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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Aaron Scott Crawford entitled "John Randolph of Roanoke and the Politics of Doom: Slavery, Sectionalism, and Self-Deception, 1773-1821." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in History.

Daniel Feller, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Stephen Ash, Ernest Freeberg, Michael Fitzgerald

Accepted for the Council:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

John Randolph of Roanoke and the Politics of Doom: Slavery, Sectionalism, and Self-Deception,
1773-1821

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Aaron Scott Crawford

December 2012

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, William B. Crawford, and my advisor, Daniel Feller.

Acknowledgments

Completing this dissertation had been a lengthy and collaborative effort, and many people have assisted me. My advisor, Dr. Daniel Feller, has proven far more patient than should be expected. His insights have been valuable and his guidance has been critical. I have, in part, dedicated this dissertation to him as an appreciative gesture for all he has done for me in the past decade. Stephen Ash and Ernest Freeberg offered invaluable advice to me during their seminars, and their assistance with the dissertation is greatly appreciated. I had the pleasure of working with Michael Fitzgerald at the Howard H. Baker Jr., Center for Public Policy, and I have valued his support and kindness. Dr. John F. Marszalek has been an important mentor, and I thank him and his wife, Jeanne, for everything they have done for me. The colleagues that have endured incessant talk of John Randolph have been innumerable, but I want to recognize three of them. Dr. Will Bolt's knowledge of the Early American politics has been incredibly helpful. Dr. Tom Coens' criticisms have been insightful. Dr. John Kvach has been encouraging and thoughtful in his advice, particularly about Southern history. All three gentlemen have generously shared important sources and documents throughout the project. I also want to thank Pdraig Riley for his comments on a portion of the dissertation presented at the 2010 Society for Historians of the Early American Republic meeting. Nicholas Wood shared critical Randolph documents. Bethany Keiper, Erin Scanlon, Dr. Mike Ballard, and Dr. Cadra McDaniel all read portions of the dissertation and helped correct numerous errors. Rachel Cannady helped untangle many grammatical problems. I also want to express my appreciation to several other people who have assisted in very important ways, particularly Dr. Fashion Bowers, Elizabeth Coggins, Dr. Travis Hardy, Dr. Paul Coker, Dr. Aaron Purcell, Dr. Tim Jenness, Patti Rebholz, Dr. Nissa Dahlin-Brown, Carl Pierce, David Nolen, and Kim Harrison. I need to especially thank Alan Lowe for his guidance and leadership. Bobby Holt, my oldest friend, has encouraged me for years in this work and always been there for me. Lisa Crawford's emotional support and impeccable research skills were crucial. For years, she supported my research and listened to more Randolph stories than a person should have to. Fortunately, she still greets me in good humor and kindness. Virginia Historical Society and Nelson Lankford offered valuable support for this project. Librarians and archivists from numerous institutions have aided in my attempt to accumulate Randolph's letters and documents. In particular, I want to thank the archives and special collections staffs at several institutions including the University of Virginia, the Library of Virginia, the Library of Congress, Randolph College, Duke University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the New York Public Library, the Massachusetts Historical Society. Laurel Sammonds has been the most patient and understanding partner that I could have hoped for, and I am glad that she has been there as I complete the dissertation. Finally, I want to thank my mother, Pat Crawford, who will be glad that I am finally out of school. I dedicate this dissertation to my late father, William B. Crawford, a Virginia public servant for thirty-five years. He introduced me to the world of Thomas Jefferson, and for that I will be forever grateful.

Abstract

In 1979, Robert Dawidoff wrote that it “was on the question of slavery that John Randolph contributed most decisively to American history.” Randolph’s stance on slavery has perplexed historians and biographers since his death in 1833. This dissertation examines the paradox of slavery in the life and career of John Randolph from the American Revolution until the Missouri Compromise. In an attempt to understand his public and private contradictions concerning slavery and the role of intense sectionalism in his politics, I have attempted to correlate his words with his actions. An examination of his letters reveal a man decidedly devoted to the belief that slavery was wrong, but a closer look of his public actions expose his commitment to preventing anyone from challenging that institution. Randolph’s cognitive dissonance over slavery is revealed in his letters and speeches, which often display alternating strands of brutal honesty and masterful self-deception. In his life as a member of the Virginia gentry, he struggled with deep-seated feelings of regret and angst over holding slaves. In his public career, Randolph’s attitudes about slavery, slaveholding, and sectionalism cultivated countless public debates in which he participated. Randolph considered the interests of Southern slaveholders above all else during his political career. Though in September 1815, he insisted that he wanted to be the American counterpart to British abolitionist William Wilberforce, he resisted any public effort to free American slaves. He devoted himself to the public defense of slavery, while privately planning the freedom for his own slaves. He saw himself as slavery’s severest critic while he acted as the most ardent defender of Virginia’s slave power. For Randolph, that transformation occurred primarily in the political realm and was informed by the declining fortunes of Virginia’s planter gentry. Examining Randolph’s contradictions on slavery is a means of examining the transformation of antislavery principles in the South during the Early Republic.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In January 1824, the United States Congress prepared to pass The General Survey Act, which would create a system of internal improvements. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun, a staunch nationalist, had for years advocated a program to build roads and canals across the states, conquering the space of the expanding republic. The bill would give the president and the central government unprecedented power in planning and executing public works projects. Calhoun and his fellow nationalists believed that the bill was necessary to strengthen the economy and the political Union. Stronger transportation and communication systems would connect sections, peoples, and ideas. In the House of Representatives, John Randolph of Roanoke rejected this vision of the nation's future and warned of the bill's true ramifications. "I ask the attention of every gentleman who happens to stand in the same unfortunate predicament with myself—of every man who has the misfortune to be, and to have been born, a slaveholder," Randolph said. "If Congress possesses the power to do what is proposed in this bill," he argued, "they may emancipate every slave in the United States."¹

Though Congress passed the General Survey Act, Randolph's warning became the clarion call that defined the struggle of slaveholders in American politics until the Civil War. Indeed, his 1824 internal improvements speech has been widely viewed as a pivotal statement that defined the antebellum proslavery effort. Historian William J. Cooper has argued that Randolph's "doom-laden" prophecy emerged from "two decades of constitutional foreboding." James Oakes claimed that the 1824 statement demonstrated the "portents of disunity in the face

¹*Annals of Congress*, 18:1, 1308.

of a rising antislavery threat.” Historians have correctly positioned Randolph as a pivotal figure in the proslavery political movement that led to the Civil War.²

During the antebellum period, rabid sectionalists promoted the image of John Randolph as the South’s first sentinel against antislavery forces. In 1860, one commentator chided fellow Southerners for ignoring “the Cassandra voice of honest John Randolph.” Beverly Tucker cast Randolph, his stepbrother, as the South’s original fire-eater. In Tucker’s writings, Randolph became the archetypal Southern gentleman defending the interest of his hamlet, a precursor to the most tragic creations of William Faulkner. A committed Southern nationalist, Tucker romanticized his kinsman as the most committed defender of the South. In his 1836 Southern dystopian political novel, *The Partisan Leader*, Tucker imagined a civil war, which drove the Deep South out of the Union and led Virginia to defy the tyranny of a fictional President Martin Van Buren, then in his fourth term. As the fictional Virginians finally stepped forward to defend their rights, it seemed as “if the spirit of John Randolph had risen from the sleep of death.” Tucker believed that Randolph had handed Southerners a charge to defend slavery from Northerners and abolitionists.³

In August 1836, the same year that Tucker published his novel, William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator* portrayed a very different John Randolph. After his death in 1833, the public learned that the arch-defender of slavery had granted freedom to his slaves and provided for their

²William J. Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery; Southern Politics to 1860* (New York: Knopf, 1983), 151; James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: Knopf, 1990), 128.

³J. Quitman Moore, “The Attitude of the South,” *Debow’s Review: Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial Progress and Resources* (July 1860), 26; William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: G. Braziller, 1961), 159; Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, *The Partisan Leader, A Novel, And An Apocalypse of the Origin and Struggles of the Southern Confederacy* (Richmond: Thomas A. Ware, 1862, reprint), 23.

resettlement in free Ohio. “I give to my slaves their freedom, to which my conscience tells me they are justly entitled,” his will declared. Furthermore, Randolph had expressed the “deepest regret” of ever inheriting them. His closest relatives, the Tucker family, insisted that he had been insane when he wrote the will and contested it in the Virginia courts. In coverage of the litigation, *The Liberator* and many other Northern papers offered anecdotal evidence that the South’s most ardent slavemaster had really been an antislavery man. In one colorful anecdote, a stranger appeared at his plantation, where Randolph served him dinner. During the meal, his guest inquired about buying one of Randolph’s favorite servants. Realizing that his guest was a slavetrader, Randolph drew his pistols and chased the man out of his house. Following the stranger on horseback with guns pointed, Randolph shouted—“Off my grounds, you rascal!”⁴

Randolph’s complicated relationship with slavery confounded contemporaries and has mystified scholars, historians, and biographers. In 1922, William Cabell Bruce, Randolph’s most comprehensive biographer, wrote that “there was a lack of coherence” in his public views on slavery. Russell Kirk’s *John Randolph of Roanoke* has argued that Randolph served as a bridge between the antislavery early republic and the proslavery South of the antebellum period. Kirk viewed Randolph’s defense of slavery as an unfortunate part of his conservative philosophy’s emphasis on preserving tradition and portrayed Randolph as hopelessly trapped by slavery. Robert Dawidoff contends in his *The Education of John Randolph* that “[i]t was on the question of slavery that John Randolph contributed most decisively to American history.” Randolph’s political position on the issue “charted the course” for the South’s eventual secession from the Union, Dawidoff argued. Yet, in his attempt to reconcile the proslavery and antislavery positions of the man, Dawidoff conceded that the issue of Randolph and slavery is “at once simple and

⁴*The Liberator*, August 13, 1836.

confusing.” Each of these authors placed Randolph among the generation of hopeful Southern antislavery men from the Revolutionary era which included Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Randolph’s stepfather, St. George Tucker. During the complex political era between the American Revolution and the Missouri Compromise in 1820, Randolph held private antislavery and public proslavery beliefs “without hypocrisy,” Dawidoff argued.⁵

The idea of Randolph as principled conservative intellectual has dominated writings about him since the middle of the twentieth century. “Through his many speeches and letters and his long political career, Randolph transformed the republicanism of the Revolutionary generation and the anti-Federalists into a modern conservative ideology that was distinctly southern in nature,” Adam L. Tate has argued. This portrayal of Randolph as a conservative intellectual has its origins in Russell Kirk’s effort to make him the “American Burke.” While Randolph read and admired the writings of British philosopher Edmund Burke, especially after the War of 1812, the characterization of Randolph as a Burkean conservative intellectual is largely unwarranted. Randolph never composed a treatise, articulated a concise vision of his political ideas, or ever revealed himself to be a systematic thinker of any kind. His letters and speeches reveal devotion to republican ideology, which in politics translated to his struggle to weaken the central government. Beyond this, his political doctrine consisted of an unwavering, unprincipled, and often irrational devotion to obstruction in governance. His stance on measures

⁵Hugh A. Garland, *The Life of John Randolph of Roanoke*. 2 vols. (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1851); Powhatan Bouldin, *Home Reminiscences of John Randolph of Roanoke* (Richmond: Clemmitt & Jones, 1878); Henry Adams, *John Randolph*. ed. Robert McColley (1882; reprint, Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996). William Cabell Bruce, *John Randolph of Roanoke, 1773-1833*. 2 vols. (See Bruce, 2: 251 for quote); William Ewart Stokes, Jr. “Randolph of Roanoke: A Virginia Portrait. The Early Career of John Randolph of Roanoke, 1773-1805.” (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 1955); Russell Kirk, *John Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in American Politics, with Selected Speeches and Letters*, fourth edition, (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1997), 157; Robert Dawidoff, *The Education of John Randolph*. (New York: Norton, 1979), 46-63.

before Congress changed without explanation often from the basest of political reasons. For instance, in 1808, just weeks after proposing an embargo on all imported goods, Randolph opposed Thomas Jefferson's nearly identical plan. His difficult and obtuse personality explains much of his hostility toward political enemies and friends, most of whom he assumed to be beneath him in social status, if not intelligence. While those who knew Randolph certainly considered him learned, few of his colleagues considered him an intellectual. Instead, he was above all else, a brawling, instinctual politician who reacted to circumstances, events, and the wishes of his constituents. Randolph's actions and words reveal that most of his political decisions were made from the deepest reasons of self-interest: protection of the power of the Virginia slaveholders and prevention of any interference with the institution of slavery.⁶

This dissertation examines the paradox of slavery in the life and career of John Randolph from the supremacy of the Virginia planter gentry until the dawn of American democracy. In an attempt to understand his public and private contradictions concerning slavery and the role of intense sectionalism in his politics, I have attempted to match his words with his actions. Randolph's cognitive dissonance over slavery is revealed in his letters and speeches, which often display alternating strands of brutal honesty and masterful self-deception. Using any term to describe or characterize Randolph presents problems. Although Randolph certainly labeled himself a republican, he also described himself in numerous contradictory terms—rationalist, Christian, Muslim, atheist, antislavery, and revolutionary. He also espoused devotion to ideas of liberalism, egalitarianism, and aristocracy at different points in his life. His intense devotional attachment to his beloved state was at times punctured by expressions of hatred for and

⁶Adam L. Tate, *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals 1789-1861* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005), 20; Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot*. 7th edition (New York: Regnery, 2001), ch. 5.

disappointment in his fellow Virginians. Indeed, nothing in Randolph's life was beyond potential rebuke.

In his public career, Randolph's attitudes about slavery, slaveholding, and sectionalism informed countless public debates in which he participated. In his life as a Virginian, he struggled with deep-seated feelings of regret and angst over holding slaves. An examination of his letters reveal a man decidedly devoted to the belief that slavery was wrong, but a closer look at his public actions expose's his commitment to preventing anyone from harming that institution. As with most humans who grapple with serious moral questions, equivocation, reversals, tragedies, and financial hardships influenced his attitude. Therefore his rhetoric and actions changed from year to year. In 1799, he denied being an abolitionist. In 1800, he wrote a will freeing his slaves, which numbered approximately 120 to 140. In 1804, he wrote of his growing love for the plantation. In 1807, he opposed abolishing the foreign slave trade. In 1810, he wrote that he had finally reconciled himself to slavery. In September 1815, he insisted that he wanted to be the American counterpart to British abolitionist William Wilberforce. In October 1815, he again insisted that he reconciled himself to slavery. In 1816, he insisted that his public support for the American Colonization Society was to strengthen slavery. In 1818, in a letter to a Philadelphia Quaker he indicated that he would consider federal intervention on the matter. In 1819, he wrote another will freeing his slaves and providing for their care in a free state. In 1820, he offered a blistering defense of the rights of slaveholders in the Missouri debate. While he lived this life of contradiction, the slave population at Roanoke continued to grow. When he died in 1833, nearly 400 slaves lived at Roanoke. He saw himself as slavery's severest critic while he acted as the most ardent defender of Virginia's slave power. Dawidoff's assertion that Randolph's relationship to and position on slavery was at once confusing and simple appears to

be an understatement. Examining Randolph's contradictions on slavery is a way to also examine the transformation of antislavery principles in Virginia from the early Revolutionary era to the intense sectionalism of the Missouri Compromise. For Randolph, that transformation occurred primarily in the political realm and was informed by the declining fortunes of Virginia's planter gentry.

His disparate views about slavery had arisen during his childhood and stemmed from the crisis of Virginia's plantation system. His earliest memories were of life at Cawsons, the plantation home of his grandfather, Theodorick Bland, Sr., in the Virginia Tidewater. Randolph's mother, Frances, instilled in all of her sons a devotion to the Virginia gentry, the small group of families who had controlled Virginia's economy, political system, and society for more than a century. Land and slaves gave the gentry its power and means of influence and made it truly independent. For that reason, she taught him that above all else, he must protect his property. The planter aristocracy became the predominant organizing institution of his life, giving him social standing and instilling in him a sense of superiority. The gentry, after all, represented the natural leaders of Virginia, he was taught. Randolph and his brother Richard wanted nothing more than to become Virginia planters, as their father and all of their males ancestors had been. Specifically, for the Randolph children, the extensive debts of their father, John Randolph, Sr., threatened their inheritance, as creditors pursued the family for repayment.

In early national Virginia, Randolph came of age in a household devoted to the idea that slavery was wrong and should eventually end. His stepfather, St. George Tucker, believing that Virginia's agricultural and social systems were in an irredeemable decline, urged Randolph to plan for a future independent of the plantation. Tucker and Richard Randolph, John's brother, both took decisive action against slavery. In 1796, St. George Tucker presented a plan for

gradual emancipation to the Virginia General Assembly. Tucker argued that slavery betrayed the republican commitment to natural rights and warned of severe consequences if Virginia refused to eradicate the institution. When Richard Randolph died the same year, his last will and testament revealed that his estate would free all of his slaves and would provide for their future. In the document, Randolph condemned slavery in the harshest moral terms and scorned the previous generations of the Virginia gentry who had encouraged its growth. Tucker and Richard Randolph, both students of the eminent jurist and fervent antislavery activist George Wythe, believed that slavery violated the natural rights of the black population and degraded the white masters. While studying in Philadelphia during the 1790s, John Randolph also became a devotee of the antislavery cause. Obsessed with the French Revolution, he followed closely the struggle for liberty in Europe, paying close attention to abolition efforts in England and France. After he inherited his plantation, Roanoke, he told several neighbors of his hope to eventually free his slaves. When he ran for public office in 1799, his enemies attacked him as an abolitionist.

In 1789, while studying at Columbia College in New York City, John Randolph observed the beginning of the new United States government, regularly attending sessions of the First Congress. From the gallery, Randolph observed Thomas Tudor Tucker, a South Carolina congressman and brother of St. George, as he passionately opposed the new financial measures of the federal government. The expansive financial plans of Alexander Hamilton spurred Tucker's opposition, but he and other slaveholders from the Deep South expressed their fears that the government would use its powers to emancipate the slaves. If the federal government attempted such a plan, Tucker warned, the nation would risk civil war. Tucker, joined by fellow congressman Theodorick Bland, Jr., John Randolph's uncle, vehemently defended the states against any federal interference with slavery. The young Randolph became devoted to Thomas

Tucker, who frequently allowed the boy to dine with him in the company of the most powerful men in the government. Soon, John Randolph's views reflected the staunch Anti-Federalist, pro-states' rights views of Thomas Tucker. When Randolph was elected to the House of Representatives in his own right, he attacked similar petitions from Philadelphia's antislavery community during his first congressional speech. Like Thomas Tucker, he insisted that the House and the federal government had no power to interfere with slavery.

This divergence of action and words defined Randolph's private and public life. He objected to slavery in principle and talked of freeing his slaves, yet once he became a planter, he expanded his plantation and encouraged the reproduction of his slave population. During his first campaign for public office in 1799, objections from his constituents forced him to deny and effectively to disown his antislavery past. As a member of the House of Representatives, he refused to support any antislavery effort that came before Congress, and instead proved an indefatigable defender of the rights of Southern slaveholders and slavery. Even in matters where Congress enjoyed clear constitutional authority, Randolph refused to defend any measures that might harm slavery. In 1803, when South Carolina reopened its slave trade to the universal condemnation of the nation, Randolph privately blasted the decision as foolish and dangerous, and declared it an open invitation to import rebellious slaves. Yet, he refused to support a tax on imported slaves in the House.

As chairman of the House of Representatives' Committee on Ways and Means and as the floor leader of the House Republicans, Randolph usually fought to limit the power of the federal government. But during the first term of Thomas Jefferson's presidency, Randolph violated his own principles when it came to supporting measures that benefited slaveholders, such as an expansion of the fugitive slave law and the purchase of Louisiana. He objected to the nationalist

course of Jefferson, deeming it a threat to republicanism and, eventually, the South. Breaking from the Republican party, Randolph proved ardently defensive of slavery. The extent of Randolph's hostility toward any antislavery federal policy became evident when he opposed the measures abolishing the foreign slave trade. Although most of the nation agreed with the decision to abolish the trade, Randolph threatened disunion over the possibility of federal or Northern interference with the institution.

The Napoleonic Wars threatened the stability of the Western world and the Anglo-American relationship. Randolph saw the "age of revolutions and changes" as evil. He feared the tyranny of Napoleon, but he also expressed dismay over democracy in America. A new class of men, with popular support and nationalistic in outlook, seized on the perpetual crisis of Anglo-American relations and pushed the nation to war. Randolph opposed war with Great Britain, and insisted that a war between the two closely connected nations was tantamount to a civil war. His republican commitment to peace, anti-militarism, and limited-war ideology, however, had roots in his deep-seated fear of servile insurrection. He believed that getting involved in the European conflict would lead to rebellion on the scale of the Haitian Revolution. His position, however, placed him at odds with the rest of the South and in 1813, for the only time in his career, he was defeated at the polls. After his defeat, he resided alone with his slaves at Roanoke, where he meditated on the spiritual and religious questions concerning slavery, and obsessed about the decline of the Virginia gentry. By the end of the war, Randolph believed that only white Anglo-Saxons inherently honored liberty, order, and tradition.⁷

While in political isolation during the War of 1812, Randolph returned to Christianity, after decades as a non-believer. His religious experience led him to the most vehement

⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 10:1, 1026, 1070, 1961, 2022.

antislavery period of his career. Once he returned to Congress, he pursued, for the first and only time, an antislavery measure—the abolition of the slave trade in Washington, D.C. In 1816, his participation in the American Colonization Society was widely viewed as a demonstration of antislavery sentiment, but in his remarks to its convention, he made it clear that his goal was to rid Virginia of the free black population, not the slaves. For Randolph, antislavery principles manifested themselves in his paternalistic desire to care for his slaves. As a Christian, he saw himself as the slaves' protector, feeding, clothing, and providing spiritual instruction for them. He believed that if the Northern antislavery advocates had their way, the slaves would starve and freeze.

In 1817, Randolph decided to retire from Congress. In the following year his private sentiments reflected a growing hatred of slavery and he even expressed the possibility that he could support the use of federal power against slavery, especially the slave trade. A pattern thus became clear; he expressed his sentiments for antislavery measures more strongly when he held no power or influence. During 1818-19, suffering from depression and forecasting a gloomy future for the nation, Randolph appeared to be on the verge of becoming a true antislavery advocate. His disgust with slavery resulted in a second, more expansive, last will and testament that guaranteed the freedom and care of his slaves at Roanoke.

In 1819, when economic panic hit Virginia, Randolph's constituents asked him to return to Congress. It was during the Missouri debates of 1820 when Randolph seemingly emerged as the conscience of the proslavery movement. Indeed, many historians view the Missouri crisis as the birth of Southern nationalism itself. Robert Forbes has argued, in some jest, that "the South came into existence on Saturday, February 13, 1819," which was the day that congressman James Tallmadge offered his amendment restricting slavery. In Forbes's work on the Missouri

Compromise, he attempts to reconcile Randolph's violent rhetoric and apoplectic defense of states' rights with his "oft-cited and frequently displayed hatred of slavery." Randolph's lengthy, vehement, and anti-Northern speeches represented an "effort to forestall the need for an open defense of slavery." Those who heard Randolph's Missouri speeches, however, characterized them as diatribes aimed at demonizing antislavery opponents, defending the culture of slavery, and solidifying Southern opposition to a free Missouri. Forbes's conclusions mirror those of the abolitionist press after Randolph's death. To the abolitionist, Randolph was a tortured slaveholder, saddled with the institution, and pressed into its defense by circumstances; but in the end, he rectified the great injustice by bestowing freedom on his slaves. Randolph himself created this narrative. Even when he offered the strongest defense of the right to hold slaves, he pleaded his hatred of the institution, and portrayed himself and his fellow slaveholders as its victims. The vehemence and the solidarity of the Northern antislavery movement appalled him. "These Yankees have almost reconciled me to negro slavery," he insisted. The Missouri Compromise convinced him that slavery must be defended against a federal government which would always hunger for power.⁸

In his public effort to prevent the federal government from exercising power over the institution, Randolph resorted to, and even perfected, a vision of doom for the nation. In debates over military, economic, social, or foreign policy, he expressed his belief in the horrible consequences of change, especially in regard to slavery. Slave rebellion was always the primary

⁸ Robert Forbes, "The Missouri Controversy and Sectionalism," *Congress and the Emergence of Sectionalism: From the Missouri Compromise to the Age of Jackson*, eds. Paul Finkleman and Donald R. Kennon (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), 75; Robert P. Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath: Slavery and the Meaning of America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007), 116-7; John Randolph to Brockenbrough, February 24, 1820, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:133. John Randolph will appear as JR in all subsequent notations.

danger, but he also foretold disunion, moral degeneration, and the rise of capitalism as the consequence of the failure to protect Southern society. A careless move could lead to catastrophe for the region. Randolph saw a doomed South, with or without slavery. If scholars have seen Randolph as the original fire-eater, a pivotal figure on the road to 1861, it can also be said that Randolph forecast the results in Richmond in 1865. In his letters, he expressed dismay over slavery while defending the culture that depended upon it, all the time displaying an awareness of the ultimate consequences. Randolph, possibly more than anyone else, understood that the South's devotion to slavery inflicted the wound that would eventually destroy it.⁹

This study of Randolph is informed by the recent literature on the place of slavery during the early republic. Many historians have attempted to discern slavery's effects on national politics and understand when the nation truly started on the irreversible path to the Civil War. Matthew Mason has argued in *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* that the critical period between the War of 1812 and the Missouri Compromise represented the moment when attitudes about slavery hardened and set the course for the antebellum sectional crisis. Forbes, of course, sees the Missouri debate as the moment when Southern antislavery leaders had their last real chance at avoiding the course to the Civil War. George William Van Cleve believes any chance to prevent slavery was lost before the new federal government convened in 1789, because the most critical slavery decisions had already been made during the Constitutional Convention. John Craig Hammond and Adam Rothman both offer compelling arguments that the issue of slavery's future was decided in local communities in the West as much as the national capital. An examination of John Randolph's career before the Missouri

⁹Robert F. Durden, *The Self-Inflicted Wound: Southern Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1985).

debate confirms the pervasiveness of the slavery issue in national politics during the first three decades of the national government.¹⁰

¹⁰ Matthew G. Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 237; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner's Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, and Expansion in the Early American West* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007); Forbes, *The Missouri Compromise and Its Aftermath*; Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); George William Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Press, 2010); David F. Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic: Developing the Federal Government, 1791-1861* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011); Padraig Riley, "Northern Republicans and Southern Slavery: Democracy in the Age of Jefferson, 1800-1819," (PhD Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2007); *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011). Don Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Chapter 2: “Abilities and Exertions:” John Randolph and the Crisis of the Virginia Gentry

Throughout the War of 1812, the United States repeatedly faced defeat at the hands of the British army. The King’s forces thrashed the inexperienced and ill-prepared American forces near the Great Lakes and in the American West. As the British Navy raided the Atlantic coast, it threatened an invasion of the Chesapeake Bay region—the heart of Virginia plantation country. John Randolph of Roanoke, once the most promising young Republican in Congress, opposed the war with Great Britain, for which he suffered. His enemies vilified him and then defeated him at the polls. In March 1814, stung by the rejection of his constituents and friends, Randolph set out on a journey of reflection that led him through the Virginia Tidewater region. He soon reached Cawsons, the once magisterial plantation of the Bland family, his mother’s people. In 1773, he had been born there as his father’s generation provoked rebellion against Great Britain. With a deep sense of nostalgia, Randolph now stared at the “grim and desolate” ruins of the abandoned plantation overlooking the Appomattox and James Rivers. “The ancient fires of hospitality were long since extinguished, and the hearthstone cold,” Randolph wrote. The Tidewater region, which had given birth to Virginia’s planter elite, now seemed “muted and deserted.”¹

The following January, days after the Battle of New Orleans effectively ended the war, Randolph visited the family of George Logan in Philadelphia. Randolph painted a portrait of the lost Virginia culture for his antislavery Quaker hosts. Deborah Norris Logan listened intently as he talked of Virginia “in discription [sic] so Picturesque that I shall not easily forget it.” As he had recently traveled the “part of Virginia first settled,” the decay had saddened him. “For many miles not a single family of respectability left, their large Brick houses and extensive

¹JR to Josiah Quincy, March 22, 1814, John Randolph Papers, Library of Congress.

establishments, formerly seats of elegance and Hospitality deserted and falling to ruins, and the lands laying wasted,” he told them. He mourned the decline of the planter gentry more than any physical dilapidation. “Better-bred men were not to be found in the British dominion,” he wrote to Josiah Quincy. Although class conflict, slave unrest, bitter partisanship, and economic decline plagued Virginia after the American Revolution, Randolph celebrated only the glorious past of the planter gentry and mourned its degeneration. His missives about the great Randolph heritage in Virginia dating back to the seventeenth century obscured a basic reality: the English presence in Virginia had always been marked by division, violence, inequality, and oppression.²

In 1669, William Randolph had departed England in search of prosperity. The Randolph family’s loyalty to the British monarchy during the recent civil war had led to the loss of the family fortune. He traveled to Britain’s most important colony, Virginia, where he could rebuild the family’s fortune. A half-century after the settlement of Jamestown, Virginia’s tobacco market offered economic opportunities in the growing Atlantic trading world. By 1674, Randolph patented land on the James River for a tobacco plantation and paid passage for 1,200 indentured servants to Virginia. The colony’s headright system provided Randolph with acreage for every servant. These men, many of them veterans of the recent wars, made possible the expansion of tobacco cultivation. The presence of white indentured servants, African slaves, and the native Indians, however, made Virginia a volatile place. White servants worked and earned their freedom and a chance to gain their own tobacco fortunes. Virginia’s native population, meanwhile, resisted the settlement of these freed servants on the colony’s frontiers, which often

² Deborah Norris Logan Diary, Logan Family Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; JR to Josiah Quincy, March 22, 1814, Randolph Papers, LC.

resulted in conflict. Newly-freed servants saw themselves as “a people press’d at our backs with Indians.” The settlers called on Virginia’s royal governor, William Berkeley, to wage war on all of the colony’s Indians and clear the path for settlement. The governor agreed to wage war only on hostile tribes and continue to maintain trading agreements only with peaceful Indians. In 1676, Nathaniel Bacon, Randolph’s neighbor, led a group of settlers dissatisfied with Berkeley’s decision in a rebellion against British authorities in Virginia. An inveterate troublemaker who disdained manual labor, Bacon threatened to depose Governor Berkeley. In September, Bacon and his men burned Jamestown. The violence threatened the interests of the wealthiest planters who soon supported Berkeley’s effort to suppress the uprising. William Randolph remained neutral until Bacon’s sudden death ended the rebellion. Berkeley hanged twenty-three of the rebels and seized their property. Realizing the danger presented by indentured servants, the wealthiest planters abandoned them for African slaves.³

The turmoil abated, William Randolph aggressively expanded his land holdings, slaves, and political power. In 1680, he purchased land at Turkey Island and imported English bricks for a plantation home, the symbol of a family’s importance. After Bacon’s rebellion, large planter families devoted their efforts exclusively to the cultivation of tobacco. The land produced wealth and made independence possible for the planters—but tyranny and dependence for the slaves.

Planter wealth increased as Europe became addicted to America’s cheap tobacco. Gathering

³ Jonathan Daniels, *The Randolphs of Virginia* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 19; H. J. Eckenrode, *The Randolphs: The Story of a Virginia Family* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1946), 31-2; Wassell Randolph, *William Randolph I of Turkey Island, Henrico County, Virginia* (Memphis: Seabode Mimeo Service, 1949), 1-20; Emory G. Evans, *A “Topping People”: The Rise and Decline of Virginia’s Old Political Elite* (Charlottesville: New York, 2009), 18-9; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975), 254-70; Stephen Saunders Webb, *1676: The End of American Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1984), 6, 32-3; Jon Kukla, *Speakers and Clerks of the Virginia House of Burgesses, 1643-1776* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1981), 98.

wealth and land became Randolph's primary goal. In 1698, he used his political connections to purchase, for £150, Curles, the old estate of Nathaniel Bacon. At the time of his death in 1711, Randolph owned over 10,000 acres of land in the lucrative Tidewater area, enough for a plantation for each of his sons. His fourth son, Richard, inherited Curles, the Bacon estate, and established his own branch of the Randolph family.⁴

The expansion of wealth led to the consolidation of the planters' political power. Families such as the Randolphs hoped to recreate in Virginia a British-style aristocracy, which required control of the colony's land, political system, and the lower ranks of people. Small farmers, known as the yeomen, borrowed from the wealthiest planters to buy their own land and slaves, while tenant farmers lived in perpetual debt to the large planters. Slaves proved essential to the gentry's subjugation of other classes, since they freed planters from any manual labor. Instead, planters concentrated on solidifying their political power. The gentry contended that they were the colony's only independent people, an entitled class born to rule over their dependents—slaves, servants, yeomen farmers, poor whites, free blacks, and women. And according to custom and law, they became entitled to cultural and legal deference. The planters instituted the British legal custom of entail by which a planter specified in his will his desire to leave his land to the eldest son and his heirs. This practice prevented those inheriting land from selling or disposing of

⁴ Daniels, *Randolphs*, 32; Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 43-56; Kukla, *Speakers and Clerks*, 98; Jack P. Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics: An Analysis of the Political Culture of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York*, ed. Richard M. Jellison (New York: Norton, 1976), 15; Alan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 23-44; Cynthia Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre: Rumor and Reputation in Jeffersonian Virginia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 11; Ross F. Bagby, "Randolph Slave Saga: Communities in Collision," (PhD Diss., Ohio State University, 1998), 15-6.

it. This bestowed the aura of inevitable and natural leadership on succeeding generations. Entailed land was the mark of the gentry and the means of holding onto power. In a short time, this landed gentry controlled Virginia politics. William Randolph initially served as sheriff and justice of the peace in Henrico County. Beginning in 1684, Randolph represented the county in the House of Burgesses, the colony's legislature. In 1699, he served as Speaker of that body before moving into the politically powerful clerkship of the House. His youngest son, John, would also serve as Speaker and eventually represented the colony during trade negotiations in London. In 1732, King George II knighted him, and he returned to Virginia as Sir John Randolph. In a generation, the Randolph family had risen from poverty to royal recognition. The power of the planter became self-perpetuating.⁵

Richard Randolph of Curles weathered uncertainties in the tobacco market to build a plantation empire. As more farmers occupied the Virginia Tidewater, land became scarce and the soil depleted. Randolph expanded his plantation operations into the Virginia Piedmont while his family continued to live in the Tidewater. While he owned several distant plantations, Randolph and his wife, Jane Bolling, whose ancestors included Pocahontas, established a model genteel life in their Tidewater home. The Randolphs furnished their elaborate James River estate with the finest material goods. Rugs, draperies, and mahogany and walnut furniture filled the house, and the family enjoyed meals served on fine china. Richard and Jane Randolph wore the latest English fashions, which visitors could spot in the couples' portrait displayed in their home.

⁵ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 23-44; Eckenrode, *Randolphs*, 47-8; Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics," 24; Anthony S. Parent, Jr., *Foul Means: The Formation of a Slave Society in Virginia, 1660-1740* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 210; Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 38.

Slaves and others from Virginia's lower ranks could watch the master and mistress of Curles ride through the Tidewater in their fine coach, pulled by well-bred horses. The Randolphs were representative of the growing planter gentry, where the appearance of wealth became currency in the social world of Virginia.⁶

Slaves were as important to the gentry as any material good. The presence of slavery marked the real difference between British aristocracy and its blossoming replica in Virginia. Planters had willfully chosen African slaves as their primary source of labor, which they used to make tobacco profitable. The presence of African natives in the Anglo-Saxon colony gave pause to some planters, however. In 1742, Virginia was home to 88,000 whites and 42,000 blacks, most of whom were enslaved. The growth of slavery raised fears of potential insurrection and led to the development of strategies to lessen the threat. Some of the gentry tried to slow the growth of the slave population, but Virginia's economic success required the expansion of the institution. The gentry worked to turn the racial dilemma to its advantage. Enslavement of Africans created solidarity among all whites, regardless of class. The sight of black slaves devoid of any freedom reminded poor white men that they retained their own basic freedoms. Few planters expressed any interest in the humanity of their slaves. Richard Randolph of Curles saw his own slaves as little more than animals, predisposed to thievery and the satisfaction of their sexual lust. Randolph believed that they became more productive and easier to manipulate when spread across plantations. By the mid-eighteenth century, the gentry firmly controlled the

⁶ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 47-8; Richard Morton, *Colonial Virginia; Westward Expansion and Prelude to Revolution, 1710-1763* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 552-53, 560; Gerald Steffens Cowden, "The Randolphs of Turkey Island: A Prosopography of the First Three Generations, 1650-1806." (PhD Diss., College of William and Mary, 1977), 422-23, 436; Evans, "A Topping People," 100, 104, 111, 116-17, 171-72.

colony's lower classes, white and black. Unlike their grandfathers, they would experience no Bacon's rebellion.⁷

The expansion of slavery and the growth of opulence, however, also caused instability in the Virginia economy. Dependence on slavery created indolence and entitlement among planters determined to maintain their lifestyle. Increasingly, planters mortgaged land, crops, and slaves to British firms against profits from future crops to buy both necessary and luxury items. The Virginia economy weakened, especially in the aftermath of the Seven Years' War, due to the volatile tobacco market and currency problems. The colony issued paper money to pay for the war effort and eventually planters used the currency to pay for their private debts to British merchants. When the war ended in 1763, the paper currency led to inflation, and British and Scottish merchants objected to payment in diminished currency. The British Parliament passed the Currency Act of 1764, which forced Virginia to tax the currency out of circulation and forced repayment in specie. As Great Britain tightened control on the colonial economy, planters mortgaged even more land and slaves to maintain their lifestyle. Debt carried serious consequences and the wrong financial move or a disastrous tobacco yield could both ruin a planter's finances and damage his reputation. The Virginia economy depended on territorial expansion, a steady supply of slaves, and British credit; each grew in tandem with one another, and together kept the Virginia economy afloat.⁸

⁷ Ross F. Bagby, "The Randolph Slave Saga: Communities in Collision," (PhD Diss., Ohio State University, 1998), 15, 18; Morton, *Colonial Virginia: Westward Expansion*, 523; Parent, *Foul Means*, 197-235; Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 380-1; Cowden, "Randolphs of Turkey Island," 426; Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 81.

⁸ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 302-3, 383-4; Emory G. Evans, "A Topping People," 100, 104, 116-117, 171-72; Ronald L. Heinemann, et al, *Old Dominion, New Commonwealth: A History of Virginia, 1607-2007* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press,

When he died in 1748, Richard Randolph left over 114,000 acres of land to his children. While the older sons inherited the family's Tidewater land, John Randolph (1693-1737), his youngest son, inherited a 20,000 acre plantation named Bizarre in the Virginia Piedmont. Unlike his father, Randolph valued frivolity more than his duties as planter. He journeyed to Canada and Philadelphia instead of moving to his plantation. Like so many third-generation members of the gentry, Randolph lived an idle and lavish lifestyle that he could scarcely afford. In 1768, he mortgaged seventy-eight slaves, a sign of his precarious finances. Accumulating land and expanding his tobacco cultivation became his obsession as he struggled for solvency and to maintain his lifestyle. He proved an inept businessman and a seemingly lazy master. One contemporary deemed him a man "totally without application." Unlike his father and grandfather, Randolph held no public office. In 1769, he married his cousin, Frances Bland, a daughter from another gentry family. His new father-in-law, Theodorick Bland, Sr., supplied the couple with amenities and slaves but warned Randolph that only "the hand of the diligent maketh Rich." Randolph borrowed from family, friends, and storekeepers to maintain genteel appearances. He became indebted to the London firm of Capel and Osgood Hansbury for £11,000 after his brother, Ryland, defaulted on his half of a loan. In addition, the firm of Farrell

2007), 70-71; Charles H. Ambler, *Sectionalism in Virginia from 1776-1861*, 2nd Edition. (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2008), 8-9; David Bertelson, *The Lazy South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 71-7; Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Knopf, 2000), 582-84; David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 129-130, 293; Cowden, "Randolphs of Turkey Island," 475; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 23-44.

and Jones held a note of John Randolph for £1,000. In 1773, Virginia creditors sued Randolph to collect debts, and the Virginia General Court ruled against him.⁹

The Randolphs' struggle to maintain their status as a genteel family explains their mounting debts and their decision to reside at the Bland family's Tidewater estate, Cawsons. Each of Frances Randolph's three sons entered the world at Cawsons. Richard Randolph was born there in 1770, followed by Theodorick a year later. In June 1773, came the third son, John Randolph, named for his father. The aura of the Tidewater remained a powerful idea in the mind of Virginia planters. Families invested in material goods to impress other gentry families, which few saw in the wilderness of Piedmont. Randolph purchased a 1,300 acre tract of land in Chesterfield County and built a plantation home overlooking the James River. Matoax, taken from Pocahontas's original name, stood among some of the wealthiest plantations in the colony and put John and Frances Randolph at the epicenter of Virginia gentility. To achieve the appearance of prosperity, Randolph had mortgaged all of his land and slaves, except for a single trusted family servant, Syphax Brown.¹⁰

Randolph struggled for solvency and profit in the midst of an imperial crisis between the colony and Great Britain. The Currency Act had raised fears that Great Britain threatened the economic independence of the planters. Many planters recognized that their insatiable appetite for luxury goods created an unequal balance of trade that led to the crisis. Yet the gentry class

⁹ Cowden, "Randolphs of Turkey Island," 472-80, 471-83, 497; "Autobiography of David Meade," *William and Mary Quarterly Magazine* 13 (1905), 74; Bruce Mann, *A Republic of Debtors: Bankruptcy in the Age of Independence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 131-133.

¹⁰ Cowden, "The Randolphs of Turkey Island," 472-80, 497; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 42; Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 25-6; Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 47-8, 157; Daniels, *Randolphs of Virginia*, 71; Mann, *A Republic of Debtors*, 131-133; Melvin Patrick Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom the 1790s through the Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 20; Bagby, "The Randolph Slave Saga," 17.

refused to embrace austerity and prudence: to do so would admit a loss of social status.

Parliament intensified its imperial economic policy as Britain tried to pay the debts accumulated during the recent war in America. In 1765, Parliament's Stamp Act taxed legal documents, newspapers, and other paper products in the colonies, which infuriated planters from all ranks. In the Virginia House of Burgesses, Patrick Henry, a product of the middling ranks of the gentry, led protest efforts, often in language that shocked the most genteel. Henry turned his ire on the gentry themselves, when they tried to pass measures to relieve heavily indebted planters. The measures would tax tobacco, which would pay for a loan of £240,000 to pay creditors and give the most indebted planters time to repay their personal loans. The proposed tax came as the tobacco market suffered a post-war decline. A young Thomas Jefferson watched from the audience as Henry condemned the gentry's "extravagance" and the "spirit of favoritism" with which they ruled the colony. Henry's power and thus the power of the middling planters became evident as Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, and the Governor's Council rejected the tobacco tax. Henry forced the gentry to acknowledge his power. By the 1760s, it became apparent that the ruling gentry was devoted to protecting its own interests and power. These men of distinction now clamored to protect the interests of the least distinguished of the gentry, men such as John Randolph of Matoax. As middling men such as Henry and George Washington gathered wealth, land, and slaves of their own, they threatened the tightly guarded social circle of the Virginia gentry. This emerging class of middling planters used the republican ideas of moral regeneration to attack the power of the elite. Less frightened of disorder, they proved more willing to oppose Great Britain's imperial policies. In 1769, they led a nonimportation movement to protest Britain's economic policies. The effort allowed the gentry to curtail its extravagant

spending without provoking the shame of its peers. In these years of upheaval, John Randolph seemed uninterested in these public questions.¹¹

In 1773, the Boston Tea Party triggered a showdown between Virginians and the royal government that threatened the social order. The colony's royal governor, Lord Dunmore, dissolved the House of Burgesses when it petitioned the British government with its concerns. When the reformed House voted on a resolution supporting the colonists of Massachusetts, Dunmore again disbanded the legislature. Patrick Henry and other leaders argued that Britain threatened the colony's right of self-government, which would subject them to political slavery. The British government recognized the hypocrisy of such rhetoric coming from planters who craved more slaves for their plantations. Slavery presented a real problem for the colonists as they faced potential war. Dunmore and the royal government threatened emancipation in the event of rebellion, talk which slaves took seriously. In November 1774, a young James Madison reported local unrest among slaves in Orange County as they contemplated emancipation by the English. "If america [sic] & Britain should come to an hostile rupture I am afraid an Insurrection among the slaves may & will be promoted," he wrote. During the conspiracy, slaves selected a leader who would lead them to the British during war. The slaves believed "by revolting to them [British soldiers] they should be rewarded with their freedom." Madison believed that planters must keep slaves from even hearing talk of freedom. "It is prudent such attempts should be

¹¹ T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Planters on the Eve of the Revolution*, 189-96; Edmund Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 383-4; Woody Holton, *Forced Founders: Indians, Debtors, Slaves, and the Making of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999), xix, 81-4; Bruce A. Ragsdale, *A Planters' Republic: The Search for Economic Independence* (Madison: Madison House, 1996), 48-9; Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 115-16, 123; William Wirt Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891) 1:76-7; Greene, "Society, Ideology, and Politics," 37; John E. Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783* (Williamsburg: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988), 35-40.

concealed as well as suppressed,” Madison added. In April 1775, just days after the battles at Concord and Lexington, Dunmore seized the colony’s gunpowder, declared martial law, and eventually promised freedom to any slave who helped suppress the rebellion. Dunmore’s action provoked John Randolph and others to finally become involved in the Revolution, when he and Theodorick Bland, Sr., and Theodorick Bland, Jr., sold forty slaves to replenish the colony’s ammunition. A rebellion of slaves would rob Randolph and the Blands of their fortunes and lead to social chaos and possibly death. The Revolution might prove necessary to maintain their status and property, and Randolph could ill afford to sit out such a conflict. In November, however, John Randolph died unexpectedly, leaving his sons a legacy of land, slaves, and debt.¹²

John Randolph would only cast a shadow over the lives of his sons, especially his youngest, who for decades would sign his name, “John Randolph, Jr.” Instead, their mother, Frances Bland Randolph, became the most important person in their lives. The twenty-three-year old-widow now faced stewardship of the vast Randolph land holdings and slaves. Her husband’s death gave her control over her own destiny and that of her children, but the climate of war made normal tasks daunting. She left Bizarre in the care of overseers and returned to her home at Cawsons, where her brother, Theodorick, helped look after her sons. The antithesis of John

¹²Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:18. Douglas Bradburn, *The Citizenship Revolution: Politics and the Creation of the American Union, 1774-1804* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 25-6; Heinemann, et al, *Old Dominion New Commonwealth, 1607-2007* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 117, 120; Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 22-3, 49-50; J. Maddison [sic] to William Bradford, November 26, 1774, *The Papers of James Madison*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 1:129-30; Eva Sheppard Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation: Emancipation in Virginia from the Revolution to Nat Turner’s Rebellion* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 14-5; Daniels, *Randolphs*, 88; Cowden, “Randolphs of Turkey Island,” 477.

Randolph, the motivated Bland had received a medical education in Scotland and returned to run his successful plantation, Kippax. Theodorick Bland, Sr. had taken his responsibilities seriously and secured an education for all of his children, including Frances. This, in part, explains her skilled and strong management of plantation affairs during a time when patriarchal planter culture demeaned the opinions and skills of women. Indeed, widowhood offered one of the rare opportunities for women to control their own affairs. Remarriage could provide stability for her children, but it also meant the legal loss of her property and other rights. For the moment, however, Frances remained content to stay at Cawsons with her children as the conflict with Britain intensified.¹³

In the fall of 1777, while attending a prayer service at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg to commemorate the victory at the battle of Saratoga, Frances Randolph met St. George Tucker. A young lawyer and native of Bermuda, Tucker had courted at least one woman for her fortune, but it seems he developed true emotions for Frances Randolph. After several months of courtship, the two married in September 1778. Tucker had emigrated from Bermuda, where his family controlled a powerful shipping empire. The Tucker family profited from war and commerce in the British Empire, which allowed them to create a network of important connections in the Atlantic trading world. The patriarch, Colonel Henry Tucker, wanted to establish a great British aristocratic family, a difficult task on the isolated island. He encouraged his sons, Thomas and St. George, to leave Bermuda. After studying medicine in Scotland, Thomas Tudor Tucker settled in South Carolina. St. George Tucker planned to study law in London, but a traveler convinced him of the opportunities in Virginia. In 1771, the young

¹³ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*, (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 76-7; Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 11-14, Daniels, *Randolphs*, 97-8.

Tucker traveled to Williamsburg to study and establish the family's mercantile contacts in the colony.¹⁴

In Williamsburg, Tucker joined the brewing intellectual revolution that fueled the colonies' rebellion against Great Britain. After attending the College of William and Mary, he read law with George Wythe, the most prominent jurist in the colonies. Wythe immersed his students in the Enlightenment literature from Europe, ancient classic texts, and readings in the English common law, particularly William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*. Rational thought and republicanism became cornerstones in the intellectual development of Wythe's students. Furthermore, he encouraged them to take advantage of their presence in Virginia's capital, where they could observe the governing process and understand how the legislature functioned. The experience convinced the students that the breach between England and her colonies represented something greater than a skirmish over taxes or trade. Instead, Great Britain's policies represented the corruption, abuse of power, and tyranny prevalent under monarchies and aristocracy. Thomas Jefferson, a former Wythe student, began to envision a republican society free of monarchy, noblemen, and corrupted institutions. Once freed from their control, Jefferson believed, virtuous men should rule Virginia. Frugality, self-control, and disdain for luxury should govern Virginia's next generation of leaders. A reinvigorated republican Virginia would then become a more just society, where liberty would reign. For Wythe, the existence of slavery violated these ideals as much as the actions of the British. The son of a Quaker mother, Wythe understood the religious objections to slavery, but, as a committed rationalist, he encouraged his students to embrace reasoned opposition to the institution. In 1776, Wythe's influence came to fruition when Jefferson penned the Declaration

¹⁴ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 1-26.

of Independence, a product of the Enlightenment education that convinced him that “all men are created equal.”¹⁵

While Tucker took Wythe’s lessons seriously, the young student also craved success and status. Attending the General Court regularly, Tucker mastered the colony’s laws and legal practices while cultivating relationships with Virginia’s most powerful gentry families, such as the Nelsons and Pages. In January 1774, Thomas Nelson secured Tucker a clerkship in Dinwiddie County. In the spring, Tucker presented himself to Attorney General John Randolph, a cousin of the Randolphs of Matoax, for admission to the bar. The cultivation of gentry contacts remained Tucker’s ultimate goal as he established a law practice in Petersburg serving wealthy planters.¹⁶

While practicing law, Tucker also promoted the business interests of his family among the powerful in Virginia. The Tucker family had used the black market to assist the war effort. From Virginia, Tucker coordinated the smuggling of tobacco out of the colony while arranging the shipment of sugar, salt, and military provisions to Virginia. His father, however, insisted that Tucker return to Bermuda to help the family. In 1776, his “Golden dreams of Virginia” seemed impossible as Tucker left the colony for home. His father relented and soon St. George Tucker arrived back in Virginia with a load of contraband salt. His marriage to Frances Randolph finally

¹⁵ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 8, 28-30; Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 67-75; Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 133-43; Joyce Blackburn, *George Wythe of Williamsburg* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 75, 79-80; Annette Gordon-Reed, “Thomas Jefferson and St. George Tucker,” *Jefferson, Lincoln, and Wilson: The American Dilemma of Race and Democracy*, ed. John Milton Cooper, Jr. and Thomas J. Knock (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 21-2; Kent Newmyer, *John Marshall and the Heroic Age of the Supreme Court* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 77-9; Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

¹⁶ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 1-30.

made Tucker a member of the gentry and gave him access to its social cachet. The deep patriarchal roots of the gentry attracted Tucker. As master at Matoax, he expected deference and subordination from children, slaves, and servants. Decades later, Randolph recalled how quickly life changed under Tucker's rule. "The first blow I ever received was from the hand of this man, and not a week after his union with my mother," he wrote.¹⁷

In December 1778, the British military captured Savannah, Georgia, and prepared for the invasion of the Southern colonies. In the spring of 1779, just months after his marriage, Tucker enlisted as a private in the Virginia militia, but then used his connections to secure a commission as a major. Avoiding the war would have invited dishonor for a republican gentleman, especially as the enemy prepared to invade. In 1780, the American traitor and new British general Benedict Arnold and the Redcoats invaded Virginia's Tidewater. Planters panicked as the troops marched toward Richmond. When the British reached Berkeley, the seat of the Harrison family, they emancipated the plantation's slaves. Fearing for his family and property, Tucker rushed to Matoax where he gathered his wife, stepsons, and the couple's week-old baby, Henry St. George. The slaves were sent to Bizarre, hopefully out of the way of the British. Frances Tucker never had any doubt that her obedient slaves would prove faithful to her. "My faithful Servants are every thing I cou'd wish them, & are willing to follow my fortune," she wrote.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 32, 34-5; Wilfred Brenton Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution: 1760-1783* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), 55, 39-40; Michael J. Jarvis, *In the Eye of all Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 375; JR to Tudor Randolph, December 12, 1813, John Randolph Papers, UVA; Gordon-Reed, "Jefferson and Tucker," 21-2; Christopher Leonard Doyle, "Lord, Master, and Patriot: St. George Tucker and Patriarchy in Republican Virginia, 1772-1851," (PhD Diss., University of Connecticut, 1996), 192.

¹⁸ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 44-7; JR to SGT, January 10, and October 1, 1781, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary; McDonnell, *The Politics of War*, 398, 400; Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia*, 223, 298-9; Bruce, *John Randolph*,

The British emancipation inspired many slaves to free themselves, which panicked the already frightened members of the gentry. Along the James, as British troops destroyed plantations, eager slaves fled to them in search of their freedom. Sensing opportunity, most of the slaves fled Cawsons. “Your father’s best tradesman went to the enemy,” John Banister wrote to Theodorick Bland, Jr. After taking his family to Bizarre, Tucker returned to the Tidewater and helped his father-in-law recover his slaves, most of whom were valuable skilled laborers. “You may have heard that the old gentleman has suffered much by the absconding of his negroes,” Tucker wrote Bland, Jr., Tucker, and Bland recovered all but two of the slaves. The British army succeeded in terrorizing the gentry, however. Along the James River, planters lost “a considerable [amount] of slaves,” wrote the Reverend James Madison. Many freed slaves ended up in the ranks of the British army, which raised fears of revenge. Richard Henry Lee sent word to Theodorick Bland, Jr., then serving in the Continental Congress, warning him about the social havoc caused by the British invasion. “Shew [sic] this to Col. Bland & it will surely rouse him to exert all his powers in Congress to procure us assistance & that which may be effectual—the enemy affect to leave harmless the poor & they take everything from those they call the rich—Tis said that 2 or 3000 negroes march in their [the British] train,” wrote Lee. Theodorick Bland, Sr. wanted to maintain the social order of the gentry. The episode spooked the elder man so much that he abandoned Cawsons for his safer property in Amelia County. In the midst of war,

1:43-44; John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 496-500; Ely, “Richard and Judith Randolph, St. George Tucker, George Wythe, Syphax Brown, and Hercules White: Racial Equality and the Snare of Prejudice,” *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the New Nation*, ed. Alfred Young, Gary Nash, Ray Raphael (New York: Knopf, 2011), 325.

his slaves built a large new plantation home, Springfield, which Bland filled with expensive furnishings.¹⁹

The Revolutionary War threatened social disorder, which upset Theodorick Bland, Sr. Since the beginning of the war, Virginia General Assembly had paid bounties to fill the military ranks, but as the war dragged on, enlistments declined. Seeing the “lazy fellows who lurk about and are pests to society,” the legislature instituted a draft. The lower ranks resisted conscription, arguing that it fell disproportionately on them. Men from the wealthiest families could avoid service by paying a substitute, which outraged soldiers. In response, common soldiers deserted and even rioted in Virginia’s Northern Neck. Although Theodorick Bland, Sr. supported the war, he now feared that the legislature was waging another kind of war against the gentry. Bland believed that those without property wanted to usurp the power of the propertied. “Such laws, I believe, will soon reduce the most opulent fortune to a level with that of the inferior class of people, especially if the assembly continues to put the power of taxation into the hands of the very lowest class of the people,” Bland wrote. As the legislature shifted more of the burden toward the wealthiest planters, Bland feared the possibility of an internal conflict. “[T]heir proceedings in every respect have been such that, God grant it may not bring on a revolution in

¹⁹ SGT to Theodorick Bland, Sr. *The Bland Papers: being a Selection from the Manuscripts of Colonel Theodorick Bland, Jr.*, ed. Charles Campbell, (Petersburg, Edmund & Julian C. Ruffin, 1840), 2:55; Rev. James Madison to James Madison, January 18, 1781, *The Papers of James Madison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 2:293; Sylvia R. Frey, *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 158-61; Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 259; Cowden, “Randolphs of Turkey Island,” 223, 231.

this state, which I fear is the wish of the assembly,” wrote Randolph’s grandfather Theodorick Bland.²⁰

In March 1781, Tucker had returned to the front in North Carolina, where the Continental army tried to stop the march of General Lord Cornwallis across the Carolinas. As British troops marched on Guilford Courthouse, Tucker attempted to stop his own men from fleeing in the face of the enemy. In an altercation, one of his subordinates stabbed Tucker in the leg. He healed quickly and soon returned to active duty, where his old benefactor Thomas Nelson, now Virginia’s governor and a general, rewarded him with a staff position. As the war effort moved into Virginia, Tucker remained stationed at the headquarters of the American army and its new French allies. By the summer, it became clear that the Americans had worn down the British with years of warfare. At headquarters, Tucker heard privileged information and proved no hesitation to capitalize on it for personal gain. In September 1781, as the French and American forces laid siege to Britain at Yorktown and agents canvassed the countryside in search of supplies, Tucker instructed his wife to withhold the family’s wheat from American agents and sell instead to the French, who paid in specie. In October, the British surrendered. Governor Nelson appointed Tucker to the Governor’s Council, the body which approved all executive decisions in the state. The lower classes had accused the gentry of benefitting from the war, which Tucker certainly had. Now he hoped his family could weather the peace as well.²¹

²⁰ Theodorick Bland, Sr. to Theodorick Bland Jr., October 21, 1780 and January 8, 1781, in Theodorick Bland, *The Bland Papers*, 2:37, 51; Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005, 339-345; McDonnell, *Politics of War*, 368-82; Michael A. McDonnell, “Class War? Class Struggle during the American Revolution in Virginia,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 63 (April, 2006), 306.

²¹ Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 496-500; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 47; Charles T. Cullen, “St. George Tucker and Law in Virginia, 1772-1804,” (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 1972),

The leveling tendencies that angered Bland made Tucker aware of the war's real ramifications. The conflict diminished the gentry's power and now the peace threatened their wealth. Tucker realized that families such as the Randolphs and Blands would have to rely on their natural talents, instead of land, to preserve their status and the social order. In the final months of the war, however, Frances Randolph Tucker complained that her sons had "grown quite Idle and troublesome." The boys exuded a sense of entitlement that dismissed all but paternal authority, a common trait of the children of the gentry. During the war, Tucker urged his wife and the Bland family to find the best tutor for the children. "Lose no opportunity of procuring a tutor for the boys, for the exigency is greater than you can imagine," he wrote to Theodorick Bland, Jr. If the boys hoped to navigate the uncertain future of the post-war era, Tucker urged his stepsons to find and foster their natural talents and pay the greatest "attention to your improvement."²²

Tucker stressed improvement and natural talent because peace endangered the Randolph family lands. The war interrupted the payment of planters' debts to their British creditors, but legislators realized that, if and when the colonies won the war, trade relations between the nations would have to resume. Failure to repay those debts could damage efforts to reestablish trade and put Virginians in unfavorable trading relationships. Members of the Virginia General Assembly argued that the war canceled the debts. In late 1781, as a result of anger surrounding the emancipation of slaves during Arnold's raid, the legislature declared a moratorium on debt

30-1; Edward M. Riley, "St. George Tucker's Journal of the Siege of Yorktown, 1781," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 5 (July 1948), 375-95; Frey, *Water From the Rock*, 170.

²² Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 22-5, 29-34; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 54; Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:18; SGT to John Randolph, Theodorick Randolph, and Richard Randolph, Brock Collection, Huntington Library.

repayments and closed the Virginia courts to British creditors. In the peace negotiations in Paris, the British insisted on repayment and secured a guarantee in article four of the Treaty of Paris (1783) that state governments would remove impediments to debt collection. The United States owed £4,000,000, with Virginians owing £2,000,000 of that. Anticipating the peace, the legislature reopened the courts to British creditors. Virginians resisted repayment until Great Britain compensated slaveholders for slaves freed during the conflict. Although the legislature technically reopened the courts, the gentry agreed on an unwritten policy of obstruction. When a debt collection lawsuit actually made it before a Virginia court, judges often refused to hear it. After the war, Tucker returned to the practice of law, in large part because he realized that planting could never provide him or his family with the security he desired. In his law practice, he witnessed the troubling debt cases and realized that repayment was necessary, if Virginia hoped for a peaceful and prosperous economy. Virginia's debt could interfere with reestablishment of normal trading relations between England and other colonies. A reckoning loomed, and it appeared it would doom the future of Tucker's stepsons. When the Hansbury firm initiated litigation for repayment of the debts of John Randolph of Matoax, Tucker expected that all of the Randolph land would have to be sold.²³

A successful future for the Randolph children would require a life independent from the land. Frances Tucker had taught John Randolph, Jr., to value the land above all else, since it

²³ SGT to John Randolph, Theodorick Randolph, and Richard Randolph, Brock Collection, Huntington Library; Emory G. Evans, "Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 28 (July 1971), 349-361; Charles F. Hobson, "The Recovery of British Debts in the Federal Circuit Court of Virginia, 1790 to 1797," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 92 (April 1984), 176-81; Ragsdale, *A Planters' Republic*, 261; Norman J. Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics, 1781-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 114-6, 151-6; Peter J. Coleman, *Debtors and Creditors in American Insolvency, Imprisonment for Debt and Bankruptcy, 1607-1900* (Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 1974), 201.

served as the basis of his political, social, and literal survival. He later remembered riding with her on horseback during the war, when she stopped to survey the land before her. “When you get to be a man you must not sell your land; it is the first step to ruin for a boy to part with his father’s home: be sure to keep it as long as you live. Keep your land and your land will keep you,” she told him. The land remained the basis of their social superiority, but Frances Tucker also agreed with her husband and encouraged her youngest son “to aspire to be something better than a mere country squire.” St. George Tucker had no illusion about the boys’ future. “[O]nly by minding their books,” Tucker advised his wife, “would their future success be assured”²⁴

In 1781, the Tuckers sent their children to the school of Walker Maury in Orange County, Virginia. The boys had obtained a nominal education during the war, but the invasion made consistent study impossible, and they descended into a pattern of undisciplined habits. Maury, a former classmate of Tucker’s, promised to “improve their morals and their understanding.” The teacher ruled his classroom with iron discipline and a rigid structure, which seemed tyrannical to the Randolphs. It was the youngest son’s first time away from his mother and his home, which made the experience even more difficult. For the first time, he faced a regimen of work and structure. For the first time, too the Randolph children were exposed to those from the lower classes. After his years of sheltered life at Matoax and Cawsons, Randolph encountered people from Virginia’s middling ranks, and he found the experience unpleasant. “Some four or five of us were gentlemen’s sons and, as such, heartily envied and hated by our companions,” he wrote. The experience evoked the sense of privilege and social superiority in John Randolph as he

²⁴ JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:18; Philip Hamilton, “Education in the St. George Tucker Household: Change and Continuity in Jeffersonian Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (April 1994), 170, 176, Tucker quote from 177.

observed those beneath his social status. “I have a perfect recollection of the shock with which the vulgar habiliments and boorish manners of my schoolmates and sordid, squalid appearance of the whole establishment, and the economy of the place, inflicted upon me,” he wrote. From the moment his education began, Randolph begged to remain at the plantation. Tucker forced his stepsons to continue at Maury’s school after it moved to Williamsburg, where it became affiliated with the College of William and Mary.²⁵

Maury offered a solid education although Randolph later asserted otherwise. At Williamsburg, he achieved academic success and was placed in the head class. He learned French and Greek and excelled at classical studies. Randolph particularly enjoyed the student-staged classical dramas. Throughout his life, Randolph demonstrated a command of the classics, philosophy, and literature, all topics in which he excelled at Maury’s school. Yet he hated Maury’s power over him. Randolph’s explosive temper and insistence on privilege often led to beatings from the schoolmaster. His primary goal while at the school was his return to Matoax. Only Randolph’s peculiar health problems rescued him from the stern school of Maury.²⁶

²⁵ Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:21, 47-9; July 2, 1825, JR to Francis Walker Gilmer in Bruce, *John Randolph*, 55-6; Daniel Blake, Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 92-3; Emory G. Evans, *A Topping People*, 134; Walker Maury to SGT, October 6, 1782, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library; SGT to Theodorick Bland, Jr., September 21, 1781, Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:50; Hugh Blair Grigsby, *Discourse on the Life and Character of the Hon. Littleton Waller Tazewell, Delivered in the Freemason Street Baptist Church, Before the Bar of Norfolk, Virginia, and the Citizens, Generally, on the 29th of June, 1860* (Norfolk: J.D. Ghiselin Jr. 1860), 12-3; JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, John Randolph Papers, UVA; Walker Maury to SGT, October, 6, 1782, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library; Maury to SGT, January 30, 1783, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library; Maury to SGT, 1784, Tucker-Coleman, Swem Library; Phillip Hamilton, “Education in the St. George Tucker Household: Change and Continuity,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (April 1994), 179-81.

²⁶ A.L. Morrison, *The Beginnings of Public Education in Virginia, 1776-1860: Study of Secondary Schools in Relation to the State Literary Fund* (Richmond: Davis Bottom,

Randolph had experienced several mysterious and serious illnesses, which caused his parents to fear for his life. Maury believed they came “only from eating too much butter,” and typically ignored them. In 1784, Tucker sent John to his father’s estate in Bermuda “for the reestablishment of his health.” Randolph found the excursion liberating since it allowed him to escape “the austere rule of my stepfather and the tyranny hardly bearable of Maury.” He enjoyed studying with a recently arrived schoolmaster, Alexander Ewing, and the large library at the Tucker estate. Most of all, he relished his freedom. In 1785, St. George and Frances Tucker journeyed with the entire family to Bermuda and brought Randolph home to Virginia. At home, his parents again sent him to Maury’s school, which now met in the abandoned capitol at Williamsburg. He surpassed other students as he excelled in his readings. “I have left off Latin and devoted myself entirely to greek & French until the boys have finished virgil & the long expected time will come when I shall begin Horace,” he informed his mother. Yet Randolph resisted authority at all turns at the school. He felt no compunction about challenging other students, teachers, or attendants, particularly if he believed them beneath his status. In one incident, Randolph clashed with an Englishman whom Maury had appointed steward of the children’s rooms. “We just had a violent quarrel the subject of which was whether I should burn a candle in my room,” he wrote to his mother. He thought nothing of taking the incident to Maury. The boy demanded the deference due to someone of the gentry and it often led him into conflict. Soon, Tucker condemned the corrupting influence of Williamsburg and removed the children, a decision hastened by John Randolph’s behavior.²⁷

Superintendent of Public Printing, 1917), 111-2; Grigsby, *Discourse on Littleton Waller Tazewell*, 12.

²⁷ JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; SGT to Richard Rush, October 27, 1813, “Randolph and Tucker Letters,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*,

Raised in privilege at Cawsons, Randolph expected the deference that his ancestors enjoyed from the lower classes, even as that respect declined. As Theodorick Bland, Sr. discovered during the war, the Revolution transformed the position of many middling and lower class planters. In 1776, during the convention to create a new state constitution in Virginia, George Mason proposed a bill of rights that attacked the colony's social system. "All men are by nature equally free and independent, and have certain inherent rights," he proposed. Thomas Jefferson attacked the gentry's domination of the land. The customs of entail and primogeniture had perpetuated the gentry's power and determined the fate of Virginia's economy. Nearly three-fourths of the Tidewater land was entailed, which allowed the first generation of Virginia's gentry to perpetually control the state. Land in the Tidewater became unproductive, but the law prevented its sale to those who might improve it. The abolition of entail broke this remnant of a feudal custom. Furthermore, Jefferson hoped to diminish the power of the wealthiest planters by advocating manhood suffrage, giving the right to vote to all men, regardless of land holding. At the 1776 Virginia Convention, the state maintained freehold suffrage, however, which gave the vote to men who owned more than fifty acres as long as they made the land productive and continued to improve it. Freeholders became the sole source of political power, holding the exclusive right to vote and hold office. Jefferson tried, unsuccessfully, to circumvent the law by requiring the state to give land to those without any. Land ownership became the fundamental political act in post-Revolutionary Virginia. This placed more power in the hands of Virginia's middling ranks while poor whites had little power and slaves none. The Declaration of Rights,

42 (July 1934), 217; JR to Frances Tucker, June 20, 1786, "Randolph and Tucker Letters," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 42 (January 1934), 47-8; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 54.

the abolition of entail, and a voting formula that increased the number of participants in Virginia elections all represented attacks on the power and standing of the landed elite.²⁸

St. George Tucker's admonitions about improvement and education emanated from his first-hand experience in post-war Virginia. Economic depression hit the state as the tobacco market crashed. In the Tidewater, the situation forced two potential solutions on farmers: turn to general farming or move west. The exhausted soil, domestic debts, and low tobacco prices led to abandoned farms in the region as members of once great families traveled westward in search of cheaper and more productive land. Tucker once had dreams of establishing his own great planter family, but he realized that success would prove difficult to achieve. In 1782, fearful of the cycle of debt that affected planters, Tucker returned to his legal practice. "You complain of your being oblig'd to turn County Court Lawyer. It is true that fall from a gentleman of ease and pleasure to our Laborious occupation is disagreeable," Robert Innes wrote to Tucker.²⁹

Traveling the circuit of Virginia, Tucker witnessed the degradation of the Virginia gentry and the chaos emerging in the state. While planters avoided payment of their British debts, they could scarcely avoid creditors from throughout the new nation. Tucker represented numerous planter families in debt cases and watched as their fortunes diminished or disappeared. Often he

²⁸ "Draft of Virginia Bill of Rights," *The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792*, ed. Robert A. Rutland (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina, 1970), 1:287; Robert P. Sutton, *Revolution to Secession: Constitution Making in the Old Dominion* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 19, 23-5, 31-2; Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler, *"I Tremble for My Country": Thomas Jefferson and the Virginia Gentry* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 18; Christopher Michael Curtis, *Jefferson's Freeholders and the Politics of Ownership in the Old Dominion* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3-7, 61-7; Holly Brewer, "Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia," 307, 345; Kevin R.C. Gutzman, *Virginia's American Revolution: From Dominion to Republic, 1776-1840* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 57.

²⁹ Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves*, 157-8; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 75; Avery O. Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1965 reprint), 82.

pursued planters who failed to pay his retainers. More than the loss of the gentry's fortunes, the post-war situation devolved into the decline of deference, the loss of manners, and the threat of violence. In courts, he saw judges and other local officers lose authority in the public realm. "Drunkenness, quarelling [sic], and fighting keep the pace, at least, with the Administration of Justice," he observed. The gentry made problems worse by failing to recognize their own part in the state's declining fortunes. When traveling through Virginia, French military officer Marquis de Chastellux noted how the gentry "cherishes vanity and sloth, two vices which accord wonderfully with the already established prejudices." Tucker believed that the landed elite maintained a façade of wealth and engaged in self-denial in recognizing its troubled state. The middling and lower classes were bent on diminishing the gentry's power, and if lower class whites joined with slaves, true social chaos could destroy the gentry. In 1782, Edmund Randolph reported to James Madison that local authorities thwarted a plot by poor whites and escaped slaves to attack plantations in Clay County. By the mid-1780s, those who worried about a brewing social revolution, such as Tucker and Madison, advocated a stronger national government that would help preserve order.³⁰

In 1786, in response to such concerns, several states agreed to consider amending the Articles of Confederation, specifically to change its commerce clauses to rectify problems with trade. Virginia selected Tucker, along with James Madison and Edmund Randolph, to represent the state at a convention of delegates in Annapolis, Maryland. Only five states sent

³⁰ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 76-7; Phillip Hamilton, "Revolutionary Principles and Family Loyalties: Slavery's Transformation in the St. George Tucker Household," *William and Mary Quarterly* 55 (October 1998), 539; Charles T. Cullen, "St. George Tucker and the Law in Virginia, 1772-1804," (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 1971), 73-4; Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America in the Years 1780-81-82* (New York: White, Gallaher, & White, 1827), 286; Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York; International Publishers, 1952 reprint), 207.

representatives, which prevented them from making any changes. New York delegate Alexander Hamilton proposed another meeting the following year, this time to address more of their concerns about economic unrest and the central government's lack of police power. They all agreed. Almost on cue, the delegates' fears of disorder and unrest came true. In Massachusetts, Daniel Shays led a band of discontented and indebted planters in a short-lived rebellion against the state government. In western Virginia, indebted farmers in Greenbrier County led another unsuccessful revolt against taxation by the gentry-controlled state government. If any of Virginia's leaders doubted the need for changes to the central authority, the threat of rebellion from below convinced them.³¹

Tucker wanted to remove his stepsons from the coming chaos and the pervasive lethargy of the gentry. In 1786, on a journey northward, which included the Annapolis meeting, St. George and Frances Tucker met with John Witherspoon, the president of the College of New Jersey in Princeton. The college president promised the parents that he and the college could provide an enlightened education in a controlled environment. In early 1787, John and Theodorick Randolph arrived at Princeton, while Richard studied under George Wythe in Williamsburg. At the College of New Jersey's grammar school, John Randolph became attached to Witherspoon, who personally instructed him. The schoolmaster soon recognized the young boy's intelligence and advanced knowledge, a sign that Maury's school had benefited him. Initially, John and Theodorick were "very much pleased by the northern states." However,

³¹ Cullen, "Tucker and the Law," 75-6; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 77; Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 186; Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 10-11; Leonard L. Richards, *Shays's Rebellion: The American Revolution's Final Battle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002); David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980).

John's resentment of authority and natural sense of superiority again emerged. Once Witherspoon admitted him to the college, his teachers became fools and his fellow students became nuisances. In a letter home, he declared himself a "ten times better scholar than the mentor." During a public speaking contest, he remained "conscious of my superiority over my competitors" while he "despised" those who believed they could judge him. He wanted others to recognize and defer to his intelligence, if not his social standing.³²

His parents stressed that Randolph would need to rely on more than his intelligence to transcend the difficulties of the planter life; he must prove diligent in his work and conduct himself with reserve. Tucker argued that Randolph's future success and his happiness "depends upon the conduct you now pursue." He believed his stepsons should look to the era's most distinguished republican gentlemen such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin as models of behavior. Particularly in Washington, they could see a reserved man who controlled his passions and exhibited a moderate temper. "I shall study hard, not only to be the best scholar in the class but to give you and Mama all the pleasure in my power," Randolph assured his parents. The hope remained that the experience at the College of New Jersey would help shape Randolph and his brothers into the natural republican aristocracy that would rule in the next generation. Tucker believed that these republicans needed not only brilliance or intelligence but an ability to control their emotions, a disinterested approach to public questions, and an

³² JR to SGT, April, 1786, April 30, 1787, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library, College of William and Mary; JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; SGT to Theodorick and John Randolph, April 11, 1787, Randolph Papers, UVA; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 54-5.

appreciation for the moral dimensions of law and liberty. Tucker wanted them to embrace these principles of republicanism to maintain Virginia's social order, not overthrow it.³³

Slavery presented the most serious problem for the Randolph sons and Tucker knew it. Tucker favored the outlawing of the foreign slave trade in Virginia in 1778 and generally embraced antislavery ideals. He doubted slavery's morality and loathed the effect it had on the white population. The disparity between white and blacks was always evident to Tucker. Indeed, during the siege of Yorktown when British troops faced serious deprivations, Tucker noted that the black soldiers died first. "An Immense number of Negroes have died, in the most miserable manner in York," Tucker wrote. In the 1780s, however, his search for profits and security led him to contract out fifteen slaves a year. He was never comfortable in the role of slave master, and now he was free from the day to day problems of a planter. Frances Tucker exhibited a certain devotion to the institution and when necessary, a forceful mastery of slaves. Unlike her husband, she was raised in the presence of unrelenting slavemasters. Her father, brother, and late husband all ruled their slave kingdoms with authority and decisiveness and she did the same. In September 1787, with her husband away on the legal circuit, Frances responded to unrest at Bizarre. Pregnant with her eighth child, she rode the long distance from Matoax and took control of the Cumberland County plantation:

You will no doubt be surprised my dear St. George to find me absent at your return, but the necessity is so great. I flatter myself you will think it sufficient apology [sic]. The existence [sic] of everything at Bizarre probably depends [sic] upon it... I have determined to make use of the days of your absence to see into the Anarchy at the present

³³ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 85-6; JR to SGT, September 13, 1787, Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:82-3.

reigns at Bizarre, the extreem [sic], & repeated cruelty of the Overseer (who is not control.d [sic]at all by Holcombe's repeated orders to the contrary) has driven off many of the most valuable Negroes one of which has come down to me on a horse which is an addition to the injury done the plantation—but the poor unhappy Wretch was unable to come to me without; I can no longer leave the miserable creatures a prey to the worst part of mankind, without endeavoring to mitigate, as far as is my power, the pangs of their cruel situation.

Her compassion masked her determination to maintain order and profits on her plantation, which would help her sons keep the land. She was devoted to the gentry and wanted to maintain the plantation system with slavery. Her husband accepted that circumstances made that less likely with each passing year.³⁴

Revolutionary leaders understood the contradiction between slavery and their principles of liberty, self-government, and natural rights. During the war, Thomas Ludwell Lee scolded his fellow planters for fighting for rights that they denied their slaves. An antislavery feeling grew with the revolutionary rhetoric, which led in 1778 to the abolition of the slave trade. Some considered the practice an abomination while others saw it as potentially damaging to the Virginia economy. Either motive, however, cast doubt on the unchecked importation of slaves. During the tumultuous Confederation period, the Virginia Quakers wanted the government to take strong moral antislavery action and petitioned the General Assembly to abolish slavery. In

³⁴ Paul Finkelman, "The Dragon That St. George Could Not Slay: Tucker's Plan to Slavery," *William and Mary Law Review* 46 (February 2006), 1218; Doyle, "Master and Patriot," 110-125; *Virginia Silhouettes: Contemporary Letters Concerning Negro Slavery in the State of Virginia*, ed. Mrs. George P. Coleman (Richmond: Dietz Printing, Co. 1934), 3-4; Edward M. Riley, "St. George Tucker's Journal of the Siege of Yorktown, 1781," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 5 (July 1848), 387; Frey, *Water From the Rock*, 170.

1782, at the prodding of the Quakers, the legislature passed a new manumission law, which allowed a slaveowner to free his slaves without the approval of the General Assembly. Although a conservative measure with numerous restrictions, the bill seemed to point toward a gradual emancipation of slavery in Virginia. The act encouraged antislavery Quakers to continue their petitions to the legislature. “The body of negroes in this state have been robbed” of their natural rights, stated one petition. The growing antislavery feeling, however, pushed many ambivalent planters to protect slavery. In 1784 and 1785, over 1,200 proslavery petitions arrived in the Virginia legislature. One petition condemned the Quakers as “tools of the British administration” who wanted to “wrest from us our slaves.” If unchecked, these religious zealots would ruin the state and unleash a class of dangerous free blacks on society, all in the name of false piety, the petitioners continued. The economic depression, fear of uprising, and a growing awareness of racial distinction evoked a deep suspicion of antislavery movements.³⁵

The antislavery sentiment reflected the growing hostility toward the institution throughout the Atlantic world. From England, Quakers led a trans-Atlantic emancipation movement that centered on the horrors of the slave trade. When the end of the Revolutionary War revived the Atlantic slave trade, Quakers attempted to inform the public in England and the United States of the grim details of the practice. The group petitioned the British Parliament and the American Confederation Congress in an effort to shame legislators to outlaw the trade. Methodists joined the Quakers to build a religious-based antislavery movement in the United States and Britain, which envisioned the eradication of slavery from the western world. Before his death, Methodist founder John Wesley encouraged young British abolitionist William

³⁵ Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 13, 34-6; James Hugo Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia and Miscegenation in the South, 1776-1860* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970), 106, 111-2; Hamilton, “Slavery in the Tucker Household,” 535.

Wilberforce to persevere in their goal. “Go on, in the name of God, and in the power of His might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish before it,” he wrote.³⁶

When the delegates gathered in Philadelphia during the summer of 1787, the apathy of Annapolis had disappeared. The Virginia legislature passed over Tucker as a potential delegate and instead sent James Madison, George Washington, George Mason, Edmund Randolph, and George Wythe. With Washington presiding over the secret proceedings, the convention decided to abandon the Articles of Confederation for a new government. The debates over the interest of the small and large states and the power of a prospective presidency provoked tense moments, but the issue of slavery nearly derailed the continuance of political union. In the Northern states, a growing discomfort with the institution fueled a desire to see the foreign slave trade abolished, a stance with which the upper South delegation agreed. Madison noted that the convention’s basic division was “principally from the effects of their having or not having slaves.”³⁷

The South Carolina and Georgia delegations made it clear that any attempt at Union would fail without pledges of protection for slaveholders’ rights and for slavery itself. In response, New York delegate Gouverneur Morris offered one of the most explicit attacks on slavery in the entire debate. “It was a nefarious institution,” he argued, “It was the curse of heaven upon the States where it prevailed.” In the Northern states, where abolition was under

³⁶ Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Cooperation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), 27-37.

³⁷ Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 32-3; Lacy K. Ford, Jr. “Reconfiguring the Old South: ‘Solving’ the Problem of Slavery, 1787-1838,” *Journal of American History* 95 (June 2008), 97; *A Necessary Evil? Slavery and the Debate Over the Constitution* ed. John P. Kaminski (Madison: Madison House, 1995), 47.

way, Morris noticed a happier people with more democratic institutions. In an obvious slap at the power of the Virginia gentry, Morris contended “that Domestic slavery is the most prominent feature in the aristocratic countenance of the proposed Constitution.” Indeed, he deemed the South’s wealth a façade inadequate even to defend the region. While Southern “Aristocracy” restored and consolidated its own power through the “vassalage of the poor,” the Northern states would find themselves taxed for the security of the slave states against internal attack. At the same time, the Southerners’ ever-present fear of insurrection made them unreliable partners in governance. If the nation ever engaged in a foreign war, Morris asked, would slaveholders send soldiers, leaving their plantation unguarded? Despite a contentious debate, the two sides reached compromises on the matter of slavery, agreeing that Congress would count slaves as three-fifths of persons in the matters of federal representation and taxation. The agreement would inflate Southern numbers in the House of Representatives and in the electoral college. The agreement would help offset the growing population of the Northern states. Furthermore, the delegates agreed to establish a twenty-year delay on the abolition of the foreign slave trade, at the insistence of Georgia and South Carolina. In return the Southern states gave the new Congress the right to control navigation and maritime law by a simple majority in Congress, a critical concession for the merchants of the North.³⁸

Almost all agreed that no political union could ever exist without Virginia due to its size and prestige. During the Virginia ratification debates in June 1788, Patrick Henry and George Mason attacked the implicit power of the proposed Constitution. Henry argued that the new

³⁸ *A Necessary Evil?*, 56-7; Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996), 14-5; Albert F. Simpson, “The Political Significance of Slave Representation, 1787-1821,” *Journal of Southern History*, 7 (August 1941), 315-20; Ford, “Reconfiguring the Old South,” 97-8.

federal government could extrapolate its powers against Southern interests. “They might lay such heavy taxes on slaves, as would amount to emancipation; and then the Southern States would be the only sufferers,” Henry argued. George Mason agreed that “by laying taxes too heavily on slaves they might totally annihilate that kind of property.” Opponents saw this primal fear behind every potential implied power of the president or Congress.³⁹

For the Randolphs, the new government would endanger everything they owned. Article VI of the proposed Constitution affirmed that the new central government would make good on all its debts: “All Debts contracted and Engagements entered into, before the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be as valid against the United States under this Constitution, as under the Confederation.” Ratifying the document would end resistance to paying British creditors. The British government would appeal to the new central government in its effort to collect the debts.⁴⁰

John Randolph and his brothers followed the proceedings with trepidation. Tucker opposed the Constitution because of the power it could wield over Virginia, if not for the damage it would cause his stepsons. When Virginia ratified the document in 1788, he prepared his stepsons for the inevitable outcome for their family and encouraged them to rededicate their attention to shaping their own futures:

You will have heard that the Constitution has been adopted in this State; that Event, my

³⁹ Pauline Maier, *Ratification: The People Debate the Constitution 1787-1788* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 295; *The Ratification History of the Ratification of the Constitution: Ratification of the Constitution by the States: Virginia* ed. John P. Kaminski and Gaspare J. Saladino (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1993), 10: 1339, 1343.

⁴⁰ Emory G. Evans, “Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 28 (July 1971), 370-1.

dear children affects your interest more nearly than that of most others the recovery of British debts can no longer be postponed—there now seems to be a moral certainty that your patrimony will all go to satisfy the unjust debts from your Papa to the Hansbury's [sic]. The consequence, my dear boys, must be obvious to you—your sole dependence must be on your own personal Abilities and Exertions: it's happy for you, my sons, that the Point has been so long postponed as to give an opportunity of laying the foundation of a good Education for you both.

In the North, Tucker insisted, they should not let their time pass “without availing yourself of every opportunity of improvement.”⁴¹

⁴¹ Emory G. Evans, “Private Indebtedness and the Revolution in Virginia, 1776 to 1796,” 370-1; SGT to John, Theodorick, and Richard Randolph, Randolph Papers, UVA.

Chapter 3: The Inconsistent Education of John Randolph, 1789-1799

George Washington passed through the streets of Manhattan aboard an elegant coach bound for Federal Hall, where militia companies, marching bands, and ordinary citizens awaited him. John Adams, the new Vice-President, greeted him and then officially introduced him to the two bodies of the new national legislature. Making his way to the second floor, Washington emerged onto the balcony with Adams and Chancellor Robert Livingston, New York City's highest ranking judicial officer, behind him. From below on the street, fifteen-year-old John Randolph watched as Livingston held a small Bible and administered the presidential oath of office to Washington. The sight of the tall planter, dressed in a fine suit of clothes, with his hand on the Bible, left an impression on Randolph. The distance prevented Randolph from actually hearing the oath, but the event seemed majestic, nonetheless. However, the young Virginian was skeptical. Like his stepfather, Randolph had opposed the Constitution and feared the power of the new central government. Washington's inauguration signaled "the Constitution in its chrysalis state," Randolph wrote. He later recalled his misgivings at that moment. "I saw what Washington did not see; but two other men in Virginia saw it—George Mason and Patrick Henry—the *poison under its wings*."¹

For Randolph, the poison that he saw that day was always the same—the potential threat of an overpowering federal government. "You know I was an Anti-Federalist when hardly breeched," he later told Josiah Quincy while remembering his opposition to the new government. In New York, during the first Congressional sessions, Randolph watched his uncle, Theodorick

¹ James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington and the New Nation: 1783-1793* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 184-7; Bruce, *Randolph*, 1: 95.

Bland, Jr. and Thomas Tudor Tucker, his stepfather's brother, both new members of the House of Representatives, attack the pretensions of the federal government. Tucker, or "Uncle Thomas," as Randolph called him, led a vociferous defense of the rights of slaveholders during the congressional sessions at Federal Hall. It became apparent to Tucker that in the House of Representatives, Southerners would have to defend their rights as slaveholders. St. George Tucker continued his effort to lead his stepsons away from the plantation. After the death of Frances Randolph Tucker in December 1787, Tucker pushed to make them independent of the plantation, and, in turn, slavery. Yet, Randolph and his brothers resisted their education in the North, hoping instead to continue their lives as privileged members of the Virginia gentry. In the decade between the commencement of the new government and John Randolph's election to Congress, the contradictory principles of the two Tuckers influenced him. During those years, Randolph embraced antislavery principles and envisioned himself as a radical. At the same time, he wanted desperately to inherit his plantation and assume his place among the Virginia gentry. As he watched the new national government rise, private and public circumstances pulled him in opposite directions. Yet, as he entered public life, he realized that political demands forced him, at least publicly, to declare his loyalties.²

Following his wife's death, St. George Tucker insisted that his stepsons continue their education in New Jersey. Richard joined his brothers at Princeton, which seemed to alleviate John's homesickness. Indeed, Richard Randolph's efforts to carry himself like a Virginia gentleman mesmerized John. In New Jersey, Richard purchased a new suit of clothes and sent the bill to Tucker. His youngest brother admired how Richard Randolph always held himself

² JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA.

“above low company of any sort.” In Virginia, Tucker received the bills for their extravagant spending and urged them to practice frugality. In 1788, he decided to send the boys to Columbia College in New York City, where his brother, Thomas, could supervise them. Columbia also offered the type of education Tucker wanted for them. The college’s president, William Samuel Johnson, gave the students republican instruction, aimed at producing virtuous men and leaders for the new republic. As president, Johnson promoted democracy, condemned slavery, and supported New York City’s artisans. Tucker believed that Columbia College could help the Randolphs develop their natural talents. He expected Richard and John to prepare for legal careers, while Theodorick would receive a medical education. They needed to approach their studies seriously and live frugally, Tucker believed. Only then would they find success in life independent from the plantation.³

Instead, Randolph and his brothers lived as exiled planter aristocrats in New York City. After arriving in the city, Richard Randolph refurbished their quarters after deeming them too shabby and Theodorick hired a servant to attend to their needs. Theodorick drank and gambled; Richard bought fashionable new clothes. John Randolph imitated his brothers, often spurning academic work for pleasure. Briefly, William Cochran, an Irish professor of Latin and Greek, fired his enthusiasm, which lasted only until the professor left the school. The Randolphs approached their education as a means of refinement to prepare them for a life of gentility. The real education, they believed, occurred on the plantation. Randolph’s brother, Theodorick, often

³ David C. Humphrey, *From King’s College to Columbia, 1746-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 204-5, 302-3; JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, John Randolph Papers, UVA; Robert A. McCaughey, *Stand, Columbia: A History of Columbia University in the City of New York, 1754-2004* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 59; Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), particularly chapter 17.

encouraged him to abandon study for the pleasures of the city. John recalled once that his brother would “open the door of my study and [toss] the books over the floor, sometimes out the window.” The sixteen-year-old John soon “fell into the habits and ways of life of my unfortunate brother.” But no amount of distractions could mask John Randolph’s dissatisfaction with life in the North. Still grieving for his mother and homesick, he begged Tucker to allow him to return to Virginia. “I am anxious to go home, never to return,” he wrote. “You cannot conceive the Pleasure it will give me, and the expence will be no greater than that of staying here,” he added. Richard Randolph informed Tucker that his brother was simply lazy. Tucker denied the request and forced young Randolph to remain in New York City.⁴

That the Randolphs would successfully navigate the current crisis of debt in the Old Dominion seemed unlikely to Tucker. In the Virginia court system, he saw planters facing ruin from their debts; and the circumstances of personal friends and family offered more sobering evidence of the gentry’s problems. Since the end of the war, a relative, John Banister, had struggled to recover from the economic depression and the shrinking yield of tobacco at the family’s plantation, Battersea. “[M]y Chariot horses and several of my best Negroes are taken in execution which will prevent my taking a Crop,” Bannister wrote to Tucker. Banister’s reputation declined along with his financial situation, until he died in 1789. “What will become of the Battersea Family and Estate?” John Randolph asked Tucker. Eventually, creditors

⁴ JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, John Randolph Papers, Alderman Library; JR to SGT, August 4, August 12, September 25, December 7, 1788, SGT Papers, LC; St. George Tucker to Theodorick and John Randolph, June 29, 1788, John Randolph Papers, Alderman Library, UVA; JR to SGT, December 15, 1788, Randolph-Tucker Family Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 7; JR to SGT, January 25, 1789, March 1, 1789, August 20, August 30, SGT Papers, LC; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 94.

liquidated the plantation. Most shockingly for Tucker, the Nelson family lost its fortune when his old benefactor, Thomas Nelson, died in 1789. Young John Randolph seemed to grasp the dire situation and expressed appreciation for Tucker's continual guidance. "How fortunate am I, after having lost my Parents, in having so good a Friend, as my dear Papa to take care of me until I am able to do it myself," Randolph wrote.⁵

Richard Randolph ignored the warnings and planned his return to Virginia, where he would soon inherit Bizarre. Although he studied at William and Mary, the College of New Jersey, and Columbia College, Richard failed to earn a degree. Instead, he planned on the planter life and began courting his cousin, Judith Randolph. Richard's grim financial situation led Judith's father, Thomas Mann Randolph, to object to their marriage. Tucker also objected and insisted that her father would have to help the couple financially if they married. The couple disregarded the warnings, and by the end of 1789, Richard and a pregnant Judith were married. Although Richard inherited Bizarre, he and his new bride stayed with Tucker at Matoax. The whole affair fueled John Randolph's desire to return to Virginia. "I can attain great deal more Knowledge (and at much less expense) in Wmsburg than in New York," he argued. Despite his homesickness, however, one activity in the city had captivated him: politics.⁶

On March 4, 1789, John Randolph skipped school and traveled downtown toward Federal Hall, where the House of Representatives convened for the first time. More than just a curious onlooker, Randolph attended to observe Thomas Tucker, his stepfather's brother. He had

⁵ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 73 (Bannister quote); Hamilton, "Education in Household," 184; JR to SGT, January 25, 1789, SGT Papers, LC.

⁶ Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 23; JR to SGT, January 25, 1789, SGT Papers, LC; JR to SGT, March 1, 1789, SGT Papers, LC; JR to SGT, August 20, 1789, SGT Papers, LC; JR to SGT, August 30, 1789, SGT Papers, LC.

represented South Carolina in the Confederation Congress, and voters had recently elected him to the new House of Representatives. Although Tucker was not a blood relation, Randolph had grown attached to him. Tucker was only one of thirteen congressmen present that day, but the hall soon filled with men from all over the country. Within days, Randolph's uncle, Theodorick Bland, Jr., and cousin, Richard Bland Lee, arrived to represent Virginia in the House. Although Randolph admired his Uncle Bland deeply, it was the fiery and obstinate Tucker who captivated the boy. "Of all the Men in the World, yourself, my dear Sir, excepted, I had rather be under the direction of Uncle Thomas. He is like a father to me," he told St. George Tucker.⁷

Since the Revolution, Thomas Tucker had vehemently attacked tyranny and monarchy while espousing a faith in democratic government. A doctor by trade, he urged South Carolinians to see the American Revolution as a truly revolutionary and democratic event that empowered the people. In 1784, he published *Conciliatory Hints*, an anonymous pamphlet that condemned America's continuing attachment to the British Constitution. Tucker argued that the people could ill afford to place their trust in an uncoded and unnamed traditional form of government and must embrace a true "democratical government" that recognized that "all authority is derived from the people at large, held only during their pleasure, and exercised only for their benefit." To Tucker, only a specific written constitution that defined the powers of government would suffice. In spite of these admonitions, he opposed the new Constitution as too loosely constructed and with too much potential for abuse through implied powers. "The proposed Constitution seems to me replete with Danger, & I dread it's [sic] Consequences," he wrote to St. George Tucker. The fear of monarchy convinced Thomas Tucker that "the president will be a monarch whilst in

⁷ JR to SGT, September 25, 1788, January 25, 1789, Tucker Papers, LC; Stokes, "John Randolph," 69.

Office.” Yet he distrusted the electoral process, convinced that popular elections to the House of Representatives would be decided by “intrigue among the most unprincipled of the People.” Deeply suspicious of power, Tucker took his new seat determined to thwart usurpation of the people’s power and to fight tyranny.⁸

Randolph often skipped his classes at Columbia to watch Tucker and the proceedings of the House. Tucker excoriated and ridiculed those suspected of monarchical intentions, with Vice-President Adams a particular victim of his derision. When Congress debated a number of royal-sounding titles for the new President, Tucker became apoplectic. “I am out of all Patience when I think how we suffered ourselves to be duped into Measures destructive [sic] of every Republican Idea,” he wrote. In the early days of the new Congress, it became apparent that the old divisions from the ratification debate had been transferred to the new national legislature. “The words *party, Tory, Anti & Federalist* compose the greatest part of the Conversation of this Place,” Randolph observed. Randolph came to echo Tucker’s uncompromising views on monarchy and his fears of the subversion of the people’s power. Writing home to his stepfather, he described a debate about congressional pay. “The Senate have become worse every Day. They want to have ten Dollars a Day and the Representatives six only. They were supported in the House by Messrs. Madison & R. B. Lee Who asserted that such a Discrimination should be made because the Senate represented the *Sovereignty of the People* & they the People *themselves*,” he wrote.

⁸ JR to SGT, January 25, 1789, Tucker Papers, LC; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 280; Diana Dru Dowdy, “‘A School for Stoicism’: Thomas Tudor Tucker and the Republican Age,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* Vol. 96, No. 2 (April 1995), 112-3.

Like his uncle, Randolph listened for hints by those who wanted to assume unauthorized power and privilege.⁹

Despite nearly universal condemnation of partisanship, President Washington sowed the seeds of faction with his selection of men to lead the executive departments. During the first years of the government, the Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, provoked hostility in Congress with his economic plans for the national government. Great Britain's strong, centralized economic system inspired Hamilton's plans, which included a national bank, the assumption of the states' debts, and support for manufacturers. For Anti-Federalists such as Thomas Tucker and Theodorick Bland, these measures fulfilled their longstanding fears about centralized power. The proposed financial system would strengthen the central government's powers, saddle the nation with debt, and punish planters and farmers by favoring manufacturers. The Anti-Federalists, believing that Hamilton's system planted the seeds of corruption and monarchy, adopted the rhetoric of the agrarian "country" party formed in response to the British Prime Minister Robert Walpole (1676-1745). The opposition to Hamilton led the Anti-Federalists to form Democratic-Republican societies throughout the nation. The most powerful enemy of Hamilton's plans also served in Washington's cabinet. After five years as minister to France, Thomas Jefferson returned to become Washington's Secretary of State and, although responsible for foreign affairs, he worked with his friend James Madison in congressional opposition to the economic plans. While some Northerners and merchants feared the power of the central government, they endorsed Hamilton's support of commercial enterprise. Planters such as Jefferson, John Taylor, and Bland believed the prospect of a commercial republic

⁹ JR to SGT, March 1, 1789, Tucker Papers, LC; JR to SGT, Tucker Papers, LC; Stokes, "John Randolph," 76; Dowdy, "'School for Stoicism,'" 11.

dangerous. Despite Republican efforts, however, most of Hamilton's economic vision became law.¹⁰

European developments aggravated the split among the followers of Jefferson and Hamilton and exposed deep cultural divisions between the two emerging parties. During his final months as minister to France, Jefferson witnessed popular discontent among the lower classes turn into full-scale revolution. In a short time, French mobs overturned the rule of the aristocracy, abolished the remnants of feudalism, severed ties with the Catholic Church, and called a new National Assembly. In August 1789, the Assembly issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which declared that all "men are born and remain free and equal in their rights." Legislators abolished all social distinctions. The French experience seemed the natural outgrowth of the American Revolution in its struggle against monarchy and thus won the support of most Americans. The attempt at leveling society in France, however, soon aroused the suspicions of conservatives such as Hamilton and Adams, who had already developed misgivings about popular government in the United States. Indeed, Adams often claimed credit for many of the ideas in Edmund Burke's scathing critique, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. These conservatives craved order, the antithesis of France's revolution. In contrast, the spirit of egalitarianism dominated discussions at the tables of Republicans such as Jefferson and

¹⁰ Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism & the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 174-87; McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, 146-7; Stanley Elkins & Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism: The Early American Republic, 1788-1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); James Roger Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic: The New Nation in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780-1840* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970), 85.

Thomas Tucker. Jefferson reassured his supporters and President Washington that rumors of the Revolution's excesses came from Great Britain in an effort to derail the movement for liberty.¹¹

Because of his social position and relationship to Tucker and Bland, Randolph often attended dinners where he heard congressmen and cabinet members discuss domestic political struggles and the revolution in France. Tucker guided Randolph through the political scene in New York, and gave him access to the development of the growing political factions surrounding Jefferson. "I have no society except Members of Congress who have done me the Honour to take great Notice of me," Randolph wrote. As he dined with Thomas Jefferson, a cousin, James Madison, and Edmund Randolph, another cousin and Washington's Attorney General, the young man saw the inner workings of the new government. Thomas Tucker believed the boy bright and a serious observer of national matters. "John, I think, has more prudence, good Sense [and] Docility than one of his years," Tucker wrote. Yet Randolph also proved arrogant even among distinguished company. After one dinner, his uncle admonished him for interrupting guests with his own opinions. In a letter to his stepfather, he contended that such incidents occurred "on account of my using in Company the privilege which you allowed us at your Table, namely that of speaking our sentiments fully." Thomas Tucker cared for the Randolph sons a great deal, even taking John to the beach to recuperate from one of his many illnesses. "Uncle Tucker has

¹¹ Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, ch. 2, 313; Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 174-7; Robert W. Smith, *Keeping the Republic: Ideology and Early American Diplomacy* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 71-2; Joseph J. Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams* (New York: Norton, 1993), 146-7; Conor Cruise O'Brien, *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution, 1785-1800* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 79-88.

behaved like a Father to us,” John wrote. “I shall always feel myself under the greatest Obligations to him.” During his time in New York, he considered Tucker his true mentor.¹²

Slavery emerged as an issue when Congress initially convened in 1789. During the first session of the House of Representatives, Virginia Congressman Josiah Parker proposed a ten dollar tax on every slave imported into the United States, with an eye toward destroying the foreign slave trade and ending slavery. He charged the United States with “inconsistency in our principles.” The proposal outraged representatives from Georgia and South Carolina. Georgia Representative James Jackson condemned Parker’s real motives. “It was the fashion of the day to favor the liberty of slaves,” he said. Tucker pointed out that Congress held no authority to interfere with the slave trade. “The constitution gives us no power on that point,” he added. Tucker and Jackson wanted Congress to avoid the discussion, insisting that the House had no right to interfere with slavery and therefore no reason to discuss it. James Madison, who supported the tax, believed that Congress not only had the right but the responsibility to debate the issue. “The dictates of humanity, the principles of the people, the national safety and happiness, and prudent policy require it of us,” he argued. “I conceive the constitution, in this particular, was formed in order that the Government, whilst it was restrained from laying a total prohibition, might be able to give some testimony of the sense of America with respect to the African trade,” he added. Madison believed that Congress had a moral and logical responsibility to discourage slavery, especially the slave trade. Madison said, “It is certain a majority of the States are opposed to this practice.” The resistance of the Deep South baffled Madison since

¹² JR to SGT, August 20, September 11, 1789, January 7, 1790, Tucker Papers, LC; Thomas Tucker to SGT, September 15, 1789, Tucker Coleman Collection, Swem Library, William and Mary; Stokes, “John Randolph,” 71; *The North American Review*, 103 (July 1866), 158.

decreasing importation only benefited them. “I should venture to say that it is as much the interest of Georgia and South Carolina as of any in the Union. Every addition they receive to their number of slaves, tends to weaken and render them less capable of self-defence,” he argued. Theodorick Bland agreed that “if it was impossible to cure the evil” he would support “measures that prevent it extending further.” The Georgia and South Carolina delegations delayed the matter until it finally disappeared.¹³

Madison’s sentiments reflected the antislavery feeling that existed in Virginia. Most of the Virginia delegation also believed that Congress should nudge the nation toward eventual eradication of slavery. In Virginia, St. George Tucker promoted the idea to his students at William and Mary. He wrote Virginia congressman John Page, urging Congress to promote a plan of gradual emancipation, “recommending to the States to take up the subject.” More than simple advocacy, Tucker believed a “plan for extirpating an Evil so abhorrent to the principles of our Government” could work. “I am induced to think, if the Finances of the united states [sic] would admit, that a few thousand Dollars per annum might be appropriated to the purpose of promoting such a Society [for Abolition of Slavery] in the several States,” Tucker argued. If the states could move toward emancipating slaves, the federal government could then relocate them to the western territories. Madison also hoped that the spirit of republicanism, such as Tucker displayed, was “secretly undermining the institution.”¹⁴

¹³ Bradburn, *Citizenship Revolution*, 248-55; *Annals of Congress*, 1:1, 349-356; Robin L. Einhorn, *American Taxation, American Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 152.

¹⁴ SGT to John Page, March 29, 1790, *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America 4 March 1789-2 March 1791: Correspondence, Second Session: 15 March-June 1790* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 19: 1034-5; McCord, T.B., Jr. “John Page of Rosewell: Reason, Religion, and Republican Government from the

Congress, however, moved in an opposite direction. Whether the nation would retain the current mode of organization of western territories fell to Congress. The Confederation Congress had adopted the Northwest Ordinance, an organization of the territories that banned slavery north of the Ohio River. In 1789, the new Congress renewed the Northwest Ordinance but refused to extend the ban on slavery to the Southwest Territory. The public land system would encourage settlement to raise revenue, not practice moral suasion. Some argued that the constitutional compromise over slavery discouraged any more interference with the institution. In renewing the Northwest Ordinance, Congress respected both the historical precedent of the act as well as the natural barriers to slavery's expansion. With both pieces of legislation, however, Congress made the Ohio River the great dividing line between slavery and freedom.¹⁵

The hardening of sectional attitudes about slavery became even more evident in early 1790. In the North, the Quakers ceaselessly advocated for abolition and recognition of the rights of slaves throughout the nation, issuing petitions and pamphlets about the institution's evils. In Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin aided the religious sect in its effort against slavery. In early 1790, he crafted a petition that attacked the morality of the institution and sent it to Congress

Perspective of a Virginia Planter, 1743-1808." (PhD Diss., American University, 1991), 1183-4; James Madison to Benjamin Rush, March 20, 1790, *The Papers of James Madison*, 13:109.

¹⁵ Garry Wills, *Negro President: Jefferson and the Slave Power* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), 21-32; David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2009), 87-8; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 154; Peter S. Onuf, *Statehood and Union: A History of the Northwest Ordinance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders*, chs. 2 and 3; Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), ch. 1; John Craig Hammond, *Slavery, Expansion and Freedom in the Early American West* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2007), 2-3, 10-11; John Craig Hammond, "'Uncontrollable Necessity': The Local Politics, Geopolitics, and Sectional Politics of Slavery Expansion" in *Contesting Slavery: The Politics of Bondage and Freedom in the New American Nation* ed. by Hammond and Matthew Mason (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia Press, 2011).

under his own signature. The petition urged Congress “to countenance the Restoration of liberty to these unhappy men, who alone, in this land of Freedom, are degraded into perpetual bondage.” Arriving during the tense debate over the assumption of states’ debts, the petition angered the South Carolina and Georgia delegations. Thomas Tucker opposed even reading the petition on the House floor and blamed the “mischievous attempt” on Franklin, “a man who ought to have known better.” Tucker and the South Carolina and Georgia delegations, already agitated over Parker’s proposed tax on slave imports, accused Northerners of destroying the Constitutional agreement. Ratification of the Constitution required North and South to accept “each other with our mutual bad habits and respective evils,” Federalist Congressman William Loughton Smith argued. “The best informed part of the citizens of the Northern States knew that slavery was so ingrafted into the policy of the Southern states, that it could not be eradicated without tearing up by the roots their happiness, tranquility, and prosperity,” he added. For Smith, the effort represented an insidious plot to destroy the South. Quakers cowered in the face of the enemy, but they interfered in the affairs of others, Smith argued; now they were “doing every thing in their power to excite the slaves in the Southern states to insurrection.” Tucker agreed that the petition masked malicious motives and warned of the consequences of an attempt at abolition by the federal government. “Do these men expect a general emancipation by law? This would never be submitted to by the Southern States without a civil war,” Tucker insisted.¹⁶

¹⁶ Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 21-2; Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders’ Union*, 191-203; “Petition from the Pennsylvania Society signed by Benjamin Franklin, President of the Pennsylvania Society, February 3, 1790,” Kenneth R. Bowling, ed. Et al, *Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America, March 4, 1789-March 3, 1791: Petition Histories and Non-legislative Official Documents* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 326; *Annals of Congress*, 1:2, 1508, 1240; Douglas R. Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 254-5; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 525-6.

Tucker led an effort to refuse even accepting the petitions, and hoped to stop the House from ever discussing the issue again. The petitions had made a “great uproar in these Southern States,” wrote an anonymous South Carolinian. Some Northerners tired of the issue, since nearly everyone agreed that the federal government had no power over slavery. Madison remained adamant that the Quakers had the right to petition their government, although he feared that discussing slavery on the House floor would enflame tempers and sap the republican spirit that he believed would lead to emancipation. In the end, Madison arranged for the petitions to go to a special committee, which confirmed that the House could not act on slavery. The debate made Southerners suspicious that the Northern states were trying to dominate the slaveholding states. “I had rather myself submit to all the hazards of war & risk the ~~poverty~~ loss of every thing dear to me in life, than to live under the rule of a fixed insolent northern majority,” Henry Lee wrote to Madison.¹⁷

The plans of Hamilton and the growing power of the central government frightened Theodorick Bland, Jr., who saw in them the means to damage Southern interests. “I already perceive that the workings of it are Statical [sic], and I fear much that whoever plays the Music, the Southern States will pay the Piper,” Bland wrote to St. George Tucker. The new federal government “could have no competitor.” As the full scope of Hamilton’s financial plans unfolded, Bland compared the nation to a ship pulled in different directions. “One half of her crew hoisting sail for the land of *energy*, and the other looking with a longing aspect on the shore

¹⁷Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders’ Union*, 195; James Madison to Benjamin Rush, March 20, 1790, *The Papers of James Madison* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1981) 13: 109; “Letter from Charleston, South Carolina, to New Jersey,” March 31, 1790, *The First Federal Congress*, 19:1058; Douglas Egerton, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 254-5; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 525-6; Henry Lee to James Madison, April 3, 1790, *First Federal Congress*, 19: 1113.

of *liberty*,” he said. In the conflict over the nation’s financial future, Bland saw the sacrifice of the slave South’s rights. “[T]he agricultural interest is the permanent interest of this country, and therefore, ought not to be sacrificed to any other,” he insisted. The passage of Hamilton’s plans only confirmed Bland’s misgivings. “The sacrifice of states’ rights has in my opinion been offered up,” Bland wrote. The Quaker petitions raised the question of whether Congress had any power in taking up the question out of “mere morality.” St. George Tucker and James Madison believed that although the Constitution restricted regulation of and prevented intervention with slavery, Congress could act as a moral agent promoting antislavery sentiment among the states and the people. While Madison hoped that America leaned toward freedom, Thomas Tucker and the Deep South wanted otherwise. They insisted on congressional neutrality but also cast slavery as morally defensible.¹⁸

While Randolph often spent his days in Congress, he increasingly spent his nights drinking with his older brother Theodorick. With Richard back in Virginia, Theodorick proved an irresistible influence. In New York, the second Randolph son spent his time in revelry and his money on alcohol. Indeed, his family in Virginia remained concerned about Theodorick’s behavior. “You will recall to mind my frequent admonitions to avoid Taverns, [and] other places where you maybe led into the practice of such an abominable vice,” St. George Tucker wrote to him. While Thomas Tucker tried to watch over the boys, his congressional duties proved too

¹⁸ Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:28; *Annals of Congress*, 1,1:291; Theodorick Bland to Patrick Henry, March 9, 1790, William Wirt Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, 3:417-19; William Charles DiGiacomantonio et al, *The Documentary History of the First Federal Congress of the United States of America, March 4, 1789-March 3, 1791: Debates in the House of Representatives: Third Session, December 1790-March 1791* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 858, 861, 884, 885; “Brutus to the Public,” from *Connecticut Courant*, April 26, 1790, *First Federal Congress*, 19:1334.

distracting and they continually accumulated debts that their stepfather was forced to pay. “Col. Bland seems to be apprehensive that they are wasting Time [and] Money here,” Thomas Tucker wrote to his brother. Their frustrated stepfather tired of admonishing them and planned a change. In the spring of 1790, he sold tobacco from the Randolph lands to send Theodorick to Europe, where he would study medicine, while John would remain in the United States to study law.¹⁹

Tucker arranged for John Randolph to study law with Attorney General Edmund Randolph when the federal government moved to Philadelphia. Jefferson and Hamilton had recently struck a deal to locate the permanent capital on the Potomac River, but agreed that the national government should reside in Philadelphia in the interim. The young Randolph hated the idea. “I could do as well in the Wilds of Kentucky as in the Desart [sic] of Philadelphia for such it is to me.” Despite the excitement of living again at the center of national politics, Randolph begged to return to Virginia.²⁰

A proponent of the Constitution during the ratification debate, Attorney General Randolph now led the effort to define the parameters of the federal judiciary, attend to the president’s private legal matters, and serve as advisor to Washington. The position was both ill-defined and low-paying, forcing him to take law students and continue his private practice. As an instructor, he supervised John Randolph’s reading, stressing David Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* followed by Shakespeare, classical history, and works on natural rights. Randolph studied alongside the president’s nephew, Lawrence Washington, and Joseph Bryan of Georgia.

¹⁹ SGT to Theodorick Randolph, August 30, 1789, Joseph Bryan Papers, UVA; Thomas Tucker to SGT, September 15, 1789, Tucker Coleman Collection, Swem Library, William and Mary; SGT to Theodorick Randolph, February 20, 1790, Joseph Bryan Papers, UVA.

²⁰ Thomas Tucker to SGT, September 15, 1789, Tucker Coleman Collection, Swem Library, William and Mary; JR to SGT, Tucker papers, LC; JR to Henry Rutledge, April 26, 1790, February 24, 1791 (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV.

Although never close to Washington, Randolph began a lifelong friendship with Bryan. Indeed, he and Bryan spent more time carousing than studying. Randolph considered the Attorney General a poor teacher, and complained that public duties prevented him from devoting sufficient time to students.²¹

Life in Philadelphia evoked John Randolph's sense of entitlement and superiority. With rent high in the city, he was forced to find Spartan quarters which he hated. "[L]ow and ill bred people" surrounded him at his lodgings. "[I]n the Conversation and Company of ignorant and awkward fellows," he became even more aware that he had "been brought up to associate with Gentlemen and Men of Sense." Increasingly, he seemed to reflect Thomas Tucker's own difficult personality and disdain for those around him. As the Hamiltonian plan passed through Congress, William Loughton Smith commented on the difficulty dealing with their colleague. "Tucker seems sunk in an indifference proceeding from ill-humor—he was dissatisfied with every thing (as he generally is)—he hated the Assumption, but he was obliged to vote for it—he didn't like the residence bill much better; he disliked the government itself, & was not therefore sorry to see it become contemptible—he accordingly took no part, but allowed things to take their own course," Smith wrote. Frustrated and condescending toward his colleagues, the cynical Tucker convinced his nephew that life in Philadelphia was "incompatible with study." With Thomas Tucker's encouragement, Randolph pressured his stepfather to allow him to return to Virginia and become a planter.²²

²¹ Stokes, "John Randolph," 85; John J. Reardon, *Edmund Randolph: A Biography* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 216-7.

²² Stokes, "John Randolph," 79-85; William Loughton Smith to Edward Rutledge, August 8, 1790, "The Letters of William Loughton Smith to Edward Rutledge: June 8, 1789 to April 28, 1794," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 69 (April 1968), 131; John Randolph to Henry Rutledge, February 24, 1791 (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV.

The lingering British debts made the future of Virginia planters uncertain. Great Britain pressed the debt problem with the new American government. The situation embarrassed Secretary of State Jefferson during negotiations with the British. Virginians still insisted on reimbursement for lost slaves as a precondition for repayment. The British creditors refused to relent and continued to press the issue through diplomacy and the courts. The Hansbury and Osgood firm's lawsuit against the Randolphs proceeded. "It may not be amiss to inform you that a Court of Law is to determine whether I shall be a man of small or opulent Fortune. As there is an equal chance for my giving up or retaining my present property," Randolph wrote. To put himself "above the reach of poverty," he would continue his legal studies. "If I am ever necessitated to pursue the practice of the Law, I shall give it over as soon as I shall have acquired a sufficiency to support me genteelly in my native Country," he added. Randolph wanted a life in "refined Society." Despite Randolph's assurances that he would finish his legal studies, his time with the Attorney General seemed a failure. In early 1792, Tucker allowed him to return to Virginia.²³

Their stepfather feared that the Randolph children had misspent their opportunities and planned to rely on their social status as gentry. Despite a brief improvement in the tobacco markets, Tucker reevaluated his own participation in the slave-driven economy. He believed the new market economy positioned bankers, doctors, and lawyers to become the next generation of leaders. By the early 1790s he doubted whether any natural leadership still remained among Virginia's planters. The gentry still lived in excess as their fortunes and society collapsed—and no better example of this lax new generation could be found than in Tucker's stepsons, who

²³ Thomas Jefferson to George Hammond, May, 29, 1792, PTJ, 23:584; JR to Henry Rutledge, February 24, 1791 (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV; Stokes, "John Randolph," 82; Ohline, "Politics and Slavery," 265-6.

shunned both hard academic work and frugality. Tucker himself abandoned any hope in Virginia's plantation system. He sold his own plantations, left Matoax, which belonged to the Randolph family, and moved to Williamsburg, where he became a professor of law at the College of William and Mary. Although he maintained a tangential interest in slaves, bank stocks became his primary form of investment. In Williamsburg, he would educate "my Children at the College without parting with them from under mine own Eye." The wayward Randolph sons had disabused him of his faith in a distant education. Tucker wanted to break the powerful hold that the gentry had on the imagination of his children. His stepsons had proven irrationally devoted to the idea of the gentry. With great irritation, he watched Richard and Judith Randolph try to run Bizarre from a distance because they refused to leave Matoax or the rarefied air of the Tidewater. Tucker reminded the Randolph children that the decision to plant came with harsh realities. "The Harvest is small, but the Labourers [sic] are abundant," he wrote. He urged Richard and Judith to move "to Bizarre in the fall." The ill-fated decisions of the Randolphs made Tucker determined that his own children would never depend on the cultural power of the gentry.²⁴

The only Randolph son who prepared for a serious education had problems of his own. Tuberculosis and alcoholism ended hopes of a European medical education for Theodorick Randolph. In 1791, he returned to Virginia, where his family hoped for his recovery. Despite his poor health, he fell in love with his cousin Nancy Randolph, sister to Judith, his brother Richard's wife. The courtship angered her father, who disapproved of another daughter's

²⁴ Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 79-83; Hamilton, "Tucker and Education," 188-191; SGT to Theodorick Randolph, February 20, 1790, Joseph Bryan Papers, UVA.

marriage into the severely indebted branch of the Randolph family. In February 1792, however, Theodorick Randolph died, leaving behind a grief-stricken Nancy.²⁵

In June 1792, illness struck John Randolph while he stayed at a Richmond tavern. “I was taken with scarlet fever and brought to the brink of the grave,” Randolph later recalled. For days, he lingered near death. Virginia Governor Henry Lee tended to the boy and reported his progress to Tucker. Although Randolph recovered, historians have speculated that the illness arrested his masculine development, rendering him sterile and impotent. As he grew older, people described his strange appearance. His voice remained high pitched, similar to the tone of a child or female. At the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1829-30, George Wythe Mumford described the fifty-six-year-old Randolph: “his features were rather delicate and feminine...his voice was peculiarly feminine and shrill.” No hair ever seemed to grow on his face. His narrow shoulders, long arms and legs, and rail-thin torso gave him a distinctly feminine appearance. His appearance led to whispers, smears, and innuendo throughout his life, and many believed the illness at Richmond was responsible. The details, however, point to a rare genetic disease. He was nineteen when he suffered the scarlet fever illness, but he had already failed to experience some of the basic signs of puberty. After Randolph’s death in 1833, doctors examined his body and found half-formed testicles and lack of pubic hair. The symptoms seem to imply Klinefelter’s syndrome, a rare chromosome disorder. Instead of the normal XX chromosome combination, males who suffer from this disease have an extra female chromosome, or XXY combination. Throughout Randolph’s life, his feminine appearance and his continual ill health, both

²⁵ SGT to JR, Randolph Papers, UVA; Stokes, “John Randolph,” 89-90; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 101-2; “Theodorick Bland Randolph,” *Princetonians: 1784-1790: A Biographical Dictionary*. Eds. Ruth L. Woodward and Wesley Frank Craven, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 104.

characteristics of the disease, plagued him. Possibly the most serious consequence was his sterility. Although he displayed a romantic interest in women, most notably Maria Ward, he remained reticent to begin any serious relationship. In Southern culture, where manhood mattered immensely, Randolph failed to achieve the basic function of a man: fatherhood. The illness meant that he could produce no progeny for the great Randolph family.²⁶

Tucker was making a new life for his family in Williamsburg and brought Randolph there to recuperate. Randolph found that his family had changed a great deal. Recently, the widower Tucker had married Lelia Skipwith Carter, a wealthy widow from another powerful gentry family. The union demonstrated Tucker's own unwillingness to break completely from the planter aristocracy that he often criticized. While he hated many of the traditions of the planter elite, he remained very much committed to the social order of the gentry. Randolph hated the new situation and blamed Tucker's new wife. "I shall never forget the chilling coldness of my reception," he commented about Lelia, whom he labeled a "shrew" and "vixen." After several years in the North, he returned to find Tucker and his children in far better financial condition than the Randolphs. The stepfather had carved out a reputation as one of the state's finest legal minds and worked to assure that his own children would enjoy a prosperous and successful future. Now he had married into another wealthy family. As Randolph faced the probable liquidation of his own property, the well-being of others may have been, in its own way, devastating. He left the Tucker home. "I set out for Bizarre, and was once more restored to the

²⁶ Dawidoff, *Education of John Randolph*, 98-99; Stokes, "John Randolph," 92-3; JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; George Wythe Mumford, *The Two Parsons: Cupid's Sports; The Dream; The Jewels of Virginia* (Richmond, J.D.K. Sleight, 1884), 568; Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:21; "Dr. Francis West's Reminiscences of the last moments of the Hon. John Randolph of Roanoke, May 1833," Randolph Papers, UVA; Harry F. Klinefelter, "Klinefelter's Syndrome: Historical Background and Development." *Southern Medical Journal*, 79 (September 1986), 1089-1093.

society of the fondest of brothers,” he later remembered. At Bizarre, John and Richard Randolph hoped to save their ancestral lands and their family’s reputation. As they prepared for Randolph to inherit Roanoke on his twenty-first birthday, they hoped to use parts of their late brother’s inheritance to satisfy their creditors.²⁷

As autumn arrived in Southside Virginia, the Randolphs of Bizarre set out to visit their close friends Randolph and Mary Harrison at their plantation, Glentivar. On Monday, October 1, 1792, Richard, Judith, Nancy, and John Randolph traveled across Cumberland County to the plantation. With space limited in the Harrison home, John Randolph found lodgings at a local tavern. That night at Glentivar, Nancy’s screams startled Mary Harrison, who rushed to check on the girl. Finding the door to Nancy’s room bolted, she knocked. Richard Randolph opened the door to reveal a teenage slave tending to a very ill Nancy. Richard told Harrison that he had administered laudanum and alcohol to the girl to relieve her hysterics. Harrison watched for a while before returning to bed. Later, the Harrisons heard Richard Randolph leave the house and return and assumed that he left to summon a doctor. For three days, the stricken Nancy remained in her chambers. Later that week, the Harrison’s slaves discovered a fetus on a pile of old shingles on the plantation grounds. The master refused to believe the slaves, but they soon spread rumors that someone had murdered a baby at Glentivar. According to the gossip, Nancy Randolph gave birth to a child that night—and Richard murdered the baby. The child’s paternity became the focus of the rumors. Many assumed that Theodorick had fathered the child before his

²⁷ JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 79.

death in February, but those closest to Nancy knew she was not at full term when she visited Glentivar in October. Rumors among the gentry settled on a more troubling suspect: Richard.²⁸

John Randolph first heard of the dramatic night a few days later when he traveled to Williamsburg. “[Jack Banister] gives me the first intelligence of what was alleged to have happened at Glenlyver,” he wrote in his diary. Throughout the winter of 1792-93, the planter gentry whispered that Richard Randolph impregnated his sister-in-law Nancy and then traveled to Glentivar, where he performed an abortion. Through the years, Richard had earned a reputation as a vacuous planter’s son, concerned only with satisfying his passions for indiscriminate spending and illicit sex. “I have been unfortunate in having passions which I had never resolution to govern or resist,” he once wrote. Nancy later admitted that Richard once came to her bedchamber to seduce her while he complained of Judith’s cold and unloving behavior. His questionable reputation gave the rumors special credence as they spread across the Virginia countryside. By spring 1793, Richard faced a daunting swell of hatred toward him as his peers privately condemned him. “I have been informed of the late horrid and malicious lie, which has been for some time too freely circulated,” he informed his stepfather. Such accusations normally would lead to the dueling ground, but the accusers remained faceless and left him with no one to challenge.²⁹

²⁸ Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 1-6, 37-63; Alan Pell Crawford’s *Unwise Passions: A True Story of a Remarkable Woman—and the First Great Scandal of Eighteenth Century America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Christopher L. Doyle, “The Randolph Scandal in Early National Virginia, 1792-1815: New Voices in the ‘Court of Honour’,” *Journal of Southern History* (May 2003), Vol. 69. No. 2, 283-318; “Notes of Evidence” Charles Cullen and Herbert Johnson eds. *The Papers of John Marshall* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1977), 2:161-179; Stokes, “John Randolph,” 98.

²⁹ Doyle, “Randolph Scandal,” 289-90; Richard Randolph to SGT, March 14, 1793 in Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:116.

As the scandal brewed, John Randolph returned to Williamsburg and the College of William and Mary. Nancy remained at Bizarre with Richard and Judith, which made life uncomfortable. Randolph had long resisted Tucker's plans for education, but the scandal encouraged him to find refuge at the college. As the rumors spread, Richard considered leaving Virginia until the controversy passed. When Nancy's brothers, William Randolph and Thomas Mann Randolph, Jr., openly accused him of seducing her and fathering the child, Richard struggled to end the growing public spectacle. The very charges of Richard's behavior had made him unworthy of an affair of honor with William Randolph. For many in Cumberland County, Richard Randolph now stood beneath contempt. Tucker advised openness, which led Randolph to issue a public statement announcing that he would present himself at the next court day at the Cumberland County courthouse. "[A] public enquiry into it is *now* more than *ever* necessary," Randolph believed. He promised to "answer in due course of law, any charge or crime which any person or persons whatsoever shall then and there think proper to alledge [sic] against me." Those unwilling to face him could submit their charges and evidence to a newspaper. Hopefully the public airing of charges would clear his name and lift the cloud over his reputation.³⁰

On April 29, 1793, Richard Randolph handed himself over to the Cumberland County court. Although this legal procedure was not a trial, it would determine whether the county would charge him with a crime. Randolph took no chances and spent a hefty sum for legal defense. Two of Virginia's most distinguished lawyers, Patrick Henry and John Marshall, represented him at court. Nearly all of the family members present that night at Glentivar testified during the proceedings. Randolph Harrison admitted that he suspected an improper

³⁰ Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 39-41; Richard Randolph to SGT, March 14, 1793 in Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:116; "Editorial Note," *Papers of John Marshall*, 2:163; Doyle, "Randolph Scandal," 289-90.

relationship between Richard and Nancy while Mary Harrison and Martha Jefferson Randolph suggested that an abortion occurred. When John Randolph testified on his brother's behalf, he pleaded ignorance of any impropriety. He insisted that he lounged on a bed with Judith and Nancy not long before that night but "never suspected her [Nancy] of being pregnant." He agreed, however, with witnesses about a strange smell that lingered in Nancy's room the day after the supposed event. No one in the family testified to seeing a fetus. The Glentivar slaves saw the body, but Virginia law prevented these incriminating witnesses from testifying.³¹

During the legal proceeding, a portrait emerged of a degraded and even demented gentry. John Marshall's defense of Richard made the affair seem all the more perverse. While denying that Randolph took advantage of his sister-in-law, Marshall portrayed Nancy as an indulgent and spoiled daughter whose parents never denied her desires. "She had been nursed in the lap of ease and indulgence; she had been accustomed only to wish, and to find her wishes complied with," Marshall said. The entire affair revealed the gentry's self-indulgence and unwillingness to deny their basest desires. Without the slaves' testimony, accusers could prove nothing, however. The restrictions of the legal system in a slave society spared Randolph further charges. The court took no action, and in a single day, Richard Randolph ended his legal problems.³²

The scandal, though, lived beyond the courthouse as the public believed the accounts of the slaves. In the eyes of his peers, Richard remained guilty. In a letter to the public, St. George Tucker reminded the planters that the court cleared Randolph of the charges, but acknowledged that "the public mind is not always convinced by the decisions of a court of law." Tucker tried to convince others of the family's happiness, but John Randolph's diary entry in the aftermath of

³¹ "Notes of Evidence," *Papers of John Marshall*, 2:168-9, 171-2; Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 54-5, 57-9.

³² "Notes on Evidence," 175, 176; Doyle, "Randolph Scandal," 298

the hearing revealed otherwise: “The trial. Return. Quarrels of the women.” Try as he might, Tucker failed to convince many people of his stepson’s innocence. Inside the family, some absolved Nancy Randolph and blamed Richard for the indiscretion. “I am in hopes there that neither of you feel any uneasiness but for the pitiable victim [Nancy], whether it be of error or of slander,” wrote Thomas Jefferson. Following details of the scandal while in Philadelphia, Jefferson reached his own conclusion. “I see guilt but in one person, and not in her,” he added. The court proceedings convinced Martha Jefferson Randolph that Richard Randolph had seduced Nancy, impregnated her, and effectively destroyed her life. “As for the poor deluded victim I believe all feel much more for her than she does for herself. The villain having been no less successful in corrupting her mind than he has in destroying her reputation,” she wrote to her father. Martha Randolph’s feelings revealed the damage done to Richard and Nancy Randolph’s reputations.³³

John Randolph found himself confronting the consequences of his brother’s scandal. Their decision to take their places among the gentry meant that Richard and John Randolph must live by the code of the honor-driven culture. Unlike in New York, the loss of reputation and one’s good name meant losing critical social standing among family, friends, and neighbors. Disgrace resulted for those who failed to defend their name. At William and Mary, John Randolph clashed with Robert Barraud Taylor, a young Federalist, during a political debate. A duel followed. They met on the field of honor, where Randolph shot his opponent in the hip, although Taylor survived. Some argued that the issue between the two may have been as trivial

³³ St. George Tucker, “To the Public,” May 5, 1793, *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*; Randolph diary entry, Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:118; Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, April 28, 1793. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 25:621; Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson Randolph, May 16, 1793. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26:53.

as the proper pronunciation of a word. Randolph's reaction to Taylor's affront, however, suggests a remark over the recent scandal. In the court of honor, Randolph felt responsible for the broader reputation of his family. Randolph quit the school before his inevitable expulsion. The incident ended his hope of staying in Virginia. In late spring 1793, other developments added to Randolph's problems and made the prospect of continuing to live in Virginia problematic.³⁴

In May, George Wythe, now a judge of the state's chancery court, handed down a devastating decision for Virginia planters. In the case of *Jones v. Walker*, the court found the new U.S. Constitution rendered Article IV of the Treaty of Paris (1783) binding. The decision "abrogated the acts of every state in the union; tending to obstruct the recovery of british [sic] debts from the citizens of those States." Furthermore, Wythe admonished attorney Patrick Henry for his legal attempt to absolve planters from their responsibilities to creditors. In his decision, Wythe confirmed that the agreements between creditors and debtors were contracts. He dismissed the arguments about compensation for slaves as a matter of politics unrelated to the legal case, and a responsibility of the federal government. Wythe's standing gave the decision gravity, but outraged many planter families. Indeed, many never forgave him for the decision. Although many families continued to fight creditors, the decision reinforced Tucker's long-held

³⁴ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 62-64. Stokes, "John Randolph," 104-7; Bruce, "John Randolph," 1:125-6.

belief in the inevitability of repayment. The recent court decision indicated that John Randolph would likely lose Roanoke. “That event I think seems, every day more inevitable,” he wrote.³⁵

Debt and scandal precipitated plans for Randolph to resume his legal studies with Attorney General Randolph in Philadelphia. He wanted anything but to return to Philadelphia, however, and in the spring, circumstances seemed to offer him an alternative. In April 1793, France’s new minister to the United States landed in Charleston, South Carolina. Edmond Genét traveled from South Carolina to Philadelphia soliciting American support for France’s recently-declared war against England and its monarchy. Since his first stay in Philadelphia, Randolph had devoted himself to the ideas of the French Revolution, following its development and believing that it would save mankind. Genét’s call for American support fired Randolph’s imagination. Seeing no future in Virginia, Randolph wanted to play a role in France’s great struggle against the British monarchy. He asked Tucker to “permit me to go, immediately to France to enter into the army of the Republic.” Promising that the endeavor would cost no more than a year in Philadelphia, Randolph tried to convince Tucker of the cause’s righteousness. Without his plantation, Randolph dreaded a life as “a miserable attorney” dealing with “a thousand petty villainies in order to secure the sum of fifteen shillings.” He added, “Sir, I have not one spark of lawyer in me.” Tucker surely saw the futility of the legal profession even if he refused to support a venture into the European war. He rejected the scheme and Randolph returned to Philadelphia.³⁶

Randolph committed himself to the ideas of the French Revolution in Philadelphia even as many Americans condemned the increasingly violent turn taken by the revolutionaries. France

³⁵ Wythe Holt, “George Wythe: Early Modern Judge,” *Alabama Law Review* 58 (2006-07), 1020-25; JR to SGT, May 25, 1793, SGT Papers, LC.

³⁶ JR to SGT, May 25, 1793, SGT Papers, LC.

believed England's monarchy one of Europe's greatest threats to the world's liberty and tried to foment rebellion in Ireland. Federalists feared that the radical turn in France could destabilize the social order in the United States. On the other hand, Jefferson and his Republican supporters argued that the French Revolution offered the best hope for mankind to escape from tyranny and ignorance. In January 1793, the execution of the deposed King Louis XVI sparked a streak of political violence by the Jacobins against their enemies. Regardless, Randolph and many Republicans maintained their support of the French Revolution.³⁷

Edmond Genét encountered overwhelming support for the Revolution as he traveled to Philadelphia that spring. Met by large crowds and thousands of supporters, he attempted to recruit troops and arm privateers for the war effort against Britain. Reaching Philadelphia, he hoped that Secretary of State Jefferson, his well-known supporter, could help secure aid for the war. The raising of privateers outraged President Washington, who issued a policy of neutrality just days after meeting Genét. The French minister ignored Washington's statement of neutrality and began recruiting new privateers. The French diplomat hoped to incite rebellion in Canada and encouraged Americans to overthrow Spanish rule in the west. When Genét threatened to appeal directly to the American people against Washington's proclamation of neutrality, he turned even Jefferson against him. A furious President Washington insisted on Genét's recall. Randolph sided with Genét and believed Washington a tool of the British. "I think the minister has been treated very coolly [sic] by our court, for that is appellation with which the executive is known by the high flyers of this metropolis," Randolph wrote.³⁸

³⁷ Rachel Van Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America: Visions of Violence from Anti-Jacobinism to Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 58-62.

³⁸ Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 330-354; JR to SGT, August 25, 1793, SGT papers, LC.

Randolph saw himself as a part of a great trans-Atlantic revolution. As with so many planters, he saw the struggle between the planters of the South and commercial interests of the North as a struggle parallel to France's rejection of monarchy. He embraced the moral, intellectual, and political ideas of the revolution. The ideas of the revolution usurped some of his long-held planter beliefs. For instance, his mother encouraged her sons to embrace the Anglican faith of their ancestors, but Randolph rejected it for the "rational religion" of deism that St. George Tucker had long professed.³⁹

In his intellectual journey in Philadelphia, Randolph also embraced the antislavery principles that his stepfather had long advocated. The inherent violence of slavery bothered Randolph. On one visit to Matoax in 1788, he watched John Coalter, a tutor for the Tucker children, viciously beat a family slave. When a slave "treated him ill," Coalter "knocked him down and stamped him under his feet and kick[ed] him most inhumanely." The violence of the moment shocked young Randolph. "Mr. C. kick[ed] him in the Breast and stomach until I thought it would have killed him," he said. Coalter continued the beating even as Theodorick Randolph attempted to stop it. Theodorick insisted "that he [would] not see your [Tucker's] property trampled on in such a manner," John informed his stepfather. "[S]weating with rage and vexation," Coalter stopped as he realized the consequences of damaging Tucker's property. Unsatisfied, Coalter insisted that Theodorick have another slave, Essex Brown, deliver a whipping to the insolent slave. John Randolph begged for mercy for the servant since the arrogant and brutal Coalter's behavior had been "inexcusable even to a Slave."⁴⁰

³⁹ JR to SGT, November 17, 1790, SGT Papers, LC.

⁴⁰ JR to SGT, July 13, 1788, SGT Papers, LC.

Witnessing such brutality explains, in part, why a radical Randolph embraced the trans-Atlantic movement for emancipation. In particular, he became attached to Thomas Clarkson's pamphlet, *An Essay on the Impolicy of the Slave Trade*, which focused on the damage that the slave trade caused to the economic and political systems of the modern world. The arguments fed Randolph's moral dislike of slavery. "From my early childhood, all my feelings and instincts were in opposition to slavery in every shape; to subjugation of one man's will to that of another; and from the time I read Clarkson's celebrated pamphlet, I was I am afraid, as mad—as Clarkson himself," Randolph later remembered. He expressed his support of the anti-slavery Quakers and the developing French *Société of des Amis des Noirs* (Society of the Friends of Blacks). Formed in Paris by elites before the outbreak of Revolution, the organization went beyond the antislavery movement in Britain. Clarkson and Wilberforce focused their efforts on outlawing the slave trade, but the Ami De Noirs attacked slavery itself. The arrival of Genét, an avid member of the society, encouraged abolitionists in Philadelphia. The convergence of Philadelphia Quakers, British antislavery ideas, and the *Societe of de Amis des Noirs*, created a dynamic moment of hostility toward slavery that appealed to Randolph. He later mused that he had been "brought up among Quakers," which helped make him "an ardent *ami des noirs*."⁴¹

Events in the Caribbean, however, tempered revolutionary enthusiasm in the Southern states. The fight for liberty in Paris inspired slaves on the French island of St. Domingue to assert their own rights. Officials in the United States government worried about tales of unrest coming

⁴¹ Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 328; Seymour Drescher, *Abolition; A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 151-55; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (New York: Verso, 1988), 169-76; *Register of Debates*, 19:1, 118-19; JR to John Brockenbrough, July 24, 1824, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:224.

out of the island, a leading source of the nation's sugar and molasses. In June 1790, Secretary of State Jefferson tried to appoint a consul to St. Domingue to protect American trading interests. The concern proved warranted. In July 1791, a band of slaves seized cane-cutting tools and marched on the plantations. In an orgy of violence, slaves killed masters and their families, destroyed plantations, and burned crops. Several hundred slaves planned the rebellion in conspiracy, but within a month nearly 10,000 bondsmen joined in the violence. Within weeks, rebels destroyed nearly two hundred plantations. White militia units responded with vengeance, and the island exploded in a harsh and frightening violence. Race war had arrived in the Western hemisphere.⁴²

President Washington assisted the embattled white planters of the island, investing \$726,000 and arms to help them maintain power. A skilled manumitted slave, Toussaint Louverture, stepped forward to lead the slaves and brought order to a violent and disorganized rebellion. He proved effective in his diplomatic skills as he played the European powers against one another. To quell the unrest, France's republican government sent Léger-Félicité Sonthonax to the island as a de facto ruler of the island's governing commissioners. His goal was to defeat the rebellion, establish order, and protect the slaves who had already been freed. His rival,

⁴² Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 46-9; David P. Geggus, ed., *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001); Alfred Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006); Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Tim Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy: Haitian-American Relations during the Early Republic* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003); Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005); C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1938); Thomas O. Ott, *The Haitian Revolution, 1780-1804* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1973); Madison Smartt Bell, *Toussaint Louverture: A Biography* (New York: Pantheon, 2007).

General Francois-Thomas Galbaud, a planter and military governor, solicited British support to defend the planters and their economic interests, exploiting England's fear that the rebellion would spread to Jamaica. Eventually the forces of Galbaud and Sonthonax clashed. Randolph condemned Galbaud's effort against the republican forces once he heard the news. "I believe he is an aristocrat, as the St. Domingo people praise him for his assistance against the commissioners," he wrote. Those commissioners realized that Louverture's forces would prove victorious and preemptively freed the slaves in an effort to win support of island inhabitants. The measure won the conditional support of Louverture. Forces soon drove Galbaud off the island. Despite efforts by the United States government, white rule in Haiti had effectively ended.⁴³

Most of Randolph's fellow Virginians failed to share his enthusiasm for the impending liberation of Haiti. Although many Virginia planters supported the French Revolution, they now feared its ideology of liberty would infect their slaves. Rumors of slave conspiracies spread. In July, John Randolph, a cousin, swore a deposition about uncovering a potential plot inspired by the St. Domingue rebellion. Awakened by noisy slaves, Randolph had opened his window and heard two of his slaves talking. "The one spoke to the other telling him that the blacks were to kill the white people soon in this place," he deposed. The "chief speaker" used the example of St. Domingue to encourage the other slave: "you see how the blacks has [sic] killed the whites in the French Island and took it." With the nation's largest slave population, Virginia feared its chaos. "It is high time we should foresee the bloody scenes which our children certainly, and

⁴³ Donald R. Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806" *Journal of the Early Republic* 2 (Winter 1982): 363-65; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 143-59; Ott, *Haitian Revolution*, 69-70; JR to SGT, August 25, 1793, SGT Papers, LC.

possibly ourselves (South of Potomac) have to wade through, and try to avert them,” Jefferson wrote to James Monroe.⁴⁴

In February 1794, the French Convention abolished slavery in France and all its territories, a decision that led many American planters to end even nominal support of the French Revolution. In contrast, New England merchants supported the St. Domingo rebels, especially as their trade to the island increased. The region’s support of Haiti fueled Southern suspicions that the Federalists planned to use the federal power assumed under Hamilton’s economic plans to emancipate the slaves. In 1793, Jefferson and Madison asked John Taylor to produce a pamphlet attacking the power assumed under Hamilton’s economic system. Taylor’s initial draft digressed into Southern fears about slavery, much to Jefferson’s annoyance. Working through Madison, Jefferson instructed Taylor “to strike out the passage relating to slaves, which however in itself would be a signal for raising the cry of Virginianism agst. [sic] the publication.” Northern Federalists had come to hate that slavery dominated the political decisions of many Southerners. The following year, after Taylor delivered a highly sectional speech on British debts in the Senate, two Northern Senators, Rufus King and Oliver Ellsworth, asked Taylor to cooperate in a secret plan for the peaceful dissolution of the Union since “the eastern states would never submit to their [Southern states] politicks.” Taylor resisted, but believed secession a possibility. Many industrious New Englanders saw Southern planters as hypocrites devoted to the perpetuation of a debased and lazy lifestyle. Connecticut Federalist Chauncey Goodrich condemned the struggle against the central government as a part of this effort. “Southern people will oppose [the

⁴⁴ “John Randolph’s Deposition,” July 22, 1793, *Calendar of State Papers and other Manuscripts from August 11, 1792, to December 31, 1793*, Ed. Sherwin McRae (Richmond: A.R. Micou, 1886) 6:452-53; Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, July 14, 1793, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, May 1793 to August 1793* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 26: 503.

Government] till it accommodates itself to a state of Negrohood, debt, luxury, and gambling,” he wrote.⁴⁵

In this environment, the political interests of Virginia and the South became of paramount importance to Randolph. In January 1794, James Madison offered resolutions to the House of Representatives designed to restrict commercial interactions with Great Britain. Since that nation had failed to honor several parts of the Treaty of Paris, the Republicans hoped to use commercial policy to assert the United States’ economic independence. The war between France and Great Britain caused trouble for U. S. trade and Madison wanted the nation to assert its rights. Randolph attended the session as Madison tried to build support for his resolutions. The absence of congressmen John Page and John Francis Mercer during the debate outraged Randolph. “Mr. Madison’s resolutions respecting the restrictions of commerce,” Randolph wrote, “will be, I am afraid, thrown out, from the circumstance of our southern men being absent.” He deemed Southerners who failed to fill their basic duties as elected officials “unpardonable.” The “indolence” of the region’s own men and the “villainy” of others endangered “the interests of the southern states.” Randolph saw no contradiction between his support of revolutionary republican ideals and defense of the South.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Ohline, “Slavery and Politics,” 243, 276 (Goodrich quote); Douglas R. Egerton, “The Tricolor in Black and White: The French Revolution in Gabriel’s Virginia,” *Slavery in the Caribbean Francophone World; Distant Voices, Forgotten Acts, Forged Identities* ed. Doris Y. Kadish (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 94; Hickey, “Problem of Haiti,” 365. James Madison to John Taylor, September 20, 1793, *Papers of James Madison*, 15:121; Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1980), 218-9; William E. Dodd, “John Taylor, of Caroline, Prophet of Secession,” *John P. Branch Historical Papers, at Randolph Macon College* vol. 2 no. 3 and 4 (June 1908), 220-1; John Taylor, *Disunion Sentiment in Congress in 1794* ed. with introduction by Gaillard Hunt (Washington, D.C.: W.H. Lowdermilk and Company, 1905).

⁴⁶ JR to SGT, January 26, 1794, Brock Collection, Huntington Library; Ketcham, *James Madison*, 349-50.

The national and international political developments fascinated Randolph in a way that reading law never would. By the end of 1793, he wanted desperately to leave the study of Attorney General Randolph. In December, Tucker asked Thomas Jefferson for help. “[M]ight I presume so far on your Attachment to those of your native country, who wish to improve themselves, as to solicit [sic] your friendship and advice to him?” In his request, Tucker admitted that the relationship between his stepson and the Attorney General was a failure. This effort to win Randolph another opportunity came from “my Anxiety for the advancement of my son,” Tucker wrote. Jefferson advised Randolph “to devote the winter to Coke Littleton,” but informed Tucker that he had resigned from the cabinet and would soon return to Monticello. In a last ditch effort to educate Randolph as a lawyer, Tucker asked him to return to Williamsburg and complete his education at William and Mary. Randolph reluctantly agreed to return to do so:

I will now, my dear, sir, touch upon that part of your letter dated New Year’s day, which relates to my studying in Williamsburg. I have found my conduct and character, during my residence in that place canvassed in so ungenerous and malicious a manner, that were it not for the residence of yourself, and your beloved family, I never would set foot in it again, but if you wish me to return, I will conquer my aversion to the place.

Randolph’s hatred for the legal profession, his distaste for William and Mary, and his desire to inherit Roanoke dashed Tucker’s hopes for his stepson. In June 1794, Randolph finally inherited his plantation and returned to Virginia to assume control over his indebted lands.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ SGT to TJ, December 11, 1793, TJ to SGT, December 22, 1793, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 27: 506, 609; JR to SGT, January 26, 1794, in Powhatan Bouldin, *The Home Reminiscences of John Randolph* (Richmond: Clemmitt and Jones, 1878), 220-1.

Since leaving for Princeton seven years earlier, Randolph had stayed at any of his plantations only on an intermittent basis. After years of dreaming about the planter life, he now found himself “overwhelmed with overseers and blacksmiths and sheriff’s claims of several years standing.” Debts still encumbered Randolph lands, and creditors continued to press their claims with the government and the courts. Tucker encouraged the brothers to sell Matoax to settle part of the debts, but they resisted. The plantation remained the family’s connection to its Tidewater roots. The sale of their family seat would violate Frances Tucker’s admonition to keep hold of their ancestral lands at all costs. The brothers refused to sell their Tidewater land.⁴⁸

After his return to Virginia, Randolph again decided to live at Bizarre with his brother’s family. There, he and Richard could try to dig out of the financial mess. The mood at Bizarre remained melancholic as Richard, Judith, and Nancy lived there in isolation. Many continued to shun Richard Randolph, who alternated between sadness and extravagance. Richard and Judith filled their lives with luxuries that only increased their debts. In contrast, John Randolph had remained solvent and frugal during his most recent stay in Philadelphia, but now Richard faced numerous personal debts in addition to his family’s debt. A year after the court proceeding, Patrick Henry sued Richard for his legal fees. Adding to the financial stress, Richard still struggled to clear his name, all the while remaining uncomfortably close to Nancy. His efforts only exacerbated his damaged reputation and drove a wedge between himself and Judith, who begged him to leave the scandal alone. Judith grew close to John, the only member of her household untainted by the scandal.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Stokes, “John Randolph,” 123-4; JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA.

⁴⁹ Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 87-8.

Whenever possible, John Randolph escaped the tense environment of Bizarre and traveled throughout Virginia, staying with friends and family, as he indulged his growing love of horse-racing, the favored sport of the gentry. Indeed, he seemed far more interested in the lifestyle of the planter than actually running his own plantation. During most of 1795, he wandered aimlessly, avoiding some of the more complicated questions that Richard Randolph and St. George Tucker were confronting. “You inquire after my plans,” he wrote to his friend Rutledge, “I have none, my dear Henry. I exist in an obscurity, from which I shall never emerge.” Randolph’s life fulfilled the Northern stereotype of the idle planter, born of privilege, who lived from the labors of others. In the same year, a Virginia expatriate condemned the “Lords of the Soil who are taught from their infancy to consider the industrious Poor even of their own colour as little above the Africans who in the Minds of many are on a level with the Brutes.”⁵⁰

Richard Randolph arrived at similar sentiments about the planter gentry and slavery. The guilt of slavery and the shame of excess weighed on him as he suffered in disrepute. The planter elite was consumed with self-interest and harbored lazy and entitled people, he believed. He looked to himself for the best example of planter degeneration. For a brief time, he studied with George Wythe, who strengthened the young man’s antislavery feelings. Afterward, Randolph became devoted to the ideas of the French Revolution, but during his self-reflection, he realized the hollowness of those sentiments. He perpetuated the injustice of bondage on his slaves at Bizarre while he lived in excess. Increasingly ill and depressed, Richard Randolph turned his self-loathing into a constructive plan. In early 1796, he composed a will that freed his slaves

⁵⁰ JR to Henry Rutledge, December 28, 1795, (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV; Peregrine Foster to Dwight Foster, November 30, 1795, in Ohline, “Slavery and Politics,” 276.

upon his death. The document's language went far beyond mere manumission. Randolph indicted slavery, the gentry, and his own ancestors for "lawless and monstrous tyranny." While he "humbly" begged the forgiveness of his slaves, he also wanted his two sons to understand the "horror" of a "crime so enormous & indelible." John Randolph, Sr. remained responsible for the current condition of the slaves, his son insisted. The institution had been "forced on me by my father" who had "mortgaged all his slaves to british Harpies, for money to gratify pride & pamper sensuality." Although he planned to free his slaves as soon as possible, Randolph instructed Judith and his executors to free them once his debts were paid. He wanted a part of his estate given to the slaves to establish a free community and urged Judith "to lend every assistance to the said Slaves thro' life."⁵¹

While Richard Randolph contemplated a private plan for his slaves' freedom, St. George Tucker researched and composed a public proposal to rid Virginia of slavery. His ideas concerning gradual emancipation had evolved from his lectures at William and Mary after the St. Domingue rebellion. The island revolution gave Tucker's emancipationist ideas urgency. Jefferson's thoughts for emancipation in *Notes on the State of Virginia* also inspired Tucker, but he looked beyond the South for viewpoints on emancipation. Tucker corresponded with Dr. Jeremy Belknap in Boston, who sent him the various plans used by Northern state legislatures to abolish slavery. Taking into consideration slaves, free black Virginians, "the deep-rooted

⁵¹ Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 447-9; "Will of Richard Randolph, Jr., of 'Bizarre,'" *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, (January, 1926), 71-76. Ely has provided a modern, faithful transcription of the will as an appendix in his book. The 1926 transcription contains several irregularities that render it less accurate.

prejudices of whites,” and his devotion to Lockean ideas of property rights, Tucker devised a plan to “remove the same evil from among ourselves.”⁵²

His hopeful yet tentative “Dissertation on Slavery” offered a plan for gradual emancipation that also addressed the white fears of a free black population. Tucker ruled out immediate emancipation since it equaled a sentence of “lingering death by famine, by disease and other accumulated miseries.” Freedom should unfold over generations, which would respect all the slaveholders’ property rights and prevent the sudden appearance of a large free black population. The plan would free all females born under slavery, but they would remain in servitude until they were twenty-eight, a form of compensation for masters. All men during the first generation would remain slaves. The second generation would be free but would serve as apprentices until they turned twenty-one. Unlike other Virginia antislavery men, Tucker refused to express a belief in the inferiority of slaves. His fear of a free black population rested in the belief that an uneducated, unskilled, and unprepared black population would seek retribution from white Virginians. He opposed the forced removal of liberated slaves from Virginia, but he did not want the state “to encourage their future residence among us.” Free blacks would enjoy few rights and would be banned from office-holding, voting, serving as jurors or witnesses, or owning guns. If free blacks remained in Virginia, the white population would control them. Tucker hoped that these deep-seated prejudices would eventually decline, however. The plan seemed to fulfill Madison’s expectation that Virginians would promote Lockean antislavery ideas from within. Indeed, Madison assured his colleagues during another debate over slavery in 1795 that Virginia would continue to implement laws aimed at “gradually reducing the number

⁵² SGT to Jeremy Belknap, January 24, April 11, June 29, 1795, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 5th Ser. 3 (1877), 380; Bradburn, *Citizenship Revolution*, 258-9.

of slaves.” In 1796, Tucker submitted his plan to the Virginia General Assembly for consideration. The antislavery feeling, in which Madison and Tucker placed so much hope, however, had waned considerably. The legislature tabled the plan without really considering it. Tucker himself found it impossible to fully escape the dilemma of slavery. Just days after submitting his plan, he arranged the sale of a slave that he had long rented out, an action rendered acceptable by his belief in property rights.⁵³

During most of the time that Tucker and Richard Randolph spent contemplating public and personal resolutions regarding slavery, John Randolph traveled through South Carolina and Georgia in the company of his proslavery friends such as Joseph Bryan. While his brother struggled, John Randolph reveled in the life of a planter—betting on horses and drinking. On his return trip home, he fell ill at Petersburg. Richard traveled to his brother’s bedside and apparently urged him to return to Bizarre. After being assured that his brother would recover, Richard Randolph returned to his plantation, where he unexpectedly fell ill. British architect Benjamin Latrobe visited Bizarre in early June, and he reported that his host suffered from an “inflammatory fever.” On June 17, 1796, the doctor arrived to treat Richard, but “his opinion was against the probability of Mr. Randolph’s recovery,” Latrobe reported. A messenger met John Randolph as he made his way to Bizarre with the news of his brother’s death. A sense of

⁵³ St. George Tucker, “A Dissertation on Slavery: With a Proposal for the Gradual Abolition of It, in the State of Virginia” (Philadelphia: Printed by Matthew Carey, 1796), 79, 93, 94; Wolf, *Race and Liberty in the New Nation*, 105-7; Paul Finkelman, “Dragon That St. George Could Not Slay: Tucker’s Plan to End Slavery,” *William and Mary Law Review* (46), (February 2006), 1216; Bradburn, *Citizenship Revolution*, 259; See Locke’s Second Treatise on Government for his take on slavery, John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* ed. Ian Shapiro, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 109.

doom had followed Richard Randolph since the scandal, and his brother always suspected that, in the end, it destroyed him.⁵⁴

With the death of his brother, the twenty-three year old Randolph became the patriarch of his family. He abandoned any thought of moving to Roanoke and settled instead at Bizarre to assist Judith in managing the plantation, caring for her children, and carrying out his brother's will. "I am sensible to the deranged state of your brother's affairs and rely entirely on your assistance and advice," Judith wrote to him. In turn, Randolph became attached to Judith and her two sons, John St. George and Tudor. "I dread leaving her alone," he wrote before one trip. He was determined to save the plantation for his nephews. "I have long ago assured her that I considered myself pledged by the most sacred ties to advance their mutual interests and Happiness," he wrote to Tucker. Richard Randolph had insisted that his sons be raised and educated as enlightened republican citizens, and their uncle took a personal role in that mission. Protecting their land concerned him most, however. Randolph brought sixty-four of his own slaves to assist in clearing new lands for cultivation and experimented with new agricultural practices to conserve the soil.⁵⁵

Remaining creditors inched through the legal process to collect the Randolph family's outstanding debts. Tucker advised John to sell land since the creditors would get it anyway. Adding to the hardships, Richard's private debts came due, and Judith faced the manumission of

⁵⁴ Stokes, "John Randolph," 126-128; Benjamin Henry Latrobe, *The Journal of Latrobe: Being the Notes and Sketches of an Architect, Naturalist and Traveler in the United States from 1796 to 1820* (New York: D. Appleton, 1905), 13-4.

⁵⁵ JR to SGT, July 18, 1796, in Bruce, John Randolph, 1:132; Judith to JR, Sept. 25, 1796, Randolph Papers, UVA; Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:70; JR to SGT, January 26, 1796, Lipscomb Library, Randolph College; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 106.

the slaves at Bizarre. John Randolph understood that if he failed to satisfy the numerous demands, the family faced the humiliation of losing Bizarre and Roanoke. Soon after Richard's death, a federal court decided the debt case in favor of Hansbury and Osgood. Randolph found himself overwhelmed as he negotiated with the creditors. Staring at the dire financial situation, John Randolph finally sold Matoax for three thousand pounds, which erased a substantial portion of the Randolphs' outstanding obligations and kept other creditors at bay. He had violated his mother's admonition and parted with the family's most important piece of land. The sale of Matoax ended the family's presence in the Virginia Tidewater. "I have been deprived by a sentence of the family court of more than half my fortune," Randolph wrote. "I am highly chagrined at being robbed in so villainous manner," he added. He remained determined to make the family solvent and keep the remaining plantations. Honor forced him and Judith to try to carry out Richard's emancipation plans, even though it would destroy Bizarre's labor source and its wealth. But the remaining debts of Richard and the family prevented immediate emancipation. Indeed, Randolph sold several slaves to cover part of his late brother's debts. As pieces of Bizarre fell into disuse, Randolph rented the land to tenants or moved his own slaves from Roanoke to work it. At Roanoke, Randolph truly became the master and Judith found his decisions and power hard to resist.⁵⁶

His responsibilities taxed him emotionally, and his fragile emotional state began to show. "I go to bed but can not sleep," Randolph wrote, "I turn and toss about, and altho' it is now late at night, I do assure you that I have not been even in a doze since the night before last." He paced

⁵⁶ Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 33, 44-5, 97; JR to SGT, June 24, 1796, Lipscomb Library, Randolph College; JR to Henry Rutledge, December 28, 1795 (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV; JR to Tudor Randolph, December 13, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Daniel Cole, May 30, 1798, Randolph papers, UVA; JR to Henry Rutledge, April 29, 1797 (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV.

the floor, muttering to himself lines from Macbeth. Some nights found him patrolling the grounds of Bizarre, pistols in hand, protecting his land from unseen enemies. “I have nobody to unburden myself to,” he wrote to Tucker. The struggle to pay the debts consumed his attention for several years. Even after the Hansbury decision, Randolph contested the amount owed, accusing the financial firm of overcharging. Like his brother, he found it “impossible for me to investigate so confused a parent as that of my late father.”⁵⁷

After Randolph left Philadelphia, he followed national politics closely, and he remained committed to republican and revolutionary principles. The ongoing war between France and Great Britain threatened to pull in United States. Randolph and fellow Francophiles believed that the Washington administration’s neutrality policy functioned as a means of passive support for Great Britain. The war only aggravated already tense relations between the United States and England. Despite the Treaty of Paris (1783), Britain maintained forts in the Northwest, refused to offer any compensation for emancipated slaves, and kept many British ports in the West Indies closed to American merchants. To make matters worse, the British navy routinely seized American ships suspected of carrying provisions to France. Jefferson and Madison believed that a peaceful but strong commercial policy could break Britain’s hold on the Atlantic and force that nation to respect American maritime rights. In 1794, President Washington appointed Chief Justice John Jay to a special mission to negotiate a treaty with Great Britain. The appointment outraged Republicans, who wanted the House of Representatives, the direct representatives of the people, to decide on a commercial policy with Great Britain. Madison and Jefferson believed

⁵⁷ JR to SGT, July 18, 1796, Lipscomb Library, Randolph College; JR to Henry Rutledge, December 28, 1795 (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV; Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:70; JR to Daniel Cole, May 30, 1798, Randolph Papers, UVA.

Jay's mission represented an effort to use executive power to circumvent popular will. In 1795, Jay returned with a treaty that incensed Republicans. In the agreement, England agreed to abandon its forts, compensate American ship owners for losses, and establish a trading relationship that amounted to most favored nation status with Great Britain. British negotiators refused to consider the planters' demands for compensation for freed slaves, and the antislavery Jay refused to press the issue. Furthermore, the treaty granted American Indians far-reaching rights in the West, an impediment to unchecked westward expansion. The treaty reinforced Republican suspicions that Federalists wanted to subordinate American interests to Great Britain and force a breach in the U.S. relationship with France. Republican mobs burned Jay in effigy and, after Washington signed the treaty, condemned him as a tool of the British. While in South Carolina, Randolph joined in the condemnation of the treaty, expressing his hatred of Washington. "In order to concentrate in his own person all the powers of the Government, the president has riveted the chains of his Country," he wrote. The president rallied men of "British principles" and used Jay's Treaty as a means to suppress the Republican opposition, especially Southerners. As the Anti-Federalists had once warned, the executive used his popularity "to force people" to accept a policy "inimical to Their interest and freedom," Randolph continued. Washington, Randolph believed, led the nation into "tyranny." The financial chaos in the aftermath of Richard's death prevented Randolph from participating in the 1796 election, but he supported the pro-French platform of the Republicans and the presidential campaign of Thomas Jefferson against the Federalist nominee, John Adams.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ JR to Henry Rutledge, April 29, 1797 (typescript), William Cabell Bruce Collection, Library of Virginia; JR to SGT, February 2, 1796, SGT papers, LC; For Jay's Treaty see, Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy*, revised edition (New Haven; Yale University Press, 1965) and Jerald A. Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the*

In the campaign, Federalists attacked Republicans as both dangerous Jacobins who threatened social disorder and slaveholding aristocrats determined to protect their interests at any costs. Both charges, of course, were based in fact. The Northern supporters of Jefferson consisted of artisans, small farmers, and a host of middling or lower class people. Influenced by the French Revolution, these people subscribed to democracy and believed in its leveling effects. In the South, planters used the language of democracy, but devoted themselves to maintaining the status quo and slavery. Even while Richard and John Randolph tried to rescue their plantations and maintain their family status, they adopted the garnishments of revolutionary language, signing letters “citizen” and adopting the revolutionary Thermidor calendar. In Virginia, signs of gentry decline became evident in the loss of deference, but its power had been replaced by men who had recently found their fortunes and stubbornly kept lower-class whites out of politics. Jefferson and Madison knew that Northerners and Southerners must unite to build a national movement that could defeat Federalists. The North saw Jefferson as an antislavery man, but Southerners knew he would never embrace abolition or other emancipation measures. The Federalist press noticed and accused Jefferson of “gross hypocrisy, since at one moment he is anxious to emancipate the blacks, to *vindicate the liberty of human race*—at another, he discovers that the blacks are a *different race* from the *human race*.” The 1796 election was decided along sectional lines with Adams winning little Southern support.⁵⁹

Founding Fathers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970). For the popular demonstrations see Todd Estes, *The Jay Treaty Debate, Public Opinion, and the Evolution of Early American Political Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006).

⁵⁹ Ohline, “Slavery and Politics,” 282-3; Riley, “Northern Republicans and Southern Slavery,” ch. 1; *The Pretensions of Thomas Jefferson to the Presidency Examined and the Charges Against John Adams Refuted* (Philadelphia, 1796), 7-9.

The temperamental John Adams hoped to govern independent of party influence, a goal derived as much from his dislike of Alexander Hamilton as from his principles. After the signing of Jay's Treaty, France began to seize American ships on the Atlantic, which created a tense diplomatic problem for the new administration. In his first days in office, Adams consulted with Jefferson about sending James Madison to France to repair relations damaged by Jay's Treaty. The Hamilton-controlled cabinet objected to the plan, although Jefferson's acquiescence in a potential political and diplomatic coup for Adams seemed unlikely. President Adams realized that Federalists would be the obstacle to a peaceful agreement with France. "I will resign the office and let Jefferson lead them to peace, wealth and power if he will," Adams threatened. Instead, he selected Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, John Marshall, and Elbridge Gerry for the French mission. French officials insulted and bullied the American envoys and demanded humiliating concessions from the United States. French minister Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigold insisted that Adams apologize for an earlier aggressive speech made about France and that the United States government assume France's debts to American suppliers. Most appallingly, Talleyrand insisted on a £50,000 bribe for himself and the French Directorate even to begin negotiations. In other words, France demanded money for peace. When the envoys returned with news of the failed mission, President Adams refused to release its full details but asked Congress to arm merchant vessels. Jefferson and his supporters accused Federalists of manufacturing a war panic and demanded the release of dispatches from the mission. The details shocked the nation when Adams finally released them. In addition to the bribery scandal, French officials indicated that they counted on French supporters within the United States as key allies. The assertion left Jefferson red-faced and Republicans on the defensive. An outraged public

clamored for war. The Federalist press condemned France and its domestic Republican sympathizers.⁶⁰

The crisis allowed Federalists to regain the public support lost in the aftermath of Jay's Treaty and gave President Adams considerable leeway in his response to the crisis. The development intensified Southern Republican fears. The situation presented Alexander Hamilton with the opportunity to implement his militarist vision of the republic, which meant that the United States would build support for a permanent military that the nation would use to implement its foreign policy. Adams imposed an embargo on trade with France and abrogated treaties, which he expected would increase attacks on the sea. As tensions between the two nations mounted, Adams asked Congress to build a navy. Amid the anti-France fervor, Hamilton instructed his supporters in the government to expand the nation's army. Rumors of a French invasion fed public support for the proposal. In 1798, President Adams reluctantly asked for twelve regiments while also creating a "provisional army" of 10,000 additional men. Tyrants, Republicans believed, used state-controlled standing armies, consolidated power, crushed dissent, stifled reason, and created a perpetual state of war. Indeed, many Americans believed armies exacerbated other evils that ruined republican governments. In 1795, James Madison explained the republican hatred of war. "Of all the enemies to public liberty war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. War is the parent of armies; from these proceed debts and taxes, and armies, and debts, and taxes are the known instruments for bringing the many under the domination of the few," he wrote. Nations should resort to war only under direct attack, Republicans believed, and the people should ideally

⁶⁰ Ralph Adams Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1975), 29-30; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 171-2; Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 549-50, 581-618.; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 241-2.

defend themselves through militias. When war proved inevitable, republics should strive for limited war. A limited conflict would involve the fewest soldiers possible, have immediate objectives, and leave the citizenry untouched. In a true republic, the people relied on commerce to forge peaceful relations between nations. Jefferson stressed his opposition to “a standing army in time of peace which may overawe the public sentiment.” The nation’s security should rest in the hands of the state militias “till actual invasion.” News that Alexander Hamilton angled for control of the new army only fulfilled Republican fears and even gave President Adams pause.⁶¹

The entanglement in European affairs complicated the United States policies toward St. Domingue, now Haiti, which also escalated Republican fears. Louverture maintained loyalty to the French after that nation’s abolition of slavery in 1794. No nation recognized the inevitability of home rule on the island, which explains why the United States ignored Great Britain’s invasion of Haiti in an effort to restore order. Supplied by the French, Toussaint Louverture and his armies fought for four years before wearing down the British army. Before evacuating the island, Britain agreed not to invade the island again while Louverture promised to attack neither Jamaica nor the United States. Haiti remained nominally under French rule and Louverture used

⁶¹ Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment of America, 1783-1802* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); Karl-Friedrich Walling’s *Republican Empire: Alexander Hamilton on War and Free Government* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); John Lamberton Harper’s *American Machiavelli: Alexander Hamilton and the Origins of U.S. Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); “Political Observations,” April 20, 1795, *The Papers of James Madison*, (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1985), 15: 518-20; Reginald C. Stuart, *War and American Thought: From the Revolution to the Monroe Doctrine* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1982), 14-9; TJ to Elbridge Gerry, January 26, 1799, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 30; 646; Max Edling, *A Revolution in Favor of Government: Origins of the U.S. Constitution and the Making of the American State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 93-4; Alfred Vagts, *A History of Militarism: Romance and Realities of a Profession* (New York: Norton, 1937), 12; Albert J. Lauterbach, “Militarism in the Western World: A Comparative Study,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* (October 1944), 446.

the prospect of his nation's independence to exert influence. Because of Haiti's status as a French colony, the United States stopped its lucrative trade to the island when it instituted the embargo. Secretary of State Timothy Pickering, an arch-Federalist, believed the United States should urge the independence and recognition of the nation as a weapon against France. Louverture sent an envoy to the United States to seek support of the Adams administration. The President believed that no power would ever reestablish control over the island and wanted to reach an arrangement with Louverture. Great Britain's opposition to Haitian independence, however, prevented any real agreement. Pickering came to see the Haitian general as "respectable." Informally, Louverture agreed to protect American interests near the island. In return, Adams urged Congress to add a section to an existing bill that gave the President power to open trade with Haiti when he believed it in the interest of the United States. Jefferson complained that Adams wanted to surrender Haiti to the "Cannibals of the terrible republic."⁶²

The Adams administration's confidence in Toussaint Louverture angered Southerners, who feared the consequences of American recognition of the rebellion or of Haitian independence. If the United States bestowed its blessings on the rebellion, their own slaves would believe that an uprising could end in recognition and reward. White refugees from the island carried horror stories of the violence against masters, while Southerners feared that black Haitians who made it into the United States threatened to spread rebellion. Rumors about the island created deep suspicion and led to panic such as the November 1797 rumors that French

⁶² Alexander DeConde, *The Quasi War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Undeclared War with France, 1797-1801* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1966), 130-6; Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series, Vol. 63, No. 4 (October, 2006), 658-9; Matthewson, *A Proslavery Foreign Policy*, 66-71; Thomas Jefferson to Aaron Burr, February 11, 1799, *Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr*, ed. Mary-Jo Kline and Joanne Wood Ryan, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 1:390; Hickey, "Problem of Haiti," 365-66.

black refugees plotted rebellion in Charleston. James Simons of South Carolina informed Secretary of Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Jr. that slaves circulated stories among themselves. “The report will undoubtedly spread *that the French are expected here and that when they come they are to make all the Negroes free*,” he wrote. “If they [the slaves] get possession of Savannah or Charleston, they might do immense mischief before they could be dislodged,” South Carolina Congressman Robert Goodloe Harper argued. Secretary of State Pickering fed the Southern anxiety when he informed Harper, who headed the House Committee of Ways and Means, that five thousand Haitian soldiers planned to invade within a week. In Virginia, St. George Tucker feared that “an Army of Negroes from St. D[omingue]” commanded by black officers would land in the South and provoke “a general Insurrection of Slaves.” If such occurred, Virginian David Meade argued, it would “prove fatal to the Union [and] must bring evils upon the three or four Southern States, more terrific than Volcano’s [or] Earthquakes.”⁶³

Southern fears actually led Southern Federalists to embrace the standing army as the means of suppressing rebellion. Indeed, President Adams and other Federalists sold the military buildup as a means to offer internal security to the South. In an early draft of the special message requesting the army, President Adams contended that the government would use the force “in case of Insurrection of Domestics or others.” Secretary of the Treasury Oliver Wolcott, Jr. informed George Washington that the administration looked toward “the enrollment of a force with a view principally to the Blacks in the most Southern States.” Washington advised the administration to select South Carolina’s Charles Cotesworth Pinckney for a military post since

⁶³ David Meade to Joseph Prentis, September 7, 1798, from Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 41; Ohline, “Slavery and Politics,” 293-315; Hamilton, “Slavery in the Household,” 541; *Annals of Congress*, 5:2, 1647; Eric Robert Papenfuse, “The Evils of Necessity: Robert Goodloe Harper and the Moral Dilemma of Slavery,” *Transactions of the American Philosophy*, 87 No. 1, 1997), 27.

he would best prepare for an invasion from Haiti or an insurrection. Adams and the Federalist party offered security and used fear to sell the army to the public, Republicans argued. Many in South Carolina, including John Rutledge, switched loyalties from the Republicans because Federalists offered the best chance to quash any slave unrest. The Federalist party found itself about to build a national movement by promises to protect slavery. The choice was hardly to be celebrated and many believed the remedy would be worse than the disease. St. George Tucker believed the military buildup would only hasten “a separation of the [United] States and perhaps in the Subjugation of the Southern part of the Union.”⁶⁴

Republicans used the expanding newspaper market to condemn Federalist policies and vilify their enemies. A group of editors and politicians including Benjamin Franklin Bache, William Duane, Matthew Lyon, and James Callender printed sensational critiques of their opponents, often in vulgar and popular terms, which signaled the growing democratic base of their newspapers’ readership. In July 1798 the United States Congress passed the Sedition Act, which made it a crime to publish or state false, malicious, or scandalous things about the United States government. The law would silence the remaining Jacobins, Federalists hoped. Secretary Pickering led a zealous effort to prosecute the most virulent critics of the administration and its policies. For instance, Federal authorities charged, jailed, and fined Republican Congressman Mathew Lyon for his particularly nasty attacks on the President. Along with the Sedition Act, Congress passed the Alien Act to curb the influence of immigrants, a large Republican constituency. In Virginia, citizens gathered in county meetings and expressed fear that a

⁶⁴ Ohline, “Slavery and Politics,” 293-315; Hamilton, “Slavery in the Household,” 541; Oliver Wolcott, Jr. to George Washington, April 19, 1797, *The Papers of George Washington: Retirement Series*, ed. W.W. Abbott, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 1:140; Bradburn, *Citizenship Revolution*, 172-3; *Annals of Congress*, 5:2, 1647.

monarchy was rising before their eyes. Assemblies throughout the states continually petitioned the government for the repeal of the acts while reasserting their rights of speech and assembly.⁶⁵

In a climate that repressed political opposition, Vice-President Jefferson and James Madison declared their opposition to the Federalist abuse of power in the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. Discontent in Virginia drove the leaders to precisely define what their struggle represented. In their resolutions, Jefferson and Madison offered narrow goals—the repeal of the Alien and Sedition Acts—but also crafted definitions to define the question of ultimate sovereignty when the federal government’s interests clashed with the states. In resolutions passed by the Kentucky legislature Jefferson argued that “the States retain as complete authority as possible over their own citizens.” Citizens, through their state governments, could render unjust and unconstitutional laws void by nullifying them. The union between the states and the federal government did not mean “unlimited submission to their general government.” Furthermore, sovereign states could decide their means of redressing abuses. The idea of nullification emanated as much from the people as from Jefferson himself. In August 1798, an Amelia County petition argued that “[a]ny ‘Act’ violating the Constitution, is, we conceive, a nullity.” While Jefferson’s Kentucky Resolutions and Madison’s accompanying Virginia Resolutions expressed a theory of states’ rights, they also helped the Republicans’ effort to create a national movement. While the Republicans expressed support for natural rights, they believed that the states were responsible for protecting them. Acting on behalf of the people, state governments held the responsibility to resist the overreach of the central government through

⁶⁵ Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 205-6, 218; Richard R. Beeman, *The Old Dominion and the New Nation, 1788-1801* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1972), 185-6; Elkins & McKittrick, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 592-3; John C. Miller, *Crisis in Freedom: The Alien and Sedition Acts*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1951), 86-7; Bradburn, *Citizenship Revolution*, 182-3.

nullification, and, if necessary, secession. In his introduction of the Virginia Resolutions, John Taylor argued that the recent actions of the federal government represented the oppression of the few by the many. “[T]hat oppression was the road to civil war,” Taylor insisted. While Northern democrats rejected the implicit defense of slavery in the Resolutions, they also saw them as Anti-Federalist theory crafted into a theory of constitutional dissent. If they could be used to defend slavery, they could also be used to protect liberty in the North. The Resolutions’ constitutional defense of states’ rights became the “principles of ’98.”⁶⁶

The supposed abuses of John Adams and the Federalists spurred John Randolph from his grief at Bizarre. “The friends of Freedom [and] Mankind are alarmed at the lengths to which this administration of this country have gone,” Randolph wrote. As war became a distinct possibility, he condemned Adams and the administration as “emissaries [and] dependents of [William] Pitt.” The breakdown of U.S.-French relations, Randolph, believed, could be traced back to the British government. Randolph promised resistance by “the free American people” before they participated in a war against France. Still very much invested in the radical rhetoric of the French Revolution, Randolph believed Federalist offenders deserved the ultimate penalty. “Before that

⁶⁶ Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 230-45; *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1962), chapter 25; Kevin R. C. Gutzman, *Virginia’s American Revolution: From Dominion to Republic, 1776-1840* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 121-130; Kathryn R. Malone, “The Virginia Doctrines, The Commonwealth and the Republic: The Role of Fundamental Principles in Virginia Politics, 1798-1833,” (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1981); Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 90; *The Virginia Report of 1799-1800, Touching the Alien and Sedition Laws; Together with the Virginia Resolutions of December 21, 1798*, (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1850), 28; Bradburn, *Citizenship Revolution*, 193-5; Kathryn D. Malone, “The Fate of Revolutionary Republicanism in Early National Virginia,” *Journal of the Early Republic* (Spring, 1987), 27-51; Ketcham, *James Madison*, 312.

period arrives I hope to see the advisors of such measures brought to the block; this is the only atonement which can be made by them for their political sins,” he wrote.⁶⁷

Randolph’s rage reflected the political mood in Virginia. Republicans were determined to defeat Federalists in the state and federal elections of 1798-99. The party planned to drive all Federalists from state office, prepare for potential conflict with the federal government, and promote the candidacy of Thomas Jefferson for the presidency in the 1800 election. The failure to eradicate Federalist influence would result in an “[a]nglo-monarchic-aristocratic-military government,” argued John Taylor of Caroline. After they routed their opponents in the state elections, Republicans used their majority in the Virginia General Assembly to dismiss Federalists from the state government. In Richmond, the legislature prepared for a military showdown between state and federal government. Realizing that the federal government controlled the Harper’s Ferry arsenal, the only substantial collection of arms in Virginia, Republicans passed long-stalled measures to build a new armory in Richmond, reorganized the militia, and passed tax provisions to pay for it all. Years later Randolph proudly admitted that Virginia prepared and planned to fight the federal government during the crisis. “Who could say that freemen had not a right to arm against John Adams and his provisional army[?],” Randolph asked.⁶⁸

Creed Taylor, leader of the Southside Virginia Republicans, launched an electoral assault on the state’s Federalists in the congressional elections. In 1798, Taylor searched for a replacement for the seat of retiring Congressman Abraham Venable. Randolph wanted the seat

⁶⁷ JR to Henry Rutledge, April 29, 1797 (typescript), Bruce Collection, LOV; Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 163-4; Elkins and McKittrick, *Age of Federalism*, 541-3.

⁶⁸ Sharp, *American Politics in the Early Republic*, 203-5; Beeman, *The Old Dominion and the New Nation*, 201-3. Philip G. Davidson, “Virginia and the Alien Sedition Acts,” *American Historical Review* 36 (January 1931), 336-7; *Annals of Congress*, 14:2, 797.

despite protestations that “the idea of representing this district in Congress never originated with me.” He and Taylor had become politically close while both serving as founders of the town of Farmville, which was formed from land donated from Judith Randolph’s Bizarre plantation. No experience had satisfied Randolph more than watching the debates of Thomas Tucker, and now Randolph wanted a congressional seat himself. As the election approached, he allowed Taylor to promote his candidacy for the seat representing the fifteenth congressional district.⁶⁹

Many expected a Republican sweep in the 1799 congressional elections, especially since the party wielded such power in the Virginia General Assembly. The Republican-dominated legislature distributed copies of the Declaration of Independence, Alien and Sedition Acts, and Virginia Resolutions in their effort to convince the public of their views. Overconfidence led many in the party to escalate radical rhetoric, including talk of secession and the possibility of military conflict between state and federal governments. The *Virginia Gazette* published an accusation that congressional Republican William Branch Giles advocated disunion: “In company last evening, at the Swan Tavern, I heard a gentlemen say, that you had declared it was your desire to see a separation of the state, from the General Union!” Federalists, on the other hand, promised voters a moderate government that would protect Virginia from attack and maintain liberty through the Union. The palpable anger of the Republicans seemed ready to explode. In Fredericksburg, when John Marshall assured voters that Federalists would govern by the Constitution, a mob of Republicans threatened to beat him. Federalists appealed to the merchants in more populated areas and settlers west of the Blue Ridge Mountains by arguing that the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions were schemes designed by the planter gentry to maintain their power. Republicans’ radicalism disturbed many, including Patrick Henry. The once staunch

⁶⁹ JR to Creed Taylor, September 16, 1798, Randolph Papers, UVA.

Anti-Federalist had quit politics after the ratification debate and resisted numerous offers to serve in national and state government. In the winter of 1799, George Washington convinced Henry to stand for election to the Virginia General Assembly. In the growing uneasiness about the radicalism of the Republicans, John Randolph walked into his first political controversy.⁷⁰

In March 1799, a month before the election, the *Virginia Gazette* attacked Randolph as an abolitionist. In a series of public letters, political enemies reported that during a recent discussion Randolph had contended that his “principle was to serve no one” and declared it “wrong that anyone should serve” him. During a conversation about his belief in egalitarianism, Randolph revealed his hatred for slavery. “Mr. John Randolph, jr. another of the candidates,” alleged William Hopkins, “advocated the emancipation of our slaves.” If elected, Randolph allegedly said, “he would endeavor to carry the measure [emancipation] through congress.” Anxiety over Haiti and the federal government had altered attitudes toward slavery in Virginia and had diminished most of the revolutionary-era optimism about its eventual demise. Traveling through the state in 1798, Methodist circuit rider Francis Asbury noted that antislavery movements were limited to Quakers, Methodists, and two remaining manumission societies. The people of Virginia as a whole had no desire to eliminate slavery, according to Asbury. In February, rumors of a potential slave revolt in Petersburg had caused considerable anxiety in Southside Virginia.

⁷⁰ *Virginia Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, January 24, 1799; Joseph McGraw, “‘To Secure These Rights:’ Virginia Republicans on the Strategies of Political Opposition, 1788-1800,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 91 (January 1983), 70; Daniel P. Jordan, *Political Leadership in Jefferson’s Virginia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 157; Beeman, *The Old Dominion and the New Nation*, 204-10; Myron F. Wehtje, “The Congressional Elections of 1799 in Virginia,” *West Virginia History*, 29 (July 1968), 260-66.

The freeholders of Randolph's district wanted to maintain slavery and insisted that their representative should protect it.⁷¹

The well-known radicalism of the Randolph brothers lent credibility to the allegation and forced Randolph to explain himself. Friends and supporters denied that Randolph made the specific remarks. Some enemies argued that he planned to free his own slaves, in an effort to avoid the family's creditors. On the contrary, Randolph sold slaves the year before to pay part of his brother's debts. In a public letter he defended himself against the specific allegation of going to Congress to pass an emancipation bill. "Let it be understood that even if I were the strongest advocate for the emancipation of our slaves (which is not the case) and if every man in the state of Virginia were of the same disposition, I would oppose the execution of that measure by the congress of the United States," he insisted. In late April, the *Gazette* posted several letters that exposed Randolph's antislavery attitudes. Francis Watkins, the man who heard the initial conversation, agreed that Randolph never advocated such a congressional measure. He insisted, however, that Randolph had admitted his general antislavery views. Sixteen years later, Nancy Randolph, the center of the Bizarre scandal, recalled how Randolph often talked of freeing his own slaves:

There are many who remember, while your slaves were under mortgage for the British debt, your philanthropic assertion that you would make them free and provide tutors for them. With this project, you wearied all who would listen. When by the sale of some of them, a part of the debt was discharged and an agreement made to pay the rest by installments, you changed your mind. This was not inexcusable, but when you set up for

⁷¹ "William Hopkins letter," *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, April 4, 1799; Gordon E. Finnie, "The Antislavery Movement in the Upper South before 1840," *Journal of Southern History*, 35 (August 1969), 326; Stokes, "John Randolph," 155.

representation in Congress, and the plan to liberate your slaves was objected to in your District, you published, to the astonishment of numbers, who had heard you descant on your liberal intentions, that you never had any such idea.

Although Randolph wrote her account in anger, it accords with the accounts published in the *Gazette*. Randolph printed a handbill of his denial of the charges and distributed it throughout the district. As he campaigned in Southside Virginia, he assured fellow freeholders that he supported slavery.⁷²

In April 1799, just days before the election, Randolph agreed to appear alongside Patrick Henry at the town of Charlotte County Court House. Henry's absence from politics had only accentuated his legend, which made the gathering a spectacle. Despite later fanciful suggestions, Henry and Randolph did not debate that day but instead simply addressed the voters. In his bid for a seat in the state legislature, Henry offered a deeply emotional speech, warning against conflict between Virginia and the federal government, and using the image of Washington and the memory of the American Revolution effectively. "Where is the citizen of America who will dare to lift his hand against the father of his country?," he asked. The old Anti-Federalist now pleaded with voters to elect Federalists to keep the Union together. The mere presence of Henry, the great orator of the Revolution, captivated the crowd. In contrast, Randolph followed Henry with remarks so undistinguished that they went unrecorded. Contemporary accounts simply stated that Randolph offered a scathing rebuke to the Federalist party and its attack on liberty.

⁷² *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, April 23, 1799; Ann C. Morris to John Randolph, January 16, 1815, JR papers, UVA; Stokes, "John Randolph," 157.

The sight of the scrawny twenty-six-year-old beardless man with his high feminine voice campaigning for the fifteenth congressional district remained with them, however.⁷³

Voters elected both Randolph and Henry in the April elections. Overall, the elections proved disappointing for Virginia Republicans. Federalists won eight seats in the House of Representatives and staved off Republican domination of the congressional delegation. John Marshall helped lead Federalists to success by distancing himself and his party from the Alien and Sedition Acts. Principles of law, Constitution, and order became pillars of the Federalist campaign. The preparations for war and the radicalism of the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions sobered voters. The freeholders of Virginia saw the threats before them—federal power, slave revolts, standing armies—and divided on how to confront them. Merchants from the coast and small planters in some western districts chose the Federalists. The old gentry and large planters in the Tidewater and Piedmont elected Republicans to defend their interests. For Republicans who dominated the state government, the results were stunning. “The Virginia congressional elections have astonished everyone,” Jefferson wrote. In the far west, however, where Republicans supplanted some Federalists, John G. Jackson believed that the Republicans would

⁷³ William Wirt, *The Life of Patrick Henry*, Fourth Edition, (New York: M’Elrath & Bangs, 1831), 409-10; William Maxwell, *A Memoir of the Rev. John H. Rice, D.D.*, (Philadelphia: J. Whetham, 1835), 20-1; James W. Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander, D.D.*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854), 187-9; *Virginia Gazette and General Advertiser*, April 5, 1799; Stokes, “John Randolph,” 151-3; “Patrick Henry and John Randolph,” *Virginia Historical Register* (January 1851), 34-8.

ultimately win because “the truth is on our side and that truth will be omnipotent.” Randolph prepared to take the Republican truth with him to Congress.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Wehtje, “The Congressional Elections of 1799 in Virginia,” 267-9; Newmyer, *John Marshall*, 122-6; Thomas P. Abernathy, *The South in the New Nation, 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 239; Bradburn, *Citizenship Revolution*, 202-3; Stephen W. Brown, *Voice of the New West: John G. Jackson, His Life and Times* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1985), 19.

Chapter 4: “The Interest and Feelings of the Southern States:” John Randolph and the Congressional Defense of Slavery and Slaveholders, 1799-1807

In December 1799, John Randolph returned to Philadelphia as the congressional representative for his rural Southside Virginia district. As he prepared an attack on the new standing army in his maiden congressional speech, a group of petitions landed before the House of Representatives. Among them lay the petition of free black Philadelphia minister Absalom Jones, urging Congress to outlaw the international slave trade and “emancipate” all of the nation’s slaves “from their present situation.” An inveterate abolitionist, Jones had long used the Free African Society and his African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas to fight for freedom and interracial harmony in Philadelphia. Now at the end of the eighteenth century, Jones wanted Congress to take a stand against slavery before it moved south to Washington, D.C., and asked sympathetic congressman Robert Waln to introduce the petition. In response, seasoned pro-slavery representative John Rutledge, Jr. of South Carolina condemned the action as a consequence of the “new-fangled French philosophy of liberty and equality.” Beginning on January 2, 1800, the House debated the petition and Congress’s responsibility regarding slavery.¹

Since the debate concerning the Quaker petitions in 1790, Southerners in Congress had become resolute in their defense of slavery against Northern interference. In January 1800, Virginia congressman “Lighthorse” Henry Lee reminded his colleagues that Southern constituents sent them to Congress “to protect the rights of the people and the rights of property.”

¹ Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2:66; 1:153-5; *Annals of Congress*, 6:1, 229; *Philadelphia Gazette*, Jan. 4, 1800; Jordan, *White Over Black*, 422-3. Richard Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 147-8; Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 105-6; Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia’s Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 186-8; Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 154.

Indeed, Lee insisted that “Congress had no authority but to protect it [slavery].” Massachusetts congressman George Thatcher expressed the North’s growing hatred of slavery when he declared the institution “a cancer of immense magnitude, that would some time destroy the body politic.” The political Union faced disaster “except that a proper legislation should prevent the evil,” he added. John Brown of Rhode Island agreed with Thatcher’s prognosis. “No subject surely was so likely to cause a division of the States as that respecting slaves,” he remarked. Yet Brown agreed with Lee that Congress had no right to interfere with slavery. Furthermore, Brown opposed any plan of emancipation that would encourage freed slaves to migrate to the North.

Still stinging from being labeled an abolitionist during the campaign, John Randolph offered brief remarks on the antislavery issue so as not to “encourage that discussion.” He argued that Congress had no right to accept the petition nor did it enjoy any power to interfere with slavery. Furthermore, he wished “the House would have been so indignant as to have passed it over without discussion.” In his remarks, Randolph echoed Thomas Tucker’s sentiments of a decade earlier. “The Constitution put it out of the power of the House to do anything,” Randolph argued. He insisted that the political issue of slavery belonged to the states while the private conscience of slaveholders must confront the moral problem of slavery. In solidarity with the Georgia and South Carolina delegations, he demanded respect for the rights of the Southern states. He urged his colleagues to reject a referral of Jones’s petition to the committee charged with handling the slave trade and insisted “this be the last time the business of the House would be entered upon, and the interest and feelings of the Southern States be put in jeopardy.” His colleagues agreed and rejected Jones’s petition after two days of debate.²

² *Annals of Congress*, 6:1, 230-8; *Philadelphia Gazette*, Jan. 16, 1800. David L. Lightner, *Slavery and the Commerce Power: How the Struggle Against the Interstate Slave Trade Led to*

Randolph came to Congress to talk about anything but slavery. In 1800, when the Republicans won majorities in Congress and the presidency, other issues seemed more important than the peculiar institution. It seemed safe for slaveholders dominated leadership positions in the federal government. Yet resentment of the disproportionate power of Virginia and its slaveholders in the government meant that slavery remained a persistent irritant. As Randolph gained power as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and floor leader of the House, he defended slaveholders and slavery with legislative maneuvers, blunt political power, and, if all else failed, inflammatory rhetoric. His stated political goals of frugality, anti-militarism, and a weak federal government emanated from his desire to protect Virginia, the South, and its slaveholders. Randolph has often been classified with Southern conservative ideologues such as John Taylor of Caroline as a founder of conservative Southern nationalism. Such comparison presents problems since Randolph could never be described as an intellectual or a theorist. Instead, he was a brute political fighter. From 1799 to 1807, Randolph consistently, emphatically, and harshly protected slavery by not only defending the rights of the states but also by fighting to assure that Southerners maintained control of the government. In his effort, he gave his Northern colleagues a demonstration of the slavemaster in action.

The petition distracted Randolph from his most important goal—the dismantling of the army. Federalists still dominated the House, so the prospect of winning a legislative victory was remote. Instead, Randolph wanted to make a political stand against the military expansion enacted by the Federalists. In January 1800, John Nicholas, a Virginia congressman with shifting

the Civil War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 41; Mason, *Slavery and Politics in the Early American Republic*, 32; James H. Broussard, *The Southern Federalists, 1800-1816* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978); Ohline, “Politics and Slavery,” 321-24.

party loyalties, proposed legislation to repeal the law that authorized twelve new regiments of the regular army and expanded the number of general officers. Randolph seized the debate and declared Nicholas's measure too timid. Instead, Randolph "wished to see the whole of it [army], reprobated as it is by our citizens, abandoned." He attacked Federalists as centralizers, using "foreign dangers" to frighten the people into accepting a standing army and diminishing the nation's real source of protection, the state militias. "A people who mean to continue free must be prepared to meet danger in person," Randolph insisted.³

While Randolph argued that his stance on the army came from his strict republican principles, he also believed that a standing army threatened Virginia's social hierarchy. He warned his Southern colleagues that Federalists would recruit "worthless" members of communities for the army, who would then "live upon the public" and "consume the fruits" of those in "honest industry." In Virginia, Randolph argued, the army would confer power, money, and prestige on those without land, slaves, or the benefit of a distinguished family. In essence, Federalists would use democratic means to diminish the power of the gentry. "The military parade which meets the eye in almost every direction excites the gall of our citizens," Randolph said. In democratic fashion, such spectacles could elevate a lower-class person above his social superiors while spreading propaganda of the federal government at taxpayer's expense. St. George Tucker had expressed dismay at these public events and how they eroded deference to the gentry in Virginia. Randolph insisted that planters could defend themselves and "do not want their noses held to the grindstone to pay protectors." During the debate, the class implications of

³ *Annals of Congress*, 6:1, 247, 298-300, 367-8, 372-8; Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 278-282.

the standing army emerged as Randolph's central concern. "They [planters] put no confidence, sir, in the protection of a handful of ragamuffins," he argued.⁴

On the following day, Randolph retracted the word "ragamuffin" from his comments and stressed that the poorest of his community "ought to excite compassion, and not gall." He reiterated his concerns about the standing army. But the "ragamuffin" comment provoked anger among Federalists and military men in Philadelphia. On January 10, 1800, two marines taunted and threatened Randolph while he watched a performance at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. When the crowd exited the theater, one of the soldiers grabbed Randolph's coat and nearly sparked a stampede on the stairs. Joseph Nicholson, Randolph's closest friend and fellow congressman, prevented the soldiers from harming his colleague. The next day, Randolph sent a letter to President Adams demanding an investigation. The incident at the playhouse represented an attack on the legislative branch and an insult to the "majesty of the people," Randolph wrote. Even as Randolph attacked the leveling potential of the military, he resorted to democratic rhetoric to evoke public outrage toward the Federalists. He insisted that Adams take action: "In their name [the people's], I demand that a provision commensurate with the evil be made, and which will be calculated to deter others from any future attempt to introduce the reign of terror into our country." In his effort to make the incident a political weapon, Randolph abandoned deference to create a public spectacle. President Adams sent Randolph's letter to the House "without any other comments on its matter of style."⁵

⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 6:1, 369, 298-9, 345, 372-8; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:160-5; Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 243, 266-71; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 292; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*.

⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 6:1, 345, 372-8.

The House investigated the incident but found nothing beyond the misdeeds of the soldiers. The affair, however, propelled Randolph to the center of national politics. The audacity of this freshman challenging the President heartened supporters and outraged enemies. “J. Randolph has entered into debate with great splendor & approbation,” wrote Thomas Jefferson, who believed the young Virginian would emerge with an “increase of reputation.” Federalists condemned his insolence. “This stripling comes full to the brim with his own conceit and all Virginia democracy,” wrote Abigail Adams. Soon Randolph’s reputation for theatrics and hyperbole spread throughout the nation. The *Pittsburgh Gazette* labeled him a “forward, spoilt boy...remarkable for his intemperance and incivility.”⁶

The upcoming election of 1800 inspired Randolph’s exaggerated rhetoric aimed at exposing the Federalist threat of monarchy. In 1800, Northern and Southern Republicans again united behind Jefferson while Federalists condemned him as a slavemaster and a Jacobin. In the North, Jefferson’s enemies condemned the Republicans’ use of egalitarian rhetoric to build political support, pointing to the hypocrisy of slaveholders encouraging democracy. One Federalist commentator refused “to learn the principles of liberty from slave-holders of Virginia.” Southern and Northern Republicans set aside reservations to build a coalition between planters in the South and small farmers and artisans of differing ethnicities and religions in the North. Jefferson’s supporters in both regions revealed a deep paranoia toward monarchy, and many remained convinced that the Federalists planned to assert tyrannical control over the nation. Randolph believed that the Federalists colluded with the British monarchy and that

⁶ Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:160-5; TJ to Mary Jefferson Eppes, January 17, 1800, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: 1 February 1799 to 31 May 1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 31: 314; Abigail Adams quote from Page Smith, *John Adams, 1784-1826* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), 2:1023. *Pittsburgh Gazette*, April 12, 1800.

neither would relinquish power. “Tories of Britain and America, shall impose Mr. Adams upon the people against their consent,” Randolph wrote. He expressed faith in the people to correct the abuses of Adams and the Federalists. “When the people begin to examine into their own concerns, woe be unto those who have abused their unsuspecting confidence,” Randolph wrote.⁷

In late summer 1800, rumors of slave rebellion in Virginia threatened the Republican coalition. In August, reports that slaves were plotting an uprising in the Richmond area came to the attention of Governor James Monroe and other Virginia authorities. After an investigation that included the interrogation of slaves, Monroe confirmed the existence of a conspiracy. “The plan of an insurrection has been clearly proved, & appears to have been of considerable extent,” Monroe informed Jefferson. According to reports, a literate slave named Gabriel plotted an uprising that would free the slaves and establish equality in Virginia. Inspired by the French and Haitian revolutions, Gabriel persuaded others to join in the effort to win their freedom. On August 30, he and his men planned to march on Richmond and secure their freedom or overthrow the government. When the hour of attack came, however, a violent Virginia

⁷ JR to Joseph Nicholson, May 3, May 14, June 21, July 4, and August 12, 1800, Joseph Nicholson Papers, LC; *Annals of Congress*, 12:2, 782; Matthew Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 32; Broussard, *The Southern Federalists*; Online, “Slavery and Politics,” 321-24; Tate, *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 22; Brian Schoen, *The Fragile Fabric of Union: Cotton, Federal Politics, and the Global Origins of the Civil War* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 67-94; Brian Schoen, “Calculating the Price of Union: Republican Economic Nationalism and the Origins of Southern Sectionalism, 1790-1828,” *Journal of the Early American Republic* 23 (Summer 2003), 174, 180; Susan Dunn, *Jefferson’s Second Revolution: The Election of 1800 and the Triumph of Republicanism* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 147 (Connecticut Courant quote); Bernard A. Weisberger, *America Afire: Jefferson, Adams, and the Revolutionary Election of 1800* (New York: William Morrow, 2000); John Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Edward J. Larson, *A Magnificent Catastrophe: the Tumultuous Election of 1800, America’s First Presidential Campaign* (New York: Free Press, 2008); *The Revolution of 1800: Democracy, Race, & the New Republic*, ed. James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis & Peter Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002).

thunderstorm created chaos among the plotters. Frightened slaves revealed the plans to authorities, who rooted out the conspirators and thwarted the rebellion.⁸

In September 1800, slave patrols and Virginia militia gathered slaves suspected in participating in the conspiracy, who then appeared before the state's oyer and terminer courts, designed to handle slave justice. Randolph attended some of the proceedings, where the influence of radical revolutionary rhetoric on the slaves became apparent. "They manifested a sense of their rights, a contempt of danger and a thirst for revenge which portend the most unhappy consequences," he wrote. Although the slaves acted upon language that Randolph once espoused, he refused to sympathize with those who hoped to produce a "general massacre." The failed uprising reminded Republicans such as Randolph that a racial reign of terror could prove the consequences of their ideology. Randolph believed the "spirit" that produced Gabriel and his failed rebellion could "deluge the southern country in blood."⁹

The potential slave uprising could have easily damaged Republican electoral chances. Monroe concealed damaging information concerning the possible involvement of two Frenchmen from his political enemies, even Richmond's Federalist mayor, James McClurg. By mid-September, state authorities had executed twenty-five suspected conspirators, with many

⁸ Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) 45-6, 69-72; James Monroe to TJ, September 15, 1800, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 32:145; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 87-8; James Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords: Race, Rebellion and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Michael L. Nicholls, *Whispers of Rebellion: Narrating Gabriel's Conspiracy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 53-70; Egerton, "Gabriel's Conspiracy and the Election of 1800," *Journal of Southern History* 56 (May 1990), 191-214; Philip J. Schwarz, "Gabriel's Challenge: Slaves and Crime in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 90 (July 1982), 285-309.

⁹ JR to Nicholson, September 25, 1800, Nicholson Papers, LC; Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion*, 80-1.

more heading for the gallows. Gabriel himself remained at large, which left many citizens in the Richmond area nervous and angry. The spate of executions smacked of vengeance instead of justice, and Monroe realized the political consequences of mass hangings of people who fought for their liberty. “Where to rest the hand of the executioner, is a question of great importance,” Monroe wrote to Jefferson. “[T]here is strong sentiment that there had been hanging enough,” Jefferson responded. The Federalist press already condemned Jefferson as a hypocrite concerning slavery and more executions would only prove slavery’s dehumanizing effects on all white men. “The other states and the world at large will forever condemn us if we indulge in a principle of revenge,” Jefferson wrote. In late September, authorities captured and executed Gabriel. Monroe ended the executions despite pleas by many planters to continue them. Randolph refused to condemn them and expressed relief that the only blood shed was “that which streamed upon the scaffold.”¹⁰

In the months after the rebellion, Randolph, Monroe, and the Republicans hoped to downplay the incident. When the crisis passed, Monroe assured the legislature that the state never really was in any danger, while he continued to hide critical details from the public. The threat of insurrectionary slaves filled the imagination of Southerners with paranoia about their servants’ behavior. “It has come out that the fire in Richmond within these two years was the work of the negroes,” James Callender wrote to Jefferson. “I learnt with concern in Bedford that the important deposit of arms near New London is without even a centinel [sic],” Jefferson wrote. “[W]e cannot suppose the federal administration takes this method of offering arms to

¹⁰ Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 92-3, 112, 186-7; Monroe to TJ, September 15, 1800, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 32: 145; TJ to Monroe, September 20, 1800, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 32: 160; Larson, *A Magnificent Catastrophe*, 197; JR to Nicholson, Sept. 25, 1800, Nicholson Papers, LC.

insurgent negroes; yet some in the neighborhood of the place suspect it,” he added. Monroe and the Republicans portrayed Gabriel’s rebellion as an aberration of slave society, but Jefferson’s letter revealed the chronic fear of a slave uprising.¹¹

Randolph worried most about the political consequences of the rebellion. “You have doubtless heard the story with every exaggeration [and] will not be surprised to learn that our federalists have endeavored to make an electioneering engine out of it,” he wrote to Joseph Nicholson. The French-inspired rhetoric of liberty and equality sparked the rebellion, Federalists argued, and in an example of gross hypocrisy Republicans hanged people who took the ideas seriously. “Liberty and Equality has been infused into the minds of the Negroes,” the Federalist *Virginia Herald* stated. In that paper, a “private citizen” reminded the public that anyone who held slaves “can never be a Democrat” and that Republicans deceived themselves if they put “any faith in any compromise between liberty and slavery.” The Northern Federalist press cast Jefferson and his party as demagogues, enticing the lowest orders of Northern society with expressions of democracy, but the rebellion proved that the Republicans were tyrants masquerading as democrats. “He who affects to be a Democrat and is at the same time an owner of slaves, is a devil incarnate,” one Federalist writer insisted. Northern critics believed the failed Gabriel’s rebellion foretold the violence assured by Jefferson’s election. Gabriel’s Rebellion put Northern Republicans in an awkward position, forcing them to indirectly defend an institution they despised. William Duane, a radical egalitarian, absolved Southerners when he claimed that “it is very well known that the people of the Southern states generally, entertain no wish more ardently, than to get rid of the curse which England has inflicted on America.” In the campaign,

¹¹ JR to Nicholson, Sept. 25, 1800, Nicholson Papers, LC; Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords*, 130-2; James Thomson Callender to TJ, September 29, 1800, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 32:174; TJ to Monroe, November 8, 1800, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 32:248.

the Republicans from the free states lionized Jefferson as the architect of liberty and the enemy of tyranny, downplaying his role as slavemaster.¹²

In the fall of 1800, Republicans held their coalition together, defeated Adams, and eliminated the Federalist majority in the House. Jefferson failed to win a clear victory, however, when he tied his own vice-presidential running mate, Aaron Burr, in electoral votes. In the winter of 1800, the House of Representatives prepared to decide the election after Burr refused to withdraw from consideration. Initially, Randolph rejoiced in a Republican victory and stressed that the political movement was much larger than a single candidate. “I believe that republicanism depends not on a few orators, statesmen, and philosophers but on a diffusion of general information throughout the mass of society,” he argued. Randolph insisted, however, that Jefferson deserved “the support of the people” and that to refuse him the office could lead to sectional animosity, if not worse. Southerners considered the political union dear but “it was cherished as the means, not the end of national happiness.” In February 1801, the House of Representatives deadlocked over the election as Jefferson failed to win a clear majority. In Virginia, nervous planters feared the loss of the election, which led Governor Monroe to prepare the militia for use. Others considered an emergency national convention to force Jefferson’s election. On February 11, when it appeared that the House might not decide the election, Randolph assured Monroe that measures had been prepared to protect Virginia’s interests. “The design is to defeat the election [of Jefferson] in my opinion. A Senator told Mr. J. Nicholas that

¹² JR to Nicholson, Sept. 25, 1800, Nicholson papers, LC; *Virginia Herald* (Fredericksburg), October 18, 1800, quoted from Egerton, “Gabriel and Election of 1800,” 212; “Private Citizen,” *Virginia Herald* (Fredericksburg) from Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords*, 135-6; Larson, *A Magnificent Catastrophe*, 197 (*Connecticut Gazette* quote); Egerton, *Gabriel’s Rebellion*, 102-115; Hunt, *Haiti’s Influence*, 107; White, *Encountering Revolution*, 153; Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders*, 174. Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, ch. 5; Cleves, *The Reign of Terror in America*, 94; *Aurora General Advertiser*, September 24, 1800; Riley, “Northern Republicans,” 185-6.

they would choose Wilson Nicholas as president [pro tempore] of the Senate if we came to no election,” Randolph wrote. Randolph expected that the ascension of the slaveholding Virginian, Nicholas, to the presidency should calm fears of Southern Republicans. The precautions became unnecessary when the House finally selected Jefferson on February 17, 1801.¹³

In the wake of Gabriel’s rebellion, Virginians faced a dilemma over the future of slavery. Despite Monroe’s assurances, most planters believed that the authorities barely averted a calamitous racial uprising. In response, many Virginians openly questioned the wisdom of private manumissions. A decade earlier, the hopeful belief in liberty led planters such as Richard Randolph and Landon Carter to arrange for their slaves’ freedom and care, which seemed to point the state toward eventual freedom. Virginians, however, had grown skeptical of such measures, as evidenced by the accusations against John Randolph during his initial congressional campaigns. The failed rebellion only heightened racial awareness in Virginia and raised questions about the growing free black population. In John Randolph’s district, which included Charlotte, Prince Edward, Cumberland, and Buckingham counties, the population of 24,000 slaves outnumbered the district’s 21,000 white citizens. The disparity prevented Randolph from even raising private concerns about slavery. Yet on November 17, 1800, just weeks after the capture and execution of Gabriel, Randolph composed his last will and testament, which addressed his private feelings about slavery:

¹³ JR to Nicholson, December 17, 1800 and January, 1, 1801, Nicholson Papers, LC; Dawidoff, *Education of John Randolph*, 167; Alex B. Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress: Congressional Method and Politics, 1801-1809,” (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 1963), 11; JR to James Monroe, February 11, 1801, Monroe Papers, LC.

I request that the management of my estate continue under my friend Major Scott who will direct every thing relative to it as if it were his own, and that the profits, after my debts are paid [,] be accumulated and vested in some eligible fund for the support of the helpless slaves and when that purpose is effective it is my desire that every individual negroe of whom I may die possessed be restored to that freedom which is his just and natural right and of which has been so long and basely deprived.

Although the document lacked the bitterness that marked his brother's will, John Randolph still subscribed to the belief that emancipation should occur privately and from the planter's beneficent feelings.¹⁴

Randolph, however, exhibited no sign of backing away from slavery or the plantation society in Virginia. When not attending Congress, he remained at Bizarre with Judith or in Richmond with friends, leaving Roanoke the exclusive domain of slaves, managers, and overseers. His friend and neighbor Joseph Scott managed plantation finances, the sale of crops, and the care of slaves at the plantation. Randolph relentlessly expanded his holdings on and around the Roanoke River. He jealously protected his interests at Roanoke. For example, he restricted access to the road that ran on the edge of the plantation to only approved family and friends. When one neighbor erected a mill nearby on the Roanoke River, Randolph forced its removal, fearing river traffic would interfere with his loading docks. When 700 acres adjacent to the plantation almost fell into the hands of a "monied man," Randolph used his connections and power to secure the land. The plantation consisted of 3,000 acres when he inherited it in 1794 but would grow to 8,000 by the time of his death in 1833. Slaves cultivated tobacco, wheat, and corn

¹⁴ John Randolph's Last Will & Testament, November 17, 1800. Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

on Roanoke plantation's three sections, the Ferry Quarter, Middle Quarter, and Lower Quarter. Since he resided elsewhere, Randolph remained aloof from the slave population on the plantation. In March 1801, Scott compiled the first comprehensive list of the eighty-four black residents of Roanoke plantation: thirty-six adults and ten children resided at the Lower Quarter, while sixteen adults lived in the Middle Quarter. Eight adults lived at the separate Ferry Quarter; eight children split time between the Middle and Ferry Quarters, a sign of marriages between slaves from different quarters. Scott failed to designate family structure, thereby obscuring a full view of slave life at Roanoke. The 1801 list also included eight free blacks who lived on the plantation, probably slave spouses. Randolph's personal servants, slaves on loan to Bizarre, and children younger than twelve were missing. In 1800, Randolph owned between 120 and 140 slaves. Of all those slaves, he maintained personal relationships with only a few, Essex White, Juba, and John. These servants lived and traveled with him, often sleeping in the same room, even at Bizarre and Roanoke. But they could never forget that they were, above all else, his slaves.¹⁵

Randolph honed his skills as slavemaster at Bizarre as he dealt with the consequences of his brother's decision to free the plantation's slaves. The emancipationist plans hung over the heavily indebted estate. Few would have blamed Judith Randolph for finding a loophole to avoid the manumission. The slaves, however, demanded their promised freedom. John and Judith Randolph constantly struggled to maintain order over the slaves while earning enough profit to settle Randolph's debts. As years passed, the slaves grew more hostile and even staged work

¹⁵Commonplace Book, 1803-1832, Tucker-Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary; JR to SGT, January 6, 1802, Duke University; Henry Bradshaw, *History of Prince Edward County, Virginia*, (Richmond: Dietz Press, 1955), 302; Bagby, "Randolph Slave Saga," 67-76, 269-70; Sidbury, *Ploughshares Into Swords*, 28-31. Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2: 357, 359, 669.

stoppages in protest of the failure to give them their freedom. When Randolph left for congressional sessions, Judith often pleaded with the slaves and reassured them that they would eventually be freed. When he returned, however, John Randolph exerted control over them, sometimes against Judith's will. "My heart delights not in the miseries of my fellow creatures," she wrote. "I am guiltless even in thought of inhumanity towards an unfortunate race of beings." John Randolph kept his slaves docile. "These poor Negroes feel a degree of awe of you which I fear will be but too necessary to restrain them until their emancipation," she wrote.¹⁶

The family had to pay the personal debts of Richard Randolph and the remaining debts of John Randolph, Sr. before the emancipation of any slaves. "I am at a loss to know what steps to take in relation to his request of emancipating his [Richard Randolph's] slaves—not that it can be done now," John Randolph wrote to his stepfather. He set slaves to clearing lands and planting new fields to increase the tobacco yield at Bizarre. Personal debts already impoverished Judith Randolph, who often borrowed money from Creed Taylor for her survival. Now she faced the loss of her slaves, her primary means of income. Her brother-in-law never missed an opportunity to admonish Judith for her expensive taste and the difficulty in which she now found herself. "I have always been mindful of the wide distance between our means of gratification," she wrote. Since his sojourn to Philadelphia in 1793, John Randolph lived a frugal life, avoiding accumulating any unnecessary debts. He continued to pay his father's debts, which he considered humiliating. "I am somewhat embarrassed by the approaching necessity of paying the amount of a certain bond from my father to my uncle Richard," he wrote, recalling the original debt from before his birth. In planning for the emancipation of his brother's slaves, Randolph remained

¹⁶ Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox*, 39; Ely, "Richard and Judith Randolph, St. George Tucker, George Wythe, Syphax Brown, and Hercules White," 332; Judith Randolph to JR, April 23, 1803, November 3, 1809, Randolph Papers, UVA.

cognizant of his own financial interests. “I am also ignorant how far they or any of them may have claims upon me for any of my transactions relative to their disposal,” he informed Tucker. The prosperity of Roanoke required more land and slaves, which meant Randolph must make peace with slavery. Judith’s finances deteriorated as she continued to prepare for life without the slaves.¹⁷

Virginia’s slave problem continued to worsen as the Randolphs planned the Bizarre emancipation. The revelation of another slave plot in 1802 centered in counties south of the James River, only increased the fear of Virginia planters. Randolph inquired of Monroe about the “alarming report respecting an insurrection prevalent or rather close to have taken place in the southern counties” in Southampton, Virginia. In May 1802, Monroe found himself monitoring the trials of “slaves on the charge of conspiracy & insurrection.” For Monroe, the number of threats and plots revealed a change in Virginia’s slave population. “The spirit of revolt has taken deep hold of the minds of the slaves,” he argued. “The symptoms are attributable to some other cause.” In addition, President Jefferson received numerous reports of slave unrest and conspiracies from all corners of the South. One man warned him of “an intended landing of the French incendiary negroes” in South Carolina. Another informed him of a thwarted plot in Georgetown, just a few miles from the new capital in Washington. Jefferson and Monroe attempted secret negotiations with Great Britain for colonizing Virginia’s most troublesome slaves and free blacks but that nation refused, fearing that the blacks would spread unrest. In Virginia, the failure of colonization plans only exacerbated fear of the growing free-black population. In 1804, the new governor, John Page, informed Jefferson that the Virginia General

¹⁷ JR to SGT, May 9, 1801, Randolph College, Lynchburg, Virginia; Judith to JR, April 23, 1803, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to SGT, May 9, 1801, Randolph College, Lynchburg, Virginia.

Assembly was considering a plan for “the removal of at least 19,000 free negroes and mulattoes.” The failure of colonization led the Virginia General Assembly to consider legislation expelling all manumitted slaves from the state.¹⁸

Randolph and his Virginia colleagues expected that the Republican presidential and congressional victories would usher in a revolution overturning the Hamilton financial system and the excesses of the previous Federalist administrations. Jefferson broke from the past when he discontinued the formal levees favored by previous administrations and most public ceremonies, particularly those that resembled the events of a monarchical court. In his inaugural address, however, Jefferson demonstrated a willingness to decrease the intense partisanship. The new president’s reconciliatory theme of “we are all federalists, we are all republicans,” troubled his strongest supporters. Virginia congressman William Branch Giles informed Jefferson that the staunchest Republicans feared “the principle of moderation adopted by the administration.” Federalist congressman Manasseh Cutler of Massachusetts believed that Jefferson might “prove a prudent man,” but the radical Republicans would dominate the president: “If he pursues a wise and prudent tone of conduct, he will have a hornet’s nest of Jacobins about his ears.” Even

¹⁸ JR to Monroe, January 12, 1802, James Monroe Papers, New York Public Library; Monroe to TJ, December 8, 1801, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 36:76; Monroe, to TJ, May 17, 1802, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 37:422; TJ to Rufus King, July 13, 1802, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 38:54; John Drayton to TJ, October 20, 1802, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 38:526; Johnston, *Race Relations in Virginia*, 119; Christopher Gore to TJ, October 10, 1802, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 38:474; McCord, “John Page of Rosewell,” 1183-4; Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 121-9; George Tucker, *Letter to a Member of the General Assembly of Virginia on the Subject of the Late Conspiracy of the Slaves; with a Proposal for their Colonization* (Baltimore: Bonsal and Niles, 1801), 5-6.

Timothy Pickering believed Jefferson would “look more to the Federalists than to Jacobins for his support.”¹⁹

Randolph believed that diminishing the power of the federal government was the most important goal for the newly-elected Republicans. First, Congress and the President must strip the federal government of much of its power and restore it to the states. Without this first crucial step, Randolph believed that the electoral victory would prove meaningless. Jefferson’s conciliatory attitude toward Federalists gave him doubts. “[I]f we procured not a substantial reform in the government, our work, will be good for nothing. Of this, I have little hope,” Randolph wrote. “I see but little prospect of readjusting the federal machine. Still less of restoring somewhat of equality between the two great forces of the body politics—the state & federal.” Giles urged Jefferson to promote amendments, repealing the necessary and proper and general welfare clauses in Article 1, Section 8 of the Constitution. Southerners, especially Virginians, wanted the general welfare clause repealed since it posed the most danger to their interests, especially slavery. Alexander Hamilton had urged a broad interpretation of the general welfare clause to justify his economic programs and Southerners believed the federal government could eventually use it to justify an emancipation plan. If Jefferson refused these reforms, Randolph argued, “we shall soon be blended into one mass and find ourselves in the point of monarchy to which our constitution has so strong [and] so alarming a tendency.” Indeed, before the Seventh Congress ever convened, Randolph demonstrated considerable suspicion of the executive office: “[I]t is the monster which threatens our destruction.” As the Seventh

¹⁹ *American Aurora*, February 13, 1804; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 184-200; William Branch Giles to TJ, March 16, 1801, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 33: 311; Manasseh Cutler to Ephraim Cutler, March 21, 1801, *Life, Journals and Correspondence of Rev. Manasseh Cutler, LL.D.* Edited By William Parker Cutler, Julia Perkins Cutler (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1888), 2:44; Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 15-6.

Congress prepared to convene, Randolph wondered whether the public would support such alterations. “Will men prefer the loaves [and] fishes of the hour to the glory of regenerating their country, of restoring to our manners [and] our language the nervous tone of independence?” he wondered. For his part, Jefferson found exercising power far more difficult than he realized. “What is practicable must often control what is pure theory; and the habits of the governed determine a great degree what is practicable,” he wrote. The public had grown used to the stability created by Hamilton’s system, and Jefferson realized that pulling it down would prove difficult.²⁰

When the Seventh Congress convened in December 1801, slaveholders dominated the highest ranks of the government. Jefferson’s closest advisor, James Madison, served as Secretary of State. The new President also selected Thomas Tucker, long defeated in South Carolina politics, as the Treasurer of the United States. Before he left office, President Adams appointed Virginia Federalist and slaveholder, John Marshall, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The United States Senate selected Virginia planter Wilson Cary Nicholas, a close Jefferson ally, as president pro tempore. Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin, a Pennsylvania Republican, served as President Jefferson’s most important antislavery advisor. The government’s new location on the Potomac River, between the slave states of Virginia and Maryland, minimized the antislavery voices that were so prevalent in Philadelphia. The new capital of Washington, D.C.,

²⁰ JR to SGT, March 16, 1801, in Jack Wendell Hines, “John Randolph and the Growth of Federal Power: The Opinions of a States Righter on the Political Issues of His Time,” (PhD Diss., University of Kansas, 1957), 45-6; Giles to TJ, June 1, 1801, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 34: 227-9; Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 18-9; Van Cleve, “A Slaveholder’s Union,” 177-8; JR to Nicholson, October 18, 1801, Nicholson Papers, LC; TJ to Dupont de Nemours, January 1802.

with a population of 14,000, soon had 3,000 slaves. Congress adopted the slave laws of Maryland to govern the city.²¹

For the first time since 1789, Federalists or devotees of Alexander Hamilton would not control the House of Representatives. The Hamiltonian economic program became law as a result of Federalist control of the House speakership. The Speaker appointed the chairmen of standing permanent committees and temporary select committees, which wrote bills and built support for measures. On the first day of the session, the House selected Nathaniel Macon as Speaker on the first ballot. Macon, a stalwart Jeffersonian and a North Carolina planter, was one of the most popular members of the House. Randolph and Macon had forged a close friendship since the young Virginian had arrived at Congress. As the new Speaker filled House committee assignments, he planned on Randolph taking a major role in shaping the new Republican Congress. When the House turned the select Committee on Ways and Means into a standing committee, Macon passed over far more experienced legislators to make Randolph its chairman. Soon the House voted to give the committee the full power of appropriations and revenue. In only his second term, Randolph controlled the legislative branch's role in the nation's finances.²²

²¹ Donald L. Robinson. *Slavery in the Structure of American Politics, 1765-1820* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), 267-8; Paul Finkelman, "Slavery in the Shadow of Liberty: The Problem of Slavery in Congress and the Nation's Capital," *In the Shadow of Freedom: The Politics of Slavery in the National Capital* ed. Paul Finkelman and Donald R. Kennon (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 10-1; Stanley Harrold, *Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington D.C., 1828-1865* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 15; Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic*, 60; Constance McLaughlin Green, *Washington: A History of the Capital, 1800-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), 20-22; Peter Onuf, "Federalism, Republicanism, and the Origins of American Sectionalism," in *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, ed. Edward Ayers. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 15-8.

²² *Annals of Congress*, 6:1, 310, 312; 7:1, 336, 349, 355; Norman K. Risjord, "Partisanship and Power: House Committees and the Powers of the Speaker, 1789-1801," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 49 (October 1992), 629-30, 650-1; Dumas Malone, *Jefferson the President: First*

Jefferson hoped to rely on his personal friends and informal alliances in Congress to pass desired legislation. The unofficial floor leader of the Republican caucus would work with the Speaker to plan the House schedule, direct legislation to committees, and direct the administration's initiatives. Without any real party machinery, the floor leader and the caucus would make majority workable. Jefferson wanted Giles, who had served in the House for eleven years, to lead the Republican legislators. But Jefferson's desire failed to prevent a struggle for control in the House. Early in the Seventh Congress, when Giles left the House for business in Virginia, Randolph and Maryland congressman Samuel Smith struggled with each other over control of the Republican caucus. "[T]here evidently appears much rivalry and jealousy among the leaders," Connecticut congressman Roger Griswold wrote. When Giles returned he reasserted his control over the caucus. "In the House of representatives [sic], M. Giles leads the ministerial phalanx, and is the only member of it whose capacity is adequate to conducting the measures of party. Mr. Randolph attempted to lead, but failed," stated the anti-Jeffersonian *Washington Federalist*. The failure to command his colleagues troubled Randolph. "Johnny Randolph is perfectly astonished that his great abilities should be overlooked," Griswold wrote.²³

Randolph believed he represented the interests of Virginia more faithfully than any other member, including Giles. Despite the power that Virginians enjoyed in the federal government,

Term, 1801-1805 (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1970), 90-2; Noble Cunningham, Jr., *The Process of Government Under Jefferson* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 187, 190; Robert M. Johnstone, Jr., *Jefferson and the Presidency: Leadership in the Young Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), ch. 5; Noble Cunningham, *Jeffersonian Republicans in Power: Party Operations, 1801-09* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1963), ch. 4; Robert V. Remini, *The House: The History of the House of Representatives* (New York: Smithsonian Books, 2006), 76-7.

²³ Lacy, "Jefferson and Congress," 122-7; *Annals of Congress*, 7:2, 666; Johnstone, *Jefferson and the Presidency*, 132-3; *Washington Federalist*, February 17, 1802; Ralph Volney Harlow, *The History of Legislative Methods in the Period Before 1825*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1917), 168.

Randolph thought his state remained in perpetual danger from an array of sources. Indeed, he realized that the power of the slaveholders of the Piedmont and Tidewater required constant vigilance against the federal government, slaves, and democratic forces. Within Virginia, the representation system of the Constitution of 1776 assured that the counties in eastern Virginia continued to control most of the seats in the General Assembly even as settlers populated counties west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. In early 1802, Randolph reacted to rumors that western settlers were talking of secession to remedy the representation problem. Behind the movement to divide Virginia, Randolph saw sinister centralizing forces, hoping to divide the state and diminish its power. Virginia's size and political system gave the state enormous advantages in the federal government, while preventing other states from dominating. "They know that to reduce the large state is the first great step to consolidation," he argued.²⁴

In 1802, the House debated a bill that could change the basis of congressional apportionment. The plan would fix the ratio at one congressional representative for every 33,000 persons (currently 30,000), which would limit the number of congressmen from small Northern states. In the debate, representatives who supported the increased ratio argued that the House represented the people, a democratic notion that Randolph considered "heretical and improper." Any belief that he and his fellow congressmen represented anyone but the states "should be exploded on its first annunciation," he believed. Randolph saw this bill as an effort to "diminish the confidence of the people in the State governments." Ideas about democracy, sectionalism, and slavery fed on each other and threatened the planter interests. The federal government would fill that chaotic void and swallow the states' power and individual liberties. He condemned such

²⁴ JR to Creed Taylor, Jan. 31, 1802, William Cabell Bruce Collection, LOV; Thomas M. Coens, "The Formation of the Jackson Party, 1822-1825," (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2004) 116-63; Richards, *Slave Power*, 59. Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 63.

democratic language despite using it in the past to justify his own political battles. In January 1801, when the Republicans dismantled the Sedition Act, he argued that the American people were the basis of American political power. “Their voice was more powerful than that of the court and their President.” Although he had once expressed support of the expansive ideas of liberty and citizenship, Randolph now rejected the idea that the “the people” exercised power in any way but through the state governments. They may have been sovereign, but the people never truly ruled. In contrast, Jefferson and Madison maintained a belief that “the people” ruled directly through their government and favored a more expansive electoral process. They believed that a government selected by a responsible republican citizenry would respect the restraints and responsibilities of law, order, and moral justice. For Randolph, the gentry represented the truest idea of citizenship. The reversal of his earliest stance revealed the malleable nature of democratic language. As his Northerner colleagues exhibited a commitment to democracy, Randolph became less tolerant of the idea of the popular governance.²⁵

In the earliest days of the Seventh Congress, Randolph realized that Northern Republicans posed an obstacle to unchecked Southern power. In the expiring days of the Federalist-dominated Sixth Congress, Maryland congressman Joseph Nicholson had urged the House to strengthen the current federal fugitive slave law, thus making it easier to recover runaways. After Gabriel’s Rebellion, more slaves fled the border states for freedom and Maryland citizens called for federal assistance in recovering runaway slaves in free states. The House appointed a committee to consider the bill, but the electoral turmoil prevented any action.

²⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 7:1, 341; 369, 6:2, 920; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics Since Independence* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), 78-80; Michael Schudson, *The Good Citizen: A History of American Civic Life* (New York: Free Press, 1998), 89-91.

Nicholson revived the bill and hoped that the Republican majority could pass it in the Seventh Congress. His bill would strengthen the current federal fugitive slave law by imposing a five-hundred-dollar fine on anyone harboring or employing runaway slaves. Furthermore, the federal government would force free blacks to produce papers proving their free status or risk being declared fugitive slaves. Northern Republicans and Federalists joined together to narrowly defeat the bill, 46 to 43. Contradicting his rhetoric about a strong central government, Randolph voted for this far-reaching expansion of federal power.²⁶

The failure of the bill confirmed Randolph's fear that the Republican majority would prove unworkable. Hostility to the Adams administration had united Republicans for the electoral victory, but the majority was "by no means *marked*," he wrote to his stepfather. Specifically, he blamed Northern Republicans for the "discordance of opinion in the majority" and considered them a threat to Southern power. "The Eastern gentlemen generally seemed content with the change of men, [and] wish not to pursue it much farther. We are for a change of important principles," he wrote. While most Northern Republicans agreed with many of the Jeffersonian economic goals, they proved less acquiescent on the matter of slavery. In little time, the House knew what Randolph and the Virginia delegation hoped to protect. "The inordinate ambition of Virginia begins also to be better understood by both parties," Roger Griswold observed.²⁷

²⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 6:1, 310, 312; 7:1, 317, 316, 423, 425; Riley, "Northern Republicans," 48-51; Ohline, "Politics and Slavery," 328-30.

²⁷ JR to St. George Tucker, December 26, 1801, Bruce papers, LOV; Bruce, John Randolph, 2: 272-3; Noble E. Cunningham, Jr., *The Jeffersonian Republicans in Power: Party Organization, 1801-1809* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963), 73-5; Rita Mary McBride, "Roger Griswold: Connecticut Federalist," (PhD Diss., Yale University, 1948), 111-2.

As chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, Randolph intended to use his power to weaken the federal government. He planned to use the committee's appropriation and revenue power to overturn the Hamiltonian financial system. Randolph insisted that he was "determined to pay the debt off, to retrench every unnecessary expense, military, naval, [and] civil to enforce economy as well upon men calling themselves republicans as upon federalists." In addition, he worked closely with Treasury Secretary Gallatin, who often attended committee meetings, to reduce the national debt and eliminate taxes. In the process, Randolph planned to make Congress the dominant power in budgetary matters. As Ways and Means chairman, Randolph decided when and if the committee met, drafted most of the bills that it produced, and appointed any sub-committees. Nothing happened on the committee unless Randolph approved it. The *Washington Federalist* referred to him as "Chancellor of the Exchequer," but when a tax bill that he drafted required an amendment twice as long as the original bill to repair its deficiencies, it became obvious that power instead of finances was his real strength.²⁸

In addition to controlling the nation's finances, Randolph wanted control of the Republican congressional caucus. Although he worked closely with Giles, Randolph believed himself a better representative of Virginia's interests. During the apportionment debate, Giles had supported the lower ratio to empower smaller states, which Randolph deemed damaging to

²⁸ JR to SGT, January 15, 1802, Randolph College, Lynchburg, Virginia; *Washington Federalist*, March 25, 1802; Lacy, "Jefferson and Congress," 135-8, 278; Donald R. Kennon and Rebecca M. Rogers, *The Committee on Ways and Means: A Bicentennial History* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1989), 60; John Austin Stevens, *Albert Gallatin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899), 227-8; Raymond Walters, Jr. *Albert Gallatin: Jeffersonian Financier and Diplomat* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 147-50; Nicholas Dungan, *Albert Gallatin: America's Swiss Founding Father* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 71; Dennis S. Ippolito, *Why Budgets Matter: Budget Policy and American Politics* (Pennsylvania State: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 45; Donald R. Stabile, *The Origins of American Public Finance: Debates Over Money, Debt, and Taxes in the Constitutional Era, 1776-1836* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 143.

Virginia's power. In December 1802, Giles failed to appear at the new congressional session, having fallen ill in Virginia. Without Giles, the House fell into chaos, unable to move important business through the process. Once it became apparent that Giles would probably fail to return to the House, another power struggle occurred between Randolph and Samuel Smith. "I firmly believe that the majority would split into Violent Coteries," wrote North Carolina Congressman William Barry Grove.²⁹

Jefferson wanted neither Randolph nor Smith as leader. Instead, he had recruited Caesar Augustus Rodney, a Delaware Republican, to run for the House in order to eventually assume the leadership. "I really wish you were here," Jefferson wrote to Rodney. He believed Rodney, an accomplished attorney, could make the House more efficient and shorten the sessions. Jefferson and Randolph had never formed a close relationship, and the President believed him unequal to the task of congressional leadership. But Randolph's power, stemming from the Ways and Means Committee, proved highly valuable in passing the administration's legislative economic agenda. Regardless of Jefferson's misgivings, Randolph was able to exert enough influence to prevent Rodney from taking power when he arrived at the session.³⁰

Initially, many House Republicans refused to acknowledge Randolph's power, especially since he seemed so unlikely a leader. His strange physical appearance fascinated his colleagues and led many to misjudge the congressman who looked like a "beardless boy." The illness that

²⁹ JR to Nicholson, May 9, October 21, 1802, Nicholson Papers, LC; *Annals of Congress*, 7:1, 367; William Barry Grove to John Steele, February 15, 1803, *The Papers of John Steele*, ed. H. M. Wagstaff. (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards & Broughton Printing Co., 1924) 1:368-9; Lacy, "Jefferson and Congress," 135.

³⁰ TJ to Caesar A. Rodney, December 31, 1802, Jefferson Papers, LC; Cunningham, *Jeffersonian Republicans in Power*, 75; Lacy, "Jefferson and Congress," 132; Long, "Jefferson and Congress," 117.

robbed him of virility also plagued him politically. Congressman Samuel Taggart's description of Randolph to a friend revealed how many people must have perceived Randolph:

He is rather taller than middle size, extremely slender, he never had a razor on his face and has no more appearance of beard than a boy of 10 years old, and his voice is the same...By his appearance one would suppose him to be either by nature, or manual operation fixed for an Italian singer, indeed there are strong suspicions of a physical disability.

To combat the whispers, Randolph offered a daily masculine performance as gentry planter, coming to conduct House business dressed in riding clothes and knee length boots. His dress, often slovenly put together, evoked republican simplicity and the gentry all at once. During debate, Randolph's dress, behavior, and rhetoric displayed the authority of the slavemaster in his domain. If anyone failed to receive the message, the ever-present riding whip in Randolph's hands informed them. In his new role, the Virginia planter demonstrated his mastery.³¹

In the Eighth Congress, he used his power over revenue and appropriations to build support and demand loyalty on votes. The young Virginian, William Plumer noted, was "profuse in censuring the motives of his opponents—artful in evading their arguments, & preemptory in demanding the vote." In a matter of months, Randolph commanded the House effortlessly. Plumer observed him "[s]itting on his seat insolently & frequently exclaiming I hope this motion will not prevail—or when it suited his views, I hope this will be adopted." In debate, colleagues came to fear his nasty insults, often aimed at supporters as well as enemies. "With an almost

³¹ Stokes, "John Randolph," 247; William Plumer, *William Plumer's Memorandum of Proceedings in the United States Senate, 1803-1807*, ed. Everette Somerville Brown (New York: Macmillan Co., 1923), 248-9; Samuel Taggart to John W. Taylor, January 13, 1804, "Letters of Samuel Taggart: Representative in Congress, 1803-1814," ed. George H. Haynes, *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 33 (1924), 125.

feminine voice,” noted one observer, Randolph “utters the most biting sarcasm with a manner the most irritatingly courteous, and a voice that resembles the music of spheres.” Men feared Randolph’s bitter rhetorical style even if they questioned his masculinity.³²

Randolph refused to treat many of his colleagues with any modicum of respect. Usually only Southern planters commanded his immediate respect. For the most part, he saw himself as superior to the majority of his colleagues, as he had since he entered Maury’s school. Plumer characterized him as “assuming & very arrogant.” Samuel Taggart observed that Randolph’s “insolent haughty overbearing disposition knows no bounds.” Even fellow Republicans found themselves subject to his “aristocratic hauteur,” observed Simeon Baldwin. Randolph relied on naked intimidation and humiliation to build coalitions and achieve legislative victories. Plumer summed up the House Republicans’ thoughts on their leader: “[T]hey hated him.” Although President Jefferson never truly trusted Randolph, he handled him gingerly since he ushered through legislation. “The truth is, his talents are necessary to them, and for a season he [Jefferson] will bear over them,” Plumer added.³³

President Jefferson could scarcely afford parochialism or short-sighted political behavior. From the moment he became president, the troubling state of European affairs dictated

³² Plumer, *Memorandum*, 24-5; *National Intelligencer*, June 4, 1833; *Annals of Congress*, 7:1, 362, 349; Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 122, 128; *Washington Federalist*, Feb. 18, 1802; Cunningham, *Jeffersonian Republicans in Power*, 77; Koenig, Louis W. “Consensus Politics,” 1800-1805.” *American Heritage* 18 (February 1967).

³³ Plumer, *Memorandum*, 24-5; *National Intelligencer*, June 4, 1833; *Annals of Congress*, 7:1, 362, 349; Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 122, 128; *Washington Federalist*, Feb. 18, 1802; Cunningham, *Jeffersonian Republicans in Power*, 77; Simeon Baldwin to wife, February 14, 1804, *Life and Letters of Simeon Baldwin*, (New Haven: The Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor), 349-50; Koenig, “Consensus Politics, 1800-1805;” David H. Wendelken, “The Rhetoric of John Randolph of Roanoke: A New Evaluation,” (PhD Diss., Ohio University, 1984).

moderation and deliberate decisions. Napoleon's expansionism threatened Europe with despotism even as the French ruler trumpeted his devotion to liberty. In March 1801, Jefferson learned that Spain had secretly ceded the Louisiana Territory to France. He feared that this cession signaled Napoleon's plan to expand his empire to North America. In response, the anti-British Jefferson pursued rapprochement with England.³⁴

Jefferson knew that the United States needed to improve relations with Great Britain, regardless of his personal ideology. A generation after the American Revolution, Britain remained the U.S.'s most important trading partner. By 1800, a quarter of British exports headed for the United States. New England merchants and Southern planters relied on access to Britain's markets. The outbreak of war between Britain and France had presented a lucrative opportunity to New England merchants and shipping companies. The warring powers prevented access to each other's Caribbean colonies, but American shipping interests interceded and facilitated access to those markets. This carrying trade blossomed as American merchant ships reloaded goods and paid duties in U. S. ports before sailing to Europe. This broken voyage allowed the Americans to maintain their neutral status and avoid diplomatic problems. Between 1790 and 1807, the value of the carrying trade had increased from \$500,000 to \$60 million, making the United States the largest neutral transporter of goods in the world. The British believed that this carrying trade exploited wartime conditions and hindered the war effort against France. Since the war began in 1793, Britain had seized American ships in search of contraband and runaway

³⁴ Clifford L. Egan, *Neither Peace Nor War: Franco-American Relations, 1803-1812* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983); Joseph I. Shulim, "Thomas Jefferson Views Napoleon," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 60 (April 1952), 288-304; Joseph I. Shulim, *The Old Dominion and Napoleon Bonaparte: A Study in American Opinion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952); Joseph Allen Smith to TJ, March 21, 1801, *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 33: 404.

British sailors, whom the British navy often impressed. Realizing the need to maintain good relations with Britain, in light of Napoleon's rise, Jefferson retained Federalist stalwart Rufus King at the Court of St. James to negotiate for America's maritime rights. King's diplomatic effort helped ease tensions over ship seizures and the carrying trade.³⁵

In 1801, Britain and France reached a peace agreement at Amiens, which hurt New England shipping interests but reopened tobacco and cotton markets for Southern planters. Randolph himself experienced a lucrative year at Roanoke during the peace, as crops flourished. The peace failed to comfort Jefferson, however, especially since Napoleon sent troops to restore French power on the island of Haiti. Jefferson believed that France's presence in the Western Hemisphere threatened American access to New Orleans. The United States had long feared that European politics and wars would interrupt access to that key port on the Gulf of Mexico. Spain still governed the territory and in 1802 revoked Americans' right of deposit in New Orleans. In response, many Federalists demanded war with France, insisting that it was necessary to defend the interests of western farmers. Randolph accused New Englanders of pushing for a war to revive the carrying trade. "This darling object however is in the estimation of N. England second to that of alienating the minds of the western people from the present administration, or of,

³⁵ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 6-8; Adams, *John Randolph*, 33. Bradford Perkins, *The First Rapprochement: England and the United States, 1795-1805* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 13, 80-91, 137-49; Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 532-45; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 622-23, 644; Kaplan, *Entangling Alliances With None: American Foreign Policy in the Age of Jefferson*, (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1987), 107; David A. Bell, *The First Total War*, 232; John D. Forbes, "European Wars and Boston Trade, 1783-1815," *The New England Quarterly* (December, 1938), 719; David Allen Carson, "Congress in Jefferson's Foreign Policy," (PhD Diss., Texas Christian University, 1983), 167; McDonald, *Presidency of Thomas Jefferson*, 100-1; Robert Ernst, *Rufus King: American Federalist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 240-5; Daniel George Lang, *Foreign Policy in the Early Republic: The Law of Nations and The Balance of Power* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985).

embarrassing the finances of the U.S. by a foreign war,” he wrote. He insisted that Republicans wanted peace but admitted that “N. Orleans is the only embarrassment.”³⁶

Jefferson also wanted to avoid war while pursuing a solution to the problem of New Orleans. In 1803, Toussaint Louverture’s Haitian forces defeated Napoleon’s armies, leaving Jefferson concerned that a frustrated Napoleon might sell Louisiana. When the peace between France and Great Britain collapsed and European war resumed, Jefferson concluded that Napoleon might part with the city and sent Robert Livingston to Paris to negotiate the purchase. Randolph disagreed with the idea and argued that “to buy it is to buy off a war.” But he also rejected the calls for the United States to seize the territory since “to conquer it is to depart from our character.” The nation would have to wait until France attacked before it could seize the territory, Randolph insisted. In general, he feared the acquisition of New Orleans or Louisiana, believing it would change the character of the American republic. Napoleon surprised the Americans when he offered the entire Louisiana territory for \$15 million. The deal would secure 500 million acres of land, give the American people incalculable room to expand, and prevent France or Spain from occupying it. Livingston seized the opportunity and signed the treaty.³⁷

New England Federalists objected to the acquisition of such an ethnically diverse region, which they believed would diminish the power of their section and increase the power of the South. Article III of the purchase treaty stated that Louisiana’s inhabitants should be made

³⁶ Stokes, “John Randolph,” 234; Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 56-7; John D. Grainger, *The Amiens Truce: Britain and Bonaparte, 1801-1803* (Boydell Press, 2004), 164-5; JR to Caesar Rodney, January 4, 1802, Randolph Papers, LC; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 644; Brown, *Toussaint’s Clause*, 191; JR to SGT, [1802], Randolph College, Lynchburg; JR to Monroe, January 3, 1803, Monroe Papers, LC.

³⁷ JR to SGT, [1803], Randolph College, Lynchburg; Peter J. Kastor, *The Nation’s Crucible: The Louisiana Purchase and the Creation of America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Jon Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense: the Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

American citizens “as soon as possible.” Abraham Ellery wrote to Alexander Hamilton that New Orleans was “a place inhabited by a Mixture of Americans, English, Spanish, and French...and where the white population bears so small a proportion to the black.” Nearly half of Louisiana’s population was black, both slave and free. While many New Englanders feared that Louisiana’s Catholicism and mixed-race population would dilute the white republic, their main concern emanated from the disproportionate power it would give to the slave states. Virginia and its slaveholders would dominate the political system, guaranteeing the political extinction of the Federalist party and the subjugation of New England. With the three-fifths compromise inflating Southern power, the acquisition of Louisiana meant that “western & southern states, will, on all occasions, decide the election just as they pleased,” William Plumer argued. Timothy Pickering insisted that the purchase represented a “great evil” since it empowered slaveholders. He began advocating a constitutional amendment repealing the three-fifths clause and even urged talk of New England secession. “I am convinced, that the accession of Louisiana, will accelerate a division of these States,” wrote Uriah Tracy of Connecticut.³⁸

In October 1803, Randolph led the legislative effort in the House to fund the treaty and make the purchase effective. Despite his private reservations about the constitutionality and wisdom of the purchase, Randolph left nothing to chance and had himself appointed head of the

³⁸ Abraham Ellery to Alexander Hamilton, October 25, 1803, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett and Jacob E. Cooke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 25: 166-7; Kukla, *Wilderness So Immense*, 291-3, 327-8, 350-3; Wills, *Negro President*, 120-40; Richards, *Slave Power*, 43-4; Uriah Tracy to James McHenry, Oct. 19, 1803, in Bernard C. Steiner, *The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry* (Cleveland: The Burrows Brothers Company, 1907), 522; Ohline, “Slavery and Politics,” 355; Plumer, *Memorandum*, 63; Pickering quote from a letter to Winthrop Sargent, Jan. 6, 1804, in Kevin M. Gannon, “Escaping “Mr. Jefferson’s Plan of Destruction”: New England Federalists and the Idea of a Northern Confederacy, 1803-1804” *Journal of the Early Republic* (Autumn 2001), 427; Kevin M. Gannon, “Calculating the Value of Union: States’ Rights, Nullification, and Secession in the North” (PhD Diss., University of South Carolina, 2002), ch. 2.

select committee addressing the occupation and settlement of the territory. When the matter came before the whole House, Randolph found himself defending President Jefferson's loose interpretation of the Constitution to justify the purchase. Opponents of the measure wanted Jefferson to release all the correspondence pertaining to the purchase to disprove Spanish claims that it still owned Louisiana. Although Randolph had long condemned secrecy in the affairs of the government, he stifled the efforts to force Jefferson to release the documents. The Louisiana issue was the first time that Jefferson relied on the new floor leader, and he continually sent information to Randolph during the debate. Jefferson wanted no deviations. Yet, on October 27, Randolph opposed a bill that gave all administrative authority in the Louisiana Territory to the executive branch during the early part of the territory stage, cutting Congress out. Randolph insisted that he "did not believe that, under any circumstances, it was proper to delegate to the Executive a power so extensive." If the president gained such power at the expense of Congress, he would not likely ever surrender it, Randolph argued. Jefferson selected Caesar Rodney to lead the bill through the House. Afraid of losing influence, Randolph changed his position and supported the measure.³⁹

In the debate over Louisiana's settlement and organization, Randolph found himself answering charges that the South would rush to settle the territory. "It destroys the perfect union contemplated between the original parties by interposing an alien and a stranger to share the power of government with them," argued Roger Griswold. If Southerners settled the territory and

³⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 8:1, 388, 406, 418, 440, 487-9, 498; Hines, "Randolph and Federal Power," 50-2; Abraham Ellery to Alexander Hamilton, October 25, 1803, *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Vol. 25, ed. Harold C. Syrett and Jacob E. Cooke (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 166-7; Kukla, *Wilderness So Immense*, 291-3, 327-8; Wills, *Negro President*, 120-40; Forrest McDonald, *States' Rights and the Union: Imperium in Imperio, 1776-1876* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 61.

Congress admitted states quickly, the three-fifths clause would assure the destruction of New England's power, critics argued. Randolph assured his opponents that while Louisiana's citizens would enjoy constitutional rights, any future states from the territory would enter the Union "not on the footing of the original States, or of the States created under the Constitution." In essence, Randolph shared the fears about the diversity of the Louisiana population, and he hoped that settlement and incorporation into the Union would be slow. Regardless of objections, Randolph secured passage of the appropriations to make the Louisiana Treaty effective and complete the purchase. In New England, critics insisted that the acquisition of Louisiana marked the triumph of the Virginia-led "slavocracy" that would destroy the Union. "Virginia holds her preponderance, as a mistress of the Union!—a title more dear to the lazy arrogance of her plantation barons, by an avowed inequality," Fisher Ames insisted. Randolph believed that Virginia's "territory, population, and wealth" along with "her character for wisdom, moderation, and firmness" justified its "weight in the confederacy." Randolph insisted upon a republic led by Virginia.⁴⁰

Northern concerns about the expansion of slavery were anything but phantom fears. Kentucky and Virginia slaveholders wanted to bring their slaves with them as they settled the territory of Indiana, justifying Northern fear about the spread of the institution. Indiana's territorial governor, William Henry Harrison, a Virginia planter, presided over a convention at Vincennes that petitioned Congress to lift the Northwest Ordinance's ban on slavery and allow

⁴⁰ *Annals of Congress*, 8:1, 461-2, 487; Fisher Ames, "The Republican X," *The Works of Fisher Ames*, ed. William B Allen (Indianapolis: Liberty fund, 1983), 1:265; JR to Littleton Waller Tazewell, June 8, 1804, Tazewell, Papers, LOV; Gannon, "Calculating the Value of Union."; Onuf, "The Expanding Union," in *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic*, ed. David Thomas Konig (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Remini, *The House*, 78-9.

importation for ten years. Petitioners argued that the ban violated their constitutional right to property and would retard the territory's economy. Randolph headed the special committee considering the request and upheld the Northwest Ordinance's prohibition of slavery. The committee report argued that the Ordinance "wisely calculated to promote the happiness and prosperity of the Northwestern country, and to give strength and security to that extensive frontier" and that removing the ban would be "highly dangerous." Randolph and his committee rejected the argument that slavery would promote economic growth and settlement. Far from an antislavery statement, however, the report contained no condemnation of slavery and reaffirmed the supremacy of economics in the committee's decision. Randolph's report stated "[t]hat this labor, demonstrably the dearest of any, can only be employed to advantage in the cultivation of products more valuable than any known to that quarter of the United States."⁴¹

In late 1803, the dim reality of slavery's spread became evident. In South Carolina, western farmers had requested more and cheaper slaves. With Louisiana now open, speculators saw an opportunity to satisfy those demands and make enormous returns on their investment in foreign slaves. In 1803, the South Carolina legislature reopened the foreign slave trade. The decision provoked outrage throughout the nation, especially in Virginia. Randolph privately condemned the decision as shortsighted, greedy, and dangerous and an attempt by South Carolina planters to expand profits from the slave trade rather than hard work. "All her rice, indigo, and cotton is to be converted into slaves," he wrote. The devotion to profits had destroyed "the opulent nabobs of St. Domingo" and South Carolina now invited a similar

⁴¹ *Annals of Congress*, 7:2, 1353; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2: 244; McColley, *Slavery and Virginia*, 178-9; Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders*, 64-5; Riley, "Northern Republicans," 340-2; In addition to Randolph the committee consisted of Roger Griswold of Connecticut, Robert Williams of North Carolina, Lewis R. Morris of Vermont, and John Hoge of Pennsylvania.

catastrophe. “In less than five years the course of these wretches will be recruited by two hundred thousand native Africans.” South Carolina’s decision invited a slave rebellion on the scale of Haiti. “The lower country of S. Carolina and Georgia can never be recovered in case the negroes get possession,” Randolph warned. Echoing the sentiments of his stepfather, he condemned the motives behind the action: “I tremble for the dreadful retribution which this horrid thirst for African blood, which the legislators of that state are base enough to feel.” South Carolina courted “indelible disgrace” by opening the trade. “It beho[o]ves Virginia, in my opinion, to look to the consequences.”⁴²

Many Virginians openly condemned South Carolina’s decision to reopen the foreign slave trade as a betrayal of the revolutionary antislavery spirit. The revival of the trade “makes every friend to freedom and humanity weep for the want of foresight, and the entire abandonment of every noble feeling, by one of our sister states,” wrote the editors of the *Alexandria Expositor*. All agreed that the reopening of the trade complicated the future of slavery in Virginia. In the Piedmont, poor agricultural practices continued to force planters westward, which created a surplus of slaves. For years, the interstate slave trade had provided countless slaves to Kentucky and Tennessee markets and Louisiana looked even more lucrative. Diffusionists, such as Jefferson, believed that slaves would find freedom in the West, while

⁴² Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79-142; Van Cleve, *Slaveholder’s Republic*, 215-7; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 49; David Hugh Connolly, Jr. “A Question of Honor; State Character and the Lower South’s Defense of the African Slave Trade in Congress, 1789-1807,” (PhD Diss., Rice University, 2008), 32-3; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 49; JR to Littleton Waller Tazewell, Jan. 1, 1804, Tazewell papers, Library of Virginia; Littleton Waller Tazewell to JR, December 29, 1803, Tazewell Papers, LOV.

others hoped for slavery's perpetuation. Now South Carolina's decision would dilute the slave market and destroy both plans.⁴³

In response to South Carolina's actions, Pennsylvania Republican David Bard revived the proposal of a ten-dollar tax on all imported slaves, which would punish traders bringing slaves into the state. The sum represented a trifling amount considering the profits that the slave traders stood to make. Bard, a Presbyterian minister, proposed the plan from "the principle of morality" and to assure the world that the United States truly opposed slavery. "It will show the world that the General Government are opposed to slavery and willing to improve their power, or far as it will go, for preventing it." South Carolina's Benjamin Huger vehemently opposed the tax and the moral outrage from which it emanated. "On this point [morality] the Union ought to be silent," he argued. Southerners would serve as "the exclusive judges of her [the South's] own conduct," he continued. Randolph allowed Bard's measure to reach the House floor but he refused to support Bard's measure and voted to postpone the proposal until it died. The regulation of the foreign slave trade presented the federal government with an opportunity to strike at the institution. Randolph, however, refused to translate his private outrage into public policy.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Alexandria Expositor*, June 21, 1804; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of Politics*, 295; Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 79-142; Hammond, *Slavery, Freedom, Expansion*, 36; Riley, "Northern Republicans," 312-3; Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders*, 63; Alan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 229-30; Steven Deyle, *Carry Me Back: The Domestic Slave Trade in American Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁴⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 8:1, 820, 994-6, 1004-5, 1021, 1035; Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic*, 141-2; Carl Harrison Brown, Jr. "The Reopening of the Foreign Slave Trade in South Carolina, 1803-1807," (M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1968), 47; Robinson, *Slavery in the Structure of Politics*, 319-21; Jan Lewis, "The Problem of Slavery in Southern Political Discourse," in *Devising Liberty: Preserving and Creating Freedom in the New American Republic* ed. David Thomas Konig. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 277; Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery: The Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1961), 82; Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 105; Schoen, *Fragile Fabric*, 68.

Although Bard's tax failed to make it out of the House, strong antislavery legislation concerning Louisiana did pass Congress. During the organization of the Louisiana Territory, antislavery Northern men and Upper South diffusionists in the Senate passed legislation that banned the foreign slave trade, restricted the importation of any slave unless accompanied by an owner for the purposes of "actual settlement," and prohibited the admittance of any slave who arrived in the United States after 1798, which disallowed foreign slaves imported from South Carolina. Outraged, Louisianans petitioned Congress to reopen the slave trade and to allow the territory to govern itself. They demanded the right "to the free possession of our slaves, and to the right of importing slaves into the district of Louisiana." Territorial Governor William C. C. Claiborne, a Jefferson appointee, supported antislavery measures but warned Jefferson that Louisianans might rebel if the trade remained closed. "I find an almost universal sentiment exist[s] in Louisiana in favor of the African trade," Claiborne informed Secretary of State Madison.⁴⁵

In December 1804, Randolph chaired the House committee that considered the petitions of the Louisiana slaveholders. After reviewing them, the committee reported its disapproval of the slavery restrictions. The United States had only the options of "force and affection" to integrate Louisiana into the United States. Randolph and the committee dismissed force out of hand, deeming it "repugnant." Instead, the nation must win the residents of the territory over with affection and that meant accepting slavery without restrictions. The committee failed "to conceive how the United States are more interested in the internal government of that Territory than of any State in the Confederacy." Despite Randolph's earlier assurances of not admitting on

⁴⁵ Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 111-5; Ohline, "Politics and Slavery," 384-98; Claiborne to James Madison, July 12, 1804, *Official Letter Books of W.C.C. Claiborne, 1801-1816*, ed. Dunbar Rowland (Jackson, Mississippi: State Department of Archives and History, 1917), 2:245.

equal footing states that emerged from the Louisiana territory, he and the committee certainly believed that Louisiana would enjoy the same rights as the slave states. Indeed, the report argued that the decision rested with the people, making popular sovereignty the deciding factor in whether or not to allow slavery. In March 1805, federal officials relented and opened the domestic slave trade. In the next two years, Louisiana imported over 5,000 slaves from South Carolina alone. Soon after the Louisiana question was resolved, Randolph presented a petition to the House to allow slavery into specific counties of Indiana.⁴⁶

Northerners who had expected Virginians to lead Southern antislavery efforts expressed disappointment at the developments in South Carolina and Louisiana. “The gradual abolition scheme which had so able an advocate in Judge Tucker, of Virginia, was admitted as most favourable in theory, but it cannot be executed in one State, while slaves are admitted freely into another, having the same habits friendly to the slave trade,” wrote a Massachusetts editor. Randolph resented the increased Northern attacks on Virginia power and slavery. “[T]he enemies of freedom,” he argued, “are without an exception, in this country, enemies of Virginia.” Those who attack its power spoke with “the tongue of envy.” With each attack on Virginia power, Randolph’s devotion to his state’s plantation society seemed to grow. “When I cross the Potomac, I leave behind me all the scraps, shreds, and patches of politics which I collect during

⁴⁶ Randolph’s Report, January 25, 1805 in *American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States, from the First Session of the First to the Second Sessions of the Tenth Congress, Miscellaneous Papers, Vol. 1* (Washington D.C., Gales and Seaton, 1834), 1:404, 417-8; Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders’ Union*, 221; Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 113-7; *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, Being the Second Session of the Eighth Congress Begun and Held at the City of Washington, November 5, 1804, Vol. 5* (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1826), 343.

the session, and put on the plain homespun, or (as we say) the ‘Virginia cloth,’ of a planter, which is clean, whole, and comfortable, even if it be homely,” he wrote to Gallatin.⁴⁷

Randolph’s sectionalist rhetoric and attitude contradicted Jefferson’s attempt to build a national political movement. Although no less devoted to Virginia, the President treated his Northern supporters with respect and took them into his confidence. It became clear shortly after Randolph emerged as leader that Jefferson would prefer someone else to lead the House Republicans. When Jefferson’s sons-in-law John Wayles Eppes and Thomas Mann Randolph won seats in the House, they offered him a way around Randolph’s leadership. In November 1803, Eppes relayed instructions from the President during a committee hearing. Randolph saw the incident as a slight and declared his independence from such instructions, “without any consideration from which a motion comes.” But realizing his mistake, Randolph then wrote an apology to Jefferson professing his “high esteem and veneration” of the President. Jefferson requested a “more unreserved communication” with Randolph. They never conferred. Instead, Jefferson and the Republicans became more perplexed and disapproving of Randolph’s behavior. In 1804, Randolph seized on the Republican hatred of the judiciary and forced the impeachment of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase, the most despised Federalist on the court. Jefferson hated the Federalist-dominated judiciary but disapproved of the impeachment and saw Randolph’s performance as House manager during the trial as an embarrassment. “This business of removing Judges by Impeachment is a bungling way,” Jefferson confided to William Plumer. By 1805, Jefferson’s instructions and suggestions to the House were coming increasingly through Eppes. “I was surprised to find Mr. Eppes, the son-in-law of the President, in debate in

⁴⁷ *Salem Register*, February 23, 1804; JR to Littleton Waller Tazewell, June 8, 1804, Tazewell Papers, LOV; JR to Albert Gallatin, October 14, 1804, in Henry Adams, *The Life of Albert Gallatin* (Philadelphia; J.P. Lipincott & Co. 1880), 325.

the House on this subject—state the very ideas of Jefferson—the very same he mentioned to me in private conversation,” Plumer noted in early 1804. Randolph proved unsuitable for leadership as he found it difficult to handle the demands and inquiries that constantly besieged him. “As much free will as you please in everything else, but in politics I must never be a neccesstarian [sic],” he wrote to Gallatin.⁴⁸

Randolph’s stubborn refusal to acquiesce became apparent over the issue of Yazoo land. In 1795, while visiting his friend Joseph Bryan in Georgia, Randolph witnessed the unfolding Yazoo land fraud case. In the 1780s, as the new American government struggled with excessive debt and economic chaos, most states ceded their western lands, a valuable source of revenue, to the federal government. Georgia refused to cede its thirty-five million western acres, most of it acquired from Indians in the region known as Yazoo. The flourishing of cotton cultivation inspired a frenzy of land speculation. Georgia limited the land’s distribution to a thousand acres per person, but speculators used nefarious methods to accumulate as much as 50,000 acres. The Tennessee Yazoo Company, Virginia Yazoo Company, and South Carolina Yazoo Company soon appeared, each angling for more of the territory between Georgia and the Mississippi River. While the speculators struggled to gain control of the land, the Spanish government and numerous Indian tribes also claimed ownership. As President George Washington negotiated with Spain for clear title to the land, he also insisted that Georgia honor all treaties that bestowed ownership on the tribes. In 1789, however, the Georgia legislature sold twenty-five million acres to the three Yazoo companies. But each company collapsed after the state demanded payment in

⁴⁸ *Annals of Congress*, 8:1, 626; JR to Thomas Jefferson, November 30, 1803 and TJ to JR, December 1, 1803 Jefferson Papers, LC; Plumer, *Memorandum*, 101; Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 135-44; JR to Gallatin, October 14, 1804, Adams, *Life of Gallatin*, 324

hard currency. In the mid-1790s, new Yazoo companies tried to monopolize western lands. These companies included U.S. senators, governors, and federal judges among their investors. In 1795, some of these men used their inside knowledge and bribery to secure the passage of the Yazoo Act in the Georgia legislature, which granted the sale to four Yazoo companies. Every legislator who voted for the sale had invested in a Yazoo land company. In total, the companies paid \$500,000 for thirty-five million acres of land.⁴⁹

Outraged Georgians burned the offending politicians in effigy and demanded that the legislature repeal the sale. The state's most respected man, James Jackson, resigned his United States Senate seat and returned to the Georgia legislature and secured passage of the Repeal Act, which voided the sale. The repeal occurred just as the New England Mississippi Land Company bought eleven million acres from the Georgia Mississippi Company. The New England investors who bought land found that the Repeal Act prevented its resale. Investors throughout the nation now held title to land they could not sell. Randolph witnessed the hysteria and condemned the Yazoo speculators and believed that the Repeal Act represented the fulfillment of the people's will.⁵⁰

Angry investors of the New England Mississippi Land Company lobbied President Washington for federal intervention. The president believed that the Georgia legislature's repeal could "deeply affect the peace and welfare of the United States," causing conflict with Indians and Spain. In addition, Federalists argued that the Repeal Act violated the contractual obligations

⁴⁹ Daniel Feller, *The Public Lands in Jacksonian Politics* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 5-6; Roger G. Kennedy, *Jefferson's Lost Cause: Land, Farmers, Slavery and the Louisiana Purchase* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 127; C. Peter McGrath, *Yazoo: Law and Politics in the New Republic, Fletcher v. Peck* (Providence, R.I.: Brown University Press, 1966), 3-6; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:6; Farris W. Cadle, *Georgia Land Surveying History and Law* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 109.

⁵⁰ Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:181-82.; McGrath, *Yazoo*, 5-15.

of the original Yazoo Act. Although Randolph and other Republicans believed that the matter rested with the people of Georgia, Washington and the Federalists believed that the conflicting claims of the Spanish, New England investors, and Indians gave the federal government jurisdiction. Georgia, however, rebuffed efforts by the Washington and Adams administrations to settle the dispute. After Spain ceded control over the Mississippi territory in 1798, a Georgia constitutional convention, led by Jackson, reaffirmed the state's right to rescind the original Yazoo Act, but it opened the possibility of ceding the land to the federal government. Commissioners of the United States government began discussions with state officials to finally settle the Yazoo claims. Dependent on Northern support, President Jefferson wanted to solve the crisis. In 1803, he selected Madison, Gallatin, and Levi Lincoln for a commission to satisfy the claims. The commission recommended a settlement of five million acres for the predominantly Northern investors.⁵¹

In January 1804, Randolph opposed the Yazoo settlement as a violation of "the cardinal principle of my political opinions...the sovereignty of the States." The proposal, he argued, empowered the federal government and robbed the people of Georgia of their rights. Randolph suspected that the administration's Postmaster General, Gideon Granger, manipulated Jefferson and the Southerners into pushing for settlement. Granger had served as the president of the New England Mississippi Company before joining the administration, and he stood to gain considerably from the Yazoo plan. In 1805, when the House took up the question of

⁵¹ McGrath, *Yazoo*, 21-3, 27-8; Thomas Perkins Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation, 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1961), 161-2; *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 1:175; Robert V. Hayne, *The Mississippi Territory and the Southwest Frontier, 1795-1817* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 28-9; Malone, *Jefferson The First Term*, 448-55, Risjord, *Old Republicans*, 40-1.

compensation for the investors, Randolph launched a vicious attack on the “Yazoo squad,” whom he labeled as plunderers who “buy only to sell, and sell only to buy,” and now planned on robbing the federal treasury.⁵²

Although Jefferson wanted to put the matter behind the nation and the Republican party, Randolph determined to block the settlement: “This is one of the cases which, once being engaged in, I can never desert or relinquish, till I shall have exercised every energy of mind, and faculty of body I possess, in refuting so nefarious a project.” He contended that the Republicans had assumed their offices determined to end corruption in government. When even many Southern Republicans joined New England Federalists on the Yazoo issue, Randolph went on the attack. “Of what consequence is it that a man smiles in your face, holds out his hand and declares himself the advocate of those political principles to which you are also attached, when you see him acting with your adversaries upon other principles,” he asked. When the House took up debate on the matter, he “treated no man that was opposed to him with either respect or decency,” wrote Plumer. In particular, Randolph attacked the Northern “moneyed capitalist” for exploiting the honest republicans of Georgia and the South in an effort to “rob unborn millions of their birthright and inheritance.” Enemies reminded Randolph of Virginia’s inordinate power in the government, and that the president himself wanted the settlement. Randolph countered by stating that Virginia had selflessly ceded its own valuable western lands for the good of the nation while speculators engaged in corruption to acquire territory.⁵³

⁵² *Annals of Congress*, 8:1, 1109, 1118; 8:2, 1031; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:197-9; Malone, *Jefferson the First Term*, 450-1; Donald A. Macphee, “The Yazoo Controversy: The Beginning of the “Quid” Revolt,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 49 (1965), 33; Tate, *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 38-9.

⁵³ *Annals of Congress*, 8:2, 1026, 1032; 8:1, 1103, 1104, 1106-08; McGrath, *Yazoo*, 38-9; Plumer, *Memorandum*, 269-70.

Randolph furthermore ridiculed “the feeble cry of Virginian influence” and singled out New England’s Granger as the great Yazoo corrupter. Granger, Randolph contended, appeared on the House floor, where he bribed and coerced congressmen to vote for a settlement. The action violated the public trust since Granger, a member of the executive branch, had a claim for 160,000 acres of Yazoo land. Randolph characterized Granger as a “jackel” who roamed the streets of Washington corrupting honest republican men: “At night, when honest men are in bed this obscene animal prowls through the streets of this vast and desolate city, seeking whom he may tamper with.” In particular, Randolph insinuated that Granger had offered “a profitable contract for carrying the mail” to Kentucky congressman Matthew Lyon. Randolph declared Lyon, a stalwart Republican who had once been jailed under the Sedition Act, an “independent man” now fallen to corruption.⁵⁴

An infuriated Lyon attacked Randolph and the elite planters he represented. Lyon responded that slave labor allowed the Southern Republicans to enjoy a life of genteel partisanship, in which they could control and denounce those who lived by free industry. He condemned Randolph’s upbringing in the “bosom of opulence, inheriting the life services of a numerous train of the human species.” Randolph’s characterizations of land speculation as a dishonest and parasitic business particularly stoked Lyon’s ire. The Kentucky congressman insisted that Randolph and the planter gentry acquired slaves in as dishonest a fashion as any land speculator while claiming that “no man can be honest and independent unless he has inherited lands and negroes.” Lyon cast the debate as one between the honest democratic laborers of the North and the small farmers of the emerging western territories against the

⁵⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 8:2, 1106-7; Aleine Auston, *Matthew Lyon: New Man of the “Democratic Revolution,” 1749-1882* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), 139-41.

repressive and corrupt planting aristocracy of the South. Randolph's Yazoo diatribes represented an attack on "free" white people by slaveholders who did not allow "a man to vote in the people's elections, unless he is a landholder." In this regard, Lyon cast the debate as one of free men of principle versus a slave aristocracy bent on fighting any motion or idea that threatened its power. Lyon hoped that opening up the Yazoo lands would encourage western settlement and destroy the lingering power of the gentry. Randolph needed to free "the stolen men in his possession" if he planned to attack honest men, Lyon insisted.⁵⁵

Randolph fell silent for one of the few times in his career. Lyon's attacks had turned personal and nasty, particularly when he compared Randolph's face with "that of an ape or a monkey." Lyon, a consummate troublemaker who had nearly been expelled from the House for spitting in Roger Griswold's face, hoped to provoke Randolph into a duel. Randolph refused to issue a challenge to such a socially inferior man, which only validated Lyon's condemnation of the aristocratic slaveholder. But if Randolph refused to tangle with Lyon, he instigated confrontations whenever Yazoo emerged in the House or in public. During dinner one evening at a local boardinghouse, the conversation turned to the Yazoo debate. North Carolina Republican Willis Alston expressed his support for the settlement in terms that Randolph deemed unacceptable. After dinner, Randolph followed Alston to the parlor and threw wine in his eyes, then smashed the glass on his face. When a struggle ensued, Randolph tried to hit his colleague with a wine bottle, before fleeing to his room, where he locked the door and threatened to shoot anyone who entered. A local judge ordered Randolph's arrest but the charges were dropped.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 8:2, 1106, 1025, 1125; Auston, *Matthew Lyon*, 139-41.

⁵⁶ Auston, *Matthew Lyon*, 139-41; *Annals of Congress*, 8:2, 1025, 1125, 8:1, 1109; McDonald, *Presidency of Jefferson*, 88-9; Joanne Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New*

Representatives in the House watched in amazement as Randolph raged against the Northern interests in the debate. Samuel Taggart wrote that Randolph addressed the House in “robes of vengeance.” In debate, he insulted anyone who dared defend the Yazoo settlement or the interests of Northern speculators. “I never witnessed so much rage & indignation in a deliberative assembly,” Plumer observed. During one session Randolph singled out Connecticut congressman Samuel Dana for abuse and ridicule. Dana, unlike so many others in the House, refused to be intimidated. Realizing that his colleague did not fear him, Randolph threatened personal revenge. “Ah, Have you come to this—I am ready for you!” Dana responded. Randolph backed down. The spectacle of John Randolph wore on his colleagues and Northern Republicans rebelled against his leadership. “The eastern democrats seemed to forget their opposition to the federalists—they both unite as men—& they act as the Inhabitants of free, not slave, States. Randolph in vain invoked the aid of party—eastern demo’s [sic] would not rally under his banners,” Plumer wrote. Despite Randolph’s efforts, the House voted 63 to 58 to indemnify the claimants but he never ceased efforts to prevent payment to the claimants.⁵⁷

The Yazoo issue became the dividing line of Randolph’s politics, and he used it to separate the centralizers from those devoted to states’ rights. Randolph saw the issue as the best chance to fly “the banner of States rights in opposition to federal usurpation.” After 1805, he defined most of his political enemies and friends by where they had stood on the matter. “The Yazoo business is the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega of our alphabet. With that our differences began, and with that they will end,” he declared. Although he still respected

Republic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 173-5; Simeon Baldwin to wife, February 12, 1804, *Life and Letters of Simeon Baldwin*, 436-7; Sawyer, *John Randolph*, 42.

⁵⁷ Plumer, *Memorandum*, 269-70; Samuel Taggart to John W. Taylor, February 3, 1805, “Letters of Samuel Taggart,” 151-3; Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 153.

Jefferson, their political courses had begun to diverge. Foreign policy pressures from Europe and questions concerning America's continental integrity inspired President Jefferson and Secretary of State Madison to pursue a more nationalist vision, from which Yazoo distracted attention. Randolph believed that the protection of states' rights in general and the rights of the Virginia, in particular, should dominate the public business. Although Congress approved the settlement, he used the appropriation power of the Ways and Means Committee to deny payment to claimants. Speculators eventually sued until the Marshall Court declared Georgia's Repeal Act illegal in *Fletcher v. Peck* (1810) and ordered Congress to pay the claims. As the Yazoo debate consumed the House, Randolph also managed the House trial of Justice Chase. During arguments it became apparent that Randolph could not match the legal thought of Chase's attorney Luther Martin and he turned again to theatrics. "In the midst of his harangue the fellow cried like a baby with clear, sheer madness," wrote Senator Manasseh Cutler. The Senate refused to convict Chase. With the twin spectacles of Yazoo and the Chase trials, Randolph damaged his standing with the administration and many Republicans. Gallatin concluded that the humiliating spectacle of the trial and the hateful rhetoric of the Yazoo debate "destroyed his [Randolph's] influence" and believed that his popularity was "sunk forever."⁵⁸

In January 1805, Jefferson expressed his displeasure with Randolph's bizarre behavior and states' rights course in a conversation with Senator John Smith of Ohio. "He did not know what course to pursue with Mr Randolph—he would never consult him—or his friends—but

⁵⁸ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 26 and Nov. 5, 1805; JR to Nicholson, March 9, 1805, Nicholson Papers, LC; Malone, *Jefferson the First Term*, 452-4; Adams, *John Randolph*; *New York Daily Advertiser*, February 8, 1805; Magrath, *Yazoo*, 46-9; Malone, *Jefferson: the First Term*, 452-3; Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:227-8. *Annals of Congress*, 8:2, 1025, 1125, 8:1, 1109; McDonald, *Presidency of Jefferson*, 88-9; *Richmond Enquirer*, Feb. 26, 1805; Cutler, *Life, Journals and Correspondence*, 2:193.

regardless of them all pursue his own course—That some measures were he thought wild & impracticable [sic],” Smith reported. Attorney General Levi Lincoln told the President of a talented legislator in the Massachusetts State Senate, Barnabas Bidwell. When Bidwell won a seat in the Ninth Congress, Lincoln assured the President that the new congressman was “a uniform and warm and [a] supporter of the measures of the existing administration.” In December 1805, Jefferson placed the concerns of the administration in the hands of the freshman congressman from Massachusetts. The decision to place the House business in the hands of a New Englander enraged Randolph. “Mr. B[idwell] was considered the leader of the New England interest which Mr. R[andolph] cordially hated,” Jefferson’s private secretary William Burwell wrote. During Bidwell’s maiden congressional speech, Randolph conspicuously attended, dressed in leather riding breeches, blue riding coat, and his signature high-top riding boots. He sat closely and listened for fifteen minutes before he rose and made his way out of the chamber, all the time striking the palm of his hand with his ever-present whip.⁵⁹

As his second term began, Jefferson realized that Randolph’s erratic leadership would harm the administration, especially since a serious international crisis loomed. The administration struggled to maintain neutrality in the European war while bickering with Spain over details of the Louisiana Purchase. In 1805, British anger over the carrying trade led Prime Minister William Pitt to issue new Orders-in-Council to increase the search and seizure of neutral American ships. During seizures, the British navy continually impressed suspected runaway British sailors. In the decade since the war began, the British navy had seized thousands

⁵⁹ Plumer, *Memorandum*, 370; James E. Rea, “Barnabas Bidwell, A Note on the American Years,” *Ontario History* 60 (1968), 33-4; Quincy, *Life of Quincy*, 95.

of men and the number now increased. Jefferson appointed James Monroe to the Court of St. James to continue Rufus King's negotiations on maritime issues but Madison suggested a special commissioner to assist in negotiations when it became clear that the British mistrusted the strongly pro-French Monroe. Randolph had long wanted a diplomatic post, a fact well known among friends and colleagues. In 1805, Virginia congressman Christopher Clark urged the administration to appoint Randolph. While the appointment would have removed the quarrelsome congressman from the House, it would have placed the temperamental man in a foreign court. His performance during the Chase trial revealed that he was no match for skilled legal minds. President Jefferson instead appointed Baltimore Federalist William Pinkney, one of the nation's most skilled lawyers, who could build bipartisan support for a prospective treaty on impressments.⁶⁰

After the British negotiations stalled, Monroe and Pinkney visited Madrid in an attempt to secure West Florida for the United States. President Jefferson believed the territory belonged to the United States as a part of the Louisiana Purchase, a problematic assumption since the nations had never agreed on the established borders. Napoleon, however, controlled Spain and resented the American diplomatic attempts to force the cession of West Florida, especially after

⁶⁰ Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 79-83, 89-90, 105-7, 113-5; *War in Disguise; of the Frauds of the Neutral Flags* (London C. Whittingham, 1805), 4-6, 92-3.. Kathleen Burk, *Old World, New World: Great Britain and America from the Beginning* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008), 216; James Fulton Zimmerman, *Impressment of American Seamen* (New York: Columbia University and Longmans, Green & Co., 1925) 23; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 640-2; Gallatin to Jefferson, April 16, 1807, Thomas Jefferson Papers, LC. Carson, "Congress in Jefferson's Foreign Policy," 167-8; JR to Monroe, March 20, April 22, 1806, James Monroe Papers, LC; Risjord, *Old Republicans*, 53-4; JR to Garnett, June 4, 1805, Randolph Papers, UVA; Cunningham, *Process of Government*, 224-5; *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 984-5, Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 712-6; William Armistead Burwell, "'Strict Truth:.'" The Narrative of William Armistead Burwell," ed. Gerard W. Gawalt, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101 (January 1993), 120-2.

merchants from New England had run supplies to Haitians while his troops tried to subjugate the island. At the end of 1805, Napoleon declared that West Florida would remain under Spanish control. Tying with the Americans, however, he hinted that cash might change his mind. In December 1805, Jefferson's annual message urged Congress to prepare for war over Spanish Florida and a potential conflict with Great Britain.⁶¹

Randolph retained his powerful chairmanship of the Ways and Means Committee, despite the loss of the administration's favor. He approved the request for defense expenditures but urged Jefferson to find an "amicable settlement" with both Britain and France since "the best interest of the Union cry aloud for peace." Jefferson wanted peace and prepared to pay Napoleon's demands for West Florida, which he considered essential for American security. On December 21, 1805, Secretary Madison summoned Randolph and asked him to secure \$2 million for West Florida. If President Jefferson wanted money for that purpose, Randolph replied, the request should have come in the annual message. The proposal smacked of back-room deals and he rejected it. Jefferson took the proposal to Bidwell, who eventually secured the \$2 million appropriation. In response, Randolph declared the president an apostate of republicanism. "My confidence in the principles of the man entertaining those sentiments, died, never to live again,"

⁶¹ J.C.A. Stagg, *Borderlines in Borderlands: James Madison and the Spanish American Frontier, 1776-1821* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 44-7; Robinson, 406-7; Andrew McMichael, *Atlantic Loyalties: Americans in Spanish West Florida, 1785-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 55-60; Egan, *Neither Peace Nor War*, 49-50; Walter Nugent, *Habits of Empire: A History of American Expansion* (New York: Knopf, 2008), 93-5; A *Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1789-1897*, Ed. James D. Richardson (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1896), 1:371-2, 383-5; Cunningham, *Process of Government*, 224-5; *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 984-5, Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 712-6.

Randolph said. Now, he asked Congress to weigh Jefferson with the “same scale with which we measured John Adams.”⁶²

West Florida served as the impetus for Randolph’s complete break from Jefferson. Centralizing influences had corrupted Jefferson, Randolph claimed. Increasingly, Randolph believed that Madison pushed the president in that direction, but he also believed that the influence of Northern Republicans swayed the president. In January 1806, Andrew Gregg, Pennsylvania Republican, proposed a resolution to prohibit the importation of all goods manufactured in the British empire until that government curbed impressments and ship seizures. Gregg’s resolution fulfilled the Jeffersonian desire to conduct foreign affairs through commercial policy, which would hopefully avoid war. From the beginning Gregg stressed the importance of the measure to the nation and urged members to shed “geographical distinctions” and serve national economic interests, a rebuke of both Southern Republicans who proposed no change in policy and New England Republicans who called for war with Great Britain. Randolph saw the Northern Republican influence behind the measure that now manipulated Jefferson.⁶³

On March 5, 1806, Randolph attacked Gregg’s resolution as nothing more than “incipient war measures.” In what William Plumer described as “a bitter, severe and eloquent phillipic,” Randolph accused Northern merchants of sacrificing Southern interests to protect the carrying trade. This “fungus of war” fed on the misery caused by Napoleon’s megalomania. “I, for one,

⁶² *Annals of Congress*, 9:2, 1117-8; 9:1, 947; Wendelken, “Rhetoric of Randolph,” 116; *Richmond Enquirer*, April 11 and August 15, 1806; Malone, *Jefferson the Second Term*, 74-5; Alexander DeConde, *The Affair of Louisiana* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1976), 232-4; *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 984-5.

⁶³ *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 413, 501, 539, 543, 555-574, 596-605; Dinah Mayo-Bobee, “‘Something Energetic and Spirited:’ Massachusetts Federalists, Rational Politics, and Political Economy in the Age of Jefferson, 1805-1815,” (PhD Diss., University of Massachusetts Amherst, 2007), 126; Malone, *Jefferson the Second Term*, 104-5; Carson, “Congress and Jefferson’s Foreign Policy,” 167-8.

will not mortgage my property and my liberty, to carry on this trade,” he contended. In his comments, Randolph urged Southern solidarity against the power of Northern economic interests and the federal government. He urged “inhabitants of that Southern country” and its “simple, agricultural people” who wanted “to travel in peace to market with the produce of their labor” to oppose Gregg’s resolution.⁶⁴

The debate over non-importation revealed a transformation in Randolph’s vision of the world. Great Britain, he now argued, represented “the sole bulwark against universal dominion.” The “noble and generous” sentiments of the French Revolution disappeared under Napoleon’s rule. Now Republicans wanted to aid Napoleon by striking at the British economy and eventually sparking war. If the United States could defeat Great Britain’s navy, and he doubted that it could, the “iron sceptre of the ocean will pass into his hands who wears the iron crown of the land.” While House Republicans argued that Gregg’s resolution aimed at securing economic independence from England, Randolph insisted that it represented a measure to support the expansionist impulse of the administration, which would backfire. An ascendant Napoleon would then invade America and stoke rebellion in Louisiana, with “its discontented and repining [sic] people, whose language, manners, and religion, all incline them to the invader.” Randolph urged Republicans to remain committed to “the true territory of the United States, not your new fangled country over the Mississippi, but the good old United States...the old thirteen states.” The cultural relationship between the coastal states and Great Britain became important to Randolph, the proud planter who idealized the connections between the Virginia gentry and its

⁶⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 556, 557, 560-2, 580, 618; Spivak, *Jefferson’s English Crisis*, 41; Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 709; Risjord, *Old Republicans*, 54-7; *Richmond Enquirer*, November 18, 1805; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:250-1; Malone, *Jefferson the Second Term*, 104-5; *Vermont Gazette*, March 24, 1806. JR to Garnett, May 11, 1806, Randolph Papers, UVA.

British antecedents. Indeed, he now disavowed the addition of Louisiana. “The purchase was the greatest curse that ever befell us,” he argued. Randolph’s attacks led the way for the defeat of Gregg’s resolution. Although Jefferson never really supported the measure, he now pressed for the passage of Joseph Nicholson’s alternative non-importation bill, which targeted specific non-essential items that other nations could easily supply and would not be implemented for nine months. In perverse delight, Randolph ridiculed the Northern Republicans for producing a weak bill that he compared to “chicken broth.”⁶⁵

During the debate, Randolph leveled unprecedented and vicious attacks on the administration and particularly Madison. “The stenographer cannot relate them,” Plumer insisted. News of his remarks puzzled the President. “Randolph’s late conduct is very astonishing, and has given me much uneasiness,” Jefferson told Plumer. “I do not know what he [Randolph] means.” Indeed, Samuel Taggart noted how Randolph’s attitude and demeanor toward the president changed as he spoke for several hours at a time. “I see more and more evidence daily of a change in Randolph’s conduct and sentiments,” he wrote. Randolph now believed Jefferson and Madison were sacrificing republican government and Southern interests to spark a conflict with Great Britain for the interests of New England merchants. Once at war, the administration would seize power for the federal government, just as Republicans once accused Federalists of producing the French war scare. In the end, only Napoleon would benefit. Some reported that Randolph urged Republicans to travel to Braintree, Massachusetts, and apologize to John Adams for opposing his war measures against France. Federalists watched with glee as Randolph attacked the Northern Republicans who supported the president. “I find

⁶⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 555-70, 644, 928; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 644; *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 851; Malone, *Jefferson the Second Term*, 110-1; Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 171, 709; Spivak, *Jefferson’s English Crisis*, 45-6.

that federal members have every day listened to John Randolph with unmixed pleasure, in opposition to the mean dastardly democrats of N. England!,” wrote Timothy Pickering. Randolph carried a small group of Southern Republicans with him into opposition to the administration, but his old friend Joseph Bryan warned Randolph that his recent remarks meant he had “passed the Rubicon.”⁶⁶

Many Southerners shared Randolph’s suspicions of the influences on Jefferson. The *Richmond Enquirer* lionized Randolph for standing against “the principal officers of the government.” The Georgia legislature passed resolutions commending his “virtuous and manly opposition” to the Yazoo settlement. “The administration may do what it pleases. It favors federal principles,” Randolph wrote. The party needed purification, which meant a return to true Southern domination. “The old republican party is ruined past redemption. New men and new maxims are [the] order of the day.” The followers, dubbed Old Republicans or Quids, included Nathaniel Macon, James Mercer Garnett, Richard Stanford, and Joseph Bryan—all Southern planters who wanted to prevent the election of Madison to the presidency. For months, Randolph courted James Monroe as a candidate, especially after realizing that Jefferson’s decision to send Pinkney to assist in the negotiation with England had angered the diplomat. “We may differ on the subject of the present administration, all parties here (I speak of the republicans) unite in support of Monroe for president,” Randolph informed Nicholson. Jefferson’s government “stands aloof from its tried friends whilst it hugs to its bosom men of the most equivocal character.” The Old Republicans led a mutiny of the President’s supporters, aggravated by

⁶⁶ Plumer, *Memorandum*, 444, 471; Samuel Taggart to John W. Taylor, February 10, 1806, “Letters of Samuel Taggart,” 179; Timothy Pickering to Rufus King, January 13, 1806, *The Life and Correspondence of Rufus King, Comprising His Letters, Private and Official His Public Documents and His Speeches: 1801-1806*, ed. Charles R. King (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1897), 4: 476.

Randolph's barrage of accusations that the administration conducted policy in secret. Jefferson resented the attacks, especially the charges of secrecy in his administration. "[W]e know that we shall hear the cant of backstairs' councilors. But we never heard this while the declaimer was himself a backstairs' man, as he calls it," Jefferson wrote to Bidwell. Aware of Randolph's maneuvering, Jefferson warned Monroe, "You must not commit yourself to him."⁶⁷

When the House convened for the second session of the Ninth Congress in December 1806, Willis Alston wanted to separate Randolph from his source of power—the Ways and Means Committee. Alston proposed a change of House rules to removed the power of appointing committees from the Speaker and instead allow their selection by ballot. Randolph's unpopularity would surely exclude him from the chairmanship if not the committee itself. Macon and Joseph Clay prevented the effort, but Randolph did not attend the opening session. Speaker Macon had long refused to appoint members who were not present to committees and now declined to name Randolph to the Ways and Means Committee. When Randolph appeared thirty minutes after the decision, he became convinced Jefferson had engineered the maneuver. Soon, James Mercer Garnett, a close friend and ally of Randolph, resigned his seat on Ways and Means and Macon appointed Randolph in his place. Four days later, the committee informed the Speaker that it had selected Randolph as chairman. Macon found himself torn as he tried to remain loyal to both Randolph and Jefferson. After this episode, many whispered that, indeed,

⁶⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, Nov. 5, 1805, *National Intelligencer*, December 16, 1807; Plumer, *Memorandum*, 608; JR to George Hay, January 3, 1806, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Monroe, Sept. 16, 1806, Monroe Papers, LC; JR to Edward Dillon, 1806, John Randolph Letters, Virginia Historical Society; JR to Joseph Nicholson, April 12, 1805, Nicholson Papers, LC Risjord, *The Old Republicans*, 62-6, 73-7; JR to Joseph Nicholson, June 24, 1806, Nicholson Papers, LC; Ammon, *James Monroe*, 245; Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline*, 121-2; Tate, *Conservatism and Southern Intellectuals*, 16-7; Abernathy, *South in the New Nation*, 313-4; JR to William Branch Giles, February 12, 1806, Boston Public Library; TJ to Barnabas Bidwell, July 5, 1806 quoted in Lacy, "Jefferson and Congress," 171.

Randolph controlled the Speaker. “Some enemy, whom we know not, is sowing tare among us,” Jefferson wrote to Macon. Each man knew precisely who sowed dissension and know that Randolph used Macon’s intense devotion to the slaveholding South as leverage.⁶⁸

Along with Bidwell, Thomas Mann Randolph and John Wayles Eppes tried to counter Randolph’s effort to divide the Republican party. Each man stood fast against intimidation and returned his attacks during debate. In one exchange, Thomas Mann Randolph accused him of using language typically “inadmissible in society” on the floor of the “sacred” House, and the two Virginians barely avoided a duel. The President’s supporters maneuvered to unseat Randolph in the Virginia elections, even trying to recruit his old benefactor, Creed Taylor, to run against him. “I am hunted down with the whole Yazoo pack at my throat,” Randolph remarked. The freeholders of Randolph’s district never wavered in their support and continued to reelect him. Many congressmen surely agreed when Thomas Mann Randolph declared John Randolph “bankrupt as a political statesman.” Across the nation, Jefferson’s supporters splintered, but Randolph’s defection was the most indicative of rift among Southern slaveholders. “There are now in the United States—Yazoo, Jefferson, Randolph, Butler, Lyon, Elliot, McKean, Duane, Lewis, and Clinton Republicanisms,” wrote the *Trenton Federalist*.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 1114-5; Long, “Jefferson and Congress,” 104-5; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:307-8; Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 175-80; TJ to Nathaniel Macon, March 26, 1806, Thomas Jefferson Papers, LC.

⁶⁹ JR to Nicholson, April 30, 1805, Nicholson Papers, LC; *Annals of Congress*, 8:2, 1025; Macon to Nicholson, April 4, 1806, Nicholson papers, LC; Thomas Mann Randolph quote from *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 1104; *Richmond Enquirer*, June 17, 1806; Plumer, *Memorandum*, 490-1; JR to Nicholson, March 4, 1804, Nicholson Papers, LC; Malone, *Jefferson the Second Term*, 72-3, 128; William H. Gaines, Jr. *Thomas Mann Randolph: Jefferson’s Son-in-Law* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 64-5; JR to Edward Dillon, 1806, John Randolph Letters. Virginia Historical Society; JR to Joseph Nicholson, April 12, 1805, Nicholson Papers, LC; Michael J. Dubin, *United States Congressional Elections, 1788-1997: The Official Results of the Elections of the 1st through 105th Congress* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland &

In February 1806, New Jersey Quaker James Sloan again raised the idea of duties on imported slaves. Immediately, Randolph urged the House to move on, “with the view of getting rid of this business.” Barnabas Bidwell entered the debate, however, and urged his colleagues to prepare legislation for the abolition of the foreign slave trade on the first day of 1808, so “that there may be no room for disappointment or surprise, and that the world may know the policy we mean to pursue.” Recognizing that most House members did not want to deal with the “delicate and irritating subject” of slavery, Bidwell believed it absolutely vital that Congress quickly pass a bill abolishing the trade and move on. Failure to abolish the trade “will weaken us as a nation,” Bidwell argued. Although his remarks went unrecorded, Randolph naturally opposed the measure. The sight of Jefferson’s new floor leader from Massachusetts advocating antislavery measures fulfilled his worst fears. President Jefferson had grown largely ambiguous about slavery in public policy, but he never disavowed the increasingly resolute antislavery sentiments that emerged from Northern Republicans. In December 1806, he encouraged Congress to move quickly and abolish the trade at the earliest legal date, the first time an American president used his office to encourage a major restriction of slavery. Jefferson wanted to “withdraw the citizens of the United States from all further participation in those violations of human rights which have been so long continued on the unoffending inhabitants of Africa, and which the morality, the reputation, and the best interests of our country, have long been eager to proscribe.” Jefferson’s urgency reflected his lingering commitment to natural rights ideology.⁷⁰

Company Publishers, 1998), 32; *Trenton Federalist*, September 9. 1805; Malone, *Jefferson the Second Term*, 72-3.

⁷⁰ Mason, *Slavery and Politics*, 32; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 136-7; Ohline, “Politics and Slavery,”; “Slavery Overshadowed: Congress Debates Prohibiting the Atlantic

A special House committee chaired by Peter Early of Georgia produced a bill that outlawed the foreign slave trade and instructed the federal government to sell any slaves captured during enforcement of the ban. Having the federal government participate in the auctioning of slaves repulsed James Sloan, who offered an amendment that would mandate freedom to slaves captured during enforcement. But Nathaniel Macon argued that such a plan would force unwanted blacks on both the North and South. Freeing foreign slaves into the nation represented “an evil far greater than slavery itself,” Early argued. Growing fear of free-black inhabitants made that prospect unthinkable in the South. The House defeated Sloan’s proposal, but the issue unified Northerners who would never condone the federal government auctioning slaves. Bidwell offered an amendment that gave captured slaves to the respective states, thereby absolving the federal government of responsibility. The House agreed to the proposal but the debate had stirred considerable hostility. Nearly everyone agreed that the trade should end, but Southerners remained suspicious of the federal government exercising any regulatory power over slavery. “I can scarcely recollect an instance in which members seem so generally to agree in the principles of a bill, and yet differ so widely as to its details,” remarked Connecticut congressman Benjamin Tallmadge.⁷¹

Northern Federalists and Republicans joined together to condemn slavery as an evil, startling many Southerners. Horrified planters watched as John Similie proposed the death penalty for slave traders caught violating the ban. “A large majority of people in the Southern states do not consider slavery as even an evil,” Early informed his colleagues. After a contentious debate, Southerners succeeded in striking the death penalty from the bill. With the

Slave trade to the United States, 1806-1807,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, (Spring 2000), 59-81; *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 434-9; Richardson, *Compilation*, 1:408.

⁷¹ *Annals of Congress*, 9:2, 174, 232, 484, 626; Mason, “Slavery Overshadowed,” 62-5.

debate nearly over, Early won support for an amendment excepting coastal slave trade from the ban. On February 13, 1807, the House outlawed the foreign slave trade in a roll call vote, 113 to 5. Randolph did not vote.⁷²

The Senate demanded changes to the bill, which stirred Randolph from his silence. The Senate believed that Early's exemption of the coastal trade would encourage smuggling and render the entire ban powerless. In response, the Senate proposed ending the coastal slave trade altogether, forbidding any ships to carry slaves state to state. On February 26, 1807, an enraged Randolph finally addressed the House. Restricting slave trading along the coast denied the slaveholders their personal property rights and amounted to federal interference with slavery. The South would regret the day it granted such power to the central government as it would "blow up the Constitution in ruins," he argued. "It might be made the pretext of universal emancipation." "The next step would be to forbid the slaveholder himself going from one State to another." Randolph refused to consider any compromises and threatened disunion: "If ever the time of disunion between the States should arrive, the line of severance would be between the slaveholding and the non-slaveholding States," he proclaimed. The idea of Union between such disparate people now seemed tragically flawed to him. Northern Republicans, Randolph argued, would allow Southerners to die if the slaves ever revolted. With the hostility of the North assumed, Randolph just asked his colleagues to "remain neutral" and "not erect themselves into an abolition society." For the first time in public debate, Randolph defended the holding of slaves, with no rhetorical pretensions toward antislavery feelings. He considered it "no imputation to be a slaveholder, more than to be born in a particular country." And he advised his fellow Southerners that if the federal government continued to violate their constitutional right to

⁷² *Annals of Congress*, 9:2, 238, 486-7, 626; Robinson, *Structure of Slavery*, 329-35.

slavery, “let us secede, and go home.” Similie responded that those Southerners who “do not like the Union, let them say so—in the name of God let them go.” The Senate relented and restored coastal trade, with restrictions, but Randolph tried to stir his fellow Southerners to oppose it. Congress passed the bill but not before Randolph threatened open defiance of the foreign slave trade ban. When all else failed, he threatened to confront Jefferson over the bill and pressure him to veto it. In the end, however, he made no such appeal. Jefferson signed the bill and the U.S. participation in the foreign slave trade legally ended.⁷³

Randolph’s vehement opposition to abolishing the foreign slave trade paralleled the changing attitudes of Virginians towards slavery. While men such as Madison and Tucker once believed that a spirit of republicanism would inspire emancipation, the opposite had occurred. Instead, the state became more dedicated to the ideas of racial differences and the rights of property. Indeed, just as Randolph opposed the federal ban on the slave trade, St. George Tucker made racial distinction a critical part of Virginia law. In the case of *Hudgins v. Wright*, Judge George Wythe declared that the Virginia Declaration of Rights applied to all Virginians, including slaves. The case made it before Tucker, who sat on the Virginia Court of Appeals. If Tucker reaffirmed Wythe’s decision a legal basis for conscription could be established. Instead, he argued that racial distinctions made slavery inevitable. Furthermore, these distinctions—of skin, hair, and nose—placed the “burthen of proof” of freedom on any black person. In 1803, the Virginia legislature defeated by 90 to 61 a bill that would banish slaves from the state if they received their freedom. Later it passed legislation that forced slaves freed after May 1, 1806, to leave the Old Dominion. The spirit that inspired Tucker’s plan of gradual emancipation and

⁷³ *Annals of Congress*, 9:2, 528, 626-7; JR to Nicholson, Feb. 12, 1807, Nicholson Papers, LC; Robinson, *Structure*, 334-5; Mason, “Slavery Overshadowed,” 70-1; *The Phenix* (Providence, R.I.), March 14, 1807.

Richard Randolph's will had largely passed away. John Randolph, who considered himself an antislavery man, now actively and publicly worked to protect slavery from interference and protect the slaveholders' right to hold slaves.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Finkelman, "Dragon Tucker Could Not Slay," 1215-7; Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 121-9.

Chapter 5: “Outcast of the World:” Sectionalism and Nationalism in John Randolph’s War of 1812

In December 1811, a new generation of congressmen in the House of Representatives urged President James Madison to declare war against Great Britain. The congressional leadership believed Britain’s persistent attacks on maritime rights represented an attempt to subjugate the former colonies. The new House speaker Henry Clay argued that choosing peace would sacrifice the “nation’s best treasure—honor!” Looking on with disdain, John Randolph condemned the incessant chant for war. A dozen years earlier, Randolph had arrived in the House devoted to the idea that war and republicanism were incompatible. The nation should always work toward peace and choose war only when an enemy directly attacked, Randolph thought. For months, he walked the House floor with his pack of dogs at his side while he pleaded with his colleagues to make peace with England. The nation was ill prepared for the military, economic, and social upheaval caused by war, particularly the type of devastating war waged in the Napoleonic conflicts. Those who challenged Randolph risked a verbal lashing, a challenge on the field of honor, or even a physical beating. In the *Richmond Enquirer*, Thomas Ritchie labeled him a “nuisance and a curse.” In the House, Republicans elected the first-term congressman Clay to the speakership after he promised to control Randolph’s bizarre behavior and stop his intimidation of colleagues. In the midst of his antics, however, Randolph offered a sobering message to fellow Southerners. This war of honor, he argued, was instead a war of expansion. Freshmen John C. Calhoun and Felix Grundy had argued that the United States could easily seize Canada and deny the British empire into North America colonies. In their demand for conquests, Randolph contended, these “war hawks” would sacrifice the Union, the nation’s basic means of protecting liberty: “You are laying the foundation for secession from the Union—

on the north, by the possession of Canada, and on the borders of the Ohio, for another division. The Ohio has been made the line between the slaveholding States and those which hold no slaves.” Most importantly, he reminded his Southern colleagues that an imperialistic war would aggravate sectional “jealousies and animosities” and ultimately unleash the enemy in their midst—their slaves.¹

Randolph’s effort to protect slavery, Virginia planters, and the South put him at direct odds with the foreign policy of President Jefferson and eventually President Madison. The problem of American maritime rights plagued both presidents as the nation became caught up in the conflict between France and Britain. While both nations seized American merchant ships, Great Britain’s continual impressments of sailors forced both presidents to focus their attention on that nation. Randolph opposed conflict with Great Britain, which he believed would result in economic chaos and physical destruction in the United States. Yet, as Randolph became more reflective of his place in the planter gentry of Virginia, he came to see a potential Anglo-American war as a civil war. From 1806 until 1812, Randolph became the most stubborn and persistent critic of Republican foreign policy and the growing desire of American policymakers to use war to settle the conflict with Great Britain. While he often framed his opposition in the classical republican opposition to armies and war, he revealed to James Monroe that he feared

¹ JR to Nicholson, March 19, 1811, Nicholson Papers, LC; *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 712; “Amendment to, and Speech on, the Bill to Raise and Additional Military Force,” December 31, 1811, *The Papers of Henry Clay: The Rising Statesman, 1797-1814* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), 1:606; Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: Norton, 1991), 79; Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Richard Buel, Jr., *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle Over the War of 1813 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987); J.C.A. Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War: Politics, Diplomacy, and Warfare in the Early American Republic 1783-1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

that war would make them all slaves. He believed it was especially important that “the Southern States” confront this “mournful truth.” He insisted however that the problem of foreign affairs “equally concerns the whole Union.” Although he would threaten disunion just months later in the debate over the foreign slave trade, Randolph remained committed to the Union. What seemed like a contradiction made sense to Randolph. The Union should survive only if it protected slavery, Virginia, and the South.²

During his first presidential term, Thomas Jefferson and his Secretary of State, James Madison, conducted a foreign policy of true republican vision. In addition to carrying out military reduction, the administration eased tensions with France, secured the purchase of Louisiana and New Orleans, and kept European powers off the American continent. Jefferson adhered to republican ideology, even when war became necessary. For instance, when the United States government refused to pay tribute to the African Ottoman state of Tunis, the administration found itself at war. The navy conducted the conflict in a limited capacity, using few resources and touching few non-combatants. Republican purists, such as Albert Gallatin and Randolph, objected to the cost of the war, fearing it would derail the Republicans’ economic goals. “This tripolitan war is utterly incompatible with the repeal of the internal taxes and the payment of the debt,” Randolph wrote to his stepfather. Regardless of Randolph’s concerns, America’s victory in the Tripolitan War seemed to demonstrate the application of republicanism in foreign affairs.³

² JR to James Monroe, September 16, 1806, *The Writings of James Monroe, 1803-1806*, ed. Stanislaus Murray Hamilton (New York: AMS Press, 1969), 4:487-8.

³ Malone, *Jefferson the First Term*, 97-8; Frank Lambert, *The Barbary Wars: American Independence in the Atlantic World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), 125-8, 138; Gary J.

Randolph remained largely uninvolved in foreign matters during Jefferson's first term because the House of Representatives played a limited role in matters of diplomacy. Like many other Americans, Randolph expressed growing disillusionment with Napoleon when his imperialist designs became clear. As he soured on France, his affection for the British grew. Randolph embraced life as a planter and began to idealize the ethnic and cultural links between Great Britain and the colonists who settled the United States and Virginia. His changing attitude explains his warm friendship with Massachusetts Federalist Josiah Quincy, who likewise displayed a deep Anglophilia, primarily a love of British aristocratic traditions. The relationship between the United States and Great Britain was natural, and emanated from important cultural bonds. He came to idolize the Anglo-Saxon past of his ancestors, which shaped his political views. While Jefferson appreciated the cultural power of his own Anglo-Saxon heritage, he envisioned a nation where ethnic differences would be diminished as people moved westward.⁴

Randolph found such ideas contemptuous and believed that the administration should find a diplomatic solution to problems with Great Britain. In 1806, James Monroe, minister to Great Britain, and William Pinkney continued their quest to secure a treaty with Great Britain

Ohlis, "Roots of Tradition: Amphibious Warfare in the Early American Republic," (PhD Diss., Texas Christian University, 2008), 152; JR to SGT, January 15, 1802, Randolph Papers, Randolph College, Lynchburg, Virginia; Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 397-8; Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964); Doron S. Ben-Atar, *The Origins of Jeffersonian Commercial Policy and Diplomacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993).

⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 9:1, 560-2; JR to Nicholson, February 15, 1807, Nicholson Papers, LC; Dawidoff, *Education of John Randolph*, 115-6, 218-20; JR to Nicholson, January 2, 1807, Nicholson Papers, LC; Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by J.C.D. Clark (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 388; Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins' War: Religion, Politics, and the Triumph of Anglo-America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 334; Edmund Quincy, *The Life of Josiah Quincy of Massachusetts* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1867), 76; Arthur Scherr, *Thomas Jefferson's Haitian Policies: Myth and Realities* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 503-4

that would end the ship seizures and impressment. The situation became urgent when Napoleon's Berlin Decree inaugurated the Continental System, which prevented American ships from unloading cargo in European ports. The Continental System and British Orders-in-Council caught American merchants, farmers, and manufacturers in an economic pincer. The diplomatic situation intruded on the honest labor of the planter, Randolph believed. On his plantation, Randolph continued to make considerable profit and he wanted nothing to interrupt that. His overseer assured him that the plantation would "make more tobacco than ever." The plantation would prosper "as long as the right of property and of personal liberty remains untouched ([to] how long that will be is more than I can tell.)" Randolph feared that any involvement in the European war would harm the tobacco market. As pressure from France and Great Britain increased, Randolph began to fear for his own prosperity.⁵

Monroe and Pinkney extracted important concessions from Great Britain during treaty negotiations. In the proposed Monroe-Pinkney Treaty, England accepted the carrying trade, narrowed the definition of contraband, reduced shipping duties in British ports, and promised not to disturb American trade within five miles of the Atlantic coast. The failure to include a clause on impressments angered Jefferson, although the British government offered private assurances of curtailment of the practice. Furthermore, Britain insisted that the United States must reject French commercial restrictions. Jefferson believed such a measure would, in effect, make the United States an ally of Great Britain and would lead to war with France. In early 1807, President Jefferson refused to submit the Monroe-Pinkney treaty to the Senate, after Northern merchants advised against it. Remembering the public condemnation of Jay's Treaty, the

⁵ JR to Joseph Scott, November 9, 1806 and December 12, 1806, Brock Collection, Huntington Library; Gannon, "Calculating the Value of Union;" Schoen, *Fragile Fabric of Union*, 72

administration refused to release its details. The president was convinced that the public debate over non-importation proved “a formidable obstacle to the negotiation.” The developments convinced Randolph that Napoleon would never allow Jefferson to accept any treaty and that the French emperor now seemed unstoppable: “Nothing is left for Europe but to receive the law of the conquerer.”⁶

Randolph believed that Jefferson and Madison truly wanted a war with Great Britain and that the rejection of the treaty had produced a “war trap.” More than any time since 1798, the nation appeared close to war and Randolph believed the consequences would prove catastrophic. Randolph insisted that if President Jefferson failed at pushing the nation into war, President Madison would succeed. In his disillusionment, He was “determined not to have a Yazoo President,” and encouraged Monroe to stand as a candidate for president in 1808. “What, my dear Sir, is to enable us to resist the influence necessarily attached to a great warlike apparatus, whether naval or military it is the reaction upon our political institutions that I dread,” he wrote to Monroe. If Napoleon’s war reached the United States, the republican government would fall to tyranny and the people would become “wholly slave.” If Jefferson wanted war, Great Britain would have to attack, Randolph insisted.⁷

On June 22, 1807, Britain provoked the Americans in Chesapeake Bay when the fifty-gun warship H.M.S. *Leopard* stopped the American frigate U.S.S. *Chesapeake* in search of

⁶ Donald R. Hickey, “The Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806: A Reassessment,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (January 1987), 65-88; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 14-6; Ammon, *James Monroe*, ch. 14; Spivak, *Jefferson’s English Crisis*, 60-68; JR to Nicholson, January 2, 1807, February 15, 1807, Nicholson Papers, LC; JR to George Hay, January 3, 1807, Randolph Papers, UVA; Egan, *Neither War Nor Peace*, 71-2.

⁷ JR to James Monroe, September 16, 1806, *The Writings of James Monroe*, 4:487-8.

runaway British sailors. The captain of the *Chesapeake*, James Barron, refused British efforts to search the American ship. The *Leopard* fired on the American vessel, killing three and injuring eighteen. The administration demanded that the British government formally apologize, pay reparations for the attack, and end impressment. When Britain refused, war hysteria swept Virginia and the nation. On July 2, President Jefferson recalled American ships and ordered British vessels to leave United States ports. Three days later, the President proposed the raising of 100,000 men for the militias. Federalists and Republicans laid aside their party differences and demanded satisfaction from Great Britain. The New York *Commercial Advertiser* reported that most of the nation was expressing outrage, “which ought not be suppressed.” In Richmond, where Randolph served as jury foreman in the Aaron Burr trial, he watched as Virginians called for war against Great Britain. Mobs in Norfolk demanded a military response to the British attack. Governor William Cabell reinforced Virginia’s defenses as rumors spread of a potential attack on Norfolk. When Jefferson asked Cabell to call up the militia, Virginians responded in droves. A young generation of men talked openly about going to war for the sake of honor. In Kentucky, Henry Clay proclaimed “peace a curse.”⁸

The attack on the *Chesapeake* outraged Randolph, but talk of war made him suspicious. “I shall not be the less disposed to withdraw her from it [war] or carry her through with honor,” he wrote. By August, Americans thirsted for revenge. Joseph Nicholson informed Albert Gallatin

⁸ Spencer C. Tucker and Frank T. Reuter, *Injured Honor: The Chesapeake-Leopard Affair, June 22, 1807* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1996), ch. 1; R.B. Bernstein, *Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 166; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 648-9; Silverstone, *Divided Union*, 77-8; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, June 29, 1807; Edwin M. Gaines, “The Chesapeake Affair: Virginians Mobilize to Defend National Honor,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 64 (April 1956), 134-6; *Kentucky Gazette and General Advertiser*, July 28, 1807; Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 946-8; Robert E. Cray Jr., “Remembering the USS Chesapeake: The Politics of Maritime Death and Impressment,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 25 (Fall 2005), 445-6.

that “all distinctions of Federalism and democracy vanished. The people are ready to submit to any deprivation.” Jefferson had turned cautious, in part, because drastic military cuts made during his first term left the nation unprepared. He postponed calling Congress into session and hoped that national sentiment would create a groundswell for war and force passage of the appropriate military measures. Randolph refused to lose sight of how the nation had arrived at this point. “I have tried to avert from my country a war which I foresaw must succeed [from] the follies of 1805-6,” he wrote. He believed Jefferson’s rejection of the Monroe-Pinkney treaty created a war-like atmosphere. When Congress met in October 1807, the Chesapeake “sensation” had calmed and Randolph again reiterated his belief that the United States needed to enjoy “peace with all of the world.” If the nation capitulated to an Anglo-American war, he believed, the people would soon have “a French alliance around our necks.”⁹

In late October, Congress convened in a cautious and sober mood, much to the disappointment of Jefferson. “The members, as far as I can judge [,] are extremely disposed for peace,” He wrote to Thomas Mann Randolph. The President wanted to avoid a repetition of the previous sessions, when John Randolph used his power as chairman of the Ways and Means Committee to thwart important measures. Many were therefore shocked when Nathaniel Macon failed to appear at the first session and stand for election as Speaker of the House. Indeed, many believed Jefferson asked Macon to forego the election. An apoplectic Randolph failed to delay the election, and Republicans selected Joseph Varnum of Massachusetts. In one of his first decisions, Speaker Varnum chose George Washington Campbell of Tennessee as the new

⁹ Adams, *John Randolph*, 147-9; Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 950; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 148-9; JR to Nicholson, June 25, 1807, Nicholson Papers, LC; JR to Nicholson, June 21, 1807, Nicholson Papers, LC; JR to Thomas Newton, August 23, 1807, William Cabell Bruce Collection, LOV; JR to Garnett, August, 13, 1807, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Joseph Bryan, March 29, 1808, Tucker Coalter Family Letters, Duke University.

chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Randolph had lost his greatest source of power. Gallatin remained the only man of the administration who believed the decision wrong. “It was improper as related to the public business, and will give me additional work,” Gallatin wrote.¹⁰

With Randolph out of the way, the administration pushed Congress to build gunboats and improve fortifications in a program of defense preparation. In turn, Randolph taunted the administration for not capitalizing on the war fever during the summer. He insisted that he would have voted for war measures in the aftermath of the *Leopard*'s attack but the passage of time allowed him to approach the issue with a clear head. In fact, Randolph would probably have voted against the administration, since he exhibited suspicions of the war talk for most of the summer. He used his indecisiveness and perversity in politics to mock Jefferson. Randolph now urged the administration to find a diplomatic solution to the *Chesapeake* issue. Britain had expressed repentance at the incident but resisted any substantive changes in policy. Instead, it remained dedicated to preventing the United States from assisting France. On November 11, Britain issued a new Order-in-Council that banned all trade with the French. In December, Napoleon responded with the Milan Decree, which returned the ban in kind. The two acts made neutral trade nearly impossible for America. Randolph floated the idea of a full-scale non-importation act, banning American trade with all nations, but Jefferson feared that the nation would never “abide by all its hardships.” Surely, such a drastic economic policy “will end in war,” Jefferson wrote.¹¹

¹⁰ Lacy, “Jefferson and Congress,” 188; Gallatin to wife, October 30, 1807 in Adams, *Life of Gallatin*, 363-4.

¹¹ Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph, October 26, 1807, Thomas Jefferson Papers, LC; Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis*, 98-9, 102-5; Scott A. Silverstone, *Divided Union: The Politics of War in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 75-6; *Annals of Congress*, 10: 1, 849, 850; Schoen, *Fragile Fabric*, 74; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 648-

On December 22, Congress passed the Embargo Act without congressional debate. Despite his misgivings, Jefferson and his congressional leaders had hammered out its details in secrecy and passed it within four days. Although Randolph had advocated such an embargo a month earlier, he now rejected Jefferson's proposal, in a nakedly political decision. As the election approached, Randolph wanted more than anything to hand Jefferson a defeat, which he hoped would damage James Madison's presidential chances. He argued that the administration designed the plan to "lead to immediate war" with Great Britain, forcing the United States to assist Napoleon, he asked. "What indeed could Buonaparte require more from us than a non-importation and non-exportation?" And behind the move he saw the hand of James Madison.¹²

Indeed, Madison believed that the United States could best solve its diplomatic problems through commercial policy and convinced Jefferson to try the embargo. In early December, Gallatin had opposed the measure as potentially disastrous. "In every point of view, privations, suffering, revenue, effect on the enemy, politics at home, etc., I prefer war to a permanent embargo," he argued. On the other hand, the provincial Madison believed that banning all imports would restore the nation to its republican roots. In a series of anonymous letters to the *National Intelligencer*, the Secretary of State laid out his hopes: "It [the embargo] forces frugality...It fosters application of labor, which contributes to our internal sufficiency for our

9; Clifford Egan, *Neither Peace Nor War*, 73; Peter P. Hill, *Napoleon's Troublesome American: Franco-American Relations, 1804-1815* (Washington, D.C., 2005), 30-1; Elizabeth R. Varon, *Disunion! The Coming of the Civil War, 1789-1859* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), McDonald, *States' Rights and Union* and Daniel Corbett Wewers, "The Specter of Disunion in the Early American Republic, 1783-1815," (PhD Diss., Harvard University, 2008).

¹² *United States Statutes at Large*, 10th Congress 1st Session, 451-2. JR to Joseph Nicholson, December 24, 1807, Nicholson Papers, LC; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:319; JR to Littleton Waller Tazewell, December 24, 1807, Tazewell Papers, LOV. Malone, *Jefferson the Second Term*, 485-6; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 651-2; Ketcham, *James Madison*, 456-7.

wants. It will extend those household manufactures, which are particularly adapted to the present stage of our society.” Deprivations would strengthen citizens’ resolve and renew American character. The austerity of republican society would protect the nation from its shortages and the opulent British empire would suffer without American raw materials. “We shall be deprived of market of our superfluities. They will feel the want of necessities,” Madison wrote. A less idealistic Jefferson chose the embargo, in part, to prepare the nation for war.¹³

The embargo devastated the American economy and precipitated the nation’s most serious sectional crisis yet. In a matter of weeks, the *Trenton Federalist* reported, the embargo had “thrown a vast number of poor persons out of employment at this inclement season.” Jefferson failed to build popular support for the embargo, insisting that the measure was a congressional policy. High Federalists argued that slaveholding Southerners passed the economic restrictions to destroy New England’s commercial economy. “A Southern Aristocracy has sprung out of long possessed power; it aims to depress the growth of these Northern States, to crush their commercial enterprise, and restrain the means of our wealth and prosperity,” wrote one critic. Congressman James Sloan proposed that the federal government abandon its seat in the South and return to Philadelphia. John Taylor of South Carolina attacked the idea, recalling the “teasing and pestering...about slavery” that Southerners had once endured in that city.

Northerners, he added, “had no regard to our feelings.”¹⁴

¹³ Richard Mannix, “Gallatin, Jefferson, and the Embargo of 1808,” *Diplomatic History* (April 1979), 153-4; Carson, “Congress in Jefferson’s Foreign Policy,” 208, 229; *Writings of Gallatin*, 1:36; *National Intelligencer*, December 28, 1807; McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, 216-8; Irving Brant, *James Madison, Secretary of State; 1800-1809* (Indianapolis; Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 402-3.

¹⁴ *Trenton Federalist*, January 11, 1808; Mayo-Bobee, “Energetic and Spiritual,” 194-5; Martin Christoffer Ohman, “Ambiguous Bonds of Union; American Political Economy and the Geopolitical Origins of Interregional Cooperation and Conflict, 1783-1821,” (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 2011), 197; *A Review of the Rise, Progress and Tendency of the Present*

Southerners protested New England's claim of economic martyrdom, since non-importation also harmed the South's economy. With markets closed to tobacco and cotton, the region experienced rampant inflation and serious deprivations, but Southerners insisted that they would bear their burden in order to break the nation's dependence on trade with Great Britain. Echoing Madison's arguments, the *Richmond Enquirer* encouraged citizens to embrace home manufacturing "to keep up the prices of their produce, and to furnish supplies." Their effort at self-sufficiency would inspire citizens to "employ themselves in improving the interior of the United States. Draining swamps and marshes, clearing land, opening roads, making bridges, causeways and canals, making and enlarging gardens, planting orchards and vineyards...building and repairing houses, barns, stables, and other outhouses will employ many persons and horses, and much money."¹⁵

Northerners and Southerners accused one another of sectionalism that violated the tenets of republican disinterestedness. Many in New England and the mid-Atlantic openly defied the embargo, arguing that resistance offered the only way to survive the assault by the Southern slavemasters who ran the government. In upstate New York, networks of smugglers sent goods over the Canadian border and on to European markets. New England state governments defied federal authorities and talked of open resistance. Accusing the central government of usurping "unconstitutional powers," the Rhode Island legislature openly discussed disunion. Timothy

System, (Boston, 1808), 18; Leonard Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) 96-7, 100-1; Theodore J. Crackel, *Mr. Jefferson's Army: Political and Social Reform of the Military Establishment, 1801-1809* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 178-9; David N. Mayer, *The Constitutional Thought of Thomas Jefferson* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 236-7; *Annals of Congress*, 10:1, 1567.

¹⁵ *Richmond Enquirer*, February 26, 1808; Louis Sears, *Jefferson and the Embargo* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1927), 231-2.; Schoen, *Fragile Fabric*, 76-7.

Pickering again advocated secession, while New York congressman Barent Gardenier used the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions as justification for disunion. Jefferson became obsessed with the embargo's enforcement as New England resisted. He pushed Congress to close loopholes, increase penalties, and allot additional troops to combat smugglers on the New York-Canadian border. "I think it so important in example to crush these audacious proceedings," Jefferson wrote. In this "topsy-turvy" situation, Thomas Ritchie speculated that "the chain that binds these states will soon be dissolved."¹⁶

In April 1808, Congress approved Jefferson's request for an additional 10,000 men for the nation's army. The request surprised many in Congress. The military expansion would prepare the nation for conflict with Great Britain and help combat smugglers, but Randolph opposed the request, accusing Jefferson of attempting to stir the nation with "military mania." The measure, Randolph argued, negated the administration's contention that the embargo was a peace initiative. "This embargo, which was to have been both the shield and sword, has turned out to be a sorry defence, and must be bolstered and buckramed up by six thousand bayonets," Randolph said during the debate. "I foresee, that by an eternal and perpetual recurrence to a standing military force in every emergency, the militia will be laid aside." He lamented "the general backsliding from principles" of republican antimilitarism. Samuel Taggart marveled at

¹⁶ Leonard Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963) 96-7, 100-5; Gannon, "Value of the Union," 102-4; Onuf, "Federalism, Republicanism, Sectionalism," 19-22; Wills, *Negro President*, 174; The Enquirer quote from McDonald, *States' Rights and the Union*, 64. For Massachusetts's ironic shift to sectionalism see Ronald P. Formisano, *The Transformation of Political Culture: Massachusetts Politics, 1790s to 1840s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983); Mannix, "Embargo of 1808," 163-5; ; Douglas Lamar Jones, "'The Caprice of Juries': The Enforcement of the Jeffersonian Embargo in Massachusetts" *The American Journal of Legal History* (October 1980), 311-3; TJ to Daniel D. Tompkins, August 15, 1808, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, eds. Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, 12: 131-2.

how Jefferson, with Wilson Cary Nicholas leading the Republicans, ruled the House proceedings. “[H]e can manage everything in the national legislature by his rod,” he wrote. Randolph undermined the president, whenever possible, trying to break his grip on the House. Some even suspected that Randolph leaked confidential documents and information to embarrass the administration.¹⁷

Randolph believed his congressional colleagues failed to understand that the United States now existed in an “age of revolutions and changes.” The military expansion would inevitably lead to the nation’s involvement in the Napoleonic conflict, he argued. “Great Britain is endeavoring to seduce you by very coarse caresses and clumsy address indeed, and France to intimidate you [into] war; each is anxious to bend you to her purposes; and differ only in the means.” When the House voted for the army expansion, Randolph characterized it in apocalyptic terms: “The century before the last was an age of religious fanaticism—the world was ruled by priestcraft; the next was the century of political intrigue and negotiation—the taking of a single town was the work of a campaign; this is the military age, a great portion of the world being overrun and subjugated by military despotism.”¹⁸

¹⁷ C. Edward Skeen, *Citizen Soldiers in the War of 1812* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1999), 12; *Annals of Congress*, 10:1, 823, 1026, 1066, 1070, 1634, 1961, 1963, 2036; JR to Nicholson, December 24, 1807; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 649-652; Crackel, *Mr. Jefferson’s Army*, 173; Spencer C. Tucker, *The Jeffersonian Gunboat Navy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 31-2; Gene A. Smith, “*For the Purposes of Defense: The Politics of the Jeffersonian Gunboat Program* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1995), 53-4; Carson, “Congress in Jefferson’s Foreign Policy,” 230-1; Mark Pitcavage, “An Equitable Burden: the Decline of the State Militias, 1783-1858,” (PhD Diss., The Ohio State University, 1995), 103-6; Hiram Catton, *The Politics of Progress: The Origins and Development of the Commercial Republic, 1600-1835* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1988), 10; Samuel Taggart to John W. Taylor, March 21 and April 4, 1808, “Letters of Samuel Taggart,” 311; Long, “Jefferson and Congress,” 260.

¹⁸ *Annals of Congress*, 10:1, 1026, 1070, 1961, 2022.

In his opposition to Jefferson and Madison, Randolph joined the Federalist push to have the embargo repealed. Since the passage of the measure, Massachusetts congressman Josiah Quincy had delivered nearly a thousand petitions urging the Congress to repeal the measure. Quincy had spurned the Federalists who advocated disunion and formed a loyal opposition to the embargo, which concentrated on exposing the policy's inherent unfairness to the Northern shipping industry. In the congressional debate, he claimed that New England's suffering outweigh that of other regions. Southern planters were able to store their tobacco and cotton, but New England fisherman watched their catches rot. Southerners had characterized New England's opposition to the embargo as disloyal and unpatriotic, even as the region suffered extreme deprivations, he continued. "Patriotism is a great comfort to men of the interior," he said. The coastal regions lost both their product and capital, causing starvation in urban areas. "You cannot lay a man upon the rack and crack his muscles by a slow torment, and call patriotism to soothe the sufferer." The South, and especially Virginia, barely suffered in comparison. If Congress failed to repeal the embargo, Quincy argued, an insurrection in New England could prove unstoppable.¹⁹

Randolph said he had listened to Quincy's remarks "with very great pain" and condemned his friend's effort "to draw lines of distinction between different sections of this great Continent." He admitted "that there are parts of the country which suffer more than others" and agreed that Congress must end the "ruinous" embargo. But he reminded his colleagues that fishermen could eat their fish and the rice farmers their rice, but tobacco farmers were left with a "ridiculous and nauseous" product. Even if New England suffered "out of all proportion" it had

¹⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 10:1, 2072; 10:2, 539, 541, 544; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 655; Robert A. McCaughey, *Josiah Quincy, 1772-1864: The Last Federalist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 66-7; Mayo-Bobee, "Energetic and Spiritual," 172.

no right “to violate the laws and sap the foundation of the Union,” Randolph insisted. He tried to transcend sectional hostility and build a consensus on repealing the embargo. Turning his fire on the administration, Randolph insisted that while the administration promised the embargo would force Great Britain to relent in its commercial policies, the measure would actually destroy the Union: “We have waited with upcast eyes watching her downfall till our own begins to approach.”²⁰

Republicans deemed Randolph’s alliance with the Federalists as a nefarious attempt to bring down the administration and deliver the presidency to Monroe. In Virginia, many of Randolph’s friends turned against him, while enemies had his “destruction at heart.” His own election was not until April of 1809, but he maneuvered to place Monroe in the presidency. Randolph traveled the state trying to correct “misrepresentations which had gone abroad in regard to my conduct,” but the President’s supporters had “marked him” for his disloyalty. He and the Old Republicans urged Monroe to stand as a candidate in the upcoming election. Throughout Virginia, Monroe’s name was advanced as a candidate opposed to the embargo and Jefferson’s foreign policy. At one July 4 celebration in Richmond, a reveler toasted, “John Randolph and his proselytes—May they be immersed in the Font of popular sentiment, and baptized of their political heresy ere the next Presidential election.” Randolph believed his political career finished. “You know the old proverb—‘that a cuckold is the last man in the parish who knows his disgrace.’ It may be applied, in some sort, to a declining politician,” he wrote. The campaign to elect Monroe failed miserably, and caused a rift between Jefferson and

²⁰ *Annals of Congress*, 10:1, 2072; 10:2, 596-97, 601; Wills, *Negro President*, 174; Gannon, “Calculating the Value of Union: States’ Rights,” 85; Mayo-Bobee, “Energetic and Spiritual,” 194-5; Schoen, *Fragile Fabric*, 79-80, Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 66, Anthony Iaccarino, “Virginia and the National Contest Over Slavery in the Early Republic, 1780-1833” (PhD Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2000), 134.

Monroe. In early 1809, Randolph headed to Washington for the incoming Madison administration with “an aching head and heart.”²¹

James Madison inherited an economic and political crisis. In New England, hardship reduced a million citizens or more to “beggary,” which damaged much of the Republican support in the region. After more than a year of the non-importation policy, Great Britain refused to repeal the offending Orders-in-Council or end impressments. Indeed, the British merchants fared well under the embargo as they exploited their colonial Canadian economy. Jefferson and Madison remained stubbornly committed to the embargo and wanted to break the Northern smuggling rings. In January 1809, the administration secured passage of the Enforcement Act, which allowed the president to suspend due process of law, encouraged unreasonable search and seizure, and ignored rights against self-incrimination. The measure reignited threats of open rebellion in New England. With the administration’s policies under severe criticism, Jefferson now handed Madison the “broken sceptre” of power, as Randolph saw it. Despite his hatred of Madison, Randolph conceded that he would deserve “immortal honor if he steer[s] the nation through the peril which surrounds it.” Despite Jefferson’s effort to maintain some type of restrictive policy, Congress repealed the Embargo Act and set March 4 as the date of expiration—Jefferson’s last day as president. Madison remained committed to the idea of non-

²¹ JR to Garnett, May 8, 1808, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Garnett, May 22, 1808, Randolph Papers, UVA ; JR to Nicholson, May 27, 1808, Nicholson Papers, LC; *Richmond Enquirer*, July 12, 1808; JR to Joseph Scott, Brock Collection, Huntington Library; JR to Nicholson, November 2, 1809, Randolph Papers, LC; Risjord, *Old Republicans*, 93-5.

importation and believed his own election was an endorsement of the measure, but he left the creation of a new policy to Congress.²²

In late February, Congress proposed a Nonintercourse Act to replace the embargo. The new law would prohibit commerce only with Britain and France, and open trade with the rest of the world. A contingent of Southern Republicans still believed non-importation a viable weapon of coercion and inserted a diplomatic weapon into the bill. The president could open trade with either nation if it ceased violating American maritime rights. Madison opposed the proposal, since he still favored a full embargo. Josiah Quincy believed the Nonintercourse Act indistinguishable from the embargo since it also targeted Great Britain, and he urged Congress to abandon any restrictive measures. New England merchants bitterly condemned the proposal as a part of the South's attempt to ruin Northern commercial interests. Quincy argued that New Englanders needed to "manage our own commercial concerns according to our own interests, and no longer put them into the keeping of those who hate or those who envy our prosperity." Those Southerners believed that some type of restriction of trade must be maintained. Anything less amounted to capitulation to Great Britain's power. "If we yield now, they will trample us to death," argued Nathaniel Macon. Northern Republicans, tired of embargo and frightened of war,

²² *Worcester Gazette*, April 5, 1809; Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties*, 138-9; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 657; George Herring, *From Colony to Superpower: U.S. Foreign Relations to 1776* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 120; *Annals of Congress*, 10:2, 1466; Gannon, "Calculating the Value of Union," 102-3; JR to Edward Dillon, January 1, 1809, Dillon-Polk Papers, Southern Historical Collection, UNC; *Annals of Congress*, 10:2, 1443; Adams, *Administration of Jefferson*, 1225-6; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 181-2; Ohman, "Ambiguous Bonds of Union," 212-3.

believed that the only option was the Nonintercourse Act. Almost everyone in Congress applauded the embargo's demise, but no consensus on a successive policy could be reached.²³

Randolph pleaded his case against the Nonintercourse Act since the American people already “stood a test that no other country on earth ever did or ever will stand.” New measures would lead to new miseries, most likely in the form of war. The nation needed to admit failure in its commercial policy and accept England's domination of the sea; only then would the people enjoy peace and prosperity. Non-importation had only caused bitterness and left Europe unmoved. “We are marked, not merely to Europe but to ourselves, as a divided people, imbecile, distracted—and why? Were we a divided people eighteen months ago? We were not, sir; we were strong in the sentiment of obedience to the laws.” America's “unwise councils” decided to insert the nation into the Napoleonic struggle, and now European powers were “quarrelling with our bread and butter.”²⁴

The Southern adherence to non-importation puzzled Randolph. “From some notion of honor and dignity, quite incomprehensible to me, we are to stick to this thing,” he said. Despite the devastation to their own interests, the Southern congressional delegation argued that to end restrictions before Great Britain halted its violations of American shipping rights amounted to American capitulation. Randolph subscribed to the notion of Southern honor, but its application to foreign policy would prove suicidal. “If a man knocks you down, you do not require to be told that he has broken the peace. The question is, how will you get reparation?” Despite his objections, the House passed the Nonintercourse Act. Cobbled together from various plans, it

²³ Richard Buel, Jr. *America on the Brink: How the Political Struggle Over the War of 1812 Almost Destroyed the Young Republic* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 79-87; Spivak, *Jefferson's English Crisis*, 188-97; Quincy, *Life of Quincy*, 228; Gannon, “Calculating the Value of Union,” 126-7; Broussard, *Southern Federalists*, 126-8.

²⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 10:2, 1465-6, 1467-8.

forbade trade with all of the British empire and all nations controlled by France, prohibited armed vessels of the two warring nations from entering any American port, and gave President Madison power to lift restrictions if one of the nations ceased violations of American maritime rights.²⁵

On March 4, 1809, as Madison assumed the presidency, the Eleventh Congress convened for a special session. In May, Randolph fought to repeal the army bill that Congress had passed the previous year, since many congressmen now talked of war with Great Britain. The government had spent millions on the army, while neglecting the states' militias. "The old army is rotten to the core," he said. He used the opportunity to attack Jefferson's fall from principles. "He came into this government the friend of reform and economy, and continued to practice economy as much as any man could who had the command of a fleet of gunboats, a standing army, and resources cut off by an embargo," he argued. Randolph believed, however, that the blame for Jefferson's corruption lay with Republicans, who gave the president millions for the military. "I am for putting down the standing army; for arming the militia," he declared.²⁶

Randolph's opposition once again placed him in an alliance with the Federalists, which fueled Southern suspicion about his loyalty. New England dissent against the Southern Republicans soon became focused on slavery. Those Republicans who still aligned themselves with the language of liberty were subjected to intense attacks. "Surrounded by their slaves, the love of liberty is sublimated to a passion—and they go to the capital with a zest for personal independence, that is whetted by the continued sight of the miseries of slavery," wrote William Thornton. Randolph supported New England's opposition to non-importation, but remained

²⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 10:2, 1466-68; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 230-2.

²⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 11:1, 62, 69, 72-3.

cognizant of his responsibilities to the South. In June, Massachusetts congressman Edward Livermore proposed exempting Haiti from the Nonintercourse Act, in effect ending the embargo against the island. New England merchants wanted restoration of the lucrative Haitian trade. Jefferson had pushed Congress to impose the embargo against the island in an attempt to satisfy Napoleon and cut off the trade to a black republic, which Randolph reviled. The decision had ended a source of lucrative trade for New England merchants. Randolph jumped into the debate. “He had nothing to do” with Congress’s 1806 embargo against the black republic and had even skipped the House vote on the matter. Despite his failure to vote, however, he had long condemned the commercial interactions with the perpetrators of the hemisphere’s largest slave rebellion. Randolph remarked that he “had been astonished that, long before the traffic to that island was stopped by our Government, a sense of self-preservation had not united the interests” of the South. Although he recognized that opening the trade would prove strategically important in defeating the French, the stakes were too high. Opening trade with Haiti would “work in the Southern country a dreadful evil.” The House defeated the proposal 97 to 1.²⁷

Regardless, Randolph’s Republican and Southern enemies branded him Federalist, a British sympathizer, and even a spy. Critics labeled him “an enemy to his country” and “a ‘lover of *British gold*.” They believed his public support for Britain pointed to collusion with the enemy. Jefferson and his supporters wanted to end Randolph’s congressional career before he could derail Madison’s presidency. For the first time, he drew a Republican challenger in his district. “We united with others of the Distrect [sic] to shut him out in the late Election but Randolps [sic] Eliquency [sic] was such that we fell a long way in minority,” wrote one of his

²⁷ *Annals of Congress*, 11:1, 443-4; Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic*, 114. Thornton quote from Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), 28.

enemies to President Madison. After leaving office, Jefferson reported from Virginia that Randolph and Monroe “avoid seeing one another, mutually dissatisfied.” Many Virginia Republicans wanted to isolate, discredit, and then defeat Randolph. In the summer, the *Richmond Enquirer* published a scathing critique of Randolph by “Criticus.” He applauded Randolph’s struggle for “uniformity” but denounced his penchant for accusing others of “treacherously” abandoning republican principles. “Criticus” delighted in Randolph’s damaged public image since he had “satyrized [sic] every member of Congress.” Randolph’s political disloyalty revealed his “Nose of Wax,” shaped by his hatreds and jealousies. Many of his enemies hinted that Randolph accepted bribes from the British government to oppose the embargo and non-importation. “He certainly admires the British nation more than I do. I never said what I am sure is false, that he was under British influence. No man is more free of extraneous influence of any kind than he is,” wrote Albert Gallatin. Although Randolph survived a challenge at the polls, he returned to Virginia in the summer of 1809 despised by many of his old allies.²⁸

As Randolph returned home, Madison waited for the European response to the Nonintercourse Act. The relentless attacks on him darkened Randolph’s mood. “My health is very indifferent, and my spirits worse, so that nothing can be more sad and gloomy than my life has been of late,” he wrote. He feared that the United States would soon end up in Europe’s war

²⁸ *The Supporter* (Chillicothe, OH), February 16, 1809; TJ to James Madison, March 30, 1809, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1:92; Josiah Jackson to James Madison, June 1, 1809, *The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series* ed. Robert Rutland, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984). 1: 218; *Richmond Enquirer*, June 16, 1809; Albert Gallatin to William Henry Harrison, September 27, 1809, *The Writings of Albert Gallatin*, ed. Henry Adams, (New York: Lippincott, 1879), 463, Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:364, 591; For another attack on Randolph see the letter from “Dentatus” in the March 27, 1809 edition of the *Enquirer*.

and that increased his despair. “Bonaparte has crushed Austria, it will be our turn next.” As the world stood on “the verge of despotism,” Randolph believed that Madison’s anti-British policies aided Napoleon. “I am unable to express what I feel at the present prospect of our affairs managed as they have been for nearly four years past.” More than simple policy, he recognized a change in America’s temperament. “If I could see something like the old spirit of independence,” he wrote, “I should have some hope.” In typical Randolph fashion, he never defined that spirit or what it meant. Instead, he grew more erratic and frustrated as his enemies attacked him. In November 1809, he missed the opening of Congress due to a “nervous affliction of the whole system.” He experienced an episode of one of his chronic illnesses, but he also dreaded his reception during the next session. “My enemies, as well as friends, were anxiously desiring my arrival at Washington,” he wrote in December. He dreaded the coming political attacks. “Enough of politics—I am sick and disgusted.”²⁹

Since the spring, the diplomatic situation had taken bizarre turns. After the passage of the Nonintercourse Act, Great Britain issued a new Order-in-Council, which addressed some American complaints. In April, the British minister, David M. Erskine, approached Madison with a proposal for the United States to drop trade restrictions on Britain. In return, England would repeal the Order-in-Council that sanctioned the search and seizure of American ships. Eager to solve the problem, Madison agreed, and in April he re-opened trade with Britain. Impressments continued, but the agreement did promise rapprochement between the two nations. British Secretary of Foreign Affairs George Canning rejected Erskine’s agreement once he saw the details and accused the diplomat of going beyond his orders. Madison then reinstated

²⁹ JR to James Mercer Garnett, September 14, 1809, Randolph Papers, UVA; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2: 746; JR to Nicholson, January 24, 1810, Nicholson Papers, LC

nonintercourse measures against Britain as the Americans expressed anger at the Erskine affair. Randolph saw the failure as “a sort of rejoinder” to Jefferson’s rejection of the Monroe-Pinkney treaty.³⁰

As the crisis continued, Randolph composed a series of letters attacking Madison and American policymakers for aiding Napoleon and France with the nation’s policy toward Great Britain. In January 1810, he published his letters, addressed them directly to Madison under the pseudonym “Mutius”. “It is the interest of the United States to be at peace with all nations,” he wrote. He wanted the letters to isolate the pro-French Secretary of State Robert Smith, who directed a campaign in Washington to drive Albert Gallatin from the cabinet. The Secretary of the Treasury remained President Madison’s voice of reason and probably the best chance to avoid war. Smith and the pro-French Republicans were pushing Madison into the arms of Napoleon, “whose touch is pollution and whose embrace is death,” Randolph argued. Although he knew enemies would label him a “Tory and friend of Great Britain,” he insisted that England remained “the freest government of Europe.” But he wanted no war with France, either. The United States must return to true republicanism and strive for peace, but in the European struggle for power, it must resist assisting France. The consequences would prove dire if Great Britain suffered defeat. “When England does fall, she will fall like the strong man in the scripture; she will embrace the pillars of the temple of human liberty and human safety, and its destruction will be the last effort of her desperate strength.”³¹

³⁰ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 21-2; Adams, *Administration of Madison*, 49-95; Egan, *Neither Peace Nor War*, 105-11; JR to Garnett, July 31, 1809, Randolph Papers, UVA.

³¹ *The Letters of Mutius Addressed to the President of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1808), 19-21, 22,25; Buel, *America on the Brink*, 100; JR to Nicholson, January 24, 1810, Nicholson Papers, LC.

At the beginning of 1810, while Randolph recovered in Virginia, Congress prepared for the expiration of the Nonintercourse Act at the end of the session. The years of embargo and nonintercourse had devastated Southern planters, especially cotton farmers, who wanted more moderate measures against Great Britain. In December, Nathaniel Macon proposed a plan that permitted British and French imports if shipped in American vessels. The solution would revive American shipping and open markets to agricultural interests. Randolph found the details of the new plan uninteresting, especially given his diminished influence in the House. Through most of the winter, he remained on his plantation as others informed him of events. In February, however, he took notice of William Branch Giles's and other pro-French politicians' cry for "War!" and decided to return to Washington.³²

In March, he surfaced in the capitol to fight the growing war movement and found House Republicans "in a state of disorganization and inefficiency." He expressed his surprise that the House had failed to end the "evil" non-importation policy. Capitalizing on the confusion, he moved to reduce the army, restore the militia, and thwart passage of a new nonintercourse bill. He immediately proposed a reduction of the military and reiterated his long held beliefs about the army and militia. "If we are to have war, we know that we, the people of the United States must fight the battles." Furthermore, he pointed out the cost of the army, an important factor since commercial restrictions reduced the nation's revenues. His attendance took many by surprise, and he almost secured enough votes for his army reduction bill. With the House in confusion, Randolph's plan to stop any non-importation bill seemed possible of achievement. The Senate rejected Macon's Bill, and the House seemed unable to agree on a suitable

³² JR to Nicholson, February 18, 1810, Nicholson Papers, LC; Dice Robins Anderson, *William Branch Giles: A Study in the Politics of Virginia and the Nation from 1790 to 1830* (Manasha, Wisconsin: The Collegiate Press, 1914), 155.

replacement. In May, the House settled on Macon's Bill No. 2, which lifted restrictions on all imports but proffered a carrot. If either England or France ceased attacks on the American maritime interests, the United States would reinstate the nonimportation measures against the other. Gallatin hoped the measure would restore tax revenue, but the bill appeared to be an effort at manipulation and bribery. Few liked the bill and even Macon opposed it. Thomas Gholson of Virginia also labeled the bill as bribery, and said it "held up the honor and character of this nation to the highest bidder." Randolph saw "every thing in confusion—and every body at variance" in the House as the members could not agree on alternatives. With the end of the session approaching and the Nonintercourse Act set to expire, Republicans felt compelled to pass some type of response. In May, Congress passed Macon's Bill No. 2, which stunned even the cynical Randolph: "Is it a sort of scarecrow, set up to frighten the great belligerents of Europe; or is it a toy, a rattle, a bare plaything, to amuse the great children of our own political world?"³³

Madison believed that Macon's Bill No. 2 exposed America's weakness to the world. The United States's inability to protect its ships on the Atlantic encouraged aggression by other nations. The bill rewarded Britain's high-handed behavior. Trade was reopened and since the British navy ruled the Atlantic, the United States found itself as England's trading partner. Madison maintained that an embargo still represented the best policy but hoped he could use the new bill to force an opening with France.³⁴

As the congressional session ended, Randolph noted disgustedly the "low and contemptible" state of the House of Representatives. He resented sitting "hours in a corrupted

³³ JR to John Taylor of Caroline, April 15, 1810, Massachusetts Historical Society; Perkins, *Prologue to War*, 239-41; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 665; *Annals of Congress*, 11:1, 1609-12, 1702, 1772; Ketcham, *James Madison*, 499; Adams, *Administration of Madison*, 141-2.

³⁴ Rutland, *Presidency of Madison*, 62; Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 28-9.

atmosphere and listening to every possible modification of nonsense.” Congress seemed unwilling or unable to grapple with serious questions. Previously, Randolph had dominated the House floor, where he thrived on debate, hurled abuse, and expounded his republican dogma. Now, he lamented that only fifty members listened to a “sensible” speech by Josiah Quincy. “The two houses have tumbled about their own ears.” In addition to Congress’s troubles, “the Cabinet is all to pieces” as dissension continued between Smith and Gallatin. If they succeeded in getting rid of Gallatin, “Madison must go down with him,” wrote Nathaniel Macon. Randolph usually would have delighted in Madison’s misfortune, but “the incapacity of Government has long ceased to be a laughing matter.” After he learned that John Taylor of Caroline planned to quit politics and return permanently to his Virginia plantation, he mused, “Conscience perpetually whispers ‘why do you not go and do like wise?’” At the end of the session, Randolph planned to leave the “dull” and “stupid” environment of Washington and never return.³⁵

Randolph’s opposition to the army invited advocates for war to unleash another round of political invective against him. “If ever a man deserved the curses and execrations of his country, It is he, who, *in the hour of danger*, exerts himself to divide and distract its public councils. It is he who seeks, in the moment of peril, to palsy and deaden the arm of its government—Has not Mr. Randolph done this?,” wrote “Philo-Patris” in the *Carolina Gazette*. In July, “Americanus” attacked Randolph’s anti-military sentiment as treasonous and destructive: “At a time when the world is in arms, and we know not how soon we may be called to measure our strength with some mighty foe, would we wish to ‘break down!,’” he wrote. “Americanus” contended that

³⁵ JR to Anne Frances Bland Coulter, April, 6, 1810, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to John Taylor, April 15, 1810 (copy), Bruce Papers, LOV; Macon to Nicholson, April 26, 1810, Nicholson Papers, LC; JR to Nicholson May 2, 1810, Nicholson Papers, LC; JR to Joseph Scott, May 3, 1810, Brock Collection, Huntington Library.

Randolph had never visited a military post or made an effort to understand the nation's military. The attacks portrayed Randolph as both a naïve relic of a bygone era and a pro-British dupe. The old republican dogma against standing armies was meaningless in the United States's current crisis. James Mercer Garnett urged Randolph to answer the charges quickly. With the government in decline and the nation in danger of war, the republic needed him, Garnett insisted. "Retirement under such circumstances, would be called desertion. Or would be a step, that you yourself would probably condemn."³⁶

During congressional recesses, Randolph continued to live at Bizarre, where he grew argumentative and moody. Few cared for and loved John Randolph as much as his sister-in-law Judith, but he increasingly bullied and took advantage of her. While she continually consoled him during his political troubles, John thought nothing of pressuring her to sell him cheap land, commandeering her slaves, or making unilateral decisions about her children. "I have shed as many tears over your misfortune as my own," she wrote him in search for sympathy. As his difficult private personality and public persona collided, she found him nearly unbearable. If she dared consult other people's opinions about decisions, he exploded. "You cannot be ignorant that he cannot bear the least opposition," Judith wrote to St. George Tucker. By 1810, he desired isolation and wanted to leave both Washington and Bizarre. When Judith decided to finally emancipate the Bizarre slaves at Christmas 1810, Randolph sent his young cousin, Richard Kidder Randolph, to take his slaves to Roanoke. Randolph had no purpose at Bizarre other than

³⁶ *Carolina Gazette*, July 27, 1810; "Americanus," *National Intelligencer*, July 27, 1810. Garnett to JR, July 31, 1810, Randolph Papers, UVA; Garnett to JR, July, 9, 1810, Randolph Papers, UVA.

being a master. “You have an undoubted right in every sense to be master of your own house,” Judith wrote.³⁷

In June 1810, after the torturous congressional session, Randolph headed to his Roanoke plantation. In his first days there, he faced a drought-induced crop shortage and a troublesome overseer. “I have been involved in a disagreeable dispute with a rascal of an overseer [an Irishman] who threatened to bludgeon me,” he wrote. After the overseer broke down his door with an axe, Randolph swore out a complaint against him. Before he left Washington, he had written about a violent change of spirit that “is general in the southern country.” His encounter with the overseer confirmed it. But despite his trouble, he wanted to make a life at the distant Charlotte County plantation with his more than 150 slaves. As the world stood on the precipice of disaster, he saw the plantation as his refuge.³⁸

In July, Richard Kidder Randolph, disgusted with slavery, contemplated moving to New England. He asked his cousin, John Randolph, for his advice concerning a move to the free North. John Randolph’s response revealed his own private turmoil over slavery. “Like you,” he confessed, “it was my misfortune to be educated in a country which calculated to disgust me.” Plantations and slavery produced hardships, debt, and complications. “I framed the design, not long after I came of age to sell my property and estrange myself from the land that gave my birth.” Slavery loomed “uppermost in my thoughts.” He still believed slavery was “a mischief to our country but shall We therefore desert her because of her weakness and misfortunes?” He

³⁷ Judith Randolph to St. George Tucker, January 27, 1810, Tucker Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary; January 25, 1810, Commonplace Book Entry (transcription) William Cabell Bruce Collection, LOV; Bagby, “Randolph Slave Saga,” 73; Judith Randolph to JR, November, 3, 1809, Randolph Papers, UVA.

³⁸ JR to Garnett, June 29, 1810, Randolph Papers, UVA; “My Own List of Negroes Christmas 1810,” Commonplace Book, Tucker Coleman Papers, Swem Library, College of William and Mary; Bagby, “Randolph Slave Saga,” 70-5.

believed that planters could live in an “independent condition” better than anyone else. To leave Virginia because of slavery would be a vast mistake. “What should we say to an Englishman who should migrate to America because he thought old England were struggling with difficulties which she could never surmount?” But in the end, he realized that the decision remained a private one of conscience. “I foresee the pain which this sacrifice is to cost you.” Richard K. Randolph left for New England, and his cousin realized he would never see him again.³⁹

Living in isolation at Roanoke, Randolph brooded over the effect of international problems on the slave South. He believed that foreign affairs threatened the South and slavery. The deterioration of Anglo-American relations caused him to envision the “sacking of our towns, savaging of our coasts” once Britain unleashed its fury. Southerners courted this disaster with their increasingly militant rhetoric. He began taking large amounts of opium after an injury to his foot, and it seemed to aggravate his despair. In the fall, as he contemplated the future, he copied part of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem or “ecologue” on war, *Fire, Famine, and Slaughter*:

Ninety months he by my truth
Hath richly cater’d for ye both
And in an hour would ye repay
An eight years work—Away! Away!
I alone am faithful
I Cleave to him everlastingly

Coleridge wrote the piece in 1796 as warfare between France and Britain escalated to catastrophic levels. After a decade of struggle to restore republicanism to the nation, Randolph now was obsessed about the destruction of his way of life. He had tried to encourage peace in international relations, but fellow Southerners condemned him for it. In the face of national

³⁹ JR to Richard Kidder Randolph, July 4, 1810, Randolph Papers, LC.

turmoil, he rededicated his life to the principles of the republican freeholder. In 1810, as a sign of his commitment, he began signing every letter and document as “John Randolph of Roanoke.”⁴⁰

Events compelled Randolph to abandon plans for retirement and return to Washington. After Erskine’s failed attempt to put Anglo-American relations on solid footing, the Madison administration urged the French to accept Macon’s Bill No. 2. In the summer, French Foreign Minister duc de Cadore sent a cryptic note to the Americans revealing that France would revoke the longstanding Berlin and Milan Decrees on November 1, but only if the United States reestablished all prohibitions against England. President Madison jumped at the opportunity and declared French compliance with American policy. On November 2, Madison restored full commercial relations with France and offered Britain ninety days to revoke the offending Orders-in-Council. If British authorities failed to do so, the United States would reestablish non-importation measures on February 2, 1811. Even Madison’s most fervent supporters believed this move was too trusting of the French and too rash with Britain. Napoleon rarely negotiated in good faith, and the English government knew it. The British ignored Madison’s attempt to pressure a repeal of the Orders-in-Council.⁴¹

On January 22, 1811, John Randolph of Roanoke appeared in the House with his usual pack of dogs, itching to fight those who wanted a war with England. The months of isolation, reflection, and opium had worked him into frenzied opposition. When the House came to order,

⁴⁰ Commonbook transcription, William Cabell Bruce Collection, LOV. See the October 18 and November 20, 1810 entries in Randolph’s Commonplace books for his transcription of Coleridge. Coleridge biographer Richard Holmes writes that the poet aimed his pen at the war policies of British Prime Minister William Pitt against France. Holmes in 1798, *Coleridge: Early Visions, 1771-1804* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).

⁴¹ Buel, *America on the Brink*, 110-1; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 22-3.

his dogs howled and barked as each House member rose to talk. During one debate in which Randolph spoke for hours, he asked the House to recess, which it did. Willis Alston expressed disgust that the House still demonstrated any respect for “the puppy.” While leaving the session, Alston struck one of the dogs after he tripped over them. On the staircase out of the House, Randolph threatened his old nemesis: “Alston, if it were worth while, I would cane you. And I believe I will cane you.” Randolph then hit Alston with a hickory cane, drawing blood. Several colleagues jumped on Randolph, wrestling the cane away from him. Alston ended up with the cane, ready to strike Randolph, but then declined to harm him. A bemused William Duane informed Jefferson that “Randolph is up to his old freaks.” A Washington, D.C., grand jury fined Randolph ten dollars for the attack. Fascinated spectators arrived in the House gallery to watch the increasingly argumentative and aggressive man. “There is no speaker in either House that excites such universal attention as Jack Randolph. But they listen to him more to be delighted by his eloquence and entertained by his ingenuity and eccentricity, than to be convinced by sound doctrine and close argument,” wrote Washington Irving.⁴²

In early 1811, Madison asked John Wayles Eppes, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, to put together a new, stronger non-importation bill against Great Britain, although Napoleon had failed to live up to the promises of the Cadore letter and continued to seize American ships. Randolph now wondered whether the president really controlled his own administration. “The truth seems to be that he is president *de jure* only. Who exercises the office *de facto*, I know not; but it seems agreed on by all hands that ‘there is something behind the

⁴² Sawyer, *John Randolph*, 42; JR to Nicholson, January 28, 1811, Randolph Papers, LC; William Duane to TJ, January 26, 1811, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series, 12 August 1810 to 17 June 1811* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 330; *Alexandria Daily Gazette*, January 31, 1811; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1: 262-3, 361-2, 2:65.

throne greater than the throne itself.’” Madison and his administration bristled under the continual indignities suffered at the hand of England and wanted to resist its power. Napoleon, Randolph believed, now controlled American policy, and Secretary of State Smith seemed determined on fulfilling the dictator’s wishes. “Every thing appears to announce the coming of a *master*. Thank God! I have no children,” Randolph wrote. The House again rejected Randolph’s proposals for the repeal of all nonintercourse laws. The Madison administration seemed directionless, but Randolph seemed somewhat relieved when the President replaced the troublesome Smith with James Monroe.⁴³

In Washington, the inevitability of war with Great Britain became the consensus among Republicans. The complicity of Southerners in the war fever enraged Randolph, and he focused his attacks on them. In late January, John Wayles Eppes and his committee crafted a bill to prohibit all British goods from American ports. After weeks of delay, the committee, which included Randolph, hammered out the details of the bill. For weeks, Randolph irritated his colleagues with incessant ridicule, especially of Eppes. On February 27, the committee meeting went past midnight as Eppes pressured members over the details. Drinking heavily during the meeting, Randolph ridiculed and belittled his opponents as he warned that non-importation and war would lead to Southern secession. The more intoxicated he became, the more personal were the insults, even ridiculing the girth of one colleague. As dawn approached, Randolph labeled his colleagues dupes of Eppes, who pressured individual members to support the bill. By the end of the session, Eppes fumed at Randolph’s behavior. The meeting broke up at daybreak, and no

⁴³ Buel, *America on the Brink*, 110-1; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 22-3; JR to Nicholson, Feb. 14, 1811- Nicholson Papers, LC; Bailey, “John Wayles Eppes”, 74-7; JR to Garnett, February 17, 1811, Randolph Papers, UVA.

carriage was willing to carry Randolph to his Georgetown mess. As he walked through the pre-dawn morning. Someone hurled a rock at his head in what some suspected was an assassination attempt. He had succeeded in enraging his colleagues, especially Southerners. His breach with Eppes seemed headed for the dueling ground, and some believed Eppes wanted to kill Randolph. Yet, as with most of Randolph's encounters with the duel, he escaped the confrontation.⁴⁴

Although Randolph addressed the House fewer times than during any previous session, he drew enormous criticism. He lashed out at anyone who contradicted or opposed him. A duel with journalist William Duane almost occurred, after the journalist attacked Randolph for bringing his hunting dogs onto the House floor "in defiance of decorum, and in contempt of what in civil society is called *gentlemanly good manners*." Duane saw Randolph behind a nefarious plot against the administration and accused Gallatin of secretly supporting his old friend. The press labeled Randolph a nuisance whose actions were as "a study of revenge, immortal hate, and courage never to submit or yield." Despite his relentless promotion of a return to republicanism, his actions emanated from "the rude effervescence of passion—not the dictate of your conscience, but the mad incitement of inordinate hate." From Monticello, Jefferson followed his behavior with interest. "The example of John Randolph, now the outcast of the world, is a caution to all honest and prudent men, to sacrifice a little self-confidence and to go with their friends," he wrote.⁴⁵

⁴⁴John Wayles Eppes to James Madison, January 31, 1811, *The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press), 3:143; *Alexandria Gazette*, April 11, 1811; Bailey, "John Wayles Eppes," 78-9; JR to Nicholson, March 3, 1811, Randolph Papers, LC.

⁴⁵TJ to William Duane, April 30, 1811, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series*, 12 August 1810-17 June 1811 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 593; *Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series*, 286; *Alexandria Gazette*, April 18, 1811, *National Aegeis*, February 27, 1811.

Jefferson wanted to end Randolph's career. In the spring of 1811, he prodded his son-in-law Eppes to move into Randolph's district and challenge him. "Besides your service in the house, what greater service could you render your country than by the exclusion of John Randolph, the envenomed enemy to a democratical republican government," Jefferson wrote. Eppes, who owned property and a home in nearby Buckingham County, opposed Randolph in the April congressional election. Although he never officially declared, word spread of Eppes's candidacy, news that struck Randolph with "great force." Jefferson's Virginia friends stepped up their efforts to oust Randolph. "We understand that a poll will be taken for Mr. Eppes, by some of his friends in every county of the District, lately represented, or *misrepresented* by John Randolph," the *Richmond Enquirer* declared. "Mr. Eppes is as much an ornament of Congress, as Mr. R is a nuisance and a curse." Despite Jefferson's enthusiasm, Eppes could not defeat Randolph, who maintained strong support in his district. With little time, Eppes made few appearances and lost by 500 votes.⁴⁶

As Randolph secured his re-election, the situation with Great Britain deteriorated. The new British minister Augustus J. Foster demanded the immediate repeal of non-intercourse measures since Napoleon had failed to truly repeal his decrees. Tensions also escalated after the United States finally seized West Florida. In late spring, American naval ships preemptively attacked British ships in retaliation for the *Chesapeake* affair. In the western territories, the earliest stages of an Indian war rumbled. While Republicans argued for a war to defend the nation's honor, Randolph saw nothing more than a war for "personal aggrandizement." As he

⁴⁶ TJ to John Wayles Eppes, March 24, 1811, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series*, 3:502; JR to Garnett, March 19 and June 22, 1811, Randolph Papers, UVA; *Richmond Enquirer*, April 5, 1811, May 14, 1811; Bailey, "John Wayles Eppes," 80-1.

traveled through Virginia, he fully realized the Southern lust for war. “The character of the country is disgraced by a brutality which breaks forth very often,” he wrote.⁴⁷

Back at Roanoke, Randolph exhibited increasingly bizarre and unstable behavior. His stepbrother Beverly Tucker watched as Randolph grew “moody and morose, capricious, suspicious of friends, sarcastic and bitter toward those he loved best, and a riddle to all around him.” Tucker later described the “change in his temper” as “insanity.” It seems unlikely that Randolph experienced a full mental breakdown, but he did undergo a mental transformation. As the nation seemed headed toward war, he mourned “over the degradation of the Old Virginia from her ancient past.” The “Virginia Presidents who have debauched the public spirit” had led the nation and the state into a militarist nightmare. Perhaps the most disturbing and alienating to Randolph were the democratic methods that Republicans used to sell the idea of war. “I am alone and out of the world—buried alive,” he wrote. “The thoughts of our unexampled situation drove me from my bed about half past two this morning and I have not yet returned to it. I made a very vehement speech in imagination to Mr. Speaker.”⁴⁸

In recent elections for the Twelfth Congress, Western and Southern states had elected a group of militant leaders. These men argued the idea of national honor as national interest, evoking memories of the American Revolution, which many of the candidates were too young to remember. They made passionate appeals to the public using emerging democratic methods to form national policy. In August, Duane’s *Aurora* contended that “war and submission are now the only alternatives.” The new breed of militant young congressmen included Kentucky’s Henry

⁴⁷ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 24-5; Rutland, *Presidency of James Madison*, 80-1; JR to Joseph Nicholson, June 24, 1811, Nicholson Papers, LC; *Alexandria Gazette*, June 19 and June 24, 1811; JR to Garnett, May 5 and May 27, 1811, Randolph Papers, UVA.

⁴⁸ Nathaniel Beverly Tucker review, *The Historical Magazine*, 8 (June 1859), 188; JR to Garnett, July 25, 1811, August 7, 1811, August 13, 1811, Randolph Papers, UVA.

Clay and Richard M. Johnson, Felix Grundy of Tennessee, and John C. Calhoun, a Yale-educated planter from upcountry South Carolina. Their ideas of republicanism had shifted from the idealistic notions of community toward an individualistic and energetic republicanism, which adhered to the growing market society. Market-oriented assertiveness now informed their ideas of foreign affairs. In this spirit, men such as Clay and Calhoun openly advocated aggressive expansion. “The conquest of Canada is in your power,” Clay told the United States Senate in 1810. In 1811, Hezekiah Niles founded the *Weekly Register* to promote war and anti-British sentiment. Niles assured his readers that when war came, Canada would fall with relative ease. These slaveholders embodied the Jeffersonian ideal of nationalism and expansion. As they prepared for their first session of Congress, Duane’s *Aurora* reminded them that “the voice of every American is FOR WAR.” Randolph observed these developments sourly, convinced that the nation “*shall dance to the French piper.*”⁴⁹

The bold advocacy of war, expansion, and Anglophobia puzzled and angered Randolph. If these men had missed the American Revolution, they had also missed the worst days of the Reign of Terror and the Haitian slave revolt it inspired. Since 1808, rumors of slave rebellion had plagued Virginia and the South. In January 1811, nearly 500 slaves marched on New Orleans seeking to establish a black republic in the Louisiana territory. Randolph believed that Virginia should prepare for a slave insurrection instead of war with the English, Southerners’ natural ethnic allies. With its face turned toward Europe, the Virginia Assembly’s “stupidity and apathy”

⁴⁹ Watt, *Republic Reborn*; *Philadelphia Aurora*, August 8, 1811; “Speech on Proposed Repeal of Non-Intercourse Act”, February 22, 1810, *The Papers of Henry Clay: the Rising Statesman, 1797-1814* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1959), 1: 448; Reginald C. Stuart, *United States Expansionism and British North America, 1774-1871* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 54-5; JR to John Taylor of Caroline, September 22, 1811, Massachusetts Historical Society; Reginald Horsman, “On to Canada: Manifest Destiny and United States Strategy in the War of 1812,” *Michigan Historical Review* 13 (Fall 1987), 1-24.

left the state unprepared to meet an uprising. The fervor to defend national honor distracted them from the practical problem of living in a slaveholding republic. In the rush to declare war against Great Britain, they seemed to forget the volatile nature of the enemy in their midst. In February 1811, Randolph adamantly opposed a bill that offered financial relief for a sea captain whose ship had been seized when he was caught bringing slaves into the United States. Randolph argued against the bill “on the ground of the danger of giving any the least license to the introduction of slaves into this country, or of the maroons, brigands, or cut-throats from St. Domingo, or elsewhere.” He was amazed that his Southern colleagues seemed to have already forgotten “the occurrences in the neighborhood of New Orleans.” Southern slaveholders’ “attention will perhaps, be fervently drawn to this subject by the blaze of their houses and the shrieks of their wives and children,” he wrote to Garnett.⁵⁰

The new Twelfth Congress experienced a unique dilemma as it convened in November 1811— how to deal with John Randolph. His insults and violent temper and the constant presence of his dogs interrupted business his colleagues planned for war. The new members looked for new leadership in part to thwart Randolph. His old Republican compatriot, Nathaniel Macon, would prove too conscientious to allow an unimpeded march to war. “The friends of Mr. Madison hate him and will elect Mr Henry Clay of Kentucky who is a young man never before in this House.” Clay promised to control the House and enforce its rules. In the party caucus, Republicans agreed that the Speaker “must be a man who can meet John Randolph on the floor

⁵⁰ JR to Garnett, February 17, 1811, Randolph Papers, UVA; Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: the Untold Story of America’s Largest Slave Revolt* (New York: Harper & Row, 2011); Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 66-7; *Annals of Congress*, 11:3, 992.

or on the field, for he may have to do both.” The new Republicans elected Clay as House Speaker.⁵¹

When the House convened on November 5, Speaker Clay moved quickly to consolidate the war movement in Congress by stacking the Foreign Relations Committee with pro-war members to serve alongside Randolph. The committee’s first assignment was to deal with Madison’s annual message, which informed Congress of Great Britain’s unwillingness to repeal the Orders-in-Council. “Congress will feel the duty of putting the United States into armour,” Madison advised. Grundy and Calhoun dominated the committee and built a powerful case for war, even arguing that Napoleon had repealed the Berlin and Milan Decrees, despite evidence to the contrary. The “war hawks” made the case for a nationalistic continuation of the American Revolution, which had been “sanctified by the blood of our fathers.”⁵²

On December 10, 1811, Randolph condemned the report and wondered “how gentlemen, calling themselves Republicans, could advocate such a war.” The emotional plea to the revolutionary past represented a gross manipulation of American memory. “If we must have an exposition of the doctrines of Republicanism, [I] should receive it from the fathers of the church, and not from the junior apprentices of the law,” Randolph quipped. The Revolution served as the anti-militarist example, an honest citizenry repelling the British invader. When the nation resorted to the standing army, it rested in the hands of George Washington. “Where now is the

⁵¹ JR to St. George Randolph, November 6, 1811, JR Collection, LOV; Remini, *Henry Clay*, 79; Nathan Sargent, *Public Men and Events: From the Commencement of Mr. Monroe’s Administration in 1817, to the Close of Mr. Fillmore’s Administration, in 1853* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincot & Co., 1875), 130.

⁵² “Annual Message to Congress,” November 5, 1811, *The Papers of James Madison: Presidential Series, 5 November 1811-9 November 1812* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 4:3; *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 376; Joseph Howard Parks, *Felix Grundy: Champion of Democracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1940), 39-40.

Revolutionary hero to whom you are about to confide this sacred trust?” The nation could trust no one with military power in the current environment of militant expansionism. Echoing the Federalists’ long-held suspicions about Louisiana, Randolph asserted that the conquest of Canada would “strengthen the Northern balance of power.” The previous month, the House had debated the representation changes from the recent census, which revealed gains for the North and the West. Southerners would unleash an imperial war that would undercut their political power and debase the idea of a republican government. “This war of conquest, a war for the acquisition of territory and subjects, is to be a new commentary on the doctrine that Republics are destitute of ambition—that they are addicted to peace, wedded to the happiness and safety of the great body of their people.”⁵³

In constructing the case for war, Calhoun and Grundy failed to confront the explosive ethnic and racial problems, Randolph argued. The Republicans contended that Canada would naturally join the war effort against Britain and rebel against its colonial masters. “We shall drive the British from our continent,” Grundy argued. “I am willing to receive the Canadians as adopted brethren.” Randolph argued that Republicans ignored the underlying ethnic connections behind the merging idea of nations. Canadians would never rebel against Great Britain, their natural ally, he insisted. The United States refused to accommodate the English, “those whose blood runs in our veins,” while trading with “Turks, Jews, and Infidels.” Conflict with Great Britain amounted to a civil war and, probably, cultural suicide. Republicans saw the nation’s future in the west in the Louisiana Territory, where they believed that ethnicity seemed to matter less. In November 1811, Randolph fought the statehood bill for Louisiana in an effort to prevent “foreigners having any part in the Government.” The mixtures of French, Spanish, Creole, and

⁵³ *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 441, 442, 446-9.

African people in the territory presented a multi-ethnic future for the nation that Randolph despised. He now saw the true United States as an ethnic entity with Anglo-Saxonism as the basis for all of the United States's most important customs and institutions. He insisted that the common English heritage should bind the inhabitants of the original thirteen states with Great Britain. Now, Republicans seemed obsessed with New Orleans, which was "filled with a disloyal and turbulent people; alien to our institutions, language and manners." Once Louisiana became a state, he continued, their citizens would eventually reveal their inherent "blind devotion to the most ruthless military despotism." Social order and stability required racial and cultural solidarity.⁵⁴

No division of the population disturbed Randolph more than that between black and white. Randolph remarked that he approached the topic "as tenderly as possible—it was with reluctance that [I] touched it at all." Southerners, who now argued for a militant crusade against fellow white people, entrusted their lives to their slaves. During the Seven Years' War and the American Revolution, Randolph argued, slaves remained loyal to their masters. Ignoring his own radical past, he professed fear that "the French Revolution had polluted even them." Slaves demonstrated a "general contempt of order, morality, and religion, unthinkingly to cherish the seeds of self-destruction to them and their families." He truly believed that war with Great Britain would lead to massive slave revolts noting that "within the last ten years, repeated alarms of insurrection among the slaves" had become a constant source of anxiety for Virginians:

From the spreading of this infernal doctrine [of the French Revolution], the whole of the Southern country had been thrown into a state of insecurity. Men dead to the operation of moral causes, had taken away from the poor slave his habit of loyalty and obedience to

⁵⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 357-8, 426, 444, 447,452.

his master, which lightened his servitude by a double operation; beguiling his own cares and disarming his master's suspicions and severity; and now like true empirics in politics, you are called upon to trust to the mere physical strength of fetter which holds him in bondage. You have deprived him of all moral restraint, you have tempted him to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, just enough to perfect him in wickedness; you have opened his eyes to his nakedness; you have armed his nature against the hand that has fed, that has clothed him, that has cherished him in sickness. You have done all this. God forbid, sir, that the Southern States should ever see an enemy on their shores, with these infernal principles of French fraternity in the van!

Once European devastation spread to the South, Randolph continued, slaves would murder their masters and seize the land, a repetition of St. Domingue. While Calhoun, Grundy, and Clay envisioned a western empire of vast commercial and political power, Randolph foresaw the destruction of the English world and of liberty itself. The separation of Canada, France's defeat of Britain, and the flood of foreign peoples in the territory would excite the slaves into action. In the end, chaos and violence would consume Britain, Canada, and America. Even if war proved successful, he argued, the results would devastate the South, since the acquisition of Canada would shift the balance of power away from the slaveholding South to the free North.⁵⁵

Americans could prevent such an apocalypse if they adhered to "the promises held out by their Republican predecessors when they came into power." Raising an army and navy would require vast tax revenue and sacrifice. The House should again opt for peace, "paying off the national debt... retrenching useless institutions." Randolph feared, however, that the new Republicans resembled the old Federalist "Essex Junto." They were "infatuated with standing

⁵⁵ *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 357-8, 444, 448-451.

armies, loans, taxes, navies, and war.” Yet the Republicans condemned the Federalists of New England and proclaimed themselves the heirs of the American Revolution. Randolph wondered, “What Republicanism is this?”⁵⁶

Randolph’s speech represented the pinnacle of congressional antiwar sentiment. The repeated charges of treason had silenced New England Federalists, many of whom looked to Randolph to make the case. The speech showed signs of swaying members, particularly the arguments about the cost of war. Hugh Nelson, a Virginia freshman and neighbor of Jefferson, noted approvingly Randolph’s influence: “The more I see him the more I like him. He is as honest as the sun,” Nelson said. “Do not be surprised if before the session closes I am classified with him as a minority man.” In the past, Randolph’s personality and oratorical skill could have intimidated and swayed enemies and friends, but the new House members refused Randolph’s entreaties. Anyone who doubted a new day had arrived in American politics was soon disabused of such notions when John C. Calhoun responded.⁵⁷

Calhoun attacked Randolph’s logic as inconsistent and dangerous. While the Virginian brayed about the lack of security in Virginia and the nation’s ill state of preparation, Calhoun asked, “whose is the fault?” Calhoun blamed the nation’s problems on dogmatic republicans, especially Randolph: “Who has been a member for many years past, and has seen the defenceless state of his country even near him under his own eyes, without a single endeavor to remedy so

⁵⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 454-5.

⁵⁷ Norman Risjord, “1812: Conservatives, War Hawks and the Nation’s Honor,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 18 (April 1961), Nelson quote on 208; Wehtje, “Opposition in Virginia,” 74-5.

serious an evil?” The argument against taxation to support a just war evinced a base feeling of “avarice.”⁵⁸

Randolph’s fears of internal dissension among slaves seemed unfounded and unwarranted to Calhoun: “I believe no war can be less dangerous to internal peace, or national existence.” He ridiculed the very idea of slavery being anything other than an asset.

As far as the gentleman from Virginia speaks of his own personal knowledge, I will not pretend to contradict him—I only regret such is the dreadful state of his particular part of the country. Of the Southern section, I too have some personal knowledge, and can say, that in South Carolina no such fears in part are felt. But. [sic] Sir, admit the gentleman’s statement, will a war with Great Britain increase the danger? Will the country be less able to repress insurrection? Had we any such thing to fear from that quarter, which I sincerely disbelieve, in my opinion, the precise time of the greatest safety is during the war in which we have no fear of invasion—then the country is most on its guard; our militia the best prepared; and standing force the greatest. Even in our Revolution no attempts were made by that portion of our population; and, however the gentleman may frighten himself with the disorganizing effects of French principles, I cannot think our ignorant blacks have felt much of their baneful influence. I dare say more than one half of them never heard of the French Revolution.

Calhoun saw the South’s slaves as child-like and incapable of understanding or constructing ideologies. In Calhoun’s South, the slave understood only what the master allowed him to know. Randolph, however, had witnessed the fleeing slaves during the American Revolution, the antislavery movement in Philadelphia, Gabriel’s Rebellion, and the unrest of his brother’s slaves

⁵⁸ *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 478-9.

as they waited for their emancipation. He still believed that slaves would, given an opportunity, rebel against their unnatural state. Slaves clearly understood their natural human rights.⁵⁹

In 1812, Calhoun and the Republicans convinced the nation that Great Britain's abuses amounted to an attempt at recolonization. Georgia congressman George Troup remarked that nearly the entire House stood against "the solitary gentleman from Virginia" in opposing conflict with England. Randolph's remarks revived the allegations that the British had bribed him. "Randolph seems to have composed his speeches from the fragments of the tory publications," Benjamin Rush wrote to Jefferson. Randolph continued to stress how Americans "received our indelible character of freemen from our Anglo Saxon Descent." He wondered how one colleague could rest "his head upon his pillow without returning thanks to God that he was descended from English parentage?" From this English heritage flowed "the blessings of life."⁶⁰

In March, revelations of a British plot to incite New England's secession curbed Randolph's pro-British talk. President Madison bought secret documents that supposedly revealed a connection between New England Federalists and the British government. Randolph doubted the authenticity of the plot, but believed it proved his larger point: war would bring dissension and division. Such diversions obscured the fact that while the administration focused on Britain "the Berlin [and] Milan decrees are in operation on all they touch." Dividing the union would "be the constant object of the British government" if America went to war. "The Southern States have no points of collision with England," he wrote in his diary, but war would separate the sections. The prospect of war was already causing unrest back in Virginia. "My friends write

⁵⁹ *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 480.

⁶⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 672; Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 150-1; Benjamin Rush to TJ, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson: Retirement Series: 18 June 1811 to 30 April 1812*, 4:339; *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 490, 536.

me that the alarm is very great among the women, and the state of Society as uncomfortable as possible should there be war and invasion!" As his colleagues prepared for war, he reminded them that "the eyes of God are upon us" and asked them to wait six weeks before considering war. The "oppressive act of the party of power" frightened the people into war, he argued. By late spring, Randolph was convinced that France wanted Great Britain and the United States at war and that Madison and the Republican party too far in "propitiate[ing] the French Emperor."⁶¹

Through the spring of 1812, Randolph worked incessantly to postpone the war decision. In April, Madison urged Congress to pass a temporary embargo against England, although France still continued to violate American maritime interests. New England condemned the action as a precursor to war. Hezekiah Niles saw the looming conflict as a cleansing moment for the republic, which would allow a purge of dissenters. Republicans would then rule "as with the mind of one man." President Madison remained skeptical of war, especially when British minister Foster signaled that his government might alter the Orders-in-Council. The "war hawks" wanted war, however, and pressured Madison for a declaration. In late May 1812, Randolph rose on the House floor to respond to rumors that the president would soon ask for a war. As he began, Speaker Clay interrupted him. John C. Calhoun then requested that Randolph submit his remarks in writing to the House. "My proposition is, that it is not expedient at this time to resort to a war against Great Britain," Randolph said in his appeal to Clay. After several minutes of debate, Clay succeeded in silencing Randolph. In a letter to his constituents, Randolph claimed

⁶¹ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 37-9; *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 712, 1189, 1589; JR to Garnett, April 29, 1812, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Garnett, March 13, 1812, Randolph Papers, UVA; *Annals of Congress*, 1387-8; JR to Benjamin Watkins Leigh, March 6, 1812, JR collection, VHS; Myron F. Wehtje, "Opposition in Virginia to the War of 1812," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* (January 1970), 65-86; JR to John Taylor of Caroline, March 13, 1811, Massachusetts Historical Society.

that his right to speak on their behalf had been denied by Clay. Nothing now could stop the nation from going to war to support “the destroyer of mankind,” Napoleon. American blood would surely “flow to cement his power.” The nation would be joined in a war to destroy British liberty and in the process “put your own in jeopardy.” As he had warned his colleagues, he cautioned his constituents of the coming doom. On June 1, Madison asked for war against Great Britain and Congress soon declared it. “This sin, at least, shall not rest upon my soul,” Randolph told his constituents.⁶²

⁶² *Niles' Weekly Register*, May 30, 1812; Lawrence Delbert Cress, “‘Cool and Serious Reflection’: Federalist Attitudes Toward War in 1812,” *Journal of the Early Republic* (Summer, 1987), 124-5; Stuart, *War and American Thought*, 136-7; Verbal Exchange with John Randolph, May 29, 1812, *Papers of Henry Clay*, 1:660-2; JR to the Freeholders of Charlotte, Prince Edward, Buckingham, and Cumberland, May 30, 1812, Garland, *John Randolph*, 1:299-303; Reginald Horsman, *The Causes of the War of 1812* (New York: Barnes, 1962); Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler and Ronald L. Ivie, *Congress Declares War: Rhetoric, Leadership, and Partisanship* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1983); Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler “Party Unity and the Decision for War in the House Representatives,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (July 1972), 367-90; Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler, “The War Hawks and the Question of Congressional Leadership in 1812,” *Pacific Historical Review* (February 1976), 1-22; Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler and Robert L. Ivie, “Justifying the War of 1812: Toward a Model of Congressional Behavior in Early War Crises,” *Social Science History* 4 (Autumn 1980), 453-77; Raymond W. Champagne, Jr. and Thomas J. Rueter, “Jonathan Roberts and the ‘War Hawk’ Congress of 1811-1812,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104 (October 1980), 434-449.

Chapter 6: “Chapter of Contradictions:” Slavery, Decay, and Salvation from the War of 1812 to the Missouri Compromise

On May 10, 1822, William Wilberforce escorted John Randolph of Roanoke into London’s Freemason’s Hall for the fifteenth annual African Institution. The peculiar-looking man and “his republican simplicity of manner” intrigued the audience. In the hall, 1,500 abolitionists and antislavery men and women gathered to discuss efforts to ameliorate the condition of slaves in the Western world. During the previous year’s meeting, the Institution had expressed its belief that the recent Missouri Compromise enacted by the United States Congress would “aggravate the evils of slavery in the United States.” During the current meeting, members urged better enforcement of the ban on the Atlantic slave trade and supported measures that would lead to “the gradual abolition of slavery itself.” Baron Henry Brougham lamented the declining antislavery sentiment in the Atlantic world but expressed hope that the people of the United States would eventually lead the effort to eradicate slavery. He revealed a hope that the rise of democracy in America would lead to emancipation. Brougham singled out “Mr. Randolph’s great efforts” in working for the enforcement against “slave trade piracy,” ignoring Randolph’s vote against the 1807 bill abolishing the foreign slave trade and his continual thwarting of efforts to strengthen enforcement.¹

With no official representatives from the United States in attendance, the audience urged Randolph to respond. He addressed the crowd on behalf of his nation, though professing that he “felt inadequate” to do so. “All that was exalted in station, in talent, and in moral character,

¹ *London Times*, May 11, 1822; Kenneth Wayne Ackerson, “The African Institution of London and The Anti-Slavery Movement in Great Britain,” (PhD Diss., Temple University, 1999), 276; Fladeland, *Men and Brothers*, 111, 122.

among his countrymen, was (as was also to be found in England) firmly united for the suppression of this nefarious traffic,” Randolph was quoted as telling the crowd. In no way did he dare summarize or expound on the antislavery temperament of the United States. “It was delightful [to him] to know that Virginia, that land of his sires, the place of his nativity, had for half a century affixed a public brand, an indelible stigma upon this traffic.” He assured the audience that Virginia “had put in the claim of the wretched objects of it to the common rights and attributes of humanity.” The audience roared agreement at Randolph’s recognition of the rights of slaves. With the ringing approval of some of the most prominent Englishmen of the era, he sat down, satisfied.²

In the United States, news of Randolph’s address to the African Institution elicited mixed responses from Northerners and Southerners. In the North, Randolph’s emotional and relentless defense of the right of slaveholders had earned him the reputation as the South’s staunchest proslavery voice. The *Columbian Centinel* wished Randolph “had made himself able to add, that previous to his departure from America, he had liberated the many ‘fellow men,’ that he holds in slavery.” Instead, critics argued, Randolph’s speech represented the grossest deception imaginable. The hundreds of slaves at Roanoke provided backbreaking labor “to enable him to live in luxury, and traverse the globe at his pleasure.” Another Massachusetts newspaper published a mock toast to Randolph in the supposed dialect of a slave: “Misser Randolph—he talk a good deal about bobalition in London; be he sing another tune on his plantation.” In Richmond, Thomas Ritchie reported the event with little commentary but with obvious disdain for the African Institution. After covering Randolph’s career for several years, Ritchie certainly

² *London Times*, May 11, 1822; *Genius of Universal of Emancipation*, July 1822.

appreciated the congressman's erratic behavior and his ability to shock supporters and critics alike.³

Randolph's speech offended American abolitionist Benjamin Lundy, who idolized Wilberforce and drew inspiration from the British antislavery movement. He saw vain political reasons for Randolph's address and wondered why the attendees tolerated such a display of deception and hypocrisy. "Perhaps they were delighted to see how eloquently a violent advocate of slavery could speak against the slave trade simply because it suited his ideas of popularity," Lundy wrote in his *Genius of Universal Emancipation*. Lundy accused Southern slaveholders of ignoring the rapid "march of mind" toward freedom. Men such as Randolph failed to foresee the fate of slavery in the Western world, which was becoming increasingly apparent to Lundy. "The fiend of Slavery in North America is surrounded. The free States of this Union are on the east, the north, and the west—Hayti and Columbia on the south." Lundy believed that if Southerners embraced emancipation now they could avoid the eventual confrontation between master and slave. "THE ADVOCATES OF LIBERTY ARE SURE OF THEIR MARK," he insisted. Randolph met the greatest moral and political problem of his day with "weakness and inconsistency."⁴

Randolph believed himself an antislavery man. After the War of 1812, he struggled to reconcile his private antislavery feelings, his growing idealization of Virginia's gentry past, and his hatred of the Northern antislavery movement. During a decade of political disappointments and emotional turmoil, in which Randolph found God—or as he believed, God found him—he privately committed himself to improving conditions for his slaves. In his most expansive

³ *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), July 3, 1822; *Salem Gazette*, July 23, 1822.

⁴ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, July 1822; See Merton L. Dillon, *Benjamin Lundy and the Struggle for Negro Freedom* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1966) 84.

moments, he talked of becoming the “American Wilberforce.” He committed himself against the slave trade and advocated colonization as a possible solution to Virginia’s growing racial problems. To colleagues in the North, he lamented both the decline of the gentry and the South’s devotion to slavery. In his mind, he represented the true antislavery man, defending slaves from cruel overseers and saving them from eternal damnation. Most importantly, he arranged for the freedom of his slaves after his death, an assurance to himself that he was above all else an emancipator.⁵

After the declaration of war against Great Britain, the supporters of the conflict tried to stifle dissent. Randolph’s vehement antiwar rhetoric made him as a leading voice of opposition. In the summer of 1812, he condemned Speaker Henry Clay for cutting him off during an antiwar speech, calling it an attack on the “great fundamental principles” of republican government. In the House, the war supporters of the war stigmatized those who dared question it. Felix Grundy insisted that all Americans must now decide if they were “for [their] country or against it.” Virginia congressman John G. Jackson believed “Tar & Feathers” the just deserts of the war’s critics. By early July, the United States army planned an invasion of Canada. The moment of debate had ended and all citizens must sustain the war, supporters argued. In Virginia, Governor James Barbour urged citizens to “present an undivided front to the enemy.” In Baltimore, when newspaper publisher Alexander Hanson claimed that Madison took his war directives from Napoleon, a Republican mob beat him and demolished his newspaper building. To Randolph, the

⁵ JR to Rev. John H. Rice, September 8, 1815, in William Maxwell, *A Memoir of the Rev. John H. Rice, D.D., First Professor of Theology in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia* (Philadelphia: J. Whetham, Richmond, 1835), 115; JR to Brockenbrough, February 24, 1820, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:133.

mob demonstrated the hysteria that all war's produced, particularly in a growing climate of democracy. "I cannot trust my pen on the subject of Baltimore Mobs," he wrote. Many thought his antiwar speeches inspired treason. The dissenters, labeled by one critic as "Randolphit[e]s," threatened the effective execution of the war. "The temper of the 1790s was mildness and moderation compared with that of the present day," Randolph wrote. At one July 4th celebration in Virginia, revelers concluded their evening by burning Randolph in effigy. "If the vengeance of heaven does not fall on him, the hand of his country will at last overtake him," a war supporter wrote.⁶

In mid-July, General William Hull's army invaded Canada and immediately suffered a humiliating defeat. Within a month, British forces pushed Hull's army back into the United States and eventually captured Fort Detroit. Randolph had condemned the Canadian invasion and delighted in the American defeat, ridiculing it as "an expedition for a flock of wild geese." In August, news arrived in Washington that the new British government under Lord Liverpool had repealed the original Orders-in-Council that blockaded France and targeted American shipping. Many in Virginia urged Madison and Monroe to make peace with Great Britain. Madison refused, and seeing no alternative to continuing the war despite its growing unpopularity.⁷

⁶ Reply to Mr. Clay, *Niles' Weekly Register*, August 29, 1812; *Richmond Enquirer*, July 28, 1812, William Pope to James Madison, July 10, 1812, *Papers of Madison: Presidential Series*, 5:4; *James Barbour to the Militia Commanders of Virginia*, June 25, 1812 in Myron F. Wehtje, "Opposition in Virginia to the War of 1812," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 78 (January 1970), 82; *Annals of Congress*, 12:1, 1410; *National Intelligencer*, May 14, 1812; Hickey, *War of 1812*, ch. 3; Paul A. Gilje, "The Baltimore Riots of 1812 and the Breakdown of the Anglo-American Mob Tradition," *Journal of Social History* (Summer, 1980), 547-564; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, September 6, 1812, Harriet Langdon Pruyn Rice, *Harmanus Bleecker: An Albany Dutchman* (Albany, N.Y., 1924), 50.

⁷ Hickey, *War of 1812*, 80-5; Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 208-9.; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, September 6, 1812, Rice, *Harmanus Bleecker*, 50; Garnett to JR, September 13, 1812, Randolph Papers, UVA; Myron F. Wehtje, "Opposition in Virginia to the War of 1812," 80-1.

With elections looming in the fall of 1812, the Republican candidates expressed loyalty to the President and his war effort. Although Virginia congressional elections were not until April, John Wayles Eppes began to campaign immediately in the fifteenth district for Randolph's seat. Jefferson and the Republicans wanted to defeat Randolph, especially now that he embodied the antiwar movement. In September, the two candidates appeared together at the courthouse in Buckingham County. With a stack of books at his side, Eppes offered a learned but tedious defense of the war while attacking Randolph for failing to support the administration. To his supporters' "mortification," Eppes gave an "extremely feeble" defense of the war. In response, Randolph argued vehemently and cogently against the conflict, winning the agreement of the audience, who considered the invasion of Canada a failure. "There is no doubt of R's. re-election," wrote one observer after the meeting. The Republicans began circulating rumors that the British bribed him for his opposition to the war. "[T]he more ignorant and vicious part of the community have been told that I am a foreign pensioner," he wrote. "Those miserable wretches do, or affect to believe that I am abounding in British gold." Enemies spread these rumors among the lowest classes, to whom Randolph would never defend himself. By the fall of 1812, the administration's poor conduct of the war had diminished Eppes's chances against Randolph. Randolph expected that the "spirit and intelligence of my constituents" would end "the persecution of six years," since he had first opposed the Jefferson administration's Yazoo settlement. In the next congressional session, many realized Randolph would present a potent opposition to the war and the Madison administration. In South Carolina, General William Butler refused to run against John C. Calhoun for a simple reason: "You can meet Randolph in debate. I cannot."⁸

⁸ JR to Garnett, September 14, 1812, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Richard K. Randolph,

In the presidential election, the war, and specifically the Southern domination of the government, led to sectional tensions. As the Americans struggled to regain footing in Canada and faced the dangerous Indian threat in the West, a coalition of Northern Federalists and Republicans built an opposition movement against Madison's war. They united behind New York City mayor Dewitt Clinton to unseat Madison. Casting themselves as a peace party, the Clintonians and Federalists wanted to end the reign of Virginia presidents, who they believed opposed the commercial interests of the Northeast. The campaign effort portrayed Clinton as a pro-commercial man, free from French influence. While Clinton's supporters focused on the failed invasion of Canada as proof of Madison's incompetence, the president's supporters placed their hopes in a cabinet shuffle, urging that Monroe take control of the military and end the conflict. Rumors also abounded that Jefferson or Eppes would take over the State Department. In November, Madison won reelection with little Northern support outside Pennsylvania. Federalists increased their numbers in Congress, however, and demonstrated a sectional cohesion. The administration prepared for a contentious congressional session over the conduct of the war. In December, Monroe admitted to Randolph that the nation now stood in "an embarrassing situation." The administration had placed "great reliance on the unpopularity of an American war in G. Britain," but instead the conflict had roused the support of the British public. After Napoleon's failed invasion of Russia, it now seemed likely that Britain would emerge

September 17, 1812, Randolph Papers, LC; JR to Richard K. Randolph, October 11, 1812, LC; *The Columbian* (New York), August 10, 1810; *Connecticut Herald*, October 6, 1812; *Salem Gazette* (Massachusetts), October 13, 1812, reprint of *Norfolk Ledger* article; Charles M. Wiltse, *John C. Calhoun; Nationalist, 1782-1828* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944), 45.

victorious in Europe. Monroe hoped that the nations could reach a peaceful settlement before Britain sent its seasoned veterans of the European campaigns to America.⁹

Madison still hoped to salvage the war effort and proposed military changes to achieve victory. At the end of 1812, he asked Congress for a restructuring of the military, giving the President and the War Department more control over recruiting and military appointments. In particular, he hoped to invigorate the army's leadership by ridding it of aged Revolutionary War-era veterans and political generals. Many pinned their hopes on James Monroe after Madison convinced him to take over the War Department, in addition to his current duties as Secretary of State. Most importantly, Madison wanted an expansion of the army and construction of a navy. However, as Secretary of the Treasury Albert Gallatin informed him that the nation had scarcely enough money to survive, much less fund the war effort. The embargo and the war had left the nation's coffers empty. Congress needed to pass new internal taxes to pay for an expansion of the military.¹⁰

In January 1813, Randolph attacked Madison's request for new taxes and military expansion. The proposals confirmed Randolph's persistent characterizations of Madison as a centralizer, angling to empower the federal government. Randolph demanded that the administration produce a list of all government officeholders, which would reveal that Madison

⁹ *Weekly Messenger* (Boston), September 11, 1812; Steven Edwin Stryker, "The Sectional Politics of 'Practical Republicanism': De Witt Clinton's Presidential Bid, 1810-1812," *Journal of the Early Republic* (Winter 1985), 457-60; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 162; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 101-5; Richard P. McCormick, *The Presidential Game: The Origins of American Presidential Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 101; JR to John Taylor of Caroline, December 15, 1812, Massachusetts Historical Society; Donald R. Hickey, "Federalist Party Unity and the War of 1812," *Journal of American Studies* 12 (April 1978), 23-39; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 683-4; Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 274.

¹⁰ Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 683-4; Stagg, *Mr. Madison's War*, 275-7; *Salem Gazette* (Massachusetts), January 12, 1813.

filled these positions with political cronies. Now, he argued, the President wanted taxes to reward more friends with military positions. In a nearly three-hour speech, Randolph gloated over the administration's predicament, charging that Madison had allowed Napoleon to manipulate the nation into war but that now "the Ruler of France has turned with contempt from your reclamations." With France defeated in Russia, it seemed that the United States would face Britain's wrath alone. In his long and emotional speech, Randolph extolled Great Britain, delighting in its victories over Napoleon. The Americans' "Christian brothers" in Britain would finish off the "Devil" Napoleon if the United States abandoned the war effort, Randolph argued. The common interests, culture, and religion of the United States and Great Britain made this an unnatural, if not a civil, war. Randolph looked on Britain as a moral arbiter in the Atlantic world. In particular, he privately expressed support for Britain's continuing effort to demolish the slave trade. When Great Britain pushed the United States to clamp down on those slavetraders using neutral flags to avoid scrutiny, Randolph supported a change in American law. He hoped "that some expedient will be devised to put a stop to the infamous traffic in slaves by Americans under foreign colors." Such an endeavor proved Great Britain's moral superiority, he argued, and American assistance in prolonging Napoleon's reign was a sin. "Let us turn from him—come out from his house—and join in the worship of the true and living God, instead of spilling the blood of his people on the abominable alter of the French Moloch." As he begged for an end to the war, Randolph sat down and wept before the entire House. Through his tears, he asked how the United States could wage war against England after it "had done so much in India towards [bringing] many millions of wretches to christianity!" The Congress passed most of Madison's requested measures but Randolph helped defeat the call for new taxes. As the debate concluded,

Randolph appeared near exhaustion. “I am in a state of collapse,” he wrote to congressman James Mercer Garnett.¹¹

The Republican press condemned Randolph’s defense of Britain’s war effort as treasonous or a sign of mental derangement. “Johnny Randolph has been crying like a *baby*, in Congress, about the *war*,” wrote one critic. To Southern Republicans, Randolph’s views put him in league with New England’s Federalists. In Georgia, the legislature voted to change the name of Randolph County, which legislators had named to honor him for his relentless opposition to the Yazoo settlement. Randolph exhibited “such a desertion of correct principles, and such an attachment to the enemies of the United States, as to render his name odious to the people of Georgia, and the United States,” one editorial stated. An increasing number of critics argued that Randolph’s performances in Congress were a sign of “madness.” Such assertions marginalized Randolph and diminished his views.¹²

Randolph’s congressional performance energized political opponents in Virginia and revived Eppes’s candidacy. Citizens who had supported Randolph’s principled antiwar stand now abandoned him. His emotional performances before Congress seemed to confirm many of the worst characterizations of him as an eccentric and self-indulgent slavemaster. A Virginia Federalist advised voters to reject Randolph and “we shall then hear no more of ‘negro slaves’–

¹¹ JR to John Taylor of Caroline, quoted in Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 282-3; *Annals of Congress*, 12:2, 782, 791, 804; *Salem Gazette* (Massachusetts), January 12, 1813; John Randolph to George Logan, February 18, 1813, Logan Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; *Republican Star* (Maryland), February 2, 1813 republished from letter to *Richmond Enquirer*; JR to Garnett, February 4, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; Ohline, “Politics and Society,” 432; Ketcham, *James Madison*, 548.

¹² *Republican Star* (Maryland), February 2, 1813 republished from letter to *Richmond Enquirer*; *The Investigator* (Charleston, SC), January 27, 1813; *City Gazette* (Charleston, SC), January 19, 1813; For the most provocative take on madness, reason, and insanity see Michel Foucault, *Madness and Reason: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1965).

‘slave holders’—‘Virginia influence.’ The tone will be changed to ‘patriotic Virginians.’” In the early April election, Eppes defeated Randolph at the polls by 74 votes, and Virginians celebrated his defeat. “How the mighty have fallen!” the *Richmond Enquirer* stated. “We rejoice that the man, who has scattered damnation around the land, is doomed at last by the voice of the people to the shades of retirement and obscurity.”¹³

The defeat devastated Randolph, who condemned his enemies’ tactics as the worst ever “resorted to in Virginia.” In the weeks leading up to the election, Eppes had aimed his campaign at the voters whom Randolph disdained, new land owners and evangelical Christians. Eppes, Randolph claimed, had, “descended to attend day and night meetings at the houses of the lowest order of freeholders.” These citizens enjoyed enough prosperity to buy land, but they remained beneath Randolph’s social status. Although Eppes came from the same distinguished planter background as Randolph, he seized on the growing democratic strain in Virginia that encouraged a broader civic participation. Indeed, Eppes’s willingness to engage a host of religious groups forced Randolph to engage in electioneering in a new way. During the final week of the campaign, Eppes attended fourteen meetings of the fast growing Baptist denomination, whose antislavery views and egalitarian strain disgusted Randolph. In response, Randolph made appeals to the district’s more respectable Presbyterians. The increased campaigning forced Randolph to appear before audiences and to defend his actions in Congress while combating those “who told a thousand lies as they passed thro [sic].” Rumor served as a powerful force in the campaign by giving influence to those unable to vote. Enemies revived the charges of British bribery and people of all ranks spread them throughout the district. “Ignorant people were made to believe

¹³ *Weekly Aurora*, April 6, 1813; Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 50; *Baltimore Patriot*, April 20, 1813, reprinted from the *Enquirer*.

that the British fleet had come into the Chesapeake to aid my election,” Randolph wrote to Josiah Quincy. Randolph resented the defeat, the means of Eppes’s victory, and the voters themselves. “I owe the public nothing,” he wrote to Francis Scott Key. Those who knew him realized that the defeat would aggravate Randolph’s fragile emotional state. “All believe that he will chew the cud of reflection, the next winter at his own peaceful home,” wrote one observer.¹⁴

Randolph sank further into anguish, reflection, and self-pity. “I am overwhelmed by black misanthropy and despair,” he wrote to Garnett. In a particularly dark moment, he asked his friend Garnett, “tell me why I should not quit this wretched way of life?” His inability to influence his colleagues or constituents convinced him of the “incurable depravity of my species.” Initially, he scorned his fellow Virginians. When his young relative Theodore Dudley headed for medical school in Philadelphia, Randolph advised him to “choose not Virginians for your companions. I have no doubt that many of the medical students of the South leave Philadelphia as ignorant of everything worthy to be known in that city, as when they entered it. This arises from a clannish spirit, which makes them associate exclusively with one another, and foster their ridiculous prejudices against people of the middle or northern states, of whom, in fact they know nothing.” Indeed, he joined those who argued that Virginia and the South were a step behind the Northeast. In exile at Roanoke, he developed warm relationships with Northerners such as the Philadelphia Quaker George Logan, New York congressman Harmanus Bleecker,

¹⁴ JR to Harmanus Bleecker, April 22, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Josiah Quincy, Randolph Papers, LC; JR to Francis Scott Key, May 10, 1813, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:12; Bouldin, *Home Reminiscences*, 49, these were from the memories of James W. Bouldin; *Baltimore Patriot*, April 20, 1813, reprinted from *Enquirer*; Daniel P. Jordan, “John Randolph of Roanoke and the Art of Winning Elections in Jeffersonian Virginia” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 86 (October 1978), 396-400.

and Josiah Quincy. His electoral defeat exacerbated his disillusionment. Writing to James Mercer Garnett, Randolph threatened “selling my estate and retiring to some distant and obscure retreat.” To Francis Scott Key, he wrote, “I should convert my estate into money and move northwardly.”¹⁵

As Randolph had warned, Virginia remained ill-prepared for the war with Great Britain or the threat of a slave uprising. “The whole country, watered by the rivers, which fall into the Chesapeake, is in a state of *paralysis*,” he reported to Josiah Quincy. While the state’s militia companies prepared to join the campaign in Canada, wartime speculators exploited the situation, much to Randolph’s disgust. “The French and Jews, of whom the trading population is composed, practice the vilest extortion upon their defenders,” he wrote. As prices rose, the state’s defenses deteriorated. Randolph hoped that the hardships would inspire resistance and pressure the Republicans to end the war. “The discontent, which had been so long smothered by a large portion of the people, will break forth to the consternation of their rulers, whom they will lay upon the shelf with very little ceremony.”¹⁶

As Randolph had predicted during the congressional debates, many slaves saw the war as their opportunity for freedom. When the British navy patrolled Chesapeake Bay, slaves fled for the coast into the arms of the invader. By the spring of 1813, rumors of slave plots spread throughout the South and Washington, D.C. The lingering threat of insurrection led some to question why Virginia’s troops were fighting in Canada while their neighborhoods remained threatened. That summer, Governor James Barbour asked the state legislature to raise a separate

¹⁵JR to Garnett, January 12, 1812, Randolph Papers, UVA; JR to Theodore Dudley, August 12, 1811, *Letters to a Young Relative*, 97; JR to Francis Scott Key, September 13, 1813, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:22; JR to George Logan, February 13, 1813, Logan Papers, HSP.

¹⁶JR to Quincy, August 30, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA.

army to suppress any potential uprising. “We are all here in a state of great alarm and distress,” Randolph wrote to Quincy. While the nation worried about the campaign in Canada, Virginia struggled to subdue “the danger from an internal foe.” The state sent soldiers to the Great Dismal Swamp, which was near the most restless slave population in the state. Randolph realized that soldiers sent there would never survive the harsh climate, making them the first victims in an internal race war looming for Virginia.¹⁷

In April 1814, British admiral Alexander Cochrane issued a proclamation that offered freedom and relocation to runaway slaves in the Chesapeake Bay region. As word seeped into the Virginia countryside, more slaves fled toward the coast. In response, Virginia limited the movement of all slaves and free blacks and considered recalling the state’s soldiers from the war front in Canada to maintain order. “Our negroes are flocking to the enemy from all quarters, which they [the British] convert into troops, vindictive, and rapacious,” wrote American brigadier general John Hungerford. During the war, approximately three thousand Virginia slaves fled to freedom, which increased fears of rebellion. John Coalter, Randolph’s brother-in-law, argued that even if planters kept their slaves from rebelling or fleeing, the war had planted the idea of freedom in their minds. Fearing a class of servants enlightened about freedom, Coalter advocated selling all slaves over fourteen to other states, thus ridding Virginia of its most dangerous inhabitants.¹⁸

¹⁷ Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: International Publishers, 1969 reprint), 25, 254-5; Frank A. Cassell, “Slaves of the Chesapeake Bay Area and the War of 1812,” *The Journal of Negro History* 57 (April 1972), 145-46; Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 272; Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 69.

¹⁸ Ford, *Deliver Us From Evil*, 69-70; Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 134-5; Cassell, “Slaves of the Chesapeake,” *Journal of Negro History*, 149-50; Garnett to JR, May 9 and 14, Randolph Papers, UVA; Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 412.

The free black population was blamed by planters for spreading the spirit of rebelliousness. With the threat of racial unrest looming, John Taylor of Caroline explored the white contempt for free blacks in two of his *Arator* essays. He cast slavery as a “misfortune,” but believed it “incapable of removal.” In their misfortune, master and slave formed a powerful bond, which subdued the servants’ “furious passions.” Free blacks interfered with the master-slave relationship and thus endangered Southern stability. This “unproductive class” stole from plantations, corrupted obedient slaves, inspired them to run away, and planted the seeds of rebellion. Randolph read and agreed with Taylor’s arguments.¹⁹

While his neighbors feared their own slaves, Randolph expressed little concern about his own. In the classic example of slaveholding paternalism, he convinced himself that his slaves posed less of a danger. They loved him and appreciated how he cared for them. And by some accounts, the Roanoke slaves did exhibit affection toward Randolph, real or feigned. Josiah Quincy, Jr. expressed surprise when a man in Washington described a visit with Randolph to Roanoke. “Men and women rushed toward him, seized him by the hand with perfect familiarity, and burst into tears of delight at his presence among them. His conduct to these humble dependents was like that of a most affectionate father among his children.” Randolph insisted that he took no precautions to protect himself from his own slaves. “I sleep with windows open to the floor, my doors are never fastened, seldom shut,” he wrote. To him, they were his family. He encouraged intermarriage of his own slaves and discouraged relationships with bondsmen

¹⁹ “Number 13” and “Number 14,” John Taylor, *Arator: Being a Series of Agricultural Essays, Practical and Political; in Sixty-Four Numbers*, ed. M.E. Bradford (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1977), 115-117.

from other plantations. In his own eyes, he was their benefactor and they were, for the most part, loyal servants who offered him important connections to the gentry past.²⁰

Of course, Randolph based many of his suppositions about slavery on his limited contact with his personal servants. “My best friends are a few faithful slaves, who attend to my domestic concerns and minister to my few wants without troubling me for orders,” he wrote. John White and Jupiter, more commonly known as Juba, grew extremely close to their master. Since 1803, John White, whose father Essex had also served the Randolph family, had attended Randolph at Roanoke and Washington. The two servants accompanied their master everywhere, even sleeping in the same room with Randolph at Roanoke. Juba and John White riding alongside Randolph in the streets or standing behind him at dinner became a familiar sight in Washington. He showed them favor and may have given them a sense of distinction. Randolph doted on them publicly, even comparing John White’s intelligence favorably to that of his congressional colleagues. But they would never be allowed to forget that he was their master. When John White battled alcoholism, Randolph sent him to work in the tobacco fields, once left him in jail for three months, and at least once ordered an overseer to whip him. By the accounts of many people, Randolph was particularly close to Juba, but when one person asked him, Randolph replied “Juba is good, very good servant—none better—but he will steal.” In 1843, ten years after Randolph’s death, Henry Howe visited Roanoke and found Juba still watching over Randolph’s cabin, which remained just as Randolph had left it. As Howe surveyed the simple dwelling, he spotted portraits of John Randolph and Pocahontas. Then he saw a rarity—a drawing of Juba, which Randolph kept there among his few possessions. “He was more than a

²⁰ JR to Josiah Quincy, October 18, 1813, Randolph Papers, LC; JR to Francis Scott Key, January 21, 1814; Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1888), 228-9; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, July 26, 1814, Randolph Papers, UVA.

father to me,” Juba told him. In Randolph’s political exile at Roanoke, slavery was one of the few institutions that remained constant.²¹

In the spring of 1814, Randolph left Roanoke to tour the eastern Tidewater region where he had spent his childhood. In March, he boarded a boat in Richmond and sailed the James River until it met the Appomattox. As the boat approached the bluff above the river, “the noble sheet of water in front of the house seemed to revive me” On land, the sight shocked him. He saw his birthplace Cawsons, “once the seat of plenty and cheerfulness, associated with my earliest and tenderest recollections, now muted and deserted.” As he traveled along the James, the sight of “dismantled country-seats, ruinous churches, fields forsaken” astonished him. Randolph mourned more than the physical deterioration of the Tidewater’s plantations. The three previous decades of social, economic, and political changes had “uprooted” the gentry and altered “the whole fabric” of his society. “The old gentry had disappeared,” replaced by “the rich vulgar.” Randolph lamented the loss of his ancestors’ way of life and romanticized the “race of planters, of English descent” of his memory:

Their inhabitants and establishments, for the most part spacious and costly, in some instances displayed taste and elegance. They were the seats of hospitality. The possessors were gentlemen,—better bred men were not to be found in the British dominion. Each

²¹ Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past* (Boston: Robert Brothers, 1888), 228-9; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, July 26, 1814, Randolph Papers, UVA; *The Bostonian*, (January 1895), 339; Bagby, “Randolph Slave Saga,” 62; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2;10; Henry Howe, “Some Reminiscences of My Early Days in New England and of Historical Travel Largely Pedestrian , over Four States of the Union-New York, New Jersey, Virginia and Ohio—in the seven Years from 1840 to 1847,” in *Historical Collections of Ohio in Two Volumes, Vol. 1*, (Norwalk, Ohio, Laning Printing, 1896), xx.

planter might be said, almost without exaggeration, to have a harbor at his door. Here he shipped his crop (tobacco), mostly on his own account to London, Bristol or Glasgow. Those families had disappeared, moved west or been reduced to poverty. Rich capitalists from undistinguished families now inhabited the Tidewater. Only “the most minute attention to their affairs” concerned these men. As the gentry disappeared, Randolph believed that the “middle and lower ranks of our people,” a class he typically despised, were “more social and hospitable” than the rising moneyed class that ruled eastern Virginia.²²

Randolph blamed democracy, westward movement, the failure of republicanism, and the policies of Jefferson and Madison for the decline of Virginia. He particularly despised the use of the gentry as “an electioneering bug bear” inspired by “democratical equality.” In the politics of Jefferson’s Virginia, candidates cast the aristocracy as the enemy of republican society and government, a remnant of the “poisoned society” of Great Britain. Looking back, Randolph believed that the 1785 disestablishment of the Anglican Church in Virginia was a critical moment in the gentry’s decline. In 1814, he stared at abandoned churches that now stood “in portentous silence upon our guilty land.” The attacks on the Anglican, now Episcopal Church, by deists such as Jefferson constituted an act of “sacrilegious violence” that “contributed to the swell of general ruin.” In disgust, Randolph now watched freeholders and poor whites turn away from the Anglican Church and embrace the growing Methodist and Baptist denominations.²³

²² March 22, 1814, JR to Quincy, Randolph papers, UVA; JR to Thomas Forman, April 7, 1814, “Letters of John Randolph, of Roanoke to Thomas Marsh Forman,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, (July 1941), 201-216, original in the Randolph Papers, Virginia Historical Society; JR to Quincy, July 1, 1814, Randolph papers, LC; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, July 26, 1814, Randolph Papers, UVA.

²³ JR to Thomas Forman, April 7, 1814, *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*; JR to Josiah Quincy, July 1, 1814, Randolph Papers, LC; JR to Richard Stanford, April 19, 1814, Randolph Papers, UVA; Randolph, *John Randolph*, 2:118-129; William G. Shade, “Society and

For Randolph, the sons of Richard and Judith presented the best hope to save their family from similar oblivion. Since his brother's death, John Randolph had exercised enormous influence over his nephews. Richard Randolph wanted his sons educated in England, far away from the slave society of Virginia. John Randolph had arranged for St. George to receive an education in London under the care of Minister James Monroe, who looked after him. The child had been born deaf and mute, but he was also very capable. In defiance of Richard's wishes and over the objections of Judith, John Randolph sent Tudor Randolph to Harvard. Judith Randolph clung to her children as the brightest part of her life. The scandal still weighed heavily on her, alienating her from some of her closest family members for years. Her brother-in-law exacerbated her loneliness and isolation when he forced Nancy Randolph to leave Bizarre in 1805. Afterward, the close relationship between John and Judith Randolph grew troubled. In 1810, after she finally freed the slaves of Bizarre, she became impoverished. After John Randolph left Bizarre, Judith struggled to find peace and repair the relationships of her life. She eventually fell under the influence of a local charismatic Presbyterian minister, John Holt Rice, who ran a school near Farmville. She experienced a religious awakening that seemed to soothe her painful life. When John Randolph first heard of her conversion to the Presbyterian faith, he confronted her, screaming in his "piercing falsetto" that her alignment with the dissenters disgraced the Randolph name. The lives of his nephews would honor the family's storied past. He taught St. George and Tudor Randolph to revere their family's past and protect its land. The Randolph's family fortunes seemed doomed, however. On a spring day in 1813, John Randolph and St. George watched as flames engulfed the plantation house at Bizarre, destroying papers,

Politics in Antebellum Virginia's Southside," *The Journal of Southern History* (May, 1987), 163-93; Beeman, *The Evolution of the Southern Backcountry*.

books, and other important family heirlooms. The following year, St. George Randolph turned “entirely incoherent” as he experienced a mental breakdown. For John Randolph, “the very strange and distressing occurrences” in his family were part of a convergence of personal, local, national, and international tragedies that sprang from the unfaithful behavior and ideas of men.²⁴

Randolph again blamed those unfaithful to the gentry for the decline of Virginia and its planters. In national politics, Jefferson and Madison served as scapegoats; but in family matters, Randolph blamed his stepfather, St. George Tucker. Since 1809, stepfather and son had grown apart because Tucker disapproved of Randolph’s effort to entice his stepbrother, Beverly Tucker, to abandon the law and become a planter. After Randolph visited Cawsons in 1814, he accused his stepfather of squandering the Randolphs’ fortunes and blamed him for the loss of Matoax. Furthermore, Tucker had encouraged his stepsons to reject the God of their mother and embrace French-inspired rationalism. “The germ of piety was sown in my opening heart by a mother’s hand—the sneer of skepticism, the open daring habitual profanity of yourself and your companions,” Randolph wrote. He accused Tucker and the “men of splendid genius” of introducing him to Deism and hostility to Christianity with “the infidel books which I heard praised and read.” In regard to slavery, Randolph accused Tucker of gross hypocrisy. He accused the supposedly antislavery Tucker of selling slaves and sending female slaves to Roanoke for breeding, increasing his own human property. Randolph said he once refused to send any slaves back to Tucker, where they would face sale. “I loved them too well to ask whether they were

²⁴ Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 133-5; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2: 493-98; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 118-20; Marion Harland, *Marion Harland’s Autobiography: The Story of a Long Life* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1910), 319; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, March 25, 1813, Randolph papers, UVA; JR to John Brockenbrough, July 15, 1814, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:41-2; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2: 493-98.

Tuckers or Randolphs.” After these accusations, he met Tucker only once more, near Richmond, where he refused to shake his hand. The split also alienated him from most of his step-siblings.²⁵

The Randolph family’s remaining hope for survival lay with Tudor Randolph, and John Randolph took great pains to assure that he had the best education. On his way to Harvard College in 1814, the boy was injured in a New York City. There, Anne Morris brought him to her home, Morrisiana, where she cared for him. Morris was no stranger. She was the former Nancy Randolph, the woman at the center of the scandal that had ruined Richard Randolph. After John Randolph drove her from Bizarre, she spent several years in miserable poverty in Richmond before she fled to New York City. There she finally escaped the shame and whispers of the scandal. In 1809, she married Gouverneur Morris in New York City, despite their twenty-three-year age difference. After giving birth to a son, she settled into a peaceful life at Morrisiana. An unplanned reunion of Bizarre plantation’s former residents occurred when Judith and John Randolph rushed to New York to care for Tudor. When he arrived at Morrisiana, John Randolph embraced Anne Morris as an old friend; and as Tudor’s recovery became clear, the reunion turned into a pleasant visit. Randolph discussed the war with Gouverneur Morris, another harsh critic of President Madison. The following day, Randolph left Morrisiana on cordial terms with everyone. In New York City, however, members of the elderly Morris’s family expressed concern about Anne to John Randolph. They accused her of sexual impropriety, and tried to cast doubt on the legitimacy of Gouverneur Morris’s son. Many in the Morris family wanted the patriarch to spurn his bride and cut the son out of the wealth.²⁶

²⁵ JR to SGT, April 14, 1814, April 14, 1814, Tucker-Coleman, Swem Library, College of William and Mary; JR to SGT, February 28, 1817, Randolph Papers, UVA; Hamilton, *Making and Unmaking*, 176-80; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2: 271; Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:38.

²⁶ JR to Richard Kidder Randolph, October 24, 1814, Randolph papers, LC.

The gossip rekindled Randolph's anger regarding the Bizarre scandal, which had ruined Richard Randolph's reputation. Randolph believed that the scandal represented a watershed moment in his family's decline. Indeed, Anne Morris served as a reminder of the fading power of the planter class. In Virginia, she faced shame and scorn for her role in the scandal, but in New York she escaped the lingering whispers of infanticide, adultery, and incest. Living in splendor at Morrisiana, her life represented a reputation of the viciousness of Southern honor. Before Randolph left New York City, he spread rumors that Nancy Randolph had murdered Richard after he learned of her sexual liaison with a slave. John Randolph insisted that he drove her from Bizarre when he first suspected she had murdered his brother. As if those charges were not enough, Randolph also accused her of working as a prostitute in Richmond. On October 31, he wrote a letter to Gouverneur Morris outlining the charges. Anne was a manipulative character, Randolph argued, and he urged Morris to beware lest she murder him for his fortune. Hopefully, Morris would disinherit the child and cut Nancy off from her financial security. Although Randolph had refused to mention the scandal for decades, it now became clear that he had long suspected Richard to be guilty of some impropriety. At this time, Randolph blamed the scandal and, in part, his family's downfall on a dishonorable woman, who dealt in deceit and lived outside the system of honor. Gouverneur Morris kept the letter from his wife, and the charges initially went unanswered.²⁷

²⁷ Anne Cary Morris to Dolley Madison, December 1814-January 1815, *The Selected Letters of Dolley Payne Madison*, ed. David B. Mattern and Holly C. Schulman (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 195-7; JR to Anne Morris, October 31, 1814, in Bruce, 2:274-78; Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 136-8; JR to Mrs. Clay, Randolph Papers, LC; JR to unnamed, November 23, 1814, Tucker-Coleman Collection, Swem Library.

The dismay over Northern attacks on slavery seemed ironic, for Randolph had cultivated important friendships with antislavery Northerners in recent years. Since the debate over the war, Randolph's friendships with George Logan, Harmanus Bleecker, and Josiah Quincy had outraged some Southerners. The friendship between Randolph and Quincy had grown especially warm, for the two opposed many of the policies of the Jefferson and Madison administrations. During the war debate, Quincy, the leader of the New England delegation in the House, often deferred to Randolph when it came to opposition to the war. The men were bound together by their mutual hatreds—of France, Napoleon, Madison, democracy, and especially the war with Britain. Quincy accused Republicans of creating the breach with Britain to degrade New England's political influence. Indeed, he believed that Madison had declared war only after Henry Clay threatened to use the Republican caucus to block Madison's renomination. At the end of 1812, Quincy left the House of Representatives for the Massachusetts legislature, where he attempted to block aid to the war effort. In his opposition, however, he focused much of the blame for the war on Southern slaveholders. In their correspondence, Randolph often denigrated his fellow Virginians. When he once asked for newspapers from New England, he lamented that "we have here a little school of intelligent freeholders upon whom such things are not thrown away." From Virginia, he supported and encouraged New England's opposition to the war. "I would not have you expect the relief from the sympathy of the Southern country, the people of which are prepossessed by the demons of factions and discord with no favorable opinion of you," he wrote to Quincy. Both men wanted to end the war that threatened the civilized Anglo-American world.²⁸

²⁸ JR to Josiah Quincy, June 20, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; Josiah Quincy, May 23, 1813, Randolph Papers, LC; McCaughey, *Josiah Quincy*, 59, 77-80; Gannon, "Calculating the Value

Few others in the South shared Randolph's sympathy with New England, which earned him the label of traitor. Jefferson believed that New England's resistance represented an "apostasy," an attack on the emerging republican empire, and a cover for monarchical sympathies. Randolph insisted that Jefferson, Madison, and the Republicans wanted to stifle dissent and that they vilified the opposition to distract from the conflict's disastrous results. "It is only by obtaining entire control over the press, South and West of Virginia, (as well as in that State) and persuading the country that you and I and some others were the cause of all their difficulties by encouraging the British, that they have been able to support themselves," Randolph wrote to Quincy.²⁹

New England's solidarity appealed to Randolph. Unburdened by slavery and appreciative of its British culture, the region protected its society, culture, and republican government. In contract, Randolph believed, Jefferson and Madison had betrayed Virginia in order to empower the federal government and degrade the British roots of Virginia society. Since the Revolution, faithful Congregationalists of New England had protected and supported their church while Jefferson and his supporters looked at the Anglican faith as "a church to pull down." Randolph believed that the men of New England never failed to honor the Puritans of their lore, while Jefferson damned the Englishmen who established Virginia's gentry.³⁰

of Union," 141-2; Donald R. Hickey, "New England's Defense Problem and the Genesis of the Hartford Convention," *The New England Quarterly* (December 1977), 587-604.

²⁹ JR to Josiah Quincy, August 30, 1813, Randolph Papers, UVA; Arthur Scherr, "Thomas Jefferson's Nationalist Vision of New England and War of 1812;" Robert E. Shalhope, "Thomas Jefferson's Republicanism and Antebellum Southern Thought," *Journal of Southern History* (November 1976), 539-40.

³⁰ JR to Josiah Quincy, July 1, 1814, Randolph Papers, LC; Stephanie Kern, *Creating an American Identity: New England, 1789-1825* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), examines the cultural solidarity of the region and how it became dominant in the United States.

Whether in Virginia or New England, however, slavery posed the most serious threat to internal peace and sectional cohesion. In April 1813, Quincy aired New England's grievances against the South during an address honoring the anniversary of George Washington's inauguration. New England wanted peace, but Quincy realized that would only solve "present ills." To address Northern concerns, the federal government must undergo fundamental changes. Above all else, the oppressive power of the slaveholders offended Quincy and fellow New Englanders. The "ruling cabal" who pushed the nation into war enjoyed power only because of the "slave ratio in the constitution" and the "emigrations, into the west," Quincy insisted. The three-fifths compromise would assure that slaveholding states dominated Congress when Southerners settled Louisiana. Never mentioning the plight of the slaves, Quincy contended that the numerical advantage in Congress allowed the measures that produced the war and threatened New England's political and commercial power. In newspapers, churches, and on the street corners, New Englanders expressed similar sentiments. From the pulpit, preachers argued that the disastrous war with England might be God's judgment for the sins of the slaveholding South. As Quincy's opposition to the war intensified, Randolph assured him that "there is not a man in the United States who agrees more entirely with you than myself."³¹

³¹ Josiah Quincy, *Oration Delivered Before the Washington Benevolent Society of Massachusetts, on the Thirtieth Day of April, 1813, Being the Anniversary of the First Inauguration of President Washington* (Boston: William S. and Henry Spear, 1813), 8-12; McCaughey, *Josiah Quincy*, 77-80; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 257-60; JR to Josiah Quincy, June 28, 1813, Randolph Papers, LC; William Gribbin, *The Churches Militant: The War of 1812 and American Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973); Lawrence Delbert Cress, "Cool and Serious": Federalist Attitudes Toward War in 1812," *Journal of the Early Republic* (Summer, 1987), 123-45; Matthew Mason, "Nothing Is Better Calculated to Excite Divisions': Federalist Agitation against Slave Representation during the War of 1812," *The New England Quarterly* (December 2002), 531-61 and *Slavery and Politics*, ch. 2.

The poor performance of American troops on the battlefield further encouraged dissent in New England. During the first year of the conflict, America waged a limited war in republican fashion. The administration forbade any plundering during the Canadian campaign, waged civilized combat, and tried to leave civilian populations untouched. But this limited-war effort made the administration seem inept. In 1813, when American troops captured the Canadian capital of York, soldiers looted homes and burned the legislative assembly building. Many in New England feared retribution for the attack and resisted supplying more soldiers for the war. In the fall of 1813, Martin Chittenden, the new Federalist Governor of Vermont, ordered the state's militia home. Yet, many Republican officials and military officers refused to comply with the order. In Massachusetts, state senator Harrison Gray Otis offered a motion pledging support for Vermont's protection of "constitutional rights." The public endorsed the motion as New England moved toward outright resistance. The motion also pleased Randolph. "I have seen Mr. Otis' motion, and I assure you that no occurrence since the war has made so deep an impression on me," he wrote to Quincy. He rejoiced in New England's embrace of states' rights principles but offered words of caution about talk of disunion:

Certain reports here, to which you cannot be a stranger, have caused much speculation and some uneasiness here. Pray give me a little light respecting the serious intention of the Opposition in Massachusetts. Rash counsels are not always, if ever, wise. I trust we shall hold together.

Randolph certainly approved of disunion as a legitimate legal option. "It has always been my opinion that the Union was the means of securing safety, liberty, and welfare of the confederacy, and not in itself an end to which these should be sacrificed." He warned Quincy that a politician,

state, or society must move carefully toward disunion. A state should attempt secession only as a last resort and only when “there is reasonable prospect of success.”³²

The Republicans saw New England as traitorous, especially as merchants of the region traded with Great Britain. In December 1813, the Madison administration passed a new embargo, which banned all American exports. New England regarded the measure, with its severe penalties and fines, as an act of retribution for its antiwar activity. The tense atmosphere in the United States broke briefly when the nation learned the news of Napoleon’s fall. In early 1814, Americans hoped that peace in Europe and the end of France’s Continental System would mean the resumption of trade and the end of the war. Indeed, Napoleon’s fall briefly gave Randolph hope for peace. “I fervently trust that the hour of our deliverance is at hand,” he wrote. But he still saw the Anglo-American war as a civil war that “dimmed the ties of blood.” As was common in civil wars, vengeance could prove swift. “I have it much at heart to give them a complete drubbing before peace is made,” British admiral Alexander Cochrane wrote. Great Britain soon sent soldiers to defend Canada and to attack both Chesapeake Bay and the Gulf coast.³³

³² Stuart, *War and American Thought*, 139-40; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 224-5; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, January 28, 1814, Randolph papers, UVA; Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis, Federalist, 1765-1848*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 2:64-5. The extended quote is from a February 8, 1814 letter from JR to Quincy, printed in Quincy, *Life of Quincy*, 349; JR to Quincy, January 29, 1814, Randolph papers, LC.

³³ Stagg, *Mr. Madison’s War*, 363-5; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 173-5, 224-5; Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, 261; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, January 28, 1814, Randolph papers, UVA; JR to Richard Stanford, April 19, 1814, Randolph papers, UVA; Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59-60. Cochrane quote from Alfred Thayer Mahan, *Sea Power in its Relations to the War of 1812* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1905), 2:330-1; Marion Breunig, “A Tale of Two Cities: Washington and Baltimore During the War of 1812,” *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815*, ed. Roger Chickering and Stig Forster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 353-72;

In late summer, twenty British warships appeared in Chesapeake Bay for an invasion. Randolph rushed to Richmond, where he volunteered for military duty and served on a mounted patrol around Richmond. The militia now had two responsibilities, to guard against invasion and protect against an uprising. Stationed at Camp Holly in Henrico County, Randolph patrolled the Virginia countryside, where he again noted that “[e]verything bears the mark of decay.” After some plundering of the Virginia coast, British forces focused their attention on Washington, D.C. On August 24, Madison, who believed that the enemy was headed for Baltimore, fled the capital with his government, allowing the British army to march almost unimpeded into the city. In retaliation for the looting of York, the British burned most of the government buildings. After just a single destructive day, the Executive Mansion, the Capitol building and most of the other government offices lay in ruins. In October, Randolph visited the city and surveyed the damage:

Washington is ruined. The walls of the Capitol and Palace are rapidly decomposing. The massive columns in the Hall of Representatives are not larger than the ordinary poles of which we build tobacco houses. The Navy yard is utterly torn up and destroyed. The public offices, archives, & c., gone for ever.

As he walked the ruined grounds of the capitol building, the sight of his greatest triumphs and for a dozen years his intellectual and emotional home, he wondered what lay ahead for him, Virginia, and the nation. The British army moved on to attack Baltimore, but that city’s defenders repelled them.³⁴

Stuart, *War and American Thought*, 139-40; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, July 26, 1814, Randolph papers, UVA; JR to John Brockenbrough, July 15, 1814, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:42.

³⁴JR to Theodore Dudley, September 2, 1814, *Letters to a Young Relative*, 162; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, September 23, 1814, Randolph Papers, UVA; Hickey, *War of 1812*, 197-202; See Anthony Pitch, *The Burning of Washington: The British Invasion of 1814* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998).

New England's disgust at the war turned especially bitter when Madison requested a conscription bill in the autumn of 1814. It would allow the federal government to avoid asking state governments for more militia. In December 1814, five New England states sent representatives to Hartford, Connecticut, for a convention to consider responses to the war. Disunion was a possibility. The Convention's final report addressed immediate problems generated by the war, specifically advising state governments to nullify the federal conscription bill. Concerning long-term sectional issues, the report advocated constitutional amendments to repeal the three-fifths clause, prevent foreign citizens from serving in federal office, require a two-thirds congressional vote to declare war or implement commercial restrictions, and ban successive presidents from the same state. In addition, the Convention urged the federal government to rid itself of the western territories and limit the admission of foreigners. In essence, the Hartford Convention wanted a restoration of the Union to its English origins. The failure to pass the measures, delegates warned, would result in the secession of New England.³⁵

With the exception of the repeal of the three-fifths clause, Randolph had advocated much of the Hartford platform at various times in his career. Indeed, he wanted nothing more than to restore the nation to its original Anglo-Saxon roots centered along the eastern seaboard. But Randolph saw his political resurrection in the events at Hartford. In December 1814, he wrote a public letter to New England on the growing secessionist movement, but his real target was the "libels on the planters of Virginia" emerging from the region. Although he sympathized initially

³⁵ Gannon, "Calculating the Value of Union," 147-9; Mason, "Nothing Better is Calculated," 547-8; Latimer, *1812*, 367; Ketcham, *James Madison*, 592; McCoy, *War of 1812*, 242; Samuel Eliot Morison, "Dissent in the War of 1812," *Dissent in Three American Wars* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 20-5, Lowell quote on 24. "Report of Hartford Convention," *History of the Hartford Convention with a Review of the Policy of the United States Government, which led to the War of 1812*, (New York, N. and J. White, 1833), 368-76.

with Quincy and the war dissenters, he now objected to the seething hostility toward slavery and labeled the Hartford proceedings as disloyal. Randolph attacked those who would diminish Virginia's power or prestige. While those in New England assumed that Virginians "would be very glad to hear of the bombardment of Boston, so, I much fear, your jacobins would not be very sorry to hear of a servile insurrection in Virginia." While he wished that "neither country" harbored such feelings, he recognized that New Englander's hatred of slaveholders, if not slavery, drove their dissent. "Let not her [New England's] orators declaim against the enormity of French principles, when she permits herself to arm and discipline our slaves, and to lead them into the field against their masters, in the hope of exciting by the example a general insurrection, and thus render Virginia another St. Domingo." Southerners carried the dual burden of producing the nation's antislavery measures and caring for the slaves, he insisted. "Is this the country that has abolished the slave trade? that has made that infamous, inhuman traffic a felony? that feeds with the bread of life all who hunger after it, and even those who, but for her, would never have known their perishing condition?" New England now looked at the three-fifths clause as "the master-key which unlocks all its difficulties" and will end the "undue Virginia influence." he continued. If Virginia enjoyed a preponderance of power in the Union, then perhaps it deserved it. "What member of the confederacy has sacrificed more on the altar of public good than Virginia [?]" The remarkable letter revealed how easily Randolph could turn a public situation in his favor. In his sweeping defense, he took credit for the abolition of the foreign slave trade, ignoring both his attempt to defeat the bill and his threats of disunion during that debate. New Englanders could scarcely believe Randolph's hubris and prevarications. "If this gentleman not

be deemed insane, it must be allowed,” wrote one observer, “that his letter is practical proof, that sanity may, at times, perform the functions of madness.”³⁶

When his former constituents urged him to stand for his old House seat in the next election, it became clear that his letter had served its primary purpose. On January 7, 1815, he answered the calls for his reelection in the *Richmond Enquirer*. Reveling in his political vindication, he wondered about the “strange metamorphosis” of his former constituents. He hoped that the ongoing peace negotiations in Europe would produce a settlement and urged the people to prepare for the problems of peace. Dismantling the standing army should be the top priority for Congress after the war, he insisted. If the standing army was maintained the people could easily turn to a military despot who promised to solve the nation’s or a section’s social and economic problems. He realized that Virginia remained in a precarious condition as soil erosion, natural disaster, and the deprivations of the war caused economic suffering. “Not a village, not a neighborhood, hardly a family escapes the infection.” Interestingly, Randolph singled out the “shivering negro” as one of the war’s most unfortunate victims. “His master, no doubt some ‘Southern Nabob,’ some ‘Haughty Grandee of Virginia,’” the very idea of whose existence disturbs the repose of over-tender consciences, is revelling in luxury which the necessary wants of his wretched bondsmen are stinted to supply.” He agreed to run for Congress.³⁷

In late 1814, Americans wanted the war to end before Great Britain devoted even more resources to defeat the United States. In New Orleans, British forces seemed poised to overrun

³⁶ JR to James Lloyd, December 14, 1814, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2: 51-62; James Lloyd to JR, December 23, 1814, *Examiner: Containing Political Essays on the Most Important Events of the Time; Public Laws & Official Documents*, January 7 and February 4, 1815; Letter to Correspondents, May 30, 1815, *Cobbett’s Weekly Political Register Vol. 27 From January to June 1815* (London: G. Houston, 1815), 688;

³⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, April 1, 1815, letter reprinted in Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:417-26.

the city and sever the Union. In January, insurrection in New England seemed imminent as the Massachusetts government refused to use the militia to defend Maine from the British. On January 9, the Hartford Convention's resolutions reached President Madison. In Europe, the administration's diplomats, John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and Randolph's old friend Albert Gallatin, found peace negotiations difficult in light of the nation's dismal battlefield performance. After a quarter of a century of warfare, the British government wanted peace. Finally on December 24, 1814, the two nations signed the Treaty of Ghent, which left most of the prewar problems technically unresolved. Before news of the treaty reached the United States, General Andrew Jackson and his army dealt the British army a resounding defeat at New Orleans. When news of the treaty arrived, Americans were celebrating the victory of Jackson and his frontier warriors over the world's greatest army.³⁸

The auspicious ending of the war inspired a burst of patriotism and a celebration of nationalist principles, in which Randolph refused to participate. Instead, he believed the nation needed to deal with the "imbecility of the men at the head of our affairs." In late March, with his election victory over Eppes almost certain, Randolph argued again that Congress must disband the army and prevent the development of "two great but very unequal classes,"—the citizens who paid taxes and the army who lived off of them. Furthermore, Randolph promised to end the reign of the war merchants and profiteers who took advantage of the public's miseries. "I was

³⁸ Hickey, *War of 1812*, ch.11; Adams, *Administration of Madison*, 1214; Mark Zuehlke, *For Honour's Sake: The War of 1812 and the Brokering of an Uneasy Peace* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2006); Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Foundations of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Knopf, 1949), Walters, *Albert Gallatin*; Remini, *Henry Clay*. Also see Bradford Perkins, *Castlereagh and Adams: England and the United States* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964); Robert V. Remini, *The Battle of New Orleans: Andrew Jackson and America's First Military Victory* (New York: Viking, 1999); Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 16-8.

not born into this order of things, and I will never consent, voluntarily, to become the vassal of a privileged order of military and monied men,” he added. The victory transformed citizens’ behavior and their ideas about themselves. They interpreted the war’s end as a triumph of the new world over the old, of an expansive America over its former colonial master. But Randolph lamented “that the seeds of eternal discord are sown between the two great families of the Anglo-Saxon race.”³⁹

In the midst of Randolph’s effort to reclaim his seat, his contemptuous attack on Anne Morris returned to haunt him. Gouverneur Morris kept the contents of Randolph’s letter secret from his wife for several months. When she heard the details, she leveled a scathing rebuke designed to prevent Randolph’s election. In a letter sent to Virginia senator William Branch Giles and First Lady Dolley Madison, among others, Morris indicted Randolph and the planter society he now publicly cherished. She portrayed Randolph as a “chapter of self-contradictions” and ridiculed his transformation from Jack Randolph, the friend of French Jacobinism, to the Anglophile and genteel John Randolph of Roanoke. Contradictions and reversals “make up the history of his life,” she insisted. While Randolph of Roanoke now memorialized the lost civilization of planters, Morris condemned it with the charges of hypocrisy, self-indulgence, and selfishness. Morris exposed Randolph as a hateful and violent man with a “murderous disposition,” who once threw a knife at his brother Richard and nearly “consigned him to the grave.” But, Randolph was at his most hypocritical on the matter of slavery:

There are many who remember, while your slaves were under mortgage for the British debt, your philanthropic assertion that you would make them free and provide tutors for them. With this project, you wearied all who would listen. When, by the sale of some of

³⁹ *Richmond Enquirer*, April 1, 1815.

them, a part of the debt was discharged, and an agreement made to pay the rest by installments, you changed your mind. This was not inexcusable, but when you set up for your representation in Congress, and the plan to liberate your slaves was objected to in your District, you published, to the astonishment of numbers, who had heard you descant on your liberal intentions, that you *never* had any such idea. Thus your first step in public life was marked with falsehood.

Morris hoped the attack would outrage planters in Randolph's district, who would thus deny him office. "His constituents (at least, those who once were) must be deranged if they ever reelect this malignant madman," stated an anonymous enclosure in Morris's letter to Dolley Madison. Morris tried to enlist William Branch Giles and John Wayles Eppes in her campaign against Randolph but to no avail. Randolph believed the letter placed "her character beyond all question."⁴⁰

The press declined to make the Morris letter a public matter, but Virginia newspapers refused to support Randolph's return to office. "There was a time [when] we admired him," Thomas Ritchie wrote in the *Richmond Enquirer*. But now, Randolph's mental condition made him a bad choice for public service. "Mr. R, lives in a world of his own creation—and knows very little of the world without him," Ritchie argued. "The violence of his passions have wrought his ruin." The *Richmond Enquirer* raised the issue of Randolph's sympathy for England as an example of his unpredictable and disloyal behavior, repeating rumors that he cheered the burning of Washington. Almost as damaging were allegations that Randolph had recently condemned the

⁴⁰ Anne Morris to JR, January 16, 1815, full text in Bruce, *John Randolph*, 2:278-95; JR to Harmanus Bleecker, April 18, 1815, Randolph Papers, UVA; Kierner, *Scandal at Bizarre*, 140-1; Anne Cary Morris to Dolley Madison, December 1814-January 1815, *Selected Letters of Dolley Madison*, 196.

American Revolution as a mistake. Critics reported a version of Randolph's supposed remarks: "The American Revolution had begun in Treason (or Rebellion) had been continued by Larceny [sic] (alluding to the confiscation of the Estates of Tories,) and had ended in sacrilege (in allusion to the sale of the glebe lands of the old Episcopal Church?)." Indeed, during his recent lamentations about the decline of the gentry, he often condemned the social changes wrought by the American Revolution, particularly the growing impulse toward democracy and the decline of the Anglican (now the Episcopal) Church. Ritchie and many other Republicans believed he should never be allowed to escape his sullied past. "It is for the people to say, whether their interests will be safe in the hands of such a representative," Ritchie wrote. In the end, Morris and Ritchie failed to sway enough voters, for Randolph defeated Eppes by 62 votes.⁴¹

The war, the crisis of the gentry, and family tragedies sent Randolph into an emotional downturn despite his electoral vindication. In the past few years, Randolph had moved away from the rational Deism that he had devoted himself to since his youth. In his public trials and personal misfortunes, he began reevaluating his spiritual life. For several years, he had embraced the Episcopal Church but only as a cultural reminder of Virginia's past. When the nation began the move toward war, he began obsessing about his own spiritual welfare. Since his time at Columbia College he had believed that through politics republicanism would save mankind. In the hopeful days of his youth, he expected the French Revolution to lead to the "amelioration of mankind." Instead, it spawned Napoleon, or as Randolph characterized him, "Satan himself." That Jefferson and Madison pursued policies that assisted Napoleon while seeking to destroy England, the foundation of Virginia's gentry, convinced Randolph that mankind might be

⁴¹ *Richmond Enquirer*, March 25, April 1 and 5, 1815; Dubin, *Congressional Elections*, 55.

doomed. Defeated and outcast, Randolph looked beyond politics for the pressing answers of faith amid public crises and private tragedies.⁴²

A sermon on the responsibilities of Christian planters by the Reverend John H. Rice convinced Randolph to dedicate himself to improving his slaves' well-being, especially their spiritual conditions. Often, Randolph asked local white ministers to preach to the slaves at Roanoke, and the sermons gave Randolph the opportunity to exercise his paternal authority over his slaves. One of his favorite ministers, A. W. Clopton, recalled that after he delivered one such sermon, Randolph took his place in the pulpit and addressed the field full of slaves:

He dwelt on the gratitude that was due to God for his kindness, and illustrated by his own kindness to his servants. He spoke of the ingratitude shown to the Creator, and illustrated by their ingratitude to him. "My ancestors," said he, "have raised all of you, save one, whom I bought from a hard master for sympathy's sake. I have cherished and nourished you like children; I have fed and clothed you better than the neighbors have fed and clothed their servants. I have allowed you more privileges than others have been allowed. Consequently any good heart would have shown gratitude even to me.

The self-flattering comment said more about his image of himself and his gentry ancestors than the actual treatment of slaves. He believed that his care for the slaves made him the only person that separated them from death and that he sacrificed his own wellbeing to provide for them. The Northern antislavery interests could never understand the relationship, he believed, and they would consign the slaves to doom if they actually achieved emancipation. In his religious fervor, Randolph contended that he had reconciled himself to the place slavery had in his life. In October 1815, when he returned from visiting Morrisiana, he expressed his acceptance of

⁴² JR to John Taylor of Caroline, January 3, 1815, Massachusetts Historical Society.

slavery: “For my part I shall return enamored of Virga and quite reconciled to Negroe Slavery.” He was prepared to embrace its “comforts, as well as its curses.” In his search for spiritual renewal, however, Randolph came to see himself as a true antislavery man and would “dedicate the remnant of my life” to improving the “conditions among my poor slaves.” The company of Rev. Rice encouraged him to criticize slavery, and pointed toward an assault on the institution in public policy. “It is your partial friendship that shadows out in me an American Wilberforce,” he told Rice.⁴³

In December 1815, Randolph arrived for the first session of the Fourteenth Congress with the fervor of an evangelist. Within days of his arrival in Washington, a young slave woman jumped from a window at George Miller’s tavern. The abolitionist Jesse Torrey soon revealed that the woman had attempted suicide because slave traders had broken up her family. Torrey tried to use the incident to highlight the slave trade that operated in the shadow of the government. Visitors to the nation’s capital often witnessed chained slaves marching through the streets on their way from the border states to the Deep South. In 1816, Torrey led efforts to draw attention to the horrors of this trade.⁴⁴

⁴³ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 87-8; Bouldin, *Home Reminiscences of John Randolph*, 86-7; JR to Richard Kidder Randolph, November 7, 1814, Randolph Papers, LC; JR to Rev. John H. Rice, September 8, 1815, in William Maxwell, *A Memoir of the Rev. John H. Rice, D.D., First Professor of Theology in Union Theological Seminary, Virginia* (Philadelphia: J. Whetham, Richmond, 1835), 115; JR to Bleeker, February 2, 1816, Randolph Papers, UVA; Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 114.

⁴⁴ Robert H. Gudmestad, “Slave Resistance, Coffles, and the Debates over Slavery in the Nation’s Capital,” *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 73-4; Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic*, 66-7; Mary Beth Corrigan, “Imaginary Cruelties? A History of the Slave Trade in Washington, D.C.,” *Washington History* (Fall/Winter, 2001/2002), 4-27.

The story of the young slave woman disturbed Randolph. In March 1816, he asked that the House committee responsible for governing the District of Columbia investigate abolishing the city's slave trade, which he deemed a "crying sin before God and man." While he stressed that "he would never weaken the form of the contract between the owner and his slave," he attacked the domestic slave trade. Anyone who walked through the streets of the city, he declared, saw "an assemblage of prisons" where slaves dreaded "to be torn from their connexions [sic]," and he condemned the government for harboring the practice. He recognized that his stance contradicted his opposition to outlawing the foreign slave trade in 1807. That stance had been driven by his desire to protect the states' sovereignty, but the governance of Washington was a federal issue. He regretted that his earlier vote had led others to label him "an advocate of the most nefarious traffic that has ever stained the annals of the human race." He denounced the sight of slaves "incarcerated and chained down, and thence driven in fetters like beasts, to be paid for like cattle." As he had made clear after Gabriel's Rebellion, Randolph saw the slaves as humans, capable of understanding their own rights and interests, particularly slaves whose families had long been in America. The domestic slave trader sold the "civilized informed negro, habituated to cultivated life, from his master, his friends, his wife, his children, or his parents." The Washington slave trade violated humanity's principles and embarrassed the government, and Randolph asked the committee to find a way "to put a stop to it."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ JR to Bleecker, February 2, 1816, Randolph papers, UVA; *Annals of Congress*, 14, 1:1115-6; Robert H. Gudmestad, "Slave Resistance, Coffles, and the Debates over Slavery in the Nation's Capital," *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*, ed. Walter Johnson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 73-4; Fehrenbacher, *Slaveholding Republic*, 66-7; *Richmond Enquirer*, January 25, 1816; *Annals of Congress*, 14, 1: 1116, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2: 43-4.

The House met Randolph's outrage with indifference. His estranged stepbrother and now colleague, Henry St. George Tucker, hoping to avoid a nasty debate, suggested that a select committee should deal with the subject. Randolph regretted that his brother "seemed disposed to decline the task, and offered himself to take his share in the enterprise." He thought it imperative that Congress stop "hard-hearted masters" who destroyed slave families. He recounted a story he had heard earlier about a slave who saved his money to buy the freedom of his wife and child. With each allowance, the slave "paid it from time to time into the hands of the master." When the slave died before paying the total, the master sold the wife and child. "The transaction was an affair of honor with the master," Randolph concluded. He obviously believed that the slave, who worked honestly for his freedom, was more honorable than the master. The congressmen were in no mood for John Randolph or his sudden moralization about slavery, which one colleague believed was another of his efforts "to make a noise and breed confusion." Robert Wright of Maryland argued that the current laws were sufficient to deal with the slave trade and compared the condition of American slaves that of favorably to American sailors recently impressed by the British. Despite Wright's doubts, enough support existed for the House to appoint a select committee with Randolph as a member. However, no action ever emerged from the committee.⁴⁶

The question of slavery in postwar America seemed unimportant since the Southern Republicans now enjoyed political dominance. The unfortunate timing of the Hartford Convention politically diminished the New England Federalists, slavery's most vocal enemies. As cotton boomed in the West and slavery became more profitable and desirable, more Southerners were justifying slavery. In Virginia, most whites blamed the free black population for the escape of 5,000 slaves during the war and increased demands for their removal from the

⁴⁶ *Annals of Congress*, 14, 1: 1117; *Richmond Enquirer*, January 25, 1816.

state. Early in 1816, the young Federalist and reformer Charles Fenton Mercer, a member in the Virginia General Assembly, discovered in the records of the legislature the secret correspondence between Jefferson and Monroe concerning the negotiations to colonize slaves and freed blacks after Gabriel's Rebellion. The correspondence inspired Mercer to revive the idea of colonization, and he tried to build support in Virginia. Randolph himself considered these questions and even sought the opinion of Britain's great abolitionist, William Wilberforce.⁴⁷

In April 1816, Mercer explained to a skeptical Randolph the idea of establishing a colony in Africa for Virginia's free black population. In April, Francis Scott Key urged Randolph to attend a gathering of the colonization movement. At the meeting, Finley and Mercer lobbied men such as Randolph, Rufus King, and Littleton Waller Tazewell for federal funding for effort. On December 21, 1816, some of the most distinguished Washington men gathered at the Davis Hotel to discuss the formation of the American Colonization Society. The meeting chairman, Henry Clay, opened the proceedings. Randolph addressed the crowd, reminding the attendees that the colonization effort aimed to export the free black population and would never interfere with slavery. Referring to John Taylor's work, he said that the "mixed and intermediate population of free negroes was viewed by every slave holder as one of the greatest sources of the insecurity and also unprofitableness, of slave property." The free black population instilled a "feeling of discontent" among slaves. Ignoring the problem only courted future danger. Those in attendance agreed to reconvene and asked Randolph to compose a memorial to Congress,

⁴⁷ Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 13-4; Robert Allen Carter, "Virginia Federalist in Dissent: A Life of Charles Fenton Mercer," (PhD Diss., University of Virginia, 1988), 228; JR to Dudley, December 28, 1816, *Letters to a Young Relative*, 180, "I have received two other letters; one from England, written by Mr. Wilberforce, on the subject of colonizing the free blacks," Randolph wrote.

requesting official recognition of the colonization movement. The American Colonization Society met a week later in the House chamber, electing Supreme Court Justice Bushrod Washington, the nephew of George Washington, as its first president. The meeting drew a number of the nation's most distinguished slaveholders, including Andrew Jackson, John Taylor of Caroline, and William Crawford. While Mercer hoped that the colonization effort might end slavery, most Southerners saw it as a way to rid the region of the troublesome free-black population.⁴⁸

On January 17, 1817, Randolph presented his memorial to the House, seeking recognition and funds for the American Colonization Society. The House sent the item to the Slave Trade Committee, which rejected the plan as too costly and unworkable. Eventually, however, the government secured a colony in Africa and poured more than \$100,000 into the experiment of Liberia. Federal support for the American Colonization Society violated Randolph's beliefs about federal power, but he realized the importance of the project. After this initial effort, he remained guardedly optimistic that the project would remove Virginia's free black population and strengthen slavery. In time, however, he came to see it as both unworkable and distracting, and he never again attended a meeting of the American Colonization Society.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Douglas Egerton, *Charles Fenton Mercer and the Trial of National Conservatism* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 109; JR to Garnett, April 16, 1816, Randolph papers, UVA; Daniel Webster to JR, April 30, 1816, *The Papers of Daniel Webster: Correspondence, 1798-1824*, ed. Charles M. Wiltse (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1974), 1:197-8. *Washington Daily Intelligencer*, December 24, 1816; "A View of Exertions lately Made for the Purpose of Colonizing the Free People of Colour, in the United States, in Africa, or Elsewhere," (Washington; Jonathan Elliot, 1817), 9-10; P.J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 30-1; Ericson, *Slavery in the American Republic*, 52-3.

⁴⁹ Burin, *Peculiar Solution*, 14; Staudenraus, *African Colonization Movement*, 34; Ericson, *Slavery in American Republic*, 78-9; "28th Annual Report of the American Colonization Society,

Struggling with illness and his emotional and religious turmoil, Randolph decided not to stand for reelection in 1817. Although his old political ally, James Monroe, had assumed the presidency, Randolph believed the government was bent on a course of nationalism and he wanted no part of it. “I feel alone in this world,” he wrote. In the following months, he suffered from several serious illnesses, a part of his chronic lifelong ailment. During one near-death episode, he thought he heard God whisper into his ear and tell him that all of his beliefs had been incorrect and promise to bestow on him the “truths of Christianity.” He saw the incident as his long-awaited sign from God, but it offered him little peace. Instead, he obsessed about his own death, the decline of Virginia, and his family’s lingering tragedies. He lived in isolation at Roanoke in a simple, sparsely furnished cabin, deep in the woods. Twenty yards away stood an even more modest structure with only a sitting room and a bedroom, where Randolph lived during the winter. In these dwellings, often under the influence of alcohol and laudanum, Randolph spent the next several months in a lonely depression. “I have no longer a friend,” he wrote. During this time of reflection, he gave several indications that he had truly turned against slavery.⁵⁰

When Judith Randolph died in 1816, responsibility for the mentally ill St. George Randolph fell to John Randolph. Although St. George often functioned normally at Bizarre, he

With the proceedings of the Books of Directions, and of the Society as its Annual meetings, January 21, 1845,” (Washington: C. Alexander, 1845), 38.

⁵⁰ JR to Dudley, February 11, 1817, 189; Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:93-4; “Recollections of John Randolph, of Roanoke,” *The New Mirror*, September 2, 1843. Randolph recounted his conversion experience to a fellow passenger on a journey to England; JR to Dudley, February 11, 1817, Garland, 2:90-2; Bruce, *John Randolph*, 1:45-6; Bouldin, *Home Reminiscences*, 21-2; Horace B. Day, *The Opium Habit with Suggestions As To The Remedy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers), 244-6; Julius H. Rubin, *Religious Melancholy and Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), chs. 4 and 5.

experienced bouts of rage and mental incoherency. Convinced that St. George would never recover, Randolph tried to gain admission for him into the Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia, where Benjamin Rush had revolutionized the treatment of the mentally ill. In several letters to Quaker Philadelphia merchant Thomas Cope, a member of the hospital's board of managers, Randolph offered revealing accounts of his changing attitudes about slavery. He noted that one of the first signs of St. George Randolph's "mental alienation" was "cruelty to the slaves." The emancipation of the family's slaves angered St. George and might have inspired him in an attempt to kill his mother. In his anger, St. George wanted to reverse the manumission. "One of his ruling passions is to reduce these people again to Slavery," his uncle reported. Of course, Randolph failed to comment that he had incessantly pestered his nephews with laments about the decline of the Virginia planter gentry. John Randolph pleaded the boy's poverty in a way that played on the Quaker's antislavery sympathy: "His fortune has been much diminished by an act of which will not prejudice him in eyes of the humane [and] good, the emancipation, by his late father, of all his slaves, considerably above one hundred in number."⁵¹

In his correspondence with Cope, Randolph lauded the Quakers and their stance on slavery. "I was born a member of the old Church of England—I see no cause to leave it, but if I did I should join the Society of Friends." While he undoubtedly flattered Cope in the hopes of securing St. George's admittance to the hospital, Randolph singled out the Quaker's stance on "negro slavery" as the reason for his admiration. In a scathing attack against the foreign and

⁵¹ JR to Thomas Cope, December 27, 1816, Logan Papers, HSP. Harlan Lane, *When the Mind Hears: A History of the Deaf* (New York: Random House, 1984), 156-7; Thomas P. Cope, *The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851*, ed. Eliza Cope Harrison (South Bend, Indiana: Gateway Editions, 1978), 356-7. St. George Randolph was eventually admitted to the Philadelphia Hospital.

domestic slave trade, he condemned the nation's proslavery political leadership, particularly Andrew Jackson, who had grown immensely popular after the Battle of New Orleans:

I see no difference between the African slave trade, barbarous as it is, [and] the home trade except that the latter is more detestable. Human beings having a perfect knowledge of their situation [and] all it's [sic] horrors are sent (from this State [and] new England inclusive) to the marshes of Louisiana, or the Sand Hills of Georgia [and] Abilene, where they are treated not half as well as the four footed cattle—and yet we boast of our liberty [and] toast our 'heroes,' who when you come to analyze them are mere indian butchers, slave traders, [and] living in open adultery or fornication.

As with most slaveholders, Randolph reserved much of his ire for the overseers. Particularly disgusting to him was "their power over the female slaves to a purpose most abominable." The message to Cope and his Philadelphia friends was simple: slaves would suffer if left to the likes of overseers and the hypocrisies of politicians. Benign masters such as himself protected the slaves.⁵²

Randolph's antislavery rhetoric went much further than usual in his next letter to Cope. He continued his rant against slavery, but this time offered his most expansive condemnation of the institution while defending past political proslavery decisions:

And now for the human butchers. If any thing could reconcile me to the consolidation of the states it would be the placing of a power where it might be exercised of stifling the slave trade domestic as well as foreign—it cries aloud to Heaven [and] "vengeance is mine, saith the Lord" I voted against the bill that passed in 1807 (I think) to prohibit the African or foreign slave Trade because it was an infringement by the federal Govt. of the

⁵² JR to Thomas Cope, August 24, 1818, Logan Papers, HSP.

rights of the citizens [and] Commonwealth of Virginia (not to carry on the slave trade. I acknowledge no such right) but to travel with your servant in some ways: far enough to sail from any atlantic port even of the state of Virginia to a Chesapeake port within the same state. Now as an antifederalist [and], for such I have ever been, I hold the rights of this Commonwealth to be as independent of the Congress [and] President as if the Parliament [and] King, [and] would hold them in contempt of both authorities. The clause to sell, ie[.] to dispose of the slaves according to the state laws wherein imported, was foreseen to be a trick of the Georgian, [and] exposed as such at the time but by opposition men [and] of course unavailingly.

The curious letter exudes both genuine rage against slavery and calculation. Randolph feigned not remembering his vote against the abolition of the foreign slave trade in 1807, although he had recounted his opposition and vote during the previous year's congressional debate on the Washington slave trade. As he wrote his antislavery letters to Cope, Randolph offered to help St. George acquire some slaves for Bizarre. After Judith Randolph had freed the Bizarre slaves, her brother-in-law had loaned several to her and sold her four, but she could never pay for them. Now he wanted them back, claiming a desire to keep the slave families together. "If I can [find] some negroes to work for you I will but those of mine which you have had so long I have now [a need] for," he insisted.⁵³

Randolph's passionate letters to Cope exhibited a sense of guilt at his private and public relationship with slavery. In August 1818, he wrote to Rev. Meade that he had worried about God and sin since before he had even arrived in Congress. "It is now just nineteen years since sin

⁵³ JR to Thomas Cope, September, 28, 1818, HSP; JR to St. George Randolph, July 27, 1827, Boston Public Library.

first came to sit heavy upon my soul.” The idea of irredeemable sin weighed heavily on Randolph in the face of Virginia’s persistent decline. The condition of the state startled New York politician John A. Dix as he traveled through Virginia. “You would be astonished at the decay, which is visible between Washington and Monticello,” he wrote. The excessive cultivation of tobacco had destroyed plantations and created hardships. “The land is apparently exhausted, the system of agriculture miserable, every house old and hastening in decay.” Some communities formed agricultural societies to reform practices and educate farmers, but many realized their future lay in the West. Randolph welcomed the “great spirit of emigration” that prevailed “among the poorer classes” as they searched for means of survival. He continued to grieve, however, that the best families were “dispersed from St. Mary’s to St. Louis.” Gentlemen who once rode in “fine coaches” left for the West with “saddlebags.” The gentry as he imagined it no longer existed. Even his stepbrothers fled the family’s eastern past for opportunity in the West—Beverly for Missouri and Henry St. George for western Virginia.⁵⁴

In 1819, an economic panic aggravated the declining fortunes of Virginia. In its postwar exuberance, Congress had established a Second Bank of the United States and a protective tariff, both opposed by Randolph. Meanwhile, Europe adjusted to peace and its agricultural production revived, which hurt the American economy. The Bank of the United States called in loans, and

⁵⁴JR to Rev. William Meade, August 1818, *Old Churches, Ministers and Families*, 1: 33; John A. Dix to George Cheyne Shattuck, April 20, 1820, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, October 1916-June 1917, Vol. 1*, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 140. JR to Quincy, March 22, 1814, Randolph Papers, LC; For Virginia’s declining tobacco fortunes see Avery Odelle Craven, *Soil Exhaustion as a Factor in the Agricultural History of Virginia and Maryland, 1606-1860* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965), 104-6; L. Scott Philyaw, *Virginia’s Western Visions: Political and Cultural Expansion on an Early American Frontier* (Knoxville, University of Tennessee Press, 2004); David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); Susan Dunn, *Dominion of Memories: Jefferson, Madison & the Decline of Virginia* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

state banks turned on one another. The boom-and-bust cycle had arrived in America. Since the end of the war, Randolph had condemned the nation's seemingly new obsession with capital, and the economic panic seemed to signal the consequences of the new ethos. In Virginia, property depreciated and prices dropped. With economic disaster looming, his former constituents urged Randolph to return to public life. He briefly considered running for the Virginia legislature, but Randolph decided it was more important to return to Washington. "Very contrary to my judgment, and yet more against my feelings, I am again a public man."⁵⁵

As Randolph returned to public life, the circumstances seemed ripe for him to declare publicly the antislavery sentiments that he had expressed to Thomas Cope. The continuing decay of Virginia seemed to point to society's sin of slavery. Randolph saw himself as a part of that sin. In May 1819, before he returned to Congress, he wrote an updated last will and testament, which hopefully would absolve him of his sin:

I give to my slaves their freedom, to which my conscience tells me they are justly entitled. It has a long time been a matter of the deepest regret to me, that the circumstances under which I inherited them, and the obstacles thrown in the way by the laws of the land, have prevented my emancipating them in my lifetime. Which it is my full intention to do so, in case I can accomplish it.

⁵⁵ Murray Rothbard, *The Panic of 1819: Reactions and Policies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 135-8; Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise, 1815-1840* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 40-5; Wilentz, *Rise of American Democracy*, 206-16; Clyde A. Haulman, *Virginia and the Panic of 1819* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2008); JR to Francis Scott Key, May 8, 1819, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:105.

If his brother had believed it his republican duty to free his slaves in the 1790s, John Randolph now believed it his Christian duty to do the same. But the question remained whether his antislavery sentiments would extend to the public sphere.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ JR to Rev. William Meade, August 1818, *Old Churches, Ministers and Families*, 1: 33; Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:149-50; Randolph will material, Randolph Papers, UVA.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In 1819, Virginia's economy slumped and the nation soon slipped into full-scale economic panic. The freeholders of Southside Virginia asked Randolph to return to Congress. In their eyes, no one else had represented them as well as Randolph. In the uneventful April campaign, the name of New York congressman James Tallmadge never surfaced, although everyone in the South would soon be familiar with him. Randolph won the election and prepared for the congressional session that would convene in December 1819. In the intermediate months, the issue of slavery's expansion was brewing in the North and threatened to create an unprecedented crisis in Congress. In February 1819, Congress had debated an enabling bill to allow the Missouri Territory to form a preliminary constitution in preparation for statehood. James Tallmadge of New York, a follower of Dewitt Clinton, proposed an amendment that forbade the introduction of slaves into Missouri and declared free the slave children already in the territory when they reached the age of twenty-five. The House passed the bill, but the Southern-dominated Senate killed it. As the Fifteenth Congress adjourned, many Southerners believed the antislavery measure an aberration. During the summer of 1819, however, Northerners rallied around the idea of a free Missouri and poured their sentiments into rallies, pamphlets, and other public antislavery displays. Antislavery interests celebrated the Declaration of Independence's language of equality as a pillar of the American founding and the inspiration for an antislavery nation. Hezekiah Niles published his series, "Mitigation of Slavery," which reiterated the long held revolutionary-era notion "that slavery must, at some future day, be abolished in the United States." As Southerners became aware of the numerous antislavery

demonstrations in the Northern states, they realized that a serious threat to a proslavery Missouri existed.¹

In December, Congress met and began to discuss the question of Missouri statehood. Many curious people who had never seen him came to observe the strange-looking John Randolph. After a few days, however, the novelty of his appearance wore off, and then most of Washington avoided him. "Here I find myself isole[sic], almost as entirely as at Roanoke." Randolph wrote. "I am become [sic] one of indifference to all around me." In the House, the question of Missouri came up almost immediately and created considerable tension between members. "There are no two persons here that care a single straw for one another," Randolph observed. Immediately, John W. Taylor of New York advocated the appointment of a committee to resolve the issue of slavery in Missouri, but it became apparent that neither side wanted to compromise. On December 14, Congress admitted Alabama as a slave state. Although the Senate was now evenly divided between free and slave states, the Illinois Senators usually voted with the South. When Maine applied for admission to the Union as a free state, the prospect of two more Senators from a free state made a tense debate about Missouri statehood inevitable. Many expected Randolph to dominate such a debate. "I anticipate the pleasure of witnessing one of his highest efforts," wrote one observer. Unfortunately, congressional reporters Joseph Gales and William Seaton refused to publish most of Randolph's remarks during the session. Randolph had

¹ Wilentz, *Rise of Democracy*, 230-1; Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, 151; Dangerfield, *Era of Good Feelings*, 204; Stuart Leibiger, "Thomas Jefferson and The Missouri Crisis: An Alternative Interpretation," *Journal of the Early Republic*, (Spring 1997), 121-30.

long complained about the “incompetent” Seaton and requested that Gales record his speeches. However, they ignored him.²

Now, a year and a half after Randolph wrote the revealing antislavery letters to Thomas Cope and composed his will freeing his slaves, he displayed no hint of antislavery sentiment. In January 1820, Georgia congressman John Cuthbert offered a resolution for the standing Committee on the Slave Trade to consider establishing a “registry of slaves” to strengthen enforcement of the ban on the foreign slave trade. Randolph believed such a measure either “foolish or mischievous” or an attempt to empower the federal government. In typical fashion, he argued that “his zeal for the suppression of this detestable traffic was not surpassed by that of any man in the nation.” In no way, he claimed, did his opposition to the resolution condone the trade and he offered to “join heart and hand” with the strongest opponents of the foreign slave trade and carry “the war into the enemy’s country, even into Africa, and endeavor to put it down there, so they did not go beyond the definite land marks of the constitution.” In other words, Randolph fought any increased enforcement of the ban on the foreign slave trade, thus refusing to strengthen the most important antislavery statute on the books.³

In early 1820, Congress began debating the question of whether slavery would be permitted in Missouri. The prospect of a free Missouri angered Virginians, who demanded their representatives block any such measure. Many planters saw the Northern opposition to slavery in Missouri as a way to stifle Virginia’s economy and close the West to slaveholders and slave

² JR to Dudley, December 19 and 21, 1819, *Letters to a Relative*, 208; *Cherry Valley Gazette* (New York), January 4, 1820; JR to William Barksdale, January 20, 1820, Virginia Historical Society; *American Beacon and Norfolk & Portsmouth Daily Advertiser*, February 3, 1820; Moore, *Missouri Controversy*, 82-8.

³ *Connecticut Courant*, February 1, 1820; *The Star, and North-Carolina Gazette*, January 28, 1820; *Annals of Congress*, 16:1, 925-6.

traders. Many argued that if prevented from selling excess slaves, Virginia would see an increase in its dreaded free-black population. Virginians refused “to be dammed up in a land of Slaves, by the Eastern people,” wrote jurist Spencer Roane. Randolph’s fear of the growth of the free-black population led him to present another memorial to the House on behalf of the American Colonization Society. It requested an increase of support for the Society and the American colony in Liberia. “The last census shows the number of free people of color of the United States, and their rapid increase,” it stated. The American Colonization Society offered one avenue of relief, but Virginia needed the West for its slaves.⁴

Virginians led the Southern effort to redefine Jeffersonian republicanism and to establish slaveholding as a permanent Constitutional right. In their desperation, the members of the Virginia delegation believed that they should cede no ground in the Missouri debate. Initially, President Monroe encouraged tying together the questions of statehood for Maine and Missouri, but he later encouraged Southerners to back away from that plan after it stoked popular outrage in the North. Barbour and the Virginia congressional delegation refused to consider any possibility other than the admittance of Missouri without restriction on slavery. On February 3, however, Illinois Senator Jesse Thomas proposed banning slavery in the Louisiana Territory above the 36° 30′ line, with an exception for Missouri. Virginians believed that the compromise put them on the road to a constitutional crisis over slavery. “In this distressing crisis it becomes us to be true to ourselves, and to the Constitution, and, if necessary, to die in the last ditch,” Spencer Roane wrote to President Monroe. Talk of conflict and secession spread throughout the

⁴ *Annals of Congress*, 16:1, 1047; Christa Breault Dierksheide, “The Amelioration of Slavery in the Anglo-American World,” (PhD Dissertation University of Virginia, 2009), 66-8; Wolf, *Race and Liberty*, 171-4.

Virginia. In early February, Randolph declared his opposition to any restrictions on slavery in Missouri during a long, emotional, and much-anticipated speech. He seemed to now embody Southern emotions about the crisis. “God has given us the [sic] Missouri and the devil shall not take it from us,” he said. The *Boston Advertiser* declared the comment and his remarks “the ravings of a maniac.”⁵

In his speech, Randolph relied on his standard antislavery rhetoric to cloak his rabid and complete opposition to any interference with slavery. In a response to Randolph, Northern Republican William Plumer, Jr., repeated the Virginia slaveholder’s remarks about slavery: “A gentleman from Virginia (Mr. Randolph) has told us, that all the misfortunes of his life (they have, he says, been neither few nor inconsiderable)—are light in the balance, when compared with the single misfortune of having been born the master of slaves.” After restating his antislavery feelings, Randolph attacked anyone who dared question the right to hold slaves. “He was wild, diffuse, and sometimes perfectly incoherent,” wrote one reporter. Secretary of State John Quincy Adams slipped into the House chamber during one of Randolph’s speeches, which astounded him. “His speech, as usual, had neither beginning, middle, nor end. Egotism, Virginia Aristocracy, slave-scourging liberty, religion, literature, science, wit, fancy, generous feelings, and malignant passions constitute a chaos in his mind, from which nothing orderly can flow,” Adams wrote. Randolph leveled some of his most brutal assaults on the democratic spirit of the North that seemed to impel the antislavery movement. When opponents of slavery used the

⁵ James Monroe to James Barbour, February 3, 1820 “Missouri Compromise,” *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Quarterly* (July 1901), 9; Spencer Roane to James Monroe, February 26, 1820, “Letter of Spencer Roane, 1788-1882,” *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* (1906), 174-5; Noble Cunningham, Jr. *The Presidency of James Monroe* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 97-9; *Annals of Congress*, 16:1, 1218-1242; Trenton Eynon Hizer, “‘Virginia is Now Divided’: Politics in the Old Dominion 1820-1833,” (PhD Diss., University of South Carolina, 1997), 18-20; *Boston Daily Intelligencer*, February 5, 1820.

language of the Declaration of Independence to defend the idea of equality, Randolph dismissed the document as a “fanfaronade of metaphysical abstractions.” He pointed to a framed engraving of the document hanging on the wall of the House chamber and insisted it should be removed. Colleagues reported his uncontrollable temper and his repeated refusals to come to order.⁶

Randolph’s unseemly Missouri speeches shocked even supporters. Francis Walker Gilmer believed he was “mad as ever” and “perfectly childish.” Gilmer agreed with Randolph’s critics who argued that he was a spent force, unable to cope with the situation:

His figure more emaciated than ever, his countenance deep scars of thermidor had entrenched—his fair and glossy locks which were like those of a girl neglected—dry—angry—and the whole man disowned of his glory—the elected manner, the dignified sentiments the brilliant eloquence by which he was distinguished beyond any one I ever knew converted into doatage [sic] and mere oblivion. This was a sorry sight—and his wild look—his frantic gestures—the occasional flashes of the sublimest [sic] eloquence which shed a baleful fire upon the darkness around—still haunt my imagination and oppress my heart!⁷

The tumultuous debates and Randolph’s inflamed proslavery rhetoric inspired Speaker Henry Clay to fashion a compromise over Missouri. In early March, Congress passed three bills

⁶ *Desultory Remarks on the Question of Extending Slavery into Missouri: As Enunciated during the first session of the Sixteenth Congress* (1856), 24; Plumer, Jr. to William Plumer, February 5, 1820, *The Missouri Compromise and Presidential Politics, 1820-1825, from the Letters of William Plumer, Jr.* ed. Evert Somerville Brown, (St. Louis: Missouri Historical Society, 1926), 6; *Annals of Congress*, 16:1, 1429; *Richmond Enquirer*, February 8 and 10, 1820; *Hallowell Gazette* (Maine), February 9, 1820 from a Baltimore *Patriot* piece; Cooper, *Liberty and Slavery*, 141; JR to John Brockenbrough, February 23 and 24, 1820; Garland, 2:131-3; John Quincy Adams, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1875), 4:532-3.

⁷ Francis Walker Gilmer to Dabney Carr, April 27, 1820, Francis Walker Gilmer Papers, LOV.

that admitted Maine to the Union, allowed Missourians to decide whether or not to allow slavery, and banned the institution elsewhere north of the 36° 30' line, the compromise that Thomas had proposed a month earlier. Clay blocked a last-minute effort by Randolph to derail the compromise. Randolph believed that “the slaveholding interest has been sacrificed by Southern and Western men from the slaveholding states.” These men cultivated the goodwill and political favor of Northern politicians. Randolph wanted neither their approval nor support. He publicly expressed his dislike and even hatred for the North and its growing campaign against. Indeed, he even blamed Northerners for his own acceptance of slavery: “These Yankees have almost reconciled me to negro slavery. They have produced a revulsion even on my mind, what then must the effect be on those who had no scruples on the subject. I am persuaded that the cause of humanity to these unfortunates has been put back a century, certainly a generation, by the unprincipled conduct of ambitious men, availing themselves of a good as well as of a fanatical spirit in the nation.” In his characteristic perversity, he delighted in the political troubles of the Northern Republicans who voted for the compromise and who regularly supported the South. Randolph labeled them “dough faces,” men who were scared of their own shadows and who served the wishes of the Southern slaveholder. His remark, which became an epithet for a generation of Northern supporters of slavery, evinced his disdain for their lack of principle.⁸

Virginians opposed the compromise and yet celebrated Missouri's eventual admission without slavery restriction. During the debate, Monroe sent overtures to Randolph to resume their friendship, and even Jefferson expressed support of Randolph's performance. Randolph refused any suggestion of reconciliation and many of his colleagues soon returned to shunning

⁸ Moore, *Missouri Controversy*, 99-103; JR to Henry Rutledge, March 20, 1820, Randolph Papers, Duke University; JR to Brockenbrough, February 24, 1820, Garland, 2:133; Hizer, “Politics in the Old Dominion,” 28-9.

him. When he returned to Roanoke, he again sank into depression and self-reflection. “I have never been a happy man. I am not of a happy temperament; but I never knew until the decay of my faculties and the dropping of those who once took apparent pleasure in my society, what it was to be truly alone in the world.” He wanted to escape the country but the effects of the economic depression made it impossible.⁹

In December 1820, he returned to Washington for the next congressional session amid a new firestorm over Missouri. In the intervening months, Missouri proslavery forces had seized control of that government and written a constitution that banned free blacks from entering the state. Northerners threatened to undo the Compromise over what they saw as a denial of basic constitutional rights. These new problems of state disturbed Randolph’s “daily and nightly thoughts.” His perpetual illness plagued him, too and he feared he would die. Nathaniel Macon urged Randolph to abandon Congress and return to Virginia. When he did return to the House, after weeks of illness, the politics of the moment proved “a conundrum to me.” In response, he avoided the Missouri debate since “there is no faith among men.”¹⁰

Randolph and the other Virginians again reacted harshly to Northern opposition. They rejected any notion that free blacks were actually citizens. Congressman Philip Barbour argued that only persons of European descent could enjoy citizenship. Virginia’s emerging racial consciousness led the state’s congressional delegation to dismiss the principles of liberty. Randolph portrayed the free black population as a burden to the white Southerners. “In our

⁹JR to Brockenbrough, February 26, 1820, Garland, *John Randolph*, 2:135; JR to Richard Kidder Randolph, August 14, 1820, Randolph papers, LC.

¹⁰JR to Brockenbrough, November 26, 1820 and 1821 (undated), Garland, *John Randolph*, 2: 138-9, 143; JR to Dudley, December 26, 1820, *Letters of a Young Relative*, 231.

tenderness for the rights and privileges of the colored citizens, we have already brought into jeopardy the rights and privileges of our fellow white citizens.”¹¹

During the second Missouri debate, Randolph met regularly at the home of Secretary of the Treasury William Crawford with a group of political leaders including South Carolina’s William Lowndes and Maine Senator John Holmes, to discuss the crisis. Crawford and Randolph led discussions about the South’s possible secession from the Union. “You are a peculiar people, Holmes, prone to fanaticism,” Randolph said. In the growing Northern religious reform movement against slavery, “the Constitution will only prove a barrier of straw.” In February, when the House gathered to count the electoral votes for the presidential election, Northern congressmen, who objected to the recent Missouri Constitution, tried to prevent the inclusion of the state’s votes. Randolph responded with a speech of “severity & violence.” The Northern insistence on the rights of free blacks in Missouri outraged Randolph, who openly talked of war. “Let us buckle on our armour,” he said, “let us put aside all this flummery, these metaphysical distinctions, these legal technicalities, these special pleadings, this dry minuteness, this unprofitable drawing of distinctions without difference.” He assured his colleagues that “we will assert, maintain, and vindicate our rights, or put to every hazard what you pretend to hold in estimation.” Although he had never voted for the admission of any new state and habitually scorned the acquisition and growth of the Western territories, Randolph now assured his Northern colleagues that he would never stop “the growth of the rising Empire of the West.” In

¹¹ *Annals of Congress*, 16:2, 545-551; *St. Louis Enquirer*, February 17, 1821; *Columbian* (New York), February 21, 1821.

the end, Henry Clay offered a vague compromise that insisted that no Missouri law could deny constitutional rights despite the clause in the state's constitution.¹²

Randolph and others seemed to believe that the Missouri debate represented his “fall from glory.” While he repeated his typical threats about selling Roanoke and leaving Virginia, he seemed content with “humble mediocrity” in the absence of the Virginia gentry. He saw the old order of the republic as doomed, much as the gentry had been. “Men are like nations. One founds a family, the other an empire—both destined, sooner or later, to decay.” Nevertheless, the Missouri debates revived him. For the first time since he fell from power during Jefferson's administration, he found himself in step with his Southern colleagues, many of whom took his arguments seriously, even if they disowned his vituperations delivery. More importantly, by winning admission of a slaveholding Missouri, the forces of slavery seemed in ascendancy. Yet Randolph realized that the South must stay on guard, and that would best be accomplished by always portraying the situation in its most dire terms. The South must always feel endangered and oppressed. To be otherwise would amount to lowering its guard. Randolph finally visited England in 1822, a trip he had long desired, but he assured his colleagues that he would return before the 1824 election, which he saw as profoundly important in the struggle between North and South.¹³

¹² *Annals of Congress*, 16:2, 545-551, 1160-1; W.H. Sparks, *The Memories of Fifty Years*, Third Edition (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1872), 228-30; Moore, *Missouri Controversy*, 156-9; Forbes, *Missouri Compromise*, 115-6.

¹³ Francis Walker Gilmer to Dabney Carr, March 25, 1821, Gilmer papers, LOV; JR to Dudley, June 24 and December 30, 1821 and January 22, 1822, *Letters to a Young Relative*, 222, 232-3, 238.

As he prepared to sail, Randolph revisited his 1819 will, which had been only informal. He gave a new version to his friend and attorney, William Leigh. It was basically the same as the earlier document with a single important exception. "I give to my executor a sum not exceeding eight thousand dollars, or so much thereof as may be necessary, to transport and settle said slaves to and in some other State or Territory of the United States, giving to all above the age of forty not less than ten acres of land each." He followed the formula set by his brother, but without any of the passion. It was his duty to free his slaves. In his mind, when he set foot in the land of Wilberforce, he honestly saw himself, the architect of Southern defiance and defender of slave power, as an antislavery man.¹⁴

In the following decade, until his death in 1833, Randolph dropped all pretensions to antislavery sentiment and became the nation's unrelenting advocate of slavery's protection. In Congress, he fought the expansion of the federal government, always with an eye toward protecting slavery. In his vehemence his grew even more strange and entertaining. "He blazes now and then like a small meteor, in Congress, and emits a little light very little more steady," wrote one observer. Privately, he continued to plan his slave's freedom. During one brief period on his return from his brief tenure as minister to Russia, his rage and anger inspired him to write another will ordering all of his slaves sold upon his death. But on his death bed, he relented and asked witnesses to swear that they would see that his slaves were freed. The action turned out to be his most benevolent in a decade spent working to strengthen the institution.¹⁵

¹⁴ For text of wills see Garland, *John Randolph*, 2: 149-51, also see the court documents In the Randolph Papers, UVA. For the importance of the Northwest as a repository for freed slaves see Philip J. Schwarz, *Migrants Against Slavery: Virginians and the Nation* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001).

¹⁵ *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, January 28, 1826.

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