlantic was the First Maroon War in Jamaica in the 1730s. While the British had fought several different bands of Jamaican Maroons intermittently since taking possession of the island in the mid-seventeenth century, the Maroons were not a large enough population to present a substantial threat to the colonial planters for most of the seventeenth century. However, Maroon numbers appeared to swell in the early eighteenth century with the addition of more plantation slaves and the colonial government determined their presence was too much by 1731. Following the ensuing First Maroon War, the British secured peace treaties with the Leeward and Windward bands within three months of each other in 1738 and 1739. Among the articles of pacification included the stipulation that hostility would cease between the Maroons and colonial planters forever, and that the Maroons would live in a “perfect state of freedom and liberty, excepting those who have been taken by them, or fled to them.” Like the earlier treaties and the one at Moultrie Creek, the

⁶⁷ Young, *Black Charaibs*, 39-42, 95, 97, 98.
Jamaican Maroons agreed to return runaway slaves who had fled to them within in the previous two years and those who would run to them in the future.68

Probably the most similar Maroon treaty arrangements to the Moultrie Creek Treaty in 1823 were those made by Maroons in Dutch Suriname in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. There, waves of Maroon wars in which Whites were largely unsuccessful in defeating Maroon power led to a series of peace treaties over almost 100 years. In 1686 the Karboegers of Coppenname, a mixed-race group of Indians and African Maroons signed a peace treaty that obligated them to search for and return new runaway slaves, and the Saamakas first agreed to similar gestures when they signed a treaty in 1749. They were followed by the Djukas in 1760.69

But none of these treaties preserved peace for very long and almost twenty years after the first attempt at peace with the Dutch, the Saamakas again agreed to help eradicate other Maroon bands in order to preserve their own group autonomy. The Saamakas agreed in a new treaty in 1762 to never again commit hostilities against White planters or “free Indians” not living with them, and to identify all of their villages to Dutch colonial authorities. They also agreed to point out villages of Indians and other Maroon towns that they lived in or whom they had an alliance with, and to pressure those groups to take part in the treaty agreement or else help destroy them.


Article Five of the 1762 agreement also stipulated that planters would pay the Saamakas a fifty--
guilders bounty for each runaway they returned, much like the bounty the Seminoles were
offered. Aside from trading provisions and land and tool allotments in the treaty that were also
similar to what the Seminole Maroons gained in 1823, the Saamakas were also obligated to
capture runaways when the colonial government informed them of mass slave desertions, to help
defend the colony against foreign adversaries and slave rebellions, and to never ally with the
nearby Djukas without informing Whites first. These same provisions would be reiterated to the
Boni Maroon group in 1837 when they signed for peace as well in Suriname, agreeing to return
runaway slaves for a small bounty. In addition and like the Seminole Maroons, at the time of the
signing of the 1762 treaty, it was clear that groups of Indians were living with the Saamakas and
joined in the accord too.\footnote{Journal of Louis Nepveu [1762], in \textit{To Slay the Hydra}, ed. Price, 159-163; Price, “Uneasy Neighbors,” 9; De Groot, \textit{From Isolation Towards Integration}, 69, 99.} Importantly, these Suriname Maroon treaties demonstrate two
remarkable points as they relate to the Seminole Maroons in 1823: that Maroons were obligated
to return runaway plantation slaves in the future to protect their own communities; and that
Indians were part of these groups and involved in the treaty making process in Maroon wars
fought over slavery.

Indeed, Maroon groups throughout the Atlantic signed peace treaties to ensure their
survival just like Seminole Maroons did in Florida. Some did so despite also playing on
European rivalries and calling on foreign intervention and aid just as the Seminole Maroons at
first relied on Spanish and British protection against their former masters.\footnote{A notable group here includes Le Maniel Maroons who existed on the St. Domingue-
Santo Domingo border during the eighteenth century. In 1786 the group informally agreed to}
Florida Maroons struck peace in the model of Atlantic Maroon treaties also attests to their strength as a community. Only when Maroon groups were too small and were not considered more than a nuisance did White authorities pursue other options to eradicate them. This was certainly not the case with the Seminole Maroons, who maintained their strength and forced three White empires to reckon with them and make them part of their imperial strategies in North America. Though their British and Spanish allies were eventually driven out of Florida, they were too strong to be removed themselves, and with their Indian allies they forced American planters to settle for peace that sought to perpetuate Maroon existence.

Ultimately the end of the Gulf Coast Borderlands Maroon War did not quell hostilities between Whites, Indians, and Maroons in Florida in the long term. Travelers to Florida in the 1820s reported that 500 to 600 fugitive slaves still lived among more than 4,500 Indians in Florida, and that they lived in the Seminole towns. Some even tried moving closer to the coast so that they could attempt to flee further to Caribbean islands. The Maroon towns affiliated with the Seminoles prospered as their inhabitants continued to plant corn, melons, pumpkins, and vegetables, as well as tend to livestock. Though many had to abandon their fields near the stop raiding French plantations on St. Domingue and to return runaway slaves for a 50 ecus bounty. See Debbasch, “Le Maniel Further Notes,” 145.

It took decades before the Boni Maroons were considered a significant enough of a threat for whites to call for peace with them, while Spanish authorities in the 1780s in New Orleans launched sizeable campaigns against the Maroons of Bas du Fluve and their leader Saint Malo. Unlike the Seminole maroons and others in the Atlantic, the Bas du Fluve Maroons never secured a peace treaty after Spanish militias defeated them and executed Malo. See Acts and Deliberations of the Cabildo, 28 May-4 June, 1784, New Orleans Public Library, MF reel 91-14, 195; and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 236.
Suwanee River, they simply moved further south and established new towns, fields, and families. Violence flared up again in 1835 during the Second Seminole War, and again in 1855 during the Third Seminole War, when Maroons allied with the Seminole Indians to stop White invasion and prevent black re-enslavement. By then, most of the indigenous Seminoles and Seminole Maroons were defeated and evicted to the Bahamas and to Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma.

**CONCLUSION**

The fighting in the Gulf Coast borderlands from 1812 to 1823 was another Atlantic Maroon war in an expanding imperial colonial world dominated by Black chattel slavery, in which Maroons were concerned first and foremost with fighting their former owners to prevent re-enslavement and to limit the expansion of the slave system. Like other Atlantic Maroon wars, runaway Black slaves in the Gulf Coast created their own communities, in this case cooperating with Native Americans and some of the imperial rivals in the region, and they led a series of plantation raids that provoked American attempts to destroy Maroon villages in Florida. Their efforts were part of the long trajectory of armed Black resistance to slavery and the fight for

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emancipation that did not come to the United States until 1865. It was also one of the last Maroon wars in the Atlantic world.\footnote{74}

But considering Maroon perspectives in what I argue was one long war in the Gulf Coast borderlands from 1812 to 1823 also points toward an aspect of this Maroon war that was rare, if not unique in the Atlantic world, yet also reveals something about that world. Whereas Atlantic Maroons typically faced one or two imperial powers at a time, the Maroons in the Gulf Coast borderlands confronted three empires from 1812 to 1823. They had first allied with the Seminole and Creek Indians and Spanish in Florida against American ambitions, but as their war matured they both accepted and sought out British assistance before finally formalizing peace with Americans. Their ability to do this in the Gulf Coast borderlands demonstrated how they could change alliances and transform competing imperial interests to serve Maroon ambitions. It was another case in which Maroons crossed racial divides to preserve their autonomy.\footnote{75}

\footnote{74} I follow Hoogbergen’s assessment of characteristics of typical Atlantic maroon warfare. See Hoogbergen, \textit{The Boni Maroon Wars}, 15.

In another way, the fighting in the Gulf Coast borderlands also revealed how Maroons, often interracial communities comprised of runaway Black slaves and Native Americans, could also continue to cooperate with established Native groups to preserve their own interests. Throughout Atlantic history, Whites tried to pit Natives against Black slaves and developing Maroon societies as a way to divide and conquer in the Americas. Yet Maroons and Natives often resisted these efforts and cooperated with each other to fight against White interests. Native Americans could often pit White empires against each other too, as could Maroons. In the Gulf Coast borderlands Natives and Maroons successfully cooperated with each other and did the same for entire generations against American imperial interests. They were successful until they began losing imperial allies, and eventually American military power overwhelmed them near the end of the first half of the nineteenth century.

The fighting in in the borderlands during the period demonstrated that enslaved people still clung to militarized tactics and military service as an outlet to challenge chattel slavery in the Anglo-Atlantic. The militarization of resistance survived the American Revolution and continued to surge despite a growing abolition movement and increasing calls for non-violence among some enslaved and Free Black leaders in the Anglo-Atlantic. But soldiering was also something different for Maroons than it was for slaves. Enslaved people still rose to calls of emancipation during the period as they had done since 1676, yet Maroons also joined them even though they had already formed free and independent communities in thick forests and swamps in the Gulf Coast borderlands. War between Native Americans, Britain, and Spain seemingly

intensified the military options for Maroons in the area, and as more plantation slaves fled to become Maroons or join others, they increasingly seized on these militarized options.

But by 1823 conditions also seemed to deteriorate for slave soldiers in the mainland Anglo-Atlantic. They were not free like their Caribbean counterparts in the West India Regiments, and they had lost the last European imperial rivals to ally with and resist slavery. Native Americans in the Southeast were on a sharp decline as well, and they too had lost the last European empires that could help them stop American expansion. By then, state militias prohibited enslaved people from serving, as did the United States Army in 1821. After 1823 enslaved people and Maroons would have to find other methods to militarize resistance and use military service to undermine slavery in the United States.76

The Gulf Coast Borderlands War also demonstrated how European imperial rivalries both supported and threatened Maroon communities in the Atlantic. Europeans needed Atlantic Maroons to support their imperial agendas, which in the borderlands area could mean undermining slavery among an imperial rival, when an empire’s own slave interests were elsewhere. Maroons in the Gulf Coast borderlands assisted the Spanish in defending Florida, and they assisted the British in attacking American planters and taking in scores of plantation slaves. Their ability to play on multiple European imperial rivalries enabled them to negotiate for European support of their communities without signing a treaty that obligated them to suppress slave rebellions or return runaway slaves, which Maroon communities often did elsewhere in the Atlantic world. While Maroons in the Gulf Coast borderlands still used a hostile natural

environment to take refuge, like their Atlantic counterparts in places like Jamaica, Suriname, and Brazil, they also found refuge in the complicated and shifting alliance systems of Native Americans and three imperial rivals in the region. Ultimately, all of the competing powers became enemies of the one slave power in the region, the United States, and this development favored the Maroons. But as the U.S. began to defeat its enemies one by one, the Maroon refuge deteriorated, and they too had to withdraw—ultimately to the point where they could no longer maintain distinct, autonomous communities.

In this case the multiple imperial rivalries that Maroons played on reinforced Maroon communities that challenged the Black chattel slave system. But multiple imperial rivalries at play in the Gulf Coast borderlands also threatened Maroon community formation and preservation. As the Maroons accepted Spanish and British help, they provoked American aggression. As they shifted from Spanish to Seminole and British assistance, they drew the ire of American and Spanish planters whose enslaved people ran away to join the Maroons. Throughout the Atlantic world, Maroons adopted various strategies to fight until they sooner or later could no longer hold out. In this Maroon war, they chose to fight with numerous allies in the region, and they lasted as long as those allies could or would fight against the growing U.S. slave power that ultimately overwhelmed them all.

The fighting in the Gulf Coast borderlands Maroon War also sheds light on how enslaved and Maroon families endured Maroon warfare in the Atlantic. Caricatures of Maroon men like Cudjoe, Chatoyer, Garçon, and Prince pervaded descriptions of Maroon warfare in the Atlantic, but women and children also participated in the fighting in Florida, and they ran with their families to join the Seminole Maroons throughout the decade. Moreover, family units may have
been a decisive factor in determining where, when, and how long to fight, as at least a few women and mothers were returned to their owners without any indication of what happened to their children and partners. Others who fled the United States altogether as family units revealed how remarkably strong the enslaved family was, as slaves armed and resisted bondage and as they participated in *marronnage*. Though the bloody conflicts could stress family lines and separate kin networks, they also provided an opportunity for enslaved families to reinforce themselves as they fought together to stay free. Such circumstances were rare in the Atlantic, and they demonstrated a different degree of what taking up arms could mean and accomplish for Black families during the rise and fall of the Atlantic system. The opportunity to do so also opened in the Age of Revolution in which military service increasingly became more viable for women and children to resist the chattel system.

Finally, the war was also another case in which slaves and then Maroons took up arms for a cause entirely different from what Whites and Natives did. Whereas Maroons took up arms for the British and Spanish to serve their imperial interests in Florida, the Maroons instead fought to challenge the Atlantic system and resist American expansion that would have certainly led to their demise. European allies certainly enabled the Maroons to fight for freedom in an environment in which White Americans aggressively pursued Black enslavement. In other words, the British and Spanish imperial authorities who sought Seminole and Maroon assistance could not control these groups, who pursued their own interests. The practice of arming the Seminole Maroons was as reliable a strategy as arming slaves throughout the Atlantic world, and it served broader and emerging British imperial ambitions, including abolition. But arming Maroons in the Atlantic may have also been something of a paradox, as European empires built
on slavery continuously supported Maroons who challenged their rivals. European support for their Maroon allies ensured Maroon peace treaties that protected Maroon survival and autonomy throughout the Atlantic. European support had promoted the presence of powerful examples for plantation slaves to resist their enslavement. It promoted communities that were examples for millions of enslaved Africans to challenge the Atlantic system. It promoted communities that struck fear in Dutch, Portuguese, Spanish, British, and French slave societies, and it promoted Maroon peace treaties that could undermine empires built on slavery. Arming Maroons was clearly a double-edged sword. It both served some imperial interests and provided clear examples to other Maroons and slaves to undermine White empires elsewhere. Yet despite this challenge to the Atlantic system that Maroons represented, White imperial officials were always eager to arm them and support their survival so long as it targeted their imperial rivals and enemies. Maroon soldiers were eager to accept such support. This was the case in Florida, as it was throughout the Atlantic littoral, and the United States joined the fray as a republic.
Enslaved people in the Anglo-Atlantic took up arms in several conflicts for more than two hundred years. They first fought for slaveholders and for the planter regime in the seventeenth century. They served as soldiers to protect imperial projects including slavery from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century. But while slave soldiers fought to protect imperial interests, including the plantation slave system in the Anglo-Atlantic, they also turned armed conflict and war into something else. Often they turned their participation in imperial conflict into acts of resistance, in which slave soldiers fought for Black liberation. In other words, they turned war and armed conflict into struggles about slavery itself, at least from their own perspectives.

As early as 1676 in Virginia, enslaved soldiers took up arms in Bacon’s Rebellion. They were among the last soldiers who kept fighting, and it was clear that they refused to surrender because they were in “distrest of their hoped for liberty.” So many slave soldiers took up arms in the colony that they raised the specter of emancipation and even forced King Charles II to issue a proclamation to promote it in order to protect this royal possession. Their fight for freedom revealed that the chattel system had already taken root in early America, and it had produced the first crisis to threaten that system.

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1 Grantham to Coventry, November 21, 1677, Henry Coventry Papers, 77:301-302.
Something similar was going on in the Carolina Lowcountry by the early eighteenth century. Slave soldiers took advantage of Indian warfare and the nearby presence of Spanish colonists in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida to resist. During the Yamasee War in 1715 they made colonial warfare about Black liberation, as they took up arms with Native American and Spanish allies and fled to St. Augustine in groups. They fought their former owners and found refuge in Florida. Imperial and Native allies intensified slave soldiers’ ability to mutate armed conflict compared to what could happen during internal imperial crises like what occurred in the Chesapeake decades earlier. Conversely, armed resistance could be mitigated with certain conditions and colonial policies that had also been in place in the Lowcountry that were also absent in the Chesapeake years earlier. By law, slave soldiers could use loyal military service for their owners to achieve personal manumission, which encouraged many to take up arms for their masters and for the defense of the English plantation system in the colony. Notwithstanding these policies, slave soldiers still threatened the slave system by fighting against English interests in the colony.

The Age of Revolution opened more opportunities for enslaved people to take up arms, become soldiers, and to turn warfare into movements that supported emancipation and freedom. Revolution also led to an increase in the militarization of resistance. Throughout the Atlantic imperial and revolutionary armies became agents of mass emancipation, and enslaved people increasingly took up arms in conflicts in which offers of freedom and emancipation were vital for their mobilization. Black rebels of the Ethiopian Regiment fought against their owners in Virginia for freedom at the start of the Revolutionary War, and some continued to fight elsewhere after they evacuated the Chesapeake and migrated north to New York. They had tied revolutionary rhetoric and ideology with their military service as they wore the words “liberty to
slaves” inscribed on their uniforms. Many survived the conflict to find freedom in Canada and then Sierra Leone. With the success of the Black Loyalists like those who served in the Ethiopian Regiment, the Age of Revolution also led to the first permanent peacetime corps of professional enslaved soldiers in the Anglo-Atlantic and the establishment of the West India Regiments shortly after. Military service and armed resistance in the Anglo-Atlantic had thus changed as slave soldiers professionalized.

As permanent, peacetime, and professional soldiers, slaves in the West India Regiments could not simply use military service to fight for freedom and emancipation like their predecessors. Stationed in the Caribbean in the early nineteenth century, they could not turn to potential Native American allies to alter armed conflict either. Instead, slave soldiers had to create armed conflict to achieve their goals, which they did in April 1802 when soldiers in the 8th West India Regiment mutinied over concerns that they were going to be disbanded and sold into plantation slavery. Although these rebellious soldiers were defeated, they shook the plantation system in Dominica to its very core. Their actions ultimately contributed to the mass emancipation of all slave soldiers in the West India Regiments just a few years later, thus freeing thousands of enslaved people from the military-slave system in the Anglo-Atlantic.

By the nineteenth century thousands of slave soldiers were using professional military service as capital for emancipation. By 1812 enslaved people took up arms and became Maroons who allied with Native Americans and the British Army to challenge American plantation expansion in the Gulf Coast borderlands. Nearly 150 years after they first challenged the plantation system in Bacon’s army, they still fought against it. Yet Native, British, and Spanish allies all helped Seminole Maroons attack the plantation system and sustain armed conflict against American planters for more than a decade. Unlike their predecessors 100 hundred years
earlier in the Carolina Lowcountry in 1715-1717 and in the Chesapeake in 1676, the Seminole Maroons also joined professional armies to resist chattel slavery. Despite an expanding abolition movement in Early America that was tied to rhetoric and ideology of the American Revolution, Maroon soldiers who fought American planters in the Gulf Coast borderlands proudly flew British flags at their fort at Prospect Bluff. They did not make appeals to Patriots of a generation before them. Much like the soldiers in the 8th West India Regiment a decade before, the appropriation of revolutionary ideology among enslaved and Maroon soldiers was seemingly limited in the Anglo-Atlantic.

While revolution opened more opportunities for enslaved people to take up arms and serve as soldiers in the Anglo-Atlantic, the ability to fight for other European armies and Native Americans in mainland Anglo America eroded in 1823 with peace at Moultrie Creek. The British and Spanish left the continent and Native Americans in the Southeast had suffered a substantial defeat. Slave soldiers on the mainland could no longer play on European imperial rivalries to resist the chattel system, and potential Native American allies were increasingly becoming less reliable. After 1823, slave soldiers in the mainland would have to learn other ways to use military service and militarized methods to resist the chattel system.

Slave soldiers in Virginia in 1676 and 1775-1776, in South Carolina in 1715-1717, in Dominica in 1802, and in the Gulf Coast borderlands in 1812-1823 demonstrated that Black armed resistance against slavery in Early America and the British Atlantic was more pervasive than historians have realized. Enslaved people and Maroons increasingly used military service to rebel against chattel slavery. The opportunity to do so emerged as a viable option in the seventeenth century with the rise of the Atlantic chattel slave system, and it increasingly became a stronger option as the chattel system matured. In various conflicts during the rise of the
Atlantic chattel system, slave soldiers turned those conflicts into opportunities for freedom for themselves and others in the area. Historians often stress the danger and futility of slave revolts as a form of resistance, with the exception of the Haitian Revolution, but slave rebellion when part of war and armed conflict often became the best opportunity for freedom from chattel slavery. As the Atlantic chattel system became more developed and violent, enslaved people increasingly used military conflict to rebel against it. Their ability to do this in the eighteenth century peaked during the American Revolutionary War, and continued well into the nineteenth century, as more conflicts erupted that opened more opportunities for enslaved people to become soldiers. They ultimately set the stage for the absolute peak of militarized resistance in the Anglo-Atlantic during the American Civil War when hundreds of thousands of slaves and Free Blacks ran away or joined the Union Army to help win the war and eventually abolish slavery in the United States.

By using military conflict to resist chattel slavery, enslaved soldiers helped militarize resistance in the Anglo-Atlantic. Military service became a viable option to attack chattel slavery, and slave soldiers seized on opportunities that military service offered. They did so alongside other slave rebels who relied on martial tactics, techniques, and procedures to achieve the same goals. They used military structure, and they used military violence to achieve their goals.

The increasing militarization of resistance also reflected how enslaved people attempted to integrate into colonial society and in the early U.S. Republic. Militarization offered competing rebel visions of slave societies: the ability to withdraw and isolate from them entirely, or to challenge, reform, and remake them. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, soldiering meant overturning slave societies and withdrawing from them altogether. By the Age of
Revolution, it meant reform and change. Either way, slave soldiers used the same militarized methods to achieve these visions. Alongside the rise of Creole and White leaders and rebels who promoted more peaceful approaches to advance emancipation and abolition, such as in Barbados in 1816, Demerara in 1823, and in Jamaica in 1831, slave soldiers continued to rely on military methods and violence to fight for freedom. Like plantation and Maroon rebels, slave soldiers complimented other abolitionist approaches, and together they helped lay the groundwork for full emancipation that enslaved people finally achieved in the British Empire in 1838 and in the United States in 1865. Their actions were ultimately part of a longer military history of abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic.²

The connection between war and slavery for Black soldiers of the African diaspora in the Atlantic world also changed in the process of their enslavement in Africa, their migration to the Americas, and their participation in armed conflict in the western edges of the littoral. Whereas soldiers defeated in battle in Africa were often sold into the trans-Atlantic slave trade, on the other side of the Atlantic enslaved people took to war and armed conflict to undermine that very same system at least in the localities where they lived.³ In all the above cases, they at least threatened that system regardless of their success. They threatened the chattel system in some places even if they represented only a tiny fraction of the millions of people caught up in the Atlantic slave trade. Slavery’s soldiers were thus a double-edged sword: soldiering, rebellion, and grand marronnage often were or became the same thing. Slave soldiers both defended and challenged the Atlantic chattel slave system through military service. Those who chose the latter


did so in ways that were similar to how plantation rebels and Maroons challenged the plantation regime. They used violence, military knowledge from Africa, North America, and Europe, and organizational structures to attack the plantation regime. As they did this, they transformed the slave societies in which they lived. Military forces, military discipline, and military surveillance increasingly defined slave societies and were tools that Whites used to control Black slaves and Maroons. But recruitment of enslaved soldiers by proponents of slave regimes to protect them from imperial rivals or Native Americans also gave enslaved people and Maroons an outlet to resist that same system. Slaves and Maroons turned the militarization of slave societies on its head, and used military service, structure, and violence to undermine chattel slavery without destroying all of the societies that had so mistreated them. In the end, slavery’s soldiers revealed how people from below could transform slavery, war, and freedom despite the intentions of people above.
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