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SLAVES OF THE CHESAPEAKE BAY AREA AND THE WAR OF 1812

by

Frank A. Cassell

Sea-borne British invaders struck repeatedly at the exposed coastline of the Chesapeake Bay during the War of 1812, causing tremendous property damage and a general disruption of the region's society and economy. One aspect of the Chesapeake campaign that has received little attention is the role of the large slave populations of Virginia and Maryland.[1] A study of the slave response to the invasion provides an interesting opportunity to test several of the broad assertions about slavery that scholars have made in recent years. The behavior of large numbers of Chesapeake slaves during 1813 and 1814 casts doubt on the thesis that most plantation slaves fitted the "Sambo" image, that is, of being irresponsible, docile, loyal, dependent, and with a "childlike attachment" to their masters.[2] On the other hand, the record of slave desertions and of slave assistance to the enemy seems to support the idea that many slaves did not passively accept the system, that they harbored a profound desire for freedom, and that given an opportunity they could be very "troublesome property" indeed.

As the war progressed, escaping slaves increasingly appeared as spies, guides, messengers, and laborers for the British. A small group of perhaps two hundred donned British uniforms and fought a number of engagements with American militiamen. Because of these activities white Americans in the Chesapeake were forced to contend with two enemies, a task that severely strained the limited resources of the area. Interestingly, even when confronted with overwhelming evidence that substantial numbers of slaves were not only fiercely determined to escape but also willing and able to join a foreign enemy in fighting their former masters, white southerners did not abandon their faith in the institution of slavery or their conceptions about the character of slaves. These facts would appear to confirm

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[1] Manuscript sources for this paper were found in the Microfilm Collection of Early State Records, Library of Congress, and the war and admiralty archives in the Public Record Office, London. The best general accounts of the War of 1812 are Reginald Horsman, *The War of 1812* (New York, 1969), and Harry L. Coles, *The War of 1812* (Chicago, 1965). The census for 1810 shows 103,036 slaves in Maryland and 292,627 slaves in Virginia. Bureau of the Census, *Negro Population, 1790-1915* (Washington, 1918), p. 53.

[2] Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery* (Chicago, Second Edition, 1968), p. 82.

the observation of one scholar that white southerners in these years had accepted as unchallengeable the view that Negroes were inferior beings, perhaps something less than human.[3]

Ironically, slavery in Maryland and Virginia does not appear to have been as brutal a system as existed in the rice growing areas of South Carolina or the developing cotton and sugar plantations of the deep south. Contemporary accounts seem to indicate that Chesapeake slaves were subjected to less debilitating types of labor, were better fed, better clothed, and generally better treated than those of the lower South. These relatively better conditions did not, however, breed docility or acceptance of the system; for as the response to the British invasion showed, many slaves concealed a desperate desire for freedom beneath a mask of geniality and outward satisfaction.[4]

British naval units did not begin operations in the Chesapeake until the spring of 1813 when a small fleet under Admiral John Borlase Warren and Colonel Sir Thomas Sydney Beckwith sailed into the Bay. Under orders to divert American attention from the Canadian frontier, Warren and Beckwith initiated a long series of hit-and-run amphibious raids along the coastline. With regard to the slave population located in the areas they were attacking, the two commanders were expressly forbidden to incite uprisings. They could, however, offer protection and freedom to slaves who assisted them in conducting their forays. Such slaves were to be transported to British possessions or given the opportunity to enlist in one of the special black regiments previously organized in the West Indies. In practice these orders proved inadequate for the British had underestimated the desires of many American slaves to escape their bondage.[5]

The British, and for that matter the Americans, soon discovered that large numbers of slaves eagerly welcomed the invaders. On May 1, 1813, the *National Intelligencer* in Washington reported that a British party landed on Kent Island and seized some cattle. "Several negroes had deserted to them" the paper added ominously, "and became pilots for them in plundering." Readers of the *National Intelligencer* learned that the behavior of the Kent Island slaves was no aberration. A dispatch from Norfolk, Virginia, printed on May 12, declared that a "considerable number of negroes belonging to Princess Anne County, have at different times eloped from their owners and gone on board the British men of war in Lynhaven Bay." The author of the dispatch noted that the slaves of

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[3] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968), pp. 482-511.

[4] See Robert McColley, *Slavery and Jeffersonian Virginia* (Urbana, Ill., 1964), pp. 57-76; and Jeffrey R. Brackett, *The Negro in Maryland; a Study of the Institution of Slavery* (Baltimore, 1889), p. 1.

[5] Horsman, *War of 1812*, p. 78.

Princess Anne County were nearly all better off than most of the poor whites in the area. He attributed the illogical behavior of the slaves to the "discontentedness of their nature."[6] That many slaves would seize the opportunity to escape their bondage should not have surprised either belligerent. During the American War for Independence some thirty-five years earlier, many slaves in Virginia had eagerly responded to a proclamation issued by Lord Dunmore, the last royal governor of Virginia, that promised freedom to those slaves enlisting in the British army. Throughout that war thousands of slaves in the South had sought safety and personal liberty within the British lines. Yet memories had apparently dimmed with the passage of time and at the beginning of the War of 1812 both Englishmen and Americans seemed shocked at the willingness of so many slaves not only to defect but also to aid the enemies of their former masters.[7]

In July and August of 1813 the rate of slave desertions to the British climbed steadily. Wherever British ships or British troops went they were confronted by slaves anxious to leave America. Under this pressure, British commanders chose to interpret their orders liberally and to take on board any slave who so requested. In early July, British troops attacked Hampton, Virginia, and occupied Point Lookout in St. Marys County, Maryland. In both places slaves swarmed to the British from the surrounding country. An American militia officer in St. Marys County reported that local slaves were fleeing in such numbers that "nine-tenths of them will abscond unless the enemy can be driven from the Point."[8] A few weeks later the British returned to Kent Island where forty-two Negroes voluntarily went on board the troop transports. In the first week of September the British frigate *Plantagenet* operating off the coast of Princess Anne County regularly sent its small boats ashore to pick up groups of escaped slaves. As more and more of the black refugees crowded the decks of the invading fleet, British commanders found it necessary to detach a transport occasionally to carry some of the former slaves to the West Indies.[9]

Shaken by the economic losses they were sustaining and alarmed by stories of escaped slaves returning with British troops to terrorize their former masters, the white citizens of Virginia and Maryland began countermeasures. At the state level pressure was exerted on the national government to provide compensation for lost slaves.[10] In August, 1813, Governor

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[6] *National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), May 1 and 12, 1813.

[7] John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1956), pp. 126-144. Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1961), *passim.*

[8] *Niles Register* (Baltimore), July 24, 1813.

[9] Richmond *Enquirer*, Aug. 31, 1813; *National Intelligencer*, Sept. 7, 1813; Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States* (New York, 1837), pp. 472-473.

[10] Gov. Levin Winder to James Madison, April 26, 1813, Maryland Governor's Letterbook, Class E.2 (reel 4); Virginia House Journal, Dec. 27, 1813, Class A.16 (reel 6), Microfilm Collection of Early State Records, Library of Congress.

Levin Winder of Maryland instructed one of his militia generals to "take all proper precautions to prevent an intercourse between the Enemy and the slaves of your counties." The Governor suggested that the flight of the slaves would be curtailed if small boats, which the slaves frequently stole in order to reach the British fleet, were hauled up on land or at least better secured.[11] State officials in both Maryland and Virginia tried to help their constituents reclaim escaped slaves. It was a common occurrence for slave owners to approach British war vessels under a flag of truce and to present a letter from a governor asking the British to assist in restoring unlawfully seized civilian property. In all cases the British allowed the slaveowner to speak with his former slaves in order to persuade them to return home. Without exception the slaves refused. A free Negro, Charles S. Ball, recounted in his memoirs, for example, how he accompanied several Maryland slave owners on such a mission. Ball was supposed to talk with the runaways and convince them of their folly, but he discovered "that their heads were full of notions of liberty and happiness in some of the West India islands."[12]

The real burden of slave control lay on the shoulders of the white populations living along the shores of the Chesapeake. Subjected to continuous British raids and forced to serve long periods in the local militia, white citizens were also responsible for preventing slaves from reaching the enemy. The task was not an easy one. Nothing could stop local slaves from joining British landing parties returning to their ships. The Americans, therefore, concentrated their efforts on stopping those slaves who fled to the Chesapeake's heavily wooded shores and waited in hiding until they could attract the attention of a passing British cruiser. In both 1813 and 1814 armed patrols of whites constantly scoured the coastal areas shooting suspected escapees on sight. Typical of such operations was an incident that occurred near Hampton, Virginia, in July, 1813. Between 25 and 30 slaves, including women and children, escaped from a nearby plantation, stole several canoes, and hid in some trees near the water. Spotting a British ship, the Negroes quickly launched their canoes only to find that their movements had been discovered. A group of white fishermen, the owners of the stolen canoes, opened fire on the overloaded boats. At least one of the slaves was wounded and some fell into the water, presumably drowning, before the others gave up the effort and surrendered. The twenty-two survivors were marched back to Hampton by the fishermen who

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[11] Gov. Winder to Gen. Caleb Hawkins, Aug. 27, 1813; Maryland Governor's Letterbook, *ibid.*

[12] Lord Bathurst to John Quincy Adams, Oct. 24, 1815, *American State Papers. Documents, Legislative and Executive* (Washington, 38 vols., 1832-1861), *Foreign Relations*, Vol. IV, 118-125. Hereafter cited as *ASP;FR*. See also *National Intelligencer*, Aug. 5, 1813; *Niles Register*, Aug. 7, 1813; Ball, *Slavery in the United States*, p. 472.

received the applause of the citizenry.[13] Near Lynnhaven Bay a similar tragedy occurred in October, 1813, when a special "voluntary association" of whites came across an encampment of escaped slaves waiting to join the British. Without warning the whites attacked, killing five or six and wounding many others.[14] One militia unit on slave patrol duty in Princess Anne County tried to interfere with the intercourse between escaped slaves and the British by setting an artful ambush. While most of the patrol hid behind some sand hills a few blackened their faces and waved white handkerchiefs at a nearby British frigate. The captain of the vessel immediately dispatched small boats to pick up the fraudulent slaves. Fortunately for the British, one of the sailors spotted the white ankles of the disguised militiamen and a hasty retreat was ordered. Several sailors were killed, however, before the boats managed to row out of range of the American muskets.[15]

The zeal of the Americans in attempting to suppress the Negro emigration was justified not only on economic grounds but also as a vital military necessity since an escaped slave could provide the enemy with information on the local military situation and act as guides. Most escapees did not actively assist the British but there were certainly some who tried to take advantage of the situation and strike back at their masters. In April, 1813, for example, a party of escaped slaves rowed out to a ship near Hampton, Virginia, and enquired if it was British. The captain and crew, actually American privateersmen, lured the Negroes on board by answering affirmatively. The slaves immediately asked for arms to equip a large number of their comrades who, they said, had been secretly training for some time and were now ready to begin a general massacre of white citizens. The Americans entertained the Negroes for several hours until they obtained the details of the plan and then seized them. Eventually the blacks were incarcerated in the Williamsburg jail, but the records are silent as to their final fate.[16] Other escaping Negroes proved of more service to the British. Throughout the summer and fall of 1813 the newspapers carried reports of British raiding parties being led by Negro guides. During an attack on Fredericktown, Maryland, the British used former slaves as messengers.[17]

The Americans were most perturbed by incidents in which escaped slaves led British patrols back to their former masters' plantations. There was probably good reason for this fear since at least one British naval officer remembered many ex-slaves asking for arms so they could "cut massa's throat." Although there is no record of any such murders, a few

[13] Richmond *Enquirer*, July 30, 1813.
[14] *Ibid.*, Oct. 8, 1813.
[15] *Niles Register*, Sept. 11, 1813.
[16] *National Intelligencer*, April 6, 1813.
[17] *Niles Register*, May 3 and 22, 1813.

former slaves were able to gain a measure of revenge.[18] One such episode occurred in Surry County, Virginia, where the former slaves of Nicholas Faulcon, known to his friends as "one of the most humane and indulgent masters on earth," reappeared with a British force and helped to devastate the plantation.[19] In August of 1813 a well-publicized example of slave "vengeance" took place in St. Mary's county, Maryland, where a former slave of Caleb Jones suddenly returned to his master's home along with a British force. While the British looted, the slave, who was armed with pistols and a sword, spent the night verbally tormenting his former master. At daybreak the raiders withdrew taking with them the remainder of Jones's slaves.[20]

There can be no question that in 1813 the American slave population was a military asset to the British. Time and again black men provided information and services that greatly increased the effectiveness of the British operations. The greatest advantage to the British, however, was the white southerner's fear of the slaves. When, for example, the national government asked Maryland to call up more militia units for the defense of the Chesapeake, the acting governor replied that in fulfilling the government's request "we were most anxious to draw the militia from those parts of the state least exposed to danger, not only from the British, but also from the blacks who it appears . . . have created considerable disquietude in many sections of the state." At negligible cost the British had managed to impair seriously the American war effort. Merely their presence had encouraged a black uprising against the institution of slavery and compelled the Americans to fight on two fronts.[21]

During the early months of 1814 only a small British fleet remained on station in the Chesapeake. The flight of the slaves, however, continued. In March several dozen black refugees from plantations in Gloucester, Matthews, and Northumberland counties, Virginia, made their way to British ships. Maryland slave owners also reported large numbers of their slaves having deserted to the enemy.[22] Under pressure from angry constituents the Virginia legislature moved towards even harsher laws designed to repress the black population. Bills were introduced in the legislature to restrict the movement of slaves outside their masters' plantations and to abolish schools for "people of colour." Since many Virginians believed

[18] William Stanhope Lovell, *Personal Narrative of Events from 1799 to 1815* (London, 1879), p. 152.

[19] Richmond *Enquirer*, July 6, 1813.

[20] *National Intelligencer*, Aug. 24, 1813.

[21] Alexander Magruder to Lt. Col. Frisby Tilghman, April 10, 1813, Maryland Governor's Letterbook, Class E.2 (reel 4), Microfilm Collection of Early State Records, Library of Congress.

[22] Lord Bathurst to John Quincy Adams, Oct. 24, 1815, *ASP;FR*, Vol. IV, 119; Richmond *Enquirer*, March 30 and May 15, 1814; *Niles Register*, April 30, 1814; *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), March 18, 1814.

free Negroes were encouraging the slaves to escape, a law restricting the ability of free black vendors to travel about the state was also considered.[23] The most important legislation passed in Virginia related to appropriations for the execution or transportation of slaves. In 1813 the amount of money spent on repaying masters whose slaves had been executed or sold out of the state for disciplinary reasons doubled from the previous year. Costs leaped another twenty percent in 1814 when a total of $12,000 was spent. In these grim figures can be read the personal tragedies suffered by slaves whose bid for freedom failed.[24]

The level of war in the Chesapeake sharply increased in the spring and summer of 1814 after Vice-Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane assumed command of British naval forces in American waters. Cochrane's mission was similar to Warren's in 1813: to attract American attention away from the northern battlefields. But the end of the Napoleonic wars meant that the new commander would have many more ships and men to accomplish his objectives. Cochrane moved quickly with his expanded force to blockade the entire coast of the United States. He then turned his attention to the slaves. On April 2, 1814, the British commander issued a proclamation stating that all those "disposed to emigrate" from the United States would be welcomed aboard British ships or at British military posts. Such emigrants, said the proclamation, "will have their choice of either entering into his Majesty's sea or land forces, or of being sent as FREE settlers to the British possessions in North America or the West Indies where they will meet with all due encouragement." The temporary expedients of 1813 had now become official British policy. All slaves were now to be actively encouraged to escape as part of a military strategy aimed at weakening the American economy and disrupting American society. The slaves had become important pawns in the larger struggle.[25]

The effect of Cochrane's proclamation was to increase the flow of black refugees. To handle the large numbers of ex-slaves the British established a semi-permanent camp on Tangier Island near the mouth of the Potomac River. With the help of black laborers the invaders constructed extensive fortifications and made the island not only a haven for escaped slaves but also a base from which raiding expeditions could be launched.[26] It was at Tangier Island that the British initiated one of their most ambitious projects with respect to the slaves. In May of 1814 Admiral Sir

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[23] Virginia House Journal, Jan. 8, 11, 17, 26, and 27, 1814, Class A.16 (reel 6), Microfilm Collection of Early State Records, Library of Congress.

[24] Virginia Senate Journal, Jan. 22, 1813, Jan. 24 and 25, 1814, Class A.1a (reel 2), *ibid.*

[25] Cochrane Proclamation, April 2, 1814 Admiralty Archives, Adm 1/508, p. 579, Public Record Office, London. Hereafter cited as P.R.O.

[26] John W. Fortescue, *A History of the British Army* (London, 10 vols., 1920), IX, 140; William M. Marine, *The British Invasion of Maryland, 1812-1815* (Baltimore, 1913), p. 58.

George Cockburn reported to Cochrane that he was recruiting a "Corps of Colonial Marines from the People of Colour who escape to us from the Enemy's shore in this Neighborhood to be formed, drilled, and brought forward for service."[27]

Within a short time Cockburn had enlisted over two hundred former slaves and put them under the command of Sergeant William Hammond who was promoted to acting ensign for the duration of his assignment. Hammond had only a few weeks to train his recruits on Tangier Island, teaching them the basic skills of marching and use of firearms. In the last week of May, 1814, the black unit had its first taste of combat when the British assaulted an obscure American battery at Pungoteaque, Virginia. Under cover of rocket and cannon fire, royal marines and the black colonial marines landed and attacked the American position from the rear. After a sharp but brief contest, in which one of the black soldiers was killed and five wounded, the Americans surrendered. Captain James Ross of the *Albion*, who commanded the expedition, was pleased with the performance of the black troops. "Their conduct," he wrote Cockburn, "was marked by great spirit and vivacity, and perfect obediance."[28] A few weeks later the black marines again saw action. While pursuing an American flotilla of gunboats up the Patuxent River a British naval squadron landed a raiding party including thirty of the black marines. The local British commander was once more impressed with the "order, forbearance, and regularity" of his unusual troops. He noted that all thirty were volunteers who had originally escaped from plantations in the vicinity and risked certain death should they be recaptured. Despite the obvious temptation to seek revenge, the Negroes avoided looting the homes they captured and, it was reported, even ignored the stocks of liquor that were readily available.[29]

By the end of June, 1814, Cockburn was convinced that his experiment was a success. To Cochrane he reported that although the Negroes had been trained with "astonishing rapidity," they had displayed "extraordinary steadiness and good conduct when in action with the Enemy." Cockburn attributed the success of the black unit to the talents of Sergeant Hammond for whom he requested a promotion.[30] The achievements of the black corps led Cochrane to urge that the experiment should be continued and expanded. In July he wrote his superiors in London claiming that large numbers of escaped slaves could be recruited and that he had ordered equipment for an anticipated one thousand black cavalrymen. Black troops, he reported, were "more terrific to the Americans than any troops that could be brought forward." Cochrane added, however, that the former

[27] Cockburn to Cochrane, May 19, 1814, Adm. 1/507, pp. 59-60, P.R.O.
[28] Ross to Cockburn, May 29, 1814, *ibid.*, pp. 68-70.
[29] Captain William Baines to Cockburn, June 19, 1814, *ibid.*, pp. 81-86.
[30] Cockburn to Cochrane, June 23, 1814, *ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

slaves could only be held in service for a short time for their real interest was "to obtain settlements in the British colonies in North America where they will be most useful subjects from their hatred to the citizens of the United States."[33] Cochrane's hopes for the increased use of black troops was never realized largely because the war ended too soon. But up until the time hostilities ceased he worked diligently to encourage slaves to desert. He was particularly anxious to have several regiments of West Indian blacks ordered into the Chesapeake, believing their presence would inspire American blacks to enlist in the British army. Cochrane also assigned at least one officer the duty of devising means to encourage American slaves to join the army.[32]

The black marines continued to prove their value throughout the major Chesapeake campaigns of 1814. In late August the former slaves were assigned to the advanced unit of the British army that defeated the Americans at Bladensburg and burned Washington. A few weeks later black marines acted as skirmishers in the ill-fated attack on Baltimore.[33] As the British fleet prepared to leave the Chesapeake for the last time in September, 1814, the black troops had clearly won the respect of the British. Cochrane, for example, remarked that the Negro troops "have gained much credit for their services with the regular army." The admiral thought so highly of his black marines, whom he believed perfectly suited for campaigns in hot and humid climates, that he paid them an additional bounty to remain in the army. Eventually two hundred escaped slaves were joined with three hundred royal marines to form an integrated battalion.[34]

The increased British interest in the slaves in 1814 had produced additional problems for the war-weary white populations of the Chesapeake. Security against the blacks became an obsession in the Virginia tidewater where slaves outnumbered whites. During the early months of 1814 the Virginia legislature and the office of the secretary of war were engaged in a heated debate over the reconstruction of Fort Powhatan on the James River. The Virginians insisted that the fort was necessary as a protection against British raids along the James. Army engineers, however, ruled that no amount of work could make the fort secure against naval bombardments. During the discussions it became apparent that Virginia was really interested in the renovation of the fort as "a point of security to the in-

[31] Cochrane to Earl Bathurst, July 14, 1814, War Office Archives, W.O. 1/141, pp. 7-14, P.R.O.

[32] Same to same, Aug. 28, 1814, *ibid.*, pp. 27-30; Cockburn to Cochrane, Aug. 15, 1815, Adm. 1/507, pp. 121-122, P.R.O.

[33] G. R. Gleig, *A Narrative of the Campaigns of the British Army at Washington and New Orleans* (London, 1821), pp. 97-119, 170-177; Dr. James McCulloch to Gen. Samuel Smith, Sept. 14, 1814, Samuel Smith papers, Library of Congress.

[34] Cochrane to Admiral John Croker, Sept. , and Sept. 28, 1814, Adm. 1/507, pp. 56, 248, P.R.O.

habitants in the vicinity of the fort in case of an insurrection of negroes." A committee of Richmond citizens, referring to the recent black rebellion in Santo Domingo, warned that the fort was necessary to avoid a massacre of white citizens. The war ended before the dispute was resolved.[35]

Fear of the blacks bordered on panic in the vicinity of Washington in July and August, 1814, as British forces moved closer. The city had been swept by rumors of rebellion for over a year, but the menace seemed greater with enemy ships and troops nearby. Local civilians too old or infirm for militia duty formed volunteer companies that prowled the streets of Washington and nearby Georgetown carefully monitoring the activities of the Negro population. The wife of a prominent Washington newspaper editor was not untypical in sleeping with a loaded pistol under her pillow as a protection against what she termed "our home enemy."[36] After the disastrous battle of Bladensburg, which left the American army shattered and the road to the national capital open to the British, many Washington-area militia units insisted on returning home immediately in the belief that the slaves "would take advantage of the absence of the men to insult the females, and complete the work of destruction commenced by the enemy."[37] Despite the apprehensions of the whites, the slaves did not attack lives and property. Instead they welcomed the British army occupying Washington with pleas for sanctuary. A young British officer recalled that on the march from Washington back to the fleet the army was approached by a large number of slaves "who implored us to take them along with us, offering to serve either as soldiers or sailors, if we would give them their liberty." The British commander, believing he was about to be attacked, refused most of these requests in order to hasten the march.[38]

With the end of the war the flight of the slaves was halted. During the previous two years thousands of black refugees had been sent to the West Indies and to Canada. The single largest group of black exiles was deposited in Halifax in the early months of 1815. Over two-thousand former slaves with no resources of any kind were left standing on the docks. Penniless, jobless, many of them sick, the refugees were immediately reduced to seeking public relief. What eventually happened to them is something of a mystery. At least a portion established themselves as

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[35] John Armstrong to Gov. Barbour, Oct. 19, 1813, and Richmond Committee to Barbour, Feb. 4 and 9, 1814, Virginia House Journal, Class A.1b (reel 6), Microfilm Collection of Early State Records, Library of Congress.

[36] Gaillard Hunt (ed.), *The First Forty Years of Washington Society* (New York, 1906), p. 90.

[37] Report of General Tobias Stansbury, Nov. 15, 1814, *American State Papers. Documents, Legislative and Executive* (Washington, 38 vols., 1832-1861), *Military Affairs*, Vol. VI, 562.

[38] Glieg, *Narrative of the Campaigns*, p. 144.

farmers or domestics while others may have migrated to the West Indies.[39] White Americans insisted during and after the war that the British sold at least some of the escapees back into slavery. The American government could produce no substantial evidence for this allegation at the peace talks in Ghent and there is little documentary support for the claim. Indeed, the evidence seems to indicate that the British, many of whom were affected by an anti-slavery movement in their homeland, treated the slaves with remarkable kindness at least during the war. Few slaves, if any, were taken against their wills. Those who did flee apparently received humane treatment and were allowed to choose where they would establish new homes. That the escaped slaves sometimes helped the British forces and always refused the blandishments of their former masters to return is further proof that the blacks saw the British as being benevolent.[40]

In terms of the war the slaves had played an important part, certainly more important than has been previously recognized. Those who escaped often actively assisted the British while those who remained behind constituted a major security problem for harassed white Americans living in fear both of British attack and slave rebellion. In terms of post-war America, however, the effects of the black response to the British invasion appear limited. The flight of three to five thousand slaves from Virginia and Maryland meant hardship for many slave owners who had invested thousands of dollars in this human property.[41] But the total slave population in the Chesapeake approached four hundred thousand, and while many of these slaves might have fled if given the chance, the fact that most of them were still on the plantations at war's end permitted the general economic structure of the area to survive without fundamental change. White attitudes towards the institution of slavery also seemed unaffected by the black exodus of 1813 and 1814. Unlike some of the perceptive British officers serving in the Chesapeake campaigns, white southerners did not see that the black refugees had publicly exposed the myth that slavery was a beneficent social institution in which the interests of the masters and the slaves were perfectly compatible. The blacks who joined the British army to fight their former masters showed that at least some slaves were

[39] Walter Ronald Copp, "Nova Scotia Trade During the War of 1812," in G. A. Rawlyk (ed.), *Historical Essays on the Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto, 1967), p. 107; W. S. Macnutt, *The Atlantic Provinces* (Toronto, 1965), pp. 157-158.

[40] James Monroe to the American Plenipotentiaries at Gottenburg, Jan. 28, 1814; Joseph C. Cabell to St. George Tucker, Nov. 22, 1814; Monroe to Senate, Feb. 18, 1815, *ASP;FR*, Vol. III, 701-751.

[41] This figure is computed from several sources. In 1826 John Quincy Adams, as secretary of state, reported that 2,435 slaves had "been carried off" from Virginia and Maryland during the war. I believe this figure is too low. In 1814 alone the British campaign in the Chesapeake produced over 2,000 black emigrants who were sent to Halifax. Contemporary sources show that many additional slaves fled to the British in 1813, and that in both 1813 and 1814 several ship loads of slaves were dispatched to the West Indies. See *ASP;FR*, Vol. IV, 802-818.

not conditioned to accept the system. They demonstrated their profound alienation from and antagonism towards a country and a society that professed equality for all while tolerating bondage for some. White Virginians and Marylanders refused to accept such a view, preferring to maintain their illusions of slave docility and loyalty. Typical of such blindness was an article in the *National Intelligencer* published during the war in which the author assured his white readers that the basic patriotism of the slaves would cause them to fight the British invaders if they were permitted to do so. Slavery, he continued, was a system in which slave and master lived in harmony. It was a mutually agreeable association where the slaves "perform their daily labor not as a task enforced by fear . . . but rather under the influence of an instinct which impels them to the voluntary performance of what they are conscious is their duty." Incredibly, the same newspaper was simultaneously printing stories of slaves escaping to the British. White southerners learned nothing from the War of 1812.[42] Their basic faith in their social institutions, particularly slavery, remained firm. In their obtuseness lay the seeds of future tragedy.

[42] *National Intelligencer*, April 30, 1813.