

CHAPTER IX

EVACUATION WITH THE
BRITISH

"If they have a sufficient number of Transports, they will carry with them about Twelve Thousand Negroes, which they have now in Charles Town, and which they have stolen in their various expeditions into the Country."

Ralph Izard to Mrs. Izard, October 7, 1782

The chief concern of Americans about Negroes in the thirty months after Yorktown was their disappearance. Whenever the defeated British made their final withdrawals, whether by land or sea, thousands of slaves went with them. Take what precautions they would, the Americans could not prevent mass exodus of their black bondmen, which began immediately after Cornwallis's defeat.

The articles of capitulation at Yorktown stated that any American property held by the British garrison was subject to recovery.¹ The surrender terms were silent, however, about slaves who would try to escape by going aboard the departing warships of the royal navy. Americans did not need to be told that prompt action was necessary to forestall the flight of slaves. On the very day of the Yorktown surrender, General George Weedon placed sentinels "all along the Beach" to prevent them from reaching the vessels of the royal navy. Prompt as was his action, he feared that many runaways had already "secreted" themselves on board the ships. On the next day Weedon sent a letter to Governor Nelson apprising him of the situation.²

Virginia's chief executive had not been idle. Within twenty-four hours after the surrender he had written to Cornwallis

1. Tarleton, *History of the Campaigns in the Southern Provinces*, 439.

2. Weedon to Nelson, Oct. 20, 1781, *Cal. of Va. State Papers*, II, 561.

asking him to prevent Negroes from making their escape by boarding the sloop of war, *Bonetta*, which was allowed to sail to New York with news of the capitulation. These Negroes, cautioned the Governor, would "endeavor to lie concealed from your Lordship's Notice till the Vessel sails."³

General Washington lent his support to the effort to keep Negroes from leaving the state. He was disturbed about the number of slaves who attached themselves to the British or posed as freemen in order to deceive American commanders. To put a stop to such irregularities, Washington on October 25 ordered officers of the allied armies to deliver all Negroes who came into their hands to a guard to be established at Yorktown and Gloucester under the superintendency of David Ross, Virginia's commercial agent. Negroes who could prove they were not escaped slaves would be released. Slaves whose masters lived in the vicinity would be issued a pass enabling them to make their way home unmolested. Slaves whose owners were not Virginians would be advertised in newspapers of their home states. While waiting for their masters to claim them, they would be "sent into the Country to work for their Victuals and Cloathes."⁴

Washington's order seems to have placed a check on slave-seizing by American and French officers as well as those of the enemy. Doubtless this was what he intended, for he was fully aware that some American commanders had a weakness for acquiring property in blacks. Ten days before Cornwallis's capitulation Washington requested American army officers to report any Negroes they had "who have come out of York." Henceforth if any officer kept such a person in his service he would be called to the strictest account. Washington's order also applied to officers of the state militia.⁵

Civilians did not come under military regulations, and to prevent them from retaining other people's slaves, the Virginia legislature in May 1782 ordered all holders of runaways to deliver them to their masters, if known. If the master was not known, an advertisement seeking him was to be placed in the *Virginia Gazette*. Any person who could prove his right to a

3. Nelson to Cornwallis, Oct. 20, 1781, *Off. Letters of Govs. of Va.*, III, 88.

4. General Orders, Oct. 25, 1781, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXIII, 264-65; Washington to Ross, Oct. 24, 1781, *ibid.*, 262.

5. General Orders, Oct. 9, 1781, *ibid.*, 128-29.

slave lost during the Cornwallis invasion might apply to a justice of the peace for a warrant of recovery.⁶

To compel Americans to give slaves back to their owners was a trying task, but it was nothing compared to getting the French to give up their Negroes. In dealing with an ally whose assistance at Yorktown had been almost invaluable, a delicate touch was essential. Washington used a personal approach in writing to the Count de Grasse on behalf of a Maryland master who had lost upwards of forty slaves, five of whom had been taken in the bay by a French ship and carried to the West Indies. "I will take it as a very great favor if your Excellency will direct them to be sent back by any Vessel coming either to Virginia or Maryland." The expenses of their return trip would be paid by Colonel William Fitzhugh, their master.⁷

The difficulties of negotiating with the French were typified by an incident which occurred when the French troops were stationed in Charlotte County in southeastern Virginia. An American militia officer, Colonel Thomas Read, sent a sergeant and a guard to the French camp to apprehend runaways and return them to their owners. The French commander, the Marquis de Choisy, informed Read that he considered his application unnecessary, insisting that he had already come to an agreement with the governor respecting slaves. The rebuked Read dismissed the guard but he informed Governor Harrison that unless the Negroes who had deserted to the French were quickly reclaimed, "those who have Property of that kind in the vicinity of the Camps will suffer by their going off."⁸

With such complaints mounting, Governor Harrison took the matter up with General Count Rochambeau. Expressing his reluctance to trouble the French commander, Harrison nevertheless found it necessary to mention that reports were coming in every day about Negroes harbored by the French troops, and that there was no way in which masters could recover their property except through "your Justice." He asked Rochambeau to issue orders to hold all Negroes within his lines. Simultaneously the Governor ordered the Virginia commissioner

6. Hening, ed., *Statutes of Va.*, XI, 23-24.

7. Washington to de Grasse, Feb. 6, 1782, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXIII, 488-89.

8. Read to Harrison, Mar. 22, 1782, *Cal. of Va. State Papers*, III, 107.

of war to order a detail "to receive the slaves supposed to be with the French army."⁹

Two days later Rochambeau explained his position. He and many other French officers owned Negroes, but these had come from Rhode Island, having either been captured there by the French fleet or purchased from Rhode Islanders. Moreover, some of the Negroes with the French were hired, others were free. He was ready, said Rochambeau, to help the Virginians recover slaves, but not at the sacrifice of the rights of his fellow Frenchmen.¹⁰

Rochambeau's response was hardly satisfactory to the state authorities. The Governor notified Virginia's delegates to Congress a week later that the French troops were moving northward with "many Negroes." Since some of these belonged to North and South Carolina masters; he thought that the Congressional delegates from those states should be notified in order to recover the Negroes when the French reached Philadelphia. The exasperated Governor then unburdened himself to George Washington, declaring that he had written so many protests to the French authorities about loss of slaves that "I am wearied out without being able to procure them." Some, indeed, had been returned but most of them had been kept by the French "either for want of their owners having any proof at hand or the negroes declaring themselves free."¹¹

Little could be done about runaways who passed themselves off to the French as free men, except to put notices in the press. A Baltimore master advertised for Ned who was "skulking in the neighborhood of this town in order to join the French." They would likely welcome him as a refugee, according to the advertisement, because he was "very capable of being a waiter or hostler to any officer, having been a waiter and coachman to Colonel White, of the State of Georgia, ever since the war commenced."¹² A Virginia mistress advertising for her "artful

9. Harrison to Rochambeau, June 26, 1782, *Off. Letters of Govs. of Va.*, III, 257-58; McIlwaine, ed., *Journal of the Council of State of Va.*, III, 114.

10. Acomb, ed., *Revolutionary Journal of Baron von Closen*, 187-88n.

11. Harrison to Virginia Delegates, July 6, to Washington, July 11, 1782, *Off. Letters of Govs. of Va.*, III, 262-63, 266. The Congressmen replied July 16, "We have informed the Delegates of South Carolina, of what your Excellency mentions. Those of North Carolina are not here." Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Cont. Cong.*, VI, 383.

12. *Maryland Journal* (Baltimore), Sept. 17, 1782.

black Guinea Negro Man, named George, a good waggoner," supposed that he would "attempt to join the French troops, now on the march to the Northward, under the command of Rochambeau."¹³

Particularly vexatious to American masters was the reluctance of the French to release a Negro even after proof was offered that he was a slave. When Edmund Pendleton, Jr., heard that his slave Bob was with the French army at Baltimore he sent his overseer to recover him. Twice before Bob had escaped to the French. This time Pendleton's overseer found that he had taken the job of servant to a French lieutenant. When the overseer appeared, the lieutenant's initial impulse was to throw him into the guard house; however, the officer finally released Bob after charging \$20.00 for his maintenance. But the overseer's woes were not over; Bob again escaped, this time with the assistance of the lieutenant; and the overseer returned out of pocket and without Bob. "There are a number of other people who have lost their slaves in the same manner," wrote the influential Edmund Pendleton, "and are in a very ill humor on the occasion."¹⁴

After the battle of Yorktown, escaped slaves could sometimes be recovered from the British by a search conducted under a flag of truce; however, the procedure was difficult. A Norfolk County planter who had lost ninety slaves asked Governor Harrison to get him a permit to go into the enemy lines. Harrison thereupon wrote to Virginia's representatives at Philadelphia, asking them to find out how Congress felt about an application to the British for a flag. Replying promptly, the delegation informed Harrison that they could not give him a definite answer, "the propriety of applications to the British Commander for a restitution of slaves having never been agitated in Congress." But they added that Congress generally disapproved of negotiations between an individual state and the British as contrary to "the spirit of confederacy." Moreover, such a solicitation to the enemy "might not be very politic," and in any event would probably be denied.¹⁵

13. *Ibid.*, Aug. 6, 1782.

14. Pendleton to James Madison, Sept. 2, 1782, "Unpublished Letters of Edmund Pendleton," *Mass. Hist. Soc., Proc.*, 2nd Ser., 19 (1905), 162. For the Bob episode see also Pendleton to Madison, July 29, and Aug. 19, 1782, *ibid.*, 158, 159.

15. Harrison to Virginia Delegates, Aug. 30, 1782, *Off. Letters of Govs. of*

This reply spurred Governor Harrison and the Virginia slave-owners to urge both Congress and the commander-in-chief to take positive action in assisting the recovery of slaves in British hands. Indeed, the problem had become one for the federal government to handle, for it existed in all the areas affected by the British evacuation.

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For some months after the surrender at Yorktown, the British appeared "unable to carry on the war, and too proud to make peace."¹⁶ But by April 1782 His Majesty's ministers had decided to evacuate their troops, using three of the major seaports. The first of these departures took place at Savannah in the summer of 1782.

A week before the date set for the evacuation, the Georgia assembly urged Governor John Martin to request of the British commandant of Savannah that no Negroes or other property belonging to Americans be carried off. The legislators also asked Governor Martin to grant permission to citizens having property in British hands to lodge a formal claim. Realizing that Georgia needed all its manpower resources to rebuild the state's economy, the lower house also tried to persuade departing Tories to leave their slaves behind. The commissioners for the sales of forfeited estates were empowered to purchase Negroes from evacuees and sell them to residents, on condition that the purchasers would not carry them out of the state for at least eighteen months.¹⁷

British military forces formally withdrew from Savannah in July 1782, evacuating loyalists with their slaves as well as troops. On July 6, General Leslie ordered the royal navy to provide shipping accommodations for 50 whites and 1,900 Negroes. An embarkation return of August 10, 1782, lists six ships as having carried 1,568 Negroes to Jamaica. By December 23, 1782, an additional 1,786 Negroes had been taken to St. Augustine; seven months later this figure had reached 1,956, of whom 799 were men, 705 women, and 452 children.¹⁸

Va., III, 311; Virginia Delegates to Harrison, Sept. 10, 1782, Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Cont. Cong.*, VI, 467-68.

16. Phrase attributed to Benjamin Franklin. Washington to Nathanael Greene, Sept. 23, 1782, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXV, 195.

17. Candler, ed., *Rev. Rec. of Ga.*, III, 119-20, 122, 127.

18. Leslie to Captain William Swiney, July 6, 1782, Leslie Letter Book,

Five months after the British left Savannah, Charleston was evacuated. Here, too, the Negro problem loomed large. Confronting Leslie were the conflicting hopes and expectations of three groups: his fellow British officers, the Negroes themselves and the victorious Americans.

General Leslie's difficulties in preventing officers from taking possession of Negroes became more acute as the British made ready to leave. In early May 1782 he sent a sharply worded letter to General Charles O'Hara, informing him that a number of Negroes who had been servants of officers, but who belonged to South Carolinians, were then on board the transports about to sail. "I must request," he wrote, "that you will give the most positive orders to have them sent on shore immediately and delivered over to Colonel Ballingal, Commissioner for Claims for Negroes."¹⁹

Leslie summed up his troubles in a letter to his superiors. Officers who had been in America a long time, he said, looked upon Negroes as their personal property. Now that a general evacuation was near, "every department, and every officer, wishes to include his slave in the number to be brought off. They pretend them spys, or guides, and of course obnoxious [to the Americans], or under promises of freedom from Genl. Prevost. Ld. Cornwallis, Ld. Rawdon, or some other officer of rank, or free by proclamation."²⁰

Leslie's problem was compounded by the failure of naval commanders to issue orders against taking Negroes aboard the transports. Once the ship left Charleston it was extremely difficult for American owners to recover their slaves. Rawlins Lowndes was almost alone in managing to reclaim a slave who had been carried to New York by a captain of the engineers.

N.Y. Pub. Lib.; Lists of transports from Savannah to Jamaica, Aug. 10, 1782, C. O. 5/560, 477; Lists of refugees to East Florida, Dec. 23, 1782, authenticated by John Winniett, Inspector of Refugees, C. O. 5/160, 507; Lists of refugees to East Florida, July 18, 1783, C. O. 5/560, 810. For an analytical statement on the number of white and Negro civilian evacuees from Georgia see Kenneth Coleman, *The American Revolution in Georgia, 1763-1789* (Athens, 1958), 145-46.

19. Leslie to O'Hara, May 3, 1782, Leslie Letter Book, N. Y. Pub. Lib.

20. Leslie to Carleton, Oct. 18, 1782, *Amer. MSS in Royal Inst. of G. B.*, III, 175-76. The Carleton photostats have same letter with an unimportant change in one phrase.

He was successful only because he was able to reach the highest echelons—Leslie and Carleton.²¹

Another problem which Leslie laid before his superiors was the British obligation to the Negro. When Leslie learned that Charleston was to be evacuated, he asked the commander-in-chief for instructions as to the disposition of the Negroes under Commissioner Cruden and those employed in the different departments. "There are many negroes who have been very useful, both at the Siege of Savannah and here," he wrote, "Some of them have been guides, and for their loyalty have been promised their freedom." He pointed out that no matter how the sequestered Negroes were disposed of, there was an obligation to those who had voluntarily joined the British. Something was owed them because of the promises made to them and because of their past services. They could not "in justice be abandoned to the merciless resentment of their former masters."²²

Carleton supported Leslie in refusing to give up Negroes who had borne arms for the king or had otherwise incurred the resentment of American patriots. Leslie therefore appointed a commission, composed largely of military officers, to hear the appeals of Negroes who had served with the British army or who claimed to have fled to the British in response to proclamations offering them their freedom.²³ The responsibility which he felt to the Negroes aggravated his major problem in the evacuation—that of trying to assure the South Carolinians that their property would not be carried off. Masters were already sufficiently alarmed by the difficulty of recovering slaves by legal process; they had to prove ownership, and in establishing such proof they could not employ the testimony of the slaves themselves or of other Negroes—a law which the South Carolinians themselves had enacted.

In August 1782 Governor Mathews warned Leslie that if slaves belonging to patriotic Americans were carried away, he would retaliate by making it impossible for British creditors to collect debts. A believer in the soft answer, Leslie suggested

21. Leslie to Carleton, Aug. 8, Frederick Mackenzie to Lowndes, Sept. 12, 1782, Carleton photostats.

22. Leslie to Carleton, June 27, 1782, *Amer. MSS in Royal Inst. of G. B.*, III, 544; Leslie to Carleton, Aug. 10, 1782, Leslie Letter Book, N. Y. Pub. Lib.

23. Leslie to Carleton, Oct. 18, 1782, *ibid.* For the personnel of this commission see *ibid.*, No. 15675.

that a board of commissioners be appointed to safeguard the interests of both sides—a proposal Mathews found acceptable. On the day before the first meeting of the commissioners, Leslie instructed the two British representatives to pledge the restoration of all British-held slaves except those who had been promised their freedom and those whose services to the British had rendered them *persona non grata* in American circles.²⁴

The four commissioners had no trouble getting together, and they agreed to restore all slaves except those who were "obnoxious" and those who had been promised freedom. Restored slaves were not to be punished for having attached themselves to the British. Two Americans were to be permitted to reside in Charleston to assist in returning slaves to their rightful owners.²⁵ These arrangements were soon completed. Upon presenting themselves at Charleston, the American commissioners were received and accredited without delay, and two additional commissioners were stationed at Accabee near the British lines to receive the recovered Negroes forwarded from Charleston. The outlook for a peaceful settlement appeared most hopeful. Within a week, however, the whole plan had fallen through.

The American commissioners at Charleston found obstacles placed in their way. They were not given full liberty to examine the outbound British transports, and after they had identified 136 Negroes for reclaiming, the British cleared only 73 for delivery. Even before these could be sent to Accabee the Charleston commissioners received a letter from Leslie's headquarters notifying them that the whole plan was at an end unless General Nathanael Greene returned three British soldiers he had just seized.

The surprised commissioners immediately forwarded the note to Governor Mathews. Within a few minutes after the letter reached his hands, the impulsive and outspoken chief executive sent a lengthy reply to Leslie, accusing the British of bad faith. Announcing that he looked upon the agreement as dissolved, he ordered the American commissioners to return from within the British lines.²⁶ Leslie, on his part, attributed

24. Leslie to Alexander Wright and James Johnson, Oct. 9, 1782, Carleton photostats.

25. Articles of agreement between the commissioners for Governor Mathews and the commissioners for General Leslie, dated Oct. 10, 1782, *ibid.*

26. For this story, with copies of the letters exchanged, see Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department*, 566-70.

the failure of the plan to "the behaviour of Mr. Mathews the Rebel Governor and General Greene in insulting the outposts at the very time I was acting with the utmost moderation and forbearance."²⁷

As a result of the breakdown of this agreement, the British evacuated Charleston without any supervision of their shipments. When, on December 14, 1782, they finally left the city, they took 5,327 Negroes, of whom one-half were destined for Jamaica. Of the remainder, all but 500 went to East Florida, with a few finding their way to St. Lucia, Halifax, England, and New York.²⁸

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The last American port to be evacuated was New York. By November 25, 1783, when the last of His Majesty's troops boarded their transports, the final peace treaty had been signed. Since this treaty included a statement relating to Negroes, the New York evacuations had a broad interest, one involving policy and its observance by the signatories.

The preliminary articles had contained an agreement that His Majesty's forces should withdraw without carrying away any Negroes or other property of Americans. The terms of this agreement, signed at Paris on November 30, 1782, soon became common and official knowledge in America. On April 15, 1783, Commander-in-Chief Sir Guy Carleton issued an order from his New York headquarters warning all masters of British vessels not to commit any breach of the article relative to Negro removals. On the very same day the Congress instructed General Washington to make arrangements to obtain the delivery of the Negroes and other American property then in the hands of the British or their adherents. A week later Washington wrote to Carleton, suggesting a meeting. Sir Guy was willing, if unenthusiastic: "I cannot decline the personal interview proposed by your Excellency."²⁹

27. Leslie to Carleton, Nov. 18, 1782, American Dispatches, II, Clinton Papers, Clements Lib.

28. "Return of People Embarked from South Carolina and Georgia. Charleston, 13 December 1782," *Mass. Hist. Soc., Proc.*, 2nd Ser., 3 (1887), 95. For the specific number coming into Florida as of July 15, 1783, see C. O. 5/560, 811-20.

29. "Extract from General Orders, Headquarters, New York, 15 April, 1783," Thomas Jefferson Papers, IX, No. 1455, Lib. Cong.; Carleton to Washington, Apr. 24, 1783, Washington Papers, CXX, No. 13, Lib. Cong.

This important conference was held at Orangetown on May 6. Washington was accompanied by his military secretary and flanked by three witnesses, one of whom was George Clinton, New York's able war governor. Washington led off by stating that he had asked for a personal conference as the speediest way of reaching agreement over the major problems connected with the British evacuation, namely, taking over the posts occupied by the British troops, and recovering Negroes and other property belonging to Americans.³⁰ Carleton replied that the British were leaving the country as fast as they could—6,000 civilians had already been sent away, including some Negroes. Expressing surprise, Washington observed that transporting Negroes was contrary to the provisional treaty. Carleton then advanced a point of view which dismayed the American negotiators, despite its familiar ring. It could not have been the intention of his government, said Carleton, to ignore its obligations to Negroes who had come into the British lines under proclamations of freedom issued by his predecessors. To deliver up such persons, some of whom would thereby be executed and others seriously punished, would be a "dishonorable Violation of the public Faith." However, if British evacuation of the Negroes was subsequently declared to be a treaty infraction, the Crown would compensate their owners. With this possibility in mind, Carleton had directed that a register be kept of all Negroes involved.

Washington made no attempt to conceal his dissatisfaction. He told Carleton that he felt that his conduct departed from the letter and the spirit of the treaty. He pointed out that Carleton's proposal to compensate owners could not be executed. It would be impossible to ascertain the value of a slave from a mere register; a slave's worth depended upon his industry and sobriety. Also, a slave might falsify his name or that of his master. Carleton countered by observing that since the Negroes whom the British refused to deliver would have obtained their freedom they would have no reason to conceal facts about their

30. The summary that follows is from "The Substance of the Conference between General Washington and Sir Guy Carleton at an Interview at Orangetown, May 6th 1783," in Washington Papers, CCXX, No. 71, Lib. Cong. See also "Extract from the Substance of the Conference between General Washington and Sir Guy Carleton at an Interview at Orange Town, 6th May 1783," in Thomas Jefferson Papers, IX, Nos. 1471-72, Lib. Cong.

past. By keeping a register, as he was doing, he was actually helping the slave-owners, for if no record was kept and no control exercised over the Negroes, they would do as they pleased, to the inevitable loss of their former proprietors. His plan left open some chance of later compensation. On this note the lengthy conference came to a close.

Washington hoped that he and Carleton could reconcile some of their differences at a dinner meeting scheduled the next day, but Carleton fell ill. Even if the second meeting had been held it would probably have had little result. "I have discovered enough," Washington wrote a few hours after the initial interview, "to convince me that the slaves which have absconded from their masters will never be restored."³¹

When Washington learned that Carleton could not see him, he sent word signifying his readiness to enter into any agreement to prevent further evacuating of American-owned Negroes. Carleton replied that when he came to New York he found the Negroes free, and that he had no right to keep them from going anywhere in the world they pleased. However, he approved the establishment of an American commission to inspect the British embarkation, and was gratified to learn that Washington had already taken this action.³²

Three weeks before the Orangetown interview, Carleton had proposed that Congress appoint persons to enter New York to assist the British in inspecting and superintending the embarkations. Congress had referred the suggestion to Washington who, two days after the interview, named a three-man commission: Egbert Benson, attorney-general of New York, Colonel William S. Smith, and army contractor Daniel Parker. Washington charged them with the task of reporting both to Carleton and himself any treaty infractions relative to American property.³³

The American commissioners got to work slowly. They arrived in New York on May 10, but were unable to get an audience with Carleton until five days later. At the end of the month they wrote to the impatient Washington asking specific instructions as to whether they should superintend outbound

31. Washington to Benjamin Harrison, May 6, 1783, Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXVI, 401.

32. Washington to Carleton, May 6, 1783, Carleton to Washington, May 12, 1783, Washington Papers, CCXX, Nos. 71-72, 104-5, Lib. Cong.

33. Washington to Commissioners, May 8, 1783, *ibid.*, CCXX, No. 77.

merchant vessels as well as official transports. Washington replied that they were the best judges of such matters.³⁴

In early June the commissioners carefully selected a case that would furnish a test of their powers. They reported to Carleton that an ex-slave, Thomas Francis, was on board the *Fair American*, then about to sail for the West Indies. Escaped from an American master, Francis had come within the British lines on November 2, 1782, and had enlisted in the Jamaica Rangers.³⁵ To the chagrin of the commissioners, Carleton sent no reply.

The disillusioned commissioners asked Washington whether further protests would serve a useful purpose in view of the Francis case. They informed him that American-owned Negroes numbering at least 130 men were then aboard ships sailing for Nova Scotia. A month later one of the commissioners reported that although seven Negroes had been salvaged from the recently sailed fleet, he considered further remonstrance useless since about one thousand ex-slaves were scheduled to embark within a day or two. Nevertheless, he concluded, he would continue to supervise the examination of the ships and the registering of slaves.³⁶

By mid-July, both Washington and Congress were ready to abolish the impotent commission. Acting as an agent of Congress, the Commander-in-Chief had sent to that body a report of his interview with Carleton, and advised that the commission be discontinued. Congress needed no prodding, having already unanimously voted to instruct the American ministers in Europe to protest to Great Britain the carrying off of "a considerable number of negroes belonging to citizens of these States." Sharing Washington's sentiment that the commission was little more than a farce, Congress on July 16 instructed him to abolish it unless some change should have occurred which dictated otherwise.³⁷

34. Washington to Commissioners, May 27, Commissioners to Washington, May 30, Washington to Commissioners, June 10, 1783, *ibid.*, CCXXI, No. 45, CCXXI, Nos. 72-74, CCXXII, No. 13.

35. Commissioners to Carleton, June 9, 1783, *ibid.*, CCXXII, No. 10, Lib. Cong.

36. Benson and Parker to Washington, June 14, Smith to Washington, July 15, 1783, *ibid.*, CCXXII, No. 47, CCXXIII, No. 66, Lib. Cong.

37. Washington to Congress, June 23, 1783, *ibid.*, CCXXII, No. 83, Lib. Cong.; Congress to Washington, July 16, 1783, *ibid.*, CCXXIII, No. 73.

Thus the British evacuation of New York, as of Savannah and Charleston, proceeded with little American hindrance. Alexander Hamilton found the British point of view on slaves defensible,³⁸ but his was an almost solitary voice in non-loyalist circles. Indignation over the carrying away of slaves was both widespread and enduring; it was to affect American diplomatic relations with Great Britain for nearly half a century. Years after the war Americans were still hammering the point that the payment of pre-war debts in London and Glasgow should be withheld until His Majesty's government made restitution for the lost blacks.

It appears that the position Britain finally adopted on the return of slaves was formulated by Guy Carleton,³⁹ whose view became standard policy: Negroes who were with the British prior to the signing of the provisional treaty on November 30, 1782 were free; those acquired after that date were to be given up.⁴⁰ In arriving at this dictum, Carleton was doubtless moved, as he claimed, by a sense of responsibility to the Negroes. A far-seeing man, Carleton may also have felt that if Britain defaulted on promises of freedom made during the war, any similar proclamations in future conflicts would not be trusted.

Nevertheless, he carefully fulfilled his assurances to Washington that he would keep a register of Negroes to facilitate the compensation of their American owners. He assigned a board of three men to keep the register, and every Wednesday morning the board met for two hours at Fraunces Tavern with the three American commissioners.

By the time His Majesty's forces officially withdrew from New York on November 30, 1783, the British commissioners had compiled a detailed list of 3,000 Negroes they had inspected, com-

Lib. Cong.; "The United States in Congress assembled, May 26, 1783," Jefferson Papers, IX, Nos. 1487-88, Lib. Cong.; Hunt, ed., *Writings of Madison*, I, 471. For Robert Livingston's instructions to the American Peace Commissioners, dated May 28, 1783, see Francis Wharton, *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States*, 6 vols. (Washington, 1889), VI, 453.

38. Camillus: "Defence of Mr. Jay's Treaty," in J. C. Hamilton, ed., *Works of Hamilton*, VII, 190-94.

39. For a cogent statement on the Negro evacuation policy of the British see an undated draft headed "Negroes" in C. O. 5/8, 113-15.

40. Nothing came of Congress's referral of the matter to the American ministers abroad; moreover, as concerned the slaves, the definitive treaty of Sept. 3, 1783, merely repeated the language of its predecessor.

prising 1,336 men, 914 women, and 750 children.⁴¹ This massive "Inspection Roll of Negroes" bore eight columns listing the names of the Negroes, their former masters, and the names of the vessels on which they were embarking. One heading was entitled, "Description," and bore such arresting comments as "fine boy," "an idiot," "likely rascal," "snug little wench," and "nearly worn out."

To these 3,000 Negroes who left New York must be added the hundreds of unregistered ones carried away in private vessels. The total number of colored persons who left that city, as well as other ports, can only be guessed. Perhaps it would be safe to say that during the evacuations the numbers of Negroes leaving Savannah was 4,000, Charleston 6,000, and New York 4,000. If anything, these figures are a bit low, and they do not, of course, include those who went off with the French, nor the thousands—perhaps around five thousand—whom the British carried away prior to the surrender of Yorktown.

* * *

Many Negroes were carried off without regard for their own wishes. This would be particularly true of slaves belonging to departing loyalists. Likewise, many Negroes who had deserted to the British were not consulted about their being taken off in the evacuations. Perhaps most of these former runaways would have left America voluntarily, since the British had assiduously spread the idea that those who went back to their American masters would be severely whipped and then assigned the hardest kind of labor.

The belief that their former masters would treat them harshly for having fled was no doubt a strong factor in shaping the conduct of Negroes who had a free choice. In peacetime a recovered runaway was not likely to get off lightly; in wartime a slave who not only had taken to his heels but had joined the enemy had reason to feel nervous about the welcome he would receive upon his return to the home plantation. To allay this

41. This lengthy document may be seen in the Carleton photostats, Book of Negroes Registered & certified after having been Inspected by the Commissioners appointed by His Excellency Sir Guy Carleton, K. B. General & Commander in Chief, on Board Sundry Vessels in which they were embarked Previous to the time of sailing from the Port of New York between the 23 Apr. and 31st July, 1783, both days included. This is book I. Book II bears the same heading with the exception of the final line which lists the period as extending from July 31 to Nov. 30, 1783.

fear, some masters promised a pardon. Virginia's Theodorick Bland, Jr., sent word to his slaves, Isaac and Kitt, who were in New York, that if they would come back to Framingdell, the family plantation in Prince George County, he would let bygones be bygones. Neither would listen; Isaac informed Bland's emissary that he had heard that once a slave had returned to his master he was "treated with great severity."⁴²

Exclusive of the thousand or more youngsters who were born within the British lines and who therefore might be considered born free, a small number of adult free Negroes, perhaps a few hundred, went off in the evacuations. There were 8 free Negroes among the 2,563 colored refugees who came to East Florida from South Carolina as of July 15, 1783. Numbered in the 1,956 black emigrants from Georgia to East Florida as of July 18, 1783, were 3 free Negroes. Accompanying the British from Charleston to New York late in 1782 was free Negro Bacchus, a smith by trade. Thirteen free Negroes, 7 men and 6 women, were included in the 232 adults sailing out of New York in November 1783 on the *Peggy*, *Concord*, and *Diannah*.⁴³

One free Negro who was not near an evacuation point besought Carleton's aid in getting out of America. Originally from England, Towers Bell had been brought to Baltimore and sold into slavery. His four years in bondage were a time in which he had "suffered with the Greatest Barbarity in this Rebellious Country." For the last six years he had been free, but had neither friends nor money, and needed assistance to get home.⁴⁴

Not all the Negroes within British lines were evacuated. Aside from a handful successfully reclaimed by Washington's commissioners, there were some slaves who were deliberately left behind. They were the sick, the helpless, and the aged,

42. Jacob Morris to Bland, July 17, 1783, Campbell, ed., *Bland Papers*, II, III.

43. C. O. 5/560, 810, 811-20; Return of the Civil Branch of Ordnance and Horse Department, arrived at New York from Charleston in South Carolina, Jan. 19, 1783, Wray Papers, Clements Lib.; Inspection Roll of Negroes, taken on board the undernamed vessels, on the 30th day of Nov. 1783 at Anchor near Statten Island, previous to their Sailing for Port-Mattoon in the province of Nova Scotia, The Papers of the Continental Congress, LIII, 276-95, National Archives. These lists carry a descriptive statement on each of the Negroes who embarked on the three transports.

44. Bell to Carleton, June 7, 1783, Carleton photostats.

whom evacuating loyalists simply abandoned.⁴⁵ Some departing masters sold their slaves.

One slave thus disposed of was to have a notable career. James Derham had been the property of a surgeon in the British Sixteenth Regiment. While his master was with the army, Derham was allowed to perform medical duties, since he had already acquired some experience in compounding medicines and acting as a male nurse. At the close of the war, the surgeon sold him to a New Orleans physician, who employed him as a paid assistant. While still in his early twenties, Derham was able to buy his freedom, and by 1789 he had built up a thriving medical practice in Philadelphia, with an income of over \$3,000 a year. The celebrated Dr. Benjamin Rush was impressed by his fellow practitioner—by his fluency in French and Spanish, and, more importantly, by his knowledge of the healing arts: "I expected to have suggested some new medicines to him," wrote Rush, "but he suggested many more to me."⁴⁶

While most Negroes whom the British left behind had no choice in the matter, a corps of some three hundred ex-slaves in Georgia remained there by preference. This group had been arms-bearers for the British during the occupation of Savannah, and they proposed neither to return to their masters nor leave in the evacuation. Styling themselves the "King of England's soldiers," they settled along the swamps bordering the Savannah River, plundering by night and disappearing by day. It was not until May 1786 that they were dispersed, following the discovery and burning of their fortified encampment at Bear Creek by militia from Georgia and South Carolina.⁴⁷

The Negroes who left the United States at war's end traveled to widely separated points on the globe. Over a thousand, as will be noted, went to the west coast of Africa. An odder destination was reserved for a Negro drum corps which arrived in central Europe, accompanying General Riedesel to Brunswick, where, on a mid-October day in 1783, it formed part of an infantry battalion received with military honors in a public

45. Harry B. Yoshpe, *The Disposition of Loyalist Estates in the Southern District of the State of New York* (New York, 1939), 91-93.

46. For a sketch of Derham by Rush see *The American Museum*, 5 (Phila., 1789), 61-62.

47. Charles C. Jones, *The Life and Services of the Honorable Major General Samuel Elbert* (Cambridge, 1887), 47; Stevens, *A History of Georgia*, II, 376-78.

market place.⁴⁸ The overwhelming majority of black evacuees, however, settled in the British Caribbean islands or in Canada, although thousands of these were at first taken into East Florida, where their sojourn proved to be temporary.

Before the British evacuation of Savannah, many Georgia loyalists contemplated a removal to East Florida. Just south of the state border, it offered a climate and conditions to which they were accustomed. Uncertain as to what disposition would be made of the province after the war, they urged British authorities to retain it. Responding to their entreaties, Sir Guy Carleton, successor to Henry Clinton as commander-in-chief, merely informed Governor Leslie that the province would remain as it was. Georgia loyalists construed his remark to mean that the British did not intend to give it up. Accordingly, many of them migrated into the neighboring province, bearing with them a large number of slaves. By the summer of 1783, as we have seen, a total of 1,956 slaves had been taken into East Florida.⁴⁹

Within a few months the newcomers knew that East Florida was destined to go to Spain, and that they would have to move again; Spanish rule had no attraction for Anglo-Americans. The treaty that ceded East Florida to Spain, signed in September 1783, gave the inhabitants of the province eighteen months to get out. The nearly eight thousand Negroes in the province at that time included not more than one thousand who were free and could therefore choose whether to go or stay.⁵⁰ The others followed the dictates of their masters.

Of the 6,540 Negroes recorded as leaving the province, over 2,500 were brought back to the United States,⁵¹ many of them to Georgia. As early as October 1782 the Georgia Council

48. "The Brunswick Contingent in America, 1776-1783," *Pa. Mag. of Hist. and Biog.*, 15 (1891), 224.

49. Candler, ed., *Col. Rec. of Ga.*, XV, 664-65; Lists of refugees to East Florida, July 18, 1783, C. O. 5/560, 810; Coleman, *Amer. Rev. in Ga.*, 145-46.

50. Joseph Bryne Lockey, *East Florida, 1783-1785* (Berkeley, 1949), 23, 340.

51. For the specific figures on white and black migrants to the varying destination points see "Return of Persons who emigrated from East Florida to different parts of the British Dominions &c," C. O. 5/561, 817. Dated London, 1786, this return is signed by Colonel William Brown, Commissioner of Embarkation.

voted to permit its citizens to purchase slaves from loyalists who had gone to East Florida, and to export produce and lumber to pay for such purchases. The Council granted individual petitions to those wishing to go to St. Augustine to recover or to purchase slaves, such petitions generally specifying the product or commodity to be used in defraying expenses. In the spring of 1783 the state of South Carolina sent a commissioner to St. Augustine to seek recovery of her expatriated blacks.⁵² "There is," wrote the governor of East Florida, "a considerable influx of transient people from Georgia and South Carolina to recover their property in Negroes."⁵³ Apart from such efforts, slaves amounting to "upwards of 1,000" were brought back from St. Augustine to South Carolina by former loyalists who were legally permitted to return.⁵⁴ Some of East Florida's free Negroes returned to America, but they tended to move northwestward toward the Mississippi River rather than northeastward toward the Savannah and the Santee.

By no means was all the black emigration out of East Florida to the United States; over 2,200 Negroes went to the Bahamas, and lesser numbers went to other points, ranging from the 714 transported to Jamaica to the 35 that crossed the Atlantic to an English port. In addition to those whose departure was officially recorded, there were hundreds of refugees, white and black, who left in small groups, sailing away without authorization, leaving not a trace behind. A few hundred Negroes remained in the province; presumably they were of the free class.

As the migration figures illustrate, the Bahamas attracted slave-owning refugees, not only from East Florida, but from the United States. Over a twenty-two month span from June 1783 to April 1785 these British islands received from six to seven thousand refugees, white and colored.⁵⁵ A few of the black newcomers were destined to return to the mainland. Late in 1784 General James Grant sold to three South Carolinians twenty-seven of his slaves—ten men, five women, eleven children

52. Candler, ed., *Rev. Rec. of Ga.*, II, 388, 477, 478; James Clitherall to John Cruden, May 31, 1783, *Amer. MSS in Royal Inst. of G. B.*, IV, 115.

53. Tonym to Thomas Townshend, May 15, 1783, C. O. 5/560, 550.

54. Ralph Izard to Jefferson, with "Reports on the Trade of South Carolina, June 10, 1785, Boyd, ed., *Papers of Jefferson*, VIII.

55. Wilbur H. Siebert, "The Legacy of the American Revolution in the British West Indies, and Bahamas," *Ohio State University, Bulletin*, 17 (1913), 22.

and an infant just christened "Providence."⁵⁶ But most of the other Negroes remained in the Bahamas, giving its agriculture, particularly its cotton culture, a new impetus.

Thousands of Negroes were taken to other islands in the British West Indies; from 1775 to 1787 the colored population of Jamaica showed an increase of 60,000. Practically all of the black immigrants were slaves. Many had been brought in as slaves, but many others who came expecting to be free were seized by those holding no legal title, and sold for rum, coffee, sugar, and fruits.⁵⁷

Perhaps the most noteworthy of the Negroes taken to Jamaica was George Liele who as a slave and a free man in Georgia had been a dedicated preacher. Brought to Kingston in 1782 as an indentured servant, Liele worked out his time in two years. Once he obtained his certificate of freedom, Liele resumed his work in religion, preaching in private homes and then organizing a church—the only Baptist church on the island. By 1790 more than 450 persons had received baptism at his hands.⁵⁸

Many of the Negroes evacuated from the United States did not go southward; thousands went to Canada. Perhaps their lot may be suggested by focussing on the story of African-born Thomas Peters. Dark-skinned and of large frame, Peters had in 1776 fled from his master and joined the British.⁵⁹ During the war he served as a sergeant in a Negro arms-bearing pioneer company, being twice wounded in battle. With the coming of peace, he and his wife settled at Annapolis in Nova Scotia, a province to which many of the Canada-bound Negroes went.

The British had promised Peters and his comrades not only freedom but a farm. His Majesty's officers were slow in making

56. For this list of Negroes and the contract of sale see James Grant folder in Personal Papers: Miscellaneous, GI to GRA, Manuscript Division, Lib. Cong.

57. Siebert, "Legacy of American Revolution in British West Indies and Bahamas," *Ohio State Univ., Bull.*, 17 (1913), 16, 38.

58. See Carter G. Woodson, *The History of the Negro Church* (Washington, 1921), 43-45; and "Letters showing the Rise and Progress of the early Negro Churches of Georgia and the West Indies," *Journal of Negro History*, I (1916), 69-92, *passim*.

59. For sketches of Peters see C. H. Fyfe, *Thomas Peters: History and Legend* (a 10-page pamphlet, no date, no place, but republished from *Sierra Leone Studies* [Freetown], Dec. 1953), and F. W. Butt-Thompson, *Sierra Leone in History and Tradition* (London, 1926), 89-96.

good the promise of a farm, and the civilian authorities were likewise dilatory.⁶⁰ The black settlers in Nova Scotia felt cheated: either the surveyor was too busy to mark out their lands, or the plots they received were largely thick pine forest and hard to clear. Finding themselves landless, or holders of land that would produce little, many Negroes apprenticed themselves to farmers or congregated in Burchtown, a nearly all-Negro community.

Peters was a patient man, but after six years of waiting he determined to go to England to seek redress from the king's ministers. By virtue of a small sum raised by his fellows, and by working as a "hand" to pay his passage aboard ship, Peters arrived in London early in 1791. Here he received a welcome that must have made up for much of the disappointment of the preceding years. Granville Sharp and his fellow reformers took Peters in tow, and soon the former slave-soldier became a London celebrity. "His eloquence, his passion, his spirit, made him the rage of the newspaper world, the latest fashionable craze, and the newest object of philanthropy."⁶¹

To assist Peters, his abolitionist friends drew up a memorial in his name and sent it to William W. Granville, secretary of state for foreign affairs. This document described the plight of 102 colored families at Annapolis Royal and 100 families at New Brunswick. These Negroes would remain in those provinces, it was said, if they could obtain the full grant of land and provisions originally promised them; otherwise many would be willing to migrate to any country which would make them a "competent" offer.⁶²

This petition, which Peters signed by making his mark, brought quick action. The Secretary of State ordered the governor of Nova Scotia to investigate the matter. If the charges were true, the governor was informed that the province must

60. There were a number of Negroes at Port Roseway, and some expected at Halifax, "for whom Lands are not yet located, nor other provisions made," wrote Colonel Robert Morse to General H. E. Fox on Aug. 23, 1783, Carleton photostats.

61. Butt-Thompson, *Sierra Leone*, 93-94.

62. John Clarkson, Clarkson's Mission to America (478-page handwritten document in diary form, dated from Aug. 6, 1791 to Mar. 18, 1792, is in the N.-Y. Hist. Soc.), 6. Another copy, handwritten but with a different pagination, may be seen at the Moorland Library, Howard University, Washington, D. C. In these footnotes I use the pagination of the former.

fulfill its obligation or send these families to Sierra Leone. A removal to Sierra Leone would entail some expense, but His Majesty's government had an obligation to these Negroes for their wartime services.⁶³

The idea of transporting the Canadian Negroes to Africa originated with the directors of the recently incorporated Sierra Leone Company. Founded to enable destitute Negroes in London to make a new start by settling them on the west coast of Africa, the company had acquired a site and begun operations by the time Peters visited London. On its board of directors in 1791 the company counted such well-known abolitionists as Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce and Granville Sharp. It was Sharp who introduced Peters to the other board members, and enlisted their interest in the black Nova Scotians. In turn Peters was favorably impressed by the kindness of the board members—by their assurance that he and his associates would be welcome to Sierra Leone, and by their belief that his group would be better off there than in frigid Canada.

With the tacit support of Parliament, and the approval of Peters, the Sierra Leone Company got busy.⁶⁴ On August 12, 1791 the company authorized two agents, Lawrence Hartshorn of Halifax and John Clarkson, to screen out the candidates for resettlement and get written testimonials as to their character, sobriety and industry. The agents were authorized to offer twenty acres of land to each prospective migrant, with ten additional acres for his wife and five for each child.

The choice of Clarkson as an agent was a happy one. A former naval lieutenant and the younger brother of Thomas Clarkson, he brought a spirit of dedication to his task. Reaching Halifax in early October 1791, he took the leadership in recruiting prospective emigrants. First he interviewed the applicant, optimistically assuring him that in Sierra Leone he would have every opportunity to become his own master. The interview was followed by an investigation, and if the applicant came out well, he received a certificate of character.

63. Clarkson's Mission to America, 8, N.-Y. Hist. Soc.

64. For this Nova Scotian project of the Sierra Leone Company see *Report by Court of Directors of the Sierra Leone Company, 1794* (London, 1794), 3-8; Adams G. Archibald, "Story of the Deportation of Negroes from Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone," *Nova Scotia Historical Society, Collections*, 7 (1889-1891), 129-54.

The deeply religious and sensitive Clarkson was often moved by the interviews. He noted that the greatest number of applicants were not thinking of their own future but that of their children "whom they wished to see established (as they expressed it) upon a better foundation."⁶⁵ Particularly touching to Clarkson was the incident in which a Negro slave, John Coltress, came to enroll his free wife and children. Putting the Atlantic between himself and his family was heart-rending to Coltress, but he was willing to face it because it would bring "a better life for them."⁶⁶

Many of the candidates were personally enlisted by Peters, who returned to the province prior to Clarkson's arrival. Including his family, Peters recruited a total of eighty-four persons from St. John, New Brunswick and Annapolis, and brought them to Halifax. Some applicants made their way alone; many of these arrived at the headquarters city only after hard journeys of up to 340 miles through wooded and little known country.

Once gathered in Halifax and awaiting the date of departure, the migrants kept Clarkson busy with all kinds of requests and petitions. Typical was the request of the thirty-eight residents of the township of Preston (one of whom bore the incongruous name "British Freedom") that in Sierra Leone they be permitted to settle side by side.⁶⁷ Another group which sought to keep together and managed to make arrangements to cross the ocean in the same brig, was the congregation of the Baptist minister, David George. George had been a slave until the British seized Savannah and his master fled. He resided in Charleston during the last years of the war, and in 1782 came to Nova Scotia, where for nearly ten years he had preached at Burchtown and Shelburne. When he learned of the Sierra Leone proposal, George enrolled his own family of six, and persuaded fifty-nine of his congregation to sign up.⁶⁸

Thanks to men like George and Peters, there was no problem in recruiting good prospects; indeed, the directors of the Sierra Leone Company were surprised and gratified by the number of applicants. By the end of the year a large enough

65. Clarkson's *Mission to America*, 86, N.-Y. Hist. Soc.

66. *Ibid.*, 88.

67. *Ibid.*, 300.

68. For a brief sketch of George see Woodson, *History of the Negro Church*.

group had been recruited and the ships chartered. On January 15, 1782, a bit over three months after his arrival at Halifax, agent John Clarkson could joyfully write: "I am now under sail with a fair wind and fine weather, having on board 1190 souls in fifteen ships, properly equipped and I hope destined to be happy."⁶⁹

For the next few weeks the embarking Nova Scotians were not as happy as Clarkson had hoped. The expedition ran into heavy squalls, temporarily separating one ship from another. Some sixty-five of the voyagers died at sea, and another hundred were too ill to be landed when the fleet pulled into Kru Bay in early March. When the remaining thousand stepped ashore they found that little preparation had been made to receive them. They knew they would have to work long hours if they were to succeed in throwing up enough shelters before the rainy season set in. But if at the moment their new dwelling site lacked adequate housing, it bore a sweet sounding name—Free-town.

69. Clarkson's *Mission to America*, 399.