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1765-1775

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NONIMPORTATION AND THE SEARCH FOR ECONOMIC
INDEPENDENCE IN VIRGINIA, 1765-1775

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Key to Abbreviations used in Endnotes

<u>WMQ</u>	<u>William and Mary Quarterly</u>
<u>VMHB</u>	<u>Virginia Magazine of History and Biography</u>
<u>Hening</u>	<u>William Waller Hening, ed., The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature in the year 1619, 13 vols.</u>
<u>JHB</u>	<u>Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia</u>
<u>Rev. Va.</u>	<u>Revolutionary Virginia: The Road to Independence, 7 vols.</u>
LC	Library of Congress
PRO	Public Record Office, London
CO	Colonial Office
UVA	Manuscripts Department, Alderman Library, University of Virginia
VHS	Virginia Historical Society
VSL	Virginia State Library

Introduction

Three times in the decade before the Revolution, Virginians organized nonimportation associations as a protest against specific legislation from the British Parliament. The first association, in 1769, prohibited a wide range of British imports and was to remain in effect until Parliament repealed the Townshend duties of 1767. The organizers of nonimportation in Virginia expected that the reduction of the colony's valuable import trade would persuade British merchants and manufacturers to lobby for the removal of all revenue duties and other restrictions on the American trade. A revised Association of 1770 incorporated the merchants in the colony and established local enforcement committees in order to increase the pressure on the British. Virginians entered a third association in August 1774 in response to the Coercive Acts. This most comprehensive of all provincial associations instituted a complete boycott of British goods and announced plans to suspend Virginia's export trade in the following year if Parliament failed to repeal the recent restrictions on trade and government in Massachusetts. The Virginia Association of 1774 served as the model for the Continental Association adopted by the general congress of colonies in October 1774. These formal associations were preceded by various measures of commercial resistance against the Stamp Act. In

1765 and 1766 Virginians closed their local courts to debt cases, local groups initiated manufacturing projects, and individuals reduced their purchases of British imports, all in an effort to convince Parliament to rescind the stamp tax.

In each instance of nonimportation and commercial resistance, organizers in Virginia intended the agreements to be more than a form of political strategy. The policy of nonimportation as it developed in Virginia was also a response to changes in the imperial economy over the previous forty years. The gentry planters who initiated the associations expected commercial resistance to protect themselves and the colony at large from the growing risks of Virginia's trade with Great Britain. By lessening involvement with tobacco, reducing imports of British goods, and limiting the influence of British merchants in the colony, the supporters of nonimportation hoped to reassert their own authority over the colonial economy. Popular support wavered after 1766, but by 1774 the overwhelming majority of landholders in Virginia were convinced the goals of economic independence as embodied in the associations were the best way to protect their interests and to promote the development of the colony. These larger goals of the nonimportation associations are central to explaining the distinctive character of the resistance to British authority in Virginia. The search for economic independence is particularly important for understanding why the great planters led this most stable of

American political societies into the Revolution.

Jacob M. Price and other historians have explored in great detail the new developments in the Chesapeake trade during the mid-eighteenth century.¹ Comparatively little work, however, has been done on the effects of these commercial changes on imperial relations or the coming of the Revolution in Virginia. Even the Progressive historians, who emphasized the economic sources of the split with Great Britain in other colonies, paid slight attention to Virginia. Arthur M. Schlesinger, in his The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution (still the most complete study of commercial resistance in the colonies), found in Virginia few of the internal divisions that he believed inspired the associations in the commercial colonies. The failure of Virginia to reduce imports in 1769 or 1770 was further reason for Schlesinger to dismiss the importance of nonimportation associations in the Chesapeake.² The only extended Progressive study of the Revolution in Virginia was Isaac S. Harrell's Loyalism in Virginia. Harrell, developing an idea proposed by Charles Beard, described the Revolution in Virginia as a struggle between indebted planters and merchant creditors. The patriot cause had been an attractive opportunity for Virginia planters to repudiate their British debts.³

By the 1960s historians generally rejected Harrell's

simple notion of the Revolution as a movement to escape repayment of planters' debts. In the most thorough discussion of the issue, Emory G. Evans went so far as to deny that the colony's pervasive and chronic debt had any direct effect on the resistance to British authority before 1774. While the Progressives' emphasis on debt evasion certainly was misplaced, historians in the last twenty years have recognized that the Revolution in Virginia is not explained solely by the constitutional conflict emphasized by Evans and others.⁴ Gordon Wood was the first to identify what he called "a social crisis within the ruling group" that he believed lay behind the gentry's active involvement in the resistance to Great Britain. In the 1760s and 1770s gentry planters in Virginia expressed an exaggerated fear that they were no longer capable of maintaining their position of social and political leadership. Wood suggested that the Revolution in Virginia was in part an effort to restore the great planters' legitimacy. Jack P. Greene has examined several of the specific manifestations of the gentry's anxiety in the decade before the Revolution. The sources of this crisis and its effects on the Revolution have proved more difficult to identify. Rhys Isaac has located the origin of the crisis in the Baptists' challenge to the great planters and their Anglican establishment. Joseph A. Ernst emphasizes the economic pressures resulting from British restrictions on the monetary policy of Virginia. In a

renewal of the Progressives' interpretation, Marc Egnal focuses on the tensions between competing elites within the colony and British impediments to western expansion.⁶

The economic life of Virginians, particularly their commercial relations with Great Britain, promises to explain something of the crisis that afflicted Virginia's great planters in the 1760s and contributed to the resistance movement preceding the Revolution. Trade was the most frequent form of contact between Virginians and the British. The colony's trade was the most valuable in North America and directly involved every level of market producer in Virginia. Furthermore, the trade that was so thoroughly a part of most Virginians' lives was transformed in the forty years before Independence. The implications of that change and the reaction of the great planters and resident merchants set the stage for the commercial resistance that began in 1765.

After 1730 Virginia planters found that the expansion of tobacco markets, the infusion of British credit, and the growth in the supply of slave labor allowed them to increase their income at the same time that a sophisticated and concentrated commercial organization in Great Britain fastened its control over the colonial economy. The new opportunities for Virginians ironically accompanied the rise of the direct trade, which, with its centralized management of all business in the colony and its ties to European

markets, insured a narrow pattern of economic development in Virginia. British merchants extended credit for the cultivation of tobacco rather than any diversification of staple agriculture. The marketing and shipping of Virginia's exports remained the monopoly of British traders rather than serving to provide opportunities for the development of the independent merchant community in the colony. The introduction of the Scottish store system in Virginia extended the dependence on tobacco cultivation to small planters throughout the newly-settled Piedmont. The British credit used to encourage land and slave purchases and thereby increase tobacco production resulted in chronic indebtedness among every rank of landholder in Virginia.

The great planters were the first to recognize that the wealth derived from the expansion of the tobacco trade came at the cost of a more complete dependence on British merchants. As the gentry planters, who enjoyed few of the benefits of the direct trade, attempted to manage their large estate in the face of growing debts and uneven tobacco prices, they found that the tobacco plantations of Virginia had few defenses against the British control of credit, marketing, and supplies of manufactured goods. For many Virginians the limitations of the British trade were the natural consequence of commercial activity itself. The offers of easy credit and the illusions of ever larger tobacco markets had lured planters to make extravagant

purchases and to invest in speculative projects. This kind of planter mismanagement had opened the way for merchants to undermine Virginians' independence. Those who emphasized these individual sources of economic dependence implicitly recognized that Virginia society did not cultivate the personal traits necessary for competition with the highly organized British merchants. Others believed that the whole structure of Virginia's domestic economy was responsible for the colonists' disadvantages in dealing with the larger Atlantic economy. The weakness of indigenous commercial development and the commitment to slave labor were enough to prevent Virginians from taking advantages of new markets. The principal objects of the Virginians' dissatisfaction with the British commercial connection were the merchants and, after 1765, the British regulations that supported merchants influence in the colony. Increasingly after 1750 Virginians believed that British merchants arranged the terms of the Virginia trade so as to increase indebtedness, thereby perpetuating the colonists' involvement in tobacco and their reliance on imported goods.

The organization of nonimportation and commercial resistance in Virginia was an attempt to relieve the various problems of the tobacco trade and economic dependence on Great Britain. The immediate goal was to force a repeal of the legislation that imposed additional economic burdens and further restricted commercial activity in the colonies.

Within the colony the associations promoted a diversification of agriculture that would reduce the dependence on fluctuating tobacco markets. Domestic manufactures would enable planters to supply their own goods and reduce the debts owed British merchants. New crops and local manufactures, along with a ban on slave imports, would entice skilled workers to settle in the colony. A strict regulation of all merchant activity would offer planters a larger share of the profits from their crops and provide local merchants an opportunity to compete with British factors. The associations also were intended to reform individual character. An effective boycott of British goods would require thrift, self-reliance, and austerity. The prohibition of gambling and extravagant dress supported the type of economic behavior necessary for personal independence. If entirely successful, the associations would encourage a type of economic expansion that actually reinforced public virtue and private responsibility.

Throughout the period of commercial resistance, Virginians were ambiguous about their expectations for the future relationship between the colonies and Great Britain. Organizers of the associations expected Virginia to remain an agricultural economy, with sufficient commercial development to provide planters with flexibility in the marketing of their produce. Once freed of all imperial restrictions and the demands of British merchants, Virginians would be

able to export a variety of commodities and trade to new areas. The availability of rich land in America and the superiority of British manufactures, however, convinced most Virginians that a balanced trade between the colonies and Great Britain, with an exchange of agricultural products for finished goods, would be the probable result of free trade. The uncertainty concerning the future of commercial relations with Great Britain was symptomatic of a deeper conflict over the character of Virginia's own economy. Supporters of the nonimportation associations wanted to make the colony less dependent on British merchants and more competitive in trade through the Atlantic economy at the same time that they hoped to preserve the plantation-based domestic economy that had developed within the context of British mercantilism. The story of commercial resistance in Virginia offers one of the first instances of conflict between this type of plantation economy and the requirements of a more highly commercialized, capitalist economy that emerged in the eighteenth century.

Although the Virginians' plans for nonimportation and commercial resistance offer glimpses of the sources of Virginia's precipitous economic decline in the next century, before the Revolution Virginians remained confident about the colony's potential for economic growth. By removing the constraints of the British connection, the colonists expected to develop the full potential of Virginia's natural

resources and to open new export markets while maintaining the traditional social and political structure of the colony. If, on the other hand, the British succeeded in dominating the colonists, then "no encouragement to industry will remain but ignorance and idleness the constant Attendants on Slavery will overrun this great Continent hitherto the seat of freedom, virtue, and growing Science."⁷ As Richard Henry Lee described it the choice before Virginians was between the dissolution that was a natural consequence of dependence and the opportunity for a flourishing economy. What follows is an explanation of how the attempts to secure that opportunity moved Virginians toward Revolution and Independence.

Introduction -- Endnotes

- 1 Among the many works of Jacob M. Price relating to eighteenth-century Virginia see France and the Chesapeake: A History of the French Tobacco Monopoly, 1674-1791, and of Its Relationship to the British and American Tobacco Trades, 2 vols. (Ann Arbor, 1973); Capital and Credit in British Overseas Trade: The View from the Chesapeake, 1700-1776 (Cambridge, Mass., 1980); "The Rise of Glasgow in the Chesapeake Tobacco Trade, 1707-1775," William and Mary Quarterly (hereafter WMQ), 3rd ser. 11 (April 1954): 179-99; "The Economic Growth of the Chesapeake and the European Market, 1677-1775," Journal of Economic History 24 (December 1964): 496-511.
- 2 Arthur Meier Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776 (New York, 1918).
- 3 Isaac S. Harrell, Loyalism in Virginia: Chapters in the Economic History of the Revolution (Durham, 1926); critique of Harrell in Emory G. Evans, "Planter Indebtedness and the Coming of the Revolution in Virginia," WMQ, 3rd ser. 19 (October 1962): 511-17.
- 4 Evans, "Planter Indebtedness and the Coming of the Revolution in Virginia"; see also Thad W. Tate, "The Coming of the Revolution in Virginia: Britain's Challenge to Virginia's Ruling Class, 1763-1776," WMQ, 3rd ser. 19 (July 1962): 323-43.
- 5 Gordon S. Wood, "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," WMQ, 3rd ser. 23 (January 1966): 27-32; Jack P. Greene, "'Virtus et Libertas: Political Culture, Social Change, and the Origins of the American Revolution in Virginia, 1763-1766," in The Southern Experience in the American Revolution eds. Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, (Chapel Hill, 1978), 55-108.
- 6 Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790 (Chapel Hill, 1981); Joseph A. Ernst, Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775 (Chapel Hill, 1973); Marc Egnal, "The Origins of the Revolution in Virginia: A Reinterpretation," WMQ, 3rd ser. 37 (July 1980): 401-28; see also Egnal, "The Economic Development of the Thirteen Colonies," WMQ, 3rd ser. 32 (April 1975): 191-222; and Egnal and Joseph A. Ernst, "An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution," WMQ, 3rd ser. 29 (January 1972): 3-32. For a discussion of historiography of the Revolution

in Virginia see Herbert Sloan and Peter Onuf,
"Politics, Culture, and the Revolution in Virginia: A
Review of Recent Work," Virginia Magazine of History
and Biography (hereafter VMHB) 91 (July 1983): 259-84.

- 7 Richard Henry Lee, proposed draft of Memorial to the
People of Great Britain and Ireland, [1774], Lee
Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).

Chapter One: Trade and Economic Development in Virginia,
1730-1775

During the 1730s the Virginia economy entered a period of expansion that by 1775 had transformed the patterns of trade in the colony. The economic growth of the mid-eighteenth century increased the wealth of most households and supported the extension of staple agriculture into new areas at the same time that it further secured the British merchants' control of Virginia's trade. As European demand for tobacco increased and British traders adopted new methods for the purchase and marketing of tobacco, Chesapeake exports of the crop grew threefold between 1720 and 1770. The widespread introduction of the direct trade, in which merchant firms purchased tobacco through company agents in the colony, contributed to a concentration of tobacco importing firms in Great Britain and fixed the merchants' influence over the economic lives of local communities in Virginia.¹

The increase in agricultural production and exports after 1730 was made possible by a growth of Virginia's population from 114,000 in 1730 to nearly 500,000 in 1775. The largest source of growth was the colony's black population, which, through record slave imports and a surprising rate of natural increase, rose from 30,000 in 1730 to around 200,000 in 1775. By 1770 half the white families owned slaves. The

availability of this slave labor allowed planters to meet the demand for Virginia tobacco and also contributed to the colony's exports of grain and foodstuffs.² As in earlier periods of Virginia's history, consideration of external markets determined the type of commodities that the expanded population produced. British merchants, responding to the particular requirements of Continental markets and drawing on newly available credit, encouraged tobacco cultivation in the recently settled Piedmont and Southside regions of Virginia. The distribution of credit through the factors of the direct trade merchants offered a broad segment of landholders the opportunity to begin tobacco cultivation and receive top prices for their crop. Despite periodic slumps in the market, lowered prices for tobacco in Europe, and higher labor costs in Virginia, the size of European demand and the efficient marketing arrangements of the direct trade produced a general rise in Chesapeake tobacco prices during the four decades preceding the Revolution.³

The renewed vitality of the tobacco trade after 1730 produced uneven results in Virginia. The perennial disadvantages of a staple export economy -- cycles of overproduction followed by lower prices, dependence on foreign markets, shortages of capital and credit, and reliance on British shipping and financial services -- continued to afflict planters throughout the colonial period. During the periodic depressions in the tobacco market, the higher rates

of indebtedness and the stricter regulation of debt payment that accompanied the rise of the direct trade created greater burdens than in earlier years. In the best of markets, the direct trade's credit and marketing benefits were not available for all tobacco growers in Virginia. The merchants' preference for dealing with small growers, often in recently settled areas, excluded the great planters and their large crops from the fastest growing segment of the tobacco trade. As the direct trade absorbed the predominant share of tobacco exports and British, mostly Scottish, factors penetrated the local communities of the colony, these great planters came to fear that the restructuring of the tobacco trade would undermine their authority in Virginia as well as their previous economic advantages.

The growth of the direct trade demonstrated to Virginia's largest planters that their cultivation of premium tobacco for sale on the London market was no longer at the center of the colony's trade with Great Britain. By the mid-eighteenth century, the leading British importers of tobacco were large partnerships purchasing bulk cargoes of ordinary grade tobacco intended for reexportation to the Continent. Despite the great planter's resources of land and labor and his personal contacts with established London merchants, he had no means of restricting the business of these firms with a capitalization often in excess of £20,000 and an annual importation of over 1,000 hogsheads.⁴ Nor

could he have any effect on the complicated patterns of European demand and the fiscal requirements of foreign governments that provided the base for the expansion of direct trade marketing. The arrival in Virginia of British factors, offering the financial services formerly provided by the great planter, threatened to erode his influence over the local economy just as the structure of the direct trade in Great Britain diminished his influence on the colony's external trade. Virginia's great planters continued to grow tobacco throughout the eighteenth century, and they also enjoyed the benefits of a general improvement of credit facilities in England. The ramifications of the direct trade, however, contributed to a growing dissatisfaction with Virginia's position in the imperial economy. Restricted access to the best markets, limited flexibility during depressions in the tobacco trade, and the fear of a restructuring of social relations following the influx of British factors led the great planters to investigate ways in which they could protect their interests from the changing scope and character of the British merchants' influence over the colonial economy.

The large planters challenged by the advancement of the direct trade represented a group of families that had gained economic ascendancy in Virginia during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The wealth of Virginia's leading planters was never as concentrated as in the planta

tion colonies of South Carolina and the British West Indies, but a recognizable, and recognized, elite based on wealth and political position emerged in the colony in the late seventeenth century. Most of the families in this elite had immigrated from England after 1650 whereupon they acquired the large tracts of land that were the prerequisite for economic advancement in the colony. But land by itself was worth very little in seventeenth-century Virginia. Many individuals who had profited from cultivation of the land lost everything before their children could build on the basis of their initial wealth. Only in the final decades of the seventeenth century were a large number of planters able to translate their economic resources into the foundation of long-running family fortunes and political power. Ironically, these planters secured their wealth and authority during the years 1680-1720 when Chesapeake tobacco prices were generally low and markets stagnant.⁵

Among the sources of the great planters' success were three developments that allowed them to prosper at a time when depressions and wars halted the expansion of the tobacco economy. After 1680 planters turned to slave labor to replace the dwindling number of white servants. The transition in the labor force was initially a result of availability as much as preference for slaves, but for planters wealthy enough to purchase large numbers of slaves, the steady importation of slaves enabled them to produce

sufficient quantities of tobacco to bring a profit in poor markets. Slave labor, combined with a flexible pattern of inheritance, also made it possible for planters to convey their economic gains to all their children, male and female.⁶ A second support of the great planter's rise was their control of political office, first on the county level where they dominated the court and later in the House of Burgesses, which by 1720 was the most powerful lower house in the American colonies. The Assembly's influence in provincial government offered planter-members the opportunity to represent their trading interests and to provide some measure of protection against the mercantilist policies of the royal government.⁷

A permanent labor force and political power were economic assets only if the planters also gained access to the most favorable tobacco markets in Europe. In the absence of any rigid trading structure, planters through much of the seventeenth century participated in a variety of marketing arrangements in the hope of finding the highest sales price at any given time. By the 1690s the largest growers of tobacco found the consignment system of marketing best served their interests. Originally conceived as a trade between merchants, the consignment system consisted of the shipment of tobacco to an English merchant, usually in London, who then sold the tobacco on the best terms available. Because the shipper, whether a planter or merchant,

retained ownership of the tobacco until a sale, he was responsible for all costs involved in shipping, payment of duties, and the unloading and storage of the cargo. Although these costs were high (as much as 75 percent of the final sales price), the merchant's personal attention to the individual cargoes increased the likelihood of a profitable sale. A commission of 2-1/2 to 3 percent of the final sales price encouraged merchants to search for the most favorable buyers. The consignment trade was particularly valuable for large planters in the years 1690 to 1720 when Chesapeake prices were low and demand stagnant, but London prices were generally high due to the expenses in shipping during wartime.⁸

As the consignment trade developed, merchants offered additional services which further attracted Virginia planters. Planters who had a favorable account with their merchant used him as a banker, drawing bills of exchange in return for tobacco sales. Merchants often permitted a planter with an established correspondence to draw bills on the basis of future tobacco shipments. These bills became an important medium of exchange in Virginia; as well as an important source of credit for the colonists. The other means by which merchants made return payments for tobacco sales was the shipment of British goods, personally selected according to a planter's orders. Consignment merchants usually chose to limit their business to a size that per

mitted the personal service so prized by Virginia planters. The merchant's frequent activity as London representative for a planter's legal and personal affairs gave the consignment trade a value beyond the immediate advantages in the tobacco markets.⁹

A planter with a connection in London often served as an entry to the English market for smaller planters in his community. The great planters regularly purchased tobacco from neighbors and shipped it with their own crop. Planters in the consignment trade also purchased large quantities of goods from London and operated small stores at their plantations. The English credit extended to great planters was in turn offered to Virginians who did not have a London account. The advancement of the consignment trade thus strengthened the great planters' influence within Virginia.¹⁰

The consignment trade was at its peak between 1690 and the 1720s, during which time it overshadowed all other forms of tobacco marketing. The great planters continued to consign their tobacco until the Revolution, but after the 1720s this system lost ground to a more impersonal and ultimately more efficient trading structure. The direct trade, based on the purchase of tobacco by British merchants in Virginia and the sale of bulk cargoes in Great Britain, accounted for at least two-thirds to three-fourths of Virginia's tobacco exports by the 1760s.¹¹ In addition to its share of

tobacco exports, the direct trade, with its connection to expanding European markets, was largely responsible for the direction of economic growth in Virginia after 1730. Whereas the consignment system represented a coalescence of planters' and merchants' interests, the direct trade of the eighteenth century imposed on Virginians the requirements of a new commercial organization. Planters could benefit from the advance of tobacco markets after 1730 only if they organized their production to fit the demands of direct trade merchants.

The purchase and shipment of large cargoes of tobacco made the direct trade particularly suitable for the European market where quantity was more important than quality. As early as the 1660s, half of England's tobacco imports were reexported to the Netherlands and Germany. In the eighteenth century French purchases of Chesapeake tobacco surpassed the steady demand in Germany and rivaled the leading Continental markets of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. European demand increased to such a level that by the 1770s Great Britain reexported 85 percent of the tobacco imported from the American colonies.¹²

Of the several European markets, France was most influential in reviving the Chesapeake tobacco trade. The fiscal requirements of the French government and the operation of the tobacco trade through a state monopoly directed the growing French demand toward the direct traders in Great

Britain and a particular group of planters in Virginia. Chesapeake tobacco was cheap enough to carry the burden of heavy French duties. Moreover, Chesapeake leaf, particularly the Oronoco grown in Virginia and along Maryland's Potomac shore, suited French tastes. The availability of Chesapeake tobacco contributed to a seven-fold increase in French consumption between 1715 and 1775. Unlike the Dutch markets where numerous buyers competed for reexported tobacco from Great Britain, the French Monopoly presented a single purchaser for the nation's market. The several agents of the Monopoly who operated in Great Britain each needed to gather large purchases, often several thousand hogsheads a year. Consignment merchants in London shipped their commissions to Europe when no buyers appeared on domestic markets, but their small parcels of tobacco failed to attract the French buyers. The agents of the French monopoly instead purchased their tobacco from the largest direct trade merchants who were able to offer entire shiploads at a single price.¹³

At the same time that direct trade merchants in Great Britain won the business of the French Monopoly, a Virginia statute made that colony's tobacco the most attractive for the direct trade and the French market. The Inspection Act of 1730 provided for the destruction of all trash tobacco and the establishment of warehouses for the storage of tobacco approved for exportation. Although Governor Gooch

in his report to the Board of Trade emphasized the act's usefulness in the enforcement of customs regulations, he and the act's supporters in the Assembly intended the inspection system to limit the kind of overproduction that repeatedly depressed tobacco prices. The operation of the Inspection Act did restrict the amount of tobacco acceptable for export and helped initiate a four-decade period of generally higher prices.¹⁴ The guarantee of a certain quality for all Virginia tobacco exports and the construction of centrally located warehouses also gave the Inspection Act an importance never intended by its sponsors. Direct trade merchants now were able to purchase tobacco sight unseen and know that it would sell on the reexport market. The collection of purchases from a few, or even a single warehouse reduced the merchants' costs and the time spent in Virginia. The failure of Maryland's Assembly to enact a similar inspection system before 1747 gave Virginia the advantage during the critical years when the direct trade merchants established their operations in the Chesapeake.¹⁵

In Virginia the clearest evidence of a restructuring of the tobacco trade was the influx of Scottish traders during the forty years before the Revolution. Virginians had little knowledge of the demands of new Continental markets, but they fully understood that the business practices of the Glasgow firms and their factors forever changed commercial

life in the colony. The operation of the direct trade by concentrated Glasgow partnerships with a series of stores in Virginia came to affect every aspect of tobacco production in Virginia. By 1770 Glasgow merchants purchased half the tobacco exported from the Chesapeake.¹⁶ Their share of the trade during the third quarter of the eighteenth century enabled the Scots to influence areas of expansion, the type of planter growing tobacco, and the price levels for the crop in London and other British ports. On the eve of the Revolution Virginians understandably believed the Scots were responsible for most of the economic changes of the previous four decades.

Although Scottish merchants had traded with Virginia since before the Act of Union, as late as 1738 they purchased only ten percent of the tobacco exports from the Chesapeake. Their activity in Virginia increased after the French began to make large tobacco purchases in Scotland around 1740. The agents of the French Monopoly initially came to Scotland because war made shipping in London and the southern ports too risky. In addition to its security in wartime, Glasgow's location enabled the city's merchants to sell Chesapeake tobacco for a lower price than in other ports. The north of Ireland sailing route was the quickest between Great Britain and the Virginia Capes, and thus reduced the shipping costs that were a major expense in the tobacco trade. The efficiency of the large merchant firms

common to Scotland further reduced the costs of marketing and allowed the Scots to purchase the large tobacco cargoes that attracted French buyers.¹⁷

During the first twelve years of significant French purchases in Scotland (1739-1751), Chesapeake tobacco exports to the Glasgow area increased 350 percent. Scottish merchants reexported almost all of this tobacco, over half of it to France. The importance of the French market in the 1740s, when Scottish merchants enlarged their business in Virginia, accentuated the distinctive nature of Glasgow firms and determined many of the characteristics of Scotland's trade with the colony. The steady French purchases prompted a general expansion of credit in Scotland. This credit and the Scottish practice of reinvesting a high portion of profits made the Glasgow firms bigger than ever. A greater concentration of merchant capital allowed the Scots to organize their Virginia trade to meet the special demands of the reexport market. By 1770 the three largest trading syndicates in Glasgow controlled 50 percent of Scotland's tobacco trade with the Chesapeake. The assets of the Glasgow trading houses enabled the Scots to overwhelm their competition in the other outports and to set the terms of trade in many parts of Virginia.¹⁸

Drawing on the French purchases in the 1740s, the Scottish merchants developed the system of stores that became the basis of their operation in Virginia. Each Glasgow firm

established stores at several key locations, usually near tobacco inspection warehouses or in Virginia's few towns. At each store a young Scotsman served as a factor, buying tobacco from growers in the area and selling imported goods in return. The larger firms employed a central agent who managed the loading of company ships and maintained a uniform policy among all the factors. Planters might use cash or bills of exchange to purchase goods from the Scottish stores, but the most common practice was for the factor to extend credit on the next year's crop of tobacco. The store trade was particularly well designed for newly settled areas where generous offers of credit for goods and loans enabled the Scots to promote tobacco cultivation and create a fixed clientele.

Scottish factors preferred to do business with smaller growers who could devote all of their attention to the markets served by the Glasgow firms. The factors arranged the services of their stores to meet the need of these small or middling planters. The location of stores in newly settled areas and throughout the Piedmont provided transportation for planters who lived removed from Virginia's great rivers. The availability of Scottish credit freed the planter's limited capital for the purchase of land and slaves, or property improvements. Large quantities of inexpensive British goods sold at the stores eliminated the need for household manufactures. Once Scottish purchases became

a regular part of the local economy, planter families had less need to save money. The effect of the various services of the factors was to raise landholders above the level of subsistence and to increase production of tobacco for the reexport markets.¹⁹

Along the Potomac and in other settled areas where planters grew the Oronoco popular on the Continent, the Scots attracted business by offering the highest prices for tobacco. In order to load quickly the company's ships, cash purchases were almost always necessary as a supplement to the tobacco received on accounts at the stores. By meeting the highest price demands for tobacco, the Scottish factors could load their ships in time to reduce freight costs and meet the best markets in Great Britain. Independent purchasers in the colony were helpless against the generous offers from the Scots. In 1769 Harry Piper, an Alexandria merchant, complained that "the Scotch don't much mind prices." The arrival of the Scottish ships in the Potomac began a process of bidding up the price of tobacco as the Glasgow men "carry all before them."²⁰

The services and organization that made the Scottish store trade successful required a large capital investment. The £3,000 needed to start a single store in the 1740s and 1750s was beyond the means of all but the wealthiest Virginians. Glasgow firms commonly had a capitalization between £10,000 and £20,000. The few firms that carried

overhalf of Scotland's tobacco trade were much larger. In 1773 William Cunninghame & Co. was capitalized at close to £80,000, and the largest single importer, Speirs, Bowman & Co., was capitalized at a spectacular £150,000.²¹

These investments proved to be exceptionally profitable. The source of profit for Glasgow firms was the sale of goods at the factors' stores rather than tobacco sales. The mark-up, or advance, for goods sold on credit was frequently 80 percent above the sterling price in Scotland, plus another advance based on the prevailing rate of exchange between sterling and Virginia currency. Factors usually applied an advance of 50 percent plus the exchange rate to goods sold for cash. In many instances the actual advances may have been higher. As the sales of these goods expanded, the Scottish merchants organized their tobacco trade to insure a rapid turnover in capital and a reinvestment in the lucrative store trade. Offering top prices in Virginia and occasionally selling at below cost in Great Britain, the Scots quickly reapplied their tobacco receipts to the purchase of more goods at the factors' stores. The sale of these goods on lenient terms became one of the principal sources of credit in Virginia.²²

The distribution of credit through the store trade offered the Scottish merchants opportunities to guide regional development in Virginia. The Scottish firms focused their attention on areas that would most likely

serve the needs of their particular system of direct trade. They were not interested in the areas along the York River and the lower Rappahannock where planters specialized in the expensive sweet-scented tobacco sold on the British domestic market. In 1769 Roger Atkinson of Petersburg reported only "One Concern f[ro]m Glasgow in all York River, ... & the principal with whom I am well aq[uain]td tells me that the Tobo does not answer in Glasgow so well as the James River."²³ The factors were more likely to establish stores along the Potomac or the Upper James and throughout the Piedmont where they found the cheaper Oronoco tobacco. William Cunninghame & Co. started with stores at Dumfries on the Potomac and at the fall line towns like Falmouth and Fredericksburg. By the 1770s the company added stores along the James and in the Southside area of Halifax and Mecklenburg. As each of the company's fourteen stores opened, the local factor repeated the process of extending credit to attract small landholders who would organize their lands to answer the needs of Glasgow and the reexport market.²⁴ The location of new stores throughout Virginia's Piedmont made it feasible for planters in the area to cultivate a staple crop. John Smith of the Pocket Plantation in Pittsylvania County transported his tobacco and that of his neighbors the 100 miles to the Scottish stores along the fall line. Although this was a troublesome journey, only the services of the Scottish factor permitted Smith and

other planters in the western Piedmont to participate in the export trade.²⁵

The only areas where tobacco cultivation continued to expand after 1750 were those in which the Scottish factors were active. The strongest rate of growth was in the Upper James River naval district, especially the region west and south of Petersburg. Exports from this district increased in the same years that the Scottish merchants expanded their Virginia operations. From 6,000 hogsheads in 1739, the region's exports reached a level of around 16,000 in 1752 and maintained that level through the colonial period. By 1773 the district produced over 38 percent of the colony's tobacco exports, as opposed to a share of 19 percent in 1739. Glasgow firms bought over half of the tobacco shipped from the Upper James in the 1770s. The largest of all Scottish firms, Speirs, Bowman, & Co., operated exclusively in this region.²⁶

The districts unaffected by the Scottish traders experienced a relative and occasionally absolute decline in the tobacco trade. In the Rappahannock naval district, where Scots were present but not dominant, the share of Virginia's tobacco exports dropped from 30 percent in 1739 to around 20 percent in the 1760s and 1770s. In the York River district, the central source of the sweet-scented tobacco shunned by the Scots, the share of Virginia's trade dropped from 36 percent in 1727 to 14 percent in 1768. This

represented an absolute decline from 14,260 hogsheads to 6,272.²⁷

Large planters producing tobacco for consignment did not share in the growth of the tobacco market even in areas where the Scots traded. By the 1770s annual planter shipments from the Upper James district were less than ten percent of the total. The Potomac River area roughly maintained its relative share of tobacco shipments through the eighteenth century, but the character of production changed. Large planters like George Washington by 1770 had abandoned tobacco cultivation in that region, while the Scottish factors and English purchasers traded with small growers. The Glassford Company, a prominent Glasgow firm active in the Northern Neck, purchased most of its tobacco from sellers of five or fewer hogsheads a year.²⁸

The Scottish trading system was only one of several instruments in the centralization of British commerce and the restructuring of Virginia's tobacco trade. Faced with the success of the Scots and the growing weight of European demand, London tobacco merchants frequently entered the direct trade after 1740. Their involvement in direct purchases in Virginia accelerated the reorientation of tobacco cultivation toward European markets and brought to London the kind of concentrated trading companies found in Glasgow. In 1775 six London firms held over 50 percent of the city's tobacco trade, each firm importing over 2,000 hogs

heads in the year.²⁹

This concentration of merchant capital attracted new sources of credit to the Virginia trade. British merchants augmented their working capital by borrowing on bond from individuals, through bank loans, by reinvesting their profits, and by accepting credit extended by commercial businesses. Commercial credit was the largest single source after midcentury and the most important for the development of Virginia's tobacco trade. As long as expanding markets made tobacco a secure form of remittance on Virginia debts, British merchants were eager to extend their credit to planters. Whether through the consignment or direct trade, merchants most commonly extended credit in the form of British goods. Warehousemen, shopkeepers and tradesmen sold goods on credit, with no interest charged for the first twelve months. Merchants, in turn, offered Virginians these goods at an advanced price and similar credit arrangements. Firms with sufficient capital on hand paid for the goods in less than twelve months, thereby receiving a discount from the wholesaler. The merchants frequently allowed planters' debts to run three or four years, with a five percent annual interest charge after the first year.³⁰

The result of this credit expansion was a growth of British imports into the Chesapeake during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. In 1740 the two Chesapeake colonies imported £356,680 worth of goods from Great

Britain; by 1771 British imports into the region reached a pre-Revolution high of £1,223,726. Virginia's Scottish imports alone grew from £74,724 in 1740 to £250,401 in 1771. Although the rate of growth in the import trade during these years closely paralleled the changing volume of the tobacco trade, the 200 percent increase in English imports was a much higher rate of growth than for tobacco exports to England. The level of English imports represented the importance of London as a source of commercial credit for merchants in that city as well as Glasgow. Merchants in every branch of the tobacco trade shipped goods on credit from London to the tobacco growing regions of the Chesapeake.³¹

The influx of British credit and goods in the mid-eighteenth century allowed Virginians to benefit from the transformation of consumption patterns in Great Britain. Improvements in production and marketing reduced the price of manufactured goods to a level that encouraged consumption on all levels of British society. Also during the eighteenth century, notions of fashion and style became important considerations in retail purchases. As early as the second decade of the eighteenth century, Virginia's great planters regularly imported fashionable, luxury items through their London consignment merchants. Beginning around the 1720s and 1730s, smaller planters increased their consumption of British goods and followed current patterns

of fashion. The tobacco trade, with its access to commercial credit and efficient distribution of goods through the factors' stores, enabled Virginians to purchase new goods almost as quickly as they appeared in British markets. The reduced costs of transportation and marketing after 1740 also allowed middling and poorer Virginians to purchase more British manufactures without spending a greater share of their income on consumer goods.³²

The variety of British imports in Virginia society included every conceivable type of manufacture or commodity available in eighteenth-century Great Britain. Cloth and finished apparel were the most common types of import for all levels of society. Demand for other types of goods varied according to the wealth of the purchaser. The great planters imported everything from sets of fine china, silverware, carriages, and carpets to the clothes for their slaves and the simple tools used in field work. Smaller planters dealing with the Scottish stores relied on imported cloth, pottery, cooking utensils and farm equipment. The Virginians' dependence on British manufactures had several advantages as long as tobacco markets were strong enough to keep the supply of goods and credit open to the colony. Even after absorbing the costs of credit and transportation, British goods sold for less than the cost of manufacturing the same items in Virginia. The savings for individual planters allowed them to apply income to the improvement of

their lands. The availability of cheap imported goods eliminated the need to divert labor from crop production to home manufactures. Although many households had the equipment for weaving and spinning, only in areas outside the range of the Scottish stores did people rely on homespun cloth.³³

The long-term effect of Virginia's dependence on British manufactures was less beneficial. When tobacco prices fell and merchants restricted credit, as happened several times between 1730 and 1775, planters found it difficult to meet basic needs without going deeply into debt. The colony had few of the crafts or manufactures that might have eased the periodic depressions in the tobacco trade. The common artisans in Virginia were coopers, blacksmiths and other craftsmen necessary for a tobacco economy, rather than the producers of household goods. Virginia had no manufactures with a capacity to fill colonial demand. The colony did not have any fulling mills, essential for large-scale cloth production, before the organization of commercial resistance to the Stamp Act. Skilled craftsmen were more common in the early eighteenth century when a stagnation in the tobacco trade encouraged diversification. The variety of craftsmen in the Chesapeake disappeared, however, when tobacco markets revived after 1730.³⁴

Exact levels of indebtedness before 1775 are difficult to determine, but all accounts in Great Britain and Virginia suggest a significant rise in colonial debts after 1740.

The size of the debt owed British merchants by Virginians was, of course, a reflection of the expanding population in the colony in this period. By 1775, however, when levels of debt were recorded, Virginia and Maryland held a per capita debt triple the average for all other North American colonies. The tobacco trade evidently had attracted a disproportionate amount of the British credit available in the mid-eighteenth century.³⁵

Chronic indebtedness, whether the great planter's obligations to British merchants or the small landholder's debt to the local gentry, always had characterized Virginia's economy. Merchants were willing to offer credit to Virginians because the loans were profitable investments in tobacco production. Planters accepted the credit as a sensible means of improving their own lands and enlarging their profits from the tobacco trade as well as acquiring British goods. After 1730, with rising prices for tobacco in the Chesapeake, expanding demand for the crop in Europe, and easy access to credit from British traders, Virginia's planters borrowed greater amounts than ever before. Although British imports increased with the growing debt, only for the great planters did purchases of imported goods represent a larger share of their income than in earlier years. For most Virginians, the newly-available credit presented an opportunity to buy land and slaves, or improve the property they already owned. The heightened level of

indebtedness in the Chesapeake after 1740 was in many ways a reflection of the greater wealth in the area and of the confidence among planters and merchants that the tobacco trade would support a sustained growth of the Virginia economy.³⁶

Virginia's debt after 1740 was more pervasive as well as larger than in earlier years. In the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries only the largest planters had direct access to British credit. By the mid-eighteenth century every level of planter involved in tobacco production owed debts to British merchants or their factors in the colony. Although the size of the debt for most planters was small, usually under £100, the connection between British merchant and local planter challenged the traditional relationship between creditor and debtor. The shift from great planter to Scottish factor as the principal source of credit for the average tobacco grower portended a variety of threats to social and economic authority, the full implications of which will require study on a local level. One certain change was that for British merchants, the pervasive nature of the debt as well as its greater size made the protection of creditor interests in the Virginia courts more important than before. After 1750 the merchants in Great Britain put pressure on Parliament, the Board of Trade, and Virginia's provincial government in an effort to insure a regular payment of debts owed.³⁷

Virginia legislation and local court actions traditionally had offered a more lenient treatment of debtors than was the practice in England. In an economy where almost everyone accumulated debts of some kind, a legal structure that strictly enforced creditor demands would affect adversely all levels of society. The legal code and court actions in Virginia during the first half of the eighteenth century presented debtors the most liberal terms acceptable while maintaining the colony's legitimacy for British investment. Up until 1750 a series of statute revisions increased the protection of debtors' property, reduced the likelihood of incarceration, and limited the ability of creditors to collect the full value of debts. Although Parliament in 1732 enacted a statute subjecting land and slaves owned by Virginia debtors to creditors' claims, the Virginia courts prevented a successful application of the law. The Virginia Assembly improved the debtors' flexibility in an act of 1749 that permitted a discharge of sterling debts in local currency at a fixed exchange rate of 25 percent, a rate that was considered par but regularly fell below the true value of sterling debts.³⁸

The statute of 1749 in particular provoked the British merchants. The extent of the British-held debt in the colony was so widespread by 1750, and the credit demands in the complex organization of the direct trade so pressing, that British merchants no longer could accept the lax treat

ment of suits for recovery or the risks of fluctuating exchange rates. Merchants' complaints and pressure from the Board of Trade convinced the Burgesses in 1755 to amend the act of 1749 so as to permit local courts to determine judgments at current exchange rates. Virginia's first issue of paper currency, also approved at the Assembly in 1755, exacerbated the fears of British merchants who were concerned lest such emissions inflated exchange rates. Unpersuaded by the statute revision of 1755, merchants in England campaigned for a prohibition of all colonial currency as legal tender. Glasgow merchants, whose accounts were largely in local currency, were less concerned about the legal tender issue but also wanted to reduce the exchange rates that could eliminate all profits in the time between the sale of goods on credit and collection of the debt. One result of the merchants' demands was the Currency Act of 1764, by which Parliament permitted the issuance of paper money in Virginia but prohibited it as legal tender in private transactions.³⁹

Merchants living in Virginia also attempted to secure more regular and favorable proceedings for the collection of debts. A merchants' petition to the Assembly in 1764 requested some sort of regulation of the county courts in their treatment of suits for recovery. According to the traders, the action of these courts and their sheriffs delayed any decision on debt cases and flagrantly protected

the debtors' interests. Among the suggested remedies was institution of the practice of taking bonds, with warrant of attorney, to confess judgment, "which is the common Security on England, Ireland, and the English Dominions in America (this Colony only excepted)." In the midst of the depression following the end of the French and Indian War, the merchants could not extend their limited credit "without some such Security."⁴⁰

In the quarter century preceding the Revolution, Virginians recognized that certain concessions to merchant creditors were necessary in order to maintain the flow of credit from Great Britain to the colony. After passing a bankruptcy act that would have granted insolvents greater protection than under English law, the Assembly quickly accepted Fauquier's recommendation for a repeal, even before the Privy Council disallowed the act. A writer to the Virginia Gazette in 1766 pleaded for reform of the county courts in their treatment of debt cases. The repeated delays in action on recovery suits had become "a very great Discouragement of Trade." Without restructuring the local courts, the Burgesses in the 1760s approved several reforms of earlier acts that had made it difficult to imprison insolvent debtors. In an act of 1769, the Assembly provided for security of bonds, with warrant of attorneys, to confess judgment.⁴¹

At the same time the Assembly agreed to certain mer

chant demands for the protection of sterling debts, several burgesses vainly attempted to limit what they considered unfair privileges of the merchant-creditors. In 1766 Richard Henry Lee sponsored a bill to revise an earlier act that allowed merchants to prove book debts solely by their own oath. According to Lee, the factors and store merchants, who already "received by much the greatest part of the annual produce of our lands and labor," did not deserve a legislative favor denied to all others in Virginia. Lee's bill, however, failed to gain the Assembly's approval. In 1769 a majority of Burgesses did agree to limit the action of the Williamsburg Court of Hustings to cases arising within the city limits. Since 1736 the Williamsburg court had accepted suits for all parts of Virginia as a convenience for people attending the General Court and the Assembly. Merchants came to rely on this court because of its expeditious action on suits for recovery and its reputation as one of the most favorable courts for merchants. Although Richard Jackson, legal counsel for the Board of Trade, found no technical objections to the act restoring the court's original jurisdiction, he recognized that the wider jurisdiction was "of Singular Utility in the recovery of Mercantile Debts" and "highly useful to the Trade of this Kingdom." The Board of Trade recommended disallowance of the act on the same grounds. In February 1772 the Privy Council declared the act void.⁴³

The legislative record after 1750 made it easier for British merchants and their factors to press for the full sterling value of their credit extensions. At the same time, the Virginians' debt reached unprecedented levels and the fluctuations of the tobacco and credit markets became more extreme than in earlier years. The growth of the direct trade and the infusions of British capital had done nothing to eliminate the periodic depressions that always had plagued Virginia's economy. Twice after 1760 the entire imperial economy suffered sharp restrictions of available credit, and on both occasions tobacco prices fell. Following the close of the French and Indian War, a brief expansion of credit collapsed into a depression that persisted through the mid-1760s. The second credit crisis in 1772, the worst in the imperial economy since the South Sea Bubble, followed the largest expansion of credit in the colonial period. A fifty percent drop in tobacco prices and the severe curtailment of further credit in the second half of 1772 devastated the many Virginians -- great planters, smaller growers, and native merchants among them -- who had borrowed heavily in the boom years of 1769-1772.⁴⁴

Despite the severity of these intermittent depressions in trade, British tobacco merchants remained the only significant source of credit accessible to Virginia planters during the eighteenth century. In order to maintain the flow of credit to the colony, Virginians relied on tobacco

as the principal export to Great Britain. Throughout the colonial period exports of the Chesapeake crop consistently represented at least 90 percent of the value of all exports to Great Britain from the area.⁴⁵ The distribution of credit through tobacco merchants imposed limitations on Virginia borrowers even when the imperial economy was expanding. A planter's acceptance of credit from a tobacco merchant required the production of sufficient tobacco to make remittances on the debt. When a planter used the credit to enlarge his land and slave holdings, he needed to apply at least a portion of his new resources to the cultivation of more tobacco. The merchants' improved ability to demand repayment and the fluctuations in tobacco prices made it difficult for planters to divert capital to any long-term developments of alternative staple crops or local manufactures. Once growers were indebted to the factors' stores, Archibald Cary found that the Scottish merchants "take every step in their power to keep the Planters employ'd in that Commodity [tobacco], and often refuse to purchase there Hemp by which means many People are deterred from Cultivating it, for want of a certain market."⁴⁶

Virginia's reliance on mercantile credit perpetuated the colony's dependence on the tobacco trade at a time when population growth and the spread of settlement made possible the production of a wide variety of agricultural commodities. By the eighteenth century, Virginians' cultivation of

foodstuffs provided a surplus for exportation, primarily to the West Indies and through the coastwise trade. Virginia always led the other colonies in the shipment of corn, and by 1739 exported almost 50,000 bushels of wheat. The export trade in grain and other foodstuffs, like that in tobacco, depended on widely fluctuating foreign markets. Despite the colony's ability to grow much larger surpluses of wheat, exports of the grain fell to around 10,000 bushels in the 1740s and again in the 1750s. Wheat shipments did not exceed 50,000 bushels until the decade before the Revolution, when European demand prompted the exportation of 140,252 bushels in 1768. In 1773 Virginia shipped 254,517 bushels of wheat, making the colony the third largest exporter after Pennsylvania and New York. Demand for flour and bread exports further stimulated grain production in the decade before the Revolution.⁴⁷

Although the commerce between Virginia and the West Indies offered opportunities for native merchants, this trade never generated enough capital to provide the credit services granted by British tobacco merchants. In 1770, after an expansion of Chesapeake wheat exports to the West Indies and Southern Europe, the value of the grain trade was only one-tenth the value of the area's tobacco exports.⁴⁸ The Virginia merchants, who often were planters as well as traders, were as likely to use profits from their trading to pay for new land and slaves as to support expanded commer

cial operations. The scale of their trading interests and their investments in planting prevented the native merchants in colonial Virginia from developing into a distinct commercial community like those found in the port cities of northern colonies or in Charleston. The absence of significant towns in Virginia reflected the limited operations of the native merchants. The small trading centers that developed around tobacco inspection warehouses or along the fall line were more like collection and distribution points in the tobacco trade than port towns. The expansion of the wheat trade in the late 1760s promoted the growth of a few towns like Alexandria, but only Norfolk exceeded a population of 3,000 in the colonial period. In fact, Virginia's merchants were unprepared to handle much of the enlarged grain trade which fell into the hands of merchants from Philadelphia and Baltimore or of Scottish factors in the colony. The independent Virginia merchants were allied politically and economically with the great planters, but they never accumulated the resources to support the planters' shift from the tobacco trade.⁴⁹

In the absence of a cohesive community of native merchants, Scottish factors and other British agents, with the wealth of large tobacco firms behind them, took a lead in directing the commercial life of the colony. Even in Norfolk, the colony's only significant port and a center of the grain trade with the West Indies, Scots dominated the

town's trade. Although most British factors operated at locations dispersed throughout the tobacco-growing regions of Virginia, they regularly came together in Williamsburg during the sessions of the General Court. Throughout the eighteenth century, the informal gatherings in the capital provided an opportunity for merchants to transact business and to agree to exchange rates and tobacco prices for the coming months. In 1769 the merchants formalized the meetings at the quarterly court sessions. The price and exchange agreements at these meetings were rough figures that merchants frequently exceeded, particularly the Scottish factors who offered higher prices in an effort to quicken the dispatch of their ships. Yet to many planters, the merchant meetings and the formalization of the process appeared to be a conspiracy and to provide one explanation of the merchants' obvious trade advantages.⁵⁰

British merchants were tightening their grip on every level of Virginia's trade at the same time that Virginians faced internal pressures to curtail their involvement in tobacco cultivation. The colony's population had grown at a faster rate than tobacco so that after midcentury the majority of the labor force was no longer involved in the cultivation of the primary export staple. For the largest planters, especially in older settled areas, this meant finding new kinds of productive work for a surplus slave population. Small landholders were forced out of the

tobacco markets, which had offered the best opportunity of raising them above the level of subsistence. Wheat and other grains presented more opportunities to all landholders after midcentury, but the market for these commodities were erratic and did not provide the credit services that supported expansion.⁵¹ The Virginians' expansion westward also failed to keep up with the tremendous population growth in the eighteenth century. The result was a steadily declining ratio between settled acres of land and tithables (representing the laboring population of the colony). The increased incidence of tenantry, most notably, though far from exclusively, in the Northern Neck, was the earliest indication of pressures of land.⁵²

The changing patterns of external trade and the various internal pressures on Virginia's economy after 1750 raised doubts about the advantages of the imperial connection. The relationship that once had protected the colonies and nurtured their expansion now restricted the further development of Virginia's economy. By the eve of the Revolution, imperial regulations and the dependence on British merchants came to limit the options available to every rank of landholder in Virginia. The great planters, with their extensive land and slave holdings to protect, led the attempts to lessen this dependence on Great Britain. In the decade before the Revolution these same individuals would promote the various schemes of commercial resistance designed to

protect the colony from both political and economic interference from Great Britain.

Chapter One --Endnotes

- 1 Increased wealth of households and economic growth in the eighteenth century is discussed in Allan Kulikoff, "The Colonial Chesapeake: Seedbed of Antebellum Southern Culture?," Journal of Southern History 45 (November 1979): 513-40.
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- 3 Allan Kulikoff, "The Economic Growth of the Eighteenth Century Chesapeake Colonies," Journal of Economic History 39 (March 1979): 275-88.
- 4 Jacob M. Price, Capital and Credit, 152-55.
- 5 For a general discussion of the rise of Virginia's gentry, see Bernard Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia," in Seventeenth-Century America, ed. James Morton Smith (Chapel Hill, 1959), 90-115; Jack P. Greene, "Foundations of Political Power in the Virginia House of Burgesses, 1720-1776," WMQ, 3rd ser. 16 (October 1959): 485-506.
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- 7 Bailyn, "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia"; Greene, "Foundations of Political Power"; John Mickle Hemphill II, "Virginia and the English Commercial System, 1689-1733: Studies in the Development and Fluctuations of a Colonial Economy under Imperial Control" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1964), esp. Chs. 1, 2, and 4.
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- 9 General discussion of consignment trade is found in Rosenblatt, "The Significance of Credit"; and Robert Polk Thomson, "The Merchant in Virginia, 1700-1775" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1955), Ch. 2.
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- 11 The 1765 edition of John Mair, Bookeeping Methodiz'd, (Edinburgh) estimates the consignment trade carrying one-fourth of total British imports of tobacco. Price, France and the Chesapeake, 662, estimates the direct trade's share at two-thirds of British imports. More recently Price has suggested that the consignment merchants' share was as low as one-fifth by 1770. Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," Perspectives in American History 8 (1974): 168.
- 12 Jacob M. Price, "The Economic Growth of the Chesapeake and the European Market," 496-511.
- 13 Ibid.; see also Price, France and the Chesapeake, esp. Ch. 25, 649-77.
- 14 Hemphill, "Virginia and the English Commercial System," 156-71.
- 15 For discussion of enactment of Maryland's Inspection Act, see Aubrey C. Land, Colonial Maryland, A History (Millwood, N.Y., 1981), 180-81.
- 16 Jacob M. Price, "The Rise of Glasgow," 180-81.
- 17 Ibid.; Price, France and the Chesapeake, 662-63; Price, Capital and Credit, 23-29.
- 18 Price, France and the Chesapeake, Ch. 23, esp. 604-17.
- 19 For description of the general organization of the Scottish trade, see J.H. Soltow, "Scottish Traders in Virginia, 1750-1775," Economic History Review, 2nd ser. 12 (August 1959): 83-98; Robert Polk Thomson, "The Merchant in Virginia"; and Price, "The Rise of Glasgow."
- 20 Price, France and the Chesapeake, 664-66; Harry Piper

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- 22 Ibid., 25-29, 149-51; Price, France and the Chesapeake, 665-66.
- 23 Price, France and the Chesapeake, 666-71; Roger Atkinson to Messrs Lionel and Samuel Lyde, 25 August 1769, Roger Atkinson Letterbook, 1769-1776, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
- 24 Price, France and the Chesapeake, 666-71; for list and description of Virginia stores of Wm. Cunninghame & Co., see Virginia Claims of Wm. Cunninghame & Co., PRO, AO13/29.
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- 31 Jacob M. Price, "New Time Series for Scotland's and Britain's Trade with the Thirteen Colonies and States, 1740-1791," WMQ, 3rd ser. 32 (April 1975): 322-25. Import-export statistics for the colonial period combine the colonies of Virginia and Maryland. A separate accounting was recorded only during the years 1768-1772 in Ledger of Imports and Exports

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- 36 Ibid., Ch. 2, 5-19; Walsh, "Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency," 112-13.
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- 44 Marc Egnal, "The Economic Development of the Thirteen Continental Colonies," 191-222; Sheridan, "The British Credit Crisis of 1772 and the American Colonies," 161-62.
- 45 Price, "The Economic Growth of the Chesapeake and the European Market," 496; see specific breakdown of imports and exports in the Chesapeake colonies in PRO, Customs 3/.
- 46 Archibald Cary to Governor Fauquier, 17 April 1766, PRO, CO5/1345, pp. 134-35.
- 47 Bergstrom, "Markets and Merchants," Ch. 5, esp. table on 136; Harold B. Gill, Jr., "Wheat Culture in Colonial Virginia," Agricultural History 52 (July 1978): 380-83; Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," 165.
- 48 Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," 165.
- 49 Ibid., 163-72; Thomas M. Preisser, "Alexandria and the Evolution of the Northern Virginia Economy, 1749-1776," VMHB 89 (July 1981): 282-83.
- 50 Adele Hast, Loyalism in Revolutionary Virginia: The Norfolk Area and the Eastern Shore (Ann Arbor, 1982), 9-32; Soltow, The Economic Role of Williamsburg, 163-76.
- 51 See Bergstrom, "Markets and Merchants," Ch. 2, for population growth and tobacco production.

- 52 Ibid.; Willard Bliss, "The Rise of Tenancy in Virginia," VMHB 58 (October 1950): 427-41.

Chapter Two: The Dilemma of the Great Planters

The great planters' reaction to changes in the tobacco trade after 1730 was often shrill and accusatory. They reproached their London merchants for failing to obtain the highest possible prices for tobacco and for providing second-rate service to the colonies. They described the advance of the Scottish factors in conspiratorial terms, unable to comprehend how men could find such success without resort to deceit. Faced with a rising debt, the planters correctly understood that the rise of the direct trade and the influx of Scottish factors threatened their economic security and their authority in Virginia society. In the middle decades of the eighteenth century Virginia's largest planters faced a dilemma that prevented them from successfully adjusting to recent developments in the imperial economy. Virginia plantations could not operate without the tobacco production that attracted British credit and essential goods, yet the new tobacco markets were less and less favorable for producers of large crops and premium leaf. Despite its obvious disadvantages after 1730, the consign-ment trade remained the only source of several indispensable services for the great planters' estates. Planters who attempted to improve the viability of their plantations by diversifying production or expanding into new territory soon discovered the dearth of options available in an economy

characterized by pervasive indebtedness and only one significant source of credit. Increasingly after 1750 the great planters feared that the commercial connection with Great Britain, once a basis for their influence in Virginia, prevented them from developing the full potential of their estates. The economic threat from British merchants raised additional questions about the planter gentry's ability to perpetuate their political leadership or to provide a legacy for their children.

Direct trade merchants offered the great planters few opportunities to benefit from the expansion of their business in the tobacco trade. The direct traders deliberately avoided any involved, personal transactions with the great planters. William Cunninghame & Co. instructed its Virginia agent to solicit the trade of middling planters who were seldom in debt rather than that of the "first crop Masters who are continually so." Large planters demanded too much of their merchants and regularly allowed debts to accumulate for several years before moving on and begging credit from another merchant. If the Cunninghame factors wanted to buy tobacco from the "Great men," let the transaction be in cash.¹

The great planters occasionally offered all or a portion of their crop for cash sale to direct traders in the colony. The planter might choose to sell lower quality

tobacco to a country purchaser who gave a set price and cash payment. Large planters also often sold small amounts of tobacco to pay for incidental goods at a factor's store.² In years of low prices on the London market the attractive prices offered by Scottish buyers were a temptation to consigning planters dissatisfied with their diminishing returns. In 1765 Richard Corbin warned his London merchants, Capel and Osgood Hanbury, that "the Sales of Tob. from the Out Ports are almost double those from London, and if there is not a very great Alteration in the London market I shall not do Justice to my Family, if I do not send the greatest part of my Tobo to the best Market."³

Cash sales, however, even at good prices, did not compensate the great planters for the services available to them only from consignment merchants in London. The most important benefit of the consignment trade was the access to the kind of credit extensions that Cunninghame & Co. and other Scottish firms refused to grant to large planters. The London merchants, with access to the superior credit facilities of that city, organized their businesses so as to provide the financial services that attracted the steady trade of great planters. By limiting the size of their clientele, the consignment merchants were able to offer the regular and long-term loans required for the development and maintenance of large plantations. The merchant's role as banker, paying out bills of exchange drawn on credit or

standing accounts, provided an additional service that facilitated the planter's business affairs in the colony.⁴

The merchants' credit and personal service allowed the great planters to purchase a quality and quantity of British goods that were unavailable in the factors' stores or elsewhere in Virginia. Through their established contacts with shopkeepers and artisans in London, the consignment merchants gathered the furniture and decorations for plantation houses, the London clothing, and all the various fashionable articles that characterized the great planters' standard of living. During the mid-eighteenth century wealthy planters increased the proportion of their disposable income spent on luxury items from Great Britain. In this society where public display was an important element of social interaction, few planters were willing to abandon the trade that provided them with the most visible evidence of success. As George Washington pointed out, planters were reluctant to curtail expenditures for luxury articles for fear that it would "create suspicions of a decay in [their] fortune, & such a thought the World must not harbour." A more practical and absolutely essential service was the merchant's selection and shipping of large quantities of coarse goods used for provisioning slaves. These goods were commonly available in Virginia but not in the amounts needed by a large slaveholder and not on the terms granted by London merchants.⁵

Although the consignment system became a peripheral component of British tobacco trade, the London commission merchants remained the most favorable dealers of Virginia's sweet-scented tobacco. English markets for this higher quality leaf remained steady through the eighteenth century, and the established planters of the York River and other eastern areas continued to produce this staple. Direct trade merchants wanted little to do with this crop which required the personal marketing of a London merchant familiar with the domestic buyers. As long as consignment merchants offered to market the sweet-scented tobacco, which sold for up to five times the price of other leaf, Virginia's larger planters found it to be a worthwhile means of obtaining London credit.⁶ Less tangible benefits of the consignment trade included the merchants' services as a London agent for the planter's affairs. The consignment merchants, whose firms often carried on business with Virginia families for several generations, frequently acted as guardian for planters' children attending school in England, represented Virginians in legal or political matters, and served as an important source of information regarding politics and English fashions.⁷

The great planters had compelling reasons to continue some level of commerce with the consignment merchants, but they fully understood the intrinsic disadvantages of the trade. Landon Carter thought "it must be madness that can

continue attached to such a trade and the favour or whatever it is that inclines a man to trade to London is very dearly purchased."⁸ Indeed, the merchants' services which made the trade valuable also made it expensive. When English markets were poor or the tobacco was reexported to the Continent, handling charges and commissions for the merchant reduced the planter's return to below the price for common tobacco sold in Virginia. In the best of markets, the charges for freight, duties, insurance premiums, loading and unloading, storage, brokerage, and the merchants' commission inflated the cost of marketing the crop, all at the expence of the planter. The sources of the merchant's profit were the commissions of 2-1/2 or 3 percent on the final sales price of the crop and the manipulation of customs duties. The total duties on imported tobacco amounted to eight and one-third pence by 1759. One penny of this was paid in cash for which a 25 percent discount was offered. On the remaining seven and one-third pence, merchants received a 15 percent discount for payment with bond or a 25 percent discount for payment in cash. Consignment merchants paid the duties in cash but charged the planters for bonded payment. The difference, though less than one penny per pound, produced as much revenue as the commission charge. The costs of maintaining sufficient cash supplies to qualify for the extra discount justified the merchant's charge on the planter's account, but again the operation of the consignment

trade proved to be an expensive method for planters to market their tobacco.⁹

Planters who chose to continue tobacco consignments found it difficult to protect themselves from the high cost of the merchants' personal service. Although Virginians understood the advantages of cash payment of duties, few had the extra capital to lodge with a merchant for this purpose. Planters did distribute their crop between merchants in an attempt to enhance their bargaining position or to purchase cheaper goods in the outports. During the 1760s and 1770s John Tayloe, a wealthy planter in Richmond County, simultaneously shipped tobacco to merchants in Liverpool, Bristol, Dublin, and Edinburgh, as well as to several London merchants. The practice of dividing tobacco among London merchants allowed planters to compare returns from the same market and to put pressure on those merchants who delivered smaller returns. John Turbeville informed William Lee, James Russell and William Molleson that he would distribute his crop among them and annually rotate the size of their shares. George Washington confronted Robert Cary & Co. and James Gildart with the returns from other correspondents and with reports of what his neighbors received for similar tobacco. In what was a nearly formulaic response to consignment merchants, Washington and other planters threatened to suspend future shipments if profits did not increase. Yet Washington continued to consign tobacco even when he

realized that the sales of sweet-scented in London were often lower than what he could get for Oronoco in the country.¹⁰

Washington's involvement in the consignment trade was indicative of the frustrations facing an ambitious planter in a restricted market. Washington had shipped his earliest tobacco crops to consignment merchants in London and Bristol in order to establish a source of credit and British goods. After his marriage to Martha Custis, he transferred his business to Robert Cary & Co. and Capel and Osgood Hanbury, two prominent consignment firms that had long associations with the Custis family. Even these well-connected merchants could not provide satisfactory sales for Washington in depressed markets. How could it be, Washington asked his principal London correspondent Robert Cary & Co., that the producers of high quality tobacco, "who by a close and fixed correspondence with you, contribute so largely to the dispatch of your Ships in this Country should meet with such unprofitable returns."¹¹ Twice during the early 1760s Washington chose to sell his Potomac crop to a merchant in Alexandria rather than risk the London market. But new investments and the requirements of operating several plantations forced Washington to continue consignments to London firms. His uncharacteristic debt of £1800 to Cary & Co. in 1764, after a series of bad crops, defaulted payments from his own debtors, and purchases of land and slaves, was

irrefutable evidence of the need to ship tobacco to London as long as he relied on credit from British merchants. After 1765 Washington experimented with hemp, flax, and grain in the hope of finding a more dependable commodity for the London markets. His success with new crops, however, was limited to the West Indies trade, which provided none of the credit or manufactured goods offered in London. Washington's diversification of production at Mount Vernon, moreover, was possible only while tobacco shipments from his valuable estates on York River maintained his credit with London merchants.¹²

Washington's extensive purchase of British imports often proved as unsatisfactory as the sale of his tobacco. The dubious quality and the inflated price of the goods were, to him, aggravating reminders of Virginia's commercial dependence on Great Britain. Washington complained of receiving articles "that could only have been used by our Forefathers in the days of yore." He accused the shopkeepers and tradesmen in London of deliberately selecting inferior goods for the American trade and then advancing the price 20 percent. When ordering a chariot for Fielding Lewis, Washington instructed his merchant not to inform the tradesman that the vehicle was intended for the colonies. Washington also was frustrated by his inability to supervise the process of collecting and shipping the goods included in his detailed annual orders. The omission of goods or mis

takes in quantity and size particularly were annoying after the wait of nine or more months between ordering and receiving the goods. Robert Cary & Co., which handled all of Washington's London orders, suggested he should return unsatisfactory goods to the tradesmen, but this required as long as two years for any response.¹³

If the transactions between Washington and his consignment merchants illustrate the great planter's dissatisfaction with the trade, they also reveal the commitment to a system of agricultural production and a standard of living that perpetuated the dependence on British merchants. As long as Washington organized his plantations around slave labor and the cultivation of export crops, he needed to maintain his London account in order to obtain the necessary provisions for his estate and dependents. The purchase of the personal goods demanded by Washington and his immediate family also required a standing account with a London merchant. Even before his marriage to the wealthy Martha Custis, Washington ordered from London a variety of stylish furnishings and elaborate decorations for his then relatively modest house at Mount Vernon. During the decade following his marriage in 1759, he expanded his orders for the English luxury goods that marked the household of a successful Virginia planter.¹⁴

Washington was less entangled in the consignment trade than many of his contemporaries who continued to ship

tobacco to London more as a result of chronic indebtedness than the desire for new credit of British goods. Whereas Washington was able, and did, divert labor and capital to the development of domestic manufactures and new crops for markets outside of Great Britain, many of Virginia's great planters in the third quarter of the eighteenth century had no choice but to channel all their resources into tobacco production in order to reduce their debts and preserve the source of supplies for their plantations.

Any attempts to improve the great planters' advantages in the tobacco trade or to vary the production on their estates confronted the pervasive activity of the Scottish traders within Virginia. The influence of the factors from the Glasgow firms represented not only a shift in the tobacco market but also a new style of business which accompanied the rise of the direct trade. The great planters on their estates found it difficult to compete with or restrain the Scottish merchants as they expanded their trade in local communities throughout Virginia. The success of the factors was so striking that some Virginians feared the Scots would gain control of the entire tobacco trade and thereby dominate the colony's economy. As Harry Piper watched the Scots absorb an ever increasing share of the Potomac crop in 1769, he concluded that "they are determined to have the whole trade." Roger Atkinson, a resident merchant in Petersburg,

in the same year predicted that "in a little time they will engross the whole." William Lee thought "Glasgow has almost monopolized Virg[ini]a and its inhabitants."¹⁵

The Scottish organization of the tobacco trade so quickly overwhelmed earlier trading arrangements that Virginians and English alike suspected various types of fraud. Since the early eighteenth century, London merchants accused the Scots of taking advantage of their country's irregular coastline and sparse population to smuggle tobacco past customs inspectors. In 1769 William Nelson acknowledged that the profits from the store trade was one explanation of how "the Scots are enabled to carry the Tobo from the South Britons" but continued to give credence to the charges of customs fraud. As President of the Governor's Council, William Nelson received reports that Scottish ships hid the inspection manifests for up to 100 hogsheads when they cleared from Virginia. Upon arriving off the Scottish coast, they smuggled in this illegal tobacco and paid duties only on the smaller cargo cleared by the customs officers in Virginia.¹⁶ These alleged customs violations were the easiest explanation of the Scottish pricing system that baffled other merchants in the tobacco trade. "There is something very Mysterious in the Glasgow trade," wrote William Lee from London, "their factors raise the price nominally in Virg[ini]a & the principals always begin to lower it here in Britain."¹⁷

The rumors of illegal and unethical business arrangements aggravated the long-standing cultural prejudice against the Scots. In spite of the achievements of the Scottish renaissance, many in Virginia and England conceived of Scotland as a backward, uncivilized nation. William Lee thought it "evident that God has cursed that Country with Barreness & Vice," and he chastised his fellow Virginians for adopting "Scotticisms" in their writings."¹⁸ The colonists as well as the English also associated the Scots with challenges to the settlement of 1689. After the accession of George III, the influence of the Scottish Lord Bute heightened fears of the threat from the North Britons. This belief in the cultural degeneracy of the Scots provided Virginians with an explanation of the factors aggressive and supposedly deceitful business practices. Whenever the policies of the Glasgow firms appeared injurious to colonial planters or threatening to Virginia's economy, Virginians responded with private and public attacks on the character of the Scots.

However widespread the Virginians anti-Scottish sentiment appeared, and it was prevalent, many Scots were accepted fully as members of Virginia society. Scottish-born Virginians often served in political offices on a local and provincial level and were accorded the same respect given to Anglo-Virginians in similar positions. Virginians reserved their hostility and ethnic attacks almost exclu

sively for those Scots who represented Glasgow tobacco firms. The stereotypical character of the humorless, dour Scot, single-mindedly attached to business was a sharp contrast to the image of the expansive, self-confident Virginia planter moving easily among all ranks of society; and there was a certain truth to both of these stereotypes. The Scottish tobacco merchant and their factors seemed to confirm the great planters' worst suspicions about national character. What appeared to be innate differences of character, however, were the results of very dissimilar business methods. Arthur Lee confronted this clash of styles while studying in Scotland. On a trip to Glasgow Lee attempted to establish personal contacts that might aid his family, but the Virginian was put off by the merchants' cold behavior. "Their strict attention to business, had rendered them an uncivil, unsociable People, and utterly strangers to Politeness," he lamented to his brother Richard Henry Lee in Virginia.¹⁹

Virginia's great planters, from a long involvement in the consignment trade, conceived of the tobacco trade as a slow-moving business in which merchants steadily expanded a network of personal contacts until they secured a profitable level of annual crop shipments. There was nothing slow or personal about the Scots' business which quadrupled in volume just during the 1740s and continued to expand into the 1770s. As Lee's efforts in Glasgow demonstrated, the

great planters' business dealings were related closely to various types of social interaction. The Lees at Stratford, like innumerable other estate owners in Virginia, were used to carrying on commercial transactions in the midst of social affairs or at community gatherings such as church services. Ship captains in the consignment trade combined their collection of tobacco with social visits to the familiar planters along Virginia's rivers. Business affairs for the Virginians also were intertwined with family connections. For the great planter, social position, political connection, and family ties all insured access to economic opportunity.

The Scots, to a much greater degree, segregated economic transactions from the broader life of the community. The factor in Virginia served no other function than to provide the services associated with marketing tobacco and importing British goods. The efficiency and superiority of these services, rather than social position or connection in the colony, determined the success of a Scottish agent. Each factor established himself by drawing on his company's resources to secure a steady supply of tobacco for his principal and customers for the store. Particularly in newly settled areas, the factors' business was unrelated to community contacts, political influence or social status. Despite their tremendous significance in the colony, the Scottish traders never became an integral part of Virginia

society.

This modern notion of the exclusivity of economic life was a local reflection of the rational, centralized organization of the Glasgow merchant houses. The directors of the tobacco firms structured their operations so that the loyalties and interests of the factors remained in Scotland throughout their service in the colony. The factor's job was temporary by design. The companies selected as agents young, single men who could devote their undivided attention to business affairs before returning to advanced positions with the firm in Scotland. While in Virginia, hiring contracts prevented the factors from engaging in any kind of business of their own. Nor were they permitted to own land other than that immediately attached to the store. These factors had little opportunity or need to develop social ties in Virginia. William Cunninghame & Co. went so far as to request its factors not to develop "too great an Intimacy" with the Virginians in order not to compromise their bargaining position. When one Cunninghame factor married a Virginia woman, the company relieved him of his position.²⁰

Virginians were particularly apprehensive about the factors' transient position in colonial society. "They neither value us or our country ... no sooner are they feathered (like birds of migration) they fly away," complained a "Planter" in 1771. Landon Carter thought the Scots' lack of community attachments explained their failure

to support American resistance. Only "a very few who seem to intend this Colony as their chief residence" supported the patriot cause, while the rest actively encouraged compliance with the offensive British acts.²¹ Long before the imperial crisis the factors' allegiance to Scotland and their companies posed problems for Virginians, particularly the planter gentry. The Scots not only threatened to displace the great planters as an economic elite, they introduced a trading structure that was redefining the relationship between economic influence and community responsibility. Since the early decades of the eighteenth century the great planters had adhered to an ideal of public service that tempered the exploitive tendencies of Virginia society in the preceding century. A flexible system of local administration, a commitment to political leadership, and a paternalistic sense of social obligation balanced the great planters' disproportionate control of land and labor resources. This code of public virtue secured for the gentry the most stable social structure in British North America and eliminated all but the most inconsequential internal challenges to their authority. The Scottish factors' economic influence, which rivalled and even excelled that of the wealthiest planter, was unchecked by any similar responsibility to the community.²²

The Scottish merchants in Virginia became the special object of the great planters' fears and resentment because

they so clearly, even exaggeratedly, represented the hazards of the direct trade and of continued economic dependence on Great Britain. The immediate and obvious threat was Glasgow's potential domination of the tobacco trade. The Scots had been the most visible agents of the transition away from the consignment system, and their store system displaced the great planters as intermediaries between smaller planters and British markets. Even as most English tobacco merchants also entered the direct trade, the Scottish firms remained the most centralized and concentrated of trading organizations. Within the tobacco trade, the efficient, rationally structured, and capital-intensive companies in Glasgow were at the forefront of a kind of commercial development that overwhelmed the plantation-based gentry in Virginia. Charges of fraud and ethnic attacks were the responses of frustrated Virginians who were unable to protect their interests against the aggressive advancement of merchants whose operations they only partly understood. As the Scots particular commercial system infiltrated Virginia, it appeared to have implications far beyond the issue of relative economic advantages or questions of who controlled the tobacco trade. Scottish trading activity threatened to undermine an important basis of political stability in Virginia by dividing the common interest that once had united tobacco growers. For the great planters to protect their interests and position would require more than the

diversification of their estates or finding some compensation for the declining opportunities in the consignment trade. The broad threat presented by the Scots would not be checked until the whole colonial economy was weaned from its reliance on tobacco, and the merchants residing in the colony were incorporated in the planter-dominated political culture of Virginia.

The pattern of indebtedness in Virginia was a further indication of the ways in which the changing commercial structure of the Empire restricted the colonial economy and increased the Virginians' dependence on British merchants. After 1750, as the British-held debt grew ever larger and more dispersed through Virginia society, and credit terms were more burdensome for borrowers, many Virginians, particularly the great planters, became increasingly apprehensive about the chronic indebtedness that always had been characteristic of the colonial economy. At a time when Virginians recognized the need for a more varied and independent economy, the debt was both a symbol of the colony's persistent reliance on Great Britain and a practical obstacle to all planters who wished to extricate their estates from the pitfalls of the tobacco trade. The uneasiness about the debt in Virginia had several sources and produced varied, at times conflicting, responses. Agreement centered on the conclusion of many Virginians

that the debt by its nature had created a problem that was becoming more dangerous and required some solution if the colonists were to reduce the British merchants' influence over the Virginia economy.

The debt was a focus of concern for those Virginians who feared their involvement with a more highly commercialized Atlantic economy would undermine the traditional basis of social stability. A seemingly permanent debt, owed to merchants in Great Britain, was destructive of the personal independence and moral character thought to be necessary for maintaining public virtue. The debt itself appeared to be a result of excessive and indulgent purchases of the luxury goods supplied on credit from British merchants combined with a disregard of the limitations of the productive capacity of the planters' estates. The "Root of our misfortunes is our Pride, our Luxury and Idleness," wrote a Bedford County resident in 1773. Another claimed that the debt and accompanying economic problems were simply those "into which they have brought themselves by their own luxury and extravagance."²³ After 1760, when depressions in the tobacco trade and subsequent credit restrictions were more severe, the recent increase of British consumer goods imported into Virginia appeared a likely explanation of the planters' growing debts. Throughout this period, analysis of Virginia's recurrent economic problems repeatedly stressed the effects of personal extravagance and

inattention to the management of one's estate. The emphasis on personal weaknesses as a source of indebtedness and the calls for "Frugality and Industry" betrayed a fear that Virginia's great planters did not possess the character traits required for successful competition with the new breed of tobacco traders. If Virignians were to regain economic security and protect their estates from the demands of British merchants, they needed to adopt a simpler standard of living and develop a more disciplined management of their estates.²⁴

John Wayles, perhaps because he was colonial agent for an English merchant as well as a native planter, understood that the mobilization of credit that accompanied the rise of the direct trade was at least as responsible for indebtedness as the extravagance of the planters. "Luxury & expensive living have gone hand in hand with the increase of wealth," he wrote to a Bristol merchant in 1766. "In 1740 I don't remember to have seen such a thing as a turkey carpet in the Country ... now nothing are so common as Turkey or Wilton Carpets, the whole furniture of the Rooms Elegant & every appearance of Opulence. All this is in great Measure owing to the credit which the Planters have had from England & which has enabled them to Improve their Estates to the pitch they are arrived at, tho' many are ignorant of the true cause."²⁵

Richard Henry Lee admitted that "extravagance & want of

Industry" were responsible for the debts of many individuals, but he also thought the structure of the tobacco trade was primarily responsible for the Virginians' chronic indebtedness and the colony's underdeveloped economy. Lee was especially critical of the store trade, which he claimed took advantage of the restriction on colonial trade by imposing "most oppressively both in the price and quality of goods." The high advances on inferior goods sold at the factors' stores produced an "enormous debt due at the stores, although they have regularly received the greatest part of the annual produce from our lands and labor." Lee recognized that the great planters could improve the Virginia economy by "superintending more immediately the cultivation of their lands [and] by renting on easy terms the land they cannot cultivate, to industrious poor people, who, while they benefit the landlord, add considerable strength to the community." The merchants, however, would do more for the colony if they were cautious in the credit extensions that hitherto had trapped the planters in a cycle of debt. The influx of easy credit from the tobacco trade convinced Lee that "too extreme credit serves only to ruin the Debtor, at the same time that it distresses him who credits."²⁶

After the Revolution Jefferson was even more insistent that British merchants were responsible for the chronic and pervasive indebtedness of pre-war Virginia. The organiza

tion of the tobacco trade, he charged, had been calculated to increase the colonists' debts and perpetuate their dependence on the British-controlled tobacco trade. "The advantages made by the British merchants on the tobaccos consigned to them were so enormous that they spared no means of increasing those consignments. A powerful engine for this purpose was the giving good prices and credit to the planter, till they got him more immersed in debt than he could pay without selling his land or slaves. They then reduced the prices given for his tobacco so that let his shipments be ever so great, and his demand of necessaries ever so oeconomical, they never permitted him to clear off his debt."²⁷ Jefferson certainly exaggerated the conspiratorial design of the British merchants, but certainly they had understood the value of easy credit in attracting customers and encouraging increased tobacco production.

The two general explanations of Virginia's growing debt, one emphasizing the ill effects of personal weaknesses such as extravagance, indolence, or reckless purchases of new property and the other centering on the manipulation of British merchants who were supported by imperial regulations, seem unrelated if not contradictory. The former represented a suspicion of the commercial activity associated with expanded tobacco markets, while the latter was evidence of an impatience with the mercantilist policies that inhibited economic growth in the colony. Both atti

tudes, however, were present in this period of economic transition, and each influenced the Virginians' response to the recognized problems of chronic indebtedness. From either perspective, or, as was common, from a mixture of the two, Virginians agreed that they could not reduce their debt to Great Britain until they curtailed imports of British manufactures and developed trades less dependent than tobacco on British credit.

The diminished opportunities in the consignment trade, the competition from Scottish traders within Virginia, and the growing debt were for Virginia's great planters the particular effects of a general advancement of the commercial economy within the Empire. In both America and Great Britain the development of this more highly commercialized economy in the eighteenth century gave rise to a debate over the political and social implications of such a change. While some argued that the pursuit of commercial interests would benefit society by expanding aggregate wealth and productivity, many more admitted the obvious advantages but feared the corruption that would follow increased luxury and concentration of wealth. Commercial expansion could advance the level of civilization at the same time that it sowed the seeds of decay and dissolution. By the eve of the Revolution, Great Britain provided for many Americans an example of a nation in which commercialism had enhanced culture and

the arts but also provoked an irreversible decline into corruption and venality.²⁸

In Virginia the debate over the effects of commercial growth was complicated by the paradoxical nature of the colony's economy. Of all the North American colonies, Virginia, with its valuable tobacco exports, was involved most thoroughly with the commercial developments in the Atlantic economy. The internal economy of the colony, however, impeded the colonists' ability to respond to the shifting markets, the changes in the credit supply, and the new trading arrangements associated with the expansion of the tobacco trade. After midcentury more and more of Virginia's great planters recognized that certain characteristics of the colonial economy -- the predominance of staple agriculture, the lack of a strong, indigenous merchant community, and, above all, the commitment to slave labor -- made it difficult for them to compete against the advantages of concentrated merchant firms in Great Britain.

Faced with the growing interference of British merchants in Virginia, the great planters initially hoped to avoid the adverse effects of commercial development by diversifying and expanding their plantations. The wealthiest planters, free from the limitations of debts owed to tobacco merchants, turned to new export crops, plantation manufactures, and limited commercial activity. Men like Robert Carter of Nomini Hall and John Tayloe of Mount Airy

established iron forges and grain mills and operated ships for the marketing of new commodities. They intended this kind of diversification to provide the advantages of wider export markets while securing the independence of their estates. A wider group of Virginia planters expected the development of western lands to provide opportunities for speculation and, more important, for the expansion of plantation agriculture. The Ohio Company and similar land schemes attracted subscriptions from eastern planters hoping to provide their families with new estates.²⁹

These ambitious proposals for economic development did little to relieve the individual planter's dependence on the tobacco trade for credit and essential imports. Even Carter and Tayloe continued to consign tobacco to England long after they recognized the disadvantages of the consignment trade.³⁰ By the 1760s Virginia's great planters came to believe that their family estates and personal influence would not be secure as long as the influence of the British merchants restricted the options for economic development in the colony. The availability of future opportunities would require a reduction of the debt, a lessening of involvement in tobacco, and alternative, preferably domestic, sources for essential manufactures. Once freed of their dependence on British merchants, Virginia's great planters hoped to be able to extend the benefits of a plantation economy to their children and across the unsettled territory to the west.

Chapter Two Endnotes

- 1 William Cunninghame & Co. to James Robinson, 16 May 1772, Cunninghame of Lainshaw Muniments, 1761-1778, Scottish Record Office.
- 2 George Washington to Richard Washington, 10 August 1760, Washington Papers, LC; Glassford Company ledgers (LC) record numerous small purchases from large planters in the area.
- 3 Richard Corbin to Messrs Hanbury, 31 May 1765, Richard Corbin Letterbook, Colonial Williamsburg.
- 4 Samuel M. Rosenblatt, "The Significance of Credit," 383-99; Jacob M. Price, Capital and Credit.
- 5 For importance of public display see Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia; increased purchases of luxuries after 1750 discussed in Lorena S. Walsh, "Urban Amenities and Rural Sufficiency," 109-17; George Washington to George Mason, 5 April 1769, Washington Papers, LC.
- 6 Jacob M. Price, France and the Chesapeake, 658-62, 667-68.
- 7 General discussion of consignment trade in Robert Polk Thomson, "The Merchant in Virginia," Ch. 2; Samuel Michael Rosenblatt, "The House of Norton & Sons: A Study of the Consignment Method of Marketing Tobacco from Virginia to England" (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1960), Ch. 6.
- 8 Landon Carter, The Diary of Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1775, ed. Jack P. Greene, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, 1965), 1:413.
- 9 Rosenblatt, "The Significance of Credit," 387-88; for accounting of merchants' charges see receipts of Robert Cary & Co., Custis Papers.
- 10 Rosenblatt, "The Significance of Credit," 392-94; John Tayloe (1721-1779) Account Books, Virginia Historical Society; Robert Carter Accounts, Virginia Historical Society; George Washington to Robert Cary & Co., 20 September 1765, Washington Papers, LC; Washington to Capel & Osgood Hanbury, 5 May 1768, Custis Papers.

- 11 George Washington to Robert Cary & Co., 20 September 1765, Washington Papers, LC.
- 12 Goerge Washington accounts with Robert Cary & Co., Ledger A; Washington to Robert Cary & Co., 10 August 1764, Washington Papers, LC.
- 13 George Washington to Robert Cary & Co., 28 September 1760, 16 March 1762, 20 August 1770, and 20 July 1771, Washington Papers, LC.
- 14 See Invoices for Goods shipped from English merchants, 1754-1766, 1766-1773, Washington Papers, LC.
- 15 Harry Piper to Dixon & Littledale, 25 November 1769, Piper Letterbook; Roger Atkinson to Samuel Gist, 25 August 1769, Roger Atkinson Letterbook; William Lee to Landon Carter, 26 August 1771, William Lee Letterbook, 1770-1771, Lee Family Papers at Stratford Hall.
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- 18 William Lee to Francis Lightfoot Lee, 5 September 1774, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
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- 21 A "Planter" to Rind, VG, (Rind), 31 October 1771; Diary of Landon Carter, 2:821.
- 22 The standard treatment of the political culture of the gentry in eighteenth-century Virginia is Charles S. Sydnor, Gentlemen Freeholders; Political Practices in Washington's Virginia (Chapel Hill, 1952); see also Jack P. Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics: An Analysis of the Political Culture of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Society, Freedom, and Conscience, ed., Richard M. Jellison (New York, 1976), and Rhys Isaac, The Transformation of Virginia.

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- 24 Gordon S. Wood, "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," 27-30; Emory G. Evans, "Planter Indebtedness and the Coming of the Revolution in Virginia," 518-19.
- 25 John Wayles to Farrell & Jones, 30 August 1766, American Loyalist Claims, PRO, T. 79/30.
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- 27 Thomas Jefferson, The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, ed. Julian P. Boyd, (Princeton, 1954), 10:27.
- 28 For a discussion of eighteenth-century debate on the effect of a commercial economy on society and politics and its applicability to America, see Drew R. McCoy, The Elusive Republic (Chapel Hill, 1980).
- 29 Louis Morton Robert Carter of Nomini Hall (Williamsburg, 1941), Ch. 5-8; Account Book of John Tayloe, VHS; Marc Egnal, "Origins of The Revolution in Virginia," 401-28.
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Chapter Three: An Imperial Crisis and the Origins of Commercial Resistance

After 1763 British demands for increased revenue from the colonies threatened to place new burdens on Virginia's commerce with Great Britain. For the great planters, who feared the British merchants' growing influence over Virginia's inflexible economy, the Revenue Act of 1764 and the Stamp Act of 1765 were additional evidence of the vulnerability of a colony that remained economically dependent on Great Britain. For these planters and many other landholders in Virginia, the revenue acts aggravated the problems of an economic depression that beset the tobacco trade after 1762. Parliament's repeated attempts to raise more revenue in the colonies and to tighten imperial administration convinced many Virginians that the limitations of the tobacco trade and the colony's underdeveloped economy were a result of imperial policy as well as of the influence of British merchants. In the decade after 1763 the competition between Virginia planter and British merchant became part of a larger conflict between colony and Mother Country.

According to the Virginians, the new revenue legislation further disrupted a commercial relationship that already favored British merchants and manufacturers. By the middle decades of the eighteenth century the structure of Virginia's trade provided Great Britain with the greater

share of wealth produced in the colony and more than compensated the British for the costs of military and commercial protection. When the British government insisted on extracting additional revenue through the imposition of duties, Virginians resolved to demonstrate the colony's value by withholding their trade from Great Britain. The strategy of commercial resistance that developed in response to the Stamp Act and subsequent acts of Parliament reflected the distinctive character of Virginia's economy and was a response to the problems associated with the rise of the direct trade. Through their emphasis on self-sufficiency and the potential for economic growth outside of the British trade, organizers of commercial resistance in Virginia intended not only to force repeal of legislation but also to protect the colony from the disadvantages of dependence on British commercial interests. By lessening involvement in tobacco, reducing the British-held debt, and regulating the business of British merchants operating in the colony, Virginians after 1764 were attempting to reassert their authority over the economy. During the next decade economic independence became a central goal of the colonists' resistance to imperial policy.

Before the end of the French and Indian War, imperial regulations only occasionally were an important source of discontent with Virginia's economy. The frustrations of the

planters more often focused on the influence of the British traders and dependence on foreign credit rather than on the institutional framework of the Empire. Virginians, of course, were not without their criticisms of imperial restrictions. Complaints were most likely to appear during periods of depressed tobacco prices when growers absorbed a higher proportion of the custom duties at the same time that the colony suffered acute shortages of capital and credit. During the hard times of the 1720s and early 1730s, in particular, the colonists recognized that regulation of the tobacco trade supported the interests of British merchants and retarded agricultural diversification. In response to these falling tobacco markets the Burgesses attempted to relieve the dependence on tobacco production by halting slave imports and establishing a quota on the number of plants tended by each tithable, but these efforts were disallowed by the Crown or ignored by planters.¹

The Virginia Assembly periodically challenged the excessive tobacco duties, which steadily increased between 1660 and 1759 when they reached eight and one-third pence per pound, a sum 200-300 percent above the price of tobacco before importation. In 1732 the Burgesses campaigned for an excise tax on the sale of tobacco in England to replace all customs duties on the crop. Despite support from the ministry, pressure from British merchants defeated the scheme. When Parliament added an extra penny per pound to

tobacco duties in 1747, the burgesses unsuccessfully petitioned for its removal.² The custom duties did place a burden on the producers, especially at a time of higher prices, but the reduction of import duties was not a persistent concern of the colonists.

Prior to the 1760s, Virginians expressed no serious complaints regarding British restrictions on colonial manufactures. A Parliamentary act of 1750 prohibited the erection of new slitting mills or steel furnaces, which would have been beneficial to Virginia, but Parliament encouraged the production of pig iron for export to Great Britain. Iron foundries provided an opportunity for wealthy planters interested in diversification, and pig iron became Virginia's most important manufacture. British prohibitions on colonial exports of wool and the act of 1732 prohibiting shipment of hats from one colony to another had no effect on a colony where clothing items were usually cheaper to import than manufacture.³ In fact, the cheap production of consumer goods in Great Britain and the efficient marketing arrangements of the tobacco trade proved to be the most effective restriction on Virginia manufactures.

The absence of sustained criticisms of imperial regulations before the 1760s was partially a result of the mixed effects of British policy. The navigation acts and custom duties did, after all, protect Virginia's tobacco producers from competition with the Spanish colonies and the

Continent. Parliament also offered bounties for the encouragement of desired staples such as hemp, albeit with little success. But the lack of colonial protests long after such advantages were evident was a reflection of the nature of the restrictions on Virginia's economy. The British government prevented the development of an independent economy not with prohibitions or enforced restrictions but rather through its support of the British merchants' monopoly on the Virginia trade. Credit legislation increasingly favored the position of the merchants at the expense of the colonists; the customs system placed the financial burden on the producers, not the traders; the operation of the custom service also required capital-intensive merchant firms to be located in Great Britain; and the Board of Trade discouraged any attempts to limit the size of Virginia's tobacco crop, thereby aiding merchants whose profits depended more on quantity than quality. The merchants thus became the agents of a governmental policy that perpetuated the colonists' reliance on staple crop production and discouraged commercial development outside of Great Britain. When Virginians criticized commercial relations with Great Britain, as they often did before the 1760s, they were more likely to attack the merchants' monopoly on credit and marketing than the imperial regulations that supported the merchants' position.

The reorganization and tightening of imperial

administration that began in the 1740s initially had little effect on Virginia or its trade. Only after the close of the French and Indian War did a series of Parliamentary actions force Virginians to examine more closely the effects of imperial policy on their economy. In 1764, Virginians learned of the Currency Act, the Revenue Act, and the proposals for a stamp tax, which together signaled the intention of the British government to regulate more strictly the colonial economy and to increase the colonies' financial contributions to imperial administration. Each of these acts, in varying degrees, magnified the disadvantages resulting from Virginia's economic dependence on Great Britain.⁴

The Currency Act of 1764 forbade in the colonies south of New England all future emissions of paper money as legal tender, as well as the reissue of any paper money already in circulation. Although the act went into effect in all colonies not subject to the Currency Act of 1751, Parliament's basic purpose was to prevent Virginians from discharging their British debts in inflated paper currency. The House of Burgesses had approved the colony's first paper issue in 1755 in order to finance Braddock's expedition. Braddock's defeat and renewed military expenses made necessary twelve further emissions before 1763. At least £230,000 in Virginia notes remained outstanding in 1764. English merchants, as part of a broader effort to protect

creditors' interests in Virginia, persuaded the Board of Trade that the colony's emissions were a threat to the security of sterling debts. In May 1763, Governor Francis Fauquier presented the House of Burgesses with the Board's recent resolution, threatening to prohibit all local currency, current or future. The Assembly rejected the governor's plea for some protection of English debts and refused to eliminate the treasury notes as legal tender. According to the Burgesses' reply, all sterling debts were protected by the Virginia Assembly's law of 1755 providing for court determination of prevailing exchange rates between local currency and sterling. If the merchants had the right to decide exchange rates, they could "extort such Differences as might be very oppressive."⁵

Parliament's approval of the Currency Act provoked no immediate protest from the Burgesses who had feared their recalcitrance would provoke a prohibition of all current legal tender issues. Since outstanding currency remained in circulation, the most important practical effect of the legislation was to eliminate currency issues as a means of relieving the periodic distress of credit restriction, rising exchange, and cash shortages. The Currency Act thus strengthened the position of Richard Henry Lee and others who argued that the solution to short-term credit restrictions was a long-term improvement in Virginia's balance of trade. But even for Lee and the many burgesses who opposed

paper money in principle, the Currency Act was the clearest evidence yet of Parliament's willingness to regulate the colonial economy in the interest of protecting merchants' debts and crown revenues, even if that regulation contradicted the wishes of the colonial Assembly.⁶

Parliament's regulation of colonial currency came shortly after the reorganization and strengthening of colonial customs in the Revenue, or Sugar, Act of 1764. The act reduced molasses duties to one-half of the six pence a gallon levied under an act of 1733 and seldom if ever collected, and Parliament created new duties for a variety of new commodities and provided for an effective collection of all customs, as well as a stricter enforcement of standing trade regulations. This measure differed from earlier acts respecting trade in its stated intention to raise a revenue; proceeds were to help defray the costs of stationing British troops in North America.⁷ Although Virginia was much less affected than the northern colonies which depended on the importation of French West Indian sugar, the Burgesses were "very uneasy" about this "Attempt made in Parliament to lay a Duty on the several Commodities mentioned" and regretted they had not received word in time to register a complaint through their London agent, Edward Montague.⁸ Of greatest concern to the Virginians was the new duty of £7 per ton on Madeira wine. Wine was important to the colony, not only as a favorite drink of the gentry

but also as a valuable return cargo in Virginia's developing grain trade with Southern Europe.

Opposition to the Revenue Act in Virginia was secondary to the colonists' reaction to the proposed stamp tax. When Edward Montague sent the Assembly's Committee of Correspondence a report on the approval of the Revenue Act, he included a description of George Grenville's proposal for raising additional revenue through a stamp tax. The Committee instructed Montague to exert every effort to prevent passage of the Stamp Act. At the Assembly's fall session in 1764, the full House of Burgesses issued more protests in an address to the King and Memorials to Parliament. If Montague should be unable to submit the Memorial to the Commons, the Burgesses requested that he print copies and distribute them throughout England.⁹

The appeals of Virginia and other colonies had no effect, and the Commons approved the Stamp Act without even considering the American petitions. The Act, which was to go into effect on 1 November 1765, levied a duty on almost every type of paper in use in the colonies. The schedule of fees covered documents used in court actions, customs papers, newspapers and pamphlets, even playing cards. Rates were generally lower than in England, but all were to be paid in specie. When word of the Act's passage reached the colonies, Virginia's House of Burgesses took the lead in protesting the measure with the approval of Patrick Henry's

Resolves in May.¹⁰

Virginians, like other Americans, considered the Stamp Act representative of a fundamental alteration in the relationship between Great Britain and the colonies. The collection of revenue through a Parliamentary-imposed tax violated established political privileges and colonial assumptions about the mutual benefits of the Empire. The Virginians' earliest protests against the Stamp Act emphasized the potential economic and commercial repercussions, as well as the threat to constitutional rights, that were likely to follow Parliament's assumption of the authority to impose taxes on the colonies.

The immediate economic effects of the Stamp Act were obvious to Virginians in the mid-1760s. Passage of the Stamp Act came at a time when the colony was under an unusually heavy tax burden owing to the expenses of the French and Indian War and the cost of retiring paper currency. "For God's Sake," asked Charles Carter of Corotoman upon word of the Stamp Act's passage, "what will become of our poor colony of Virginia which is already so heavy laden with Debts & Taxes."¹¹ The Burgesses' Committee of Correspondence found the new tax particularly objectionable because the existing taxes had been "contracted chiefly in Defence of the Common Cause" during the late war.¹²

Parliament's demand for payment in specie created additional problems in a colony suffering from a shortage of all

types of circulating currency and of specie in particular. The Burgesses memorials to the Lords and Commons in 1764 warned of the colonists' "total want of specie." In the spring of 1765 Governor Fauquier reported that a general scarcity of specie was already causing distress. Merchants in the Virginia trade estimated that in the entire colony there was not one-tenth the specie needed to pay the annual duties. Even if more specie became available, merchants worried that the payments on the Stamp tax would reduce the colonists' ability to repay British debts in sterling.¹³

The scarcity of specie was one effect of the current depression in the tobacco trade. Following the Peace of 1763, tobacco prices had fallen, resulting in a withdrawal of British credit from Virginia. The poor returns on tobacco, and the shortage of coin and bills of exchange, made it difficult for planters to make remittances on the debts that they had already accumulated before 1765. Fauquier believed "this private Distress which every man feels encreases the general Dissatisfaction at the Duties laid by the late Stamp Act."¹⁴ The Stamp Act added to the problems of the depression by taxing every court action involved in the recovery and processing of debts. Edward Montague told the House of Lords that credit was so short in Virginia that securities were demanded for the smallest debts; the entry of these bonds also required a revenue stamp. Virginia merchants feared that if the Stamp Act were

enforced the greatest burden would fall on the lower class of people, those with debts under £5, who "can neither Buy or sell but affected by it nor proceed in law proceedings."¹⁵ The Act was adding insult to injury by taxing the very type of litigation that hard times necessitated.

But court cases for debt recovery and the entry of bonds were not simply a product of an economic depression, they also were integral to the operation of Virginia's economy in the best of times. Early opponents of the Stamp Act recognized that a tax on court proceedings constituted a permanent hardship in an economy like Virginia's. According to Landon Carter, the duty was indeed a tax upon necessities of life because people could not survive without buying and selling, and this was "a tax upon every branch of Trade."¹⁶ Merchants in London feared that the costs of court proceedings would limit the colonists' ability and readiness to make remittances on British debts. The hostility toward the Stamp tax was so widespread in Virginia that many merchants both in Great Britain and in the colony feared enforcement of the act would make it impossible to resume normal commerce. Virginia merchant James Balfour while in London swore he would not return to the colony with a farthing, neither would he give fifty shillings for his extensive business in Virginia if the Act was continued.¹⁷

As a defense against the immediate costs of the Stamp Act and its long-term effects on the colony's trade, Virgin-

ians between 1764 and 1766 articulated their ideal of the proper commercial balance between Mother Country and colony. This public discussion was part of a broader examination of every aspect of imperial relations from the distribution of political power to the mutual benefits of navigation acts. Just as the resulting defense of constitutional rights strengthened the attachment to political liberties and advanced colonial notions of sovereignty, so the analysis of Virginia's economic position in the Empire heightened awareness of the colony's great wealth at the same time that it emphasized the varied dangers of dependence on British trade.

George Washington could not see the justification for a tax laid on the colonies by the British Parliament since "the whole produce of our labor hitherto has centered in Great Britain."¹⁸ In the remonstrance to the House of Commons in December 1764, the Virginia Assembly declared the proposed stamp tax unreasonable because the colony already contributed so much to the benefit of the Empire. Virginia willingly had met British requests for defense appropriations during the French and Indian War, and the provincial government continued to expend money for the protection of the colony's frontier. More important than any specific contribution was the wealth that the colony's trade provided for Great Britain. According to the Assembly, "the Plantation Trade, confined as it is to the Mother Country, hath

been a principal Means of multiplying and enriching her Inhabitants."¹⁹ The members of the Stafford County court maintained the American colonies were "the most invaluable part of [the King's] Dominions for increasing the trade, Navigation, and manufactures of Great Britain." This wealth from the American trade had been developed through no costs to the British government, but rather "at the Expence of the private Adventurers our Ancestors; the Fruit of whose Toil and Danger we now enjoy."²⁰

The Virginians insisted that Great Britain would enhance the gains from the American trade by freeing the colonial economies of governmental regulation, rather than by levying taxes or imposing new trade restrictions. The Assembly assured members of the House of Commons that the colonial trade, "if not too much discouraged, may prove an inexhaustable Source of Treasure to the Nation."²¹ "If by opening the Channels of Trade," George Mason proposed to the merchants of London, "you afford Us a ready Market for the Produce of our Lands, and an Opportunity of purchasing cheap the Conveniencys of Life, all our superfluous Gain will sink into your Pockets, in Return for British Manufactures."²² The justices of Stafford County promised Governor Fauquier that with "indulgencies and proper encouragement" from the British government, instead of threats to their property and liberty, the Virginians would be able to supply Great Britain with the most valuable sorts of commodities. The

relief from taxation would even permit the colonists "to pay their unreasonable British creditors."²³

Various opponents of the Stamp Act warned that the enforcement of the new revenue acts would undermine economic growth and diminish the trade opportunities that Virginia heretofore had provided for British merchants and manufacturers. Landon Carter feared that the British had forgotten "that every duty has its additional expence, clear of the money paid into the revenue." Carter pointed out that American demand for British goods "depends solely on the luxury of the consumer" and required "an indulgence given in price; especially where the consumption principally depends upon the poorer sort of people." Revenue duties would necessarily limit that consumption and consequently injure British traders, manufacturers, and the laborers they employed.²⁴ The costs of the stamp tax also would curtail the Americans' ability to pay their British creditors, thereby disrupting the flow of payments to shopkeepers, manufacturers, and seamen to whom the merchants owed money. As George Mason reminded the London merchants, the colonies and Great Britain formed a single "Commercial Chain; break but one Link of it, and the whole is destroyed."²⁵

As early as 1764, Virginians agreed that the costs of a stamp tax would force them to develop domestic manufactures as a replacement for British imports. The Assembly accepted manufactures as a necessity of "extreme poverty," but some

Virginians recognized an opportunity to protect the colony from the immediate as well as any future British demands for revenue. Arthur Lee suggested domestic manufactures as a proper defense against the Revenue Act of 1764. Writing from Scotland where he was studying medicine, Lee urged his brother Richard Henry Lee to cultivate support in the House of Burgesses for public sponsorship of colonial manufactures. Virginians might follow the Scottish example of local improvement societies in which tradesmen instructed the people in basic crafts. Lee also suggested that the Assembly send several young Virginians on a tour of manufacturing regions of Europe in order to learn the operations and recruit skilled workers for emigration to the colony. Lee was confident of the permanent benefits of such schemes, but he warned the Burgesses to be secretive so as to avoid "the vigilance of that jealous eye, with which Britain will ever view the rise & progress of Arts & Manufactures in America."²⁶

Several northern colonies had responded to the Revenue Act with the sort of commercial resistance recommended by Lee. In 1764 Bostonians entered nonconsumption agreements, and in New York the Society for the Promotion of Arts, Agriculture and Economy offered bounties for developments in local manufactures. Throughout New England and the Middle Atlantic colonies, experiments in domestic manufactures testified to a determination to suspend imports from Great

Britain until a satisfactory revision of the Revenue Act. Interest in manufactures increased after the passage of the Stamp Act. By the fall of 1765, merchants in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston approved formal nonimportation associations, which were to remain in effect until repeal of the Stamp Act.²⁷

George Washington hoped the attention paid to manufactures and to nonimportation in Virginia would offer relief from the problems of commercial dependence and perpetual indebtedness, as well as provide protection from the immediate threat of the revenue acts. In a letter to his London merchant in September 1765, Washington predicted that once Virginia initiated widespread domestic manufactures "the Eyes of our People (already beginning to open) will perceive, that many of the Luxuries which we have heretofore lavished our Substance to Great Britain for can well be dispensed with whilst the Necessaries of Life are to be procured (for the most part) within ourselves. This consequently will introduce frugality and a necessary stimulation to Industry. Great Britain may then load her Exports with as Heavy Taxes as she pleases but where will the consumption be? I am apt to think no law or usage can compel us to barter our money or staple commodities for their Manufactures, if we can be supplied within ourselves upon the better Terms."²⁸

The organization of any form of commercial resistance

in Virginia was more difficult than in northern colonies where the principal importers were gathered together in port cities. The only institution uniting the entire colony was the Assembly which took the lead in the early protests against the Stamp Act, but Fauquier had dissolved the House of Burgesses in May and would not reconvene it until the crisis passed. Despite the lack of any means of establishing a formal association, many Virginians privately joined with Washington in supporting a reduced consumption of British goods and accompanied by experiments in domestic manufactures. In his September letter to his merchant, Washington ordered from London the tools needed to convert wool, flax and hemp into cloth. Fauquier reported that the Stamp Act prompted a "strong attempt" in the colony to convert hemp into osnaburg, a standard cloth often used for slaves' clothing.²⁹ Capel Hanbury, a London merchant, heard of schemes for weaving linen and woolens, as well as the erection of fulling mills for the preparation of wool for weaving. The reports he received from the colony mentioned a "spirit of emulation for wearing their own manufactures," which had replaced the proud display of British clothing. Hanbury's reference to "premiums for making linen and woollen" suggests that some planters, at least, organized community support for domestic manufactures. Certain communities also entered agreements not to kill lambs in order to increase the supply of wool.³⁰

The emphasis on cloth reflected Virginia's overwhelming dependence on Great Britain for all varieties of that article. The promotion of weaving also provided valuable employment for slaves. Plantation manufactures would be a step toward full seasonal labor as well as profitable work for the otherwise idle among children and the elderly. During the Stamp Act crisis, planters established schools, "which were never thought of before," in order to teach children the skills needed for home manufactures. George Mercer knew of two planters who each had transferred forty hands from agriculture "into the manufacturing way." One of these men had established a rope walk for the full processing of his plantation's hemp.³¹

Robert Beverley, who found "nothing less profitable or more troublesome than tob.," hoped the new interest in hemp would permanently relieve Virginians of the problems with their traditional staple. The costs of the Stamp Act now made some shift in agriculture imperative. Beverley knew "of nothing that can extricate this Colony at this Time if making Hemp does not contribute largely, for since we are to be taxed on all Quarters, & Expences of every kind increase daily it will be almost impossible for us to discharge our Debts to Britain."³²

The scope of support for commercial resistance in Virginia became evident by 1 November 1765 when the colonists' determination not to use stamps forced them to

choose between breaking the law or suspending all business requiring stamps. The decisions made in individual colonies varied according to the commercial character of the region and the strategy of resistance. Virginians hoped that closing the colony's courts and opening its ports would have an effective impact in Great Britain.

As early as the summer of 1765, Virginians were declaring their intention to shut the courts on 1 November. Landon Carter promised not to serve in any public office, including that of court commissioner, after November when the law would "fix the justice and equity, only in the sterling ability of the Person to authenticate his proofs."³³ In September and October, the courts of Westmoreland, Stafford, and Culpeper Counties announced to Governor Fauquier their refusal to sit once the Stamp Act went into effect. Fauquier was reluctant to appoint new commissioners for fear of the type of men who might take over the courts, so after 1 November these three courts and all but one other in Virginia closed.³⁴

Court members expected the suspension of justice to enlist the support of British merchants who depended on the county courts for the recovery of colonial debts. The delay in debt payments, like the nonimportation of British cloth, was intended to persuade merchants to bring pressure on Parliament for the repeal of the Stamp Act. Six weeks before the act went into effect, George Washington warned

his principal London merchant that if the courts closed "it may be left to yourselves who have such large demands upon the colonies, to determine who is to suffer most in the event--the Merchant or Planter."³⁵ Although several northern colonies opened local courts in defiance of the required use of stamps, Richard Henry Lee explained that "the very different situation of our affairs from theirs with respect to Great Britain" required Virginia to close the courts in order to defeat the enforcement of the Stamp Act. Even the cautious Edmund Pendleton approved of closing the courts as a means of "engaging the interest of the British merchants toward a repeal."³⁶ Several county commissioners, including Pendleton in Caroline County, eventually opened the courts to business not requiring stamps. Only in the Eastern Shore's Northampton County, where British trade was inconsequential, did the courts declare the Stamp Act unconstitutional and proceed with business as usual.³⁷

Although the refusal to use stamps where required was the public justification for closing the courts, Virginians had no compunction about continuing to clear out vessels without the stamps. In the fall of 1765 Virginia suffered from an unfavorable balance of payments with Great Britain, a high exchange rate, and a shortage of currency. Any interruptions in the colony's valuable export trade would intensify these problems and put Virginians at the mercy of their merchant creditors. Tobacco shipments to Great

Britain were the principal means of restoring a balance of payments, and the commodities trade to the West Indies and Southern Europe was a badly needed source of credit and coin. In an effort to maintain these advantages, Virginians proceeded to clear outward bound vessels within two days of the Stamp Act's going into effect. Peter Randolph, Surveyor General for the southern colonies, advised the Virginia Collectors on 2 November that they should clear ships as usual since no stamps were available. Governor Fauquier gave official sanction to this move on 7 November when he provided naval district officers with printed certificates which were intended to protect vessels from seizure by the King's men. The certificates stated that George Mercer swore he brought no stamps with him, and that the ship was otherwise cleared as required.³⁸

Between 1 November 1765 and 1 May 1766, the officers in five of Virginia's six naval districts cleared a total of 155 vessels, most of them bound for the West Indies, Southern Europe or the northern trading colonies. In other colonies some captains were reluctant to sail to London for fear of reprisals, and this may have been true for Virginia, as only three ships headed to London before 1 May. But this was the slowest season for the London tobacco trade, particularly among consignment merchants. A total of 36 ships did set off for Great Britain, and in the Upper James River District alone, nineteen heavily-laden tobacco ships

returned to the outports where merchants were trying to establish a steady, year-round trade with Virginia.³⁹

Virginia merchants and British merchants resident in the colony were generally supportive of the opposition to the Stamp Act and the strategy of commercial resistance. Fauquier could find no allies among the merchant community when George Mercer, the appointed Stamp Officer for Virginia, arrived at Williamsburg in October 1765. At the time, the town was filled with the planters and merchants who gathered from all over the colony for the meeting of the General Court. A large group of these people publicly confronted Mercer and demanded that he promise not to distribute the stamps. Fauquier labeled the crowd a mob, but he admitted that it consisted of the "Gentlemen of property in the Colony, some of them at the head of their respective Counties, and the Merchants of the Country whether English, Scotch or Virginians, for few absented themselves." Fauquier later met with many of the merchants in an effort to convince them that observance of the Stamp Act was in their material interest, but he had no effect.⁴⁰

On the rare occasions when merchants attempted to abide by the Stamp Act, they faced convincing demonstrations of the popular determination to prevent enforcement of the tax. Archibald Ritchie, a merchant from Hobb's Hole in Essex County, publicly stated his intention to use stamped paper in clearing out a grain shipment in February 1766.

After a crowd of seventy residents of Essex County failed to gain a public apology from Ritchie, Richard Henry Lee organized a regional association aimed at forcing Ritchie's recantation, even though the merchant privately had announced his decision not to use the stamped paper. At a meeting in Leedstown on 27 February, Lee gained approval for the so-called Westmoreland Association, which pledged its subscribers to resist any attempt to make use of the revenue stamps. On the following day, in their only public action, the Westmoreland Associators, along with crowds from other counties south of the Rappahannock, converged on Hobb's Hole and presented Ritchie with a prepared declaration. "After some little Hesitation," Ritchie read the statement of apology before the four hundred people assembled.⁴¹

In Norfolk, Virginia's only sizeable port, opponents of the Stamp Act formed a Sons of Liberty group that issued resolves similar to the Westmoreland document. Soon afterward, a Norfolk mob terrorized a ship captain who stood accused of informing on traders who had smuggled goods without proper clearance papers. The mob tarred and feathered Captain William Smith before pelting him with rotten eggs, parading him through the streets while tied to a cart, and finally throwing him into the harbor where he was saved only by a passing ship. Smith testified that the crowd included all the "principal men," who were encouraged by Norfolk's mayor, Maximillian Calvert. Like the Westmoreland

Associators in their confrontation with Ritchie, the Norfolk Sons of Liberty had proved that an extra-legal association and organized popular demonstrations were capable of regulating the trade of merchants in the colony.⁴²

When the Virginia Gazette of 2 May 1766 reported Parliament's repeal of the Stamp Act, Virginians were satisfied that the strategy of commercial resistance had been effective. Faced with the suspension of court actions on debt cases and the threat of reduced British imports, merchants on both sides of the Atlantic supported the campaign for a repeal of the Stamp Act. In Virginia, all types of merchants joined with the planters in a united opposition to the Parliamentary tax, despite the efforts of Fauquier to separate commercial and agricultural interests in the colony. In London, merchants from the Virginia trade petitioned and cajoled members of Parliament to rescind the Stamp Act. Traders in London, Bristol, Liverpool, and Glasgow petitioned the Lords and Commons, reporting the threat of bankruptcies due to the interruption of trade with the colonies. The Glasgow merchants specifically referred to the closing of Virginia's courts as a grave threat to the security of their outstanding debts. Virginia merchants testifying before a Parliamentary committee were unanimous in their conviction that only repeal would restore British-Virginia trade to its previous status.⁴³

Individual merchants in Great Britain assured their

Virginia correspondents that they had done everything possible to satisfy American demands. Capel and Osgood Hanbury told George Washington that they attempted "to prevent the Act passing when first it was in agitation & have since it passed spared no endeavours to demonstrate the necessity of Repealing it."⁴⁴ After recounting the efforts of Liverpool merchants to secure support for repeal among members of Parliament, Charles Goore promised Richard Henry Lee that the American colonies were now safe from Parliamentary interference since "A Spirit prevails, especially in the trading Ports, and manufacturing Countys, to oppose the Members that argued & voted against the repeal of the Stamp Act."⁴⁵

As the British merchants hoped and expected, trade with Virginia returned to normal in the months immediately following the repeal of the Stamp Act. Only gradually during the next several years did the lasting commercial effects of the Stamp Act crisis become apparent. For many Virginians, the debate over the proper commercial structure of the Empire had provided a new understanding of the dimension of the colony's dependence on British trade and the significance of imperial regulations in perpetuating that dependence. The experience of organizing various forms of commercial resistance offered these same Virginians a glimpse at the possibilities for reducing the colony's reliance on British merchants and the tobacco trade. In the

aftermath of the Stamp Act resistance, these Virginians attempted to fulfill some measure of the colony's potential for economic independence.

"A Virginian" writing in the Virginia Gazette of 11 December 1766 was confident that the recent experiments in nonimportation and domestic manufactures would protect the colonists from the worst disadvantages of the imperial economy. Although Virginians had no control over the navigation acts that contributed to the colony's "declining state," they were able to limit the influence of British merchants who exploited Virginia's restricted trade. Through excessive mark-ups on imported goods, the merchants had forced chronic debts upon the Virginians and maintained their dependence on foreign goods. A continuation of "the Frugal and industrious schemes they have lately adopted" would eliminate the Virginians' debts to British merchants and permit the colonists to patronize Virginia merchants. The subsequent increase in the number of Virginia merchants "shall bring the tobacco market home" and halt the drain of payments that currently impoverished the colony. According to this writer, saving Virginia from the "Brink of Destruction" required some such restructuring of the trade, not "Quack medicines" like the proposed loan office or bank.⁴⁶

For certain planters not too tightly caught in the web of debt and tobacco production, the commercial resistance to the Stamp Act marked a permanent reorganization of their

economic activity. George Washington's orders for weaving equipment was one part of a broad reorganization of Mount Vernon that was precipitated by the Stamp Act crisis. Beginning in the spring of 1766 at his Potomac estate, Washington completely abandoned tobacco in favor of a variety of crops and produce that would not depend on one market or creditor. Experiments with hemp and flax were part of Washington's search for new exports suitable for British markets, where he also hoped to market flour in place of tobacco. The increased production of grain and the establishment of a fishery at Mount Vernon allowed Washington opportunities to gain from West Indian markets as well. Landon Carter also began his cultivation of hemp and flax in the wake of the Stamp Act crisis.⁴⁷

The success of commercial resistance and the new confidence in Virginia's potential for economic development inspired individual planters to explore options outside the tobacco trade and British commerce. The attempt to restrict the slave trade in 1767 was one example of a collective attempt to promote the goals of economic diversification that had attracted such widespread interest during the Stamp Act crisis. When after 1767, the British Parliament enacted further restrictions on trade, the individual interests of the great planters and the public support for a more independent economy would coalesce in a more formal and ambitious plan of commercial resistance.

Chapter Three -- Endnotes

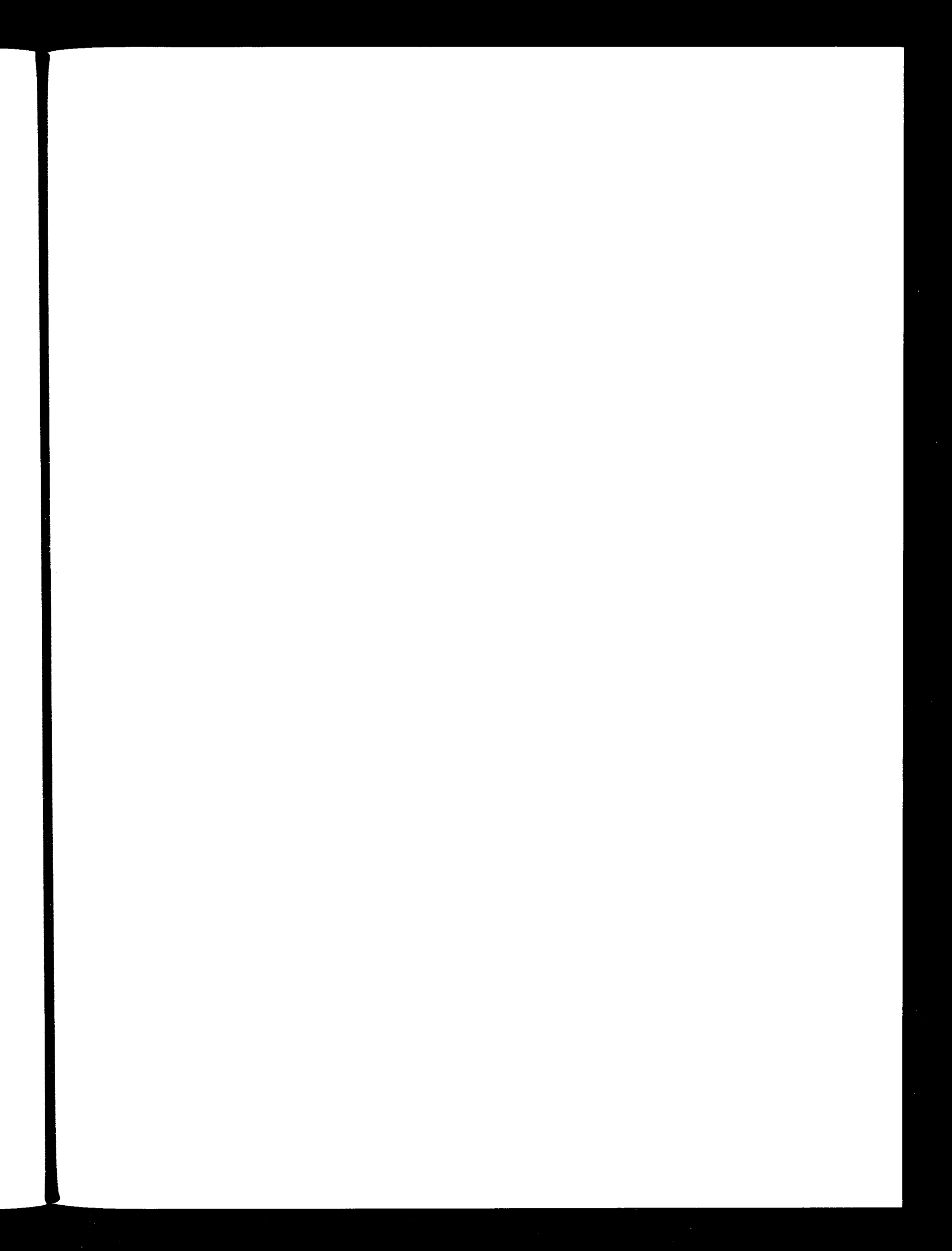
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Chapter Four: The Nonimportation Associations of 1769 and 1770

Three years after the repeal of the Stamp Act, the determined enforcement of new revenue legislation from Parliament prompted Virginians to organize the first formal scheme of commercial resistance in the colony. The non-importation Associations of 1769 and 1770 represented a conviction that Virginia's trade with Great Britain was an irreplaceable source of wealth for the Mother Country and that colonial restrictions on the trade would be an effective means of coercing the British government. By limiting the importation and purchase of British manufactures, Virginians hoped to persuade British merchants and government officials to support a repeal of the Townshend Acts. The authors of the Associations in 1769 and 1770 intended to demonstrate that Virginia's economic resources would allow the colonists to prosper without their traditional reliance on British merchants. The organization of commercial resistance in Virginia would provide the long-term benefits of alleviating chronic indebtedness, restricting the activity of British factors in Virginia, and making the colony self-sufficient in the production of basic commodities.

The debate on the Stamp Act and the success of American protests in 1765 and 1766 had encouraged Virginians to believe that commercial resistance would strengthen

Virginia's economy and protect the colonists' rights. The practical experience of organizing a comprehensive association in 1769 and 1770 confirmed their belief in the efficacy of commercial resistance at the same time that it demonstrated the difficulties of reducing Virginia's economic dependence on Great Britain. The mixed success of the Associations' several plans for diversification, the British merchants' general disregard of the nonimportation agreement, and the factors' ability to undermine popular support for the boycott heightened awareness of the colony's vulnerability to British interference. At the same time, the two-year experiment in nonimportation offered Virginians a new appreciation of the colony's potential for independent economic development and dramatized the necessity of realizing that potential.

The repeal of the Stamp Act, accompanied as it was by the Declaratory Act, never completely erased the tensions between Great Britain and America. During the following year colonial political leaders remained suspicious of the British government's intentions; while in England, all too many officials readily accepted exaggerated reports of continued American resistance. Under these circumstances, development of a successful colonial policy required careful regard for American ideas about the proper commercial and constitutional order of the Empire. Instead, a ministry

with confused leadership allowed personal ambition and domestic political concerns to dictate legislation for the colonies. William Pitt had agreed to form a cabinet in 1766, after the fall of Rockingham, but his acceptance of peerage as Earl of Chatham limited his ability to command a following in the House of Commons. Physical illness and mental lapses further reduced Chatham's effectiveness and led to his withdrawal to Bath. Lord Shelburne as Secretary of State for the southern department was in a position to establish colonial policy, but he was an unpopular man who was unable to direct legislation in Parliament. In the absence of a clear leader, the ambitious Chancellor of the Exchequer, Charles Townshend, promoted his own plans for colonial legislation in the spring of 1767.¹

Townshend claimed he could raise sufficient revenue in the colonies to offset a tax reduction in Great Britain and to pay a part of the salaries of royal officials in North America. The revenues would arise from an import duty which colonists would pay on British manufactured glass, painters' colors, and paper, as well as on tea. Another of Townshend's bills sought to strengthen the enforcement of all trade regulations through the creation of an American Board of Customs. Finally, Townshend recommended the suspension of the New York Assembly until it complied with all the provisions of the Quartering Act of 1765.²

Parliament's approval of the three acts of June in 1767

temporarily satisfied Townshend's political goals in England, but the legislation was inadequate for producing a significant revenue and dangerously inflated American fears. Each of the acts challenged rights that Americans had claimed during the Stamp Act crisis. The import duty was obviously a revenue tax, made no more palatable by its deference to the distinction between external and internal levies. The use of the revenue for salaries and royal administration further challenged the prerogatives of colonial legislatures, and the suspension of the New York Assembly was taken as incontestable proof of Parliament's willingness to alter the constitutional structure of colonial governments. The Board of Customs represented an additional incursion of British authority which was likely to provoke American opposition; a probability made definite by placement of the Board in Boston. Townshend's duties, by arbitrarily raising the prices for goods which Parliament prevented the colonists from buying elsewhere, provided the colonists with fresh evidence of Great Britain's willingness to exploit the dependent American trade for revenue.³

The colonists quickly responded to the several challenges of the Townshend Acts. John Dickinson, in his Letters From a Farmer in Pennsylvania, offered the most articulate expression of American constitutional rights and recommended a petition campaign aimed at a Parliamentary repeal. The Massachusetts House of Representatives led the

official response with a petition to the King, followed by the more extraordinary step of issuing to the other colonial assemblies a circular letter asking for a concerted resistance to the Townshend Acts. Virginia had been without an assembly since before passage of the acts, but when the Burgesses convened at the end of March 1768, they unanimously approved Massachusetts' action, issued their own circular letter, and petitioned the King, Lords, and Commons for repeal of the three acts.⁴

The earliest protests of the Townshend Acts included recommendations for the kind of commercial resistance that had been successful against the Stamp Act. Boston, which was so directly affected by the import duties and the Board of Customs, was first to initiate a boycott of British goods. As early as August 1767, a recommendation for nonimportation appeared in the Boston Gazette, and in October, one month before the Townshend Acts went into effect, the Boston town meeting approved a voluntary nonconsumption agreement. Many merchants initially opposed a nonimportation agreement, but in March 1768 the popular party in Boston gained approval for a boycott of most British commodities, observation of such an association being contingent upon the adoption by New York and Philadelphia of a similar agreement. New York followed with an association conditional on Philadelphia's support, but the resistance of Philadelphia merchants defeated these initial proposals for

commercial resistance.⁵

Proponents of the early associations continued to insist that the nature of the Townshend Acts demanded some sort of commercial response. The import duties, even more than the Stamp tax, imposed further disadvantages on Americans in a trading relationship that already favored the British. The establishment of a permanent Board of Customs portended more onerous trade restrictions and additional duties. According to John Dickinson, a duty on British manufactures was a betrayal of the accepted trade relations between America and the Mother Country. Great Britain had a right to prohibit foreign imports in the colonies, and it therefore could not tax items for which Americans were dependent on the British. Dickinson recalled the example of the Cartagenians who applied such regulations to Sardinia and then starved the islanders into submission. If a petition campaign failed to secure repeal, Dickinson favored some form of commercial resistance, although he feared that any ambitious manufacturing in the colonies would provoke new restrictions from Parliament.⁶

Arthur Lee was more confident than Dickinson that commercial resistance with an emphasis on economic independence was the proper and most effective response to the Townshend Acts. Lee's Monitor letters, published in Virginia between February and April of 1768, reiterated the constitutional arguments of Dickinson's Farmer and stressed

the economic potential of the colonies. Echoing the arguments Virginians had used against the Stamp Act, Lee claimed that the colonies were already the principal support of Great Britain's economy, providing resources and a growing market for British manufactures. With dedication and industry, Americans could establish an economy independent of Great Britain and keep their wealth at home. Lee favored a commercial association, not as a form of political pressure on the English commercial classes, but rather as a means of initiating the long-term growth that would make American trade less vulnerable to British regulation. In addition to the petitions against the Townshend Acts, Lee recommended the formation of associations for the encouragement and purchase of domestic manufactures. Such schemes would be particularly valuable in Virginia where the example of the gentry would convince the smaller planters to initiate household manufactures. The young and the old slaves of the colony, of little service in agricultural labor, also could be put to work in the production of cloth.⁷

When the Virginia Assembly met in April 1768, there was no public discussion of the kind of association suggested by Lee, but the Burgesses' petition to the King and Parliament shared Lee's view that the Townshend duties violated trade relations between Britain and America. The petition from Westmoreland County freeholders went so far as to declare that America's complete dependence on Great Britain for

supplies of manufactures rendered the duties "both cruel and unconstitutional."⁸

Proposals for nonimportation and manufacturing associations gained more support throughout 1768 as the British government expressed its determination to counter American resistance. In August 1768, Massachusetts supporters of nonimportation, capitalizing on the reaction to the arrival of the Board of Custom and Britain's order to rescind the circular letter, secured approval of a boycott agreement. The Boston association, which was to be in effect only for the calendar year of 1769, prohibited all but a few British goods necessary to carry on Massachusetts' manufactures. Later that month, New York followed with a stricter agreement, to remain in effect until Parliament repealed the Townshend duties. Philadelphia merchants delayed the decision for nonimportation in hopes that repeal would make a boycott unnecessary, but receiving no encouragement from London, they finally approved an association in March 1769 similar to those in New York and Boston.⁹

Lord Botetourt, the new governor of Virginia, reported to Lord Hillsborough in February 1769 that the Virginians opposed Parliament's revenue legislation but obeyed the laws and paid the duties "without a shadow of resistance from any Mortal."¹⁰ By the time Philadelphia approved an association, however, a number of Virginia's political leaders had concluded that petitions were not going to bring repeal

of the Townshend legislation. British policy in regard to the Circular Letter, the activity of the American Board of Customs, and the stationing of British troops in Boston in September of 1768, all indicated a determination to enforce the Townshend Acts. Private correspondence with London, along with reports of the organizational weakness of America's friends in Parliament, offered Virginians little hope for repeal. By early March, Francis Lightfoot Lee found Virginians "grow more determined every day to defend their rights."¹¹ Lingering expectations of a satisfaction of American claims ended in late March when Virginia learned of Parliament's intention to resurrect a statute of Henry VIII that would allow the transportation of Americans to England for trial on treason charges.¹² When the Virginia Assembly convened on May 8, the Burgesses were determined to take a stronger stance against the Townshend legislation, and for many of them this meant some form of commercial resistance.

However much Virginians might wish to have the colonies present a unified opposition to British policy, they could not apply the commercial agreements of the northern colonies to their own trade. The collaboration of two Fairfax County neighbors, George Mason and George Washington, produced the first plan of nonimportation designed for the particular character of the Chesapeake economy. In early April of 1769, a group of Annapolis merchants forwarded to George

Washington a copy of the Philadelphia boycott along with a statement of their own intentions regarding nonimportation. The Maryland merchants, who wished to join the Philadelphia boycott, recognized the practical difficulties of that kind of agreement in their colony where only a few importing merchants lived in port towns and where merchants accounted for only a fraction of British imports. To be effective, a Maryland nonimportation agreement needed to encompass the entire colony and include planters as well as merchants. The paucity of manufactures in the Chesapeake would also require Maryland to include more exceptions to a boycott than were found in the northern agreements.¹³

Washington knew nonimportation would face even greater obstacles in Virginia where the resident merchants were fewer and more dispersed than in Maryland and where factors of British merchants were responsible for a larger share of the colony's imports. Washington recognized that a practical association in Virginia would have to emphasize nonconsumption if it were to offset the importations by British factors. Like Arthur Lee's Monitor, Washington was confident that "the Gentlemen in their several Counties" would be able to persuade the rest of the community "to purchase none but certain innumrated Articles out of any of the Stores after such a period, nor to purchase any themselves." Public censure of those who violated the association would discourage purchases at the factors' stores.¹⁴

Regardless of the difficulties of organizing nonimportation in Virginia, Washington was eager to initiate a commercial association. Colonial petitions clearly had failed to persuade the King or Parliament, and although Washington was prepared to endorse an armed defense of American rights, he hoped economic coercion would make such drastic action unnecessary. Whatever its political results, Washington was certain, as he had been during the Stamp Act crisis, that a scheme of commercial resistance would result in private benefits for Virginians. Restricting imports would be the best means of decreasing the personal indebtedness by which "many families are reduced, almost, if not quite, to penury & want."¹⁵

Nonimportation also would provide a convenient opportunity for the colony's great gentlemen to reduce their extravagant spending. Too many members of Virginia's gentry continued to increase expenditures for luxuries and display in an effort to convince others of their solid fortune, even if such behavior ended with the insolvency of their estates. Washington hoped a nonimportation association, by making a patriotic duty of simple living, would allow these planters to live within their means and still save their social position. With regard to domestic manufactures, Washington feared the British might restrain them by the same power which assumed the right of taxation, "but as a measure of this sort will be an additional exertion of

arbitrary power, we cannot be worsted I think by putting it to the Test."¹⁶

Washington delivered the Maryland and Philadelphia documents, along with his own thoughts on a Virginia association, to George Mason who responded within a few hours. Mason also had received a copy of the Philadelphia association from a friend in Maryland, and he already was convinced a similar agreement was feasible in Virginia. He agreed with Washington that official action should wait until the meeting of the General Court or Assembly when representatives from all areas of the colony could present a united front. Before that meeting, Mason hoped to write a newspaper article to help prepare the populace for the economic sacrifices that would be necessary. Virginia was not in a position to curtail imports as sharply as the northern colonies had done, but Mason was hopeful that nonimportation would be effective if Virginians could "retrench all Manner of Superfluities, Finery of all Denominations." Mason also suggested Virginia might exert additional leverage by halting its valuable tobacco exports, "by which the Revenue wou'd lose fifty times more than all their Oppressions cou'd raise here."¹⁷

In early April Mason reported he was too ill to write anything on a proposed association, but by the eighteenth of the month he was well enough to spend four days with Washington at Mount Vernon, during which time the two men

presumably discussed the final details of a proposal for nonimportation. Two days after leaving Mount Vernon, Mason sent Washington instructions for a few minor alterations in the draft of an association, a copy of which he had already sent. This was the document Washington carried to the meeting of the Burgesses in Williamsburg. Written in an unidentified hand, it is almost certainly the work of Mason.¹⁸

Although the proposal for framing an association owed much of its wording to the Philadelphia agreement, its specific terms reflected the ideas shared earlier by Mason and Washington. Mason's first article asked subscribers to use their example and "all other legal ways & means in their power" to "encourage Industry & Frugality & discourage all manner of Luxury & Extravagance." The nonimportation article enumerated the wide range of British goods included in the proposed boycott. Prohibited were all leather goods, including shoes and boots, food products and liquor, furniture, and all sorts of English finery. Despite the Virginians' heavy demand for imported cloth, the association proposed by Mason and Washington forbade all silks, Indian fabrics, millinery and ribbons, muslins, stockings, cotton and linens priced above 2/ per yard, woolens at more than 1/6 per yard and broadcloths at more than 8/ per yard. The exceptions for cheap cottons and woolens, not included in the Philadelphia association, allowed Virginians to import

the coarse fabrics used to clothe slaves. Subscribers would agree to cease importing these goods immediately and stop purchasing them in Virginia after 1 September 1769. The boycott of enumerated goods would continue until Parliament repealed the Townshend duties. Subscribers would forever refuse any goods bearing duties laid by Parliament for the purpose of raising a revenue. Mason, who was convinced slavery inhibited the development of Virginia's economic potential, also suggested a ban on all slave imports during the observation of the association. Finally, Mason included a threat that if repeal were not forthcoming, Virginians would halt exports of naval stores, lumber, and furs, and "endeavour to find some other Employment for their Slaves and other Hands than cultivating Tobacco."¹⁹

While the Burgesses proceeded with the routine business in early May, the Virginia Gazette published Mason's essay in support of nonimportation. In a letter signed "Atticus," Mason developed the defense that he and others had used against the Stamp Act. An unrestricted commerce between the American colonies and Great Britian was the only source of the latter's continued wealth. The recent duties thus were not only unconstitutional, but threatened to deprive Great Britain of the profits from the American trade. With the failure of petitions for redress, Mason urged Virginians to take action that would "demonstrate to them [the British] that we cannot be wounded but thro' their Sides" An

association pledged to refuse British manufactures and withhold Virginia commodities would convince the inhabitants of Great Britain that the Townshend duties were unjurious to them as well as to Americans. Mason conceded that the great numbers of British factors in Virginia and the paucity of colonial manufactures were obstacles to the success of a commercial association, but both problems could be overcome. A boycott of all imported goods in the factors' stores would convince these traders to join the association without the use of "any Manner of Violence." Virginia's imports of British goods were so large that an exclusion of all but the most basic necessities would be sufficient to illustrate the value of the colony's trade. Mason also advanced Washington's argument that commercial resistance would strengthen permanently the Virginia economy. An end to slave purchases and reduced tobacco cultivation would provide the capital and labor for the development of home manufactures as well as induce British manufacturers to settle in Virginia.²⁰

At the beginning of the second week of the Assembly's session, the Burgesses renewed their protest of the Townshend Acts and British enforcement policies. They unanimously adopted four resolutions, again claiming for the House of Burgesses the sole right of taxation and affirming the right of the colonists to petition the King for redress of grievances. The resolutions attacked the proposal to

transport Americans to England for treason trials and called for an address to the King protesting this challenge to the right of trial by a jury of one's peers. On the following day, May 17, after the Burgesses approved an address to the King, Lord Botetourt dissolved the Assembly because of what he called the "ill effect" of the resolves.²¹

This provided Washington the opportunity to present his proposal for a nonimportation association. Following the governor's dissolution of the House, the Burgesses reconvened at Anthony Hay's Raleigh Tavern, where they elected Peyton Randolph moderator and appointed a committee to draw up an association. The committee left no record, but Washington was among those who spent the evening at Hay's "upon a Committee." A later report attributed the drawing up of the association to Washington, Richard Henry Lee and Patrick Henry.²²

The document presented to the former Burgesses on 18 May was essentially Mason's draft with a few alterations. The committee decided to permit the importation of dutied paper not exceeding the cost of eight shillings per ream. The final Association also made an exception for the plaid and Irish hose which were needed to clothe slaves. The committee at the Raleigh Tavern added to the Association a specific article banning all imports of wine until Parliament lifted the duty applied to that commodity by the Revenue Act of 1764. In order to encourage the production of

woolen cloth, the Association forbade the slaughter of lambs before 1 May of any year. The agreement included Mason's suspension of slave imports but delayed putting that article into effect until 1 November 1769.²³

During the debate on the proper form of commercial association, Richard Henry Lee argued that a nonexportation agreement should accompany the proposed nonimportation scheme. Virginians would be more persuasive if they withheld from Great Britain all shipments of "those raw Materials, from which her Trade Manufactures, Merchants, and Revenue, receive great profits; such as Tobacco, Tar, Pitch, Hemp, Flax-seed, Pot-ash &c." The necessary adjustments in Virginia's economy would result in "some temporary loss and inconvenience," but the lasting benefits would outweigh the dislocation. Instead of producing crops that enriched the British, Virginia's planter could begin to "raise grain, Provisions, and all Material for Manufactures, in the manufacturing of which, the rest of our labor may be employed."²⁴ The final draft of the Association rejected Lee's ambitious proposals, as well as Mason's threat of a future nonexportation agreement. However, Lee's suggestion impressed the former Burgesses with a sense of Virginia's potential economic influence. In his notice of the new Association, Francis Lightfoot Lee assured his brother William, in London, that "nonexportation is to be the next step, in order to prove who is the most dependent on the

other."²⁵

Ninety-four of the 116 former Burgesses signed the Association on May 18, and several of the absent members added their signatures later in the summer. The subscribers carried the association back to their home counties where they solicited support at local meetings. The Virginia Gazette's model for county associations included the full Williamsburg agreement along with a preamble supporting the Burgesses' resolves and declaring "nothing but motives of particular interest" could achieve "a redress of those grievances under which the trade of inhabitants of America at present labor." In Dinwiddie County alone, close to 1000 citizens signed the local association. The Virginia Gazette specifically congratulated the widows who subscribed. Reports from Norfolk claimed there was "hardly a taylor or cobbler in town but what has signed it."²⁶

Shortly after the approval of the Association, "Brutus" reminded Virginia Gazette readers that when the colony faced the Stamp Act, "a regard to our own manufactures and a resolution not to import those of Britain" insured its repeal; the present Association would have the same effect.²⁷ Other Virginians warned their London merchants that there was "no inconvenience or hardship" that they would not "submit to rather than desert the Cause," even if that meant abandoning tobacco in favor of domestic manufactures.²⁸

Virginians were as enthusiastic about the intended

domestic benefits of the Association as they were about its political efficacy. John Page echoed Washington's expectation that the Association would clear the planters of debt even if it did not lead to a repeal. Landon Carter pointed to luxury and extravagance as the real enemies of Virginia and believed the Association's discouragement of these characteristics would erase the colonists' debt, while restoring a favorable balance of trade. Martha Jacquelin decided to observe the Association because "our poor Country never stood in more need of an Effort to save her from ruin than now, not more from the taxes and want of Trayd than from our Extravagances."²⁹ Other subscribers recognized the positive role of the Association in developing internal resources and fulfilling Virginia's economic potential. The new emphasis on domestic manufactures, even if intended to satisfy a temporary shortage, would teach Virginians what they were capable of on their own, thereby lessening the need for commercial ties with Great Britain. Once established, the local production of the "Useful Articles of Life" would be "a perpetual Source of internal wealth."³⁰

A "Private Man" from Essex County urged Gazette readers to use the Association as an occasion to diversify Virginia's economy. The suspension of imports created an opportunity to encourage local production and to direct agriculture toward the cultivation of raw materials used in manufactures. Involvement in a variety of new crops

necessarily would reduce annual tobacco yields and thus raise the selling price of the traditional staple. To bring about diversification would require several years of sacrifice, but the ultimate benefits would reach beyond material security to include a more balanced, productive society. Manufactures would induce "people of character" to immigrate to Virginia. Young men in the colony would follow "industrious pursuits," escaping the drudgery of agriculture. Local manufactures would provide employment for older slaves and family members unable to work in the fields. The optimism of an Eastern Shore writer was less specific but seemingly boundless. "Philo Americanus" of Accomack County found the American colonies already to be the "Empire's brightest gem" and asserted that American resources could support every type of useful production, enabling the colonies to prosper without any connections to the rest of the world.³¹

The earliest efforts toward crop diversification and internal manufacturing centered on the production of cloth, for which planters were almost wholly dependent on Great Britain. Even the rough osnaburgs and coarse woolens distributed to the slaves were imported. Any attempt to limit dependence on British goods had to begin with a replacement for these basic items. Early supporters of the Association recommended drawing on the colony's abundant supply of deerskins as a replacement for the laborers'

coarse cloth and using available cotton and wool for fine fabrics rather than slave cloth. The Association's restrictions on the slaughter of lambs was intended to contribute to local cloth production, and by the fall of 1769 Virginians were trying to increase their flocks of sheep.³²

Within a few months of the Association's inception, various planters reported that they were supplying homespun to their slaves and were wearing it themselves. Martha Jacquelin ordered only the cheapest linen from England and hoped soon to be dressed in Virginia cloth and moccasins. The family of William Nelson wore their own wool and linen, which compared favorably to those from Yorkshire and Ireland and cost less to manufacture. Robert Wormeley Carter proudly wore a suit of clothes made by Winey, a slave at his father's plantation. The suit was the envy of Williamsburg where another associator offered to trade a silk suit for the Virginia product. By December 1769 plantation cloth production had expanded to a level permitting the men and women at the Burgesses' ball to make a "genteel appearance ... chiefly dressed in Virginia cloth."³³

Francis Lightfoot Lee and John Turbeville constructed a fulling mill for the express purpose of encouraging local woolen production and extending the benefits of domestic manufactures beyond the large plantations. Lee called on his brother William to obtain some of the necessary

equipment in Great Britain. By September of 1769 Lee and Turbeville had the mill in operation and were advertising for customers. The mill, on Nomini River in Westmoreland County, offered no credit and expected little profit, but within six months the operator was able to reduce charges and claimed to "die and dress jeans and fustians to look as well as those from England."³⁴ George Washington, who had expanded his weaving operations in reaction to the Stamp Act, by 1769 was able to hire out his weaver to farmers and tenants in the area. In the first year of the Association more than thirty of Washington's neighbors hired Thomas Davis, the Mount Vernon weaver, to make linen, cottons, fustians, and a variety of other commonly used kinds of cloth.³⁵

Cloth production was the most practical domestic manufacture for Virginia planters who had the labor available to divert for such work, but there were also schemes for more ambitious manufacturing projects. Richard Henry Lee wished to attract English glassmakers to the colony in order to begin production of that dutied article. Following his brother's instructions, Arthur Lee tried to make contact with tradesmen in the glassmaking center of Bristol only to find the craft was controlled tightly, and he gained no satisfaction.³⁶ Paper was another dutied item for which Virginians depended on Great Britain, but William Rind was able to print his Virginia Gazette on American paper and

asked his readers to save linen rags to support local paper manufacture. Despite these efforts and occasional shipments of American paper from Philadelphia, associators faced shortages of American paper throughout the period of nonimportation.³⁷

Because the Association of 1769 was voluntary and without coercive ~~au~~thority, merchants joined the agreement only when their interests or politics agreed with the boycott. Resident Virginia traders and Britons unconnected with the store trade were the merchants most likely to observe the terms of the Association. William Nelson, one of the largest native merchants, cancelled some orders and reduced others. He particularly was interested in halting the traffic in wine since it carried the most burdensome duty for Virginia traders. Harry Piper, an Alexandria merchant who purchased tobacco for a Whitehaven firm and was not an importer of goods, joined with the "great number" who signed the local association in Fairfax County. He also warned his English associates that repeal was the only action that could prevent chaos in the Virginia trade.³⁸

British factors were more likely to ignore the Association or dismiss it as the work of hypocritical debtors. James Parker of Norfolk claimed all but a few of the associators could not obtain "one shilling at any Market in England" if their actual circumstances were known. Parker knew only two firms in Norfolk that subscribed to the

Association, and of few elsewhere. He reported that the people of Northampton County resisted the boycott for fear of alienating the merchants of Norfolk. One factor urged the other representatives of British firms to meet and plan a response to the Association. If such a meeting took place it produced no public reaction. The surviving record of imports by Scottish factors suggests a complete disregard of the boycott.³⁹

Although the widespread experiments in local manufactures enabled certain individuals, and even entire plantations, to reduce their dependence on British trade, the factors were not the only ones to violate the nonimportation agreement. By the end of 1769 the Association's friends and detractors on both sides of the Atlantic were commenting on the general ineffectiveness of Virginia's nonimportation agreement. The Virginia Gazette received complaints about one of its several advertisements that brazenly offered prohibited commodities. Landon Carter decried the "prodigious importations of British manufactures" which were "daily tempting the weakness of many to infractions."⁴⁰ In London, tobacco merchants gossiped about planters who secretly violated the boycott. Lord Hillsborough noted the increased bills of entry for every type of prohibited article when he dismissed the merchants' petition for a repeal of the revenue duties.⁴¹ A cynical merchant like James Parker could easily point to the many Virginians still

dressing in fine clothes or drinking Madeira. Another British factor informed his London correspondent that the Association, if adhered to, could procure redress, but the colonists "pay so little regard ... that they deal with us as usual."⁴²

Various measurements of trade indicate the volume and worth of imports into Virginia increased throughout the first year of the Association. The official value of British exports to the Chesapeake climbed from £669,523 in 1768 to £714,943 in 1769 and £997,157 in 1770. The annual volume of certain dutied items, such as tea, green glass and Portuguese wine, declined, but imports of white glass and painters' colors, also dutied items, advanced in 1769 and again in 1770. A wide variety of nondutied British goods, including some prohibited by the Association, increased in volume each year after 1768, particularly during 1770. Virginia imports in 1770 reflected orders from the first year of the Association, and the increased items included linens, hosiery, leather, hats, even playing cards.⁴³

The voluntary nature of the Association and the haphazard organization of local agreements had left the British factors free to expand their business in Virginia. Scottish imports into Virginia alone increased at an annual rate of 14.5 percent in 1769 and 28.5 percent in 1770.⁴⁴ The Association's emphasis on nonconsumption was an effort to limit much of the market for goods from the Scottish stores,

but the factors' offers of higher tobacco prices and easy credit encouraged record sales. After the initial meetings on a local level, the Association provided no means of sustaining popular support or encouraging widespread observance of the boycott. For many Virginians, often without any resources to supply their own needs, the immediate rewards of a booming tobacco market proved more enticing than the gentry's example of sacrifice.

Despite the obvious inadequacy of the original Association, supporters of commercial resistance found compelling reasons to reorganize and continue a policy of nonimportation. The backers of the original agreement believed an enforced association would compel Britain to repeal the Townshend Acts and other legislation offensive to Americans. British friends of America reassured Virginians that the colonists still had the power to apply pressure on England's commercial classes and secure support for the repeal movement.⁴⁵ The initial experiments in economic diversification, however inchoate or isolated, were also tantalizing evidence of the colony's potential for material security and moral rejuvenation. Landon Carter recognized the "insulting contempt shewn to the Association" by merchants and others, but he also discovered a new commitment to economic responsibility and simple living. The Association seemed to restore respect for what Carter called "the examples of the polite and more considerate part of the

Country." "No sooner did they make their appearances appalled in Virginia growth," he said of the gentry, "but like an extinguisher to the extravagance and folly of the middle ranks, the example convinced them of the possibility of providing an agreeable dress, by the labours of their own families."⁴⁶ For a man like Carter, who obsessively feared the moral declension of Virginia society, this development was sufficient reason to strengthen the Association.

Carter believed the Association would be more effective politically if it made concessions to the practical limitations of the Chesapeake economy. He recommended that certain items such as slaves' shoes and tools should be exempt from the boycott because planters could not find sufficient quantities in Virginia. Carter also wanted some provision for punishing local tradesmen who, after the ban on British goods and the failure of northern colonies to answer Virginia's call for supplies and laborers, had raised prices as high as demand would justify. To reduce import violations, Carter suggested more frequent meetings of the Association and a strict disassociation from all who ignored the agreement.⁴⁷

During the winter of 1769-1770, the expectations of a Parliamentary repeal delayed the attempts to revise the Association. Several London merchants initially had expressed confidence that the new Parliament would repeal the

Townshend Acts. William Lee went so far as to ship a few prohibited goods from London in the expectation that they would arrive after the repeal.⁴⁸ Governor Botetourt's address to the newly-convened Assembly in November 1769 strongly hinted that the ministry would acknowledge the error of the recent commercial legislation and ask Parliament to repeal the duties on glass, painters' colors and paper. This would be only a partial repeal of the disputed acts, but for Robert Carter Nicholas, who praised the popular governor, it was the first indication of the effectiveness of the Association. Some associating merchants interpreted the Governor's assurances as an authorization to resume imports.⁴⁹

The promise of redress, however, was shortlived. Secretary of State Hillsborough privately reprimanded Botetourt for pledging the King to repeal. William Lee reported that in the House of Commons Isaac Barré and Edmund Burke so ridiculed Botetourt's speech to the Assembly that they "made every body laugh redy to dye for near an hour." Lee and merchant John Norton warned their friends in Virginia that Parliament was certain to maintain the tax on tea "as an absolute fix'd precedent." Lee also feared that Parliament would follow a partial repeal of the Townshend duties with a restraint on American manufactures or an act declaring the nonimportaiton association to be a felony or even treason. At the meeting of the London merchants, only Lee, his

partners Dennys DeBerdt and Stephen Sayre, and John Norton had argued for a broad petition, protesting all legislation offensive to the Americans. Other London merchants were reluctant to demand a complete redress of all American grievances because they were only interested in reopening trade as quickly as possible. The final petition mentioned only the duties complained of in Virginia's Association. William Lee assured Richard Henry Lee that a more emphatic Association with explicit demands would motivate the North American merchants in London.⁵⁰

The reports from London in the winter of 1769-1770 confirmed the opinion of William Nelson and others who had declared that a partial repeal would not satisfy American demands. A repeal of duties on glass, paper, and painters' colors would leave unsettled the contested taxes on tea, wine, and foreign cloth. By early April, Richard Henry Lee expected the associators to revise the agreement during the May session of the Assembly, while for the time being they awaited word from London to determine what changes would be appropriate.⁵¹

In early April 1770 Parliament's repeal of all of Townshend's duties except that on tea went into effect. When news of the partial repeal arrived in Virginia later in April, no one greeted the announcement as an American victory. The accompanying reports in the Virginia Gazette expressed disappointment at the lack of effort on the part of

America's friends in Great Britain. The failure of petitions from the London merchants convinced William Nelson to push for a stronger nonimportation association. "We must work our own deliverance which is in our power," Nelson informed several London merchants, "I think we must depend merely on our own conduct & Resolution, to import Nothing but what is absolutely necessary."⁵²

The Assembly convened May 21, and on the following day the associators in Williamsburg decided to establish stronger restrictions on the import trade. George Mason was not among the Burgesses in 1770, but as in 1769, he played a central role in determining the content of the new nonimportation agreement. Mason sent Richard Henry Lee a critique of the 1769 agreement and recommended changes that corresponded closely to the revised Association approved later in June. Mason admitted his policy of voluntary nonconsumption had failed to reduce import levels or to convince Parliament of the seriousness of Virginia's Association. Too many colonists, "even some who affect to be called Gentlemen," purchased enumerated goods as long as such items were available in the country. The revised Association, therefore, needed to establish a means of restricting the importations of British factors and of securing the compliance of resident consumers. Mason believed the factors would observe the nonimportation agreement if the "Principle People" in the colony refused all business with merchants

who sold enumerated goods. The factors would "hardly venture to supply their worst Customers with such Articles, at the Hazard of losing their best." In order to prevent Virginians from dealing with merchants who might continue to violate the Association, "the Sense of Shame & the fear of Reproach must be inculcated & enforced in the strongest Manner."⁵³

The shortcomings of the original Association demonstrated that Mason, Washington, and many others had been mistaken to believe that the example of the great planters would encourage a general observance of nonimportation. The faithful compliance of the great planters had done little or nothing to curtail purchases at the factors' stores. To enforce a new Association, Mason still relied on the economic and social influence of Virginia's gentry, but he hoped to institutionalize the gentry's authority through the creation of county committees. Based on the successful experiments of Maryland's association, Mason proposed the creation of committees which would each draw together the most important planters and merchants from one or more counties. These committees would have the authority to inspect all importations within their jurisdiction, as well as merchants' correspondence concerning shipments to Virginia. When inspectors found enumerated goods within any cargo, they would request that the offending merchant return the items to Great Britain. Refusal to comply with the

committee's order would result in the publication of the merchant's name as an enemy of the country, and local associators would cease all commercial dealings with the individual or firm.⁵⁴

Mason was convinced the Association would apply pressure on Great Britain only if goods were reshipped rather than stored until repeal of the duties, but he was undecided whether the requirements for reexportation should be retroactive. Certainly anyone importing goods during the previous year was aware he was violating the original Association, but Mason feared an attempt to reship goods already in the country would frustrate the effectiveness of the committees. Mason was most concerned with halting the recent practice of shipping goods to Virginia after they had been rejected by associations in other colonies.⁵⁵

The Association members in Williamsburg decided at a meeting on 1 June that the success of a revised agreement depended on the participation of the colony's merchants. They accordingly invited the merchants and traders, who were already in the capital for the Oyer Court, to a 15 June meeting. James Balfour, a merchant from Hampton and Virginia agent for the Hanburys of London, persuaded the other merchants in Williamsburg to attend the meeting at which Richard Henry Lee apparently presented some form of Mason's recommendations. No record of that meeting survives, but Washington was in attendance until eleven o'clock at night,

and one Scottish factor reported that the draft proposal underwent "some considerable amendment." One week later, on the evening of 22 June, 165 people, including original associators, new burgesses and a large group of merchants, signed the Virginia nonimportation Association of 1770.⁵⁶

In the preamble of the new Association, the subscribers promised "to promote the welfare and commercial interests of all those truly worthy merchants, traders and other inhabitants of this colony" who observed "the spirit of this association." Any traders who violated the nonimportation agreement would lose the patronage of loyal associators. The Williamsburg meeting approved a system of committee enforcement, much as Mason had suggested. Each county would elect five members, any three of whom would have the authority to inspect cargoes and merchants' records and to order the reshipment of prohibited goods. In addition to the boycott of enumerated goods, merchants and other associators agreed to refuse any goods which had been rejected by the associations of other colonies. Traders also pledged not to take advantage of shortages by raising prices for goods already in the country or properly imported during the Association. The associating merchants also agreed to establish a committee for the investigation of trading conditions in Virginia. The 125 member committee, including individuals of every commercial interest, from native traders to the Scottish factors of Glasgow syndicates, met in June and

agreed to deliver in October 1770 a report on the general state of trade in Virginia. At that time they would recommend additional British goods that might be boycotted.⁵⁷

The merchants' public support of the new Association came at a high price. The revised agreement contained enough concessions on the importation restrictions to satisfy most merchants that their interests would not be injured by signing. James Robinson, principal agent for William Cunninghame & Co., reported to another Scottish factor that "as it [the Association] stands at present it will not be of great prejudice to the trading part of the Colony and you will observe an evident partiality in favor of Glasgow."⁵⁸ The Association permitted the importation of hoes, axes, sugar, pewter, cambrick costing up to six shillings per pair, men's riding saddles costing up to 25 shillings and women's up to 40 shillings; all items prohibited in the Association of the previous year. The new list of enumerated goods raised the acceptable price ceiling for cotton from two shillings to 3 per yard, for woolens from 1/6 to 2 shillings and for narrow cloths from 3 shillings to 4. Landon Carter had hoped the exemptions for tools, shoes, and cheaper cloths would make it easier for the average planter to observe the Association, but the revisions in the boycott also opened Virginia's trade to the exact sort of inexpensive goods that filled the Scottish stores.⁵⁹

The new dates for enforcement of the Association proved equally generous for the merchants. Although subscribers agreed immediately to stop ordering all enumerated goods, they could accept any goods sent on commission from Great Britain until 1 September 1770, and receive any goods ordered by themselves as late as 25 December 1770. All goods already in the country were unaffected by the Association. The boycott of wine was to be effective on 1 September, and the prohibition of imported slaves on 1 November. The agreement was to remain in effect only until the total repeal of the act imposing a duty on tea, paper, glass and painters' colors, whereas several of the original associators had hoped to direct the boycott against a wider scope of Parliamentary legislation. Indeed, shortly after signing the Association, the Burgesses approved an address to the King which protested the procedures of the viceadmiralty courts and the taxes on foreign cloth, as well as the duties mentioned in the Association. The Moderator, Peyton Randolph, or any twenty members of the Association, had the authority to call future meetings. A meeting of one hundred associators was necessary to revise the terms of the agreement unless Parliament met the specific demands.⁶⁰ James Robinson hoped the Association would produce a repeal of all revenue duties, but he was more thankful that the Association of 1770 would not interfere with the Cunninghame company's business. He confided to another Glasgow man "I

am happy as we must have joined in a Association, that the terms we have agreed to are so favorable."⁶¹

Washington wished the Association were "ten times as strict," and others later complained of its inadequacies. In June of 1770, however, most subscribers were hopeful that the inclusion of the merchants would vitalize the previously ineffective association. Richard Henry Lee found the revisions generally agreeable to the traders in the colony, and expected the changes to encourage merchant support. Harry Piper believed most of his fellow merchants would sign the Association, in which case it would be observed strictly. A writer to the Virginia Gazette heralded the merchants' participation as the first step toward a rewarding cooperation of planters and merchants. A standing institution encouraging the collaboration of these groups, "whose real interest is the same," would overcome the problems of Virginia's dispersed settlement and would encourage economic development by recommending commercial legislation.⁶²

Peyton Randolph and others among the original associators recognized that the participation of the merchants would contribute to an effective nonimportation agreement only if the county committees were able to supervise trade and maintain the type of popular participation that was absent from the Association of 1769. By involving the local planters and encouraging a public commitment, the committees would be able to isolate any factors or planters who

continued to violate the Association. Shortly after the signing of the new agreement, Randolph ordered the associators in the House of Burgesses to carry copies of the Association to their respective counties for the collection of signatures. The delegates were also to publicize a meeting of all local associators, to be held within two months, for the purpose of electing five members to the committee of observation.⁶³

Randolph divided the counties into districts in which the Burgesses circulated separate copies of the Association. In Fairfax County, Washington added an oath designed for local signers and distributed copies to Alexandria, Colchester, and five other districts encompassing almost the entire county. The 333 signers in Fairfax represented one-fifth of the adult white male population and between one-third and one-half of the regular voters in the county. The Association received approval from all but two of the seventeen members of the county court, as well as a majority of the vestrymen and many small landowners. In Alexandria, where the initial signing took place on 28 July, almost one-half of the subscribers were Scottish merchants.⁶⁴ In Norfolk, where the concentration of population facilitated the organization of a local association, a committee was in operation by July and 145 residents added their names to the agreement.⁶⁵

By late summer of 1770, with only a few counties

reporting the election of committees of observation, Randolph reissued his instructions to the Burgesses in charge of establishing the county associations. More counties complied toward the end of the year 1770, but others were unable to hold elections until after the new year. The majority of counties failed to report altogether. In the fall of 1770 Richard Henry Lee proposed several resolutions designed to encourage the formation of more local committees and to restrict the merchants' ability to weaken the colony's commercial resistance. One of Lee's amendments would have ordered local officials to hold elections or be replaced by someone who would form a committee. Lee also wanted to require that out of the one hundred associators needed to dissolve the nonimportation agreement, seventy five be planters. Of the twenty associators required to call a meeting, Lee suggested ten be planters.⁶⁶

The membership of the county committees represented the traditional landed gentry, with only occasional inclusion of merchants. Of the sixteen counties reporting to the Virginia Gazette, all but one counted a Burgess among its five members and in eleven of the counties, both delegates to the Assembly served on the committee. More than half of the men on every committee were serving, or had recently served, as justices of the peace; in eight counties the entire committee consisted of justices. Candidates competed

for committee membership in two counties, in Spotsylvania, where nineteen men were on the ballot, and in Culpeper County, where several polls were taken before completing the election; but these contests were probably between rival planters rather than between conflicting commercial interests. Five members of the merchants' committee, established in Williamsburg, served on county committees and other members of the local bodies may have been traders, but the factors of British firms were conspicuously absent from the county committees.⁶⁷

Once the widespread popular involvement evident at several county meetings subsided, the enforcement of the Association depended on the performance of the five-member committees, and effectiveness varied from county to county. The Norfolk committee met the first test of its authority in July 1770 when Captain Robert Speirs, of the ship Sharp, arrived in Elizabeth River with European goods which had been refused landing by the Philadelphia association. Speirs claimed his Philadelphia agent consigned the goods to William and John Brown of Norfolk, but these merchants would have nothing to do with the cargo. Norfolk's associators forbade the landing or storage of the shipment and promised to ostracize anyone who aided Speirs in the disposal of the goods. After Speirs sailed from Norfolk, the committee printed in the Virginia Gazette a description of the prohibited cargo as a warning for other Virginia ports. When

Speirs arrived in Dumfries to load a return cargo, the local committee, in response to the Gazette notice, inspected the Sharp only to find the prohibited goods missing. Speirs had managed to unload his shipment while still in Norfolk, and the Norfolk committee finally referred the matter to the Virginia Association. Shortly thereafter Speirs published a confession, protesting his ignorance of the colony's Association and promising never to violate the agreement of any American colony.⁶⁸

In Essex County, the committee forced merchants John and George Fowler to rescind an order sent to England on 10 June, even though the Association exempted orders placed before 15 June. But when committees faced the arrival of prohibited goods that had been ordered in June, they usually permitted their landing. On New Years day 1771, Caroline County's committee allowed Robert Gilchrist to accept goods that he had ordered on 15 June 1770 and that were shipped from London in mid-September. The Essex County committee three weeks later permitted local merchants to proceed with the sale of prohibited goods ordered in June 1770, since the men who had placed the orders had "not violated the true meaning and spirit of the association."⁶⁹ Native merchants, such as Thomas Jett of Leedstown who alerted a committee to the possible violation in his own shipments, often cooperated with the local associations. The committees had less influence over British factors, including

those who signed the Association.⁷⁰

No sooner had the local committees begun their enforcement of the Association in the summer of 1770 than word arrived in Virginia of attempts to rescind the nonimportation agreements in northern colonies. The effective reduction of British trade with the northern ports was injuring the local merchants who also feared the increasingly radical action of the urban enforcement committees. The announcement of Parliament's partial repeal of the Townshend duties gave these merchants an opportunity to challenge the nonimportation agreements. Public meetings through the spring and summer of 1770 in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia reasserted support for a boycott to force repeal of the tea duty, but merchants in those cities continued to maneuver for a resumption of trade. When New York's merchants on 9 July 1770 claimed public support for opening trade, supporters of nonimportation in every colony condemned the move. Nevertheless, New York's decision to import effectively broke the union of resistance, and others followed. Philadelphia merchants overcame the opposition of the city's enforcement committee and voted on 20 September to resume trade, while Boston merchants agreed in October to import all British goods except the dutied tea.⁷¹

The challenge to nonimportation in the Chesapeake came from Baltimore merchants who, fearing competition from importing Philadelphia merchants, declared their intention

to import British goods. In late October an Annapolis meeting of the provincial association renewed the boycott, however, and determined to stop all commerce with violators in Baltimore, thus preserving the agreement in principle, if not entirely in practice.⁷² In Virginia, contributors to the Virginia Gazette praised Maryland's action and claimed their own colony's share of the British trade was sufficient to make a local boycott effective, but friends of nonimportation recognized that the defection of the northern colonies seriously undermined the potential effect of Virginia's Association. William and Arthur Lee separately reported from London that the dissolution of the northern associations rendered repeal a dead issue, regardless of Virginia's action. Merchant Roger Atkinson of Petersburg supported nonimportation but said the second Association would never have been considered if it were known the northern colonies would desert. William Nelson blamed the northern defection for the decline of popular support for Virginia's Association.⁷³

When Peyton Randolph responded to the request of twenty associators and announced a general meeting of the Association, to be held in Williamsburg on 14 December, longtime supporters of nonimportation interpreted the action as an attempt by Virginia merchants to follow the example of the northern colonies. Richard Henry Lee believed the meeting was "a North Briton scheme for the abolition of the Associa-

tion."⁷⁴ Landon Carter also sensed a plot by merchants. Merchants had corrupted the northern associations and had entered Virginia's agreement only to serve their own interests. The traders, he insisited, had "impersonated associating" in order to collect colonial debts and then "go full handed to market with the money, as soon as the association ends." The first attack on Virginia's Association had come from a "Mercator," and Carter suspected the twenty associators requesting a meeting were also merchants. He rejected the proposals for a boycott limited to dutied articles and urged fellow associators to maintain the commercial pressure on Great Britain.⁷⁵

Carter feared a confrontation with the merchants, but the meeting in December 1770 was an anticlimax. When fewer than the required quorum of 100 associators appeared, Randolph postponed the meeting until summer. The poor showing in Williamsburg reflected general apathy more than the difficulties of December travel. Even before the meeting Mason found the Association to be in a "very languid state." William Nelson soon afterward predicted the boycott would "die away and come to nought." Although Francis Lightfoot Lee insisted that "the Traitors are allmost to a man merchants," he admitted the "the Country Gent[leme]n are all well inclin'd but indolent."⁷⁶

During the first six months of 1771, planters and merchants were confused about the status and applicability

of the Virginia Association. Scottish factors questioned whether to observe the boycott in their next orders from home. In London, William Lee was unsure whether to comply with orders for prohibited goods. Thomas Jefferson's orders to London in February included instructions to observe the Association if there were no repeal, but by June he told Thomas Adams to ship the prohibited goods since a dissolution was likely before the articles arrived. Harry Piper reported that the committees had stopped inspecting invoices by May and that he expected a formal dissolution.⁷⁷

The committee in Fauquier County continued to report its inspection of merchant cargoes as late as June 1771. At that time the committee complained to Peyton Randolph that merchants in Falmouth and Dumfries ignored the boycott and were importing more goods than ever before. According to the Fauquier committee, merchants in these towns justified their imports by referring to the examples of Fredericksburg, Port Royal and even Williamsburg, where traders allegedly paid the Association no mind. The committee members accused the merchants in these towns of entering the Association with the intent to destroy it, and they wished all violators would publicly be censured. But Fauquier County could not maintain nonimportation by itself. If merchants throughout the colony imported without any reproach, Fauquier associators would have no choice but to view the boycott as dissolved.⁷⁸

Alexander Henderson, a factor for the Glasgow firm of Glassford & Co., and William Balmain, an Alexandria merchant, regularly submitted their invoices and cargo manifests for inspection by the Fairfax County committee until June 1771 when they noticed such widespread disregard for the Association that they declared to the committee their reluctant decision to begin imports of all but dutied British goods. The Fairfax committee confirmed the merchants' accusations of rampant violations and requested Peyton Randolph to hold a general meeting of the Association for the determination of a uniform policy for the whole colony, whether it be dissolution or renewed enforcement. If the Association did not act, the Fairfax officers feared Virginia's trade would fall into the hands of the least honorable traders.⁷⁹

The opportunity for a general meeting of the Association came about as the result of a natural disaster rather than the weaknesses of the agreement or a new development in imperial relations. In May 1771, a severe storm sent flash floods down Virginia's rivers and destroyed an estimated 4,000 hogsheads of tobacco stored in public warehouses. The losses for merchants were so extensive that acting Governor William Nelson called a special session of the Assembly in order to provide public compensation for the destroyed tobacco. The economic dislocation following the flood undermined the last vestiges of support for nonimportation.

On 15 July the associators assembled in Williamsburg dissolved the boycott agreement except as it related to tea, paper, glass, and painters' colors of foreign manufacture "upon which a Duty is laid for the Purpose of raising a Revenue in America."⁸⁰

Virginia's second Association would have proved ineffective and subsequently have collapsed regardless of the defection of the northern colonies. Although no colony by itself was likely to carry on a scheme of commercial resistance, violations of the Association of 1770 began before the breakdown of nonimportation agreements in other colonies. The reorganized Association had no effect on the expansion of British imports that began in the Chesapeake in 1769, accelerated in 1770, and reached a colonial record in 1771, when British goods valued at £1,223,726 entered Virginia and Maryland. Scottish imports into Virginia alone reached a record value of £250,401 in 1771.⁸¹

The pervasive dependence on British manufactures and the various exemptions in the boycott prevented Virginians from reducing imports as sharply as several northern colonies and the Carolinas did. Even the strongest supporters of nonimportation, many of whom owned large plantations capable of diversification, found it impossible to eliminate all British purchases during the Association. George Washington strictly observed the Associations which he helped establish, but he continued to rely on his London

merchant for the supply of basic commodities needed at his several plantations. The Mount Vernon weaving operation was still not capable of producing all of the kinds and amounts of cloth required on the estate. In the early months of the Association of 1769, Washington ordered from London goods costing over £77. Nearly £50 of that amount went for coarse woolens, linens, hose and sewing supplies necessary for provisioning the slaves. During the second year of nonimportation, Washington ordered goods valued at £110, with inexpensive cloth again accounting for the bulk of his order, and much of the remainder consisted of basic tools unavailable from Virginia craftsmen. Once the Association dissolved in 1771, Washington sent to London to fill the shortages that had resulted from two years of limited orders. The return shipment cost him over £350. This cargo of goods, and the one of equal value in 1772, included some items prohibited by the Associations, but the greatest costs were for large quantities of common cloth, apparel, iron tools, equipment for the commercial fishery at Mount Vernon, and basic plantation supplies.⁸²

In 1769 John Baylor of Caroline County reduced his British orders from the usual amount of £300 to around £100. The smaller order included necessities such as 500 ells of osnaburg, 500 yards of "Common Negroes Cotton," 160 pair of "Negroes plaid cheap hose," sewing supplies, medicines, and tools. Baylors request for three dozen cotton

cards indicated his expectation of producing the cheap cloth on his own plantation in the future.⁸³ Although most of the great planters continued to order goods from Great Britain, they did observe the restrictions of the Associations. Trade in luxury goods prohibited by the Association virtually ceased in Virginia for two years. Carriages, clocks, cabinetware, expensive silks, even racing horses, disappeared from the customs records.⁸⁴

The selection of enumerated goods in both Associations made it easiest for the great planters to observe the boycott. In addition to their refusal to buy imported luxury items, the owners of large plantations had sufficient labor to divert from agricultural work to experiments in domestic manufactures. The successful cloth-making operation of the Nelson family was an example of the sort of self-sufficiency that was beyond the means of all but Virginia's wealthiest families. The Nelsons devoted entire plantations in Albemarle County to the manufacture of clothing items while other plantations continued the agricultural production that, along with the family's trading business, supported the family income. Most planters did not operate on a scale that permitted this kind of division of labor.⁸⁵

The average planter family, which regularly traded with local factors and bought few luxury goods, found it difficult to reduce purchases of British manufactures if they

were going to maintain their planting activity. The easy access to Scottish stores, with their inexpensive goods and available credit, had encouraged small and middling planters to concentrate all their labor on tobacco cultivation, while the factors supplied the whole array of household necessities. Domestic manufacture of cloth was most common in families that lived in the backcountry or produced no crops for export, and these people had a negligible effect on import levels. Given this widespread state of household manufactures, the Associations' emphasis on nonconsumption was impractical for the majority of families in Virginia.⁸⁶

The long-standing reliance on British manufactures and the difficulties involved in reorganizing a plantation of whatever size, explain why Virginians could not achieve a significant reduction of their annual imports from Great Britain. But during both Associations Virginia's imports actually increased at unparalleled rates of growth. The size and nature of this increase were irrefutable evidence of the British merchants' nearly unchecked influence over Virginia's economy. Virginia's first experiments with organized commercial resistance fortuitously coincided with one of the largest credit booms in Great Britain during the eighteenth century. The expansion of British credit allowed every type of merchant in the American trade to enlarge their ventures in the colonies. In 1770, imports grew in New England and New York as well as the Chesapeake. The

following year British imports reached record levels in every colony in North America.⁸⁷

Nowhere was the expansion of imports more dramatic than in Virginia and Maryland. The recovery of tobacco prices from the depression of the mid-1760s prompted British merchants to attract the Chesapeake crop with generous offers of credit. As prices rose and tobacco exports increased in 1769 and 1770, British merchants responded with larger shipments of goods during the following years. The Scots led the way, expanding their outstanding credit in Virginia from £500,000 in 1766 to £1,100,000 in 1772. Direct trade merchants in England followed the Scots' pattern, and even consignment merchants devised ventures to expand their business on the basis of the credit boom. The London consignment merchants, like other tobacco importing firms, entered the cargo trade, in which independent Virginia merchants accepted entire store inventories on credit, and agreed to make return payments in tobacco or bills of exchange. This variation on the traditional form of the direct trade allowed consignment merchants to ship and receive larger cargoes than were manageable under the personalized service of the commission trade. In Virginia, a new group of resident merchants imported large assortments of British goods, with no security but the expectation of good prices and easy credit. The cargo business of John Norton & Sons in London increased the company's outstanding

debt from £11,000 in 1767 to £40,000 in 1773. The larger firms in London extended proportionately greater credit.⁸⁸

The regional pattern of imports during the Associations further suggests the role of the direct trade in producing record shipments of British goods. The items responsible for the increases, particularly the prohibited goods, experienced the largest growth in the Upper James River District and to a lesser extent in the Lower James district. This was exactly the area where Scottish traders were most influential and where planters were most likely to sell their tobacco through stores. At the same time, shipments of some prohibited goods actually declined in other naval districts. Among the goods that increased the most in 1770 and 1771 were linens, leather, haberdashery and millinery, hats and hosiery, all of which were in some degree prohibited by the Associations. Virginia imported 97,488 pounds of tanned leather in 1769 but in 1770 the amount jumped to 232,733 pounds and went on to 275,162 pounds in 1771. The Upper James District alone increased imports of leather from 10,786 pounds in 1769 to 123,862 pounds in 1770 and 148,754 the next year. Haberdashery and millinery imports followed a similar pattern, with a colony-wide increase of close to 325,000 pounds in 1770, and the two James River districts accounted for 260,000 pounds of the growth. The Upper James led increases in linen and other cloths, particularly in 1770. Total imports increased

during 1770 and 1771 throughout Virginia, but the absolute and proportional increases in the Upper James district, combined with the reduced shipments of luxury goods, indicates that direct trade merchants were responsible for the imports which destroyed the credibility of the nonimportation associations.⁸⁹

For the majority of planter families in Virginia, the opportunities made possible by the factors' generous credit and the long-awaited rise in tobacco prices proved more persuasive than the revised Association or the limited authority of the five-man committees. Despite the initial participation of British factors and the attempts to establish some means of enforcement, the Association of 1770, like the original agreement, found consistent support only among great planters and resident merchants. The steady flow of goods from Great Britain to Virginia convinced everyone in London that the second Association was as ineffective as the first. As early as September of 1770, Arthur Lee abandoned plans for the London publication of his articles in support of Virginia's Association. Lee's brother-in-law, William Shippen, reported that Philadelphians assumed Virginians were unable to establish "any associations that will be of any efficacy from the nature of their commerce & the number of Scotch factors &c."⁹⁰

Although many Virginians recognized that British merchants in the colony made a mockery of the second Asso-

ciation, the full extent of the factors' responsibility for increasing imports only became apparent in late-1772 when an economic depression in Great Britain precipitated an immediate and devastating withdrawal of credit from Virginia. At that time, the many planters who ignored the Associations realized that their prosperity of the past several years had been dependent on the credit and speculation of British merchants. These planters henceforth joined with the organizers of the Associations in seeking to limit Virginia's reliance on British trade.

For the great planters, the failure to reduce imports during the Association confirmed their worst apprehensions of the factors' influence in Virginia society. The fear that the Scots' extensive economic activity in Virginia would erode the great planters' political authority was no longer hypothetical. The factors' commercial connection with middling and small planters effectively had undermined the gentry's ability to organize popular support for the Associations. The example of the "gentlemen," which George Washington, George Mason, Landon Carter, and others had expected to encourage a general observance of the nonimportation agreement, had been no match for the factors' lucrative offers. Clearly, an effective Association in Virginia required stricter regulation of merchants' business activity, a concerted effort to maintain popular participation, and domestic manufactures on a scale that would allow all

planter families to reduce their purchases of British manufactures.

By the end of 1770 George Mason admitted that his proposals for commercial resistance had been unrealistic for the Chesapeake economy. Mason realized he had been too ambitious to expect that a boycott of British goods would produce a repeal of the Townshend Acts within one or two years. The variety of goods encompassed by the nonimportation agreement also had been impractical; few Virginians could abide by the agreement even for one year. The coincidental rise in demand for British goods in Europe and the inconsistencies among the agreements in different colonies cancelled out whatever effect Mason hoped the Associations might otherwise have had. In the event commercial resistance was necessary in the future, Mason proposed a single association for all the colonies, with the boycott covering "only Articles of Luxury & Ostentation together with the Goods at any Time taxed." Such an association, "in the Nature of a Sumptuary Law," would cost the government "more in one year on two Articles only (manufactured Tobacco & Malt Liquors) than it wou'd gain in ten by the American Revenue Act." Mason recommended that future associations should place more emphasis on long-term plans for the development of domestic manufactures and the encouragement of immigration by skilled workers from Europe. As the colonies became capable of producing more items at home,

they would reduce their dependence on British trade. Although Mason hoped further commercial resistance would be unnecessary, he confessed that a plan like his own was "now in Contemplation."⁹¹

The nature of the Associations' failure suggested that some type of commercial resistance would be necessary if Virginians were to achieve any measure of economic independence. The lessons of the Associations, particularly the role of the factors, provided fresh evidence of the dangers that resulted from Virginia's reliance on British manufactures and the commercial services of British merchants. The experience that led to a better understanding of the limitations of Virginia's colonial economy also contributed to a greater awareness of the possibilities for independent economic development. The immediate legacies of the Associations were additional schemes, both public and private, for the diversification of agriculture and manufactures, a continued campaign to restrict the slave trade and attract skilled laborers, and broader interest in the kind of commercial development that would compete with the British factors.

Chapter Four -- Endnotes

- 1 Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 215-23.
- 2 Ibid., 225-26.
- 3 Ibid., 226-28.
- 4 Ibid., 241-43, 250; Pauline Maier, From Resistance to Revolution (New York, 1972), 169-70; JHB, 1766-1769, 174, 165-71.
- 5 Arthur Meier Schlesinger, The Colonial Merchants, 104-20; Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 266-73.
- 6 John Dickinson, "Letters from a Farmer," No. 2, 3, in The Farmer's and Monitor's Letters, ed., William J. Van Schreeven (Richmond, 1969), 4-14.
- 7 Arthur Lee's "The Monitor" was published in the VG (Rind) between February and 28 Apr. 1768. The Farmer's and Monitor's Letters, "Monitor" No. 6, 7, 8, pp. 80-92.
- 8 JHB, 1766-1769, 165-71, 146.
- 9 Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 283-87; Schlesinger, Colonial Merchants, 120-31.
- 10 Governor Botetourt to Secretary of State, 17 Feb. 1769, PRO, CO5/1347, ff. 66-67.
- 11 For comments on the possibility of repeal see Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 27 Dec. 1769, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm), Arthur Lee to [Francis Lightfoot Lee], 23 Mar. 1769, Lee Family Papers (recipient is incorrectly identified as Richard Henry Lee); [Francis Lightfoot Lee] to William Lee, 9 Mar. 1769, Brock Collection, Huntington Library (Colonial Williamsburg microfilm).
- 12 VG (Purdie & Dixon), 23 Mar. 1769.
- 13 Philadelphia Merchants to Annapolis merchants, with reply, 15 Mar. 1769; Annapolis merchants to Virginia Merchants, 25 Mar. 1769, Washington Papers, LC.
- 14 George Washington to George Mason, 5 Apr. 1769, Washington Papers, LC.

- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 George Mason to George Washington, 5 Apr. 1769, Papers of George Mason, 1:99-100.
- 18 For collaboration of Washington and Mason see The Diaries of George Washington, eds. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, 6 vols. (Charlottesville, 1976-79)), 2:142; Mason to Washington, 23 Apr. 1769, Papers of George Mason, 1:102-03.
- 19 Draft of association in Washington Papers, LC.
- 20 VG (Purdie & Dixon) and (Rind), 11 May 1769, also printed in Papers of George Mason, 1:106-09.
- 21 JHB, 1766-1769, 214-18.
- 22 Account of proceedings and printed copy of Association in Rev. Va., 1:73-77; Diaries of George Washington, 2:152; attribution in James Parker to Charles Steuart, 26 June 1769, Charles Steuart Papers, National Library of Scotland.
- 23 Rev. Va., 1:73-77.
- 24 Nineteenth-century copy of a fragment of a speech in the Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm) with attribution to Francis Lightfoot Lee and dated 1774. Internal evidence proves beyond doubt that it is from 1769. More problematic is the attribution to Francis Lightfoot Lee, who was not a member of the Assembly in 1769. Another nineteenth-century copy of the fragment is in the Lee Transcripts, Virginia Historical Society. This copy contains a note saying that the original handwriting looked like that of Richard Henry Lee. This note has been crossed out and an attribution to Francis Lightfoot Lee put below it. Given his absence from the Assembly, and Richard Henry Lee's views on the Association, it would appear the original attribution was correct.
- 25 Francis Lightfoot Lee to William Lee, 22 May 1769, Brock Collection, Huntington Library, (Colonial Williamsburg microfilm).
- 26 Rev. Va., 1:73-77; VG(Rind), 27 July 1769.

- 27 VG(Rind), 1 June 1769.
- 28 Robert Carter Nicholas to John Norton, 31 May 1769, in John Norton & Sons, Merchants of London and Virginia, being the Papers from their Counting House for the Years 1750 to 1795, ed. Francis Norton Mason, (Richmond, 1937), 76-77.
- 29 John Page, Jr. to John Norton, 27 May 1769, in John Norton & Sons, 93-94; letter of C_____ R_____ (Landon Carter) in VG(Rind), 1 June 1769; Martha Jacquelin to John Norton, 14 Aug. 1769, John Norton & Sons, 103.
- 30 Robert Beverley to John Backhouse, 25 July 1769, Robert Beverley Letterbook; see also William Nelson to Charles Goore, 2 Sept. 1769, Nelson Letterbook, Virginia State Library.
- 31 VG(Rind), 6 July 1769; VG(Purdie & Dixon), 7 Nov. 1769.
- 32 VG(Rind), letter of "Buckskin," 1 June 1769; VG(Purdie & Dixon), John Wiley to Printer, 28 Sep. 1769; VG(Rind), Inhabitants of King and Queen County to the Speaker, 16 Nov. 1769.
- 33 Martha Jaquelin to John Norton, 14 Aug. 1769, John Norton & Sons, 103; William Nelson to Edward Hunt & Son, 17 Nov. 1769, and Nelson to John Norton, 24 Jan. 1770, Nelson Letterbook; VG(Purdie & Dixon), 14 Dec. 1769.
- 34 VG(Rind), 14 Sep. 1769, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 14 June 1770; Francis Lightfoot Lee to William Lee, 26 Sep. 1769, Edmund Jenings Lee Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
- 35 George Washington, Weaving Account, Washington Papers, LC.
- 36 Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 15 Nov. 1769, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 37 VG(Rind) 31 May 1770; William Shippen to [Richard Henry Lee], 25 Aug. 1770, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 38 William Nelson to Edward Hunt & Son, 2 June 1769 and 17 Nov. 1769, Nelson to Messrs Lamar, Hill & Bisset, 24 Aug. 1769, Nelson to Thomas Lamar, 16 Sep. 1769, and Nelson to William Cookson, 2 Sep. 1769, all in Nelson

- Letterbook; Harry Piper to Dixon & Littledale, 8 June 1769, Piper Letterbook.
- 39 Parker comments on printed copy of 1769 Association, in Parker Family Papers, PA 7-2, Liverpool Record Office; James Parker to Charles Steuart, 26 June 1769, Charles Steuart Papers, National Library of Scotland; VG(Rind), 25 May 1769, letter from a "Factor"; for continued imports see Glassford Company Papers.
 - 40 VG(Rind), 2 Nov. 1769, letter from "R"; Landon Carter to Purdie & Dixon, 1769, Carter Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
 - 41 Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 15 Feb. 1770, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm); Perkins, Buchanan, & Brown to Thomas Adams, Thomas Adams Correspondence, Adams Family Papers, Virginia Historical Society.
 - 42 James Parker to Charles Steuart, 20 Oct. 1769, Charles Steuart Papers; An Associator to Rind, VG(Rind), 30 Nov. 1769.
 - 43 For official value of exports and imports in Chesapeake see Jacob M. Price, "New Time Series," 307-25; Import figures for individual commodities in PRO, Customs 16/1, Ledger of Imports and Exports (America), 5 January 1768 -- 5 January 1773.
 - 44 Price, "New Time Series," 320-21.
 - 45 C___ R___ to Purdie & Dixon, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 23 Mar. 1770; letter of "Monitor," VG(Rind), 31 May 1770.
 - 46 C___ R___ to Purdie & Dixon, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 23 Mar. 1770; draft of this letter in Sabine Hall Collection, Alderman Library, University of Virginia.
 - 47 Ibid.
 - 48 William Lee to Richard Parker, 10 Aug. 1769, William Lee Letterbook, 1769-1771, Lee Family Papers at Stratford.
 - 49 JHB, 1766-1769, 226-27; Robert Carter Nicholas to [Arthur Lee], 29 Dec. 1769, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm); for merchant orders following Botetourt's speech see William Brown to Thomas Adams, 16 June 1770, Thomas Adams Correspondence, Adams Family Papers.
 - 50 Secretary of State to Botetourt, 18 Jan. 1770, PRO,

- CO5/1348, ff. 23-24; John Norton to John H. Norton, 10 Feb. 1770, John Norton & Sons, 23; William Lee to Richard Parker, 6 Jan. 1770, William Lee to Anthony Stewart, 5 Dec. 1769; William Lee to William Fitzhugh, 19 Jan. 1770, in William Lee Letterbook, 1769-1771, Lee Family Papers at Stratford; William Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 6 Feb. 1770, Brock Collection, Huntington Library, (Colonial Williamsburg microfilm).
- 51 William Nelson to Edward Hunt & Son, 17 Nov. 1769; Richard Henry Lee to William Lee, 5 Apr. 1770, The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:41-42.
- 52 VG(Rind) 26 Apr. 1770; VG(Purdie & Dixon), 24 May 1770; William Nelson to Robert Cary & Co., 20 July 1770, William Nelson to Samuel Athawes, 3 Sep. 1770, William Nelson to Edward Hunt & Son, 26 July 1770, Nelson Letterbook; VG(Rind) 26 April 1770 also contains call of "Brutus" for meeting of associators to develop more a effective method of enforcement.
- 53 VG(Rind), 3 May 1770; George Mason to Richard Henry Lee, 7 June 1770, in Papers of George Mason, 1:116-19.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 7 June 1770; Diaries of George Washington, 2:247; Robert Wormeley Carter to Landon Carter, 22 June 1770, Sabine Hall Collection; James Robinson to David Walker, 11 July 1770, William Cunnighame & Co., Letterbook of Colonial Agent, 1767-1773, National Library of Scotland.
- 57 text of Association in Rev. Va., 1:79-84; Instructions for merchants' committee in Article ten of Association; account of first committee meeting and Gazette article, both from a now destroyed copy of 28 June 1770 newspaper, printed in Virginia Historical Register, (Richmond, 1850), 3:79-38.
- 58 James Robinson to David Walker, 11 July 1770, William Cunnighame & Co., Letterbook of Colonial Agent, 1767-1773.
- 59 Rev. Va., 1:79-84; C___ R___ to Purdie & Dixon, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 23 Mar. 1770.
- 60 Rev. Va., 1:79-84; JHB, 1770-1772, 27 June 1770, 101-02.

- 61 James Robinson to David Walker, 11 July 1770, William Cunninghame & Co., Letterbook of Colonial Agent, 1767-1773.
- 62 George Washington to Robert Cary & Co., 20 Aug. 1770, Washington Papers, LC; Richard Henry Lee to William Lee, 7 July 1770, Richard Henry Lee Correspondence; Harry Piper to Dixon & Littledale, 26 July 1770, Piper Letterbook; Virginia Historical Register, 3:79-83.
- 63 Virginia Historical Register, 3:24; Norfolk signers listed in VG(Rind), 26 July 1770.
- 64 Donald Sweig, "The Virginia Nonimportation Association Broadside of 1770 and Fairfax County: A Study in Local Participation," VMHB 87 (July 1979): 313-25.
- 65 VG(Rind), 26 July 1770.
- 66 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 6 Sep. 1770; statements concerning reports based on those appearing in VG, surviving copies of which are not complete for 1770-1771; Richard Henry Lee, Proposed resolutions for association, 1770, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 67 Committee members recorded in VG in 1770 and 1771; Record of men serving as justices of the peace found in "Justices of the Peace in Colonial Virginia, 1757-1775," Bulletin of the Virginia State Library 14 (April-June, 1921): 41-149.
- 68 VG(Rind), 19 July 1770, 2 Aug. 1770, 23 Aug. 1770, 6 Sep. 1770.
- 69 John and George Fowler to Dobson, Daltera & Walker, 2 Aug. 1770, Dobson & Daltera vs. Fowler svg. ptr., U.S. Circuit Court, Virginia District, Ended Cases, 1798, Virginia State Library; VG(Rind), 31 Jan. 1771, 7 Feb. 1771.
- 70 VG(Rind), 30 Aug. 1770.
- 71 Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 363-69; Schlesinger, Colonial Merchants, 217-33. Throughout the summer and fall of 1770, the Virginia Gazette carried reports of the dissolution of the northern agreements.
- 72 Jensen, Founding of a Nation, 369, Schlesinger, Colonial Merchants, 233-34; report of Annapolis meeting in VG(Rind), 29 Oct. 1770.

- 73 "A Virginian" to Mr. Rind, VG(Rind), 29 Nov 1770; Willaim Lee to Dr. Charles Mortimer, 7 Nov. 1770, William Lee Letterbook, 1770-1771, Lee Family Papers at Stratford; Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 10 Sep. 1770, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm); Roger Atkinson to Samuel Gist, 10 Jan. 1771, Atkinson Letterbook; William Nelson to Secretary of State, 19 Dec. 1770, PRO, CO5/1349, ff. 38-39.
- 74 Randolph's announcement in VG(Rind), 8 Nov. 1770 and (Purdie & Dixon), 22 Nov. 1770; Richard Henry Lee to William Lee, 8 Jan. 1771, Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:52-55.
- 75 VG(Rind), 13 Dec. 1770, "An Associating Planter," (identified as Landon Carter by Greene, ed., The Diaries of Landon Carter, 1:529).
- 76 William Nelson to Seceretary of State, 19 Dec. 1770, PRO, CO5/1349, ff. 38-39; Francis Lightfoot Lee to William Lee, 17 Dec. 1770, Edmund Jenings Lee Papers.
- 77 Adam Fleming to Neil Jamieson, 11 Jan. 1771, Neil Jamieson Papers, Library of Congress; William Lee to Edward Lloyd, 21 Feb. 1771, William Lee Letterbook, 1770-1771, Lee Family Papers at Stratford; Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Adams, 20 Feb. 1771, 1 June 1771, Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 1:61-62, 71-72; Harry Piper to Dixon & Littledale, 13 May 1771, Piper Letterbook.
- 78 Fauquier Committee to Peyton Randolph, 11 June 1771, VG(Rind), 18 July 1771.
- 79 Fairfax Committee to Peyton Randolph, in VG(Rind), 18 July 1771.
- 80 William Nelson to Secretary of State, 14 June 1771, PRO, CO5/1349, ff. 102-03; VG(Purdie & Dixon) 18 July 1771.
- 81 Price, "New Time Series," 320-25.
- 82 Invoices for Goods Consigned to Washington by London Merchants, 1766-1773, Washington Papers, LC.
- 83 John Baylor to John Backhouse, 21 July 1769, Backhouse Admx. vs. Baylor exor., U.S. Circuit Court, Virginia District, Ended Cases, 1798.

- 84 PRO, Customs, 16/1, Ledger of Imports and Exports (America), 5 January 1768 - 5 January 1773.
- 85 William Nelson to Edward Hunt & Son, 17 Nov. 1769; Nelson to John Norton, 24 Jan. 1770, Nelson Letterbook.
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- 87 Price, "New Time Series," 322-25.
- 88 Jacob M. Price, Capital and Credit, 129-30; Allan Kullikoff, "The Economic Growth of the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Economy," 287.
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- 91 George Mason to [George Brent?], 6 Dec. 1770, Papers of George Mason, 1:127-30.

Chapter Five: The Slave Trade and Economic Reform in Virginia

The prohibition of slave imports was one of the several provisions by which the Associations of 1769 and 1770 responded to the broad support for an economy less dependent on British merchants and the tobacco trade. The associators intended the ban on African and West Indian slaves, like the boycott of select British manufactures, to promote domestic manufactures and to attract skilled laborers to the colony at the same time that it pressured British merchants who profited from the commerce in bondsmen. For several years after the dissolution of the second Association in 1771, the House of Burgesses attempted to secure a prohibitive duty on imported slaves and thereby make permanent the restriction on the slave trade. The Assembly's repeated approval of a prohibitive duty was the most important official effort to redirect Virginia's economy. This support for limiting the slave trade grew while the imperial crisis worsened. The vote on a prohibitive duty fell one burgess short of approval in 1760, then gained a majority in 1767 and 1769 and finally received unanimous approval in 1772.

Slavery had existed in Virginia for as long as tobacco had been a major export crop. In the eighteenth century this labor system was closely tied to the colony's continuing involvement with tobacco and the expansion of

tobacco cultivation into new areas. So, too, was slavery related to Virginia's economic dependence on Great Britain. The British government and merchants had encouraged the slave trade that brought agricultural labor to the colony and increased the production of tobacco. The British-supplied slaves were valuable assets for most tobacco planters in the first half of the eighteenth century and continued to help new planters in the Piedmont enter the tobacco market. Slavery, however, proved to be an inflexible system of labor, not easily adapted to other types of agriculture or manufactures. Virginians gained very little from the slave traffic which remained in the hands of British traders and drained the colony of always scarce specie and bills of exchange. In the third quarter of the century, and particularly among the great planters in established areas, the unrestricted slave trade came to represent many of the limitations of the colonial economy. Some of these planters feared that a commitment to slave labor prevented Virginians from competing with the commercial development in certain colonies to the north. During the fifteen years before the Revolution, those Virginians interested in agricultural diversification and domestic manufactures argued that an end to slave imports would attract skilled laborers and offer planters a variety of options in the management of their lands.

But slavery was not an exclusively colonial affair; the

institution was an integral part of the Atlantic economy and Great Britain's trade with Virginia. The colony's attempts to restrict the slave trade challenged the mercantilist principles of the British government. On no other economic issue did the intent of the Virginia Assembly so sharply conflict with imperial regulations as with the slave import duties. The Burgesses' attempt to close off the slave trade by raising duties provoked the direct intervention of the Crown, which after 1772 prevented Virginians from enacting legislation respecting this central aspect of the colonial economy.

Through much of the eighteenth century Virginians had accepted eagerly the large importations of black slaves. Demand in certain areas continued unabated until the 1770s. Slaves became an important part of Virginia's labor force in the 1690s when privateers first arrived with large numbers of blacks to replace the dwindling supply of indentured servants. The opening of the slave trade to all shippers after the expiration of the Royal African Company's monopoly in 1698 accelerated the transition to slave labor as Virginians received increasing numbers of slaves direct from Africa. The colony's black population of 16,930 in 1700 advanced to 23,118 in the century's first decade.¹ The largest slave shipments were between 1727 and '69 when 39,679 slaves arrived in Virginia. Slave imports reached an annual high of 3,116 in 1736. After 1740 South Carolina

surpassed Virginia as a slave importer, but the steady shipment of slaves and healthier climate in the Chesapeake made Virginia the largest slave society among the British continental colonies on the eve of the Revolution. One-hundred-eighty-seven thousand blacks, constituting 40 percent of the population, lived in Virginia in 1770. All but a small percentage of these blacks were slaves.²

Virginia's adoption of slavery coincided with, and was made possible by, Great Britain's ascendancy as the premier slave-trading nation in the Atlantic world. Although the English were comparatively late to enter the slave trade, they were the major shippers from West Africa by 1700. By the 1730s they controlled the largest share of the slave trade from all of Africa, a position Great Britain held until the early nineteenth century. British advancement in the trade provided Virginians with access to the African slaves they preferred to import. The colonists no longer needed to depend on the unpredictable West Indian slave trade which had been incapable of filling the demand for bondsmen in the Chesapeake. By the 1720s the majority of slaves imported into Virginia were from Africa. The following years of heavy importations were largely the story of British traders shipping Africans directly to Virginia. Importations were the greatest in the 1730s and 1740s when the influx of credit from the direct trade enabled Virginians to expand their slave holdings and increase tobacco

production. West Indian slaves, whom the Virginians considered too savvy and rebellious, accounted for only 12 percent of slave imports after 1727. The slave trade from the islands was always ancillary to the commodities trade.³

The profits from Virginia's slave trade went primarily to English merchants and shipowners who carried 89 percent of the slaves from Africa to the colony. Although American shipping was more involved in slave importations from the West Indies, English capital supported a large share of this trade as well. Virginia ships did not carry a single slave from Africa during the years of heaviest imports, 1727-1769, and they carried only small shipments, usually ten or fewer slaves per voyage, from the West Indies. Planters and local merchants in Virginia frequently acted as sales agents for slave shipments, but they did not manage the entire adventure. The high operating costs of the complicated network of the slave trade and the efficient specialization of Bristol and Liverpool merchants precluded the competition of colonial purchasers in the financing or operation of the trade between Africa and the Chesapeake. The English domination of the valuable slave trade resulted in a specie drain from the colony in years of heavy purchases.⁴

Bristol merchants were the most active in the Virginia trade. They centered their shipments in the York River area during the first four decades of the eighteenth century, while Liverpool traders preferred the Rappahannock River for

their slave sales. The volume of slave imports as well as their destination roughly correlated with the fortunes of the tobacco market. After 1740 the Bristol slave merchants concentrated their shipments in the Upper James River district where the expansion of tobacco cultivation fostered a demand for slave labor. The British ships from Africa, specializing in the commerce of slaves, were most likely to land in the several upriver areas where they could sell their large cargoes of slaves. Ship captains from the West Indies generally landed their slaves cargoes in the Lower James district and disposed of the slaves as a sideline to their trade in West Indian produce. Virginia's slave imports decreased sharply in the 1750s, only to revive during the short boom following the end of hostilities in the French and Indian War. The depression of the mid-1760s again reduced the shipments of slaves and almost completely discouraged the trade from Africa. The return of more favorable tobacco prices in 1769 attracted large cargoes from Africa. The slaves imported between 1769 and 1773 arrived exclusively in the James River and were the last sizable importations into Virginia. Almost all of the slaves imported after midcentury settled in the Piedmont.⁵

The overall demand for new slaves declined in Virginia after midcentury while the British traders carried a higher proportion of their North America-bound slaves to South Carolina. In contrast with the high mortality rates for the

slave populations of South Carolina and the British West Indies, a remarkable rate of natural increase among Virginia slaves provided an expanding labor force without imports. The slave population of Virginia grew from 60,000 in 1740 to 101,000 in 1750 and 187,000 in 1770, with imports accounting for less than 15 percent of the growth after midcentury.⁶ This large resident labor force, combined with changes in agricultural practices, eliminated much of the demand for new slaves, particularly the market for Africans who were unskilled in the supporting crafts of Virginia's plantations. The tobacco planters of the Piedmont and the southwestern counties still paid good prices for "New Negroes" during advancing tobacco markets, but many other Virginia planters, especially the gentry of the Northern Neck and Tidewater, needed few new slaves. Indeed, these planters found compelling reasons to halt the importation of all slaves into the colony.

The large planters, facing pressures on their eastern estates and experimenting with crops less labor intensive than tobacco, often found themselves with a surplus of labor. Some planters attempted to take advantage of their oversupply of labor by settling fresh western lands with slaves who could produce tobacco and help reduce the planter's London debts. Nathaniel Burwell assured John Norton in 1770 that he could better than double his annual shipment of tobacco by sending more slaves to his mountain estates.

William Fitzhugh of Stafford County was so "overstocked" with slaves that in 1772 he borrowed £400 to purchase land on which he could put the extra slaves to work. But there could be a desperate character to the settlement of new lands, as in the case of John Page who already lost credit with his London merchant. Page went to great expense to open up estates for his slaves to work. By 1773 his lack of credit forced him to buy the supplies for slaves at expensive Virginia stores, and the venture threatened to drive him further and further into debt.⁷

The use of newly-arrived slaves to establish additional tobacco plantations appeared to an increasing number of planters to be a foolish renewal of the circumstances that originally imposed economic limits on their established estates. As long as the slave trade provided the work force for new plantations, Virginians were likely to remain dependent on tobacco and the commercial services of British merchants. The unrestricted importation of Africans added to the unskilled agricultural labor force at a time when many planters found a need to employ their slaves in a wider variety of tasks. William Lee recognized that he had more slaves on his Green Spring plantation than ever could be employed profitably in agriculture. He urged his steward to train the surplus slaves to work in manufactures and produce the supplies needed for the plantation. The various proposals for nonimportation during the period between the Stamp

Act crisis and Independence all included recommendations for domestic manufacturing schemes that, besides replacing British goods, would have the advantage of employing idle slaves.⁸ The establishment of home manufactures would lower the costs of provisioning slaves and ease the planters' distress during unfavorable tobacco markets.

After midcentury some Virginians argued that slave labor, whether skilled or unskilled, inherently restricted the development of a diversified economy and that the continued importation of Africans would perpetuate the colony's economic dependence on Great Britain. During the Assembly's debate on slave import duties in 1759, Richard Henry Lee argued that the introduction of new labor through the slave trade prevented Virginia from attracting the skilled immigrants required for economic diversification. Lee's argument, and its various formulations over the next fifteen years, became the most frequent justification for ending the slave trade in the colony. George Mason hoped that legislative discouragements of the slave trade would attract free settlers who would accelerate the pace of westward expansion and make more productive use of the land than was possible with slave-based agriculture. Recalling the example of ancient Rome, Mason reminded Virginians that "one of the first signs of the Decay, & perhaps the primary cause of the Destruction of the most flourishing Government that ever existed was the Introduction of great Numbers of

slaves."⁹ The House of Burgesses repeated Mason's claim in the 1772 address to the King requesting authority to enact restrictions on the colony's slave traffic. The slave trade, claimed the Assembly's petition, "greatly retards the Settlement of the Colonies." This line of thought was so widespread by the summer of 1774 that various county committees, in meetings following the dissolution of the Assembly, recommended the nonimportation of slaves as a means of encouraging skilled, free laborers to settle in Virginia.¹⁰

George Mason was also among those who expected restrictions on the slave trade to further the expansion of tenantry. The increased tenantry in Virginia before Independence had several sources, one of which was the advantage it held as a system of land management for large planters who formerly supervised the cultivation of their lands by their own slaves. Renting to tenant families allowed these planters to develop new lands more quickly and more economically than was possible when they relied on the expansion of their own labor force. Tenants with sufficient income offered the added advantage of reducing the landowners surplus of slaves by hiring bondsmen from their landlords. George Washington, who rented an increasing portion of his eastern estates to tenants, planned to settle his western bounty lands with German redemptioners and Scots-Irish immigrants who would sit as tenants, rather than to duplicate the plantation slavery of the eastern areas.¹¹ In addition to the

private benefits for large planters, Mason and Richard Henry Lee believed "that the Custom of leasing lands is more beneficial to the Community than that of settling them with Slaves." Lee urged others to rent land as a way to distribute the advantages of land to all Virginians. Following Dunmore's Proclamation in 1775, William Lee went so far as to suggest the slaves themselves might be established as tenants.¹²

Governor Fauquier and certain British merchants in the colony claimed the opponents of the slave trade were all large slaveowners seeking profits from the expected rise in slave prices. Some were, in fact, willing to take advantage of any such opportunities (Richard Henry Lee negotiated for a cargo of Africans while he campaigned for an end to the slave trade), but the potential for profits at this time was too limited and short-lived to explain the widespread support for restricting slave imports. The absence of an organized slave trade made continued profits unlikely and had contributed to the pressures on large slaveowners in the first place.¹³

The critique of slavery and the slave trade in Virginia was only occasionally, and peripherally, humanitarian in nature. Petersburg merchant Robert Pleasants and other Quakers kept their Philadelphia brethren informed about the anti-slavery activity in Virginia, but they had only a fringe audience in the colony and made no impact on the

efforts to end the slave trade. Isolated individuals like Arthur Lee opposed the institution on moral grounds, although Lee was more concerned with the effects on whites than on blacks whom he considered "abominable objects." Humanitarian arguments, like references to the security threats from a large slave population, were most common in appeals to royal officials. Rhetoric of this sort became more common in the years immediately preceding the Revolution. Few, however, advocated any interference with slavery. The argument against the slave trade remained essentially one of political economy.¹⁴

What unified the opposition to the slave trade and tied it to the broader support for economic reform was the fear that unrestricted slave importations threatened Virginia's preeminence among the North American colonies. Many Virginians had accumulated great fortunes on the labor of slaves, but after midcentury some Virginians believed the predominance of slave labor limited the colony's ability to compete in the changing markets of the Atlantic economy. As early as 1759, Richard Henry Lee called attention to neighboring colonies that, "though much later than ourselves in point of settlement, are now before us in improvement." The explanation appeared obvious to Lee: "with their whites they import arts and agriculture, whilst we, with our blacks exclude both. Nature has not partially favoured them with fertility of soil nor do they enjoy more of the sun's

cheering and enlivening influence; yet greatly have they outstript us."¹⁵ Twelve years later, following the collapse of the Association of 1770, a writer to the Virginia Gazette urged Virginians to establish a permanent prohibition of slave imports. "Let us endeavour to discourage a Practice which must for ever prevent our Country from flourishing as the northern Colonies have done. A Practice which is a never failing source of ignorance and Vice, of Indolence and Cruelty, amongst us."¹⁶ Slavery was not the only characteristic distinguishing the Chesapeake economy from that of the northern colonies, but as the major source of labor it precluded the flexibility required in manufactures and the production of food crops. The reliance on slavery also discouraged whites from developing the skills and work habits which would contribute to a diversified economy.¹⁷ The large supply of slave labor might continue to be a source of wealth, but if Virginians were to maintain the colony's economic strength and exploit the potential of its resources, they needed to limit the future importation of slaves.

As long as Virginia was a colony of Great Britain, the House of Burgesses could not abolish the slave trade, but the Assembly, through its imposition of duties, was able to regulate the flow of slave imports. Throughout the eighteenth century the Burgesses enacted a series of import duties which served variously as a source of revenue and a

means of regulation. The first duty, established in 1699, was a 20 shilling levy on each imported slave. The Assembly allocated the proceeds to help finance construction of the new capitol in Williamsburg. The Burgesses renewed this duty several times before 1710, when they replaced it with a substantial £5 duty on new slaves. The higher duty, twice renewed before its expiration in 1718, was a valuable source of revenue for public projects, but the Assembly also intended it to act as a brake on the rush of slaves imported into the colony. Rumors of slave insurrections had raised fears about the colony's ability to assimilate safely the large importations of Africans. The Burgesses wanted a duty that permitted slave imports but at a pace that better assured the security of whites in the colony. The slower rate of importations also would provide planters an opportunity to reduce the often reckless debts accumulated in their frenzied purchase of slaves. Governor Spotswood feared the duty might prove prohibitive, but demand was so strong that over 4,000 slaves entered Virginia between 1710 and 1718.¹⁸

Twice in the 1720s the Burgesses attempted without success to secure another slave duty that would operate as something more than a revenue measure. These efforts were the clearest precedents for the movement to restrict the slave trade in the 1760s. Large tobacco crops and slackening demand for the commodity in Europe made the

depression of the 1720s a serious economic crisis for Virginia planters. In response to these pressures, a group of planters in the Assembly argued that Virginians could avoid the dangers of periodic depressions only if they reduced their dependence on tobacco as the sole export crop. In 1723 these burgesses gained approval of a discriminatory duty of 40 shillings on imported slaves as part of a broader program to discourage the expansion of tobacco production. Despite approval by the Assembly and the reluctant consent of Governor Drysdale, many slaveholders in Virginia expressed their opposition to the duty, and the King disallowed the act. Overproduction and low prices continued to plague the tobacco market through the 1720s, and again in 1728 the Assembly approved a 40 shilling duty on imported slaves, this time with the full support of Governor William Gooch. The ministry, unwilling to approve any measure that might lower revenue from tobacco duties or limit the interests of British traders, disallowed the second duty as well.¹⁹

In 1732 the Virginia Assembly succeeded in overcoming the British government's resistance to any duty paid by merchants or shippers by approving a five percent ad valorem duty on imported slaves, to be paid by the purchaser. The revenue measure had no discernible effect on the record slave imports of the 1730s and 1740s. With the exception of a six-month lapse in 1751, regular extensions by the Assem-

bly maintained this base duty of five percent until 1773.²⁰ The success of the duty in raising revenue without disturbing the slave trade persuaded the Burgesses to increase periodically the duty in order to answer temporary financial demands. Between 1740 and 1744 an additional duty of five percent helped defray the costs of establishing defenses and enlisting troops for the war against Spain. Another five percent duty in 1754 provided security for a £10,000 loan the Assembly used to encourage settlement along the waters of the Mississippi. This added income proved so useful that the Burgesses, even after abandoning their support for western settlement, continued the additional five percent duty until 1771, thereby raising to ten percent the base levy paid on slaves imported after 1754.²¹

When faced with the unprecedented requirements of financing its part in the French and Indian War, Virginia's Assembly again turned to the slave duty to help meet the costs of military preparation. An act of 1755 raising £20,000 for protection against the French included the imposition of an additional ten percent ad valorem duty on imported slaves. Two years later the Assembly approved another slave duty of ten percent. The accumulated duties, now totaling 30 percent and coinciding with the wartime disruption of shipping, effectively closed Virginia's slave trade. No African slaves arrived in 1756 or 1757; total registered imports for the years 1756-1759 amounted to only

136 slaves.²² The Assembly received reports of more slaves being brought illegally into Virginia through Maryland and North Carolina, and in 1759 it imposed a 20 percent duty on all slaves imported into Virginia from Maryland, the Carolinas, or the West Indies by persons for their own use.²³ Without slave imports, of course, the levies did not serve the purpose of raising revenues, and so the Assembly, as early as March 1759, considered reducing the slave duties. In 1760, citing the discouragement to western settlement and the increased custom abuses, as well as the lack of significant revenue, the Burgesses repealed the ten percent duty established in 1755. The following year they eliminated the ten percent duty from 1757.²⁴

The increased duties of 1755 and 1757 were desperate revenue measures, but their prohibitory effect encouraged those who subsequently wished to decrease Virginia's reliance on slave labor. The debate in 1759 on the motion for repeal of the duties marked the first time since the 1720s that the Assembly discussed slave duties in terms of restricting the trade. Richard Henry Lee, who had entered the House only one year earlier, argued for continuing the high duties as a means of limiting Virginia's involvement with the institution of slavery. In one of the strongest public attacks on slavery in Virginia during the late colonial period, Lee ignored the issue of revenue and focused on the questions of political economy and morality

that he associated with slavery.²⁵ When the motion for repeal of the 1755 duty came up again in 1760, the Assembly approved the measure only by a single vote. Governor Francis Fauquier feared the sharp political division produced by this issue would continue during the following session when the Assembly discussed repeal of the 1757 duty. Fauquier considered the debate on slave duties representative of a broader conflict between opposing economic interests in the colony. "The Contest on this Occasion is between the old Settlers who have bred great Quantity of Slaves, and would make a Monopoly of them by a Duty which they hope would amount to a prohibition; and the rising Generation who want Slaves, and don't care to pay the Monopolists for them at the price they have lately bore, which was exceedingly high." Fauquier conceded that "these reasons ... are not urged in the arguments on either side; but I believe are the true foundation of the Squabble."²⁶ The political division was not based on the narrowly-defined self-interests described by Fauquier, however, a real antagonism did exist between the proponents of a limited slave trade and those who believed more slaves would improve the economic status of small planters.

Following the repeal of the 1755 duty, the Assembly received and rejected a petition from "sundry inhabitants" of the Northern Neck asking for a reduction of the 20 percent duty on slaves imported from Maryland, the Caro-

linas, and the West Indies. This appeal presumably came from small planters or tenants along the Potomac who purchased slaves in Maryland rather than from gentry planters in the area, most of whom supported limitations on the slave trade. Fauquier had his own doubts about the legality of this duty, which he reluctantly approved only after the Council assured him that it imposed no additional duty, rather it enforced a standing act. Matthew Lamb, the legal counsel for the Board of Trade, found no objection to the levy.²⁷ The heavier duty on the intercolonial slave trade remained in effect because it served the interests of several powerful groups. Advocates of a restricted slave trade welcomed any duty which might limit the arrival of new slaves. Planters of the Upper James district hoped the duty would encourage the importation of African slaves rather than the less desirable ones from the West Indies. And the Board of Trade approved of any measure which discriminated in favor of British shippers in the African trade.

The return to a ten percent duty on slaves and the economic resurgence of the early 1760s attracted to Virginia slave traders who brought 4,630 slaves between 1761 and 1763. With the onset of another depression, slave imports dropped to 665 in 1764 and to a negligible 66 in 1765.²⁸ Opposition to the slave trade, however, did not disappear in the face of reduced imports. The resistance to the Stamp Act in 1765 called fresh attention to the limitations of an

agricultural economy reliant on slavery and the production of a staple crop. Various proposals for reducing British imports at this time included suggestions for the more productive use of slave labor in domestic manufactures. Private interest in developing a skilled labor force and reducing dependence on tobacco cultivation continued after the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766. By 1767 a majority of the Burgesses were convinced that a prohibitive duty on slave imports would contribute to a diversification of the economy and greater self-sufficiency.

In 1763 the Assembly renewed the five percent duty of 1754 under a new "Act for continuing and appropriating the additional duty upon slaves." This act, together with the renewal in 1766 of the original five percent duty from 1732 extended to 1770 a base slave import duty of ten percent. Then, on 23 March 1767, the House of Burgesses ordered Henry Lee and John Bolling to prepare a bill for establishing an additional duty on slaves imported into Virginia. The bill that Henry Lee reported to the House on 28 March called for a ten percent duty, to be paid by the purchaser, "over and above the several duties already laid upon slaves imported or brought into this colony." The bill stated that such a duty was the only possible import or export levy that would not be an oppressive burden. The Assembly reserved the right to apply the revenue from the new duty to a reduction in the poll tax or to any other purpose on which it later

decided.²⁹ The publication on March 19 of Arthur Lee's address to the Burgesses, calling for an end to the slave trade, suggests the bill was far more than a revenue measure and that the Burgesses in Williamsburg had been discussing the merits of limiting the importation of slaves.³⁰

The Burgesses recognized that the prohibitive level of the proposed duty might meet objections in London. The third article of the act as passed by the House on 9 April and approved by the Council and Governor suspended enforcement of the duty pending the King's assent. Although the Board of Trade and the King's Privy Council had consented to earlier duties providing revenue, Fauquier's refusal to approve any new duty in 1759 raised doubts about London's reaction to this act. The Burgesses' Committee of Correspondence directed its agent, Edward Montague, to use his best abilities to secure the King's approval.³¹ When the Board of Trade referred the act to Matthew Lamb, he questioned whether the act conflicted with the Governor's instructions to withhold approval from any slave duties which fell on the shipper. He also was disturbed by the act's preamble which declared all other duties to be oppressive. The Board of Trade too found the preamble disturbing, and it recommended disallowance of the act. At this time, the Board held "no particular objection" to the substance of the act, but in the midst of the American protest of the Townshend duties, it was hesitant to approve a colonial law

that asserted the provincial assembly's reluctance to submit to other revenue measures. If the Board permitted such an act, it would "only operate to restrain and deter the Legislature of Virginia from making further Provisions if such shall be required of them in future cases of Emergency." The Board's report made no reference to the duty's potential effect on the slave trade.³² The Privy Council accepted the Board's recommendation, and on 18 August 1768, John Pownall informed Governor Botetourt of the disallowance of the act, which never had gone into effect.³³

During the first session of the Assembly following the disallowance of the act of 1767, the Burgesses renewed their effort to establish an additional duty on imported slaves. On 17 May 1769, the day Governor Botetourt dissolved the Assembly and one day before the creation of the nonimportation Association that included a prohibition of slave importations, the House of Burgesses ordered the Committee of Propositions and Grievances to prepare a bill to lay an additional duty on slaves. When the Assembly reconvened in November 1769, the House repeated the order, this time to the Committee of Trade. The bill enacted on 20 December created an additional ten percent duty similar to that in the act of 1767. This time the Burgesses omitted the obnoxious preamble and promised to direct the new revenue to cover the charges of the colonial government. This act also

contained a clause delaying enforcement until the King granted his approval.³⁴

At the November session, the Burgesses reorganized the existing legislation covering slave duties so as to make the renewal of duties simpler and to protect the base duty on slaves imported from Africa. The original five percent duty, dating from 1732, and the 20 percent duty on slaves brought from Maryland, the Carolinas, and the West Indies were now combined in a single act and extended until April 1773.³⁵ The other five percent duty on imported slaves, originally part of "An Act for the encouragement and protection of settlers upon the waters of the Mississippi," and more recently included in "An Act for continuing and appropriating the additional duty on slaves, . . .," was now encompassed by "An Act for the better support of the contingent charges of government" which was to be in effect until October 1771.³⁶ These alterations may have eased matters for the Burgesses, but they further complicated the maze of slave duty legislation and dangerously confused the Board of Trade.

In Great Britain, slave traders and government officials reacted to the prohibitory intent of Virginia's new duty legislation. Merchants from Liverpool, Bristol, and Lancaster petitioned the Board of Trade for disallowance of the additional duty, which, they claimed, was actually a tax on the importer and would operate to the discouragement of

British trade. The Liverpool merchants argued that the colonial slave trade was valuable for all Britons because it encouraged the cultivation of cash crops and boosted the nation's foreign trade.³⁷ Richard Jackson, legal counsel for the Board of Trade, found the act for an additional duty to be legally proper, but questioned the commercial wisdom of allowing a high duty on so valuable an article of British trade. Jackson recommended the Board members approve the additional duty only if they found Virginia to be populated sufficiently with slaves or if they wished to redirect slave shipments to the West Indian islands recently ceded to Great Britain under the terms of the Treaty of 1763. The Board of Trade, which had considered the additional duty of 1767 solely as an issue of imperial sovereignty in revenue policy, now believed the possible interference with the slave trade to be so important a matter that it delayed its decision for four months after receiving the merchants' petitions and Jackson's legal report.³⁸

In November of 1770 the Board of Trade advised the King and his Council to disallow Virginia's act imposing an additional duty on imported slaves and to forbid the continuation of the "Act for the better support of the contingent charges of government." The Board mistakenly believed the latter act created a new duty which would increase to 25 percent the total charge on imported slaves. According to the Board of Trade, Virginia's Assembly intended to prohibit

absolutely the slave trade. Such an action, in the Board's opinion, would damage the economy of Great Britain and the colony. The lack of new slaves necessarily would limit tobacco production, which would in turn raise prices, reduce consumption, and ultimately decrease the Crown's revenue from the tobacco trade. In support of its recommendations, the Board also transmitted a 1728 report that another Board had prepared following an earlier attempt to establish a prohibitive slave duty in Virginia.³⁹

The Privy Council accepted the Board's recommendation and accompanied its disallowance with additional instructions to Virginia's governor, ordering him to withhold approval from a renewal of the "Act for the better support of the contingent charges of government" and from any act that increased the original duty of ten percent or interfered with the importation of slaves. The insistence on a duty no greater than ten percent suggests that the Council might have disallowed the additional duty even if it had understood that the "Act for support of the contingent charges ..." did not impose a new duty. In any case, the additional instructions had the effect of lowering Virginia's import duty on slaves to the lowest level since 1753 and barred the Assembly from further regulating the slave trade in the colony. Acting Governor William Nelson, in a letter to the Secretary of State, attempted to clarify the confusion over Virginia's recent duty legislation, but

to no avail. The colony's new Governor, Lord Dunmore, arrived in September 1771 with orders to reject any additional duties on slave imports.⁴⁰

The Associations' prohibitions of slave imports was ineffective in the face of renewed demand for imported slaves in 1770 and 1771. The availability of British credit and the rising tobacco market encouraged planters in the Upper James River district to invest in newly-arrived slaves. In both 1770 and 1771 more slaves were brought to the colony than in any year since 1763. In the months before the credit collapse of 1772, Virginia imported more slaves than in the two previous years combined. Support for closing off the slave trade, however, continued after the dissolution of the Association of 1770 and after the Privy Council refused to permit higher duties. The Burgesses maintained their opposition to the unrestricted slave trade during the years from 1769 to 1772 when Virginia enjoyed a favorable balance of trade. In July 1771 a contributor to the Virginia Gazette, calling himself "Associator Humanus," suggested that the Association's article forbidding the importation of slaves be made "perpetual, and most strictly obligatory." A coercive association was the only way to overcome the objections of a ministry which endeavored to increase the number of slaves in the colony and would never approve an additional duty. Some plan for ending slave imports was necessary, he argued, if the Virginians were to

maintain ideological consistency and encourage economic development.⁴¹ The special Assembly of July 1771, called to provide public relief for losses in the spring flood, did not take any action regarding the slave trade or the rejected duties. When the next Assembly convened in February 1772, it attempted to reinstate the long-standing ten percent duty. The bill presenting "An Act for continuing and amending several acts, and reviving one act, for laying duties" with the five percent duty from the recently expired, and now forbidden "Act for the better support of the contingent charges of government," passed in 1769. In an attempt to convince the Board of Trade that the new bill was not for an additional duty or a limitation on the slave trade, the text of the act explained the history of the second duty from its inception in 1754. The Burgesses also included in the bill a continuation of the duty on slaves imported from Maryland, the Carolinas, and the West Indies, although they changed the rate from 20 percent ad valorem to a flat £5 per slave. Finally, the act created a new collection procedure by which the Burgesses hoped to stop fraud and smuggling.⁴²

Before passing the act for a slave duty on 21 March, the House agreed to send an address to the King asking for permission to limit the slave traffic to Virginia. The Burgesses appointed a committee composed of Benjamin Harrison, Archibald Cary, Edmund Pendleton. Richard Henry

Lee, Robert Carter Nicholas and Richard Bland to draw up the address, which was unanimously approved and presented by the Assembly on 1 April 1772. The Virginians acknowledged the value of the slave trade for some merchants in Great Britain, but they argued that the prohibition of the trade would encourage the settlement of the colonies "with more useful inhabitants," to the eventual benefit of the whole Empire. The Burgesses' appeal also emphasized the inhumanity of the trade and the potential threat that unchecked importations might present to the security of the American colonies. In the hope "that the Interest of a few will be disregarded when placed in Competition with the Security and Happiness of such Numbers," the Burgesses requested that the King "remove all Restraints on your Majesty's Governors of this Colony, which inhibit their assenting to such laws as might check so very pernicious a Commerce."⁴³

Governor Dunmore agreed to support the Burgesses address, although for his own particular reasons. After six months in Virginia, Dunmore had an exaggerated fear of the colony's blacks (he thought they outnumbered whites by two to one), and his argument against the slave trade rested on security considerations. Ironically, he predicted an enemy army might draw support from Virginia's slaves and "encourage them to revenge themselves; by which means a conquest of this Country would inevitably be effected in a

very short time."⁴⁴ The Secretary of State, Lord Hillsborough referred Dunmore's supporting letter and the Burgesses' address to the Privy Council, but he gave Dunmore little reason to expect satisfaction. The council initially directed the address to its Committee for Plantation Affairs and five months later passed it off on the Board of Trade. In January of 1773 the Board read the appeal and Dunmore's letter but failed to record no further action on the matter.⁴⁵

Virginia's new slave duty act fared as badly as the address to the King. The Board of Trade considered the revival of the duty from the earlier "Act for the better support of the contingent charges of government" to be a direct violation of the Governor's instructions. The Board's report to the King repeated its earlier arguments about the dangers to the "commerce & manufactures of this Kingdom" that would result from prohibitive slave duties, and it recommended disallowance of the entire act of 1772. The Privy Council agreed, and in April 1773 Lord Dartmouth, the new Secretary of State, transmitted to Dunmore news of the disallowance, along with the report of the Board of Trade. Dunmore defended his support, insisting that the act only restored the traditional ten percent duty rather than create a prohibitive tax, but the Board adhered to its position and sent Dunmore additional instructions to reject any further duties.⁴⁶

When the last slave duties expired in April 1773, the economic collapse of the previous year had quieted what remained of a demand for new slaves in Virginia. The issue of the slave trade returned, however, in the spring and summer of 1774 when various county committees and the provincial Association demanded a prohibition of slave imports. The Assembly of May 1774 considered a revival of the duty act of 1769, but the Governor's dissolution prevented a vote on the bill. In the final session of June 1775, the Burgesses again reported a bill to reestablish the original five percent duty, along with the duty on slaves imported from neighboring colonies and the West Indies. The House later included these measures and another five percent duty in a bill for appointing Commissions to settle the Accounts on the Militia. Dunmore, who already had withdrawn to the safety of a British naval vessel, refused to approve the bill on the grounds that it was contrary to his instructions forbidding prohibitive slave duties. The House replied that ten percent duties were never considered prohibitive, but the ordinance as enacted by the Assembly omitted the duties, probably because the collapse of the custom service prevented enforcement. Although the colonial Assembly never had another opportunity to limit the slave trade, its repeated efforts finally reached fruition in 1778 when the Assembly of the state of Virginia became the first legislative body in America to abolish the slave trade.⁴⁷

During the Virginia ratifying Convention of 1788, George Mason referred to the royal disallowance of prohibitive slave duties as "one of the great causes of our separation from Great Britain." Allowing for the hyperbole of political debate, this statement reflected a widely held belief that was most clearly articulated by Thomas Jefferson in the Summary View and in his draft of the Declaration of Independence. The royal government, Jefferson charged, had forced slavery upon the colonies in their "infant state"; more recently, George III had exacerbated the wrongs of his predecessors by rejecting colonial attempts to halt the slave traffic, "thus preferring the immediate advantages of a few British corsairs to the lasting interests of the American states."⁴⁸ British responsibility for the introduction and subsequent support of colonial slavery was a comforting fact for Americans trying to reconcile slaveholding with republican political principles. Jefferson's charges would become a central myth in the southern defense of slavery in the nineteenth century. The involvement of the British in the development of American slavery, of course, was no absolution of the Virginians who purchased the Africans and made the decision to perpetuate the bondage of slaves and their descendants. Yet, in the 1770s, Jefferson's remarks contained an accurate critique of imperial government. The British had protected slavery

because the institution was essential to a mercantilist policy that encouraged colonial production of raw goods and restricted the development of manufacturing skills in the colonies. The continued vitality of the slave trade also strengthened British shipping interests and was an important contribution to Great Britain's balance of trade. Virginia had benefited, as well, from the British-supplied labor during the years of expanding tobacco production, but after 1750 many Virginians considered the state-supported trade to be one of several obstacles to the economic maturation of the colony. The failure of the various efforts to prohibit the trade heightened frustrations with the British government and made more ironic Virginia's deepening involvement with slavery in the decades following the Revolution.⁴⁹

Chapter 5 -- Endnotes

- 1 Population figures from Historical Statistics of the United States Colonial Times to 1970, part 2 (Washington, 1975), 1168; K.G. Davies, The Royal African Company (London, 1957), 43, 125-43. In the first ten years of the open trade, the separate traders brought 5928 slaves to Virginia, while the Royal African Company imported only 679.
- 2 Herbert S. Klein, "Slaves and Shipping in Eighteenth Century Virginia," Journal of Interdisciplinary History 5 (Winter 1975): 385-86, 409; Historical Statistics, part 2, 1168.
- 3 James A. Rawley, The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History (New York, 1981), 149, 164, 333; Klein, "Slaves and Shipping," 384-87, 394-95.
- 4 Klein, "Slaves and Shipping," 404-06; Rawley, The Transatlantic Slave Trade, 404; for operation of the slave trade in the English outports, see Rawley, Chs. 8, 9.
- 5 Rawley, The Transatlantic Slave Trade, 190; Klein, "Slaves and Shipping," 396, annual slave imports for 1727-1769 in Table 2, 385-86; Imports for 1768-1772, recorded in Ledger of Imports and Exports (America), 5 January 1768 - 5 January 1773, PRO, Customs 16/1. In 1770 Roger Atkinson of Petersburg referred to an African slaver going to James River: "He will sell well there, where all Guineamen come now." Roger Atkinson to Lionel and Samuel Lyde, 28 May 1770, Atkinson Letterbook.
- 6 Historical Statistics, part 2, 1168; Klein, "Slaves and Shipping," 385-86.
- 7 Nathaniel Burwell to John Norton, 3 Sep. 1770, John Norton & Sons, 146-47; William Fitzhugh to Stuart & Campbell, 3 Apr. 1772; and John Page to Campbell, 14 June 1773, American Loyalist Claims, PRO, T. 79/12.
- 8 William Lee to Francis Lightfoot Lee, 13 July 1770, William Lee Letterbook, 1769-1777, Lee Family Papers at Stratford; William Lee to Cary Wilkinson, William Lee Letterbook, 1769-1772, Virginia Historical Society. See chapter 3 for discussion of earliest proposals to employ slaves in manufactures during a period of commercial

resistance.

- 9 Richard Henry Lee, Memoir of the Life of Richard Henry Lee and His Correspondence, 2 vols. (Philadelphia, 1825), 1:17-18; George Mason, "Scheme for Replevying Goods and Distress for Rent," 23 Dec. 1765, Papers of George Mason, 1:61-62.
- 10 JHB, 1770-1772, 283-84; Proceedings of the committees of Caroline, Culpeper, Nansemond, Prince George, Princess Anne, and Surry Counties in Rev. Va., 1:116, 119, 146, 151, 162.
- 11 George Mason, "Scheme for Replevying Goods and Distress for Rent," 23 Dec. 1765, Papers of George Mason, 1:61-62; George Washington to James Tilghman, Jr., 17 Feb. 1774, GW to Henry Riddell, 22 Feb. 1774, Washington Papers, LC; Douglas Southall Freeman, George Washington, 7 vols. (New York, 1951), 3:327-28, 343.
- 12 George Mason, "Scheme for Replevying Goods and Distress for Rent," 23 Dec. 1765, Papers of George Mason, 1:61-62; "Rusticus" [Richard Henry Lee] to Rind, [176-], Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm); William Lee to Robert Carter Nicholas, 6 Mar. 1775, William Lee Letterbook, 1774-1775, Virginia Historical Society.
- 13 Francis Fauquier to the Board of Trade, 2 June 1760, in Elizabeth Donnan, ed., Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America, 4 vols., (Washington, 1935), 4:145; Darold D. Wax, "Negro Import Duties in Colonial Virginia: A Study in British Commercial Policy and Local Public Policy," VMHB 79 (January 1971): 39-40; Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 14 Feb. 1773, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm); William Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 23 Feb. 1773, Richard Henry Lee Correspondence.
- 14 Robert Pleasants to Anthony Benezet, 22 Feb. 1774, Robert Pleasants Letterbook, Library of Congress; Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 20 Mar. 1765, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm); Richard K. MacMaster, "Arthur Lee's 'Address on Slavery:' An Aspect of Virginia's Struggle to End the Slave Trade, 1765-1774," VMHB 80 (April 1972): 141-157.
- 15 Richard Henry Lee, Memoir of ..., 1:17-18.
- 16 "Associator Humanus," VG(Purdie & Dixon), 18 July 1771.

- 17 Richard Henry Lee, Memoir . . ., 1:17-19; MacMaster, "Arthur Lee's 'Address on Slavery'," text on 153-57.
- 18 Wax, "Negro Import Duties," 32-35.
- 19 Ibid., 35-36; Hemphill, "Virginia and the English Commercial System," 66-71, 88-91; Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade, 4:102-17, 122-27.
- 20 Text of Act of 1732 in 4 Hening 317-24. The act was continued in 1734, 4 Hening 394; in 1738, 5 Hening 28-31; in 1742, 5 Hening 160-61; in 1745, 5 Hening 318-19. After expiring on 31 July 1751, the act was revived by the Assembly in April 1752, 6 Hening 217-21; and continued in 1753, 6 Hening 354-55; in 1759, 7 Hening 281; in 1766, 8 Hening 193-94; in 1769, 8 Hening 336-37; and finally in 1772, 8 Hening 530-32.
- 21 5 Hening 92-93. The Assembly renewed this duty in June 1742, but the Governor withheld his approval. Philip Ludwell moved to revive the 1740 duty in October 1744, but the motion failed. Carter Burwell suggested another five percent increase in December 1748, and this motion also failed. JHB, 1742-1747, 1748-1749, 62, 69, 139, 322-25. The act for the 1754 duty is printed in 6 Hening 419. Acts continuing this duty in 1755, 6 Hening 468-70; in 1759, 7 Hening 282-83; in 1763, 7 Hening 639-42; and in 1769 when it was included in "An Act for the better support of the contingent charges of government," 8 Hening 342-48.
- 22 6 Hening 461-68; 7 Hening 81; annual imports in Klein, "Slaves and Shipping," 386.
- 23 7 Hening 338-40.
- 24 JHB, 1758-1761, 95-96; 7 Hening 363, 383.
- 25 Richard Henry Lee, Memoir . . ., 1:17-19.
- 26 Francis Fauquier to the Board of Trade, 2 June 1760, The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, 1:372.
- 27 JHB, 1758-1761, 211; Fauquier to the Board of Trade, 1 Sep. 1760, in The Official Papers of Francis Fauquier, 1:404.
- 28 Import figures in Klein, "Slaves and Shipping," 386.

- 29 7 Hening 639-42; 8 Hening 193-94; JHB, 1766-1769, 92, 101; 8 Hening 237-38.
- 30 Text of Lee's address in MacMaster, "Arthur Lee's 'Address on Slavery'," 153-57.
- 31 JHB, 1766-1769, 119, 123, 125, 129; 8 Hening 237-38.
- 32 Lamb's report in PRO, CO5/1332, ff. 35-36; Board of Trade to His Majesty, 29 July 1768, PRO, CO5/1368, ff. 184.
- 33 Privy Council Register, 12 Aug. 1768, PRO, PC2/113, ff. 305-07; John Pownall to Botetourt, 18 Aug. 1768, PRO, CO5/1375, ff. 25-26.
- 34 JHB, 1766-1769, 217, 289, 350; 8 Hening 337-38.
- 35 JHB, 1766-1769, 289, 302, 310; 8 Hening 336-37.
- 36 8 Hening 342-48.
- 37 Petition to the Board of Trade from Merchants of Lancaster, 2 June 1770, PRO, CO5/1332, f. 192; Petition to the Board of Trade from Merchants of Liverpool, 7 June 1770, PRO, CO5/1332, f. 193; Board of Trade to His Majesty, 23 November 1770, PRO, CO5/1336, ff. 182-85 refers to petitions from Lancaster, Liverpool, and Bristol.
- 38 Richard Jackson to Board of Trade, 18 July 1770, PRO, CO5/1332, ff. 203-04; John Pownall to Bamber Gascoyne, 20 July 1770, PRO, CO5/1368, ff. 19.
- 39 Board of Trade to His Majesty, 23 Nov. 1770, PRO, CO5/1369, ff. 26-28; Board of Trade to His Majesty's Council, 23 Nov. 1770, PRO, CO5/1369, ff. 5-54.
- 40 Disallowance on 9 December 1770, Privy Council Register, PRO, PC2/114, 653; Additional Instructions to Virginia's Governor, 10 Dec. 1770, PRO, PC2/114, 653-54. The Board of Trade had written to Botetourt (who recently had died) on 5 Dec. 1770 informing him of their recommendation for a disallowance of the slave duty act and for not continuing the "Act for the better support of the contingent charges of government," PRO, CO5/1369, ff. 28-30. On 11 December 1770, Hillsborough sent acting Governor William Nelson the Orders in Council for the disallowance and the Additional Instructions, PRO, CO5/1375, ff. 55-56;

Copy of additional instructions in CO5/1375, ff. 82-83; Dunmore's Instructions, regarding future slave duties, 30 Jan. 1771, PRO, CO5/1369, ff. 124-25.

- 41 Slave imports for 1768-1772 recorded in PRO, Customs 16/1, see note 5; "Associator Humanus," VG(Purdie & Dixon), 18 July 1771.
- 42 JHB, 1770-1772, 246, 248, 263; 8 Hening 530-32.
- 43 JHB, 1770-1772, 256-57, 283-84.
- 44 Dunmore to Hillsborough, 1 May 1772, PRO, CO5/1350, ff. 46-47.
- 45 Hillsborough to Dunmore, 1 July 1772, PRO, CO5/1350, ff. 472-73; Privy Council Register, 31 July 1772, and 19 December 1772, PRO, PC2/116, p. 395-96, 524; Journal of the Board of Trade, 25 January 1773, PRO, ff. 8-9.
- 46 Board of Trade to His Majesty, 11 Mar. 1773, PRO, CO5/1369, ff. 217-21; Privy Council Register, 5 Apr. and 7 Apr. 1773, PRO, PC2/117, p. 131-32, 160-62; Dartmouth to Dunmore, 10 Apr. 1773, PRO, CO5/1351, ff. 18-19; Dunmore to Dartmouth, 9 July 1773, PRO, CO5/1351, ff. 63-65; additional instructions sent to Dunmore by the Board of Trade on 27 October 1773, PRO, CO5/1351, (the latter does not contain the exact instructions but refers to the Board as having been correct on the matter of the additional duty).
- 47 JHB, 1773-1776, 85, 91, 201, 208, 278-80; 9 Hening 61-71, 471-72.
- 48 George Mason in the Virginia Ratifying Convention, 17 June 1788, Papers of George Mason, 3:1086; Thomas Jefferson, Draft of Instructions to the Virginia Delegates in the Continental Congress (MS text of A Summary View) and draft of the Declaration of Independence, in Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 1:129-30, 317-18.
- 49 For discussion of the importance of the slave trade to British mercantilist policy, see Rawley, The Transatlantic Slave Trade, Ch. 11, "The Economics of the Slave Trade"; See Richard S. Dunn, "Black Society in the Chesapeake, 1776-1810," in Slavery and Freedom in the Age of the American Revolution, eds., Ira Berlin and Ronald Hoffman (Charlottesville, 1983), 49-83, for discussion of the expansion of slaveholding

in Virginia during the final quarter of the eighteenth century.

Chapter Six: Commercial Development and the Credit
Crisis of 1772

The organization of commercial resistance in Virginia demonstrated the difficulty of establishing any measure of economic independence for the colony. As Virginians attempted to reduce imports and develop domestic manufactures, they more than ever became aware of the limited options available in an economy for which the tobacco trade with Great Britain remained the only regular source of credit. As early as the Stamp Act crisis, supporters of commercial resistance recognized that an effective defense against interference from Parliament or the demands of British merchants would require an ongoing effort to restructure certain aspects of the colony's plantation economy. The campaign against the slave trade was one manifestation of this attempt to provide a greater variety of opportunities for Virginia planters. The involvement with commercial resistance also prompted a broader effort to enhance the commercial flexibility of Virginia's economy. In the late 1760s and early 1770s Virginians explored various means of expanding the indigenous commercial community in the hopes of competing in the tobacco trade and tapping other markets. The related interest in the diversification of produce available for export was intended to allow Virginians to take advantage of varied opportunities

throughout the Atlantic economy. A proper degree of commercial development would enable planters to maintain the viability of their estates at the same time that they curtailed their involvement with British merchants.

The failure to reduce imports during the Associations of 1769 and 1770 called particular attention to the need for independent commercial activity in Virginia. Despite the best efforts of many, the great planters in the colony were unable to find a substitute for the credit and essential commodities supplied by British merchants. The influence of British factors operating in the colony had overwhelmed the planters and resident merchants who adhered to the nonimportation agreements. In contrast to Virginia, the northern colonies with thriving merchant communities of their own and more diversified economies effectively reduced British imports during the observation of their local associations. Throughout 1770 several writers in the Virginia Gazette recognized that Virginians would not be able to control their own economic affairs until the colony established certain commercial advantages beyond the scope of the current association. The prosperity of a nation's commerce determined its wealth, according to one writer, but Virginia did not enjoy the benefits of any significant commercial activity. "The tobacco trade cannot so properly be called the trade of this colony as of Great Britain, in as much as the merchants concerned therein mostly reside there, where

the profits centre."¹ Another writer cited the rise of Glasgow's merchant class in recent years as an indication of "what wealth is lost to the colony by inhabitants not having a greater interest in the commerce of the country." Great Britain achieved her preeminence through a strict regard for trade and commerce, and Virginia needed to follow her example if the colony were to secure economic prosperity.²

"A Friend to Virginia" realized that the absence of a strong merchant community, like the dependence on slave labor, deprived Virginia of the economic advantages that several northern colonies appeared to enjoy in the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Virginia possessed the greatest of natural advantages, yet the northern colonies "have supplied by industry and trade ... what their natural situation denies." Philadelphia, "though but of yesterday as to us," was a city comparable to those of Europe. Trade from that port, as well as from New York and Newport, extended the cities' influence to Europe and Africa. The commercial success of northern ports also threatened to absorb a share of Virginia's own trade. The ports traded without the supposed advantage of a staple crop, but "they have outdone those that boast a certain and dependable one and even from the very shores of such colonies, they gather wealth."³ Virginia's export and import trade remained the most valuable of all the mainland British colonies, but the recent, and rapid, expansion of trade in the port cities of

the northern colonies offered opportunities unavailable in the Chesapeake. Only an encouragement of trading interests in the colony would allow Virginians to build on its natural riches and maintain its leading position among the American colonies.

These writers understood that the development of commercial options for Virginia would require more than a nonimportation association, but they believed the effort would be "worth a few years inconvenience." The encouragement of trade would solve several economic problems in the colony including the scarcity of cash and the low price of lands. A manufacturing base to the trade would result in a more productive employment of labor and the introduction of new crops.⁴ The political conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies added a more pressing motive for developing an independent colonial trade. William Lee, writing from London in 1771, warned one wealthy Chesapeake planter that Americans ought "strenuously to endeavour to bring everything forward so as to enable you as soon as possible to live without the assistance of this country, for it does not require the gift of prophecy to foresee that it is a contingency that you must be put to the tryal of before many years."⁵

In the years after the Stamp Act crisis, and increasingly after 1769, Virginians interested in commercial development appealed to the provincial Assembly for public

support of new crops and internal improvements, for the regulation of trade in various commodities, and for other legislation favoring local commerce. Parliament and the colonial assemblies frequently had offered bounties for the cultivation of crops unavailable in Great Britain and had established favorable trade arrangements for these desired commodities. Various petitioners to the House of Burgesses hoped that body would offer similar aid to the ambitious schemes that were beyond the means of any individual. The Assembly continued to respond favorably to appeals which coincided with the traditional mercantilist goals of the Board of Trade and Parliament. The Burgesses were also willing to sponsor general improvements in internal transportation, provided the financial responsibilities were limited. The Assembly, however, was very reluctant to promote any scheme that might contribute to a restructuring of Virginia's economy or in any way challenge the interests of British merchants. Even in instances when a majority of Burgesses favored a proposed measure, in their official capacity they would reject any plans that might displease the Board of Trade or provoke the interference of Parliament. The members of the Assembly feared that public encouragement of manufactures or trade outside the Empire might convince Parliament to prohibit colonial manufactures altogether. The constraints on the public treasury during these years further limited the usefulness of the Assembly

for the promotion of commercial development. The Burgesses' repeated efforts to establish a prohibitive slave duty was the exception that proved the rule, and their failure confirmed the Assembly's unwillingness to directly challenge British commercial policy.⁶

Hemp was one crop that Virginians hoped would complement tobacco production and that coincided with the mercantilism of British policy. Parliament itself in 1764 had offered a bounty for colonial produced hemp, which the British navy and merchant fleet used for roping. Virginia's Assembly acknowledged this encouragement in an act in 1767 for the erection of warehouses for the storage of hemp before shipment. In 1770 the Burgesses added their own enticement for hemp production with a bounty of four shillings for every gross hundred weight of hemp made in the colony. Hemp production increased during the decade preceding the Revolution, but even with bounties, the costs of labor and shipping prevented Virginia hemp from competing with European imports on the British market.⁷

Since the days of the Virginia Company, periodic schemes for economic diversification had included suggestions for the production of wine, a commodity thought suitable for Virginia's climate and useful for reducing Virginia's dependence on foreign imports. In 1770, the House of Burgesses answered the petition of French emigré Andrew Estave with £450 for the establishment of a vine-

yard. The Burgesses appointed a Board of Trustees, made up of the Assembly's most prestigious members, to purchase for Estave's use one hundred acres near Williamsburg. They also built him a house, bought three slaves for his use, and appointed three apprentices to be taught the art of viniculture. If Estave within six years produced "ten hogsheads of good merchantable wine," the trustees would convey to him the land and slaves as a reward. Two years later, Estave had established vines and was ready to train apprentices presented by the trustees. At this time, the Burgesses also offered him additional financial assistance. After frost killed the season's grapes in 1774, Estave petitioned for more money and equipment, but the Burgesses had not acted on his request when the Governor dissolved the house in May.⁸

Robert Bolling expected the production of wine to solve several of Virginia's persistent economic problems. Vineyards provided a family income on a relatively small acreage and would allow many of the colony's poor to remain in settled areas rather than migrate to the frontier. Wine-making required the assistance of craftsmen, such as glass-makers, and would foster the development of towns filled with the supporting services of traders and artisans. Successful viniculture in Virginia would benefit Great Britain by reducing the price of Madeira and increasing the colony's power to purchase British goods. When Bolling in 1773 petitioned for public assistance in the establishment

of a winery in the hills of Buckingham County, the Assembly granted him £50.⁹

At the same time that the Burgesses offered premiums for the production of commodities in demand in Great Britain, they rejected appeals for the support of manufactures that would reduce Virginia's dependence on British imports. In December of 1769, the Assembly failed to approve a bounty for Virginia-made cloth, in spite of the Burgesses' near unanimous support of domestic manufactures in the Association of the previous May. The Assembly also rejected a petition in May 1769 from leather manufactures in the colony calling for a ban on the exportation of unfinished hides.¹⁰

The requests for public support of new trade commodities included suggestions for the kind of governmental regulation that already supported the trade in tobacco. An Augusta County petition in 1769 was the first of several requests for an inspection system for hemp, similar to that in operation for tobacco. Certificates of inspection would grant credibility to the marketing of a crop which varied widely in quality. The use of inspection notes as local currency also would extend to western counties the same advantages enjoyed in tobacco-growing counties east of the Blue Ridge. Despite these requests, Virginia's Assembly did not institute any such hemp inspection until the Revolutionary War years, when demand for rope increased the market

for the crop.¹¹ The Burgesses did move to regulate further the uniform size and quality of barrels for food-stuffs important in the West Indies trade. Flour, which, with bread, grew to "become a very advantageous article of commerce," required more detailed regulation in 1772. The Burgesses instructed inspectors, who were to have no interest in the flour trade, to guard carefully the quality of flour, the condition of shipping casks, and the honest weighing of filled barrels.¹² In the Northern Neck George Washington and others established a successful trade in salted fish, which they shipped to the West Indies for provisioning slaves. In 1774 residents of Fairfax County petitioned the Assembly for a uniform regulation of this new trade. The request, however, arrived too late for the House of Burgesses to act before its dissolution.¹³

The trade in several commodities dependent on West Indian markets suffered from Virginia's rum duties which diverted much of the West Indian trade into duty-free Maryland. Between 1769 and 1774, Alexandria merchants and several counties petitioned for the removal of duties from West Indian rum. Robert Carter Nicholas, treasurer of the colony, wanted to encourage new trade but explained that the "Duties on Liquors offered the principal Part of the Revenue appropriated for discharging the current expences of the Country."¹⁴

Similar fiscal concerns limited, although they did not

eliminate, the provincial government's appropriations for internal improvements. Virginia's commercial development, whether it involved new products in the trade with Great Britain or new markets elsewhere in the Atlantic world, required a reliable transportation system extending beyond the tidewater of the colony's principal rivers. For many years the Assembly ordered the clearing of Virginia's streams and established ferries or roads, but the expansion of tobacco, grain, and hemp cultivation into western areas demanded a broader government support of internal improvements. Augusta County's petition for roads over the mountains were supported by residents of Fairfax and other eastern counties who hoped to secure the western trade that otherwise might fall into the hands of merchants from Pennsylvania or Maryland.¹⁵ In 1772 the Assembly responded with funding for a road from Warm Springs to Jennings's Gap in Augusta County and another one over South Mountain in Botetourt County to Crow's ferry on the James in Bedford County.¹⁶

During the same session, the Assembly approved measures encouraging two ambitious proposals for opening the James and Potomac Rivers to navigation. The first act, authorizing a company of subscribers to build a canal around the falls of the James, would allow the growing merchant community around Richmond and Manchester to expand its trade into the Piedmont counties to the west. The other act,

establishing a similar company and permitting a lottery to finance a canal above the falls of the Potomac, would enable Alexandria and other Virginia towns to dominate the trade of areas currently falling under the influence of Baltimore and Philadelphia.¹⁷ Canals also offered the potential for the development of commercial centers in established areas of Virginia. The House of Burgesses in 1772 approved construction of a canal, "for the navigation of boats ... with heavy burthens," between York and James Rivers, by way of Williamsburg. Deep-water access would be "of great advantage" to the capital city, and "promote the improvement of navigation in other parts, which would make a great addition to the commerce and riches of this country."¹⁸

After the Assembly established the two canal companies, all planning and financing were the responsibility of the private individuals who subscribed. George Washington invested in the Potomac canal out of a conviction that the project would make the "Potomack the Channel of Commerce between Great Britain and that immense Territory which is unfolding to our view the advantages of which are too great & too obvious."¹⁹ The subscribers to the canal projects commissioned John Ballendine to tour the canal sites of England and to investigate possible designs for Virginia. Ballendine returned to the colony in 1774 with forty "ingenious mechanicks" trained in the construction of canals, but the Revolution delayed the initiation of work on

these waterways.²⁰

Other types of private associations and partnerships were formed to promote ambitious developments that the Assembly was unable or unwilling to support. The one hundred founding members of a "Society for advancing useful knowledge" established in 1773 intended their sponsorship of scientific research to produce commercial advantages for Virginia. The study of natural resources in the colony would "yield the greatest emoluments" to Virginians by providing new articles for trade. The encouragement of mechanical innovations would be particularly valuable in a colony with a scarcity of skilled labor.²¹

"Academicus" hoped the Society would provide the exchange of ideas that in other colonies took place in cities and that was a necessary prerequisite to advancement in the sciences or letters. By improving technical skills and expanding knowledge of agricultural sciences, the Society would extend benefits to the entire population. One immediate goal would be the discovery of alternatives to tobacco, a crop that "Academicus" found "completely adapted for restraining the Progress of Population, and national wealth."²² The search for alternative trade commodities led a group of Virginia's wealthiest and most powerful citizens to finance the Italian Philip Mazzei in his attempts to make silk, wine, and olive oil in the colony. Although this scheme of 1774 proved no more successful than

earlier experiments with silk and wine, Governor Dunmore and men like Washington, Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison and Thomas Nelson joined in the hope of finding products for export crops that would reduce the colony's dependence on tobacco.²³

The emphasis on new export commodities and the development of internal transportation networks offered few commercial advantages for Virginia as long as external markets and foreign credit sources continued to dominate the colonial economy. What commercial successes Virginians achieved in the decade before Independence owed more to fortuitous developments in British finance and Atlantic markets than to the limited promotions of the Assembly or recurrent private efforts to cultivate exotic produce. The expansion of British credit and the proliferation of new marketing arrangements in the late 1760s enabled a growing number of Virginia merchants and planters to participate directly in the Anglo-American trade. The demand for Virginia foodstuffs both in southern Europe and in the West Indies encouraged local merchants to expand their operations in those markets. The new opportunities, coinciding with the nonimportation associations, briefly offered Virginia merchants a partial fulfillment of their goal of economic independence. By the time the British withdrew the generous credit, Virginia merchants had enlarged the size and scope of their businesses and permanently raised their

expectations.

The influx of credit available to Virginia merchants most frequently came through the "cargo trade," in which British merchants consigned wholesale shipments of manufactured goods to the colonial trader who in turn sold the goods through a retail store. The Virginia merchant usually accepted the goods on twelve-months credit and paid for them with tobacco he purchased or with bills of exchange he received in other trading operations. The British merchant, who got the goods for the cargo from wholesalers and shopkeepers on twelve-months credit, profited from the large "advance," or mark-up, on the articles he exported as well as from the remittances of tobacco shipments sent from local merchants in Virginia, and from the five percent interest applied to all accounts outstanding after one year. The credit extensions from British tradesmen to British merchant, from British merchant to Virginia trader, and from local storekeepers in Virginia to their customers substantially raised the costs of British goods (the advance in the colonial store alone was often as high as 80 percent above the Virginia merchant's costs), but the availability of credit in Great Britain during the late 1760s and early 1770s and the simultaneous rise in tobacco prices encouraged Virginia merchants to accept cargoes from British merchants of every kind.²⁴

As early as the middle of the century, some specialized

firms in Glasgow began shipping wholesale cargoes to Virginia merchants. After 1765 tobacco merchants throughout Great Britain imitated the arrangement. During the boom years before the collapse of 1772, even consignment merchants joined with direct traders to ship cargoes in an effort to secure more tobacco and a higher, quicker return on their investments. Beginning in the late 1760s, firms like Robert Cary & Co., John Norton & Sons, and merchant James Russell that previously had catered to the largest consigning planters, added commercial accounts to their business in the colony. The scattered stores of Glasgow firms such as William Cunninghame & Co. and John McCall & Co. that dealt with the smallest tobacco planters, also advanced goods to resident merchants.²⁵

The generous extensions of credit from British merchants allowed George Fowler and his brother John to establish their own business in Virginia in 1769. In August 1769, George Fowler, an assistant of merchant Thomas Tabb in Petersburg, ordered close to £1,000 worth of goods on his own account from his employer's Liverpool correspondent. Three months later, John Fowler, a former assistant with the Virginia firm, Field & Call, joined with his brother to order more goods from the Liverpool merchants, Dobson, Daltera, & Walker. The Fowlers used the goods to open a new store at Bowlers, along the Rappahannock River in Essex County where they planned to specialize in high-demand goods

such as osnaburgs and Irish linens. In their initial proposal for a correspondence with Dobson, Daltera, & Walker the Fowlers stated their intention to make their payments in bills of exchange rather than tobacco or other commodities. John Fowler, who had experience purchasing goods in England and Ireland, was disappointed with the quality of goods they received and with the confused shipping instructions, but the brothers continued to order more items from the firm. By the end of 1770, they had received over £4,000 in goods from Liverpool. Despite a remittance of only £500 from the Fowlers in 1770, Dobson, Daltera, & Walker sent another £1,100 in goods in 1771, and in the first half of 1772 they forwarded nearly £4,500 more.²⁶ Landon Carter believed the prices at Fowlers' store were the most reasonable in the area, as well they might have been with such abundant credit from England. The store attracted a diverse business which allowed the Fowlers to remit a few more bills in 1771 and, in the spring of 1772, to ship a cargo of 236 hogsheads of tobacco, along with pig iron, copper, flax seed, and snake root. In the summer of 1772, however, the Fowlers still owed over £4,500 to Dobson, Daltera, & Walker.²⁷

The cargo offers allowed merchants who previously restricted their business to the West Indies trade to profit from the current tobacco boom. Occasionally individuals with little or no commercial experience were able to open stores on the basis of new British credit. Robert Beverley

found that many of the recipients of cargoes could scarcely be called merchants. They were actually "people possessed of very little more than an ideal Property, & who in general depend upon the Profits, which they expect from the Sale of those Goods, w[hic]h the Merchts of England have sent them to make even their first remittances."²⁸ British merchants were so eager to enter the cargo trade that Virginia merchants could obtain credit and goods from several sources at a time. Alexander and Peterfield Trent by 1775 owed commercial debts to British direct traders, London consignment merchants, and several Scottish stores in the colony. The Fowlers in their relatively small business had established a correspondence with at least one other British company besides Dobson, Daltera & Walker.²⁹ The entrance of so many Virginians into the cargo trade contributed to the record levels of Chesapeake imports from Great Britain in the years 1769-1771. Writing to his Whitehaven correspondents, Harry Piper of Alexandria found "the people to be running mad here, it would amaze you the number of ships and stores we have in Town." By November of 1771, Piper counted twenty stores and shops in Alexandria, and he expected more to open soon.³⁰

During these few hectic years before 1772, Virginians for once appeared to have an opportunity to assume the commercial advantage. When merchant Thomas Adams returned to Virginia in 1770, he wrote his London business asso-

ciates, with slight exaggeration, that "the principal planters from the great Prices they have lately got for their Commodities are entirely out of Debt & choose to be their own Bankers or to leave their Money in the hands of Men of more permanent Property," rather than keep it with British merchants. Prosperity allowed the Virginians to become merchants in their own right. Adams warned the Londoners that "no considerable consignments can in future be received at your Port but by sending Cargoes of Goods." Adams recognized that the cargo trade provided Virginians with an opportunity to challenge the pervasive and resented influence of the Scottish stores. "The Virginians seem to be gaining ground fast on the Glasgow Men in the Tobo Trade," he reported to London, and then added, "the latter were never in such low credit since their first Settlement in this Country."³¹ The Scots had proven that the tobacco trade was most profitable when carried out through a system of stores that sold goods on credit, in expectation of receiving future tobacco crops as payment. The offer of cargoes from British merchants provided Virginia merchants their first opportunity to duplicate the Scottish store organization, and they expected their involvement in the trade to undermine the Scots' business.

The hope for an alternative to the Scottish trade even took precedence over the nonimportation associations. When merchants Hartwell Cocke and Alexander Trent ordered large

cargoes through Thomas Adams during the 1769 Association, no one in Virginia challenged them. Adams, though reluctant to fill the merchants' requests, found that "the country seems inclined to indulge these Gentlemen as much as possible as they are great champions to oppose the Scotch Interest & it would be a Sin to leave them to Combat on unequal terms."³²

Of course, at the same time that the cargo trade provided opportunities for Virginia merchants to participate in the tobacco trade, the general expansion of credit and the rise in crop prices enabled the Scots to take control of an unprecedented share of Virginia's trade with Great Britain. The success of the cargo trade was limited further by the traditional dependence on British credit, albeit in a new form. During the Association of 1770, Richard Henry Lee and Landon Carter attempted to establish a "Patriotic Store" that would carry on trade to Great Britain without any involvement with merchants. Lee and Carter found popular support for their project but not the financial backing they needed.³³ A writer calling himself "Benvolus" urged other Virginians to follow the lead of the men from the Northern Neck and create some type of cooperative store. He accused the British factors of secretly advancing the price of goods more than 30 percent above the tremendous advances to which they admitted. The increased costs created such debts among the planters that "it is unnecessary to send troops here, for the people are already made captives with the ledger."

The writer suggested that planters from two or three counties might contribute the money needed to import the goods ordered by a group of subscribers. The goods would be sold only with the charges involved in importation and the operation of the store. Investors would receive 10 percent interest and the satisfaction of witnessing the "change from universal distress to universal happiness, from a state of debt and thralldom to one of ease and independence."³⁴

Several months after the dissolution of the second Association, a "Planter" in the Virginia Gazette suggested another form of planter cooperation that would restrict, if not eliminate, the influence of British merchants in the tobacco trade. In this writer's view the merchants' advantage arose from the regular meetings held during the General Court. "Do they not meet twice a year in Williamsburg to consult and plan schemes to enslave us, by setting their own price on our tobacco, and what per cent we must give them for goods?" The planters could challenge the merchants' control by organizing meetings at the local courthouses and establishing their own prices, below which they would not sell tobacco. Planters might also refuse to sell tobacco without the promise of a "reasonable" advance on the merchants' goods. The "Planter" reminded readers that they could not rest easy from the suppressed tyranny of Great Britain when "we are slaves to the power of the merchants."³⁵

The increased demand for grain exports after 1765 offered Virginia merchants one area of commercial growth where they neither relied on British credit nor competed with British merchants. Throughout the eighteenth century Virginia merchants had carried wheat and corn to the West Indies, and occasionally to southern Europe. Wheat exports from Virginia reached as high as 48,028 bushels in 1739, but wars and droughts interrupted the trade and forced exports back to around 10,000 bushels a year in the late 1740s and again in the late 1750s. During the decade after 1765, however, demand for American grain was so strong that wheat became the second most important export from Virginia, and in certain regions of the colony it rivaled tobacco. In 1768, Virginia shipped 140,252 bushels and in 1773 the figure reached 254,517, making the colony the third largest export- er of wheat behind Pennsylvania and New York. Virginia already exported the largest amount of corn of any mainland colony, 566,672 bushels in 1773; and processed bread and flour further boosted the value of the grain trade in the colony.³⁶ The foreign demand for grain was so strong in the early 1770s that in Alexandria, local merchants hurried to the edge of town to solicit incoming wagonloads of wheat and flour.³⁷

The value of annual grain exports from Virginia in the years 1768-1772 was still only about one-tenth of the value of the record tobacco exports of the period, but for many

Virginians wheat appeared to be the surest foundation for future economic growth. Roger Atkinson of Petersburg was euphoric in his expectations for wheat production. In 1772 he wrote to the London merchants Lionel and Samuel Lyde: "We shall in a few years make more wheat in Virginia than in all the Province of Pennsylvania put together, altho' it is their staple commodity..., our poorest lands will produce it in great abundance ... but the richer Lands will still produce it in greater Abundance. I do not believe there is a finer Country under the Sun, take it altogether, the rich land & the poor, for any grain." Articles in the Virginia Gazette echoed Atkinson's optimism about the future of Virginia's wheat trade.³⁸

Virginia merchants who hoped to profit from the expanding wheat trade confronted a persistent limitation on commercial development in the colony. A successful wheat trade depended on urban centers for milling facilities, for storage of the bulky cargoes, and for the ease of loading ships, but the development of port towns had been retarded in an economy where the British-controlled tobacco trade held sway. Although a few Virginia towns, such as Norfolk and Alexandria, grew after 1750 as centers of the wheat trade, most areas of the colony did not have access to local shipping centers. One writer to the Virginia Gazette in 1770 complained that "great numbers of our farmers labour under the necessity of carrying their wheat and flower to

Baltimore Town, and even to Philadelphia, for want of a sufficient market on our rivers." If grain or hemp were to become viable alternatives to tobacco, the first thing "necessary is to have towns erected near the heads of those rivers which penetrate farthest into the colony and are most contiguous to our fertile back counties."³⁹ Even along the tidewater reaches of the Rappahannock, Francis Lightfoot Lee in 1773 remarked on the need to ship Virginia wheat to Baltimore "for want of a market here." Virginia also lacked the shipping capacity to carry increased exports of wheat and foodstuffs. Much of the new trade fell into the hands of merchants like Willing & Morris of Philadelphia who purchased wheat along the Potomac River to supplement their Pennsylvania supply.⁴⁰

The unusual and ambitious merchant career of William Lee covered the range of commercial opportunities available in the Virginia trade during the decade preceding 1776. One of the only Virginians to establish a trading firm in Great Britain, Lee was in a unique position to understand the difficulties of developing independent commercial interests in the colony. Lee entered the consignment trade in 1769 and soon attempted to expand his business by advancing cargoes to Virginia merchants and soliciting new trade commodities. During his years in London, Lee also became involved in radical politics; and among the merchant commu-

nity there, he was a chief spokesman for American rights. His political activity, culminating in his 1775 election as Alderman in the City of London, further acquainted him with the limitations on the colonial economy and with the interplay of imperial politics and colonial trade. Lee had come to London to find a personal career, but he always believed his own success might coincide with, and contribute to, the improvement of Virginia's trading position. An early and persistent advocate of the nonimportation associations, Lee shared his lessons in trade and politics with his Virginia clients, many of whom were friends and relatives. The course of Lee's business and his correspondence with Virginians help to explain many of the pressures on colonial trade in the years immediately preceding the Revolution.

William Lee was born in 1739 to one of the wealthiest and most influential families in Virginia, yet upon reaching his majority he owned no land and held few resources. When Councillor Thomas Lee died in 1750, he left the great house and estate at Stratford to his eldest son, Philip Ludwell Lee. Three of the younger sons, Richard Henry, Thomas Ludwell, and Francis Lightfoot, each received land and slaves, but to his youngest sons, William and Arthur, Thomas Lee left only money and instructions that the boys should be trained in a profession. Philip Ludwell Lee, as executor of his father's will, further worsened the situation of his two youngest brothers by withholding the money due them from

Thomas Lee's estate.⁴¹ Even without his patrimony, however, William Lee was heir to a family legacy that would shape his private life and public career. The Lee family heritage had an important influence on William and others of his generation who, in a manner more typical of Virginia families in the nineteenth century than the colonial period, investigated their genealogy and the achievements of their ancestors. One result of this emphasis on family history was an awareness of the need for each generation to renew the family's wealth and reestablish its social influence. The Lee heritage also taught the Stratford children that economic success was predicated on public service and political involvement. The ability of Thomas Lee and his predecessors to adjust to Virginia's shifting economy and to utilize the advantages of public office had allowed them to expand their estates in unison with the growth of the colonial economy. And the Revolutionary generation of Lees, perhaps more than any family in the colony, identified their own well-being with the future prosperity of Virginia.⁴²

Philip Ludwell Lee, who inherited his father's plantation as well as his seat on the Governor's Council, had the easiest task of maintaining his family's influence. Richard Henry Lee explored new methods of plantation management and applied for various imperial appointments in an effort to emulate his father's career and accumulate an estate for his own children. All of the Lee brothers invested in western

land companies in the hope of connecting their fortunes to the areas of greatest economic development. William Lee, however, was the only brother in this land-rich family who found it necessary to concentrate on the possibilities of a commercial career.⁴³

After William Lee completed schooling with a tutor at Stratford Hall, he was uncertain how to support himself. While his brother Arthur, also without an estate, went to study medicine in Scotland, William Lee worked at various positions which taught him about plantation operations and Virginia's trade. He served as steward and manager of the plantation at Stratford during Philip Ludwell Lee's frequent trips to Council meetings in Williamsburg. Returning from a trip to England in 1761-1762, William became involved in scattered trading activity and may have served as an agent for the London merchant, James Russell. He became the Secretary of the Mississippi Company in 1763. Three years later, he was among the subscribers to Richard Henry Lee's Westmoreland Association. Lee's various experiences in the 1760s exposed him to a broad range of economic ventures, but without his inheritance he found no real opportunities in Virginia. In 1768, he decided to accompany Arthur to London where each of them hoped to find a career.⁴⁴

Upon arriving in England, William Lee arranged to go to India as a merchant, but his plans, and opportunities, changed in March of 1769 when he married Hannah Ludwell.

The Virginia-born Hannah had lived in London for almost a decade and, with her sister Lucy Ludwell Paradise, was heir to the estate and fortune of Philip Ludwell of Green Spring in Virginia. At the division of the Ludwell estate in 1770, William Lee found himself the owner of Green Spring plantation with its 7,030 acres, 164 slaves and valuable livestock. Within two weeks of his wedding, Lee decided to remain in London and enter the tobacco trade, provided he found support from his friends in Virginia. He noted at the time that consignments from his family would probably be sufficient to start the business.⁴⁵

A handful of friends and relatives, most of them from Lee's native Westmoreland County, consigned small cargoes of tobacco to William in the spring of 1769. The forty hogsheads carried by Captain Aderton of Northumberland County included 20 from John Tayloe who was eager for Lee to stay on in London rather than go to India. The other shippers were interested in improving the return they regularly got from the established merchants James Russell and William Molleson.⁴⁶ Upon receiving the tobacco, Lee advanced goods by return voyage in order to encourage his Virginia shippers. At the same time, he called on friends in Virginia and Maryland to advise him on the wisdom of establishing a full-scale consignment business. Richard Henry Lee assured his brother that in normal years he could easily fill a small ship with tobacco consignments and that

this would provide a foundation for a more extensive business. Francis Lightfoot Lee suggested that if William was to "vary at all from practice it should be in favor of planters & in those particulars where they think themselves imposed upon."⁴⁷ The Annapolis merchant Anthony Stewart was more cautious. Beyond the immediate disruptions of the imperial dispute, Stewart feared that the changes in the tobacco trade would render a consignment business unprofitable. The returns from the cargo trade were unpredictable, and the costs of credit extensions so high that a new merchant could not afford to send goods to Chesapeake merchants. Even when London merchants established their own stores for the purchase of tobacco they could not compete with the advantages of the Glasgow men. Stewart warned Lee that once a merchant engaged creditors and customers he could not easily draw back.⁴⁸

By the early fall of 1769, William Lee had decided to enter the consignment business on terms that he hoped would avoid the potential risks for merchants and planters. He proposed to sell tobacco for a flat commission of 25 shillings per hogsheads instead of for the customary 2-1/2 or 3 percent. He would advance money to no one and returns for the tobacco would be made in goods or bills for the exact amount of the sales. When Lee began to solicit consignments, he agreed to allow shippers to draw bills of exchange on tobacco before it reached market, but only under

certain conditions. After the tobacco sailed, the shipper could draw bills, at 60 days sight, for the amount at which tobacco was selling on the river of origin. Lee demanded immediate notification of such drafts and full insurance on the consigned cargo. He hoped to discourage early drafts by promising to sell the drawer's crop immediately upon receipt rather than wait for the best market.⁴⁹

The current boom in tobacco markets convinced Lee that a London business could bring him success. He found many merchants in the city who "cleared more in one year by the tob. trade than any man ever did by a Virga estate in seven."⁵⁰ Within two years of "tolerable trade," he expected "more money may be made ... than all my Estate is now worth."⁵¹ His knowledge of Virginia's trade would also benefit the consigning planters and, possibly, the colony's economy. Lee understood from experience the many complaints against the consignment trade, but he was convinced that his plan of operation would guarantee the planters a better price than they could receive in Virginia. A consignment business run from a Virginian's point of view would be Lee's service to the colony. Virginia needed patriots in England, as well as at home, and he was convinced he could "serve her as a Mercht here, much more effectually than in any office I can ever possibly expect to fill there."⁵²

On the recommendation of Philip Ludwell Lee, William

Lee negotiated with Captain James Walker to manage a voyage to Virginia in the spring of 1770. Lee was debating whether to charter a small ship for Walker or obtain space on the large vessel of another captain when he decided to diminish his own risks and enter a trading partnership with Dennys DeBerdt and Stephen Sayre. DeBerdt, his son Dennis, and Sayre were merchants with extensive American connections through their trading ventures to the New England and Middle colonies. The elder DeBerdt was colonial agent for Massachusetts and Delaware, while the New York-born Sayre had represented the firm on business in the colonies. Both men were noted supporters of colonial rights.⁵³

In January of 1770, the partnership of DeBerdts, Lee, & Sayre purchased the 350-hogshead ship Liberty for Walker's spring voyage. Lee, who had access to the personal contacts on which a successful consignment business depended, remained the principal director of the Liberty's adventure to Virginia. He took advantage of his Virginia connections by engaging his brother, Philip Ludwell Lee, and his cousin, Richard Lee, Collector for the South Potomac Naval District, to organize the collection of consignments in the colony. Philip Ludwell Lee assured his brother that, given full control over the ship's business in Virginia, he could gather consignments from the largest shippers in the Northern Neck and along the York River.⁵⁴

William Lee made his own solicitations for tobacco from

dozens of acquaintances and relatives along the Potomac and Rappahannock Rivers. To each potential shipper, Lee explained his business operation and suggested various advantages of dealing with a Virginian in London. With the assistance of his friends, Lee hoped to correct the worst abuses of the tobacco trade and expand the commerce of the Northern Neck. He promised a reasonable commission rate, an honest accounting of all shipping charges, and a full discount on duties for any planter who deposited money with him. Lee's knowledge of the "particular tastes of the Gentl[me]n in Virginia" would improve the quality of goods shipped to the consigning planters. Hannah Lee planned to assist in the purchase of fineries for the Virginia women. During this period of imperial conflict and nonimportation associations, Lee hoped that Virginians would support a countryman of sympathetic political beliefs, and he emphasized that his partners were "almost the only real Friends to America amongst all the American Merchts."⁵⁵

Lee was sufficiently familiar with the tobacco trade not to depend entirely on consignments to load his first ship. He enlisted the help of his brothers, Francis Lightfoot Lee and Richard Henry Lee, to carry out whatever contingency plans might be necessary to return the Liberty in time to meet the best tobacco market in London. These two brothers understood the importance of allowing the vain Philip Ludwell Lee to manage affairs in name, but they

became William's actual agents during each venture to the colony. For this voyage, William Lee instructed Francis Lightfoot Lee to purchase as many as 150 hogsheads in his own name if they were needed to fill Walker's ship in time for a profitable return trip. He suggested that Francis Lightfoot Lee watch the purchasing activity of the London merchants and their agents; if those men were buying in the James and York River areas, the price would remain high and Walker should prepare to sail with purchased tobacco. William Lee set ceilings on the prices for various types of tobacco and recommended specific warehouses from which tobacco usually fetched the highest prices in London. A less preferable, but acceptable, alternative would be to load planters' tobacco "on liberty of consignment" and collect the freight charges. If tobacco purchases were not feasible, Lee planned to send the ship to Annapolis where his friend Anthony Stewart would load her with grain for Oporto. As a final option, Lee preferred that Walker load available space with barrel staves rather than remain in Virginia too long.⁵⁶

Captain Walker sailed from England in mid-February of 1770 with instructions to land the Liberty in York River where he could load tobacco from Green Spring and contact planters at the General Court in Williamsburg before sailing to Yeocomico in Westmoreland County. By the time Walker reached the Virginia Capes, Lee's partnership with the

DeBerdt and Sayre had dissolved because of the death of the elder DeBerdt. Lee was well rid of DeBerdt's heavily indebted firm, but his purchase and outfitting of the Liberty, at a cost of £1,450, placed new pressures on his inaugural venture. Now Lee insisted on remittances from everyone who owed him for goods shipped in 1769. He also asked Philip Ludwell Lee for £1000 of his inheritance to keep the business in operation.⁵⁷

Walker managed to load a full cargo of tobacco only after annoying the several agents in Virginia and delaying the return voyage. His failure to collect important consignments that had been solicited by Philip Ludwell Lee forced the latter to add 155 hogsheads on liberty of consignment to the tobacco consigned to William Lee. Francis Lightfoot Lee, who criticized Walker for ignoring his instructions, helped salvage the adventure by loading 80 hogsheads of purchased tobacco. The Liberty also carried 24 hogsheads from William Lee's plantation at Green Spring. Of special pride to William Lee was the consignment from several Marylanders of a single hogshead of tobacco, the proceeds of which were directed to John Wilkes. Ballast of barrel staves and twenty tons of pig iron from John Tayloe's foundry completed the Liberty's cargo.⁵⁸

When Walker reached England in September 1770, William Lee had set up a household at 33 Tower Hill in London and, with his assistant Edward Browne, had established an office

at the same address. Lee was disappointed with Walker's late sailing, which cost him £3 per day, and with the large number of hogsheads on liberty of consignment, but the returns from the Liberty's cargo were sufficient to encourage an expanded voyage during the next season.⁵⁹

For the Liberty's second adventure to Virginia, Lee hoped to solicit larger consignments from fewer planters. He made a special appeal to his godfather, Landon Carter, who was reportedly angered with his London merchant, William Molleson. Lee hoped to pick up substantial consignments from Edward Lloyd of Maryland, also dissatisfied with his regular London merchant. John Tayloe agreed to transfer his business from James Russell to William Lee in return for Lee's promise of freight-free shipment of pig iron. In his instructions to Walker and his Virginia agents, Lee emphasized the importance of cultivating other large shippers like William Nelson, Richard Corbin, and Robert Carter of Nomini Hall.⁶⁰

Larger and fewer consignments from Virginia made it easier for Lee to market the tobacco in London and secured freight payments. Lee was especially anxious about freight charges in the winter of 1770-1771 when the threat of war with Spain and the impressment of sailors raised the costs of hiring a crew. In order to cover the costs of the out-bound voyage, Lee needed to load a full freight of British goods. He solicited cargoes from John Glassford & Co. and

other Glasgow firms that exported many of their store goods from London.⁶¹ He also expected his own involvement in the cargo trade to cover freight costs as well as insure larger remittances of tobacco. Lee's first advance of goods to a Virginia merchant was to John Gordon of Lancaster County. In November of 1770, he offered Gordon goods with no interest charged if remittances of tobacco were made for the full amount within twelve months. Lee made a similar offer to William Carr of Dumfries and shipped £570 worth of goods on his own account to be sold by Francis Lightfoot Lee. William Lee wanted to use these goods, the cost of which included shipping charges, to attract tobacco sellers if the crop was small. If tobacco was plentiful, Francis Lightfoot Lee could sell the goods for cash that was always needed to cover the expenses of loading the ship.⁶²

Walker's management of the second adventure again threatened the success of Lee's business in Virginia. The Liberty left London in November but was still at Falmouth in January. By April when the ship reached Virginia, Francis Lightfoot Lee could not sell the cargo of winter goods until the fall, and many consigning planters had sent their tobacco on James Russell's ship in expectation of a favorable early market. Walker was ill during much of his stay in the colony and spent the rest of his time socializing. The loading of the Liberty was principally the work of Richard Henry Lee on the Potomac and Francis Lightfoot Lee

on the Rappahannock. Walker remained four months in Virginia, which prevented the Liberty's cargo of 347 hogsheads of tobacco from reaching a satisfactory market in London. William Lee was still trying to sell some of the consignments in the early months of 1772.⁶³

Lee determined that a reorganization of his business would overcome the problems of personality and management that plagued his first two adventures to Virginia. In the fall of 1771, he fired James Walker and made Captain Charles Rayson a part owner of the Liberty. Rayson sailed in December to load consignments exclusively on the Potomac River under the direction of Richard Henry Lee.⁶⁴ William Lee chartered space for 200 hogsheads on Captain William Outram's ship which Francis Lightfoot Lee would fill with consignments and purchases from Rappahannock and the York River areas. Because London tobacconists were prejudiced in favor of any tobacco from York River, Lee suggested Outram's ship clear out from the York River Naval District.⁶⁵ For the outvoyage of the Liberty, William Lee obtained the freight of goods for several Scottish stores on both shores of the Potomac. He also advanced cargoes to the merchant firms of William Carr and Hipkins & Tomlin.⁶⁶

By the completion of this 1772 adventure, William Lee had developed an extensive clientele of regular consignors in Virginia ranging from Frederick County in the west, through the Northern Neck, and south to the York River. The

success of his business brought with it a more realistic awareness of the limitations on the consignment trade. Lee had hoped to reform the tobacco trade, but practical experience soon taught him that institutional obstacles prevented an individual from changing the system and thereby effectively promoting the interests of Virginians. Lee would have to control a dominant share of the market if he were to challenge the system of charges that reduced a planter's receipts. He agreed with Landon Carter on the uselessness of London brokers, but he could not sell tobacco without paying the fees of these long-established middlemen. Lee also found the consignment system to be the least efficient method of marketing tobacco in London, even when the leaf was of top quality. The separate sale of small parcels was more time-consuming than the commissions warranted, and when the tobacco was poor, as it often was, disposal of the parcel took twice as much effort.⁶⁷

Lee's activity as a London agent for his consignment customers was troublesome and unrewarding. In the summer of 1771, after searching for skilled servants ordered by several clients, Lee swore he would reject future requests in this "reproachful business." The expectations of special service from a Virginian exacerbated Lee's problems with the consignment business. After two years of trading, William Lee complained to Richard Henry Lee that the Virginians "have the same expectations from me that Jews have from a

Messiah -- that is, I am to make them all rich & Princes over the Earth." Lee's friends in the colony wanted unlimited power to draw bills of exchange, reduced freight rates, the highest prices for their tobacco, and goods shipped with no commission charges.⁶⁸ These unreasonable demands were particularly irksome in light of the weak support Virginians offered their countrymen in trade. All too often Virginians shipped their crop to British merchants connected with tobacco manufacturers or the agents for foreign markets, "when common sense will tell us that it is the common interest of these sets of men to keep down the price of Tobo."⁶⁹ Until Lee's fellow colonists recognized their true interests in Great Britian, they would never challenge the domination of the Scottish firms and the large merchants of London. He reminded Landon Carter that "the Virginians have one principal in general diametrically opposite to the most warrantable, if not the only one for which the N. Britons are remarkable. The Virginians by their conduct seem always to think any unprincipled, beggarly stranger, can & will do them more justice than a Countryman, & one too who they know has Property to answer for any effects they trust in his hands."⁷⁰

Lee's frustration with the consignment trade often focused on the influence of the Scottish traders, who, by the 1770s, affected even the London tobacco market. When Glasgow merchants flooded the London market in 1771, Lee

found that prices for all kinds of tobacco fell, notwithstanding the destruction of much of Virginia's crop in the flood of that year. The low price at which Scots regularly sold tobacco to the French further deflated London's market, and confounded Lee. Lee, however, could do nothing to counter Scottish domination of the tobacco trade, which he blamed on unethical business dealings in Glasgow and a Virginia inspection system that facilitated the sale of bulk cargoes of mediocre tobacco. His chronic suspicion of Scottish business practices was justified in the spring of 1772 when he warned his Virginia correspondents not to accept Scottish bills of exchange unless they were at a lower exchange rate than bills for the same amount drawn on London. After June of 1772 and the credit collapse that began in the overextended businesses of Glasgow, Lee refused all Scottish bills.⁷¹

The credit crisis of 1772 soon affected every aspect of British-American trade, bringing bankruptcy to some London tobacco markets and forcing others, like James Russell, to restrict their affairs in order to stay in business. Lee faced no immediate threat from the collapse of credit, and although he understood the need for caution, he also believed he was in a position to take advantage of the disruption in Virginia's trade. While his consignment business now insured a full load of the Liberty and was as extensive as he cared to handle, his cargo trade might

successfully expand in the wake of Scottish credit failures. Lee gambled that the Scottish factors would reduce their sales of goods on credit and curtail cash purchases of tobacco. If Lee advanced cargoes to more Virginia merchants, he could fill the demand for goods and procure shiploads of tobacco as remittances.⁷² During the first six months of 1773, Lee made his largest cargo advances to date: £800 of goods to William Triplett and George Thornton, £900 to Hudson Muse, almost £3,000 to the Trents and their various partners, and, to Daniel Muse alone, enough goods to produce a return of 200 to 300 hogsheads of tobacco. Lee preferred to advance cargoes to resident merchants in Virginia rather than to operate his own store, the fixed costs of which proved a burden to many direct trade merchants in London. Yet he was confident the Virginians, managing their own stores, would profit from the cargo trade. "The Glasgow men this year will hardly send anything from hence," Lee wrote from London in January 1773, "so these young men have it in their power to make a great beginning." After the Liberty returned with 372 hogsheads of consigned tobacco in the summer of 1773, Lee needed to charter a special ship to collect tobacco from his merchant correspondents.⁷³

Despite warnings from Richard Henry Lee and early indications of the merchants' inability to repay the value of the cargo advances, William Lee shipped cargoes to more mer-

chants in the early months of 1774. Merriwether Smith and John Mills each received goods worth £1,500. By the summer of 1774, Lee was aware that neither he nor his mercantile correspondents in Virginia were immune from the effects of the credit restrictions and falling tobacco prices. From that time forward, he advanced goods only to a few merchants who posted securities for the full value of the cargo. Other merchants, such as the Trents, were so remiss in payments that Lee ordered suits against them. Lee's advances had been so large, in such a short period of time, that remittances of 200 hogsheads failed to reduce some of the debts by half.⁷⁴

William Lee's late entry into the cargo trade and his steady consignment business saved him from the near ruin faced by other merchants who advanced cargoes during the boom cycle of the early 1770s. Yet during the final year of trade before the Revolution, Lee's major concern was the collection of debts from his commercial clients in Virginia. Like many consignment merchants, Lee had hoped the cargo trade would advance his business to the level of London's biggest direct traders, with importations of several thousand hogsheads a year. As a Virginian, he had the added incentive of promoting colonial merchants in competition with the Scottish factors. The cargo trade had enlarged the scope of Lee's business and temporarily boosted the fortunes of Virginia merchants, but neither he nor they

were any freer of British credit than the consigning planters or the patrons of the factors' stores. Lee could advance cargoes only so long as he received credit from the London warehousemen and tradesmen who supplied the goods. And the ability of Virginia merchants to make remittances, thereby keeping Lee's credit open, depended on a steady market for goods and tobacco, neither of which continued after 1772. Lee's trading experience in the years before Independence proved that the disadvantages associated with Virginia's tobacco planters were not to be explained simply by the corruption or collusion of British merchants. The promise of Lee's entry into the consignment trade and his later encouragement of cargo merchants raised expectations of commercial arrangements favorable to the colonists, but the collapse of credit reminded Lee and his correspondents that the foundation of Virginia's tobacco trade had changed very little. The impact of William Lee's intended reforms would be inconsequential as long as Virginians depended on Great Britain for the financing and marketing of their agricultural produce.

In varying degrees, the credit crisis of 1772 affected every Virginian who traded in the Atlantic economy and compromised the recent commercial advancements in the colony. Consigning planters once again faced the shortages of credit and bills of exchange that accompanied the peri-

odic depressions in the tobacco market. By June of 1773, John Tayloe believed that Virginia "can equal any part of the Globe in want of money and credit." The crisis was particularly severe for the planters who had borrowed money to finance the expansion and diversification of their plantation operations. Falling tobacco prices limited their ability to reduce outstanding debts, while the lack of further credit extensions suspended the improvement of recently purchased lands. The fortunate planters, like George Washington and Robert Carter, who had established alternatives to tobacco production found this depression less severe than others, but even these men depended on the tobacco trade and the financial services of London merchants.⁷⁵

For the resident Virginia merchants who had entered the cargo trade, the collapse of credit put an end to their opportunity to compete directly with the Scottish factors and London agents. During the three years before the Revolutionary War and the nonexportation agreement, the cargo merchants struggled to reduce the debts they had accumulated in the boom market before 1772. A glut of British goods, falling tobacco prices, and the scarcity of British bills of exchange in the colony made it difficult for the Virginia merchants to procure remittances of any kind. When they collected a shipload of tobacco, whether through the exchange of undervalued goods or purchases with local

currency, the proceeds were not likely to cover their British debts. The inability to pay for cargoes within twelve months added interest charges to the merchants' debts.⁷⁶

As early as the fall of 1772, the credit collapse endangered the business of John and George Fowler. At the October General Court in Williamsburg, the Fowlers could not purchase any bills of exchange to send to their Liverpool correspondents. The Scottish factors, who supplied many of the bills in the colony, were unable to draw a shilling, according to the Fowlers, and the exchange rate was up to 30 percent. Within the next few months, the Fowlers traveled to Alexandria and Norfolk just to purchase bills "at a dear price." In November of 1772, their store at Bowlers was selling goods at prices lower than the original costs in Liverpool. Dobson, Daltera, & Walker, hoping to keep their debtors in business, agreed to send small spring and fall cargoes in 1773, but the Fowlers' remittances over the next twelve months barely covered the value of those goods. In February of 1774, the Fowlers announced the closing of their store and began to press their own debtors for payments. Their troubles, however, were far from over. Interest charges of £253 in 1774 and £360 in 1775 increased their debts, while the closing of Virginia's courts in the summer of 1774 prevented the Fowlers from suing their customers for their debts. In the spring of 1775, John Fowler sailed to

Jamaica to sell his sloop and a cargo of grain, but, with the beginning of hostilities, the Fowlers did not send their English creditors the proceeds of this adventure. At the opening of the Revolution, the Fowlers owed over £7,000 to Dobson, Daltera, & Walker.⁷⁷

The severity of the credit restrictions in Scotland directly affected Virginia's small planters who had been immune to the worst effects of earlier depressions. The financial resources of the large Glasgow firms and the steady demand for cheap tobacco on the continent allowed Scottish factors to offer their Virginia customers a relatively steady supply of goods, credit, and marketing outlets, even during the market fluctuations to which consigning planters were so susceptible. The financial collapse of 1772, however, threatened the great Scottish houses with bankruptcy. These trading firms survived the crisis only by immediately curtailing their Virginia operations. On 1 July 1772, a week after the first bank failure in Scotland, William Cunninghame & Co. issued new instructions to its factors in Virginia. The company ordered an end to the factors' liberal drafts and limited future bills drawn to a fraction of the value of tobacco shipped. For the next year, the factors would receive "very Scanty Supplies" in order to clear out old goods and to encourage the collection of tobacco in payment for old debts rather than to use goods to attract new accounts. For the future, factors were

permitted to order only those goods that would find immediate sale or were necessary to round out the assortment on hand. The company also ordered the factors to close out the accounts of all customers who were not tobacco producers.⁷⁸ The impact of the credit collapse soon appeared in the prices offered for tobacco at the local stores of the Glasgow firms. Throughout the first six months of 1772, the Dumfries store of John Glassford & Co. paid 20 shillings Virginia currency for a hundred weight of tobacco. By August the price fell to 18 shillings, and for the next year the factors offered no more than 12/6.⁷⁹

Cunninghame & Co. and other Glasgow firms seldom sued for the collection of their debts, most of which were for less than £10, but the restriction on their businesses after 1772 had a disastrous effect on their customers, many of whom had nowhere else to go for credit, household goods, or the sale of their tobacco crop. In areas where Scottish factors dominated trade, frustrated planters supported various cooperative schemes to import goods and market tobacco on their own. In the fall of 1773, a Louisa County "Planter," angered by the low price of tobacco and the high price of imported goods, blamed the merchants for his distress and that of his fellow tobacco growers. He feared that the estates of Virginia planters were likely to fall into the hands of merchant creditors if the planters did not organize for their defense. This "Planter" recommended that

tobacco growers in every county appoint four men from among their number to represent them in negotiations with tobacco purchasers.⁸⁰ A planter from Caroline County wrote the Virginia Gazette about the support in his county for a similar association "to frustrate the ingenious Designs of the merchants."⁸¹ From Bedford County in the west came a more elaborate proposal. Local agents would be appointed for the marketing of tobacco and the procurement of imported goods; agents from the various counties would agree to a minimum price for tobacco sold in the country.⁸² The proposals for planters associations and cooperative stores often ignored or betrayed a misunderstanding of the substantial costs of credit extensions in the Chesapeake trade, but they focused new attention on the inflexibility of tobacco culture and heightened anti-Scottish sentiment. By 1773, more planters than ever before were determined to play a more direct role in the operation of colonial trade.

The credit crisis and falling tobacco prices put an end to the brief hopes of commercial independence that had flourished during the nonimportation associations and the economic prosperity at the opening of the decade. By the latter months of 1773, the pervasive nature of the depression had united the interests of small tobacco producers with those of the gentry planters and resident merchants who had tried to establish some degree of economic independence from Great Britain. The suffering and disappointment after

1772 contributed to the ferocity of colonial opposition to British policy in the spring of 1774 and prompted widespread calls for a renewal of commercial forms of resistance.

Chapter Six Endnotes

- 1 C. R., VG(Purdie & Dixon), 22 Mar. 1770.
- 2 Letter to Purdie & Dixon, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 14 June 1770, Supplement.
- 3 "A Friend to Virginia" to Mr. Rind, VG(Rind), 14 June 1770; the commercial development of the colonies to the north was a concern for many Virginians during the 1760s and 1770s, see e.g. "Associator Humanus," VG(Purdie & Dixon), 18 July 1771; To Mr. Printer, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 22 Mar. 1770; and A Virginian to the Printer, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 3 Mar. 1774.
- 4 "A Private Man in Essex," VG(Rind), 6 July 1769, and Gazette articles cited above.
- 5 William Lee to Edward Lloyd, 8 Apr. 1771, William Lee Letterbook, 1770-1771, Lee Family Papers at Stratford.
- 6 For government role in the colonial economy see Dickerson, The Navigation Acts and the American Revolution, Chs. 1-2; and Robert Johnson, "Government Regulation of Business Enterprise in Virginia, 1750-1820" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1958), Ch. 4.
- 7 For Parliament's bounty, see The Statutes at Large, 9, (London, 1770), Cap. XXVI, 185; "An Act for erecting warehouses for the reception of Hemp," 8 Hening 253-55; "An act for encouraging the making of Hemp," *ibid.*, 363-64; George Melville Herndon, "The Story of Hemp in Colonial Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1959), Ch. 4-5, 82-153.
- 8 JHB, 1770-1772, 17, 19, 96, 240, 265; JHB, 1773-1776, 111; 8 Hening 364-66.
- 9 JHB, 1773-1776, 16-17; VG(Purdie & Dixon), 25 Feb. 1773; Bolling and Estave carried on a debate on various aspects of viniculture in VG(Purdie & Dixon), 18 Mar., 29 July, and 2 Sep. 1773.
- 10 On 12 Dec. 1769, the House ordered James Mercer and Lemuel Riddick to prepare a "Bill for giving a Bounty on Woolen, Cotton, and Linen Cloths, made in this Colony," but a vote for the measure never came up, JHB, 1766-1769, 332; Petition of leather manufac-

turers: JHB, 1766-1769, 203, 206, 247, 288. The House declared the petition reasonable when it was submitted in May of 1769 but rejected it after being resubmitted in November.

- 11 JHB, 1766-1769, 210; 11 Hening 412-14.
- 12 "An act to amend so much of an act of assembly, intituled An act for the inspection of pork, beef, flour, tar, pitch, and turpentine, as relates to the inspection of flour," 8 Hening 511-14.
- 13 Freeman, George Washington, 3:243, 263, 267, 287; petition sent through Fairfax burgesses GW and John West, see Robert Adam to GW, 16 May 1774, Washington Papers, LC; JHB, 1773-1776, 123.
- 14 JHB, 1766-1769, 251; JHB, 1770-1772, 242; JHB, 1773-1776, 119-120; Alexandria petition presented 10 Nov. 1769 and 13 Mar. 1772; similar petition presented by Berkeley, Loudoun, and Frederick Counties on 21 May 1774; To Mr. Printer, VG(Purdie & Dixon), 22 Mar. 1770; for the Treasurer's defense of the rum duties, see Robert Carter Nicholas to George Washington, 9 April 1774, Washington Papers, LC.
- 15 JHB, 1766-1769, 253, 259.
- 16 8 Hening 546-49.
- 17 Ibid., 564-79.
- 18 JHB, 1770-1772, 251; 8 Hening 556-63.
- 19 George Washington to Thomas Johnson, 20 July 1770, George Washington The Writings of George Washington, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington, 1931), 3:17-21.
- 20 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 7 July 1774.
- 21 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 13 May, 22 July 1773.
- 22 Ibid., 5 Aug. 1773.
- 23 Mazzei's Outline of a Plan for Introducing into the Colonies of Great Britain in North America the Different Products of Europe" and list of subscribers in Thomas Adams Correspondence, Adams Family Papers; see also Dumas Malone, Jefferson the Virginian (Boston, 1948), 164-65.

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Chapter Seven: The Revival of Commercial Resistance

In the midst of the prolonged depression that followed the British credit collapse, Parliament provoked a new imperial crisis with its approval of legislation designed to encourage American imports of dutied tea. Virginians, already alarmed by the severity of the economic depression, the failure of recent commercial ventures, and Great Britain's repeated attempts to derive a revenue from colonial trade, interpreted the new legislation and the harsh enforcement measures that followed as a determined effort to secure the colonists' absolute dependence on British trade. Their response was the most elaborate plan of commercial resistance yet proposed in America. The Association developed at a series of county meetings in the summer of 1774 and approved by the former Burgesses at a Convention in August surpassed the previous associations in its complete regulation of all economic activity in the colony. The prohibition of British imports, the plans to halt tobacco exports to Great Britain, and the support for domestic manufactures were evidence of a popular resolution to protect Virginia's staple economy from the demands of British merchants and from imperial regulations. The widespread effects of the credit crisis and Parliament's subsequent interference in colonial trade convinced the great majority of Virginians that economic independence was a prerequisite

for political liberty as well as material security. As one county meeting explained, a comprehensive association provided "the only possible Means of avoiding that dependent commercial connexion which hath hitherto subsisted between the Colonies and Great Britain, [and] which hath induced an arbitrary and designing Administration to attempt the Total Destruction of our Rights and Liberties."¹

The legislation which precipitated this final imperial crisis was part of Parliament's reform of the East India Company and the tea trade, rather than an overt attempt to collect revenue from the American trade. As part of its plan to salvage the near-bankrupt company, Parliament hoped to increase tea imports in America and to grant the East India Company the profits from that enlarged trade. In the so-called "Tea Act" of May 1773, Parliament approved a refund of all duties paid on tea landed in Great Britain upon the reexportation of the tea to America. To further reduce its price of British imported tea, Parliament allowed the East India Company to bypass the colonial middlemen and sell the tea in America through its own agents in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston.² This legislation reduced the price of tea to a level competitive with smuggled Dutch tea, but the arrangement, with its implications of monopoly and royal patronage, provoked immediate opposition in the four port cities. Even greater protests centered on the issue of the tea itself, which carried the

sole remaining duty from Townshend's revenue acts, and which, in principle, the colonial nonimportation agreements still forbade. Popular political organizations, often with the support of local merchants, prevented the landing or at least the sale of the tea in each of the four ports and, in Boston, destroyed the Company's cargo in December of 1773.³

A recently established network of intercolonial communication allowed Virginians to keep in contact with other colonies and informed of their response to the tea act. The Assembly's Committee of Correspondence, created in March 1773, provided the Burgesses with information regarding developments in the other colonies and in London. The committee's London correspondent, prominent tobacco merchant John Norton, offered the first warning of the tea act and its implications for the American colonies. In July 1773, Norton informed the committee of Parliament's "Strides towards Despotism...with respect to the East India Company as well as America." The Company, according to Norton, was to be but "a Cats paw" used to establish a tea duty of three pence per pound.⁴ From the committees of Massachusetts and Connecticut came defenses of colonial rights and assurances of opposition to the landing of the East India Company tea. The private correspondence between Virginia committee member Richard Henry Lee and Samuel Adams provided the Virginians with additional information about the renewal of commercial resistance in Massachusetts.⁵

Articles in the Virginia Gazette further publicized the northern protests against the Tea Act and emphasized the commercial and economic implications for Virginia. A Charleston report claimed the establishment of tea warehouses in the four cities was "intended to pave the Way for introducing large Factories for other Goods at all the principle Ports, and then bring in an Honourable Board of Excise." The announcements of revived associations in New York carried appeals for similar support from all colonies.⁶

Although the Tea Act did not affect Virginia directly, the special arrangements for the importation of a dutied item provoked a new round in the Virginians' debate over the proper commercial regulation within the Empire. In the fall of 1773 two contributors to the Virginia Gazette attempted to justify Parliament's latest commercial legislation for the colonies. "Corporal Trim" of Suffolk in Nansemond County argued that Parliamentary duties were the proper price for British protection of American commercial and military interests. A certain "Landon Honduras" of "Cosmopolis" attacked the resolves of Philadelphia, New York, and Boston as a dangerous provocation of the British government. If Americans refused to accept the East India Company's ships, he feared the British might stop importing colonial goods. "Honduras" urged the colonists to rest content with the advantages of cheap tea.⁷

The popular opposition to the Tea Act quickly became clear in the response to these isolated defenses of Parliament. A letter signed by "Thousands" challenged "Honduras's" account of the northern resolves and dismissed his suggestions of threats to America. The northern colonies were virtuously adhering to an association which remained in effect for Virginians as well. "Thousands" contended that the Tea Act was "part of the abominable plan" that began with the Stamp Act and continued with the Declaratory Act and Parliament's betrayal of its promise to repeal the Townshend duties.⁸ "Landon Honduras" responded with warnings about the possibility of alienating British merchants and about the danger of inciting "the lower class, with who it may be sufficient to make use of the Term Liberty to make them believe a mere Question of Trade or Expediency has anything to do therewith."⁹ "Thousands" replied that Virginia's "Tobacco Trade is so extremely profitable to our Friends beyond the Water" that they would never cut off commerce with the colony. Landon Carter reminded "Honduras" that Parliament's duty, not the cheapness of tea, was the important issue. Carter admitted that Virginians made a mistake of importing tea during recent years, but it was done in good faith while other events in Great Britain had suggested a possibility of reconciliation.¹⁰

The nonimportation associations of 1769 and 1770 had

reduced Virginia's tea imports from a 1768 level of 23,804 pounds to 20,076 pounds in 1770 and 11,104 pounds in 1771. Although the prohibition on tea remained in effect after the Association's dissolution in July 1771, Virginians imported over 44,000 pounds of tea in 1772. Only a few devoted adherents to the nonimportation Association refused to accept tea while it carried a duty. Tea imports declined in 1773 as a result of the general depression in Chesapeake trade rather than from any observance of the old Association.¹¹

By January of 1774, however, Virginians were calling for a strict observation of the old agreement not to import tea. "A Lady's Adieu to her Tea Table" announced in verse that some Virginia families already had rejected the popular drink. Other articles in the Virginia Gazette discussed the unhealthy effects of tea, particularly that from the East India Company, and offered suggestions for herbal substitutes.¹² In February, the newspaper refused to print a letter, from King William County, criticizing the destruction of the tea in Boston and warning of the dangers from an enraged Ministry. Alexander Purdie and John Dixon denied that the British would seek revenge or retribution because the "Ministry, from past Experience are too wise to attempt any Thing against America which may affect its commercial Intercourse with the Parent State, whose Prosperity so much depends on that Cement of Nations."¹³

The editors of the Virginia Gazette accurately assessed

the value of the American trade but not the wisdom of the British Ministry. Lord North insisted on a plan to punish Boston and exact compliance with the Tea Act through a series of measures that confirmed the most exaggerated fears of American colonists. The Port Act, first of the four "Coercive Acts" directed against Massachusetts, closed Boston to all shipping except for a restricted coastwise trade in foodstuffs and fuel. The port was to remain shut until the city paid for the destroyed tea and compensated customs officers for losses sustained during several riots.

The Lee brothers in London immediately suspected that Parliament's drastic interference with the trade of Massachusetts presented a threat against the rest of America. during the debate on the Port Bill, Arthur Lee warned Richard Henry Lee that Boston might be the direct target of Parliament's action, but all America would lose. Lord North, having destroyed the opposition, "made the vast revenue & territory of India in effect a royal patronage" and now intended to do the same with America. The only effective defense, according to Arthur Lee, would be a "general resolution of the Colonies to break off all commercial intercourse with this Country." As difficult as such a measure might be, Arthur Lee assured his brother, "you would be amply repaid not only in saving your money & becoming independent of these petty tyrants the Merchants, but in securing your general Liberties."¹⁴ William Lee advocated

a similar response, with the emphasis on nonexportation. Withholding exports from the Chesapeake and Carolina colonies, he maintained, would be sufficient to bring repeal of the offensive acts within one year. A suspension of all commerce with Great Britain would also "in the end tend to the particular pecuniary advantage of each colony."¹⁵

Even before receiving word of the Port Act or his brothers' advice, Richard Henry Lee, a long-standing advocate of commercial resistance, prepared for the Assembly's response to any Parliamentary retaliation against Boston. The Assembly's meeting, scheduled for early May, was the first since news of the Tea Act and the subsequent protests in other colonies. Lee wanted to insure that the gathering of the Burgesses would be an opportunity for Virginia to condemn the Tea Act and take a lead in defending the colonies against any further Parliamentary interference. Acting on an expectation of harsh measures against Boston, Lee requested Samuel Adams to forward any relevant news directly to Williamsburg where Lee would be for the Assembly. He also suggested that communications from the Massachusetts Committee of Correspondence would have the most effect if they arrived while the Burgesses were in session.¹⁶

The Burgesses who gathered for the Assembly's opening on 5 May 1774 assumed the colony's response to any Parliamentary threat would be some form of commercial resistance. As the Assembly proceeded with its routine business during

the first two weeks of the session, the Virginia Gazette printed various reports of proposals for punitive measures against the colonies and of military preparations in Great Britain. In private, Burgesses discussed possible resolutions in support of Boston, and some feared a dissolution of the House. After the Virginia Gazette of 19 May published an official report of the Boston Port Act, the Burgesses immediately began preparations for a specific plan of commercial association. One member of the Assembly reported on 20 May a "universal determination to stop the exportation of tobacco, pitch, tar, lumber, &c., and to stop importation from Britain while this act of hostility continues."

William Carr in Dumfries learned of plans to end all imports and exports as well as to close the county courts to debt cases. When, on 22 May, George Mason arrived in Williamsburg on private business, he "found every body's attention ... entirely engrossed by the Boston affair."¹⁷

On 25 May, Richard Henry Lee drafted resolutions which he agreed to withhold from consideration until the House of Burgesses completed the country's business. The seven resolutions included defenses of the colonial assemblies' right of taxation, a condemnation of the blockade of Boston harbor, and a pledge to boycott East India Company tea. The precise terms of a commercial association were left to a proposed congress of deputies from each colony which would determine the most effective means of stopping exports and

would adopt "other Methods as shall be most decisive for securing the Constitutional rights of America against the Systimatic plan formed for their destruction."¹⁸ Two days before writing these resolves, Lee joined with several burgesses, including Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and Francis Lightfoot Lee, to prepare a resolution for a day of fasting on 1 June in observance of the enforcement of the Port Act. The fast-day resolution, submitted by Robert Carter Nicholas and approved by nearly the whole House, declared the Assembly's solidarity with the citizens of Boston and prayed for an avoidance of the civil war that surely would follow a continued disregard for American rights. The Burgesses intended the fast to alert the public to the danger from the Port Act and to prepare the colony for the sacrifices necessary under a strict commercial association.¹⁹

The governor, Lord Dunmore interpreted the fast as a "determined resolution to deny and oppose the Authority of Parliament." On 26 May, two days after approval of the fast, Dunmore dissolved the House before it had an opportunity to consider Richard Henry Lee's more radical resolutions. The Burgesses had anticipated a dissolution, but the timing came as a surprise. Most members expected the House to complete its regular affairs before it approved some specific action in support of Boston.²⁰

At Dunmore's abrupt ending of the session, following

the precedent of their 1769 dissolution, the members quickly reconvened at an extra-legal session in the Apollo Room of the Raleigh Tavern. There they accepted an Association which was signed on 27 May by 89 of the former Burgesses. This initial agreement urged all Virginians to oppose the "Determined system...formed and pressed for reducing the inhabitants of British America to slavery," but it failed to establish the detailed program of commercial resistance that many members expected. A "tender regard" for the interests of British merchants and manufacturers temporarily prevented the Burgesses from entering into a more radical agreement, although the Association recognized that a suspension of all commerce with Great Britain would be necessary if Parliament persisted in its unconstitutional taxation of the colonies. For the time being, the Burgesses reestablished their boycott of dutied tea and recommended a prohibition of all other East India Company imports, with the exceptions of saltpeter and spices, which were necessary for medicinal preparations. The boldest measure of the Association was Richard Henry Lee's proposal for an annual convention of deputies from all the American colonies. In his original draft for the Assembly's resolves, Lee had recommended that this congress adopt a uniform commercial association. In the aftermath of the disintegration of the Association of 1770, Virginians were determined that any future scheme of commercial resistance would provide for the full participa-

tion of other colonies.²¹

The opportunity for a more comprehensive program of commercial resistance appeared on 29 May when Peyton Randolph received copies of resolves from Boston, Philadelphia, and Annapolis. Faced with the enforcement of the Port Act, Boston's Town Meeting had decided that the surest defense, as well as the "Salvation of North America & her Liberties" would be a joint colonial agreement to refuse all imports from Great Britain and to cease all exportations to Great Britain and the West Indies.²² In a cautious response to Boston's appeal, the Philadelphia City Committee resisted a commercial association, for the time being, but accepted the idea of a general congress. Annapolis's Town Committee endorsed the proposal for nonimportation and nonexportation and distributed the Boston resolves to every part of Maryland. The committee suggested public meetings be called to discuss the possibilities for nonintercourse and a closing of the courts to all debt cases.²³

Randolph immediately gathered together the Burgesses who remained in Williamsburg and presented them with the letters from Massachusetts, Philadelphia and Annapolis. The 25 members at this meeting unanimously agreed to support whatever measures were determined on by the other colonies. They hoped that any joint agreement would include a nonimportation association, but they were divided on the issue of nonexportation. Randolph, Thomas Nelson, and Paul

Carrington believed exports should continue so that planters could reduce the private debts they owed British merchants. Rober Carter Nicholas led those who believed that an effective association needed to curtail all commerce. This small gathering refused to make a final decision of the enlargement of their recent Association but recommended a general meeting of all former burgesses. On 31 May, Randolph and the others sent their fellow representatives an account of their reaction to the Boston resolves and an invitation to an August 1st meeting in Williamsburg. The intervening two months would allow the former burgesses time to ascertain "the Sense of their respective Counties." Already the citizens of Williamsburg had "most chearfully acceded to the Measures" adopted.²⁴

Opposition to the Port Act was so widespread in Virginia that William Carr of Dumfries predicted "the sense of their constituents" would force the burgesses into a more radical association. Carr was convinced at least two-thirds of the inhabitants would support a total cessation of commerce with Great Britain.²⁵ A town meeting in Dumfries, held before word of the Burgesses' Association, responded to the resolves of the Boston Town Meeting with a resolution favoring nonintercourse with Great Britain and the West Indies. When Fredericksburg's Town Committee received the resolves of Boston and other cities to the north, it convened a town meeting which approved a general

association of the colonies. A joint committee of Norfolk and Portsmouth, on 31 May, called on the citizens of Charleston and other commercial cities to "to fix upon such expedients in the regulation of Trade, as may be most productive of relief to our suffering Brethren in Boston."²⁶ When the Burgesses returned to their home counties in early June, they found that these various proposals for commercial resistance enjoyed a popular support that never had emerged in 1769 or 1770. Harry Piper warned his English partners that this time the "Americans will undergo many hardships before they will part with their libertys." William Reynolds assured a friend in England that the fate of earlier associations was no indication of the unanimous support a new one would receive.²⁷

George Washington realized that the Port Act was only the most dramatic in a series of events contributing to the pervasive sense of crisis in Virginia. He noticed in June 1774 that "since the first Settlement of this Colony the Minds of People in it never were more disturbed, or our Situation so critical as at present." Virginia's frontier faced attacks from an Indian confederacy and the likely prospect of war, "whilst those from whom we have a right to seek protection are endeavouring by every piece of Art and despotism to fix the Shackles of Slavery upon us." The indefinite suspension of the Assembly also kept the county courts closed, and a shortage of currency further disrupted

business affairs. A freakish snowstorm and frost in early May had destroyed at least half the colony's wheat crop.²⁸ The misfortunes described by Washington complicated the lingering effects of the British credit collapse. Throughout the first six months of 1774, tobacco prices remained so low that planters refused to sell their crops. The rate of exchange between Virginia currency and British sterling continued to be well above par.²⁹ This accumulation of economic hardships and disruption in government laid the basis for the popular reaction to the Port Act. Great Britain's arbitrary restrictions on colonial commerce and disregard for the government of Massachusetts appeared to Virginians as proof of a determination to secure a permanent and absolute dependence of the colonies on British trade. The sequence of events involving the passage of the Tea Act, Boston's response, and Parliament's approval of the Port Act had special meaning in Virginia at a time when every planter and native merchant was keenly sensitive to the vulnerability of a colonial economy largely dependent on the British merchants and British credit. Not since the Stamp Act had a measure of the British government provoked such protests from all ranks of free Virginians.

However widespread popular opposition appeared in early June of 1774, the burgesses and other members of the gentry in the individual counties recognized the need to cultivate and organize anti-British sentiment if they were to avoid

the shortcomings of the commercial associations of 1769 and 1770. Only popular opinion and the appearance of unanimity could legitimate the proceedings of the August Convention that was, in effect, a House of Burgesses outside the jurisdiction of royal authority. The fast day was the first effort to convince the population that the affairs in Boston were a potential threat to all Americans. "The effect of the day," according to Jefferson, "was like a shock of electricity arousing every man & placing him erect and solidly on his centre."³⁰ A week after the fast day, Landon Carter appeared at the Richmond County Court to persuade the people that a commercial association would be the most effective defense against the British assault on American rights. Carter cleverly played on the prejudice against Scottish merchants, many of whom were the leading opponents of any commercial association. He argued that the Scots favored submission to British taxation because "they were strangers to Liberty themselves and wanted the rest of Mankind to live under the same slavish notions, that they have ever done, that is from a tendency to be arbitrary themselves they wanted to set the example to others." The image of Scots depriving Virginians of their independence was all too believable to the many Virginians who stood indebted to the factors' stores and had suffered from the Scots' restricted credit policy after 1772. Carter also argued that stopping all commerce with Great Britain and

closing the courts to debt cases would be an effective and deserved response to the failure of the British people to oppose "this Arbitrary Proceeding of their Parliament." After his speech, Carter was convinced the people of the county would be "Pretty unanimous" in support of nonimportation and nonexportation.³¹ Carter's friend Dr. Walter Jones also found that public gatherings provided an opportunity to persuade the community that commercial resistance would safeguard everyone's interests. Following a meeting at Farnham in Richmond County, Jones reported the "Many people who came there with an opinion, too common among the Vulgar, that the Law affecting Tea alone, did not concern them, because they used none of it had their prejudices removed."³²

Virginians developed a specific plan of commercial association on the county level at a series of formal meetings called to elect and instruct delegates to the August Convention. During June and July of 1774, at least forty-one of the colony's sixty-one counties held meetings and announced their recommendations for the Convention. The Williamsburg Association of May and the resolves of Boston's Town Meeting served as starting points for the county proposals which also attempted to correct the deficiencies of Virginia's earlier nonimportation agreements. The county resolves ranged from cautious agreements to accept the decision of a colonial convention and general statements of

support for an intercolonial congress all the way to demands for a radical break with all British commerce and for specific recommendations about the enforcement of nonintercourse. Some counties immediately entered an association, while most waited for the results of the Convention. The overwhelming majority of counties favored some form of nonimportation.³³

Attended by large numbers of "Freeholders and other inhabitants," the county meetings were an important device for guaranteeing that the popular opposition to the Tea Act and Port Act would translate into an effective scheme of commercial association. In 1769 and 1770, county meetings had served as a ratification of an agreement established by the burgesses in Williamsburg rather than as a means of collecting proposals from every area of the colony and from a wide range of citizenry. The process of instructing delegates in 1774 informed the freeholders that their support and participation were prerequisites to the success of this unprecedented political activity. The public gatherings also provided the local gentry with an opportunity to demonstrate their intention to participate fully in the program of austerity and to reassert at the same time their authority over county politics. At the opening of the York County meeting, Thomas Nelson, one of the county's wealthiest merchant-planters, announced that "we must resign the Hope of making Fortunes."³⁴ Repeated assurances of a strict

regulation of business activity, expressions of support for the poor in Boston, and the renunciations of extravagance guaranteed to the common people that all ranks of society would share in the burdens of economic sacrifice.

The Dumfries Town Committee called for the first county meeting in Virginia even before it received a copy of the Williamsburg Association or the announcement of the August Convention. When the meeting for Prince William County convened at Dumfries on 6 June, the assembled citizens had received reports of the proceedings in Williamsburg and found the recent Association disappointing. The former burgesses had "not fallen upon means sufficiently efficacious to secure us the enjoyment of our civil rights and liberties." Prince William County's meeting was fully prepared to accept the Boston Town Meeting's recommendation for complete stoppage of imports from and exports to Great Britain and the West Indies. The meeting also advocated closing the colony's courts to all civil cases until the acts against Boston were repealed.³⁵ On 8 June, a meeting in Frederick County in the west echoed the Boston resolves in their call for a joint resolution of all the colonies to stop imports and exports. Frederick's meeting followed the Williamsburg meeting in declaring an immediate boycott of East India Company imports and also suggested a network of local committees of correspondence that would insure the uniformity of a general association. Loudoun County's

meeting on 14 June resolved to cease all commerce with Great Britain until the repeal of the Port Act and until such time that "the right of regulating the internal policy of N. America by a British Parliament shall be absolutely and positively given up."³⁶

In Westmoreland County, where Richard Henry Lee was elected a Deputy and undoubtedly influenced the resolves, the meeting agreed to join a nonimportation-nonexportation association that included a majority of the continental colonies. The Westmoreland resolves of 22 June offered several supporting suggestions for the successful execution of a broad commercial association. No court action for the recovery of debts should be allowed, "it being utterly inconsistent with a Non-exportation Plan that Judgement should be given against those who are deprived of the Means of paying." During the period of nonexportation, no one should carry their produce to warehouses or shipping wharves, unless it be grain intended for other parts of Virginia or for other colonies operating under the association. The storage of crops at individual plantations would prevent "a few designing Persons" from hoarding commodities in expectation of a rising market when the ports reopened. The Westmoreland citizens also declared that anyone who agreed to the association and later disregarded its terms would be censured by the community.³⁷

Prince George County, in a set of resolutions that

served as a model for several other counties, offered more proposals to encourage the observance of a nonimportation agreement and to make economic independence a reality. As in 1769 and 1770, some Virginians feared the colony could not expect to exclude all British manufactures. Prince George's resolves suggested exemptions for tools, coarse fabrics used to clothe slaves, medicines, and paper, all items for which demand exceeded the production of colonial manufactures. Culpeper and Hanover Counties recommended exemptions for these items as well as for the saltpeter, lead, and powder required for defense. Chesterfield County wanted permission to import wool and clothiers' cards and other "Implements necessary for the manufacturing of Woolens and Linen." Albemarle and Hanover asked that "the necessary tools and implements for the handycraft arts and manufactures" be excepted "for a limited time." Jefferson's resolves for Albemarle County also recommended the free importation of books and printed paper.³⁸

In an effort to reduce the colonies' dependence on Great Britain for basic supplies, Prince George became the first of several counties to propose subscriptions for the encouragement of local manufactures. Public support of sheep raising and cultivation of hemp and flax would be another way to increase the production of the coarse fabrics for which Virginians never were able to find sufficient local replacements. The Prince George County meeting

elevated cloth manufactures to a matter of civic duty when it declared that "to be clothed in Manufactures fabricated in the colonies ought to be considered as a Badge and Distinction of Respect, and true Patriotism."³⁹ The authors of Chesterfield County's resolves recommended subscriptions for the promotion of "Manufactures amongst the Inhabitants" as the only guarantee of the economic independence that was a necessary foundation for political liberty.⁴⁰

The consideration of Virginia's scarcity of manufactures led once again to a discussion of the effects of slave labor on the colony's economy. Repeating the familiar arguments used in support of prohibitive slave duties, the Prince George resolutions declared the African trade was an impediment to the settlement in Virginia of freemen, "Manufacturers and other useful Emigrants from Europe," as well as the source of the annual increase in the colony's unfavorable balance of trade. Seven other counties repeated this condemnation of the slave trade and recommended extending the nonimportation association to prohibit slave imports in Virginia. Culpeper, Princess Anne, and Surry Counties' resolves proposed a prohibition on the importation of convict servants, as well as slaves.⁴¹

Despite the obvious seriousness of the county's support for a nonimportation association, the Prince George resolves made no mention of nonexportation. This was the first indi-

cation on a county level of the debate that had divided the twenty-five former burgesses in Williamsburg. At least seven more of the county meetings omitted all reference to nonexportation, while other counties publicized their objections or qualifications to this more radical form of commercial resistance. The Henrico and Hanover County meetings admitted nonexportation might be necessary if the British government persisted in its measures against Massachusetts, but "A love of Justice, and the tender Regard" for the British merchants and manufacturers convinced them to limit their support to a nonimportation agreement. James City County offered a possible point of compromise with a suggestion for delaying the effective date of a nonexportation association. The Albemarle and Fairfax resolves recommended that exports continue until the fall of 1775. Norfolk's meeting, with a large representation of merchants, wanted to allow "Time for the discharge of British Debts" before entering a nonexportation association.⁴²

Throughout July, various county meetings offered further revisions of the general outline of a commercial association. Essex County's meeting insisted that merchants pledge not to advance the price of goods above the general level in effect "for some time" before the association. Elizabeth City County and the town of Hampton concurred and promised to withhold all business from anyone who did extort higher prices. Stafford County's meeting wanted to broaden

the nonexportation agreement to halt all shipments of "wheat, flour, provisions, and lumber, to any part of Europe." Richard Henry Lee feared that the free exportation of grain to Southern Europe would provide an opportunity for unscrupulous ship captains to smuggle their cargoes into the West Indies. The meeting of Princess Anne County endorsed nonimportation and nonexportation with regard to British trade but instructed its delegates to oppose any restrictions on the West Indies trade which was so important to lower Tidewater.⁴³

Most of the county meetings intended the commercial association to remain in effect until Parliament repealed the Coercive Acts, and many also demanded a withdrawal of the tea duty. In his Albemarle County resolves, however, Thomas Jefferson wanted more extensive concessions from the British government. In addition to the usual demand for the repeal of the Port Act, Albemarle's resolves called for continuing nonimportation and nonexportation until Parliament lifted all restraints on American manufactures, removed all commodity duties payable in America, and ended all other restrictions on American trade. After Parliament agreed to these terms, the colonies would consider granting "Great Britain such privileges in commerce as may amply compensate their fraternal assistance, past and future."⁴⁴ The insistence on such unlikely concessions from a government that never considered the Empire a union of equal partners

raises questions about how seriously Jefferson expected or, perhaps, even desired a reconciliation.

Fairfax County, a longtime center of support for commercial resistance to British policy, produced the most comprehensive and influential of all resolves approved by county meetings in the summer of 1774. Ever since the Stamp Act crisis, individuals in the county had supported nonimportation and increased domestic manufactures as a means of pressuring British merchants and strengthening the local economy. In 1769, George Mason, a Fairfax justice and prominent planter, wrote the draft of the colony's nonimportation association and a Fairfax Burgess, George Washington, presented the plan in Williamsburg. During the Association of 1770, Fairfax's Committee organized a broad-based popular subscription to the provincial agreement. The economic interests of the county's planters and merchants, still actively involved in the tobacco trade but also leaders in the diversification of plantation organization and the development of non-British trade routes, placed them in a favorable position to develop a commercial association for Virginia. Of all the county proposals for commercial resistance in 1774, the final document issued by the Fairfax County meeting most convincingly combined a legal justification for American resistance, a workable plan of nonintercourse designed particularly for Virginia, and a regard for the long-term implications of economic develop-

ment outside the confines of Anglo-American commerce.

After waiting for Washington to return from Williamsburg and his York River estates, Fairfax County held its initial meeting on 5 July. The demands of the wheat harvest prevented many people from attending, but those present subscribed £273 sterling, 38 barrels of flour and 150 bushels of wheat for the relief of the poor in Boston. The meeting also appointed a committee to draw up resolves such as "the Circumstances of the County would permit us to go into." Within six days the committee completed a draft of resolves that was either circulated through the colony or distributed at the election of the burgesses on 14 July. A general meeting of the "Freeholders & Inhabitants" on 18 July approved the resolves with a few revisions.⁴⁵

Membership of the drafting committee was not recorded and authorship of the resolves, long attributed to George Mason, is uncertain. If the committee elected on 18 July reflected the constituency of the earlier group, the resolves were written by leading members of the county gentry and the resident merchant community in Alexandria. The text of the resolves strongly suggests that Mason and Washington were, if not the principal authors, leading contributors to this most ambitious of all plans for commercial association.⁴⁶

Fairfax County prefaced its specific proposals for an association with a justification of commercial resistance against the acts of Parliament. Recalling the agreements

developed by Virginians during the Stamp Act crisis, the Fairfax Resolves reminded the British that compliance with the navigation acts had never represented an acknowledgement of Parliament's sovereignty over the colonies. Virginians had accepted the navigation acts, "altho in some degree repugnant to the principles of the Constitution," as a convenient means of promoting trade within the Empire. As long as the colony retained control over internal affairs and all revenue legislation, Virginians did not wish to challenge policy that mutually benefited the commerce of Great Britain and her colonies. Virginians could not accept the recent series of Parliamentary acts that interfered with the colonist's established constitutional rights and jeopardized the commercial benefits of the imperial connection. Before the 5 July meeting George Washington decided that evidence of a "systematic plan" against the colonies necessitated some form of commercial retaliation as a defense against the ministry's and Parliament's design.⁴⁷

The first step in the colonial defense recommended by the Fairfax resolves was a congress at which all the colonies could agree upon a "General & uniform plan." The plan proposed by Fairfax County was a nonimportation association that would prohibit goods shipped from Great Britain after 1 September 1774. Inexpensive woolens and linen, some sewing and weaving supplies, nails, saltpeter and medicines from Great Britain would be exempt from the prohibition until 1

September 1776. Throughout the period nonimportation was in effect, no colony would import slaves, a restriction that the Fairfax meeting hoped to make permanent. Lumber exports to the West Indies would cease when nonimportation became effective.⁴⁸

The authors of the Fairfax resolves agreed with the Williamsburg Association on the need to boycott the East India Company, which they called the "Tools and Instruments of Oppression," but they insisted on recognizing the private property rights of the company. Following a satisfactory redress of American grievances, Fairfax County was willing to contribute to a reimbursement of the East India Company for the tea destroyed in Boston Harbor. In the meantime, all tea in Virginia and that imported before 1 September was to be publicly burned. If no subscription paid for the tea it would be stored, at the risk of the owners, until Parliament lifted the duty.⁴⁹

Under the terms of the Fairfax Resolves, merchants in Virginia would be required to take a special oath testifying to their willingness to abide by the nonimportation agreement. The colony's experience with the 1769 and 1770 Associations had proved that no plan of nonimportation could succeed without the participation of all merchants in the colony. Resident merchants in Fairfax County who had supported nonimportation in the past were particularly concerned that British factors not carry on business as

usual. According to the oath of association, anyone who received goods shipped after 1 September 1774 was bound to return the shipment or store the goods in a warehouse under the supervision of the respective county committee. Merchants and storekeepers were also to agree to sell goods at the same price that had been in effect through the previous year. County committees would certify all traders who took the oath and publicly announce the names of those who refused.⁵⁰ A "Solemn Covenant and Assotiation," to be sworn to by the inhabitants of every colony would be further assurance of a uniform observation of the association of the general congress. Committees in the counties of each colony would publish a list of all who violated the association, "That such Traitors to their Country, may be publickly known & detested."⁵¹

Washington was reluctant to endorse a nonexportation scheme when Virginians owed so many debts to British merchants. He feared that withholding remittances would lessen the credibility of colonial demands for justice. "Nothing less than the last extremity," he felt, "can justify it." The question was whether the colony had reached that extreme. The Fairfax Committee was willing to wait one year and schedule nonexportation to go into effect in September 1775 if Parliament had not repealed by that time the Coercive Acts and all revenue duties. The general meeting for Fairfax County on 18 July 1774 voted to delay

nonexportation until 1 November 1775. In preparation for a nonexportation agreement, subscribers to the Fairfax Resolves agreed not to plant tobacco after the harvest of the current crop. If the general congress of the colonies decided upon a nonexportation association, the Fairfax Resolves recommended immediately closing the courts to all judgments on debts cases.⁵²

Throughout the Fairfax Resolves, the committee offered assurances of the County's desire to restore the prosperous relationship that once had served both Mother Country and colony. One resolve specifically denied the rumors that the American colonies intended to establish an independent union. "While we are treated upon an equal footing with our fellow Subjects, the motives of self interest and preservation" would persuade Virginians to contribute to the costs of defending the Empire, "But tho we are its Subjects, we will use every means, which Heaven hath given us, to prevent our becoming its slaves." Fairfax County recommended to the general congress that it prepare a petition to the King explaining the colonies' desire to remain under his authority but warning of their determination to resist the unconstitutional acts of his Parliament. The Fairfax meeting suggested that the petition remind the King "that from our Sovereign, there can be but one Appeal."⁵³

The cumulative effect of the Fairfax resolves was to balance a radical challenge to Parliamentary authority and

British domination of colonial commerce with a careful regard for the internal order of Virginia society. The denial of Parliamentary sovereignty was followed by an extended legal justification of colonial resistance and an affirmation of the gentry's leadership in the local community. Proposals for diminishing the colony's reliance on British capital and credit were accompanied by a recognition of the rights of private property and a protection of private debts through the postponement of nonexportation. Here was an outline of the ideal economic society as envisioned by the men who drafted the resolves. The principal men of the colony would direct the development of a more independent economy through their personal example and their financial encouragement of manufacturers and smaller planters. The proposed association fully incorporated the local merchants and regulated their commercial activity according to the needs and welfare of the community. The long-range results of such a commercial association would be an integrated economy in which merchants, manufacturers and skilled, free laborers supported the dominant agricultural interests of the planter gentry.

Only a few county meetings dissented from the general support for a commercial association. Middlesex County's meeting condemned the Port Act and Parliament's attempts to raise a revenue in the colonies, but was quick to disassociate itself from the destruction of the tea in Boston. The

Middlesex resolves approved the boycott of East India goods and the prohibition of British luxury items but dismissed the proposals for a more extensive nonimportation-nonexportation association as "injurious to the Commerce, and fatal to the Credit, of this Colony." Subscribers to the Middlesex resolves were more interested in instructing their deputies to avoid any course of action that might result in another dissolution of the Assembly. Dinwiddie County's meeting also criticized "the Outrages committed by the People of Boston in destroying the private Property of the East India Company," although it was equally critical of Parliament's excessive reaction. The Dinwiddie resolves, like those of Accomack County, supported the August Convention but omitted all reference of nonimportation or nonexportation.⁵⁴

Isolated individuals who supported a moderate course of opposition found it difficult to influence the county meetings. Robert Beverley went to the Essex County meeting of 9 July with a draft of resolves that stopped short of a commercial association. The meeting rejected Beverley's suggestions and appeared to go out of its way to refute those who counseled caution. The approved resolves of Essex County declared that any censure of the Boston Tea Party was "inimical to American Liberty" and rejected any reimbursement of the East India Company unless it be a condition for the repeal of all offensive legislation. If the Essex

County meeting made any concession to Beverley it was in the resolve acknowledging that the recommended nonexportation association would unfortunately injure merchants and manufacturers who had supported the trade of America. "Nothing but the Desire of preserving our Rights and Liberties could induce [the Essex County meeting] to adopt a Measure big with such melancholy Consequences."⁵⁵ The strength of public opinion favoring a commercial association persuaded Bryan Fairfax that he could not stand for election as a deputy when he opposed nonimportation. Fairfax's critique of the radical stance of his county's resolves never even entered the public debate. When he received a copy of the proposed resolves for the Fairfax County, Bryan Fairfax wrote Washington of his objections to the denial of Parliamentary sovereignty and his preference for a petition to the King rather than a nonimportation association. Washington received the letter in the midst of the county's 18 July meeting, read Fairfax's criticism, and circulated the letter among the other officers at the meeting, whereupon they agreed it was useless to present the letter to the general meeting which was already nearly unanimous in support of the proposed resolves. The same insistence on a public appearance of unanimity was evident at Norfolk's meeting where the reluctant merchants found their names added to the roster of the county committee.⁵⁶

During the month preceding the August Convention, two

other opponents of nonimportation presented their case in the public press. Thomson Mason, a lawyer from Stafford County and brother to George Mason, considered a commercial association an inappropriate and possibly counterproductive form of protest against Parliament. Mason, who was a steady opponent of Parliament's recent acts, doubted that Virginians were capable of the sacrifices that would be necessary during a complete boycott of British goods. His sarcastic vision of half-clothed planters living in log cabins together with naked slaves reflected his lack of confidence in the potential for self-sufficiency on Virginia's plantations. In a series of letters printed in the Virginia Gazette and signed by "A British American," Mason argued that the strategy of commercial resistance was misconceived because it injured the merchants and manufacturers who were not responsible for ministerial policy. Mason was even more dismissive of the proposals for nonexportation which he considered dishonest and equally misdirected. If the nonexportation of tobacco was intended to reduce government revenues, the British would counter the effect by creating new taxes on other commodities. Nonexportation as a means of withholding debt payments again hurt merchants who were friends of the colonists and would alienate future sources of credit throughout Europe.⁵⁷

John Randolph, attorney general for Virginia and brother of the Speaker of the House of Burgesses, Peyton

Randolph, published his objections to the association proposals in the anonymous pamphlet Considerations on the Present State of Virginia. Randolph's derision of public opinion and his sardonic tone made this tract more an indulgence in self-justification than an attempt at political persuasion. A new nonimportation association would prove no more viable than earlier ones, said Randolph, who even doubted the Virginians' ability to surrender their tea habit. Nonexportation would unjustly hurt the innocent men who produced crops for external markets and the merchants who had advanced credit to the colonists. Neither form of commercial resistance would have any effect on a powerful British government that could easily compensate for the loss in trade. Randolph anticipated that the most likely result of American opposition would be further restrictions on American commerce and government.⁵⁸

Thomson Mason and John Randolph, like Robert Beverley, Bryan Fairfax and earlier opponents of commercial resistance, represented the same political and economic interests, indeed the same families, as some of the leading architects of the associations. What separated these individuals from the popular support for nonimportation was their faith in the responsiveness of the British government, their identification of Virginia's economic development with the imperial connection, and their doubts about the efficacy of commercial resistance. The sacrifices and disruptions of

a commercial association appeared unnecessary to these men who were confident that the King and Parliament would respond favorably to a rational presentation of American grievances. They likewise saw the proposals for nonimportation and nonexportation as dangerous threats to the trade that formed the most important of mutually advantageous bonds between the Mother Country and the American colonies. Randolph, in particular, feared that a dissolution of commercial ties would precipitate the decline of Great Britain as a world power and bring America under the dominion of a less benevolent nation. At a time when most of Virginia's political leaders emphasized the limitations of economic dependence on Great Britain and popular opinion distrusted the motivations of Parliament, these opponents of nonimportation found themselves isolated and politically impotent.⁵⁹

The central debate in Virginia during the summer of 1774 was not over the advisability of a commercial association but rather how far such an agreement should extend. By July, individuals throughout the colony informally and enthusiastically had adopted the nonconsumption agreement regarding tea and other East India Company goods. The county resolves published in the Virginia Gazette announced the widespread support for an extended nonimportation association. These same resolves indicated that the principal sources of division among supporters of a commercial asso-

ciation were the related issues of putting a stop to exports and closing the courts to civil cases. Advocates of nonexportation intended the wider association to place added pressure on the British government by reducing revenue from import duties in Great Britain and by curtailing merchants' profits from the American trade. Because even the announcement of a future nonexportation association was likely to produce a flood of suits for recovery from British creditors, the proposals to halt exports usually included provisions for shutting the courts to all debt cases in order to protect indebted planters who had no means of making remittances during an association and in order to apply additional pressure on British merchants. Nowhere was the issue of nonexportation and debt repayment more complicated than in the Chesapeake colonies where by 1774 per capita debts owed to British merchants had reached unprecedented levels and were substantially higher than in other colonies.⁶⁰

At stake were the personal honor of Virginia's debtors, the future availability of British credit, and, of no small consequence, debtor-creditor relations between Virginians.

During the summer debate on nonexportation, the county courts in Virginia, in fact, had already closed because of the expiration of the Fee Bill in April of 1774. The House of Burgesses planned to renew the act regulating the payments for county clerks, sheriffs, coroners, and surveyors but was dissolved before the bill came to a vote.

The technicality of the Fee Bill's expiration presented an opportunity for those who wanted to keep the courts closed as a means of commercial resistance. The lack of stamps had served as a similar excuse for shutting the courts in 1765-1766 when British merchants came to the aid of Americans in an effort to resume business as usual. Before the dissolution of the Assembly, some Virginians recommended closing the courts again in protest of the Port Act. In July James Robinson reported that in several counties it was freely admitted that the Coercive Acts were the true reason courts were closed.⁶¹

The merchants meeting in Williamsburg during the first week of June petitioned Governor Dunmore for a new assembly to renew the fee bill, but the Governor had assured the ministry that he would postpone another gathering of the Burgesses. A week later, the Council unanimously recommended that the Governor issue writs for the election of a new assembly in order to renew the fee bill and prepare an adequate defense of the frontier. The Governor again protested that a meeting of the Assembly would run counter to his reports home, as well as present the opportunity for more "violent resolves." After consulting with the Council on the following day, Dunmore reluctantly issued writs for a new assembly, to meet on August 11. The writs were quickly followed by a secret letter to Dartmouth in which Dunmore assured the Secretary that he had no intention of allowing

the Assembly to meet without permission from the ministry. Many counties held elections, often in conjunction with the approval of resolves for the August 1 Convention, but Richard Henry Lee suspected the Governor's plans and urged all his fellow representatives to attend the earlier Convention since that was likely to be the only opportunity for a general meeting in the colony. On 8 July, as he prepared a military expedition to the west, Dunmore prorogued the Assembly until November.⁶² The fate of the courts would now be determined by the Convention's decision on nonexportation.

Frustrated and suspicious merchants like James Parker of Norfolk became convinced that the court closings and nonexportation were an excuse for the evasion of debts. According to Parker, "calling a man a Patriot here is saying he is in bad Circumstances."⁶³ Although the merchants in Virginia stood the most to lose from a suspension of the civil courts, most of them did not have the political influence to counter supporters of nonexportation. Of greater influence were the planters like Councillor Robert Carter whose business affairs within the colony were jeopardized by their inability to sue for debts. Throughout the summer, Carter complained of tenants who refused to pay rents, but he was reluctant to criticize publicly the popular Association proposals.⁶⁴

Many of the planters who supported a nonexportation

agreement at the same were anxious to avoid any appearance of debt evasion and also to protect the colonists' credit with British merchants. This was why Washington had been reluctant to endorse nonexportation. Fairfax County's proposal for delaying the nonexportation agreement was an attempt to allow for remittances on outstanding accounts in Great Britain. The proposal also was an announcement to Virginia that the Association would not be an occasion for debt repudiation and personal gain. In their private correspondences, Washington and other planters assured their British merchants that they would make every effort to find some means of remittance and would eventually pay all their debts.⁶⁵ John Tayloe fully supported nonexportation as a means of reducing the Crown's revenue from tobacco, but he promised merchant Duncan Campbell that he would meet the payments on his London debts. Tayloe expected his iron forge to fill increased local demands during the association and produce the money for payments to Campbell.⁶⁶ For the majority of planters who had no manufacturing interests on which to rely, however, nonexportation effectively would eliminate every means of making remittances to Great Britain.

The conservative minority that opposed any form of association justified their position, in part, with predictions of internal dislocations arising from the lack of courts. Bryan Fairfax, John Randolph, and the authors of the Middlesex resolves argued that the problems facing

Virginia in the summer of 1774 demanded the order provided by a regular administration of justice. Edmund Pendleton feared that if the courts remained closed it would "introduce anarchy & disorder & render life & property here precarious." Pendleton was prepared to support whatever association the Convention approved, but he hoped courts would reopen during the observance of the agreement. In the week before the Convention, he conceded to Ralph Wormeley that the majority of delegates wanted to keep the county courts shut. By the same time, James Robinson had learned that the Convention was likely to approve an immediate nonimportation association, with nonexportation to commence at a later date and with the courts to remain closed to civil business throughout the period.⁶⁷

In answer to the public criticism of nonexportation, Landon Carter published a last minute defense of stopping exports and of suspending the courts of justice. Carter dismissed the self-interested criticisms from merchants, but he was concerned by others "truly worthy in their social Conduct" who questioned the justice of halting exports when debts were owed to British merchants. Carter's Virginia Gazette article signed "Experience" asserted that the merchants and other creditors in Great Britain were responsible for ministerial policy, if only by their indifference to the fate of America, and these were men who owed their entire livelihood to the American trade. To those who

claimed that nonexportation would prevent individuals from fulfilling personal obligations, Carter answered that the commercial arrangements between planters and merchants were always something more than private transactions, that they had a public dimension. Besides, Carter asked with some justification, if these Virginians were so worried about the safety of British debts, why had they not previously made greater efforts to pay their accounts. Nonexportation would just be another, and worthwhile, postponement.⁶⁸

Privately, Carter urged his son Robert Wormeley Carter and Francis Lightfoot Lee, both delegates from Richmond County, to insist that the Convention keep the courts closed to all action on the recovery of debts due, the suspension of justice "being the only expedient to compell the creditors in that great ballance w[hi]ch must be forever ag[ain]st us from the very situation of our trade with G. B."⁶⁹

When the Virginia Convention met at the Capitol in Williamsburg on 1 August with Peyton Randolph as moderator, it had all the appearances of the House of Burgesses and enjoyed even greater popular authority than the regular Assembly. Attendance of delegates at the six-day meeting was more complete than at any Assembly in memory and contributed to the legitimacy of the extra-legal session. The detailed proceedings for most of the Convention were not recorded, although Landon Carter later learned that the debates were "warm." During the first day in session, the

delegates approved a general congress of the colonies scheduled for Philadelphia. On Friday, 5 August, the Convention elected Peyton Randolph, Richard Henry Lee, George Washington, Patrick Henry, Richard Bland, Benjamin Harrison, and Edmund Pendleton to represent Virginia at the general congress.⁷⁰

During one of the days of the session, Peyton Randolph presented the Convention delegates with suggested resolves from Thomas Jefferson, who had fallen ill on the road to Williamsburg. When Jefferson turned back to Monticello, he forwarded to Randolph and Patrick Henry copies of his proposal, which soon after the Convention was published as A Summary View of the Rights of British America. In the Summary View, Jefferson's radical interpretation of the Empire as a union of various Parliaments and colonial assemblies, completely independent of one another and voluntarily offering their allegiance to the King, led to the broadest assertion yet offered in Virginia of the commercial rights of the American colonies. According to Jefferson, Parliament's "regulation" (he called it tyranny) of American commerce was an infringement of the colonists' natural right to free trade with all nations. Since the mid-seventeenth century, Jefferson wrote, Parliament's navigation acts had restricted American trade with the sole design of protecting British commercial profits. Colonial imports and exports carried unfair duties; Americans were not allowed to ship to

northern Europe produce that the British did not want, nor were they able to purchase European goods that the British could not supply. Parliament denied the Americans the right to sell their own tobacco on the valuable continental markets; and British monopoly of the carrying trade to America doubled and tripled the price for British manufactures. Nothing was so foolish or unjust, Jefferson thought, as the regulation of iron manufacturing, by which Parliament required the colonists to ship unfinished pig and bar iron, so "necessary in every branch of husbandry," to Great Britian and then pay for the reshipment of finished tools and nails. The act of 1732 subjecting American lands to the demands of British creditors while British lands were protected provided Jefferson with further evidence "that Justice is not the same in America as in Britain." He recommended that the Virginia Convention and the general congress declare these acts of Parliament void.⁷¹

The principal business of the Williamsburg Convention was the debate over the proper form of commercial association. The final agreement signed on 6 August owed most of its provisions to the Fairfax resolves. It incorporated suggestions from other counties in an effort to achieve the most acceptable and effective method of commercial resistance. First among the Convention's resolutions was an agreement not to import any British goods, whether from Great Britain, the West Indies or other colonies, nor to

purchase such goods imported by others after 1 November 1774. British medicines were the single exemption in the nonimportation agreement. The associators pledged themselves not to import, or purchase, slaves from Africa, the West Indies, or any other place. Otherwise, the import trade in West Indian goods would continue as usual. Tea was of such symbolic importance in the British assault on American rights that the deputies prohibited the importation of any type of tea and resolved not to use any on hand in the colony. The Convention refused to accept Fairfax County's suggestion that the tea destroyed in Boston might be paid for after the imperial dispute reached a settlement, declaring instead that if Boston were coerced into paying the East India Company for the value of the tea, Virginians would boycott all East India Company commodities until the Company reimbursed Boston. The ban on British goods would continue until such time as the British government satisfied American demands according to terms that the general congress would determine. Virginia's Association avoided tying the agreement to specific complaints against Parliament, citing only "certain ill advised Regulations, as well of our Trade as internal Polity."⁷²

Resolution of the debate over exports and British debts came with an agreement to delay nonexportation until 10 August 1775. If the British government had not met American demands by that date, Virginia's Associators would ship no

more tobacco or other produce to Great Britain nor sell any goods to any person who thereafter might export them to Great Britain. The Convention intended the delay to allow "as quick and full Payment as possible of our Debts to Great Britain." The delegates also decided that immediate enactment of nonexportation would cause too much hardship for the many Virginians who had invested all their resources in the current crop of tobacco, "by which Means they have been prevented from pursuing other Methods of clothing and supporting their Families."⁷³ After the planter "made what profit they could of the crops they had raised," the initiation of a nonexportation association would encourage them "to turn their farms to some other article of produce and deprive the exchequer of that immense revenue it receives from that article."⁷⁴

The controversial question of whether to close Virginia's courts during a nonexportation agreement provoked the expected debate in the Convention. The Association ended by omitting all reference to the subject. A "great majority" of the delegates voted to keep the courts shut, but they decided that a public announcement of the suspension of civil justice was unnecessary and perhaps dangerous. The lack of a fee bill and the unlikelihood of a new Assembly were sufficient guarantees that debtors would be free from court judgments during the observance of the Association. In early September, members of the General Court, wishing to

avoid any contribution "to the Uneasiness of the present Times," announced that they too would hear only criminal cases during their upcoming session.⁷⁵

As in the Fairfax resolves, the Convention Association suggested that Virginians prepare for nonexportation by turning their attention from tobacco to crops that might form the basis of colonial manufactures. The specific resolve by which the Associators promised to increase their sheep herds and sell surplus stock to the "poorer Sort of People" was the first step toward establishing colonial cloth manufactures. "The greatest Industry, the strictest Economy and Frugality, and the Exertion of every Publick Virtue" on the part of the gentlemen of the Colony would further encourage the people to develop home manufactures and abide by the terms of the Association.⁷⁶

The provisions for enforcement of the Association closely followed the suggestions of Fairfax County and reflected the lessons of the Association of 1770. Each county was to establish a committee which would have all merchants sign the Association and subsequently issue a certificate affirming the merchants' cooperation. Merchants who refused to sign risked losing their business in the local community. The Association's special regulations for merchants bound them to sell goods at the price in effect for the past 12 months. In a concession designed to encourage merchant participation, the Association permitted

the local committees to authorize price increases if exchange rates rose. Merchants or anyone else importing goods after 1 November 1774 were obligated to reship the cargo or accept the risk of public storage during the observance of the Association. Refusal to cooperate would result in the local committee's publication of the violator's name and details of the infraction. Associators would "thereafter consider such Person or Persons as inimical to this Country, and break off every Connection and all Dealings with them." Anyone exporting commodities after 10 August 1775 would receive similar treatment from their local committee.⁷⁷

The Convention's instructions of August 6th for the delegates to the general congress fell short of Jefferson's proposals but did enumerate specific grievances against Great Britain. Like Jefferson, the delegates affirmed their allegiance to the King while denying the authority of Parliament "in all cases whatsoever." The colonies had acquiesced in the Navigation Acts as an appropriate price for British military and commercial protection, but recent legislation restricted American rights in ways that far exceeded the benefit of the imperial connection. The Convention instructed the delegates to demand a repeal of the acts for raising a revenue in America, the act extending the jurisdiction of the Courts of Admiralty to allow the transportation of accused criminals in America to trial in

Great Britain, and the several coercive acts regarding Massachusetts. The Instructions allowed the delegates to negotiate the terms of an intercolonial association except for the date of a nonexportation agreement, which was not to go into effect before 10 August 1775.⁷⁸

While the Convention was still in session, a published address "To the People of Virginia" called for popular support of a nonimportation and nonexportation agreement along with public subscriptions for the promotion of local manufactures. The author contended that a commercial association, bringing forth "the virtue of America, and the cries of British merchants and manufacturers," was the surest way to avoid the bloodshed that otherwise would follow Parliament's continued infringement of colonial rights. During the week after the Convention, Peyton Randolph helped to develop that popular support by holding a meeting of the inhabitants of Williamsburg at which time the citizens voiced their approval of the Association and signed the agreement.⁷⁹ Even before other communities held similar meetings, the widespread approval of the Association was apparent. In Yorktown, William Reynolds "never knew people more unanimously resolute than every Class of people here are." The Norfolk-Portsmouth committee reported that "the merchants that are natives are unanimous" in their support for the new Association. Thomas Nelson and Robert Beverley both reported to London merchants the Virginians'

determination to adhere to the Association "with the most scrupulous Exactness." Nelson's letters to Samuel Athawes and Thomas and Rowland Hunt, written just one day after the signing of the Association, explained the Virginians' hope that the Association would prompt British merchants and manufacturers to demand Parliamentary repeal of the objectionable legislation. The determination to cut off exports to Great Britain was not, Nelson insisted, an attempt to end commercial relations, which he hoped could resume along mutually satisfactory terms. Although the conservative Beverley had resisted any form of commercial resistance and still opposed nonexportation, he admitted that the Association might provide internal benefits for Virginia. The colony was fully capable of developing manufactures to satisfy most needs, and the decreased reliance on Great Britain would "be a means of extricating many People from their present Distresses." Beverley, however, continued to believe that America's long-term interests would be served best by cultivating agricultural products in return for British manufactures.⁸⁰

Before the Convention met, Robert Carter Nicholas responded to John Randolph's pamphlet with an extended defense of Virginia's opposition to Parliamentary authority. When Nicholas's rebuttal was published in late August under the title Considerations on the Present State of Virginia Examined, it served as a persuasive justification

of the new Association. Nicholas dismissed as illegitimate all objections to a nonimportation association; the Americans were free to purchase or not purchase British manufactures as they chose. He admitted that nonexportation unfortunately would injure British creditors, but consideration for the "Safety of the Community" could, in extreme cases, justify withholding exports. Americans who were struggling for basic liberties could not be expected to devote their energies to paying debts to creditors who made no effort to relieve their suffering. Nor were the merchants of Great Britain entirely innocent in the creation of the large Virginia debts. They had offered numerous "Solicitations and Allurements" for Virginians to expand tobacco cultivation despite the likelihood of prolonged indebtedness during depressed markets. Nicholas did not believe the closing of the courts would be as socially disruptive as Randolph predicted. As far as he could tell, the officials in every county had agreed to serve without fee "for that Part of their Office which is necessary to preserve the Peace and good Order of Society."⁸¹

"A Contrite Debtor" writing in the Virginia Gazette expected the nonconsumption requirements of the Association to relieve the private indebtedness that inhibited diversified economic development in Virginia. His own experience illustrated that an individual debt, particularly among the colony's gentry, had ramifications for all levels of

society. This debtor had wanted to purchase fine linen manufactured by an Irish family living in Virginia, but his lack of ready money forced him to buy other linen on credit from a merchant. An Association encouraging gentlemen "to appear simply in Publick and frugally in private" would break the cycle which forced debtors to go deeper into debt. The rejection of finery and vanity would secure individual estates, promote local manufactures, and develop a sense of public spirit.⁸²

Most critics of the Association remained silent, whether out of support for the general aim of the agreement or out of fear of public censure. When Jefferson received a copy of the Association, he privately noted his several disappointments with the agreement. The Association allowed Virginians to purchase British goods imported before 1 November 1774 but did not permit the importation of tools necessary for manufactures. The agreement failed to ban articles from the West Indies and Europe that carried a British duty and left open the commerce with the West Indies and other parts of the British Empire that did not support a commercial association. Jefferson feared that these shortcomings, along with the inadequate explanation of American grievances as well as the restrictions on the bargaining position of Virginia's delegates to the general congress, would undermine the effectiveness of the colonies' commercial resistance. Landon Carter thought the professed regard

for debts owed to British merchants and the delay in nonexportation were a "Hypocrisy to America."⁸³ On the other extreme from Jefferson and Carter, many British merchants living in Virginia criticized the Association because it was too extensive, but, like James Parker of Norfolk, they only expressed their contempt in private conversations or in letters home. Parker and others hoped that by withholding merchants' participation, they could negate the effect of the Association. John Randolph, the severest Virginia critic of commercial resistance, spoke out against early proposals but refused to come out of his house in Williamsburg during the Convention.⁸⁴

Following the earliest discussions of a commercial association in 1774, Virginia merchants and planters attempted to reorganize their business affairs in preparation for the impending trade restrictions. The prolonged economic depression, with its low tobacco prices and shortages of credit and currency, combined with the changing proposals for association to frustrate these attempts to protect individual interests. The Dumfries merchant William Carr responded to the early rumors of nonexportation and court closings with a scheme to ship the largest possible cargo of tobacco to his London merchant James Russell. By the time Carr procured sufficient tobacco, much of it of indifferent quality and at inflated prices, he learned that the Convention would probably delay the nonexportation

agreement. The threatened suspension of civil justice persuaded other merchants to collect large remittances before the start of a Virginia association. The planters' reluctance to sell their tobacco in the spring and early summer months of 1774, however, made it difficult for merchants to purchase cargoes on acceptable terms. Even before hearing of the Coercive Acts or possible associations, many planters refused to sell their tobacco at current prices because the poor returns they had received the year before had made them decide to wait for a rising market. By early June, the supporters of a commercial association were refusing to sell their tobacco until they learned the full details of the acts against Massachusetts and the plans for a Virginia association.⁸⁵

When merchants did find tobacco in the market, it was often difficult to purchase. Merchants still suffered from a shortage of currency, and their bills of exchange, rated at 30 to 32-1/2 percent, were unacceptable to most planters. With the likelihood of some form of nonimportation in the near future, planters were reluctant to ship on consignment for fear of having no means of receiving goods in return. The planters' hesitancy to sell and the merchants' determination to buy inevitably raised the price of tobacco as the summer progressed. After a year of prices remaining at 10/ sterling and 12/6 Virginia currency for a hundred weight of tobacco, Potomac tobacco was by August

selling at 15/ for the most common sort and at 18/ sterling for superior quality leaf. The late-summer arrival of an unusually large number of London ships kept the prices up and injured the resident merchants who relied on cash purchases.⁸⁶

In April 1774 Charles Yates complained that he spent as much as £10 on the travel expenses, court costs, and assistants' wages involved in the collection of 10/ worth of old debts. When the courts closed in June of 1774, merchants did not have even the expensive method of legal suits to collect outstanding debts. Several Westmoreland County merchants decided to sell goods only for cash in the future, but while this policy might protect them from further losses it did nothing to collect the large amounts most due most merchants.⁸⁷ After the chaotic and unproductive June meeting of the merchants in Williamsburg ("a parcell of People Gaping at one another"), William Carr realized that few debts would be collected and that bills of exchange sent to England were likely to be returned protested. The principal agent for William Cunninghame & Co. left the same meeting with the faint hope that the "Honor & Honesty of the Debtor" would protect the company's accounts. By early July the company's factors were finding it impossible to collect from "some of the worthless kind" who became "very impudent and daring" in the absence of court enforcements. As Carr discovered while travelling

around Westmoreland County in July, personal application to the indebted planters did not bring payments. Yates found that by early fall the determination to withhold payments from British merchants and their factors had led "by a strange mode of reasoning" to the conclusion that it was "Patriotism not to pay anybody."⁸⁸

During the period between the August Convention and the approval of a general association by the Philadelphia congress, the local committees had few occasions to govern the merchants' business. The arrival in Chesapeake Bay of the brigantine Mary and Jane, laden with tea, prompted the committees in several Maryland and Virginia counties to alert neighboring counties of the vessel's cargo. In Norfolk where the tea was consigned to three merchant firms, the borough committee resolved that the tea should be returned and appointed a committee to carry the resolve to each of the merchants. The three firms readily acceded to the Committee's decision and later received public thanks for their cooperation. Caroline County's committee chastised and demanded a public apology from Andrew Leckie, a merchant in Port Royal who had ridiculed the Association and falsely accused Walker Taliaferro of violating the agreement.⁸⁹ Such committee actions, however, were relatively infrequent before the enforcement of the nonimportation agreement and as long as most merchants publicly approved of the Association. The absence of committee

interference convinced some merchants that they might avoid the full effect of commercial restrictions. William Cunninghame & Co. instructed its factors to sign any association on the assumption that a temporary nonimportation agreement would help reduce standing debts and that the Virginians would never interfere with the company's shipping of exports from the colony. Charles Yates, also assuming that enforcement measures would be as ineffective as in 1770, sent his British merchant instructions for smuggling in the goods that he ordered after the Convention. As late as the end of September James Parker noted that many British factors had avoided signing the Association. In Petersburg only one factor signed before September, and others prepared orders for goods from Great Britain.⁹⁰ The full implications of the trading restrictions became apparent only after October when newly-instituted local committees began to enforce the Association of the Continental Congress.

Chapter Seven Endnotes

- 1 Chesterfield County meeting, 14 July 1774, Rev. Va., 1:116-18.
- 2 For background on East India Company and Parliament's legislation see Benjamin Woods Labaree, The Boston Tea Party (New York, 1964), Ch. 4, 58-79; also Merrill Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 434-38.
- 3 Labaree, The Boston Tea Party, 80-145; Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 439-60; only in Charleston was the tea landed and there it was stored away in a warehouse.
- 4 Peyton Randolph, Robert Carter Nicholas, and Dudley Digges to John Norton, 6 Apr. 1773, John Norton to Randolph et al., 6 July 1773, Rev. Va., 2:20-21, 37-38.
- 5 Ibid., 44-47, 51-52; Richard Henry Lee to Samuel Adams, 4 Feb. 1773, 24 Apr. 1774, in The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:82-83, 106-108; Samuel Adams to Richard Henry Lee, 10 Apr. 1773, in Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 6 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 25 Nov. 1773, 2 Dec. 1773, 16 Dec. 1773, 13 Jan. 1774.
- 7 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 2 Dec. 1773, 25 Nov. 1773.
- 8 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 23 Dec. 1774.
- 9 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 20 Jan. 1774.
- 10 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 3 Mar. 1774; Landon Carter to Purdie & Dixon, 14 Feb. 1774, Sabine Hall Collection.
- 11 Import figures for tea in Ledger of Imports and Exports (America), 5 Jan. 1768 - 5 Jan. 1773, PRO, Customs 16/1; for example of continued refusal to import dutied tea see Invoice enclosed in George Washington to Robert Cary & Co., 26 July 1773, Washington Papers, LC.
- 12 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 6 Jan. 1774, 20 Jan. 1774, and above letters from "Thousands"; unhealthy effect of tea discussed in VG(Purdie & Dixon), 13 Jan. 1774; VG(Rind), 16 Dec. 1773 carried an article from Newport claiming that the East India tea had been infected by

a flea-like insect, "which renders it more pernicious to health than usual."

- 13 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 10 Feb. 1774.
- 14 Account of Port Bill and its passage in Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 453-60; Arthur Lee to Richard Henry Lee, 18 Mar. 1774, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 15 William Lee to Francis Lightfoot Lee, 2 Apr. 1774, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 16 Richard Henry Lee to Samuel Adams, 24 Apr. 1774, The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:106-108.
- 17 VG(Purdie & Dixon), 5 May 1774, 12 May 1774, and 19 May 1774; for early discussion of resolves and dissolution see William Aitchison to Charles Steuart, 16 May 1774, Charles Steuart Papers; Diary of Landon Carter, 2:812; plans for commercial association mentioned in "Member of the Virginia Assembly to his correspondent in London," 20 May 1774, in American Archives, Fourth Series, Peter Force, ed., (Washington, 1837), 1:340; and William Carr to James Russell, 26 May 1774, Russell Papers, Coutts & Co., London, (Carr was writing from Dumfries where he would have had no knowledge of the dissolution of the same date); George Mason to Martin Cockburn, 26 May 1774, The Papers of George Mason, 1:190-91.
- 18 Richard Henry Lee to Samuel Adams, 23 June 1774; Richard Henry Lee to Arthur Lee, 26 June 1774, in The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:111-18.
- 19 Text of fast-day resolution and Jefferson's comments in The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, 1:105-07.
- 20 Governor Dunmore to Lord Dartmouth, 29 May 1774, PRO, CO5/1352; JHB, 1773-1776, 132; George Washington to George William Fairfax, 10 June 1774, Writings of Washington, 3:223; Richard Henry Lee to Samuel Adams, 23 June 1774, The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:111-113.
- 21 Text of Association in Rev. Va., 1:97-98; Lee's original resolutions printed with Richard Henry Lee to Arthur Lee, 26 June 1774, The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 115. The former burgesses assumed theirs was the first official suggestion for a general congress, but Delaware's Committee of Correspondence

- had issued the same call on 26 May, Rev. Va., 2:82-84. The idea of a general congress had been discussed regularly since the fall of 1773, see VG(Purdie & Dixon), 11 Nov. 1773, and Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 461.
- 22 Samuel Adams to Virginia Committee of Correspondence, 13 May 1774, with enclosure of Boston Town Meeting's resolution of same date, Rev. Va., 2:71-73.
 - 23 Philadelphia City Committee to Peyton Randolph, with enclosures, 21 May 1774, Rev. Va., 2:75-77; Annapolis Town Committee to Virginia Committee of Correspondence, 25 May 1774, Rev. Va., 2:80-81. For description of route by which Boston Resolution was carried to other cities see *ibid.*, 73-75.
 - 24 The 25 members met on Sunday, May 29 and again on the morning of the 30th, at which time they published a short account of their discussion of various positions on nonexportation. Instructions for August Convention and reference to Williamsburg meeting in Rev. Va., 1:101-02; Williamsburg Town Meeting, 30 May 1774, Rev. Va., 7:730.
 - 25 William Carr to James Russell, 26 May 1774, 30 May 1774, Russell Papers.
 - 26 Dumfries Town Committee to Virginia Committee of Correspondence, with enclosure, 31 May 1774; Norfolk and Portsmouth Joint Committee to the Inhabitants of Charleston, S.C., 31 May 1774, Fredericksburg Town Committee to Peyton Randolph, with enclosure, 1 June 1774, all in Rev. Va., 2:92-96.
 - 27 Harry Piper to Dixon & Littledale, 9 June 1774, Piper Letterbook; William Reynolds to George Flowerdew Norton, 3 June 1774, William Reynolds Letterbook, 1771-1796, Library of Congress.
 - 28 George Washington to George William Fairfax, 10 June 1774, Writings of Washington, 3:221-26.
 - 29 William Carr to James Russell, 10 May 1774, Russell Papers; Exchange rates in John J. McCusker, Money and Exchange in Europe and America, 1600-1775 (Chapel Hill, 1978), 212.
 - 30 Rev. Va., 1:101.
 - 31 Diary of Landon Carter, 2:821-22.

- 32 Dr. Walter Jones to Landon Carter, 17 June 1774, Sabine Hall Collection.
- 33 Extant proceedings of county meetings published in Rev. Va., 1:111-68; Resolutions of Loudoun and Mecklenburg Counties printed in Rev. Va., 7:733-34, 737-38; at least eight counties submitted resolutions to the Virginia Gazette that were never published.
- 34 Rev. Va., 1:165-66.
- 35 Dumfries Town Committee, 31 May 1774, Rev. Va., 2:92-93; Prince William County Committee meeting, 6 June 1774, Rev. Va., 1:152-153.
- 36 Frederick County meeting, 8 June 1774, Rev. Va., 1:35-36; Loudoun County meeting, *ibid.*, 7:733-34.
- 37 Westmoreland County meeting, 22 June 1774, Rev. Va., 1:163-65.
- 38 Prince George County meeting, June 1774; Culpeper County meeting, Hanover County meeting, 20 July 1774; Chesterfield County meeting, 14 July 1774; and Albemarle County meeting, 26 July 1774, in Rev. Va., 1:150-52, 118-20, 139-41, 116-18, 112-13.
- 39 Rev. Va., 1:150-52.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 116-18.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 151, 119, 154, and 162; other counties that recommended an end to slave imports: Caroline, Fairfax, and Hanover, *ibid.*, 116, 132, 140.
- 42 Rev. Va., 1:150-52, 142, 140, 143, 112, 132, 149.
- 43 Essex County meeting, 9 July 1774; Elizabeth City County meeting, 25 July 1774, Stafford County meeting, July 1774; Princess Anne County meeting, 27 July 1774, in Rev. Va., 1:126, 124, 160, 154; Richard Henry Lee to Samuel Adams, 23 June 1774, The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 1:111-13.
- 44 Albemarle County Resolutions, 26 July 1774, Rev. Va., 1:112-13.
- 45 Text of Fairfax Resolves in Rev. Va., 1:127-33; see "Extract of a Letter to a Gentleman in Boston, in American Archives, Fourth Series, 1:517-18 for account

- of 5 July meeting; and George Washington to [],
11 July 1774, in Donald M. Sweig, "A New-Found
Washington Letter of 1774 and the Fairfax Resolves,"
WMO, 3rd ser. 40 (April 1983): 289-91.
- 46 Discussion of drafting procedure in Sweig, "A New-Found
Washington Letter"; Committee elected 18 July 1774
listed in Rev. Va., 1:133.
- 47 Fairfax Resolves, Rev. Va., 1:127-33; Ibid., George
Washington to Bryan Fairfax, 4 July 1774, 20 July
1774, in Writings of Washington, 3:227-34.
- 48 Rev. Va., 1:127-33.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 George Washington to Bryan Fairfax, 4 July 1774,
Writings of Washington, 3:227-29.
- 53 Rev. Va., 1:127-33.
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ed. Hunter Dickinson Farish (Williamsburg, 1943), 147;
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- 66 John Tayloe to Duncan Campbell, 20 July 1775, American Loyalist Claims, PRO, T. 79/12.
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- 75 James Parker to Charles Steuart, 14 Aug. 1774, Charles Steuart Papers; announcement of General Court in VG(Purdie & Dixon), 8 Sep. 1774.
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- 84 James Parker to Charles Steuart, 14 Aug. 1774, 29 Sep. 1774, Charles Steuart Papers.
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- 89 Charles County, Maryland Correspondence Committee to Fairfax Virginia Committee, 9 Aug. 1774, Washington Papers, LC; Norfolk Borough Committee, 22 Aug. 1774, Rev. Va., 2:159-60; Caroline County Committee, 13 Oct. 1774, Rev. Va., 2:160-62.
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Chapter Eight: The Continental Association in Virginia

Virginia's comprehensive model of association and the colony's dominant position in the import-export trade with Great Britain allowed the Virginia delegation at the Continental Congress to play a leading role in the formulation of an intercolonial plan of commercial resistance. The nonintercourse agreement endorsed by Virginia's August Convention had been the most elaborate response of any colony to Boston's original call for a boycott of British trade. This provincial association, representing the practical lessons of earlier boycotts and the decade-long effort to combine economic reform with the protest against imperial policy, provided the outline for the Continental Association approved by the Congress in Philadelphia. Although Virginia lost the debate over proportional representation in the Congress, the colony's economic importance secured for the Virginia delegation almost complete influence over the terms of a trade boycott. No American commercial association, after all, could succeed without the full participation of the wealthiest and most populous of North American colonies. The revised and amended Association announced by the Continental Congress in October 1774 incorporated suggestions from various colonies but required no significant compromise from the Virginia delegates. The terms of the new Association encouraged Virginians to enforce their

particular plans for establishing the economic independence of their colony.

In the earliest days of the Continental Congress, which convened on 5 September 1774, the more radical delegates gained approval for demands that ranged from the choice of a meeting place to the Suffolk resolves declaring Massachusetts' right to resist British authority. The success of these early measures indicated the likelihood of a strong commercial association; only the precise terms of commercial resistance became the subject of debate. Approval for a nonimportation agreement was so apparent that before debating any specific measures the Congress published its recommendation that all merchants countermand standing orders and withhold future orders for goods from Great Britain. The debate that followed Richard Henry Lee's motion for a nonimportation agreement centered on the question of the starting date. Virginia's Association had established 1 November as the date to commence nonimportation. Thomas Mifflin of Pennsylvania agreed that no honest man had ordered goods after June and therefore should receive no goods from orders after the first of November. Some of the Massachusetts delegates insisted the boycott begin immediately, while Richard Bland, following the example of the Fairfax resolves, wanted the starting date to apply to the date of the shipment of cargoes from Great Britain rather than the date of their arrival in America. The motion as

accepted on 27 September set 1 December 1774 as the date on which Americans would cease to import all manner of British goods (including the medicines exempted in the Virginia Association) whether they be from Great Britain, Ireland, or any other port of origin. The resolution also forbade the purchase of any British goods imported after 1 December 1774.¹

Despite Thomas Jefferson's suggestion that Americans also prohibit the imports of dutied items from non-British ports, the Virginia Association and the original resolution of Congress ignored the subject of dutied commodities and other parts of the West Indian trade. Thomas Mifflin moved to exclude imports of dutied articles, and this motion raised the question of whether the Americans were protesting all duties or only those devised for revenue. On 6 October the Congress amended the nonimportation resolution with a further prohibition of molasses, coffee, and pimienta from the West Indies, wine from Madeira, and foreign indigo, all commodities carrying a revenue duty. During the final debate on the Association, Congress agreed to add syrups and paneles (a type of brown sugar) to the list of forbidden imports.²

After the easy approval of nonimportation, the debate on nonexportation was complicated by Virginia's demand that the current crop of tobacco reach the British market. The delay of nonexportation until the summer of 1775 was the one

major issue on which the Virginia delegates differed from the radicals from the northern commercial colonies. Delegates from Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut, assisted by Samuel Chase of Maryland and Christopher Gadsden and Edward Rutledge from South Carolina, argued that only immediate nonexportation would compel the British to rescind all oppressive legislation. As delegates from various colonies listed the importance of their exports, from the New England lumber used for masts to the naval stores of the Carolinas and the enumerated commodities of the plantation colonies, Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut realized how dependent the British economy and military were on the continued exports of the North American colonies. Surely, a year of nonexportation, coming upon Great Britain "like a Thunder Clap," would secure a redress of American grievances. But the instructions to the Virginia delegates permitted no compromise on the issue. Richard Henry Lee, who privately preferred an earlier nonexportation date, defended his colony's demand by reminding Congress that tobacco went to market the year after its harvest, whereas other colonies were already shipping their crops from 1774. The intransigence of Virginia convinced Gadsden that nonexportation should begin without the participation of Virginians, but this proposal prompted the Maryland delegation to announce their colony could not withhold tobacco exports while Virginia continued to ship. In the end, the influence of

Virginia and the value of the tobacco trade resulted in a postponement of nonexportation until 10 September 1775. If the British government had not satisfied American demands before that date, the colonists would withhold all exports to Great Britain, Ireland, and the West Indies.³ Although Rutledge and Gadsden had spoken in favor of immediate nonexportation, the South Carolina delegation refused to accept a nonexportation agreement unless Congress made some provision for the rice trade. Rice, as an enumerated commodity could be exported legally only to Great Britain, and the lowland areas of rice cultivation were unsuitable for other crops. Congress revised the nonexportation resolution to permit the exportation of rice to Europe, thereby nullifying Parliament's trade restriction.⁴

Following approval of the nonimportation, nonconsumption, and nonexportation resolutions, Congress appointed Richard Henry Lee, Thomas Cushing, Isaac Low, Thomas Mifflin, and Thomas Johnson as a committee to prepare the draft of an Association. Twelve days later, the committee reported a draft which was then subject to several sessions of debate, revision, and amendment. The delegates signed the final Continental Association on 20 October 1774.⁵ The language, the provisions, and the enforcement procedures of the Continental Association all reflected the influence of the Association from Virginia's Convention. In addition to the nonintercourse agreements adopted by the Congress,

the final draft of the Association incorporated Virginia's prohibition of the slave trade and extended this provision to prevent associators from leasing vessels or selling produce to anyone engaged in the commerce of slaves. The terms of the nonconsumption agreement followed Virginia's example by forbidding the use of tea, although the Continental Association limited this restriction to East India Company tea and other kinds on which a duty was paid, rather than accept Virginia's unqualified rejection of the beverage. In an article recommended by several county meetings in Virginia but omitted from the August Association, Congress resolved to dissolve all connection and commerce with any North American colony that refused to join the Continental Association or later violated its terms.⁶

Congress agreed with the Virginia Convention that Americans needed to develop sheep herds as a source of wool rather than meat, and added a proposal to halt all sheep exports to the West Indies. Another article promoting "Agriculture, Arts, and the Manufactures" stressed the particular importance of woolen production for the colonies. The Virginia Convention's general statements about the need for industry, economy and frugality expanded into Article Eight of the Continental Association which prescribed specific regulations of entertainment and dress. In a measure that would find frequent application in Virginia, the associators pledged to discontinue all horse races, cock

fight, and every form of gambling. They likewise would discourage shows, plays, "and other expensive Diversions and Entertainments." The same article restricted the observation of mourning to a black ribbon and necklace for women and an armband for men, in place of the more elaborate succession of mourning clothes worn by the wealthier people in the colonies.⁷

The Continental Association repeated Congress's earlier recommendation, now more of an order, that merchants notify as soon as possible their British correspondents and cancel all orders for goods. For merchants who received shipments from Great Britain after 1 December 1774, the Continental Association offered the options of reshipping, paying the storage costs during the term of the nonimportation agreement, or a public sale of the goods from which the owners of the cargo would receive payment for the costs and all profits would go to the relief of Boston's poor. After 1 February 1775, all goods arriving from Great Britain would be returned without being unloaded. As in the Virginia Association, the congressional agreement required merchants to sell goods at the same prices in effect during the previous year. In expectation of scarcities, Congress also ordered that new manufactures of the colonies sell "at reasonable Prices."⁸

Enforcement of the Association was the responsibility of local committees to be elected in counties and cities by

citizens eligible to vote for representatives in the provincial assemblies. According to the instructions of Congress, these committees would "attentively ... observe the conduct of all persons touching this Association." The majority of any committee could determine if an individual violated the Association, in which case the committee was required to publish the circumstances and name of the offender so that any transgressors "may be publicly known and universally contemned as the Enemies of American Liberty." Signers of the Continental Association agreed to break off all dealings with any individual censured by a committee, just as they pledged to end commercial connections with any merchant who violated the trade regulations. In addition to these few, albeit far-reaching, instructions, the Congress recommended that the local committees and provincial conventions establish additional regulations that might facilitate the execution of the Association. Without any explicit challenge to royal government, the Association created in these local committees an institution that would soon become the de facto authority in every community.⁹

The Continental Association listed the Parliamentary legislation passed since 1763 that the Congress believed was evidence of a calculated design "for enslaving these colonies." Whereas the Virginia Convention had deferred a definition of American grievances to the decision of the general Congress, Congress now made repeal of the objection-

able legislation the single condition for a dissolution of the Association. The catalog of Parliamentary acts included the familiar sources of complaints from Americans during the previous decade: the duties on tea, wine, sugar products, coffee, pimiento, indigo, foreign paper, glass, and painters' colors; the extension of the Admiralty Court's jurisdiction; the interference with the right to a trial by jury; the provisions for transporting to trial in Great Britain individuals accused of offenses in the colonies, and the "coercive acts" depriving Massachusetts of its liberties. The most recent legislation included in the protest was the Quebec Act which established an arbitrary government and thereby discouraged "the Settlement of that wide-extended Country." The preamble of the Continental Association explained that a plan of commercial resistance was "the most speedy, effectual, and peaceable Measure" by which Americans could obtain a repeal of the offensive Parliamentary Acts.¹⁰

In a series of addresses and petitions issued after 20 October 1774 Congress offered further justification for the commercial boycott and outlined its intended effects. The address to the people of Great Britain recounted the imperial policies that had forced Americans into a defensive position. Before the French and Indian War Great Britain had been content to receive the wealth produced by colonial commerce, but since 1763 the ministry had determined to

increase revenue from the colonies at the expense of constitutional principles. The interests of self-preservation demanded that Americans unite against the oppressive acts even if their Association injured individual friends in Great Britain. Congress called on "the magnanimity and justice of the British Nation" to force Parliament to overturn the ministry's policy and restore mutually beneficial commerce between Great Britain and the American colonies.¹¹ An address to the inhabitants of British North America also chronicled the recent policies of the ministry. According to Congress the interference with American rights and excessive demands for revenue warranted a stronger, though unspecified, form of resistance than that prescribed in the Association. For the time being, however, the delegates in Congress preferred commercial opposition because it made reconciliation possible. The address urged Americans to accept the temporary inconveniences and sacrifices entailed in a suspension of trade as a small price for the defeat of arbitrary power.¹² A petition to the King, with no concession to Parliament's sovereignty over the colonies, contained the formal presentation of American grievances.¹³

Since early summer Richard Henry Lee had expected the general Congress to convey to British merchants and manufacturers a special address expressing regret that a commercial association would hurt the interests of innocent traders.

Although the Continental Congress was content with the single message to the British people, Lee's draft of a memorial to the "Gentlemen, Merchants & Manufacturers" of Great Britain reflected the commercial assumptions that underlined the Association, particularly for Virginians. As a gesture toward reconciliation, Lee assured the British that the colonists did not desire independence and were willing to abide by the traditional regulations of the navigation acts. British restrictions on commerce and manufactures, however, were all the concessions Americans would offer in return for military and maritime protection. Lee reminded the merchants and manufacturers that colonial exports of resources and demand for finished goods provided employment for "multitudes of people," increased the value of British lands, and contributed to the national wealth. American compliance with the navigation acts, in turn, cost the colonists the full benefit of their own labor and stifled the manufacturing potential of various colonies. The revenue acts of recent years were an added burden that Americans could not accept. Lee urged the merchants and manufacturers to press for repeal of the objectionable acts and thereby restore Anglo-American commerce.¹⁴

By the time the Virginia Gazette printed the text of the Continental Association on 3 November 1774, the popular determination to enforce commercial resistance was evident

throughout the colony. As William Carr awaited news from the Congress he noticed "a spirit of opposition & resistance ... amongst all sorts of People" and concluded that Virginians would "go naked rather than have any commerce or connection with Great Britain after the time Congress agrees on for stopping the imports."¹⁵ During October and early November in counties which had established committees to enforce the August Association, merchants and other dissenters faced increasing pressure to support the trade boycott or risk public censure and a loss of business. James Parker found that the Glasgow factors were the principal targets of resentment, a fact which he attributed to the great sums owed to those merchants. Whatever the source of the public anger, the treatment accorded James Dunlop of Port Royal indicated that the current Association would enforce a degree of compliance unknown in 1769 or 1770. After Dunlop refused to sign the August Association, a mob attacked his house and offered him the options of being hanged, having his storehouse and record books burned, or signing the agreement. Other counties made less dramatic but equally effective demands on those who dared to criticize the Association.¹⁶

Four days after the publication of the Continental Association, an attack on the ship of a prominent London merchant signaled that no one would be immune from the restrictions of the Association. The Virginia with Captain

Howard Esten arrived in Virginia in early November, carrying 154 pounds of tea consigned by John Norton of London to shopkeeper John Prentis of Williamsburg. Norton, aware of the resolution against tea consumption, had ordered Esten to report the nature of the cargo as soon as he reached Virginia. A committee of former Burgesses met in Williamsburg at eight o'clock on the morning of 7 November to determine what should be done with the tea. A crowd from Yorktown boarded the Virginia at ten o'clock the same morning and waited for a decision from the Williamsburg meeting. When the former burgesses failed to answer a messenger from the Yorktown crowd, the assembled group tossed the tea into the York River. The Committee of Gloucester County, followed by a group of local inhabitants, also headed toward the Virginia on the afternoon of the seventh with the same intention, but arrived to find "the Tea had met its deserved Fate."¹⁷

When the Gloucester County committee reconvened on the evening of 7 November, it censured Norton, Prentis, and Esten and asked that a "publick Example" be made of Prentis. The most serious reprimand was ordered against Norton, who had "lent his little Aid to the Ministry for enslaving America." The committee ordered the Virginia to leave within twenty days without loading any tobacco. The committee further resolved that no one in the county would thereafter consign tobacco or any other commodity to the Norton house until "satisfactory concessions" were made.

The York County Committee meeting two days later also condemned the action of the three parties involved and ordered the Virginia to clear out, with only ballast on board, within eighteen days.¹⁸

John Prentis recovered his public reputation on 24 November when he offered the Gloucester and York Committees his fullest apologies for not countermanding the order for tea. As soon as John Norton learned of the incident, he offered the two committees a lengthy explanation of his actions. Norton insisted that he had always been uneasy about the order and waited for an expected countermand. Soon after the Virginia cleared out of London in September, Norton received one of the earliest notices of the August Association. Custom regulations would not allow Norton to stop the ship and remove the cargo, but he did send word to Captain Esten to consult with the Virginia Committee of Correspondence and return the cargo if necessary. After learning of his censure by the Gloucester and York Committees, Norton wrote another letter, assuring all Virginians that his violation was unintended and that he continued to oppose any Parliamentary attempts to tax the American colonies.¹⁹

Norton's apology, printed in the Virginia Gazette in May 1775, came too late to save him from damaging losses in trade. James Parker noted that the 700 hogsheads intended for the Virginia would have paid a great many tradesmens'

bills in London. Charles Yates predicted that a future reluctance to consign tobacco to Norton & Sons could cost the London merchant much of the £40-50,000 advanced to Virginians by the firm. Yates assured his British associates that he would heed the lesson of the Norton affair and avoid any provocation of public opinion.²⁰ The loss for Norton was all the more alarming to other merchants because of his standing in the colony. Perhaps no other British merchant was as well-connected in Virginia as was John Norton. He had lived in Yorktown for over twenty years, during which time he married a Virginian and served in the House of Burgesses. After returning to London, Norton carried on his Virginia business through the representation of his son in Yorktown and the informal assistance of Robert Carter Nicholas, the Treasurer of the colony. In addition to his business affairs, Norton provided Virginians with important political information from London and, in 1773, became the official agent of the colony's Committee of Correspondence. These connections in Virginia, however, were of no use in November 1774 when men as prominent as Councillor Thomas Nelson were among the group that insisted on returning the Virginia in ballast.²¹ Even those who sought to defend Norton came under public criticism. William Reynolds after speaking in favor of Norton when the York County Committee inspected the Virginia, found himself charged with partiality and voted off the Committee at the

next election. Robert Carter Nicholas, who by 1774 was related to Norton by marriage as well as by friendship, presented the merchant's case to the York County Committee. An early and steady advocate of commercial resistance, Nicholas condemned Norton's shipment of tea but questioned whether the Committee's censure was proper under the terms of the Continental Association. Nicholas's appeal for moderation had no effect on the Committee and prompted a printed attack that accused him of hypocrisy and several specific violations of the Association. As Richard Henry Lee later recognized, the reprisals against Norton, "a much favored Merchant here," were a clear indication of the near-unanimous demand for a strict enforcement of the Association as well as an absolute regulation of all merchant activity in Virginia.²²

The regular enforcement of the Continental Association began in mid-November as counties throughout Virginia formed new committees or reorganized old ones along the guidelines set forth by the Congress. Following the Virginia Gazette's publication of the Association text and its large-print notice of the instructions for committee selection, at least twenty-nine of Virginia's sixty-one counties, along with the cities of Williamsburg and Norfolk, established new committees for the administration of the commercial agreement. Most of these counties chose the committees by January 1775, but in a few counties, such as Westmoreland

and Lancaster, existing committees enforced the Association until the gathering of freeholders at the election of convention delegates could vote for a new committee. Augusta, Bedford, and Mecklenburg counties formed committees only in May 1775 after the Virginia Convention ordered the creation of local militia units. The Bedford County Committee, however, subsequently regulated commercial activity as well as military affairs in the county. Another eighteen Virginia counties had enforcement committees operating in the months after November of 1774. Some of these committees were established after the August Association, while others may have been new committees which did not publish their selection proceedings in the Virginia Gazette.²³

The size of the committees ranged from as few as twelve members in Warwick County to as many as forty-five in Spotsylvania, although most counties elected between twenty and thirty members. The committeemen were the familiar leaders of the county communities. In many counties, former Burgesses served, often as chairmen, and the majority of members had been justices of the peace. Most of the men who served on the inspection committees during the 1770 Association were also elected under the Continental Association. Planters dominated the committees, although resident merchants were frequently represented.²⁴ Because the size of the committees was generally larger than the county courts, the Association offered an opportunity for broader political

participation. This expansion of the political base, however, reinforced rather than challenged the traditional leadership. Committee members were consistently among the wealthiest men in their respective counties, and the wealthiest members of individual committees generally dominated proceedings.²⁵ In addition to political experience and wealth, the committees reflected a geographical balance within the counties. Landon Carter noted that the twenty-eight gentlemen on the Richmond County Committee were "convenient in their Situation to inspect the attention paid to the Association through the whole county." Northampton's Committee divided the county into seven districts and appointed three members from each area to "observe the conduct of all persons therein, touching the association."²⁶

The committee election meetings were the first and most important step in consolidating popular support for the Continental Association. Freeholders and other residents gathered much as they would for the election of Burgesses, and listened to readings of the Association, after which they subscribed to the agreement. Following the election proceedings, the committees circulated copies of the Association in order to collect signatures from individuals who were unable or unwilling to attend the general meeting. In Albemarle County where over two-hundred freeholders participated in the election, the committee sent copies to each of

13 militia captains who garnered signatures in their own localities. Southampton's committee divided the county into ten districts for the distribution of the Association.²⁷

As Virginians had learned in 1769 and 1770, commercial resistance could not succeed without the merchants' acquiescence and their recognition of the committees' authority. The influence of the committee members and the weight of public opinion convinced most merchants, including Scottish factors, to sign the Association. At a meeting of the merchants in Williamsburg during early November, between four and five hundred merchants, "sensible of the need to preserve Peace & Harmony not only between different colonies, but also among all Ranks and Societies in each colony," presented Peyton Randolph with the Association, "voluntarily and generally signed." In Spotsylvania County the committee appointed members to wait on individual merchants and secure their subscriptions to the Association. In the city of Norfolk, where a concentration of Scottish merchants might have presented an obstacle to the execution of the Association, the organizers of the committee election persuaded inhabitants from the surrounding country to participate in the election. Once in power, the Norfolk Committee prevented the sale of goods owned by merchants who had not signed the Association.²⁸

In the few instances when merchants resisted the committees' demand for public assent, popular reaction was

so strong as to force compliance. In Williamsburg, the committee placed a barrel of tar, a bag of feathers, and a tar mop at the spot near the Capitol where reluctant merchants were asked to sign the Association. Under these intimidating circumstances the committee required several people to recant earlier criticisms of the Association. The committee, chaired by Archibald Cary, also called on the merchants Anthony Warwick and Michael Wallace to account for the tea cargoes they had recently imported. Norfolk's committee initially demanded the tea of Warwick and Wallace, who claimed that the cargo had to be landed at Milners in Nansemond County. The merchants never reported the tea to the Nansemond Committee, but, while in Williamsburg, a Nansemond Committee member called them before Cary's committee. The crowd was so angered at the apparent attempt to smuggle tea that only the intercession of Peyton Randolph, Robert Carter Nicholas, Edmund Pendleton and Richard Bland saved the merchants from physical assault. Warwick and Wallace returned to the Nansemond Committee, to which they promised to deliver the tea, and then they "voluntarily signed" the Continental Association.²⁹

William Allason and other merchants from Falmouth in King George County met in January 1775 to establish their own town committee for the purpose of negating the authority of the county Committee. Faced with this challenge, members of the King George Committee asked Richard Henry Lee for his

opinion of Congress's intention in the Association's article 11 calling for committees in counties and towns. Lee assured them that the mention of towns applied only to the cities of the northern colonies and the few population centers in the southern colonies, rather than "small knots or collections of interested Traders." The merchants of Falmouth already had the opportunity to participate in the election of King George's Committee; any further division of the county would produce "endless confusion" and lead "to the utter destruction of the Association." If other communities followed Falmouth's example, committees would appear in every village where the "foreign Traders are generally collected." Lee urged the King George Committee to assert its authority over Falmouth, "and as a Trading Place that their attention to it should be particularly careful."³⁰

On 3 February 1775 the King George Committee, accompanied by the Committee of Stafford County and a crowd of 150 people, confronted the merchants of Falmouth. After interrogating each merchant about the formation of the separate committee, the King George Committee voted to censure the individuals according to the terms of the Continental Association. A portion of the crowd hoped to expose the merchants to public harassment, but the merchants escaped with only the censure of the Committee. The following day, however, William Allason learned that a

Fredericksburg assemblage, angry at the merchants' failure to sign either an apology or the Association, planned to attack the Falmouth traders if ever they entered the nearby town. "From motives of self-preservation," Allason and the others agreed to sign. James Robinson, the Falmouth agent for William Cunninghame & Co., later testified that he signed the Association only to insure his personal safety.³¹

The coercion of merchants and factors who had evaded earlier associations with ease was a measure of the vigor and authority of the county committees. The Continental Association prescribed these local boards for the enforcement of specific commercial regulations, but from the beginning the Virginia committees played a wider role in their respective communities. At the election of the James City Committee, freeholders agreed that the resolutions of the Continental Congress would be "the sole rule of their conduct, in all matters respecting their present political engagements." By January William Carr reported that many county committees exceeded the instructions of the Continental Association, and in Norfolk James Parker complained the "Every thing is Managed by Committee."³² The administration of the Association through local institutions effectively denied Governor Dunmore the means of building any base of royal support. By Christmas, Dunmore was denouncing the assumption of power by committees that supervised every

aspect of merchants' business and raised independent militias "for the avowed purpose of protecting" the committees' authority. When the governor tried to cultivate his local influence he found that nearly every justice of the peace was also a committee member and that by closing the county courts, the local political leadership united itself with the lower ranks of Virginians. Dunmore was convinced the arbitrary proceedings of the committees and the scarcity of basic supplies would breed popular dissent. Until his wishful predictions came true, however, the Governor could only recommend that Parliament exacerbate existing shortages by blockading ports and shutting off all American commerce.³³

An early priority of the county committees was the promotion of local manufactures to ease the expected shortages during the interruption of trade with Great Britain. Dunmore, like many British officials, believed the Virginians were incapable of furnishing their own manufactured goods. "The people of Virginia are very far from being naturally industrious," and even if they reformed their work habits Dunmore assured Lord Dartmouth that "times of anarchy and confusion" would not provide the foundation for improvements in manufacturing.³⁴ Whether as a result of the disinclination Dunmore cited or the more likely consequence of a colonial economy, Virginians in the fall of 1774 did not have the manufacturing capacity to replace even a

fraction of their usual British imports. Of critical necessity were the coarse clothes worn by slaves and which the British produced more cheaply than was possible in Virginia. The Committee of Henrico County sought to satisfy the demand for domestic cloth by offering subscriptions for the "encouragement of all kinds of husbandry and manufactures" within the county. Chesterfield County also raised a subscription for the establishment of cloth manufacturing in the county. Home production of cloth depended on the availability of wool and cotton cards usually imported from Great Britain. Isle of Wight's Committee offered £20 to the first person who made 1,000 "merchantable" cotton or wool cards, and Gloucester County's Committee offered £50 for just sixty of the same cards. In Essex County the committee provided a bounty and offered to buy the cards. The bounty of £40 from Northampton's Committee depended on the card-maker settling in the county. The Northampton Committee regretted its bounty was not larger but proposed joining with other counties to present higher premiums for new manufactures. The committee on Caroline County suggested a similar inter-county scheme for the manufacture of linen.³⁵

The encouragement of local manufactures was generally subordinate to the committees' role in enforcing the restrictions of the Association. Congress recommended the committees as the agency for implementing its program of commercial resistance, but it did not offer specific guide-

lines for applying the Association to the particular economy of each colony. In Virginia the committees quickly asserted their authority over the merchants, especially the British factors who had undermined the earlier nonimportation agreements. By December Dunmore reported to London that the committees had assumed the right to inspect merchants' records and publicly censure any who violated the Association. William Carr complained of unprovoked investigations of traders' accounts, and Charles Yates warned others that the committees would censure merchants "for the smallest deviation." Carr also urged the prominent London merchant, James Russell, to be cautious in all his dealings with Virginians because "some People here are watching every opportunity to render your solicitations fruitless."³⁶

Some committees encouraged local inhabitants to report any violations of the Association, while others actively searched for possible infringements. Prince William County's Committee announced in December that it would summon any merchants suspected of a violation to appear before the committee and to present their daybooks and invoices. Refusal to appear would be considered an admission of guilt. In December Caroline County's Committee, followed by the Charlotte Committee in February, ordered the inspection of local merchants' records before receiving any specific accusations. Charlotte County's Committee hoped the examination of "the day books, invoices, &c. of the

several merchants, or storekeepers within this county" would allow local residents to discriminate between honest merchants and those who subverted the intention of the Association. Christopher McConnico refused the request of the Charlotte Committee and found himself cut off from the business of the community. Only in November 1775, nine months after the original demand, did McConnico deliver his books to the Committee and receive a retraction from their censure.³⁷ The Caroline County Committee also recommended a public boycott of the Port Royal merchants who denied the Committee access to their financial records. The censured merchants published a statement asserting their innocence but failed to persuade Edmund Pendleton, who, as chairman of the Caroline Committee, offered the merchants a final opportunity to cooperate. On 13 January 1775, one day after receiving Pendleton's assurance that no bodily harm would come to them if they attended the meeting, the six Port Royal merchants presented their books and apologies to the Caroline County Committee.³⁸

At the courthouse and every other public place in the county, the Isle of Wight Committee posted copies of the Association's ninth article which prohibited price increases in the face of scarcities. Other committees inspected merchants' records for possible price violations. The Gloucester County Committee boarded the sloop of John Blatt and discovered that his employers ordered him to sell goods

at an advance of 100 percent. The Committee extracted a public apology from John Blatt and from his Scottish ship captain who had challenged the right of the Committee to regulate prices. Two weeks later the Richmond County Committee found Blatt continued to sell goods at an enormous mark-up. Because Blatt was a young man in the employ of John and George Fowler of Alexandria, the Richmond County Committee expelled him from the area and asked the Fairfax County Committee to take action against the Fowlers. In Surry County the Committee censured Robert Kennan for selling salt at 3 shillings rather than his usual price of 2/6; an advance far below Blatt's 100 percent. In addition to the control of prices for merchants' goods, the Caroline County Committee established limits on the prices for raw cotton and wool produced in the colony.³⁹

For two months after 1 December 1774, the Association permitted the importation of goods ordered before the meeting of Congress on the condition that the county committees administer a public sale of the goods. After a merchant or planter delivered up the goods, the committee published a notice of the sale and announced whatever conditions were attached. In some counties importers were able to purchase the cargo for the exact amount indicated by the invoice and thereby avoid paying the surplus which the Association appropriated for the relief of Boston's poor. Under these conditions the importer was restricted only by the

demand for payment in ready money or the competitive bidding of another. In other counties, committees ordered the goods to be sold in smaller batches. The King George County Committee restricted the goods to lots valued at £5 to £20 and determined the exchange rate in January 1775 to be 35 percent. In Henrico County the committee sold 3,500 bushels of salt in lots of 500 bushels. The profits from these sales were generally small or nonexistent, although in King George County the sale of £357 worth of goods produced a profit of over £19, and in Spotsylvania County the committee collected a profit of more than £21 on a cargo worth £258.⁴⁰ Dr. Alexander Gordon offered the one instance of opposition to the public sale of imports when he refused to hand over £200 of medicine on the grounds that the provincial Association exempted medicines. When the Norfolk Borough Committee protested that they were governed by the Continental Association, Gordon replied that he preferred to store the goods according to the provision of the Association rather than offer them for a public sale. Gordon also appealed to Peyton Randolph for an opinion on his right to import medicines. After Randolph confirmed the committee's decision, Gordon refused to deliver the medicines for sale or storage. A reluctant committee, abandoning its effort to provide the medicines to the community, published a notice of Gordon's violation.⁴¹

After 1 February 1775 any goods imported into Virginia

met with the committees' demand for immediate reshipment. The authority of the committees and the observation of citizens was such that few individuals attempted to challenge the nonimportation agreement. Occasionally the inspection of a merchant's books would yield evidence of a plan to smuggle goods. When a ship carrying slaves from Jamaica arrived in Norfolk, consigned to John Brown, the merchant denied that he ordered the bondsmen. The committee's review of Brown's letterbook, however, revealed that he had asked for all remittances from Jamaica to be made in slaves, and he had warned the Jamaicans to watch out for the enforcement committees. The Norfolk Committee condemned Brown for "willfully and perversely" violating the Association. In June 1775 the same committee investigated the arrival of the ship Molly loaded with goods for Eilbeck, Ross & Co. of Norfolk. The ship's invoice indicated that the cargo was sent by Walker Chambre of Whitehaven without an order from Eilbeck or Ross. The committee nevertheless ordered a reshipment on board the same vessel and asked the merchants to obtain a certificate from Whitehaven authenticating the relanding in Great Britain. When the committee received the certificate in August, it published the name of Chambre as an enemy of America. Essex County's Committee chose the strictest enforcement of the nonimportation agreement, even in questionable cases. In 1773 Captain Joseph Richardson had imported into Virginia a cargo of osnaburg cloth that he

could not sell at the time. He carried the cloth to Antigua but on a recent trip to the island, finding the cloth unsold, brought it back to Essex County. The Essex Committee did not censure Richardson, who was unaware of the Association when he returned from Antigua, but it insisted that he return the osnaburg.⁴²

The committees' enforcement of non-commercial provisions in the Continental Association served to unify public opinion and silence the opposition. Violators of Article Eight's prohibition of gambling occasionally received a public censure from their local committee, but frequently the committees preferred to use the gamblers' contrition as an example for others to emulate. The Cumberland County Committee found that John Scruggs though guilty of gambling "exhibited such Marks of true Penitance, that it is resolved that the said Scruggs be again considered a worthy Member of the Community." When four men voluntarily appeared before the Southampton County Committee, confessed to gambling, and agreed to refund their winnings, the committee members asked the public to "join with them in not consider[in]g them as enemies to American liberty." Orange County's Committee explained that its decision not to censure an apologetic gambler "proceeds from a desire to distinguish penitent and submissive from refractory and obstinate offenders."⁴³

The committees were uniformly rigorous in their application of the Association, particularly the commercial

restrictions on merchants, and intolerant of all dissent. The Association, however, seldom resembled a witch hunt or vendetta against unpopular merchants. The committees were careful to maintain their credibility and public respect by clearing the innocent of inaccurate charges. The Brunswick County Committee published a vindication of merchant Allan Lane, who stood accused of speaking against the American resistance to Great Britain. Witnesses before the committee denied the reports, and Love offered assurances by signing the Association. After declaring his belief that Parliament had no right to tax the colonies, Love asked the committee to publish an exoneration of his name. A subcommittee in Spotsylvania County inspected the daybook and journal of merchant William Triplett on a suspicion of his selling goods for an unreasonable price. Although the committee members attested to the "good ground for the accusation," they found no evidence of price hikes and published their acquittal of Triplett. Landon Carter as chairman of the Richmond County Committee personally investigated two merchants who allegedly hoarded goods during the first weeks of the Association. When Carter was convinced of their innocence he presented the evidence to the bearer of the accusation. Carter ordered an account of the case to be printed in the Virginia Gazette "in Order to discourage and stifle such ungenerous, as well as unjust Accusations." The Norfolk Borough Committee demanded to know the name of all

accusers "as it is obvious to every one that aspersions of this nature should be well founded before they are made public."⁴⁴

During the early months of 1775, several committees suggested refinements and amendments to the regulations of the Association in order to make its enforcement more effective in Virginia. The Richmond County Committee feared that small vessels trading within the colony might subvert the nonimportation agreement by smuggling goods from British ships waiting off shore. Beginning in early February the Committee required all shipmasters and supercargoes selling goods to provide a certificate attesting that the items were imported in accordance with the Association. The certificates, to be issued by committees in the counties from which the traders came, would also provide a license to sell the cargo. The Westmoreland County Committee similarly was concerned with the "itinerant or casual vender of goods" who might carry illicit imports from one county to another. Before traveling venders sold any goods in Westmoreland County, they needed to provide the county Committee with proof of importation before 1 February 1775.⁴⁵

Without specifically referring to the problems of supervising commerce, the Virginia Convention of March 1775 passed a series of resolutions designed to enhance the colonists' ability to abide by the Continental Association. The delegates urged local magistrates and church officials to

find employment for the poor and vagrants in their communities. The perennial problem of drifters and the indigent might now become an advantage in the establishment of manufactures if officials enforced the poor laws. The Convention intended several of its resolves to promote the manufacture of increasingly scarce cloth. The Association's encouragement of sheep raising expanded into a prohibition of the butchering and marketing of all sheep under the age of four years old. The Convention further recommended that families in need of mutton kill those sheep "least profitable to be kept." In order to expand the potential for home manufactures, the Convention requested large landholders to offer their flax, hemp, and cotton on moderate terms to their neighbors. Cloth was the item most in demand during nonimportation, but the Convention also promoted the manufacture of iron for nails and wire, steel, paper made from rags, salt, saltpeter and sulphur for gunpowder, glass, and the cards and heckles used in the preparation of hemp and flax for weaving. The building of fulling mills and mills for processing hemp and flax would allow manufacturing on a larger scale than was possible on individual plantations. The cultivation of hops and barley would encourage the brewing of liquors in Virginia, and thereby lessen the dependence on imported alcoholic drinks. The Convention had no means to finance these recommended developments, but the delegates hoped premiums from local committees and a

preference among consumers for American-made goods would provide the material encouragement for diversifying the colonial economy.⁴⁶

An earlier resolution of the Convention of March 1775 confirmed the first Convention's private agreement to close the courts to all debt cases. The announcement of 25 March 1775 recommended that no one proceed with civil suits at the April General Court. The delegates also advised the county courts not to hear civil cases other than such "amicable proceedings as may become necessary for the Settlement, Division, or Distribution of Estates." In the meantime, they could only hope that creditors would be indulgent and debtors attempt to pay to the best of their abilities. Any private disputes incapable of resolution should be decided by "judicious Neighbours."⁴⁷

The Convention also called on local committees to reorganize and strengthen the colonial militia. Since the fall of 1764, some committees had been involved with military matters ranging from the organization of independent companies to the promotion of gunpowder manufacture. In the months following the March Convention, military business became more important and eventually would eclipse most of the commercial functions of the county committees. Yet, the outbreak of hostilities in Massachusetts, the Governor's removal of the gunpowder from Williamsburg, and the preparations for defense in Virginia had important commercial

implications for the local committees and the Continental Congress. The threat of further British military action necessitated some restriction on the open coastwise trade that allowed merchants to carry provisions to British troops in Boston. Once Governor Dunmore retreated from Williamsburg in June and later fortified himself near Norfolk, the internal trade of Virginia also required protection against the British interception of supplies.⁴⁸

Various county committees in Virginia responded to military preparations with a closer supervision of trade within their respective jurisdictions. In addition to their establishment of a system of authorization certificates for all incoming and outgoing cargoes, the committees investigated charges of merchants' complicity with the British military. Traders found guilty of these accusations faced the most severe reprisals of the local community. Anthony Warwick who had shipped a large quantity of pork to Gage's troops in Boston and smuggled gunpowder into North Carolina evaded the summons of the Nansemond County Committee only to face a determined mob from Isle of Wight County. The crowd, which Warwick labeled "a rabble" but the Virginia Gazette characterized as "a number of respectable inhabitants," overcame Warwick and carried him ten miles to the town of Smithfield. There Warwick received the only coat of tar and feathers recorded during the rule of the county committees. The crowd subsequently planted Warwick on a horse and chased

him out of town with "a shower of eggs."⁴⁹

The general expectation of a revised Association in the aftermath of military conflict led the Gloucester County Committee on 2 May 1775 to prohibit all tobacco exports to Great Britain, pending a further determination by the Continental Congress. Within ten days of Gloucester's ruling, Virginians learned that the Maryland Convention had suspended all exports to Boston and the continental colonies not subscribing to the Association. Before 20 May George Mason wrote to William Lee of the possibility that exports would end "much sooner" than 10 September 1775. Mason was among the Virginians who found several reasons to hasten the start of the nonexportation agreement. As early as March, Robert Pleasants referred to support for an earlier nonexportation enforcement as a means of blocking the attempts of Scottish factors to prolong exports. Mason believed that an earlier observance of nonexportation would be the most effective response to Parliament's Restraining Acts. The New England Restraining Act of March 1775 closed off all trade in and out of the New England colonies and blocked the New Englanders' access to offshore fishing grounds. A second Restraining Act, approved by the King in April, applied similar restrictions to the trade of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina. Mason hoped that a nonexportation association, commencing before the enforcement of these acts, would "have the Appearance of

Reprizal."⁵⁰

When the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in May 1775, the delegates approved several resolutions designed to adjust the commercial association to the need of military defense. Congress ordered an immediate halt to all exports to the British continental colonies outside the Association. The resolution specifically banned the shipment of any provisions to the British fisheries off the New England coast. Congress also forbade the shipment of any provisions to British troops in Massachusetts or to British vessels transporting troops or supplies to America. After a debate on the proposed early start for nonexportation, the delegates voted to keep the 10 September date. In fact a secret resolution permitted a limited export trade to continue after September as a means of paying for the importation of military supplies. In addition to these revisions in the commercial regulations of the Association, Congress added the Restraining Acts to its list of legislation which must be repealed before a resumption of Anglo-American trade.⁵¹

George Mason remained convinced that Virginia's security required further trade restrictions. At the Provincial Convention convened at Richmond in July, Mason submitted a proposal to end all exports of grain and other provisions from the colony on 5 August 1775. As protection against British raids, the resolution ordered inhabitants

living in towns and along navigable waters to store only those provisions which they needed for their own use. The resolution as approved by the Convention on 24 July also recommended that anyone living within five miles of the shoreline should thresh out only the amount of wheat they needed at a given time.⁵²

This late alteration in the trade regulations of Virginia's Association provoked immediate opposition from those merchants who depended almost entirely on the grain trade for their business. The Norfolk Borough Committee asked their Convention delegates to consider the hardships imposed on local merchants who had entered contracts for grain shipments in August and already held unusually large quantities in their warehouses. The committee's request for repeal of the resolution warned of the probable erosion of popular support for the Association if this amendment went into effect. A group of powerful merchants in Norfolk and Portsmouth sent a similar protest to their convention delegates, although their language was considerably less conciliatory than the petition from the borough committee. The traders were particularly critical of a resolution "which was adopted with great haste, and without even allowing time or opportunity for the trading interest of the colony to know that such a measure was in agitation." A third appeal from the Northampton County Committee requested an exemption for the local traders who had negotiated

cargoes of Indian corn for export to the West Indies. The committee assured the Convention that no cargoes would sail northward near the British installations.⁵³

The Convention dismissed the merchants' petition, which it considered insolent and inflammatory, but was more sympathetic toward the appeals from the two committees. The delegates could not make an exception for grain shipments from Norfolk, however, because many of the delegates who voted for the resolution also had personal interests in the grain trade. They did make an exception, however, for traders who already had negotiated shipments of Indian corn from last year's crop.⁵⁴ The whole debate on Mason's resolution became pointless August on 8 when the Convention received word of the Maryland Convention's refusal to join in the early nonexportation agreement. Matthew Tilghman explained that the Marylanders saw no advantage to stopping exports of commodities that would continue to flow from the ports of other colonies. The adjournment of Congress prevented any further consideration of the issue until after the 10 September commencement of nonexportation of all commodities.⁵⁵

When exports finally came to a halt in September, the local committees enforced the trade restrictions just as they had done with the import trade. Export violations, however, were minimal and seldom appeared among the business of the committees. Violators of the nonexportation agree-

ment were difficult to prosecute, of course, since they often left the county with their illicit shipments. The presence of British ships enforcing the Restraining Acts, however, served to enforce the Association as well. Some smuggling occurred -- grain to the West Indies and tobacco to continental markets -- but for nearly all of the merchants and traders in Virginia September 1775 brought an end to all opportunities for external trade.⁵⁶

Once the terms of the Association were announced and county committees began to enforce the agreement, planters and merchants prepared for the prolonged cessation of commerce between Great Britain and the colonies. Planters and resident merchants searched for replacements for the essential supplies normally imported and turned their attention to new crops that could be marketed in ports outside of Great Britain. The Scottish factors and other agents of British merchant firms made every effort to secure the largest possible remittances of tobacco and other commodities before the enforcement of the nonexportation agreement. With no access to courts for the recovery of outstanding debts, the British merchants could only hope to secure tobacco from indebted planters and ship it to what everyone agreed would be inflated markets in Great Britain.

As during earlier boycotts of British goods, Virginians hoped to establish the large-scale manufactures that were

beyond the capability of individual plantations. Elisha and Robert White hoped to meet the demand for cloth with the establishment of a "Woolen and Worsted Manufactory" in Henrico County. After receiving encouragement from the Virginia Convention, the Whites solicited subscriptions for the support of their project. They promised investors the security of repayment in the form of finished cloth.⁵⁷

Arthur Lee assured his friends in Virginia that the Association would be effective only if the colonists managed to supply their own needs. Planting grain crops and "Great quantities of Cotton" would convince the British that the threat of nonexportation was serious and would enable the Virginians to survive without British trade. Lee also urged Virginians to grow every kind of crop that would produce the alcoholic beverages so in demand among "the Common Planters." If the organizers of the Association failed to satisfy the needs of the average planter, Lee feared the Scots would take advantage of popular resentment.⁵⁸

The complete cessation of British imports forced most planters to concentrate on collecting the basic provisions immediately required by their families before they could turn their attention to the ambitious schemes recommended by Lee. Robert Carter Nicholas, who refused to buy anything from England after May 1774, was unable to gather in Virginia more than one-third of his usual supplies. Nicholas was fortunate enough to own an estate capable of

producing some of these goods. By December 1774 Nicholas had ordered his plantation steward to reorganize the estate for greater self-sufficiency. In place of tobacco, Nicholas turned the land over to wheat, hemp, flax, cotton, and pasture for sheep. He also provided a building on his plantation to house slave women working in the preparation and weaving of cloth. "Instead of reaping the Advantages of an Estate hitherto somewhat profitable to me," Nicholas expected only to "cloath and feed my numerous Family and my Slaves."⁵⁹ Robert Carter of Nomini Hall had avoided the debate on commercial resistance through the summer of 1774 but by October recognized the need to make provisions for the supply of his extensive estates. He informed an overseer that all future plans for the plantation would be governed by Congress's announcement of nonimportation and nonexportation. Carter ordered enough flax and hemp seed to employ one-hundred slaves in the preparation of these crops. He also chose ten slave women, "the most expert Spinners belonging to me," to work solely in the preparation of cloth. What formerly served as a tobacco house at one of Carter's plantations in February 1775 became the spinning work shop.⁶⁰

While large planters diverted slaves to the work of cloth production, the majority of Virginians faced severe shortages, particularly of cloth. By March of 1775 William Allason reported such scarcities "of all kinds of course

Goods" that he could not imagine "how the poorer sort of People & Negroes are to be provided with Cloathing & Linnen in future." Two months later Allason could find no osnaburg at all. Robert Pleasants hoped to locate "Negro Cloth" in the West Indies since it would be some time before the local manufacturing schemes were "brought to perfection." In the fall of 1775 a British sailor reported that cloth was not available "for money at any rate, there being none in the country."⁶¹

In contrast to the hardships created by nonimportation, the scheduled nonexportation agreement provided Virginia planters with an opportunity to demand higher prices for their tobacco crops. Once the merchants began to speculate in expectation of an unusually high market in London, the planters held out for the highest reported prices. James Robinson, agent for William Cunninghame & Co., recognized the dangers of speculative buying and recommended that the factors concentrate on collecting tobacco from debtors. Robinson also organized a merchant agreement to limit the price to 14/ per hundredweight of tobacco. The informal plan for a price restriction was ineffective in the face of the pressures to ship as much as possible and the reluctance of the planters to part with their crop at such a low price. Planters also refused to ship on consignment or exchange tobacco for goods at the factors' stores. Merchants who hoped to get tobacco to the most favorable

British markets had no choice but to compete for cash purchases. By February Charles Yates reported that a great deal of tobacco was bought and resold in the colony by merchants. Even the Cunninghame factors began to make cash purchases.⁶²

The interest in speculation and the frequent advances of bills from London satisfied the planters hope for higher prices. From a price of 16/ currency in November 1774, Potomac River tobacco was fetching as much as 25/ sterling in February 1775, and planters were refusing 20/ sterling. Prices continued to climb throughout the spring months, especially in May when the threat of an earlier nonexportation agreement convinced planters to make extravagant offers. The rush to buy and ship was so strong that William Carr in Dumfries could not locate any extra loading craft. James Robinson complained that the planters' demands exceeded the price limits established by Wm. Cunninghame & Co. in the aftermath of the credit crisis. The regular offers of 20/ sterling and more appeared to Cunninghame factor James Likly the highest prices could go. By July, however, merchants on James River repeatedly paid as much as 27/6 for a hundred weight of tobacco.⁶³

The merchants' generous offers for tobacco through the first half of 1775 were one indication of how thoroughly the Continental Association regulated business activity in Virginia. The committees' careful observation of all

shipping, the popular determination to refuse imports and halt exports, and the closing of the courts forced merchants to meet the planters' demands. The merchants who had come to play so influential a role in the colony now found themselves with no protection for their investments and loans in the colony. Once exports ended in September, many merchants had no reason to remain in Virginia, despite uncollected debts. Just two weeks after the beginning of nonexportation, James Parker found that many of the factors in Norfolk had left and more were preparing to go home. One of those who remained sent word to Glasgow that "business is Scarcely now talked of." Factors in the colony relied on the dubious process of personal application for the collection of debts. James Gilchrist complained that the people "are not so ready to pay as when the compulsive Power of the Law can be exerted behind them."⁶⁴

Virginia's success in regulating the business activity of British merchants in the colony failed to produce the expected results in Great Britain. Rather than respond to the cessation of trade with an accession to American demands, the British only offered further restrictions on colonial trade. In part this was a result of the Virginians' insistence that nonexportation be delayed a year. As soon as they learned of the terms of the Continental Association, Arthur and William Lee warned their fellow Virginians that the postponement of nonexportation would prevent

the merchants in London from taking seriously the new round of commercial resistance. In fact, many British merchants saw it as an opportunity to reduce outstanding debts.⁶⁵ Merchants could also afford to ignore the American Association because of a coincidental rise in demand for British goods in other markets. In August 1775 a Glasgow merchant informed an associate in Virginia that demand for manufactures was so great, and prices so advanced, that "the greatest peace & harmony is everywhere to be seen ... In short these disturbances have happened at a very lucky time."⁶⁶

William Lee, now active in radical London politics, was in a position to see the weakness of the merchants' support for America. As the North American merchants met in January to prepare a petition, Lee predicted that "they will not go any further than the Ministers choose for there is a good understanding between them."⁶⁸ A friend of Virginia merchant Thomas Adams also found "the Majority of the Merchts in the American Trade are very Cold & Indifferent."⁶⁷ From Liverpool, Gildart & Busigny urged Robert Carter to disregard the petition from their own port "as we have reasons to believe many have put their hands to papers much against their inclinations, and did it for fear of losing their Commissions from America."⁶⁸

When Gustavus Wallace arrived in Scotland from Virginia in March 1775 he confidently assured his brother that the

Glasgow merchants actively supported the American cause. After two months in the country, he realized that Virginia had "few real friends" among the Scottish merchants. In London, William Lee learned that the Glasgow merchants followed their public petition with a private message to Lord North, promising him that they intended no real opposition.⁶⁹

The strict observation of the Continental Association in Virginia was no more successful at prompting new economic growth than it was at applying political pressure in Great Britain. In part, the failure of schemes for diversification and manufactures was the result of the demands of military preparation. The problems of provisioning colonial soldiers and protecting local commerce from British interception took precedence over the county committees' initial support for agricultural and manufacturing experiments. The severe shortages of all goods and the various dislocations of wartime further limited the ability of individuals to reorganize their plantations and farms. The inadequacies of the Association's plans for development, however, persisted long after the early years of military organization. Ten years of commercial resistance had failed to establish a foundation for independent economic growth in the years following the Revolution.

During and after the Revolutionary War, Virginians discovered that the elimination of what they considered the

most detrimental aspects of the commercial connection with Great Britain produced few of the expected benefits. The regulation of merchants' business, the protection from creditors' demands, and the halt to British imports only forced the Virginians to look elsewhere for the commercial services formerly supplied by the British. The acute demand for supplies in the midst of war actually increased the dependence on tobacco exports as a means of attracting manufactured goods. Unfortunately, the tobacco trade to new markets failed to encourage the development of a stronger commercial class in Virginia. After the return of peace, the British merchants, with their superior commercial organization and offers of cheap manufactures, regained control of Virginia's tobacco trade.⁷⁰

In 1785 James Madison decried the British monopoly of Virginia's trade in words that were nearly identical to the complaints of other Virginians twenty and thirty years earlier. The British merchants, Madison claimed, used their unchallenged control of the trade to reduce the planters' accounts with fraudulent charges. He also was convinced the merchants raised the price of goods intended for Virginia. While these chronic disadvantages of the tobacco trade continued after the Revolution, Madison pointed out that the loss of the West Indies trade deprived Virginia of its only favorable trade. Despite the obvious dissatisfaction with the tobacco trade, Virginians had no choice but to continue

planting the crop in order to satisfy their needs. Madison expected that the crop of 1785 would be the largest since the war.⁷¹

By focusing on British merchants and their effect on commercial relations within the Empire, the organizers and supporters of commercial resistance in Virginia failed to recognize the inherent limitations of a plantation economy. The Associations had relieved only the symptoms of a dependence that was rooted in the whole structure of Virginia society. The great planters who dominated political life in Virginia refused to abandon the plantation system that was a central support of their influence in the colony. Their concentration on efforts to make the plantation safe from the risks of commercial involvement deprived Virginia of the opportunity to establish any kind of self-sufficient or integrated economy. The continued predominance of staple agriculture and an inflexible system of slave labor left Virginia's planters at the mercy of distant markets and foreign commercial communities. The great planters' organization of the resistance and Revolution in Virginia preserved their local influence and maintained their estates as the central economic power in their communities, but the dependence on the British commercial interests long after the achievement of political independence left all Virginians prey to the same market fluctuations that plagued the colony. When the markets for Virginia's staple finally

collapsed in the 1790s, the world of the eighteenth-century gentry vanished forever.

Chapter Eight Endnotes

- 1 Background on the First Continental Congress in David Ammerman, In the Common Cause: American Response to the Coercive Acts of 1774 (Charlottesville, 1974), 53-87; Jensen, The Founding of a Nation, 483-507; congressional action on nonimportation in Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, 34 vols. (Washington, 1904), 1:41, 43; Notes on debate in John Adams, Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, L.H. Butterfield, ed. 2 vols (New York, 1964), 2:137-40.
- 2 Nonimportation of dutied articles recommended in Albemarle Resolves, Rev. Va., 1:112; Mifflin's proposal and notes on the debate in Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, 2:138-40, 147-49; Ammerman, In the Common Cause, 81; Journal of the Continental Congress, 1:54.
- 3 Diary and Autobiography of John Adams, 2:138-40; Journals of the Continental Congress, 1:51-52.
- 4 Ammerman, In the Common Cause, 82-83.
- 5 Journals of the Continental Congress, 1:53, 62, 74-75.
- 6 Text of Continental Association in Journals of the Continental Congress, 1:75-80; For Virginia county meetings see Rev. Va., 1:112, 132-3, 147, 152, 160.
- 7 Journals of the Continental Congress, 1:75-80.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid. According to the Continental Association, the only supervisory institution above the local committees would be the provincial committees of correspondence, which would oversee the custom operations in their respective colonies and occasionally inform other colonial committees of circumstances relative to the Association.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid., 82-90; draft of Lee's address, 1774, Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 12 Journals of the Continental Congress, 1:90-101.

- 13 Ibid., 115-121; Congress transmitted the petition to the King through the agents of the colonies, *ibid.*, 122.
- 14 Richard Henry Lee to [Arthur Lee], 26 June 1774, in Ballagh, ed., The Letters of Richard Henry Lee, 114-118; draft of Memorial, [1774], Lee Family Papers, (UVA microfilm).
- 15 William Carr to James Russell, 23 Oct. 1774, Russell Papers.
- 16 James Parker to Charles Steuart, 26 Oct. 1774, postscript 1 Nov., Charles Steuart Papers; for account of actions by Caroline and Westmoreland County Committees see Rev. Va., 2:160-62, 165.
- 17 Rev. Va., 2:163-64, 218-19.
- 18 Ibid., 165-66: James Parker to Charles Steuart, 6 Dec. 1774, Charles Steuart Papers.
- 19 Rev. Va., 1:218-19.
- 20 VG(Dixon & Hunter), 6 May 1775; James Parker to Charles Steuart, 27 Nov. 1774, Charles Steuart Papers; Charles Yates to Gale & Fearon, 2 Dec. 1774, Yates Letterbook; Norton did resume his consignment collections in Virginia after his account was published in the Virginia Gazette, see John Norton & Sons, 379-87.
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- 33 Governor Dunmore to Earl of Dartmouth, 24 Dec. 1774, PRO, CO5/1353.
- 34 Ibid.

- 35 Henrico County Committee, 12 Dec. 1774, Rev. Va., 2:189; Chesterfield County Committee, 7 Apr. 1775, ibid., 3:34-35; Isle of Wight County Committee, 13 February 1775, ibid., 2:287; Gloucester County Committee, 25 Apr. 1775, ibid., 3:60; Essex County Committee, 2 Mar. 1775, ibid., 3:306-07; Northampton County Committee, 11 Jan. 1775, ibid., 2:231-32; and Caroline County Committee, 11 May 1775, ibid., 3:117.
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- 38 Caroline County Committee, 26 Dec. 1774, 12 Jan. 13 Jan., 19 Jan. 1775, Rev. Va., 2:210, 232-33, 233-34, 245-46.
- 39 Isle of Wight County Committee, 17 Jan. 1775, Rev. Va., 2:243; Gloucester County Committee, ibid., 234-35; Richmond County Committee, 7 Feb. 1775, ibid., 281-82; Surry County Committee, 22 Aug. 1775, ibid., 3:479-80; Caroline County Committee, 8 Apr. 1775, ibid., 36; Caroline County Committee, 16 Dec. 1774, ibid., 2:200.
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- 42 Norfolk Borough Committee, 3 June, 4 June, 23 Aug. 1775, Rev. Va., 3:186-88, 190, 483; Essex County Committee, 2 Mar. 1775, ibid., 2:306-07.
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- ibid., 42; Orange County Committee, 23 Feb. 1775, ibid., 2:302.
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