

**Coercion, Cooperation, and Conflict along the Charleston Waterfront, 1739-1785:
Navigating the Social Waters of an Atlantic Port City**

by

Craig Thomas Marin

BA, Carleton College, 1993

MA, University of Pittsburgh, 1998

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This dissertation was presented

by

Craig Thomas Marin

It was defended on

December 4, 2007

and approved by

Dr. Seymour Drescher, University Professor, Department of History

Dr. Van Beck Hall, Associate Professor, Department of History

Dr. John Markoff, Professor, Department of Sociology

Dissertation Director: Dr. Marcus Rediker, Professor, Department of History

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This dissertation argues that the economic demands of the eighteenth-century Atlantic world made Charleston, South Carolina, a center of significant sailor, slave, and servant resistance, allowing the working people of the city's waterfront to permanently alter both the plantation slave system and the export economy of South Carolina. It explores the meanings and effects of resistance within the context of the waterfront, the South Carolina plantation economy, and the wider Atlantic World.

Focusing on the period that began with the major slave rebellion along the Stono River in 1739 and culminated with the 1785 incorporation of Charleston, this dissertation relies on newspapers, legislative journals, court records, and the private correspondence and business papers of merchants and planters to reveal the daily activities of waterfront workers as they interacted with each other, and with their employers and masters. During these decades, while masters and employers dominated the plantation fields and urban households of South Carolina, the waterfront of Charleston and the waterways of South Carolina were the reserve of maritime workers. These environs muted the power of the white elite and greatly expanded the autonomy of workers. Due to their near-constant mobility and daily interactions with others who were mobile, maritime workers created an environment that allowed them to challenge and reset the boundaries of acceptable behavior in and out of the work environment.

While the story of planter and merchant domination in South Carolina is well documented and understood, any story of slave, servant and free worker subversion of the plantation regime from within is incomplete without a consideration of the important role that maritime laborers played in this process. By highlighting the central role that maritime laborers played in challenging and reshaping local and regional social and economic systems in the eighteenth century, this work expands our understanding of Southern, African American, Atlantic, and maritime history.

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INTRODUCTION

In November of 1764, under the cover of darkness, a small schooner pulled up to an anchored pilot boat in Port Royal, just south of Charleston, South Carolina. There were eight slave pilots aboard the anchored vessel, only one of whom was awake. The crew of six from the small schooner, armed with muskets, boarded the vessel and easily took command of it. These “pirates” abandoned their own vessel and, according to the testimony of one of the captured slave pilots who was allowed to leave the vessel in a canoe, started their journey in the stolen boat to Cuba. The newspaper account detailing this event for the residents of Charleston, described the five “pirates” as, “two Frenchmen, two mulattoes, and a negro.” Those men described as “mulattoes” were identified as natives of Antigua, and one of them, Joseph Thomas, was well known in Port Royal where he was commonly employed as a sailor.¹ In fact, the small size of the vessel used by the armed crew, and the failure to identify any larger vessel from which they came, suggests that they were all from the Lowcountry area and had worked within the maritime setting.

While authorities quickly summoned a naval vessel and outfitted their own schooner to pursue these maritime criminals, the ease with which the pilot vessel was captured and navigated out to sea in the first place reveals that the property owners--that

¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 26 November 1764.

is, the owners of the stolen vessel and the slaves on board--were unprepared for such an assault. Engagement in this type of attack on the property-holding and slaveholding system highlights how a multiethnic population could work together in attacking the elite of the Lowcountry. Evidence from the decades preceding and following this event reveals that maritime laborers did engage in similar actions along the Charleston waterfront, of which Port Royal was an extension.

In this dissertation, I explore the contexts in which such events occurred, the meanings embedded in such actions, and the effects of these actions both on the Charleston waterfront community during the middle of the eighteenth century, and on the plantation system of South Carolina that it served. While the actions of maritime workers did not undo the labor regime of Colonial South Carolina, they altered it. The fields and households were still the centers of masters' and employers' authority and control, but the waterfront of Charleston and the waterways of South Carolina were the reserve of maritime workers and those who joined them there. In this latter environment, the power of the white elite was muted and the autonomy of workers was greatest. The near-constant mobility, or interactions with those who were mobile, and the evolving community of maritime workers and the connections and acquaintances it allowed fostered a sense of empowerment, particularly among the enslaved, and this periodically allowed them to challenge and reset the boundaries of acceptable behavior in and out of the work environment.

From 1739 to 1785, Charleston was a busy center of maritime trade, routinely characterized as one of the most prosperous and impressive urban centers in British North

America.² The prosperity of Charleston was a direct product of its rise as an Atlantic port. The activities of the port, detailed in this dissertation, involved the constant movement of goods and people, and this in turn required a large population of mobile, independent workers to operate, load, unload, build, and repair the vessels ranging in size from the largest ocean-going ships to small river and coastal craft, and to otherwise maintain the waterfront infrastructure. Juxtaposed with these maritime workers was the sizable elite, consisting primarily of planters and merchants, who exercised social and political dominance over the other inhabitants of Charleston and indeed, through government agencies centered in the port city, the rest of South Carolina. While the port city was ostensibly the center of the power that was behind the strict order and control of the slave plantation system of South Carolina, Charleston also was frequently the site of worker-created disorders and antiauthoritarianism. The levels of disorder and the overtness with which workers resisted authority varied over time, and were directly related to circumstances affecting trade and relations with overseas political entities. Maritime laborers often were at the center of the purposeful disorders, outbreaks of desertion, and refusals to work. Periods of warfare, particularly the War of Jenkin's Ear (that merged into the War of Austrian Succession) and the American Revolution, provided very specific opportunities for the enslaved, indentures, and free maritime workers to engage in resistance activities on the waterfront.

Within the span of years encompassed by this study, propertied South Carolinians in and out of Charleston were confronted with a series of devastating events: one major

² George C. Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 3; Walter Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 1, 45-55.

armed slave rebellion and the plotting of more; the frequent capture of trading vessels and the periodic threat of foreign invasion; the devastation of major hurricanes and raging fires that forced major reconstruction activities; the fickle nature of overseas markets and wildly varying harvests of cash crops; and the occupation of much of the Lowcountry and of Charleston by the British as the “protectors-turned-enemies.” Through all of these episodes of actual and potential devastation, merchants and planters clung to the promise of the riches they would acquire through the production and sale of South Carolina commodities in the Atlantic market. In order to establish and maintain this trade-based wealth, the elite and aspiring elite necessarily committed themselves to employing potentially rebellious sailors, servants and slaves in positions that required both mobility and independence. It was this mobility and independence of maritime work that allowed the free, indentured, and enslaved workers in Charleston to find opportunities to control aspects of their working and non-working lives in ways that were not possible for most non-maritime workers; the starkest contrast was with their plantation slave counterparts. Indeed, mid-eighteenth century Charleston’s waterfront workers exploited to the fullest (sometimes contributing to) the multiple hardships that beset their employers; these laborers consistently managed to prioritize and achieve their own needs and interests over, and often in opposition to, the needs and interests of their employers.

The nature of maritime work not only bred independence and agency among the laborers of the Charleston waterfront, but it also, through their sharing of common skills and experiences, bred a strong sense of community among these maritime workers, both free and enslaved. This sense of community, as evidenced in the account of the multiethnic sailors above, often trumped divisions of race and ethnicity. In other words,

the near-constant mobility of the maritime laborers, and the connections and acquaintances this mobility encouraged among them, fostered a sense of empowerment in the workers--particularly among the enslaved. Within this ever-evolving community of itinerant and multiethnic workers, maritime laborers, often inspired by the success of their peers, continuously challenged and reset the boundaries of acceptable behavior both inside of and beyond their work environments.

While the story of planter and merchant domination in South Carolina is well documented and understood, any story of slave, servant and free worker subversion of the plantation regime from within is incomplete without a consideration of the role that maritime laborers played in this process of subversion. The reach of South Carolina's overseas trade during this time period was extensive, and resulted in a near-constant flow of ships and their crews into and out of Charleston, which was by far the region's most active port. From the slave uprising along the Stono River in 1739, to the years immediately following the War for Independence, maritime workers were key actors in the physical and social development of the Charleston waterfront. While the force of law, often brutal and terrorizing, was clearly on the side of the slaveowner and employer, the intense need for labor in the maritime sector often undermined the effectiveness of the systems of labor control, allowing worker agency. Threatening permanent and large-scale desertion, and encouraging the fears of rebellion, maritime workers pushed officials and employers, regardless of the laws in force, to adopt a flexible set of labor regulations in and around Charleston. In light of this, many employers tolerated daily acts of "minor" disobedience and frequent but temporary desertions, realizing the potentially devastating consequences of acting otherwise. Furthermore, given the frequency with

which the maritime laborers engaged in acts of resistance, controlling their behavior not only would have required more time and money than employers were willing to commit, but also would potentially have interfered with the efficiency and profitability of Charleston's overseas and internal trade. As the evidence in this dissertation will suggest, the maritime workers' continued and effective subversion of the elite and middling authority of the Charleston waterfront was, in part, predicated on the laborer's sophisticated understanding of the needs of their employers and owners, and a canny anticipation of when they would implement more overt and coercive measures to reinforce their hegemony in the plantation economy. By carefully watching and waiting for the right opportunities to arise, maritime workers were periodically able, through desertion, theft and violent resistance, to successfully take stronger and more permanent actions against their masters and employers.

A small but growing body of literature in Colonial and Atlantic history supports the central arguments of this dissertation: mobile maritime workers played a key role both in shaping the development of eighteenth-century Charleston, and of South Carolina's plantation economy. Combined, these works suggest, but do not fully detail, the importance of sailors, urban and maritime slaves, and indentured servants in the development of port cities and their hinterlands that the plantation economies of the Atlantic in general, and of North America in particular. Almost without exception, however, these historians fail to consider the *specific* ways in which these historical actors, embedded as they were in maritime environments, created some of the most compelling and dynamic circumstances in Early American and Atlantic history.

The influence of port cities on the development of the North American colonies is well established. In 1938 and 1955, Carl Bridenbaugh published his studies of Colonial American urban centers, *Cities in the Wilderness* and *Cities in Revolt*, persuasively arguing that understanding the growth of North American ports like Charleston was the key to understanding the development of American identity and independence from England. By carefully detailing the development of the urban infrastructures of the five largest ports of British North America, Bridenbaugh revealed the ways in which the ports became connected to one another through social networks, and came to share an identity that was distinct from that of the countryside and England. While Bridenbaugh primarily was concerned with demonstrating how the urban centers facilitated the development of a “public mind” in opposition to British policies, he also developed the broader argument that, due to the economic importance of the ports, there came to be urban dominance over the “rural areas” or “backcountry” regions.³

Despite Bridenbaugh’s compelling arguments, it took more than twenty years for another historian to argue that port cities were greatly influential in the development of British North America and the subsequent push for independence. Gary Nash, in his *Urban Crucible*, used social and economic analyses to develop a clearer picture than did Bridenbaugh of what happened to common people in the seaports as economic growth waxed and waned. In addition, Nash provided a view of developing and hardening socioeconomic divisions in these urban centers, arguing that the urban experience—characterized by growing wealth for some and poverty for many--radicalized the “lower sort” in the ports of Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Once radicalized, working

³ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, pp. vii, 418.

people in these ports found common ground that allowed for cooperative actions against arbitrary authority, and (because they also were perceived by the people as manifestations of tyranny and arbitrary authority) many of the English policies governing the colonies. Thus, whereas Bridenbaugh saw connections between the port cities solely in terms of elite communication through commercial exchange and connected social interactions, Nash identified social divisions, and the pressures that arose from them, as the unifying and defining experiences in North American port cities.⁴

While both Bridenbaugh and Nash emphasize the development and importance of the urban centers that grew up *around* the ports, neither of the historians addresses the development and importance of the port facilities themselves. Jacob M. Price, however, in his article, “Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century,” focuses much more on the factors involved in the actual development of the port. Indeed, by identifying particular economic factors in the growth of port facilities and their urban environments, Price developed a general model for understanding the ways in which port cities developed and grew. Within his framework, the nature of a port’s hinterland (the area served by the port) and its particular needs were as important as geographic advantages offered by any particular position along the coast. Thus, for instance, Baltimore, advantageously positioned to serve as a major port in the Chesapeake, never rose to prominence in the colonial period due to the fact that the hinterland was devoted to tobacco production, and planters did not need to have this high-value export commodity placed in a central processing or pooling area before shipment overseas. In fact, most of the productive areas of Virginia and Maryland in the

⁴ Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), pp. 292, 340.

colonial period were on or near navigable waterways that allowed tobacco to be loaded directly onto deep-sea vessels, thus bypassing any larger port facilities. Conversely, Boston, New York and Philadelphia, with hinterlands devoted to lower-value commodities, developed as shipment points where goods were gathered and pooled, and therefore much more economically shipped.⁵ From shipment points, the ports expanded to entrepôts only when merchant driven initiatives in overseas trade combined with a proven capacity on the part of the immediate hinterland to provide the labor and material resources necessary to produce vessels for extensive maritime trade. This was the case for all three of the northern British American ports noted above.

Price's analysis incorporated relatively universal criteria--from assessments of the potential of hinterland production to the size and occupational structure of the urban population--in determining when, how, and in what ways a port town developed. Within this framework, the growth of urban centers is directly linked to the growth and nature of the port. More recently, historians of Latin America and the Caribbean have applied Price's model to port towns in their geographic areas of inquiry, such as Havana and Buenos Aires, and found it efficacious. The heavy use of slave labor in these port towns, however, necessitated some adjustments to Price's framework for it to be useful in explaining the extent and nature of production in these locales. This was particularly the case for Havana, but even the classic Caribbean port of Bridgetown, with its

⁵ Jacob M. Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns," in *Perspectives in American History*, VIII: 1974, pp. 128, 138, 163.

monoculturally focused hinterland, exhibited more dynamism and growth over time than Price's model would suggest.⁶

Recently published literature on port cities in Asia, from Bangladesh and Hong Kong to Calcutta and Shanghai, moves beyond Price's model to suggest even stronger links between ports and their connected urban centers. Rather than stop at the explanation for development and growth of the port city, as Price does, these authors connect the shifts in society and politics in port cities to the functions and demands of the ports. Changes in trade required urban officials to adapt everything from laws regulating physical construction to social and economic policies. The trade networks and the labor requirements of the port also determined the ethnic makeup of port cities. Migrant workers, ranging from merchants to sailors and stevedores, settled, sometimes on a permanent basis, in ports throughout Asia, and their particular needs had to be met by the urban infrastructures and government bodies. To summarize, these histories of Asian port cities make the convincing claim that urban, maritime-oriented centers were considerably different from their non-port urban counterparts. While there were no major urban centers in British North America that were not also port cities, it is still important to keep in mind these unique port city characteristics when tracing the development and impact of Atlantic seaports like Charleston.⁷

⁶ For examples of literature that directly engage with Price's arguments, see Allan J. Kuethe, "Havana in the Eighteenth Century;" and Susan M. Socolow, "Buenos Aires: Atlantic Port and Hinterland." Both in, Franklin W. Knight and Peggy Liss, Eds., *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850*(Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991). For a particular focus on laborers in a West Indian port, see Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic, 1550-1610*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. On Bridgetown's maritime slave population and the nature of the port, see Pedro L. V. Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados 1680-1834*(Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), pp. 82-93.

⁷ See Peter Reeves, Frank Broeze and Kenneth McPherson, "Studying the Asian Port City," in Frank Broeze, editor, *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia From the 16th-20th Centuries*(Honolulu: University of

A history of port function and its long-term effects on the development of connected urban centers would be incomplete without the analysis of the role played by the ports' maritime laborers. Here again, there is a small, but thought-provoking, body of literature to draw upon. Marcus Rediker's research on British merchant seamen and piracy detailed the experiences of those who manned the vessels that made the Atlantic economy function.⁸ Rediker's work, which adds to the understanding of sailors' experiences and ideologies introduced by Jesse Lemisch, recast the seventeenth-century phenomenon of piracy as a form of worker rebellion. Rediker argued that both the dangerous and violent nature of work at sea, and the particular brand of egalitarianism that work before the mast produced, led to, and shaped the nature of, this rebellion.⁹

In a subsequent collaborative work, Rediker and Peter Linebaugh demonstrated that effective communication between, and cooperation among, antinomian elements (many of them the same sailors described in Rediker's earlier work) existed throughout the Atlantic world. The two historians traced the origins of sailor and laborer radicalism and antinomian tendencies, following them into the eighteenth century and onto dry land. In this way, Rediker and Linebaugh demonstrated that the developing ideologies of sailors had a resonant effect on the growing population of the working poor throughout the Atlantic. Many of these men and women were concentrated in the urban centers of America, and were subject, as sailors were from the 1640s onward, to the demands and whims of developing capitalism. Thus, the radicalization of sailors that took place at sea

Hawaii Press, 1989), pp. 29-53; and Frank Broeze, "Brides of the Sea Revisited," in Frank Broeze, editor, *Gateways of Asia: Port Cities of Asia in the 13th-20th Centuries* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), pp. 1-16.

⁸ Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets," *WMQ*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 25, No.3 (July 1968), pp. 371-407.

⁹ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 154-159.

occurred in waterfront environments as well. In Charleston, it was primarily the sizable slave population who joined with sailors in resisting some of the more repressive measures of the Atlantic labor regimes.¹⁰

Finally, this study both draws from and contributes to the body of literature detailing the Atlantic slave system, and South Carolina's specific role within that system. Recent works that explore slave life and resistance activities have particular relevance to this study, but older works have their place as well.¹¹ For instance, Peter Wood's study of the development of late seventeenth and early eighteenth century South Carolina's plantation slavery, though it ends in the year that this study begins, was highly influential in shaping my framing of slavery in these pages. Much of what Wood referred to as the pioneering stages of South Carolina slavery actually continued, in a slightly varied form, into the mid-eighteenth century urban waterfront setting of Charleston.¹² Just as their cattle ranching and skilled free-ranging slave predecessors were, the highly mobile and loosely supervised maritime slave population can be understood as an economic necessity, despite the real and potential "evils" of such employment from the perspectives of slaveowners and other white authorities. In other words, not only was the economy of South Carolina built on the labor of highly skilled and independent slave men and women, its *future* success depended on the skill and independence of enslaved people as well, particularly in the maritime sector. While there is a tremendous body of work on the

¹⁰ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*(Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), pp. 211-247.

¹¹ For particularly creative and thorough works, see: Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty*(Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Thomas Buchanan, *Black Life on the Mississippi: Slaves, Free Blacks, and the Western Steamboat World*(Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age*(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹² Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in South Carolina From 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion*(New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), pp. 95-132.

plantation slavery system in South Carolina, explorations of urban slavery in this period and region are still few and far between. This dissertation adds to this scarce literature, discussing urban slavery within the context of maritime labor.¹³

Maritime slavery, as noted in the discussion of port city histories above, has not been neglected in the context of the development of Atlantic economies. However, while economic reliance on the skills of slave sailors and boatmen has been the topic of several studies of the colonial period, the larger impact of maritime slaves on the plantation slave population and the slave regime have been explored by only a few historians.¹⁴ David Cecelski's study of maritime slavery in nineteenth-century North Carolina, for example, closely examines the impact of maritime slavery on the slave regime.¹⁵ Moving beyond concrete descriptive accounts of maritime slaves and their work—as simply the muscle power behind the labor of the ports—Cecelski argues that maritime slaves actually asserted themselves as the experts in their areas of work. This is perhaps best exemplified in the account of a vessel aground in the midst of a gale; after white captains and pilots repeatedly failed in their attempts to refloat the boat, it was a small group of slave pilots who were finally able to succeed.¹⁶ According to Cecelski, maritime slaves encouraged dependence on their skills, and then used this dependence as weapons against

¹³ Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). For an earlier study of slavery in antebellum urban centers, see Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), especially pp. 209-242.

¹⁴ For examples of the treatment of maritime slaves, see Julius Scott, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution," Duke University Dissertation, 1986; N. A. T. Hall "Maritime Maroons: 'Grand Marronage' from the Danish West Indies," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 42, No. 4 (October, 1985), pp. 476-498; Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁵ David Cecelski, *Waterman's Song* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁶ Cecelski, pp. 23-25.

the slave regime. This culminated in active rebellion—guiding and aiding Union forces in the coastal areas of the state—during the Civil War. Like their latter day northern neighbors, maritime slaves in the Charleston area worked to achieve similar goals.¹⁷

In this dissertation, I rely and expand upon these bodies of literature—the role of maritime laborers in the development and growth of port cities, the empowerment that maritime work fostered among the laborers, and the intersections between this empowered work force and the population at large in the region—to make the argument that mobility and independence among otherwise highly restricted laborers engendered a community of resistance that undermined the power and authority of the elite of Charleston and threatened the foundations of the slave system of South Carolina and the Atlantic World.

Chapter 1 provides the setting for subsequent discussions of the waterfront workers and their employers. It describes the nature and variety of work and work relations along Charleston’s waterfront. Most of the descriptions are drawn from the mid-1760s, when Charleston had grown substantially (more than doubling its number of wharves) and was still expanding, both physically and economically. The main concern in this chapter is to establish the primacy of maritime trade and its connected activities to the success of the port city and the plantation economy. The chapter provides accounts of how several members of Charleston’s elite earned their fortunes, highlighting the enormous potential for the accumulation of wealth in the Lowcountry through participation in South Carolina’s export economy. The Charleston elite depended on the waterborne trade for economic, social, and political prestige: this in turn required that

¹⁷ Cecelski, pp. 136-182.

they accept the need for a ready supply of maritime laborers. Therefore, working within the confines of a plantation economy, the elite employed slave laborers in a majority of these positions. While slaves did not fill all maritime positions in South Carolina, they were frequently the sole operators of local vessels. In other areas, they worked alongside free and indentured white men, and depended upon each other for successfully completing their work. In addition, the resulting large population of highly mobile workers understood very clearly their essential role in the success of the port town as well as the plantation economy. Free and enslaved waterfront workers used this knowledge to push the boundaries of acceptable behavior--working further from supervision, finding their own employers, holding out for higher wages, selling goods on the side, and choosing when and even where to work. This population found ways to improve their circumstances, and position themselves to take future, and increasingly bold actions. From the perspective of employers and property holders connected to Charleston, the unpredictability of the workforce was particularly problematic when the workers were slaves; here, then was one of the central dilemmas for the elite in this plantation society served by a major Atlantic port.

Chapter 2 begins with the “problem” of the Stono Rebellion in 1739, and details the responses of South Carolinians in general, and Charleston’s inhabitants more specifically, to the dangers of slave insurrections. The passage of a revised “Negro Act” in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion suggests that, in 1740, authorities were prepared to commit themselves and other white inhabitants to a more draconian system of slave oversight and control. Despite this policy, however, and despite the additional threats of imminent invasion by either the Spanish or French, South Carolinians

continued through the 1740s to employ free and enslaved maritime laborers in ways that ran contrary to the laws, in order to maintain the profitable plantation economy. In other words, employers were disinclined to make the investments of time and money needed to carefully monitor the actions of the enslaved and other maritime workers. For their part, maritime workers wasted little time in taking advantage of the combination of lax supervision and the reallocation of the already limited supervisory resources needed to defend the colony from outside threats. A sudden surge in permanent desertion of slaves, many seeking the sanctuary offered by the “enemy” in St. Augustine, and sailors, hoping to avoid naval service in this period of war between European powers, was one manifestation of maritime workers’ recognition of the opportunities opened up in this decade.

Chapters 3 and 4 detail the return, in the 1750s and 1760s, to unrestricted trade, and freedom from potential invasion by foreign powers, which provided Charleston’s authorities and property holders with the opportunity to refocus their attention on internal concerns and control of the labor force. The treaties signed by England in the 1760s in the wake of the Seven Years War opened up southern Georgia and Florida to British settlement. This heralded an extension of the plantation system that, in turn, increased the need for the transport of building materials and, eventually, the bulky plantation harvests. As result, dependence on maritime laborers deepened. Realizing this, authorities and some employers made concerted efforts to roll back the gains made by such workers over the course of the 1740s, thereby limiting the possibility for increased resistance or outright rebellion. Sailors, servants, and slaves were all subject to new restrictions in their access to taverns, a pass system was established for all sailors, market slaves were further

restricted in their actions, and members of grand juries and other officials began to finally implement slave and free worker regulations that were already on the books. At the same time, maritime slaves, sailors and servants, sought to protect their social and economic gains, by pushing against the confines of the labor system, threatening to remove their labor or destabilize the labor regime altogether. In this way, the laborers demonstrated their engagement in Atlantic worker ideology and resistance activities. While their threats were real, and many managed to remove themselves from their temporary or permanent service, simply introducing the specter of a massive revolt or mass flight served to make their actual patterns of temporary flight, erratic work schedules, and refusal to work in certain situations (e.g., low wages, overly dangerous or arduous conditions) seem far less problematic to masters and employers. During this period, the primary contest between the authorities and the workers was over the Atlantic nature of Charleston. White authorities appeared bent on applying the plantation system of controls to Charleston's slave and free laborers. Waterfront workers, on the other hand, strove to keep their mobility-based Atlantic identities intact, and to shape the waterfront environment accordingly.

The turmoil of the American Revolution is at the center of Chapter 5. As in the 1740s, war presented increased opportunities for maritime laborers and new obstacles for waterfront employers hoping to control them. Even before the British successfully invaded and occupied Charleston, simply the proximity of their army and navy changed the dynamics of the relationship between laborer and employer. Extending Lord Dunmore's Proclamation, which offered freedom to those slaves who fled to and joined the ranks of the British army in Virginia, to other arenas of the war, the British in South

Carolina and Georgia began offering protection and freedom to some runaway slaves. While some enslaved waterfront workers found freedom by fleeing their masters and joining the British, other workers, free or enslaved, used the threat of flight to “earn” additional liberties, a trend that employers and owners viewed as far better than losing their employees and property altogether. Thus, with the exception of some brief periods of intense focus on internal order, both in preparation for imminent foreign invasion, and/or in response to suspected slave insurrections, authorities during the 1760s and 1770s largely failed in their endeavor to regulate maritime laborers. The reluctance of the propertied to commit their resources to aid in this regulation allowed the waterfront workforce to continue to press their advantage against their employers and masters. During this period, free and enslaved men and women worked themselves into positions from which they could determine their own fates and work to improve their circumstances considerably.

Chapter 6 follows the evacuation of Charleston and focuses on the first establishment, through incorporation, of a local government for Charleston. The first set of ordinances passed by the City Council included many provisions for the closer regulation of the waterfront proper, and of the workers that inhabited or passed through this space. These regulations reflected White authorities’ continued concern over the activities of maritime laborers on and near the waterfront, and their intention to implement an effective system of control that would lead to greater efficiency and profits by combating worker recalcitrance. However, the continued complaints of Grand Juries reveal the persistence of worker rebelliousness; even though local officials were much more in tune with the “problems” of Charleston and the waterfront, and were given more

authority and discretionary powers, they still were no more successful in reining in maritime workers than were their colonial predecessors..

To summarize, the inherent mobility of maritime labor, an essential element of South Carolina's economy, provided greater opportunities for workers (and, conversely, much more significant challenges to employers) than have been recognized by most historians of either the Atlantic or the Slave South. As long as workers were free to move about in the course of their daily employment in Charleston, and along the rivers and coast, they found opportunities to communicate and cooperate with others in similar positions, facilitating their finding ways to create space for themselves, and to see to their own needs. At times, these opportunities led to cooperative resistance actions that were permanently damaging to the slave regime and the export economy of South Carolina. While this sometimes resulted in the swift and effective implementation of draconian measures for monitoring and controlling maritime, urban, and plantation workers, such measures were always short-lived. And more long-term measures designed to control sailors, slaves, and servants connected to the water mostly fell short of their goals, despite repeated calls on the part of the elite for their effective implementation, a lukewarm implementation of policy and regulation that, this dissertation will argue, was an inevitable product of the extreme dependence of South Carolina's planters and merchants on water transport, and the attendant need for workers to support that transport.

CHAPTER ONE: THE WORK OF THE PORT OF CHARLESTON

When the 146-ton ship, *Fox*, neared the entrance to Charleston Harbor in June of 1765, the captain would necessarily choose to take one of the harbor pilots on board. This pilot might have been Thomas Jeremiah, as he was regularly employed in this business. Once on board Jeremiah took responsibility for the safe passage of this average-sized ship that was manned by 16 sailors, and loaded with 170 slaves imported from the Gold Coast by Brailsford and Chapman.¹ Jeremiah was in a position not just to guide, but literally to take command of the navigation of the *Fox*, thus temporarily superceding the authority of the captain. With the enslaved Africans likely confined below decks to keep the working area clear for ease of handling the ship, and to avoid any chance of an attempted uprising, only the crew and Jeremiah saw the low, sandy dunes of the immediate shoreline and the more distant spire of St. Phillip's Church. As pilot, Jeremiah called for adjustments to the helm and trim of the sails, and the crew responded quickly without the intercession of the captain. Both captain and crew knew that doubting the pilot, or responding slowly to his orders, jeopardized the safe passage of the vessel through the narrow inlet, with its shifting sand shoals, that served as an entrance to Charleston Harbor.

Jeremiah's presence on the vessel may have disconcerted those sailors new to Charleston. Certainly, the use of a pilot was expected, but Thomas Jeremiah was an

¹ David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, Herbert Klein, Eds., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), unique identity number 77767. For an assessment of average ship sizes in this period, see Converse Clowse, *Measuring Charleston's Overseas Commerce, 1717-1767: Statistics from the Port's Naval Lists*(Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), p. 117.

African slave. Despite his enslavement, he carried himself with a confidence born of mastery of this work, as he had guided many vessels like this one, ensuring the safe arrival of the ship at Rebellion Road, the anchorage off Fort Johnson where the customs official and a doctor waited to examine the papers and the health of the crew and “cargo” respectively.²

Those at the anchorage surveyed the expanse of the harbor, which was more than two miles in width, and deep enough in most places for vessels drawing six feet or less. Newcomers to Charleston, whether sailors or slaves, likely found the spectacle of Charleston Harbor remarkable in several ways. The protected body of water, once the oyster fishing center for Native American groups (and acknowledged as such by naming the outermost point of the Charleston’s peninsula, where there were mounds of discarded oyster shells, *Oyster* or *White Point*) was now the busy locus of South Carolina’s plantation economy, and the means for connecting Charleston to the larger British Atlantic economy. Along with the other ocean-going ships, the *Fox* shared the harbor with innumerable canoes, skiffs and ferry boats that traversed this open area, coming down from the rivers, or transporting people, local produce, or exportable goods across the harbor back and forth from town to plantation. Also present were larger vessels such as flats, sloops, schooners and pettiaugers (see Figure 1) employed in carrying barrels of

² The origin of the name for this anchorage is unclear, but its naming predates the timeframe of this study. The most plausible explanation is that the anchorage was originally beyond the range of the guns of the town, and vessels anchored in this location could operate as they pleased without punishment if they chose to ignore the laws or customary practices of the port.

rice, indigo, pitch and tar from inland plantations or coastal locations north and south of Charleston.³

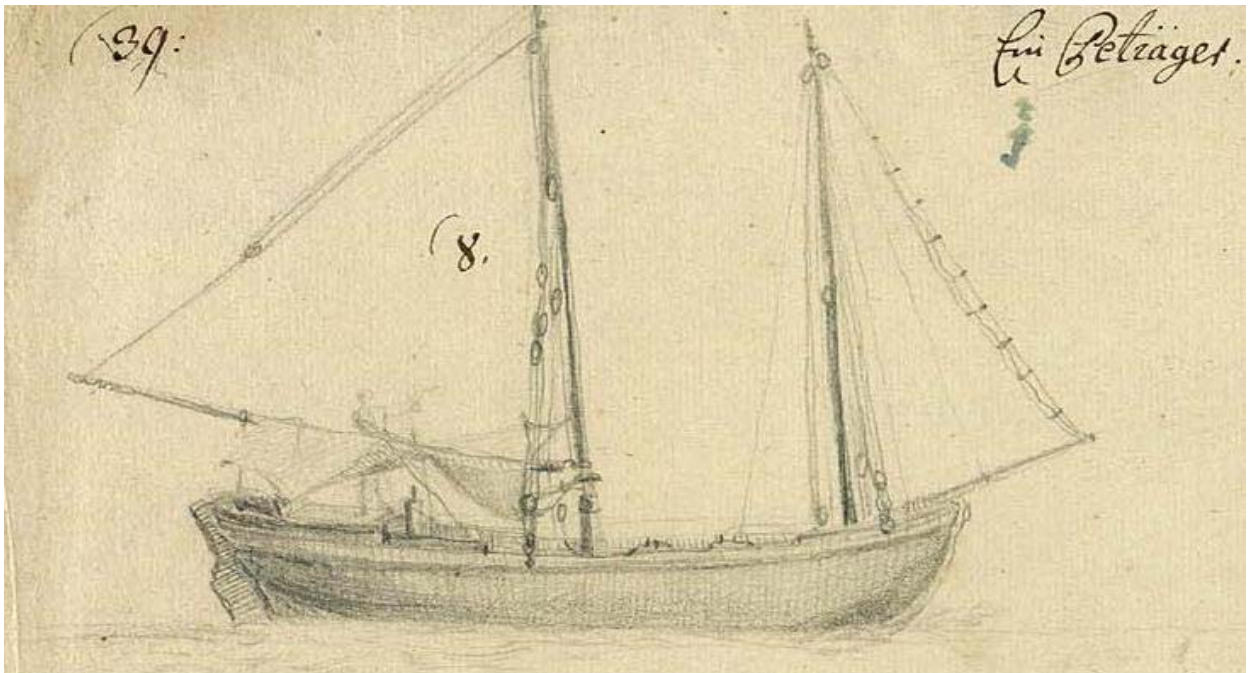


Figure 1: Pettiauger drawing from Von Reck’s Voyage (The Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark).

Indeed, nearly all of the roughly 92,000 barrels of rice exported from Charleston in 1766 were first loaded onto these larger coastal and river vessels serving the plantations of the Lowcountry before they could be shipped in the holds of vessels like the *Fox* to distant ports.⁴ Jeremiah knew that while some of these vessels were manned by mixed crews of white and black sailors and rivermen, the majority of the crews on all

³ Locally constructed craft played an integral role in the short-distance transport to and from Charleston. Relying on the combination of construction techniques common among Native Americans and Europeans, the pettiauger was constructed much like a dugout canoe that was modified to increase carrying capacity by adding planking to one or more of the burned out logs that acted as a keel. Sometimes exceeding 40 feet in length, the vessel was frequently fitted with masts, and was therefore most commonly a sailing vessel. For additional descriptions and variations over time, see C. Fleetwood, Jr., *Tidecraft: the Boats of South Carolina, Georgia and Northeastern Florida, 1550-1950*(Tybee Island, Georgia: WBG Marine Press, 1995), pp. 37-43.

⁴ Clowse, pp. 59-62.

of these local vessels were black hands, and many of the latter were enslaved sailors and boatmen. While slave sailors and boatmen were common in other parts of the Atlantic, the large number of such men within Charleston's maritime environment was unusual, and stood out to unaccustomed observers. Indeed, many first-time visitors to South Carolina's capital city likely thought or expressed words similar to Samuel Dyssli's remark in 1737, that South Carolina "looks more like a negro country than a country settled by white people," or Roger Lamb's impression in 1780 that, in Charleston, "almost every white man [kept] a great number of slaves."⁵ Visitors did not need to enter the port town itself to reach similar conclusions, as it was not at all unusual for fishing boats or general cargo vessels to break free from the swarm of harbor vessels and approach incoming ships to offer fresh fish or other provisions, sometimes even before the vessels had come to anchor. Thus, the customs stopover at Rebellion Road, with its fleet of small local vessels hoping to cater to the needs of recently arrived or soon-to-be-departing vessels, was the first point of introduction for visitors to Charleston's diverse maritime community, and the predominance of Africans and African Americans as workers in the local boating population was clear to all who entered the harbor.⁶

Jeremiah and the crew he guided viewed other features of Charleston's maritime environment as they awaited clearance from the customs officers. First, directly across the harbor, to the east, was Sullivan's Island, which the incoming ship passed on its way to the anchorage off the fort. Since 1712, when an Act of the Commons House of

⁵ Dyssli is quoted in Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1974), p. 132; see Roger Lamb, *An Original and Authentic Journal of Occurrences During the Late American War, From its Commencement to the Year 1783* (Dublin, 1809), excerpted in Thomas D. Clark, Ed., *South Carolina: The Grand Tour, 1780-1865* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), p. 12.

⁶ The dominance of slave labor in Charleston makes the port more comparable to Caribbean locales than to other British North American port cities.

Assembly established a pest house on this site, Sullivan's Island functioned as the prescribed quarantine area.⁷ Any vessel that arrived in the harbor with a sick crew or passengers was required to deposit them on the island before discharging any other passengers or the cargo. Should smallpox or yellow fever be detected, then the entire vessel would be quarantined, in order to prevent the spread of these diseases to the town or country populations. Jeremiah, however, likely avoided this inconvenience and hindrance to his work, given his limited contact with ship crews and, in this case, the imprisoned Africans on board, not to mention the recognition of his essential role in Charleston's overseas trade.

The view to the north and northwest included the houses, shops, warehouses, wharves, and public buildings of the active waterfront of Charleston, situated on the western bank of the Cooper River. A similar view is depicted in Figure 2, and reflects the variety of vessels in terms of both size and point of origin. From this distance, Jeremiah noted familiar landmarks that were a part of the waterfront's mixture of wharves and connected businesses, tipling houses and tenement houses (see Figure 2). Jeremiah also had a clear view of the houses built along the southern end of the peninsula on which Charleston stood, noted above as White or Oyster Point, which was not commercially active. Similarly, the other shoreline of the port settlement and colonial capital, the banks of the Ashley River, hidden from Jeremiah's view, lacked significant commercial development beyond a few private landings and a ferry. This would change over the next few years, when, reflecting the significant growth of Charleston and the

⁷ Fraser, p. 31.

maritime interests of its inhabitants, William Gibbes finished construction of his large wharf, and Charleston's waterfront proper extended to the Ashley River.



Figure 2: “Prospect of Charleston” before 1739, engraving by B. Roberts (New York Public Library Digital Collection).

Once the ship cleared, and a doctor examined the enslaved Africans for evidence of serious illness, the *Fox* continued to its destination along Charleston's Cooper River waterfront, still under the guidance of Jeremiah. Lined with upwards of a dozen major wharves that were dotted with and bordered by warehouses, shops and private dwellings, the waterfront was impressive. After 1768, the view would include, in stages until its completion in 1771, the visually imposing Exchange at the foot of Broad Street, built to meet the needs of Charleston's merchants and planters as trade in goods and human beings increased. Thus, when the *Fox* arrived at a berth, likely at Brailsford's Wharf, and Jeremiah's work as pilot was done, he would have disembarked at the edge of a thriving port city.

As a long-time member of Charleston's maritime community, Jeremiah witnessed much of the expansion of the waterfront that occurred from the beginning of the 1740s, when there were no more than eight wharves, to the mid-1760s, when Brailsford's Wharf was one of over twelve such structures, and several more were under construction. This

increase was not always steady, as ebbs in overseas trade in war years, and physical devastation brought by hurricanes and fires, both discouraged new construction or forced reconstruction. Much of this new construction is evident in a 1788 map of Charleston (Figure 3).⁸ Here, the number and size of the wharves are laid out clearly. Also evident are several of the public buildings, such as the Exchange and the Poor House and “gaol,” as well as the grid pattern of streets, discussed below, that facilitated movement of people and goods to and from the waterfront along the Cooper River. From the 1750s to the American Revolution, expansion was the overall trend, and by the end of the 1780s the total number of wharves would surpass twenty.⁹



Figure 3: Edmund Petrie, *Ichnography of Charleston, South-Carolina, 1788* (Library of Congress).

⁸ Edmund Petrie, *Ichnography of Charleston, South-Carolina, 1788*, Library of Congress.

⁹ Martha Zierden, “Urban Archaeology in Charleston: A Museum Interpretation,” *South Carolina Antiquities*, v. 16 (1984), p. 31.

Most wharves had substantial buildings on or adjacent to them. For instance, Peter Bountheau advertised the sale of brick warehouses on Beale's wharf that had a capacity of 2,500 barrels of rice, but also included a loft suitable for a sailmaking business.¹⁰ While Bountheau owned the warehouses he advertised, other merchants, like Henry Laurens, rented warehouses on wharves, or paid wharf operators for storing goods for them, while they awaited reshipment or sale in Charleston.¹¹ Indeed, some entrepreneurial men did not just use the buildings on wharves to store goods, but they actually located their shops on them. Thus, Gibbes and Hort advertised in 1772 that they were still in the "factorage" business and were now located on Gadsden's wharf. They were looking for someone to tend the wharf and their stores there, and they promised to supply their customers with proper boats for the freight of their goods from the countryside.¹² Workers on these wharves, employed in South Carolina's extensive overseas trade, were kept extremely busy handling thousands of barrels of rice, barreled indigo, naval stores, rough-hewn timber, and country produce as well as the imported finished goods from Great Britain and food stuffs from northern colonies.¹³

Even with the increase in wharves, there were still not enough to meet the demands of Charleston's overseas trade. The waterfront environment expanded not only to the Ashley River, but inland and along the coast where South Carolinians established "outposts." Two such locales, Port Royal to the south and Georgetown to the north, emerged as major satellite trading centers, due to their locations at the mouths of major navigable rivers. Here, merchants opened trading houses that served as extensions of

¹⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 30 January 1775.

¹¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 30 January 1775.

¹² *South-Carolina Gazette* 3 September 1772.

¹³ Coclanis, pp. 61, 78.

Charleston businesses. This allowed Charleston merchants to form more direct contacts with planter clients, and to win over new clients by offering to eliminate some of the expense and uncertainty of shipment all the way to Charleston. In addition, plantation owners could meet some of their basic needs by trading here, and therefore avoiding the time and expense of direct transport from Charleston. One of Charleston's major merchants, Christopher Gadsden, had a trading house in both Charleston and Georgetown, although by 1767 he was disposing of the latter.¹⁴

The establishment of Georgetown and Port Royal as satellite trading centers did more than just extend the reach of Charleston's merchant community. It also allowed the waterfront culture to extend to the hinterland, through the dispersion of deep sea sailors. Indeed, one of the long-established river outposts, Strawberry Ferry, originated as a temporary stop for ocean-going vessels that needed to "deworm," or stay in fresh water long enough to kill marine organisms growing on the hull—usually around 10 days. The crews of the ships that traveled far enough up the Cooper River to reach this fresh water, interacted socially and economically with the local populations during their stay. At the very least, the crews of the vessels provided a sizeable and consistent supply of customers for drinking establishments and other entertainment businesses. There also are indications that sailors earned money ashore during these stays, as temporary hired hands. The frequent visits of ships to Strawberry Ferry and other river locations, and the constant need for transport of goods produced by the expanding rice cultivation,

¹⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 29 June 1767. Gadsden was in a partnership with Godfrey at the time, and the property for sale in Georgetown was from this partnership. E. Stanley Godbold and Robert Woody, *Christopher Gadsden and the American Revolution* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1982), p. 13.

prompted the creation of facilities in these areas designed to make them convenient reshipment points for the nearby plantations.

Any successful port required more than just places to moor vessels, and Charleston offered a full complement of artisans to service existing vessels, and to construct new ones as necessary. Packed onto and in between the growing number of wharves were the shops and small landings operated by sailmakers, blockmakers, riggers and ships carpenters who did minor repairs on Charleston's overseas and local fleets. However, larger vessel work and construction required separate facilities. While both Georgetown and Port Royal developed sizable shipyards during this period, the most noteworthy construction and repair yards were at Hobcaw, just across the Cooper River from Charleston. Operated by Paul Pritchard, John Rose, and others, the facilities were deemed large enough to be a suitable location for naval construction during the American Revolution.¹⁵ Newspaper notices from that period confirm the capacity of the area's ship building yards. For instance, in December of 1764, the editor of the *South Carolina Gazette* informed his readers that a builder at Hobcaw launched a new ship, built for Captain Lempriere, and observers of the vessel noted that the new ship was one of South Carolina's finest.¹⁶ Similarly, it was reported in 1767 that John Rose launched a ship at Hobcaw; *The Liberty*, designed specifically for the Bristol trade.¹⁷ In addition to major construction here, and in Georgetown and Port Royal, extensive construction of local river and coastal vessels, some large enough for trips to the West Indies, occurred

¹⁵ As one of South Carolina's leading merchants and planters, Henry Laurens was confident in local builders and engaged some at Hobcaw in the construction of a ship for his business. Henry Laurens Ledger, June 1770.

¹⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 3 December 1764.

¹⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 April 1767.

throughout the Lowcountry along rivers and coastal inlets.¹⁸ While many of the larger vessels arriving in Charleston for the rice trade were constructed elsewhere, most of the smaller vessels that landed at Charleston's wharves, and made the journeys to and from points along the extended waterfront environment, were built in South Carolina.

Wharves and ship building and refitting sites were essential, but they were certainly not all of the physical elements needed to make Charleston a successful Atlantic port. Only so many merchant's shops, warehouses and other service buildings could fit along the waterfront proper. Charleston still needed convenient means for delivering the unladed goods to warehouses or retailers in the town and the barrels of rice and other goods from storage facilities to the waiting vessels. From its inception, Charleston was shaped by its residents with these port functions as their primary concern. Not only did entrepreneurial residents build wharves along portions of the western bank of the Cooper River deep enough to allow large vessels to berth and thus avoid the costly and inefficient use of lightering vessels to load and unload goods and people, the streets of Charleston were laid out in a grid with the wider and more settled avenues designed to either back the wharves, as Bay Street did, or to intersect the waterfront of the Cooper River at right angles in order to maximize the ease of carriage to and from vessels moored there. More specifically, at the head of Brailsford wharf, where Jeremiah left the *Fox*, was East Bay Street (or The Bay), running parallel to the river from the southern tip of the peninsula north to the limits of the waterfront and lined with wharves on one side and some of the many shops and houses on the other. Not far from this point was the east end of Broad Street, which emptied into East Bay Street at Champney's Wharf about midway along the

¹⁸ A brief survey of newspaper advertisements quickly reveals the near-constant construction of smaller vessels that occurred on plantations, in smaller towns and along the waterfront in Charleston.

waterfront and served as one of the main arteries cutting west into the heart of the city. Broad Street was the favored locale for many business owners. Also beginning on East Bay Street and cutting into the city were Tradd, Elliott and Queen Streets which originated on Motte's, Beale's and Prioleau's wharves respectively, allowing easy transit to and from the Cooper River. Union and Church Streets, dotted by a mix of commercial and residential buildings, were the major north-south running streets one and two blocks back from East Bay respectively. This was the heart of Charleston, all within proximity to the waterfront proper. Indeed, with a few exceptions that included St. Phillips Church, construction and development was oriented to the maritime economy and the plantation system that provided valuable exports first; civic and colonial government needs were dealt with second. Even the center of government and law made use of commercial properties such as inns and taverns. The eventual building of the Exchange gave the Commons House of Assembly a more permanent home, but the Exchange was primarily a commercial edifice. Like other major port cities throughout the Atlantic and other portions of the world engaged in overseas trade, the growth of the town followed the growth of the waterfront and was shaped by the needs of the port. In turn, as the population of Charleston grew and settlements in the hinterland expanded in number and size, producing greater quantities of exportable goods, the natural advantages of the port developed apace.¹⁹

¹⁹ Recent literature on port cities suggests that economic functions of waterfront environments should be the focus of any study of port cities. Most urban historians and geographers neglect this, taking the existence of the port facilities as a given rather than analyzing the importance of these in the economic, social and political development of urban centers and their connected hinterlands. For a discussion of this trend in the Atlantic, see Gregory Stevens-Cox, *St. Peter Port, 1680-1830: the History of an International Entrepo* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1999), pp. 1-14. For discussions of the connections between the economic needs and functions of the port in specific development of urban centers and hinterlands in Asia, see Peter Reeves, Frank Broeze and Kenneth McPherson, "Studying the Asian Port City," in Frank Broeze,

The elite of Charleston could not reserve the waterfront and its surrounding streets for their exclusive use, and the lower sort, in between the “respectable” shops and residences and in the shadows of the growing number of elite residences and mansions, built and inhabited their own spaces. One visitor to the city noted that the “streets [were] unpaved and narrow, [with] small wooden houses, from among which rise, from every quarter of the town, stately mansions.”²⁰ While there was no segregation by street or neighborhood, most white residents confined servants, slaves, and transient workers to attics and, in larger residences with greater numbers of servants, outbuildings.²¹ In these autonomous spaces, the lower sort engaged in their own entrepreneurial activities. Despite laws designed to prevent it, artisans’ wives sold alcohol from their homes.²² Sundays, in particular, heralded periods of unregulated behavior for slaves and sailors, as, according to documented complaints, they drank and gambled loudly in the streets during church services.²³ Illicit gatherings and activities such as these flourished under cover of darkness. Periodic attempts to establish public lamps, in order to monitor streets and alleys, were met with resistance, through negligence of the night watch, or vandalism.²⁴

Charleston was not always so bustling and prosperous. The first several decades of settlement in South Carolina brought very little in terms of financial returns for

editor, *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia From the 16th-20th Centuries*(Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), pp. 29-53; and Frank Broeze, “Brides of the Sea Revisited,” in Frank Broeze, editor, *Gateways of Asia: Port Cities of Asia in the 13th-20th Centuries*(London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), pp. 1-16.

²⁰ Francis Hall, *Travels in Canada, and the United States, in 1816 and 1817*, excerpted in Thomas D. Clark, Ed., *South Carolina: the Grand Tour, 1780-1865*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), p. 53.

²¹ See Peter A. Coclanis “The Sociology of Architecture in Colonial Charleston: Pattern and Process in an Eighteenth-Century Southern City,” *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 18, No. 4. (Summer, 1985), pp. 607-623.

²² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 9 May 1768.

²³ Grand Jury Presentments, *South-Carolina and American General Gazette*, 20 -27 May 1774; Letter published in *State Gazette of South Carolina*, 28 July 1785.

²⁴ *State Gazette of South Carolina*, November 1783.

investors or settlers. Linked as the colonial endeavor was to the experience of Barbados, colonists and their proprietary sponsors hoped to find a cash crop similar to sugar in its financial rewards. Instead, early settlers made do with a wide range of moderately profitable goods that ranged from naval stores to deerskins to cattle. Colonists arrived with African slaves intended for profitable production activities, but the only profits of consequence from slavery during the early settlement period came from the sale of Native Americans captured in war and subsequently enslaved.²⁵ The successful introduction of rice cultivation, and the consequent development of sizable plantations in the 1730s, eventually allowed a significant number of South Carolina's colonists to meet the imagined potential of the Lowcountry for profitable interactions in the Atlantic economy. This potential could only be met with a fully functioning port, and Charleston was just that by the 1740s. In sum, the remarkable expansion of the plantation system in the Lowcountry, an expansion that produced the black majority that South Carolina was noted for, was only possible with the development of the waterfront.²⁶

Because most of South Carolina's commercial activity was directed from Charleston, the merchants there chose to locate their businesses near the wharves on either East Bay or Broad Streets, in order to facilitate communication to both local and distant clients, and to allow them to supervise the loading, unloading, and inspection of the goods they bought and sold. Thus, in the period from 1762 to December 1767, a majority of the 227 merchants who advertised in Charleston's newspapers indicated that their businesses were either directly on the waterfront or very close to it on major streets

²⁵ Gary Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974), pp. 118-121.

²⁶ See, Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 95-132.

like Broad Street. Artisans, if they could afford the increasing costs of real estate in the Charleston's commercial center, followed a similar pattern. Even as the streets closest to the wharves became more crowded, and as real estate prices rose, a significant number of artisans, along with a small number of merchants, still maintained a closeness to the waterfront, relocating their homes and businesses to Church and Meeting Streets, and other avenues that, while not intersecting with East Bay Street and the wharves, were still very much connected to the waterfront.²⁷ This desire to remain close to the locus of maritime activity resulted in a crowding of streets and alleys, and contributed to a concentration of people near the waterfront; this crowding allowed for a certain degree of anonymity among visitors, and even some regular inhabitants of Charleston.

The concentration of people and businesses on or near the waterfront also produced intense competition among retailers. Indeed, property purchase and lease patterns and newspaper advertisements reveal that business owners scrambled to find and then advertise locations that were convenient to their clients along the waterfront. Advertisers in the newspapers often promoted their businesses by noting their convenient proximity to the waterfront, or nearness to other frequented or well-established commercial sites. For instance, wharves were often used as landmarks to direct potential customers to shops or taverns. This was the case for Robert Boyd, who included in his advertisement of the opening of his factorage business the fact that he was a tenant of

²⁷ The 227 advertising merchants represented 5.68% of the population of Charleston, and there were likely several more merchants, such as Henry Laurens, who chose not to advertise in this period. Even in 1782, in the aftermath of the devastating occupation of Charleston by the British, merchants still numbered 102. The first recorded artisan on Meeting street, the furthest removed business thoroughfare, was a gunsmith, and by the 1770s, there were tailors, a tin plate worker, a cabinet maker, a jeweler and a cooper. See, Jeanne Calhoun, Martha Zierden and Elizabeth Paysinger, "The Geographic Spread of Charleston's Mercantile Community, 1732-1767," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 86 (1985), pp.188-191.

Roper's Wharf, confident that this would help him to draw in clients.²⁸ John Colleton owned a lot on the Cooper River that was so widely recognized by the maritime community as a convenient location for grounding vessels that when Joseph Baird leased the lot, he felt compelled to advertise that it was not to be used by the public while a workers repaired a Dutch vessel there.²⁹

Successful waterfront businesses also prompted further business ventures and increased crowding of the waterfront. This was particularly the case for those businesses catering to the entertainment of waterfront patrons. Jacob Wurtzer, for example, in 1760, decided to open a tavern opposite a well-known one on King Street.³⁰ Similarly, Weyman and Carne offered their services in cabinet making on Queen Street near the merchant house of Daniel Cannon.³¹ And Elizabeth Axson, perhaps choosing to add to her family's income and feeling confident that the location of her business and its proximity to an established shop would guarantee her regular customers, opened a lodging house on Meeting Street next to the gunsmith John Dodd.³² A similar logic may have motivated Ruth Hartman to advertise for lodgers, by the day or for longer periods, on Union Street opposite Mr. Moses Mitchell's house.³³ Certainly Hannah Tuke, with her tavern near Burn's Wharf; Ann Imer, taking in boarders on Meeting Street near the State House; and Mary Kelsey, selling all sorts of "spirituous" liquors and a variety of

²⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 September 1755.

²⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 7 May 1753.

³⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12 July 1760.

³¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 October 1764.

³² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 31 December 1763

³³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 31 December 1763.

dry goods from her shop in a tenement near Eveleigh's Wharf, were all depending on the convenience to the waterfront for the success of their businesses.³⁴

The heavy investment in commerce, and the intense competition for profits in the commercial activities along the waterfront in Charleston, were exemplified by the experiences of wharf builders and operators William Gibbes and Christopher Gadsden. Both were successful merchants, and they clearly felt that, by offering wharves that were larger than those already built, they could earn substantial profits in the midst of Charleston's increased commercial activities. They made considerable investments in construction, and the advertisements they placed at varying stages of the projects touted their future convenience and value to South Carolina's economy: both men were very specific in listing the amenities of their wharves and their capacity to handle vessels and provide stores (warehouses) on the wharves themselves. In a letter to John Adams, for instance, Gadsden claimed that the bulk of his fortune went into the seven-year wharf construction project, asserting that thirty of the largest ships capable of passing over the bar could load at once at his wharf, and still be afloat at low water with the holds filled.³⁵

Costs of conducting business on Charleston's wharves during this period were considerable. For example, in September of 1766, Henry Laurens paid £5 (anywhere from \$250 to \$400 in today's currency, depending on the wildly fluctuating inflation of South Carolina currency in relation to the British pound sterling) to Lind and Chovin for the wharfage, or use of wharf space, and the loading and unloading of a snow at Raven's

³⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 3 May 1773, 8 February 1768 and 27 December 1773.

³⁵ Christopher Gadsden to John Adams, 5 June 1774, reprinted in Richard Walsh, *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden, 1746-1805*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1966), pp. 94-95.

wharf.³⁶ The expense of wharf construction was also clear in Gadsden's and Gibbes's concerted attempts to solicit, through repeated advertisements, assistance in purchasing construction materials, such as cypress timbers and stone ballast.³⁷

Successful engagement in the Atlantic economy, however, required a great deal more than access to a consistent supply of marketable goods and a well-developed port. In order to profit from either the export of rice and other commodities, or from the import of slaves and materials necessary for the expanding plantation economy, merchants and factors needed to remain informed about other regions connected via the Atlantic, so as to understand the markets for their goods. In part, this was accomplished through existing patterns of transatlantic travel. The square-rigged ships of England, and other European ports, generally steered South to the Azores, followed the westward flowing winds and currents to the West Indies and beyond, to the Southern coast of North America. Charleston, with its deep and protected harbor, was a convenient stopping point along routes that continued along the Gulf Stream to northern ports and then back to Europe. In fact, when the British government established a trans-Atlantic mail service, Charleston was one of the main depots.³⁸ Not only did this make engaging vessels for trade easier, it made the process of gathering news more efficient. With each vessel that arrived in port, regardless of whether it was part of the merchant or naval fleet, came news of market prices and political events from other ports throughout the Atlantic. Charleston's

³⁶ *Henry Laurens Ledger*, 30 September 1766; and Philip Hamer et al, eds., *Papers of Henry Laurens, 1765-1768*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976), p. 614n.

³⁷ See *South-Carolina Gazette*: Gibbes finished construction, 22 November 1773; Gadsden's Wharf, started in 1767, and still under construction in 1774, 19 January 1767 and 6 June 1774; Advertisement placed by Christopher Gadsden for 500 pine logs, probably needed for the construction of his wharf, 7 December 1767; Christopher Gadsden finished framing in his wharf at north end of town and needed ships' ballast to fill in the wharf, 18 January 1770.

³⁸ George C. Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*(Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969), pp. 3-4; W. M. Pine, "History Rides the Winds to Colonial Charleston," SCHM, pp. 162-175.

merchants and factors could then make decisions about what to load onto waiting vessels, where to send them, and what to arrange for future arrivals. There were limitations to this communication system, of course: there was always a time lag in the information, about the markets, and any planning based on these news sources necessarily involved gambling and guesswork. This uncertainty only added to what was, at times, a frantic scramble to earn profits whenever opportunities arose.³⁹

Most of South Carolina's trade was in rice to England, and it was no easy task for merchants to maintain levels of this trade sufficient to ensure profits. In December of 1744, the Commons House of Assembly formed a committee to determine how to deal with the low prices for rice, and high costs of shipping and insurance, due to the war with France and Spain. The House's Committee upon Trade recommended that members contact South Carolina's colonial agent in London to petition that they be allowed to trade rice in any part of Europe.⁴⁰ While this action was unsuccessful, the permission to trade with Southern Europe, and to bypass the requirement for enumerated goods that called for importation to and re-exportation from the British Isles, granted in the 1730s, ensured that rice exports reached substantial markets outside of England.⁴¹

In addition to ensuring the best market possible for rice, South Carolina merchants also worked to maintain a sufficient number of vessels in the harbor to ship the rice harvest overseas. To facilitate this, they imported goods from a variety of regions throughout the Atlantic. According to the Naval Lists for Charleston, the port was the

³⁹ Coclanis, pp. 99, 104.

⁴⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 December 1744.

⁴¹ For more on the nature of the rice trade and special considerations granted to those involved in exporting rice from South Carolina, see Kenneth Morgan, "The Organization of the Colonial American Rice Trade," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 52, No. 3 (July, 1995), pp. 438-452.

destination for a remarkable number and diversity of people and goods from all around the Atlantic. In 1763, enslaved Africans, totaling 1,144, were imported from Guinea, Gambia, Senegal, Barbados, Antigua, St. Kitts and the Bahamas.⁴² Wine arrived from Madeira, The Canaries, The Azores, Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Barbados and Antigua. In 1768, an estimated 540 pipes of wine were unloaded onto Charleston's wharves. In the same year, over 1,400 hogsheads of sugar arrived from the northern ports, as well as directly from West Indian islands. The Turks Islands were a significant trade partner due to their supply of salt, although over half of the 58,400 bushels that arrived in Charleston were from British ports. Even Honduras may be added to the list of significant, official trade partners, as it supplied the region with lumber, such as the 98,000 board feet of mahogany imported in 1766.⁴³ Through careful attention to prices for a variety of goods throughout the Atlantic, and with a little luck and good timing, merchants and factors arranged for enough ships to be on hand to keep freight rates low enough to maximize profits.

Henry Laurens, a slave trader who dealt in a wide variety of goods in addition to importing slaves, epitomized the successful practices of Charleston's merchants. By carefully watching market rates and freight costs, and then making decisions about what to trade and with whom, Laurens accumulated enormous wealth. He started his career in his twenties with the assistance of a modest inheritance from his father, and by dealing in

⁴² According to Converse Clowse, between 1717 and 1772, the numbers of enslaved Africans who arrived annually in Charleston after their brutalizing forced transport ranged from 546 to 7,080. Most years, the 1740s excepted, the number exceeded 1000. Clowse, p.31. The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database reveals that from the beginning of 1761 to the end of 1765, 16,094 captive Africans arrived in the Carolinas. By comparison, in the same period, only 924 arrived in Maryland, 6,000 in Martinique, but 47,500 disembarked in Jamaica. From 1701-1775, 94,847 slaves arrived in South Carolina, or an average of 1,265 per year: Eltis et al., *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

⁴³ Clowse pp. 34-42.

everything from slaves and rice to Irish indentured servants and oranges, Laurens went from being a partner in a merchant group, dependent on the resources of others, to an independent merchant, and eventually a planter. Laurens's success was recognized in South Carolina, and his peers acknowledged their respect for him through election to various posts in colonial, and then state government.⁴⁴

Others followed Laurens on the path to wealth and power. Robert Pringle, for example, started with a moderate amount of assistance when his family in Scotland arranged an apprenticeship in a London merchant partnership. From London, Pringle moved to South Carolina, where he was a factor with little or no control over the goods he received and sold. Slowly, he worked up to the position of a merchant, partly by marrying into a landowning family of South Carolina, and partly by careful attention to local markets, which prompted assertive requests to his overseas clients for appropriate goods for South Carolina's market. Despite £453 sterling losses in the fire of 1740, Pringle maintained his business, and purchased land in unsettled Lowcountry lands, and in Beaufort. After he was established as a wealthy merchant, he was appointed as Chief Justice for a number of years, despite a lack of legal training. While Pringle did not enter the ranks of the planter class, as did Laurens, his endeavors in real estate allowed his sons to enter the planter elite.⁴⁵

Christopher Gadsden also had a head start in making his fortune as a local merchant and planter. While his father was an established member of the elite in Charleston, and served as the collector of Customs, but his prestige was not enough to

⁴⁴ David Duncan Wallace, *The Life of Henry Laurens* (New York: Putnam and Sons, 1915), pp. 11, 15, 17-18, 44-45, 130;

⁴⁵ Walter B. Edgar, Ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, Volume 1: April 2, 1737-September 25, 1742, pp. xvi-xx.

secure wealth and status for Gadsden. His father therefore sent him to England at an early age, where he received training as a merchant. He then returned to South Carolina, and quickly developed a reputation as a sober and single-minded local country factor and retailer. With shops in Charleston as well as in several outlying towns, Gadsden extended his influence and wealth, eventually building a massive wharf in Charleston and making forays into the planter business. Partly through his accumulated wealth and partly through military experience, Gadsden, like Laurens, gained entry into the elite and the associated respect as a political leader.

Laurens, Pringle, and Gadsden all started with significant economic advantages, but their success nevertheless promoted a sense among white inhabitants that hard work could lead to enormous wealth and power in eighteenth-century South Carolina. And indeed, a few started with very little and managed to gain a great deal. Rawlins Lowndes, who would eventually serve as the Provost Marshall and win election to the presidency of the State of South Carolina during the Revolution, was orphaned at an early age with no estate, but he managed to accumulate respect, wealth, and standing through his service in the legal system of the colony.⁴⁶ Charles Crouch, an apprentice to printer Peter Timothy, eventually became a successful printer in Charleston even though he ran away on a regular basis and behaved poorly in the period of his indenture.⁴⁷ These examples of success—enormous wealth and power for some and respect and comfortable circumstances for others—encouraged in Low Country’s white residents an impatient ambition to achieve their own wealth and status. This focus on personal gain further

⁴⁶ Walter Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, pp. 76, 151.

⁴⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25th February 1751, Fraser, p.104.

undermined South Carolinian officials' attempts to secure white people's assistance in enforcing labor regulation.

The other ways in which Laurens and his merchant cohort influenced activities in Charleston was through the variety of their trading interests. For instance, in the course of just one year, Laurens's extant correspondence includes letters to merchants and other commercial agents in 21 different ports throughout the Atlantic including the West Indies, the Iberian Peninsula and Africa.⁴⁸ Such extensive communication and connected commercial activity was not unique to Laurens, and the actions of Charleston's merchants as a whole clearly reveal that, despite the apparent dominance of trade in rice, the port of Charleston was a dynamic commercial center in the Atlantic market, not just a mere shipping point in a system of bilateral trade.⁴⁹

Despite attempts to secure ready markets and good prices for rice, and to maintain variety in imports, Charleston's merchants, and the planters they represented, faced major risks as a result of European wars. While under British colonial rule, South Carolinians had to contend with the vicissitudes of war, defending themselves, on the one hand, and

⁴⁸ For letters representing the wide-ranging trade interests of Laurens, all written in 1757, see Philip Hamer, et al, eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens: Volume 2 November 1, 1755-December 31, 1758*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970).

⁴⁹ Jacob Price asserted, in 1974, that Charleston was no more than a shipping point in his study of British North American ports. In part, this assessment was meant to explain how Charleston's overseas trade could rival that of New York without exhibiting some of what he considered the essential elements of a major port. Charleston's merchant population was relatively small and the area supported very little manufacture. South Carolina's major port appeared to lack the dynamism of the northern ports of Philadelphia, New York and Boston. I present evidence in this study that counters this notion by demonstrating that extensive production of vessels and recruitment or purchase of skilled labor took place in Charleston, and it required a great deal of money and allocation of resources. Much of this construction and related maritime activity was done within the context of local shipment and trade to less distant points, such as the West Indies. In light of this evidence, a much more complex picture of Charleston's maritime activities emerges and this furthers the notion that Charleston required and exhibited many of the elements of a full-service port. Thus, while it is true, as Price points out, that many of the ships engaged in the trade in rice between South Carolina and England or Southern Europe were owned or commissioned by British merchants, the transport to Europe was only one part of a complex system involved in marketing rice. See Jacob Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns in the Eighteenth Century," *Perspectives in American History*, 8 (1974), pp. 161-163.

reaping the profits of raiding or privateering, on the other. Spanish and French privateers were a challenge, as were the constant maneuverings in the interior by the Spanish and French and their Indian allies. When fear of invasion preoccupied their employers, many of the free and enslaved Charleston workers saw an opportunity to improve their lot at the expense of their employers. Their actions added greatly to the disruptions of the war years in Charleston.

By 1765 the Charleston waterfront had grown substantially. Most of this growth occurred during the decade and a half that followed the disruptive war years of the 1740s. In 1765, more than 107,292 barrels of rice were exported from Charleston, almost double the 57,526 barrels exported in 1739. Exports of rice were by no means steady, however, since production factors and the market produced significant fluctuations from year to year. Still, between 1738 and 1766, the annual number of vessels that set sail from Charleston increased from 197 to 385. The overall carrying capacity of merchant fleet visiting Charleston, not just in terms of number but also in the size of individual ships, increased as well, more than doubling during this period (from 11,905 tons to 29,610 tons). The fact that the number of vessels and their carrying capacity steadily increased during this time period, despite the fluctuations in the amount of rice exported, is testimony to the extent and variety of trade in goods other than rice. As demonstrated in Figure 1, for example, the introduction of the cultivation and marketing of indigo, South Carolina's second most valuable export, in the 1740s, a decade marked by war with Spain and France and frequent attacks on ships engaged in overseas trade to and from South Carolina, allowed Charleston's merchants and the Lowcountry planters to diversify their holdings and continue to earn profits.

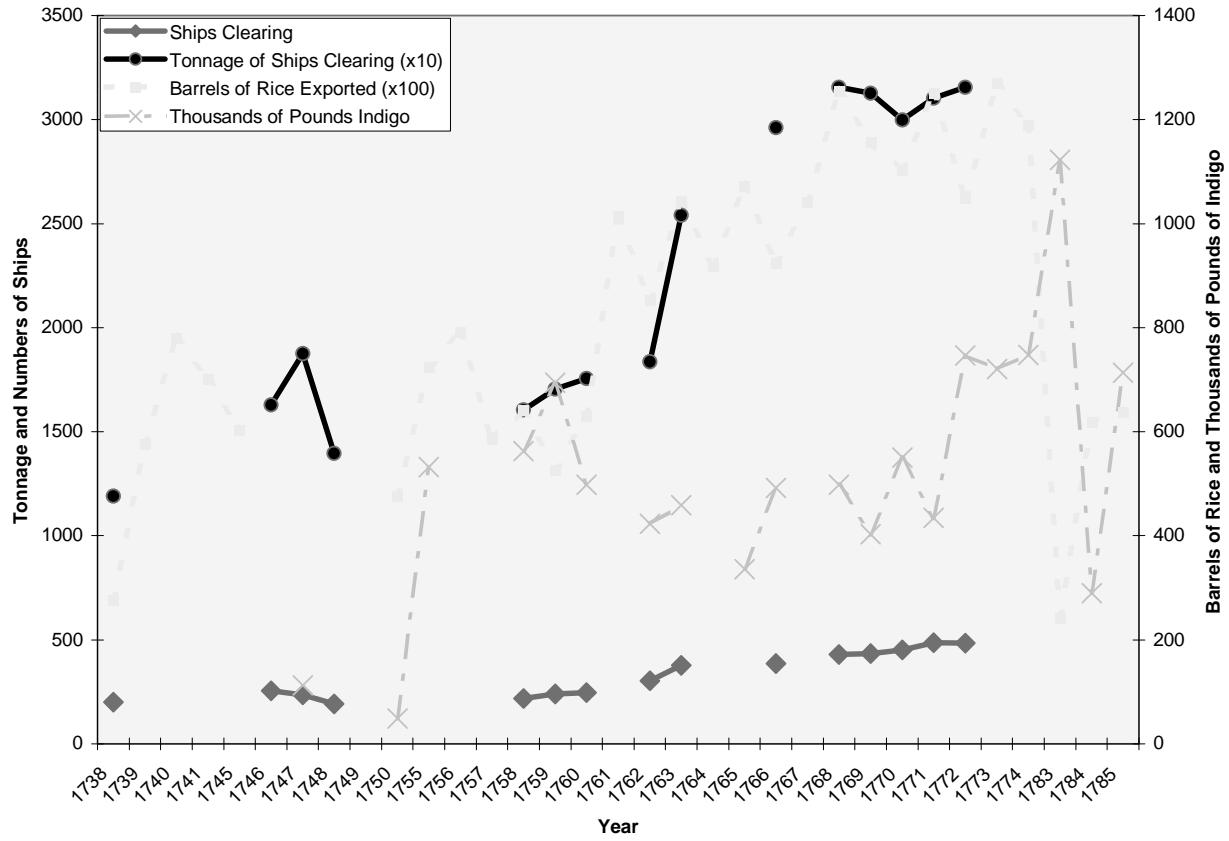


Figure 4: Charleston’s Rising Volume of Trade, 1738-1785

Sources: Converse Clowse, *Measuring Charleston’s Overseas Trade*, pp.96-105 ; Peter Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream*, pp. 82-83, 100; Stanley Kenneth Deaton, “Revolutionary Charleston, 1765-1800 (University of Florida Dissertation, 1997), p. 55.

Merchants and planters could not maintain this volume of trade, nor achieve economic success, without the constant employment of large numbers of maritime laborers, many of them enslaved. Just as the rice that brought wealth to property holders in South Carolina was produced by the labor of a multitude of enslaved Africans, the successful transport, storage and sale of that rice and other marketable goods was made possible through the constant labor of enslaved and free, African and white, maritime workers. In order properly to serve the needs of merchants, factors, and planters, and to

make the waterfront fully functional in an expanding maritime economy, a virtual army of laborers was needed.

Indeed, the immediate waterfront, consisting of the wharves and warehouses, was a throng of activity. Just as the harbor and rivers were filled with boat traffic, the wharves, streets, and alleys along the western bank of the Cooper River were teeming with people. The “great multitudes” of people, particularly slaves, crowded into the area around Charleston’s waterfront was so great, that one visitor overestimated the Charleston’s slave population four fold.⁵⁰ In addition to the sailors working on the ships, and the other boat hands working on vessels, porters loaded and unloaded vessels, carters transported goods through the streets of Charleston, and wharf managers oversaw and assisted in the mooring of vessels and management of warehouses. In addition, indentures and enslaved artisans engaged in everything from barrel-making to ship repairs.

As business owners touted their prime locations near the waterfront in their advertisements, they also reassured potential clients that they had on hand a sufficient number of both skilled and unskilled laborers to handle any amount of work. The lessee of Rhett's (renamed Frankland's) Wharf, for instance, described in his advertisements not only the shop, several fine stores, lodging rooms, and cellars available for use on his wharf, he also clearly stated that he had secured “Negroes” and carts for the speedy delivery of goods. Similarly, Frederick Merckley guaranteed potential customers at Charles Mayne’s wharves, which he had rented, that “good hands” were available for any

⁵⁰ See “The Journal of a Voyage to Charleston in South Carolina by Pelatiah Webster in 1765,” quoted in H. Roy Merrens, *The Colonial South Carolina Scene: Contemporary Views*(Columba: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), pp.219-220.

loading, unloading or carting.⁵¹ The Commissioners of the Pilotage for the Bar advertised that skillful pilots and hands would attend the entrance to Charleston Harbor at all times.⁵² Likewise, Nathaniel Greene, James Lingard, and William Coats, who owned a carting business centered on Captain Simmon's Wharf, from which they also supplied water and firewood for ships, assured their future customers that they had already purchased carts and drays, and hired "careful" drivers.⁵³ James Pritchard penned a detailed notice stating that he had leased Hobcaw Ferry, and in addition to providing ample pasturage, a new weatherproof awning for the boat, and a supply of liquor and provisions at his house for travelers, he had a large gang of oarsmen ready for employment.⁵⁴ And John Champneys advertised that he employed seven vessels of varying burdens for carrying goods to Charleston, and from distant plantations and back settlements. His assertion that they were all available at once implied that he had a large number of boat hands in his employ as well.⁵⁵

Jeremiah's employment as a Charleston pilot represented the white elite's heavy dependence on the muscle power of the lower sort, both free and enslaved. Because of their skill and knowledge, workers like Jeremiah were sometimes given enormous leeway in the course of their work. The degree of freedom of movement depended on the nature of the work, and regardless of slave status, maritime or related workers were frequently unsupervised. The more mobility the work required, the greater the workers' opportunities for independence.

⁵¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 May 1745 and 23 January 1755.

⁵² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14 January 1764.

⁵³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 31 December 1763.

⁵⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 October 1757.

⁵⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12 January 1769.

Sailors were Charleston's most mobile workers, and also the most intimately connected to the broader Atlantic world. From the fall through the spring, when most ships visited the port, sailors made up a significant portion of Charleston's estimated 10,000 permanent residents in 1760. The number of sailors visiting Charleston during the peak months of rice exportation was considerable. Between 1760 and 1771, between 300 and 450 vessels arrived annually. At roughly 8 sailors per vessel, an estimated 2,400 to 3,600 sailors spent time in Charleston annually in the mid-eighteenth century.⁵⁶ These men came to Charleston from immensely varied backgrounds--young and old, dark and light skinned, physically scarred and old beyond their years, or young and as-yet-unmarred in their brief time at sea.

The multiethnic nature of Charleston's seafaring population was a product of the patterns of South Carolina's trade. Ships from Charleston stopped at nearly every port of the British Isles in the shipment of various goods.⁵⁷ As noted above, vessels that cleared customs in Charleston entered from or departed for ports that included British possessions in North America, ports in the British Isles, maritime centers along the Iberian Peninsula, African ports, and even West Indian and a few North American ports within the possession of other European nations.⁵⁸ Thus, while a majority of the ships in Charleston's harbor were British, many of the crew-members were not British, but hailed instead from ports throughout the Atlantic. While Parliament attempted to secure British subjects for the merchant seaman service--at times it was stipulated that three out of every four seamen be subjects of the British crown-- the portion of crews who were

⁵⁶ Clowse, pp. 112-114.

⁵⁷ See Clowse, pp. 19-87.

⁵⁸ See Clowse, pp. 128-140.

foreigners could be as high as 75% during times of war.⁵⁹ Diversity in the crews of local vessels, even in times of peace, is clear in advertisements such as Joseph Glover's, in which he sought the capture of the crew of his coasting schooner. Glover accused the three free sailors, originally from Madeira, Ireland, and England, of stealing the vessel and the four slaves, only one of which spoke English, who worked with them.⁶⁰ Many other advertisements for the return of deserters reveal that vessels in Charleston also employed Dutch, German, Scottish, "northern Indian," "Spanish Indian," Venetian, and French sailors.⁶¹ In sum, it is obvious that the sailors who walked the streets of Charleston, and frequented its taverns, and otherwise interacted with native South Carolinians, came from all over the Atlantic.

After arriving in Charleston and taking advantage of their shore leave, sailors, depending on the terms of their employment, either returned to the ships they had signed onto, sought employment on a new ship, or sought employment elsewhere if work was either unavailable or no longer desirable. Thus, while some sailors continued to move in and out of Charleston via ocean-going vessels, others became part of the coastal and interior maritime system as crewmembers or patroons (equivalents of captains for local vessels) on schooners and pettiaugers. Diverse in nationality and representing a full range of conditions of servitude--from enslaved to indentured to free--sailors came to Charleston with experiences and skills that were as varied as their ethnic backgrounds. Many also brought with them traditions of resistance to oppression, intolerance for

⁵⁹ Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 80; Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), p. 220; For a further discussion of the numbers of foreigners in the British merchant marine and their impact, see, Rediker, p. 156.

⁶⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 March 1770.

⁶¹ See advertisements in: *South-Carolina Gazette*, 23 March 1752, 18 December 1752, 10 September 1753, 1 January 1754, 20 January 1757, 24 December 1764, 1 February 1768.

arbitrary authority, and a sense of community that was more inclusive than exclusive. Seamen who frequented Charleston at this time would have lived and worked side-by-side with Charleston's population of enslaved Africans and African Americans—a population that, as detailed in the pages that follow, demonstrated varying degrees of relative freedom and worldliness. In this way, many seamen directly or indirectly shared their experiences with the enslaved.

Aside from pilots, those slaves who had the most in common with deep-sea sailors were Lowcountry boatmen. These men were an essential element in the plantation economy of South Carolina, and, as such, were regularly employed on coastal and river vessels. With little to no production of marketable crops in Charleston itself, the bulk of South Carolina's goods came from the surrounding plantations. Thus, pettiaugers, schooners and flats were predominantly manned by slave men, and often supervised by other slave patroons, like Abram, one of Henry Laurens's slaves. These workers made the journey down rivers and along the coastal routes of the sea islands in order to bring the crops to the waypoint of Charleston's waterfront before their cargoes were either loaded onto ocean-going vessels, or sold and consumed in the Charleston area. In serving the Atlantic markets, the workload for men like Abram was heaviest from October to April. The slowest months were those that brought the intense heat of summer, and when Charleston was plagued with yellow fever, smallpox and hurricanes.⁶²

Slave boatmen were ubiquitous in the port of Charleston, and in this way the city more closely resembled a Caribbean or Latin American port than it did a mainland North American port. Heavy reliance on highly skilled and well-informed slave laborers for the

⁶² For references to the work of Abram, see: Laurens to Abraham Schad, 30 April 1765, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

exportation of cash crops was common both to Charleston and ports like Havana, Bridgetown, and Buenos Aires.⁶³ In addition, the resort to the port town, sometimes as the place of primary residence, by the Lowcountry planters, the colonial equivalent of “gentry,” was an established pattern of residence in many of the Caribbean island colonies. At the same time, Charleston’s hinterland was similar to its northern colonial neighbors in the extent and diversity of its production. Charleston can best be understood, then, as a hybrid of North American and Caribbean labor and production systems. This explains, in part, the heavy use of slave labor in a complex port city setting.⁶⁴

The near permanence of employment as a boatman for many enslaved men was the result of both the perpetual need for some form of water transport in South Carolina and the skill and time demands of such a means of conveyance. For the slaves employed as river or coastal transporters by the owners of local schooners, work could be found even in the off-season: carrying construction materials for new or expanding plantations, oystering, collecting ballast, offering passage to family and friends of plantation owners, delivering mail or transporting recently purchased bondsmen and -women.⁶⁵ When they were not delivering goods or people, crews were busy refitting and repairing their schooners and pettiaugers for the next season’s busy months. There was no shortage of work for slave boatmen. In fact, the labor demand was greater than the supply of regular boatmen, and recruitment and training of potential boatmen were steady. Indeed, the

⁶³ See Alejandro de la Fuente, *Havana and the Atlantic, 1550–1610* (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2008). For specific literature on the ports of the Caribbean and Latin America, see Allan J. Kuethe, “Havana in the Eighteenth Century,” Susan M. Socolow, “Buenos Aires: Atlantic Port and Hinterland.” Both in, Franklin W. Knight and Peggy Liss, Eds., *Atlantic Port Cities: Economy, Culture and Society in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991). On Bridgetown’s maritime slave population, see Pedro L. V. Welch, *Slave Society in the City: Bridgetown, Barbados 1680-1834* (Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003), pp. 82-93.

⁶⁴ See Clowse, pp. 96-105.

⁶⁵ See Laurens Ledger for examples of this employment on locally owned river and coastal vessels.

importance of regular river transportation made boatmen and river vessels invaluable. As indicated by the charges of £10 to John Harleston listed in Laurens's ledger book for detaining Laurens's schooner *Baker* for two days after she was loaded with her hands to assist in getting up his schooner that sunk in the river in the ledger of Henry Laurens, any delay in transport was costly.⁶⁶ This dependence on speedy transport gave boatmen a significant amount of leverage in the labor system and, as we shall see, they did not hesitate to use it.

In order to meet the particularly heavy demand for maritime laborers in South Carolina, particularly in the period following the harvest, many planters and merchants turned to a temporary pool of boat workers. This pattern of temporary recruitment into river transport and the dual role of many slave men is most clearly evidenced by the advertisements for the sale of estates where field hands and boatmen were grouped together. For instance, when Jonathan Drake advertised the sale of his land and fifty slaves in 1768, he went out of his way to indicate that several of these slaves were boatmen.⁶⁷ Similarly, in 1773, the advertised sale of Dr. Thomas Caw's estate included a schooner, a yawl and boatmen listed among the one hundred forty slaves.⁶⁸ William Wilkins's plantation on John's island, when sold, included slave coopers, carpenters, sawyers and many very good oarsmen.⁶⁹ A similar advertisement for the sale of Elihu Baker's estate on Ashley River included several boatmen and an open boat that could carry 75-80 barrels of rice.⁷⁰ Peter Sanders's plantation in Goose Creek, 18 miles from

⁶⁶ Laurens calculated the "hire" of the *Baker* at £5 per day. See *Henry Laurens Ledger*, November 1769.

⁶⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 February 1768.

⁶⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 February 1773.

⁶⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, April 2, 1744.

⁷⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, January 23, 1749.

Charleston, included two boatmen and a sloop in the inventory.⁷¹ While many of these temporary boatmen were drawn from the plantations, other boatmen were recruited from among those who were otherwise employed in Charleston, supporting themselves and earning wages for their masters as highly skilled artisans. This was clearly the situation for a “pair of sawyers” advertised for sale as part of John Thomas’s estate. His widow made sure that potential buyers knew the sawyers were also experienced boatmen.⁷² Thus, while the more urban artisans-turned-boatmen contributed to the Atlantic nature of Charleston itself by bringing their maritime worldviews even into the few areas of the city that were not directly connected to the waterfront, the part-time boatmen drawn from the hinterland of the Lowcountry bridged the world between the ostensibly isolated plantations and the more worldly waterfront environment of Charleston.

Fishermen, free and enslaved, were also a particularly independent, if somewhat more geographically confined, group of enslaved and free black men who were an essential part of Charleston’s waterfront community. The fact that Jeremiah was described as both a pilot and a fisherman also points to the flexible and part-time nature of this line of work. In many instances, slaves with other occupations would spend slack time or “free” time in one of the many canoes or other small boats that traversed the harbor and coastal waters proximal to the Charleston bar, in search of fish or shellfish. A 1782 account of fishing gives a sense of the nature of the coastal fishing system in which many slaves found refuge. According to Samuel Kelly, the most significant fishing occurred on a daily basis in the early morning, when slaves would take canoes beyond the bar and just to the south along the coast where there was an abundance of “black fish.”

⁷¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 8 November 1760.

⁷² *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 14 January 1772.

The fishermen returned to the designated fish market (an area including a wharf adjacent to the general market) about mid-day, as the coastal breezes picked up; an unspecified bounty was offered to the crew that brought back the greatest quantity of these coastal fish.⁷³ While Kelly provided neither an estimate of the number of slaves engaged in this daily fishing, nor the size of the catch, the fact that a separate fish market existed in Charleston near a designated wharf on East Bay highlights its importance to Charleston's local economy.⁷⁴ Certainly, as evidenced in subsequent chapters, the size and importance of this fishing sector in Charleston was such that some slaves found opportunities to move about freely and experience a certain degree of anonymity as part of the fishing fleet, and in the space created by the fish market.

In addition to pilots, fishermen and boatmen, porters, carters and draymen were among the enslaved laborers who were omnipresent in the working and social spaces of Charleston's waterfront. Although not as mobile as some of their counterparts who spent time on river and ocean vessels, these enslaved men moved the import and export goods to and from ships, making their way along wharves, into warehouses, and up and down Charleston's streets. They represented a significant segment of the bound laborer population in Charleston, and, as such, they often made gains for themselves in terms of autonomy and material circumstances. Docking and unloading were charges that were dependent on the length of time the vessel remained for unlading or lading, but storage of goods on or near the wharf was additional, as was the delivery of goods by the porters

⁷³ Crosbie Garstin, Ed., *Samuel Kelly: An Eighteenth Century Seaman*(New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1925) p.55.

⁷⁴ Wragg's Wharf was advertised at times as a locale for the sale of fish, but it appears that by 1767, a specific wharf was built or requisitioned for the purpose of marketing fresh fish, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 June 1767 and SCHM, Volume 19 No. 4, p.183, Order Book of John Faucheraud Grimké, March 26, 1780.

and carters. These rates were variable, and despite merchants' attempts to regulate fees, the enslaved men employed in these occupations were largely able to set their own price. Henry Laurens and other merchants, for instance, noted in their ledgers the expense of wharfage and storage of materials with a variety of wharf operators in amounts that ranged, depending on the vessel's length of stay, from £5 to £15.⁷⁵ These fees did not include the transport of the vessels' goods to or from the wharves, and while wharf operators' fees may have been consistent, the porters and carters, many of them enslaved, took advantage of their monopoly in this area to set their own fees. And judging from repeated complaints, these fees appeared to be designed to extort the highest rate possible. In a letter to a Georgetown correspondent, Laurens referenced the difficulties of dealing with porters in Charleston when he included "pilferage" in his list of typical factor's charges.⁷⁶ Dock workers' "excessive" independence drew attention from officials on a regular basis, spawning legislation and ordinances designed to fix rates, and curb the excessive fees asked by "monopolizing" enslaved carters and porters.⁷⁷

Market slaves were frequent migrants from interior plantations. They made their mark in Charleston and were often connected to maritime laborers due to their frequent recourse to water transportation to get themselves and their goods to Charleston from local plantations. As authorized or unauthorized traders in small goods, these men and

⁷⁵ See, *Henry Laurens Ledger*, September 1766 for accounts with Livingston & Champneys for wharfage of the sloop *Bell* and with Lind & Chovin for a snow; in June 1768 Laurens paid Fees to the operator of Beale's Wharf for wharfage and storage for the *Ann*. Also see, *William Ancrum Account and Letterbook*, South Caroliniana Library, 25th January 1778, for records of accounts with Eliason Mirchinson for wharfage at Burns Wharf.

⁷⁶ Laurens to Samuel Wragg, 5 April 1766, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁷⁷ For complaints about excessive independence and monopolizing of slave porters and carters, see the Grand Jury Presentments, St. Philip's Parish, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 October 1760. For commissioners published rates for carting, see *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 August, 1764 and 25 April 1769. For calls for legislation, see J. H. Easterby, ed., *Journals of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina (JCH)*, February 2, 1750.

women entered Charleston and, much like porters and carters, bargained with white customers to gain the best price they could for their goods and wares. Also like porters and carters, they were frequently singled out for inappropriate behavior. Statutes and calls for curtailment of the excesses of market slaves appeared in legislative records and newspapers throughout the colonial and early statehood periods. Some market slaves—like the runaways, Hannah, well known for selling cakes and other goods, and Jack, a hawker of fruits—were free from the direct supervision of their masters on the journey to Charleston and in the market itself. Their masters assumed that they would, at least for a time, continue to sell goods in the market despite being runaways who lacked tickets granting permission to sell goods.⁷⁸ Perhaps most alarming to slaveholders was the frequent resort to “marketing” among many slaves who were not permitted at any time to travel from their plantations to Charleston. This activity was most readily publicized in the notices published for the return of runaway slaves.

Slave artisans and white apprentices also played a key role in keeping the waterfront a fully functional environment *and* in pushing the limits of white authority. As in many other parts of the maritime environment, South Carolinians relied heavily on unfree laborers to carry on the necessary labor, even for the highly skilled work required to construct and repair facilities. Thus, enslaved and indentured ships carpenters, coopers, block makers, blacksmiths, sailmakers and riggers were all employed beside, or even in place of, free white workers on the Charleston waterfront, in the nearby shipyards of Hobcaw (across the Cooper River in Port Royal), in Georgetown, and on many of the plantations along South Carolina’s navigable rivers. These slaves and indentured

⁷⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 December 1751 and 26 February 1752.

servants provided services that were essential to the maritime transport business, and their skills not only made them valuable to South Carolina's economy, but also to their owners and employers. Because of their skills, master artisans enjoyed both extra income and more consistent business. In particular, the earning potential of the enslaved men encouraged the practice of "hiring out," or allowing enslaved people to seek out employers on their own, in order to secure the best wages and fullest employment. Such a system made skilled slaves and maritime apprentices nearly as mobile and independent as boatmen. In fact, some of these slaves, who were not always employed in their trades year-round, became temporary boatmen or sailors, thus extending their maritime connections and identities.

Employers and authorities recognized, however, that a freely moving and self-sufficient population of workers created problems, ranging from escalating wages and fees for labor, to potential insurrections among the servant populations, and they worked hard to place restrictions on these freedoms. For instance, skilled slaves were legally barred from choosing their own employers; instead, their masters were required to locate employers for them. The evidence suggests, though, that the masters, employers, and slaves commonly ignored this regulation. One indication of this can be seen in David Rhind's warning to all cabinetmakers, carpenters, and others not to employ York, his slave, without his permission; apparently Rhind felt compelled to place this advertisement because York had frequently hired himself out without consulting first with his master.

In another example of a law designed to ensure elite control over the working population of Charleston, river and coastal vessels were required to have on board at least

one white supervisor or captain, often called a patroon. Any slave or sailor found moving about in the port city or surrounding countryside had to show written proof that they either were on their master's business, or, in the case of sailors, a certificate confirming that they had been released from service from a vessel. Anyone found in the streets or in a tavern without these documents of authorization would be jailed. These regulations were quite restrictive in design; however, as shown in subsequent chapters, many of these regulations owed their inception and frequent revision to the real, not just anticipated, actions of maritime workers.

White authorities in Charleston also cracked down on the workers' behaviors during off-times, creating and constantly revising regulations designed to limit the free movement and non-work activities of laborers in and around Charleston. When Peter Timothy placed a notice in his own paper requesting that tavern keepers stop "entertaining" his apprentice, Charles Crouch (who chose to spend his time drinking and gambling rather than working for the printer), he was giving voice to a concern held by many of the masters of unfree laborers of all kinds in Charleston.⁷⁹ In another example, John Paul Grimke noted that Cuffee and Sharper frequently stole his money and spent time in town, and he warned people not to harbor or sell rum to them.⁸⁰ Both notices demonstrated the limits of laws designed to prohibit such actions and ensure a more pliant workforce.

Here then, was a central paradox confronting the mid-eighteenth century South Carolina elite: on the one hand, their plantation system had as its cornerstone a highly-

⁷⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25th February 1751.

⁸⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 19 January 1759.

monitored and tightly-controlled enslaved workforce; on the other hand, their market economy depended on the ready water transport of goods, which in turn depended on the same servant populations' freedom of movement. In other words, in order to further their own economic gains, white South Carolinians needed to undermine some of the very laws and regulations that were designed to protect the lives, property, and continued wealth of the elite.

This situation clearly created considerable unease among South Carolina's merchants and planters, as evidenced by William Pinckney's angry notice to the readers of the *South-Carolina Gazette* in 1771. He threatened to prosecute any and all owners of coasting schooners, or other craft, who did not employ white supervisors for their vessels "according to law." Pinckney argued that this laxness resulted in the frequent plundering of plantations along the Ashepoo River.⁸¹ Despite complaints such as these, however, South Carolinian employers continued to err on the side of risk and profit. As evidenced by advertisements for the sale of estates like Kenneth Michie's, which, although located seven miles from Charleston, was near the Cooper River and had access to several landings for river craft,⁸² it was ultimately the elite's need for easy access to water transportation and maritime laborers that informed their decisions—not their fears of insurrection. This, coupled with the practical difficulties of locating and paying the number of free white, and diligent, patrols called for by men like Pinckney, ensured the continuance of slave boatmen as the primary transportation workers on South Carolina's

⁸¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 2 May 1771.

⁸² *South-Carolina Gazette*, December 31-January 7, 1751.

waterways.⁸³

White authorities experienced similar difficulties securing the cooperation of employers and business owners in enforcing regulations on the highly competitive commercial environment of the Charleston waterfront. In fact, rather than assisting in the efforts to maintain order and control over maritime laborers, many enterprising members of Charleston's white community chose to offer amenities to this large group of waterfront inhabitants in order to gain profits or a competitive advantage. In the crowded areas surrounding the waterfront, the maritime workers, wages in hand, found very willing retailers of everything from food and clothing to, most commonly, alcohol. Indeed, a series of small taverns, or "dram shops," both properly licensed and unlicensed, were located all along the waterfront, and actively drew in waterfront workers. In these smaller shops, it was possible for a man like the slave pilot, Jeremiah, to purchase alcohol, despite the laws against serving enslaved people. The fact that Jeremiah had money to spend outweighed concerns over the implications of allowing a slave the opportunity to drink, and share time and space with other maritime laborers. In fact, the common practice of retailing alcohol without a license, and selling to slaves, was acknowledged in grand jury presentments and General Sessions Court records.⁸⁴ The operators of these less scrupulous establishments also were accused of harboring and

⁸³ A revision of the regulations for the employment of carts in Charleston that required the active supervision of slave cart drivers by white men lasted a few short months before business owners and residents successfully reversed the policy, demonstrating that most white men willing to do the job demanded excessive wages or performed poorly. Laughlin Martin was offering high wages to white cartmen and slave cart loaders. He planned to sell the carts if no one could be hired, *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 30 September 1777.

⁸⁴ *Journal of General Sessions*, 1769-1776. See entries for selling alcohol without a license: 19 January 1770, 17 April 1770, 25 January 1771, 26 October 1771; For disorderly houses, see: 21 April 1769, 27 April 1769, 19 October 1769, 16 April 1770. See *South-Carolina Gazette* 9 May 1768 for references to retailing without a license and selling to slaves and 22 October 1764; 25 January 1768 for disorderly house charges.

facilitating prostitution, and of providing a safe space for the fencing of goods or, at the very least, the planning of thefts.

The common experience of work on the water created an easy means for conversation in taverns, on street corners, and in the course of working; the maritime workers shared stories and disseminated news all along the waterfront, and even in the non-maritime spaces outside of Charleston. It is not difficult to imagine how interactions in the spaces of the port encouraged the development of a sense of community among the lower sort of Charleston's waterfront. Certainly the circumventing of tavern regulations was just one of the many ways in which the ostensibly servile flouted the laws, and saw to their own wants and needs, rather than those of their employers and masters. As I will argue in the following pages, the shared sense of community that grew among the enslaved and free laborers along the waterfront ultimately facilitated their ability to resist the labor regimes of Charleston's waterfront, the plantation economy of South Carolina, and the Atlantic maritime world at large.

Yet, subversion has its limits. Increased liberties maritime laborers eked out for themselves during the middle of the eighteenth century did not always result in positive changes in their circumstances. As the following chapters will also demonstrate, the financial success and earned liberties of men like Jeremiah were necessarily limited in a society that enforced a system of racially-determined slavery. In Jeremiah's case, the independence and eventual purchased freedom that his success as a pilot and fisherman brought him would eventually earn him the enmity of Charleston's white community. In the early years of the American Revolution, as detailed in a subsequent chapter, in a hasty trial in the slave court system created by the "Negro Act," and with limited evidence and

only one damning accusation from a slave, Charleston's white inhabitants convicted and executed Thomas Jeremiah for fomenting rebellion within the slave community. Prior to the fears of slave revolt sparked by the Revolution, this free black pilot had apparently served, rather than troubled, the white community. But his obvious success marked him—the system of slavery demanded that examples be set for the rest of the slave and free black population.

CHAPTER TWO: RUNAWAYS, RENEGADES AND REBELS ALONG THE CHARLESTON WATERFRONT IN THE 1740S

In August of 1747, in the middle of a war, the *South-Carolina Gazette* reported shocking news of an English sailor working for the French. The sailor had disguised a French privateer as an English vessel in distress and lured unwitting English vessels into capture, thus gaining easy prizes for the French vessel and disrupting trade off the coast of South Carolina. By March of the following year, the traitor had been captured and identified: his name was John Collings. He was held briefly in the Charleston jail, and after purportedly burning the jail down was pressed onto one of the colonial sloops employed in the defense of South Carolina's coast. He escaped from the sloop, posed as a soldier, rented a fishing boat and made his way to St. Augustine, a well-known haven for runaway servants and slaves throughout much of the eighteenth century. Eventually, Collings's boasting in St. Augustine of his escape from Charleston and actions against South Carolina reached the editor of the *Gazette* who warned his readers of the man's plans to return on a privateer and "steal" slaves from coastal plantations.¹

Collings's ability to move about so freely despite being first a prisoner and then a fugitive was not uncommon in Charleston, although the extensive newspaper coverage of

¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, August 17, 1747 and March 28, 1748.

his exploits was somewhat exceptional. Remaining at large and finding the necessary resources to hire ready water transportation to St. Augustine, probably through theft, was an option for many maritime workers. Other sailors, runaway servants and a large number of slaves engaged in similar actions and likewise found means to avoid authorities along the Charleston waterfront both before Collings's exploits and for decades afterwards.

This bold behavior was remarkable given that it occurred during the 1740s. This was the decade that came on the heels of the Stono Rebellion when sixty or so slaves rose up and slew twenty members of the white slaveholding class and worked their way to the south in the hopes of reaching the Spanish in St. Augustine; the decade in which England was at war first with Spain and then France, and South Carolina was in constant danger of invasion by these enemies of England; the decade that saw a wholesale revision of the laws regulating slaves in order to tie them more closely and permanently to the rice-producing plantations and prevent further uprisings. Nonetheless, the Charleston waterfront continued to be the site where law and order were tenuous at best and where such acts of blatant defiance, such as Collings's, could take place.

While North American port cities have been accorded a great deal of importance in the development of American society, economy and politics, historians have not fully examined waterfront environments as contact zones for a variety of cultures and their incumbent ideologies.² Studies of laborers in the Atlantic, particularly the work of

² See Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979); Carl Bridenbaugh, , *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955). For works specific to Charleston's maritime activities and export economy, see Converse Clowse, *Economic Beginnings in Colonial South Carolina, 1670-1730*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971) and *Measuring*

Linebaugh and Rediker, have begun this examination by tracing a tradition of resistance to developing capitalism and the forms of labor oppression its expansion brought throughout the Great Ocean. At the root of this tradition of resistance lay the cooperation of laborers, and those sympathetic to their plight, who refused to confine themselves by race and status.³ Such cooperation was most evident in areas that brought men and women with varied experiences together in work or recreation, where they became aware of the common forms and sources of their oppression. These areas were often port towns.⁴

Within the historical literature on South Carolina slavery, where resistance has taken center stage, waterfront and maritime laborers have been given limited attention.⁵

Charleston's Overseas Commerce, 1717-1767: Statistics From the Port's Naval Lists(University Press of America, 1981); Peter Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), especially pp. 3-11 and 48-110; Leila Sellers, *Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934), particularly pp. 49-78; R. C. Nash, "South Carolina and the Atlantic Economy in the Late Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 45 (1992), pp. 677-702; Kenneth Morgan, "The Organization of the Colonial America Rice Trade," *William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 52 (1995), pp. 433-452; Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962), pp. 133-158 and 315-337.

³ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), pp. 179-184, 198-210. The New York Conspiracy of 1741 is at the center of this discussion of land-based Atlantic insurrections, and the events described by the authors have some marked similarities to events and general circumstances in Charleston in the 1740s. Also see Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World*(New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Julius Scott, "The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Duke University, 1986); W. Jeffrey Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

⁴ Linebaugh and Rediker, pp. 218-221.

⁵ For a discussion of early South Carolina slavery, see Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in South Carolina From 1670 Through the Stono Rebellion*(New York: W. W. Norton, 1974); Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Daniel Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina*(Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*(Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard, 1998); Leland Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*(Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), especially pp. xxxiii-xlv and 59-62; Sellers, pp.99-108. Herbert Aptheker,

Indeed, recent studies of the history of South Carolina slavery, particularly the works of Philip Morgan and Robert Olwell, fail to distinguish between maritime skills and other craft skills among slaves. They posit that while a certain degree of freedom and autonomy was common among skilled slaves and market slaves, they had been co-opted into the plantation economy dependent upon slave labor.⁶ In other words, skilled slaves were granted privileges because they did not commonly abuse them, and masters did not control their skilled urban slaves closely because they did not have to control them closely. This chapter takes issue with this assessment. A focus on the waterfront reveals that masters of urban slaves, particularly those engaged in maritime labor, did not control their slaves because they could not—certainly not in the manner that laws demanded and plantation slavery approximated. What Morgan and Olwell do not fully consider is the openness of the waterfront environment that was a product of mobile and resistant workers who struggled to maintain an independence of their own while encouraging a dependence among their masters and employers on their skill and labor power.

In order to maximize the potential of the port of Charleston to produce profit, merchants in this waterfront environment, along with ship captains, planters and other propertied whites, employed the largest combination of slave and free workers in any British North American port. As a consequence, the port of Charleston was one of the more socially volatile sites of its time. While it may have seemed that the purpose of the

American Negro Slave Revolts(New York: Columbia University Press, 1943); and for insights into South Carolina Low Country slavery from the perspective of the southern neighbor Georgia, see Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775*(Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984). The work of W. Jeffrey Bolster is the only exception to the absence of in-depth analysis of maritime slavery, and his treatment of slave sailors is focused on their experiences at sea rather than in port or along riverways and coastal waters.

⁶ Morgan, p. xxii; Olwell, pp. 10, 165. This argument for cooption and acculturation was made earlier by historians of antebellum urban slavery. See, for example, Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South 1820-1860*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), especially pp. 209-242.

Charleston waterfront was to serve the economic and political interests of its city and colony, in fact it maintained an internal set of rules and social configurations created and maintained by workers that, while meeting many of the immediate economic needs of the propertied, undermined the system that tried to make people without property into property themselves. Thus, in a port such as Charleston, merchants, planters, tradesmen and retailers--the employers of free and slave laborers-- made a daily decision to gamble that an unruly and mobile group of workers would bring them greater profits than losses as they broke free from supervision and frequently flouted the laws that regulated their work activities and free time.⁷

Charleston was the busiest southern seaport in eighteenth-century British America. As such, it was the regular or temporary home to groups of propertied and free men such as merchants, planters, artisans, shopkeepers and tavern keepers as well as the propertyless and frequently unfree groups of apprentices, sailors, dock workers and others who comprised the maritime labor force. The convergence of people and economic activities was mirrored by the confluence of navigable rivers, the Cooper to the east and the Ashley to the west, running from deep in the hinterland and merging into the protected bay. Within this arena the propertied and those who labored for them contested one another's notions of appropriate and inappropriate forms of labor and general behavior. In the constant bustle and fluid movement of people, the limits of appropriate behavior for laborers, set by masters and employers, were often and clandestinely exceeded.

⁷ For a discussion of the extent to which merchants and others put profit above the welfare of the colony, see Stuart Stumpf, "Implications of King George's War for the Charleston Mercantile Community," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 77 (1976), pp. 161-188.

Maintaining order in a busy colonial seaport like Charleston, even under normal circumstances, was difficult. Still, in the immediate aftermath of the Stono Rebellion and in the midst of war, white property holders in South Carolina appeared undaunted in their determination to increase control over their laborers in Charleston and in the colony as a whole. Lawmakers were terrified by the possibility of more slave rebellions. The prompt and brutal response to the Stono Rebellion—the executions and beheadings of the rebels and the public display of their heads on posts along the roads leading into Charleston—was just one response. Subsequent executions through public hangings, burnings, and gibbeting were retaliatory actions in response to uncovered or quashed violent resistance, particularly from slaves.⁸ Indeed, in a letter to the king of England in the summer of 1740, the members of the Commons House of Assembly and the Upper House complained that the colony was in a “Dangerous situation.” Adding to these fears for the colony’s continued existence were two additional slave revolts that were uncovered and suppressed before they were put into action in the vicinity of Charleston.⁹ Authorities expressed concerns that brutal and public punishments might not be enough to curb insurrectionary tendencies in the working population. For instance, a Commons House of Assembly committee appointed to consider the “Message from his Honour the Lieutenant Governour concerning Mr. Lloyd’s Negro Caesar” reported on March 6, 1742, that they

⁸ For a full discussion of the actions taken by authorities immediately after the rebellion and the discovery of subsequent plots, see Peter Wood, *Black Majority*, pp. 314-320. For a discussion of the role and nature of executions in South Carolina in the late eighteenth century, see Gabriele Gottlieb, “Theater of Death: Capital Punishment in Early America, 1750-1800,” (PhD dissertation, University of Pittsburgh 2005), pp. 30, 115.

⁹ J. H. Easterby, ed., *Journals of the Commons House of Assembly of South Carolina (JCH)*, July 23, 1740. For further discussion of the impact of the Stono Rebellion on South Carolinians, see Wood, pp. 320-326 and Darold Wax, “‘The Great Risque We Run’: The Aftermath of Slave Rebellion at Stono, South Carolina, 1739-1745,” *The Journal of Negro History*, 67 (1982), pp. 136-147; Morgan, pp. 386 and 455-456; Olwell, pp. 21-26; Weir, pp. 192-203 and 208-213;

had examined Bernard Taylor, who informed the committee that he found Caesar making a key, that would “go over the wards of almost any lock, into the key-hole of which the said key could enter.” Taylor took the key from the Caesar in order to show it to the man’s master. The deponent stated that Caesar “seemed very uneasy at the key’s being taken from him, and offered to give the informant any thing, if he would let him have it again.” The committee concluded their report by stating that it was their opinion that the key was made with an “ill design,” and the assembly ordered the drafting of a message to the Lieutenant Governor recommending that Caesar be transported out of the colony and his owner compensated for the loss.¹⁰ With no evidence that others were involved in the making of the key and without information regarding any planned slave insurrections, Caesar would likely have been subjected to physical punishment. In the 1740s, however, lawmakers were unwilling to gamble that Caesar posed no greater threat than that of a clever burglar.

The extent of fears of future slave rebellions or criminal actions such as those discussed above is best evidenced by the passage of the “Negro Act” on May 10, 1740, which called for the close supervision of and strict limitations on the independence of slaves. According to the new law, no slave could leave a town or plantation without a letter or ticket from the master or overseer, signed and dated, to explain the slave’s business. Slaves apprehended off their masters’ property were to be punished with up to 20 lashes. In other sections of the 1740 law, Charleston slaves were singled out. Lawmakers clearly perceived that allowing slaves to earn money encouraged independence and could lead to insurrection, and they placed limitations on slaves’

¹⁰ *JCH*, March 6, 1742.

abilities to earn wages by working for someone other than their masters, or being hired out. The law also provided proscriptions against slaves selling goods in the market or on the streets. It was clearly designed to correct previously permissible behavior that was now deemed dangerous.¹¹ Thus, the law provides a window into circumstances as they existed prior to 1740. In particular, the newly proscribed activities point to the daily forms of resistance that slaves had developed in opposition to the often violent process of stripping away their independence and agency. The “Negro Act” was an attempt to undo the progress slaves had made in gaining control over their free time and in establishing customary “privileges” within the system of forced labor.

Yet slaves were not alone in receiving attention from wary property owners in South Carolina. Indeed, there was a good deal of concern regarding the independent behavior and freedom of movement exhibited by waterfront laborers in general. While a majority of workers in or connected to the waterfront environment were slaves, white sailors, servants and apprentices played an essential role in the successful operation of the port. Keeping these servants and sailors under control and at work in the 1740s became increasingly difficult. Indeed, with the outbreak of war between England and Spain and the subsequent inclusion of France as an additional enemy to England, the numbers of available white laborers began to diminish. This phenomenon was directly related to an increase in the size of England’s navy. From the 1730s to the 1740s, the number of

¹¹ “An Act for the better Ordering and Governing Negroes and other Slaves in this Province,” 10 May, 1740, in “The Public Laws of South-Carolina,” John D. Cushing, ed., *The First Laws of the State of South Carolina* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1981) Part 1, pp. 163-175 and Thomas Cooper and David McCord, *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina [1682-1838]* (Columbia: A. S. Johnston, 1838-1841), Vol. VII, pp. 397-419. For a discussion of social and political processes involved in both the passage and implementation of this law, see Wax, pp. 136-142.

sailors enlisted in the navy increased from 8,000 to as many as 60,000.¹² Colonial coast guard vessels and privateers also increased their demands for sailors. While captains of privateers were not in a position to press sailors into service, colonial and naval officials made frequent sweeps of Atlantic ports to meet their labor needs. In this scenario, merchant vessels were often left undermanned and unable to make their voyages in a timely fashion. The scarcity of South Carolina's free maritime laborers available to man the merchant vessels is underscored by a report made in 1740 to the British Board of Trade by the surveyor-general of customs for the southern district of America and future Virginia governor Robert Dinwiddie. He estimated vessels for offshore trade or fishing owned by South Carolinians amounted to only 25, and that the white population was not large enough to supply more than 4000 fighting men in the colony. At the same time, Dinwiddie estimated that 200 British or Irish vessels called in South Carolina ports that year. Just to man these vessels alone would require more than 1600 sailors, and nearly all of these mariners were from places outside of South Carolina.¹³

In Charleston, merchants were vocal about the detrimental effects that a lack of sailors and the inability of the British Navy and colonial scout boats to effectively protect trade brought for the colony's economy. For example, in December of 1742 Robert Pringle noted in a letter to a family member and business associate in England that, "your Ship *Susannah* which has been clear'd out since the 20th, & fair Winds ever Since...has been detain'd as [Capt. Gregory] tells me purely from want of Hands, & [he] is oblig'd to

¹²Carl E. Swanson, *Predators and Prizes: American Privateering and Imperial Warfare, 1739-1748*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p. 79.

¹³ Robert Dinwiddie, "A Computation of the Value of Trade of the British Empire of America; As also, An Account of the Number of Fighting Men in each Colony or Plantation.," British Public Records Office, 323/10. Also reprinted in William A. Whitehead, Ed., *Archives of the State of New Jersey, Series One –or- Documents Relating to the Colonial, Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary History of the State of New Jersey*, (Newark: New Jersey Historical Society, 1880), Vol. 6, pp. 83-91.

goe at Last Weak handed, having two Less than his Compliment, besides Two Spaniards.”¹⁴ In a letter to Richard Partridge, dated the 29th of January, 1743, Pringle commented that “Capt. Hallin has been at no Expence here for the Vessel but what has been necessary & has been Detain’d some time since he has been Loaded and Clear’d at all the Offices purely for want of Sailors, having had Two Impress’d on board one of the King’s Ships with whom we have had a pretty Deal of Trouble & Charge before [we] had [the sailors] Return’d, having oblig’d [the naval officers] to return them.”¹⁵ Pringle also noted the increase in wages for merchant seamen, stating that, “Merchant Ships are greatly Oppress’d here by the King’s Ships Impressing their Hands, which makes Sailor’s Wages Run very high.”¹⁶ In a separate letter in 1744, Pringle noted that, “15 and 20 guineas [are] given to sailors for the run to Europe as sailors are scarce and difficult to procure.”¹⁷ With average monthly wages for seamen in the 1740s between £2 and £2.5 sterling, these wages seem remarkably high.¹⁸

Henry Laurens made it clear in his correspondence that merchant trade was becoming more and more dangerous in the 1740s. In one letter, he commented that the *Adventure*, man of war, off Port Royal was out of commission due to damages sustained in bad weather, and with the *Aldborough* still in Boston, the coast was open to privateers. Indeed, Laurens noted that 14 to 15 English prizes were said to be in St. Augustine, and that 10 or 12 loaded vessels had been recently taken off the South Carolina coast. It was with some relief that Laurens could eventually report that the Assembly was preparing to

¹⁴ Robert Pringle to Andrew Pringle, 31 December 1742, in Walter Edgar, Ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle, II* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 471.

¹⁵ Robert Pringle to Richard Partridge, 29th January 1743, *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle, II*, p. 492.

¹⁶ *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle, II*, p. 492.

¹⁷ Robert Pringle to Henry and John Brock, 12th December 1744, *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle, II*, p. 777.

¹⁸ For Lists of seamen’s wages in the merchant shipping industry, see Rediker, pp. 304-305.

fit out two “fine vessels” to cruise the coast and protect trade.¹⁹ With wages already high and the likelihood of capture by enemy ships increased, desertion of sailors became an increasingly alarming problem for the merchants of Charleston.

Throughout the decade the demand for maritime laborers remained high within a labor market that served both the navy and merchant shipping industry. Despite the depredations of war, it appears that trade continued with moderate reductions in volume. Returning to Robert Dinwiddie’s 1740 report, the value of trade goods exported from South Carolina was an estimated £200,000. According to James Abercromby in a report made to the Lords of Trade in 1752, based on the computations of Dinwiddie, the value of South Carolina’s exported produce just over a decade later was unchanged.²⁰ In the estimates of other historians, it is clear that while trade did not expand, large numbers of vessels continued to call in the port of Charleston. Indeed, data regarding the numbers of vessels clearing out from Charleston between 1746 and 1749 show that the number of trading vessels never dipped below 190. A conservative estimate of the number of men needed to navigate these deep-sea vessels, based on the declared capacity for cargo in tons,²¹ would be no less than 1200 sailors for each year in this period characterized by low rice exportation. In fact, in each of the three worst years for rice exports, from the

¹⁹ Henry Laurens to James Crockatt, 23rd October 1747; to Thomas Savage, 11th November 1747; to Samuel Lawrence, 21st January 1748, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

²⁰ Dinwiddie, “A Computation;” James Abercromby, “An Examination of the Acts of Parliament Relative to the Trade and the Government of our American Colonies,” reprinted in: Jack Greene, Charles Mullett and Edward Papenfuse, Jr., Eds., *Magna Charta for America: James Abercromby’s “An Examination of the Acts of Parliament Relative to the Trade and the Government of our American Colonies” (1752), and “De Jure et Gubernatione Coloniarum, or An Inquiry into the Nature, and the Rights of Colonies, Ancient, and Modern” (1774)* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1986), pp. 62-67. For a discussion of these two reports and a third report by Dinwiddie made to the Duke of Newcastle in 1743, see Louis Koontz, *Robert Dinwiddie: His Career in American Colonial Government and Westward Expansion* (Glendale, California: Arthur H. Clark Company, 1941), pp. 51-65.

²¹ For an explanation of ton/man ratios on ocean-going vessels, see James F. Shepherd and Gary M. Walton, *Shipping, Maritime Trade, and the Economic Development of Colonial North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp. 211-227.

beginning of 1745 to the end of 1747, the number of vessels carrying rice alone was just over half of all vessels clearing out in 1740.²² Data regarding the number of ships entering and clearing out for Charleston in this period are incomplete, but given that most exports aside from rice remained fairly constant in this period, and indigo was introduced as a new export commodity, it is safe to say that, despite decreasing profits due to higher transport costs and lower rice prices, trade was only modestly curtailed, and the number of sailors needed for the vessels heading in and out of Charleston Harbor was relatively constant in this period. For the decade as a whole, the number of sailors required for deep-sea trade alone would have been between 800 and 1000 in the slowest years, and the number could have equaled or exceeded the 1600 needed to man the vessels, ocean-going or coastal, that crossed the bar into Charleston Harbor in 1740. Again, most of these vessels, and thus most of the sailors on board them, were not from South Carolina. Taken together, the number of deep-sea sailors equaled 20% of Charleston's total population of roughly 8000. Even accounting for the fact that not all of these non-resident mariners would have been in Charleston at once, they were still a sizable portion of Charleston's waterfront community at any given time between early Fall and late Spring.²³ Such a large number of Atlantic sailors, who had almost no connection to the local population or to local concerns, would require a great deal of effort and commitment of resources to police, whether they were on or off the merchant vessels in Charleston Harbor.

²²Charles Joseph Gayle, "The Nature and Volume of Exports from Charleston, 1724-1774," *The Proceedings of the South Carolina Historical Association*, (1937), pp. 25-33.

²³ Historian Walter Edgar states that the population in Charleston for the colonial period was roughly even between whites and blacks in his book, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), p. 156.

Given the continuing demand for sailors in the merchant trade and the increased need in this decade within the British Navy, official and public acknowledgment that the loss of manpower to desertion was a growing and increasingly dangerous problem is not surprising. In January of 1743, the *South-Carolina Gazette* carried a letter to the editor suggesting how to prevent sailors' desertion. The author of the letter, writing under the pseudonym of Mercator, suggested that, in order to stop sailors from deserting northward in great numbers it was, "necessary for every person who passes a Ferry, to have a Certificate with him from a Magistrate, that such person is about his lawful affairs; and, in failure of producing such Certificate to the Ferryman, he should not suffer any Person that is not personally known to him to pass."²⁴ Mercator's suggested plan frankly acknowledged the fact that most sailors were strangers in South Carolina and could be easily identified as outsiders and unauthorized users of the ferry system. In addition, his system was remarkably similar to the one created for slaves outlined in the revision of the slave codes in 1740 and part of the crackdown on slaves' physical freedoms. Thus, the same system of passes that applied to slaves who moved about without their master or overseer should be applied to all who were not "known" in the province. In other words, Mercator saw no reason to distinguish between free and unfree laborers when it came to limiting autonomy in general and mobility in particular. He went on to suggest that strict enforcement of existing laws would, "prevent his Majesty's Seamen from being entertain'd and carried off by the Merchantmen; so, that when they find that there is no Way left open to them, to facilitate their escape, they will certainly be more cautious how

²⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, January 10, 1743.

they run the hazard of incurring the Penalties and Punishments to be inflicted on Deserters...”²⁵

At roughly the same time, January 1743, the Lords of the Admiralty sent a letter to Lieutenant Governor Bull at the behest of the naval officers then on duty on the coast of Carolina. The letter reprimanded the South Carolina Legislature for its failure to provide the necessary means for controlling sailors when in port and for preventing South Carolinians from harboring and employing deserting sailors.²⁶ This sparked a show of righteous indignation on the part of legislators in the Commons House of Assembly, who were anxious to prove that their impotence in the face of desertion was not from a lack of effort. Still, Mercator’s “suggestions” were taken up by the Commons House of Assembly when, on May 7, 1743, its members passed the act “for the better restraining Seamen from absenting from their service, And for encouraging the apprehension and securing of fugitive seamen, and to discourage frivolous and vexatious actions at law being brought by seamen against master and commanders of ships and vessels.” The passage of the bill followed nearly five months of debate and consideration of the most

²⁵ Ibid. The advertisement that *Mercator* was responding to was placed in the *South-Carolina Gazette* on January 3, 1743 and read: “Whereas an Act of the Parliament of Great Britain passed in the 6th year of her late majesty Queen Anne, entitled an Act for encouragement of the trade to America, it is amongst other things enacted, ‘That every Commander of a Privateer or trading ship in any part of America, shall, before he receives any person to serve on board his ship, by all reasonable ways, endeavour to discover whether such person has deserted any ship of War, and if he shall entertain any such person without such endeavour, or which he knows or has been informed has deserted, such commander shall forfeit for every such offense twenty pounds, with costs of suit, to be recovered in any court in her majesty’s dominions.’ And, whereas the following persons, (to wit) George Reed, Samuel Watkins, John McBride, John Eaton, William Gray, George Nichols, Peter Craven and William Clarke, did, on the 22nd instant desert from his majesty’s ship the *Rye*, at Hobcaw: These are therefore to give notice, that any person who will apprehend all or any of the said deserters, and deliver them to the commander of any of his majesty’s ships of war in the Harbour, or unto Mess. Nickelson, Shubrick, and Comp. shall receive from the person to whom delivered, the sum of twenty pounds current money, for each person so apprehended and delivered AND, all persons concerned are hereby forewarned, to pay due regard to the aforesaid act of Parliament, otherwise the same will be carried strictly into Execution by... Charles Hardy.”

²⁶ January 12th 1743, letter from the Lords of the Admiralty, January 14th 1743, *Original South Carolina Correspondence from the Governor and Others (Original Correspondence)*, British Manuscripts Project, PRO 415, Library of Congress.

effective means, including appropriate fines and rewards, for curtailing sailors' flight.²⁷ However, even with this and other laws regulating sailors on the books, enforcement was lax as was compliance among property owners, and workers took merciless advantage of this. This is quite clear in the frequent complaints of grand juries that noted the willingness of South Carolinians, particularly tavern keepers, to continue to harbor, conceal or employ seamen.²⁸

This pattern of passing ineffective laws was not limited to the realm of control over free sailors. The "Negro Act" of 1740 was also rendered less effective by the inclusion of caveats to many of the carefully crafted regulations of slaves' activities. Such exceptions clearly stated that the limitations placed on the freedom of movement and agency of slaves were in no way intended to prevent masters from receiving income from hiring out their slaves or having slaves sell their goods for them in the markets. Even the prohibitions regarding the sale of alcohol to bondsmen and bondswomen made exceptions if the slave had a ticket indicating that he or she was purchasing alcohol for his or her master.²⁹ For the 1740s, then, it is clear that calls for action or complaints of ineffectiveness regarding control of waterfront workers were met with token laws that contained limited means for enforcement. Certainly, little time and money was allocated for these matters, and complaints continued throughout the decade.

²⁷ May 7, 1743, *JCH*, pp. 135, 459. Also see, January 14, 1743, *Original South Carolina Correspondence from the Governor and Others (Original Correspondence)*, British Manuscripts Project, PRO 415, Library of Congress.

²⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, March 23, 1747. This published list of Grand Jury Presentments appealed to the Commons House of Assembly for more effectual laws in preventing the harboring of seamen. An earlier list of presentments from the Grand Jury, *South-Carolina Gazette* March 28, 1743, noted "the necessity of taking some effectual Means, to prevent Sailors deserting from their respective ships, and especially from leaving this province in times of alarm or invasion."

²⁹ Cushing, Part 1, pp. 163-175.

The actions of sailors, servants and slaves contributed to this mixed response to their autonomy and mobility. The records of this period reveal that temporary desertion or desertion to local destinations, for example, was extremely common and that those who deserted knew that their labor power and skills would be welcomed on the ships and along the wharves in Charleston. Fugitive workers could find refuge for a period of time with potential employers or tavern keepers anxious to either gain the advantages of workers' skills or labor power or to encourage increased or continued patronage of their businesses. In this way, the deserters foiled the efforts of authorities to recover them and, if sailors, they only had to wait until the ship they had signed onto left port. Further evidence in support of the notion that this was a common form of desertion is found in a report from some of the militia captains in July of 1742. The report indicated that there were a number of deserted sailors in the country who, having found refuge or employment there, were willing to return to assist Oglethorpe's forces in repelling the Spanish in Georgia if they would not be punished upon their return. At least one naval officer readily agreed to these terms.³⁰ In addition to this, several of the orders of the Council regarding "presses" for sailors made specific reference to "the seamen in town who commonly desert and hide in and around Charleston until their ship is gone."³¹

Frustration on the part of the captains of ships on the Carolina station at the lack of cooperation from local authorities and the inhabitants in general was frequently made clear in letters to the Governor and Council. Outrage was apparent in a letter from Captain Ashby Utting of the *Aldborough* to the Governor informing him of the active interference of Charleston's pilots in the efforts to man naval vessels. Perplexed by the

³⁰ Letter to Lt. Governor Bull, 15th July 1742, *Original Correspondence*.

³¹ See, for example, the Order of the Council Chamber, 15th March 1742, *Original Correspondence*.

small number of sailors found on board incoming vessels from distant ports, naval officers began to focus their attention on the actions of pilots. From witnesses, they learned that the pilots in Charleston were assisting merchant sailors in avoiding the naval press gangs. When vessels arrived off the bar, the pilots informed the crew that there was a press in progress and offered to take some of them on board their pilot boats to be secreted ashore. When the navy's press gangs boarded the now undermanned merchant vessels *inside* the harbor, they found no one to press.³² While it is not clear whether the pilots were motivated by a sense of camaraderie with these merchant seamen or they hoped to receive some monetary compensation from these actions, it is certainly clear that they had no interest in assisting the naval captains on the station.

While most of the cases of desertion detailed above demonstrate that sailors took a clandestine approach to desertion, there were instances when waterfront laborers, sailors in particular, took a bolder, more aggressive stance in response to authorities. Governor Glen related such an incident to the Board of Trade in England, explaining that the attempts to man schooners for the defense of the colony in January of 1748 were met with armed resistance from a group of merchant sailors who “having loaded their arms went in a piratical manner and took possession of another ship near them and going into close quarters swore they would be the death of whoever came on board.”³³ The sailors involved in the incident were from two adjacent ships on one of the city's wharves. They armed themselves and joined ranks when the press gang, including soldiers, came down

³² Letter to Governor and Council from Captain Ashby Utting, 1st November 1745, *Original Correspondence*.

³³ *Journal of the Council*, 5th January 1748. The Council received a series of depositions regarding this affair, including one from the Provost Marshall testifying to the sailors' preparation through the gathering of small arms to defend against the press.

the wharf. The sailors wounded two soldiers and later surrendered. They were ordered to jail to stand trial for the murder of the soldiers who had died of their wounds, but they subsequently freed themselves from the jail and avoided recapture.³⁴ Clearly, there was an advantage held by maritime laborers inclined to desert, and that was the anonymity that could be found in a port like Charleston and the availability of routes for escape.

Other advertisements in the *South-Carolina Gazette* suggest that workers of all backgrounds, not just sailors, recognized and took advantage of owner or employer powerlessness in the face of desertion at or near the waterfront. Even young apprentices and indentured servants had some success in taking what they needed from the labor system and escaping when the opportunity arose. There are references in advertisements from the *South-Carolina Gazette* to the flight of indentured servants and apprentices who apparently refused to recognize the legitimacy of the indenture. Some of these servants were on board vessels when they fled or had clear connections to the waterfront and took advantage of them to break free from their masters. For example, in Josiah Claypoole's advertisement for a runaway indentured servant, he noted Robert Allen had enlisted and then deserted in the brief campaign to assist in the repulsion of the Spanish from Fredericka, Georgia, in 1742. Not only did Allen take advantage of the opportunity to run while away from his master on the journey southward by boat, but he had also adopted the "look and actions" of a sailor. His confidence in remaining at large and finding employment on board a boat was likely buoyed by his knowledge that the skills he had learned in the trade of carpentry would make him a valuable addition to any ship's crew. Certainly Claypoole, who offered a £25 reward for the recovery of his servant,

³⁴ *Original Correspondence*, 19th January 1748. *Journal of the Council*, 5th January 1748.

valued Allen's skills.³⁵ Another servant, John Montgomery, took a similar path to his freedom by absenting himself from a vessel that brought him to Charleston. While it is not clear from the advertisement whether this 20 year-old man, originally from Scotland, was arriving from the back country or from overseas, what is clear is that he found the waterfront of Charleston to be the ideal location to flee from his indenture.³⁶ Luke Blakely and George Salter took advantage of the opportunities provided by the labor shortage of the 1740s and perhaps the proximity of the British enemies in St. Augustine and fled their indentured positions as assistants to Charleston pilots. Blakely, born in Dublin, may well have hoped that as a Catholic, he would find sanctuary and a rewarding position with the Spanish in Florida.³⁷

Not all of the servants and apprentices who took flight in this period were employed on boats or traveling by water when they decided to flee--proximity to the maritime world was enough. Samuel Vurnor, apprentice to John Bruno, a block maker on one of Charleston's wharves, concluded that the war and nearby water transportation were the exact circumstances he needed to plan and put into execution his escape. Vurnor's contact with sailors would have been frequent and extensive. His work took him on board vessels on or near the wharves of Charleston to repair blocks or rig new, and the shop in which he worked and resided was adjacent to large numbers of moored vessels loading and unloading goods and wares. Such proximity to ocean going vessels made opportunities for flight frequent and relatively easy. The seriousness with which Vurnor approached his escape is evidenced by the additional information contained in the

³⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, August 9, 1742.

³⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, November 21, 1742.

³⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, April 15, November 4, 1745.

notice. His master wanted everyone to know that the apprentice broke open a chest and removed his indentures and some other items of value. By removing and possibly destroying the records of his apprenticeship, Vurnor clearly hoped, and his master feared, that this would make his story of being a free man more plausible in the event of being stopped and challenged.³⁸ In addition, Albert Lenud, apprentice to John Laurens in Charleston, took advantage of his access to the waterfront to run away with a sword, gun and a box of cartridges as well as some other valuables. Aside from the theft committed by Lenud, this notice is remarkable for its lengthy run in the *Gazette*. Laurens ran the advertisement almost every week for just under a year. While this young man had no clear connection to the waterfront labor, Laurens maintained a shop in Charleston, and Lenud was from Santee and likely returned there by water. More importantly, he was able to remain at large for 11 months, and since we have no record of his capture or return, it's possible he achieved permanent freedom from his indenture.³⁹ Such examples parallel the accounts of deserting sailors discussed above as well as notices regarding runaway slaves discussed below. Taken together, this evidence of ease of flight underscores the notion that control of laborers on or near the waterfront was incomplete at best.

Masters of runaway slaves in the 1740s, particularly those who employed their bondsmen and women on or around the Charleston waterfront, were alarmed at the frequency of desertion and the numbers of deserting slaves who worked their way to St. Augustine. They were not alone in expressing anxiety over such actions in this decade. Witness the presentments of the grand juries of St. Philip's Parish (Charleston) in 1744

³⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, January 20, 1746, January 2, 1749.

³⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, June 22, 1745, May 26, 1746.

and 1746. Slaves were noted buying and selling all wares and strong liquors and working without a ticket. They were also complained of as haughty and independent, particularly one group of maritime workers who “act as porters and who refuse to work for a reasonable hire when they are frequently found idle, and often insist on as much for an hour or two as pays their masters for a whole day.”⁴⁰ These men and women were exercising an independence and agency that was not tolerated officially, but was prevalent enough to require the attention of the members of the grand jury who were forced to call for legislative remedies due to the slow or ineffective responses of law enforcement officers, the watch, or the propertied inhabitants of Charleston. The grand jury noted other “grievances” such as the frequent practice of the “Negroes going in and out of town under pretense of picking myrtle berries by which they barter and trade rum and other goods with country slaves encouraging theft.”⁴¹ While their masters may not have considered them as “deserters” in these instances, the slaves who engaged in these illicit activities were deserting a system of controls and general oversight built for them. As the grand jury presentments make clear, these temporary deserters were often indicted by public opinion for property crimes in Charleston. Houses and shops that were burgled, boats and canoes that were stolen, or goods that disappeared from wharves and storehouses were often assumed to be the handiwork of slaves.

The fact that actions such as those described above warrant notice in the 1740s is an indication of the increased awareness on the part of some of the authorities and property holders that an unfettered working population could be the active agents or encouragers of disorder or rebellion that would open up the province to attack. What was

⁴⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, November 5, 1744; *Journal of the Council*, April 17, 1746.

⁴¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, November 5, 1744.

common practice among workers in previous decades and merely irksome to some took on a more ominous meaning in these years. Runaway slave notices frequently described the deserted slaves as being well known in town due to their employment as anything from domestic workers who hired out their time to hucksters and market vendors to skilled coopers, carpenters or boatmen. Such was the case with Dianna, a washerwoman employed in Charleston; Bacchus, who was well-known in Charleston where he sold produce in the streets; and Johny, a butcher. Maritime slaves like Ziky (formerly known as Cyrus), a pilot, found opportunities to increase their freedom as maritime workers. Ziky's master thought he had gone to the region around the Stono River and was residing there with a free black woman. When two boatmen teamed up with a Creole field hand and absconded, they may have felt their notoriety in town, as frequent and unsupervised visitors, would be helpful for a time. Advertisements for the return of slaves like Caesar, a bricklayer who ran away after working some time in Charleston, are particularly suggestive given that the runaway notices also referred to the disappearances of canoes or other small boats that coincided with the flight of these slaves.⁴² What all of these runaways had in common was their owners' willingness to characterize them as overly independent and determined. They relied on the same network as sailors and for similar ends; they used the need for their labor power and skills to negotiate space and, particularly in these cases, assistance in exercising some degree of freedom. For example, an advertisement placed by John Stevens for the return of Andrew, a "bold and impudent" slave, noted that he had been seen in Charleston where his master feared that

⁴² *South-Carolina Gazette*, October 24, 1743, June 11, 1744, May 7, 1744, September 12, 1748, December 7, 1748, January 2, 1749.

he might convince a captain to sign him on as a sailor.⁴³ Reid & Kennan advertised for the return of slave sailors Joseph Johnson, born in Bermuda, and Thomas Esbery, born in Jamaica. The men ran away from the privateer *Pelham*, and Johnson was thought to be harbored among slaves in Charleston as he had established relationships with some on a previous trip.⁴⁴

Repeat offenders were also common in this period and masters exhibited a great deal of frustration at the unruliness of these slaves. Little Toney, who had fled from James MacKelvey, had spent some time as a hunter at Pee Dee cowpen (likely responsible for killing predatory animals) where it appears he was frequently outside of the control of his master. He was described as saucy and obstreperous, and he had caused his master enough trouble in the past that a reward was offered for his head if he resisted capture.⁴⁵ Christopher Gadsden was forced to advertise twice for the return of Mingo who was a cooper by trade. Gadsden's second advertisement was placed in 1750 after Mingo and another man named Scipio had deserted the *Aldborough*, a British ship of war, some eighteen months prior to Gadsden's advertisement.⁴⁶

Many of these runaway notices remarked that slaves who ran away were dressed in clothes designed to give the appearance of a sailor or were suspected of trying or were noted to have already attempted to gain passage on board vessels leaving the port. In the previous decade, such advertisements made reference to dressing like sailors or previous experience on or around the water much less frequently. Other notices detailed previous connections to maritime trades or flight to maritime oriented locales. John Man sought

⁴³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, March 18, 1745.

⁴⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, April 8, 1745.

⁴⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, June 1, 1745.

⁴⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, May 4, 1747, August 13, 1750.

the return of a slave who, as a cooper, carpenter and sawyer, exhibited skills commonly associated with support of maritime trade.⁴⁷ David Fry wanted assistance in recovering Clacs who had escaped from the sloop *Huzza* while it was berthed at Motte's wharf. Clacs, who appears to have been an experienced sailor, spoke both English and Spanish. Given the proximity of St. Augustine, his flight likely caused Fry a great deal of anxiety.⁴⁸

Some slave owners in the 1740s demonstrated a marked lack of confidence in gaining assistance from their fellow South Carolinians in recovering runaways. While there were 29 out of a total of 192 advertisements promising prosecution of anyone harboring the advertised fugitive slaves in the 1730s, there were 87 such advertisements out of a total of 272 placed in the 1740s. More striking is the increase in the number of advertisements that contain warnings against employing or "harboring" fugitive slaves in the 1740s. While 12.5% of advertisements placed in the 1730s contained such warnings, by the 1740s, 30% of the masters advertising for the recovery of their slaves threatened to prosecute anyone harboring runaways. Labor scarcity seems to have contributed to fears on the part of masters that their deserted slaves would be difficult to recover. Desertion of slaves and others was clearly drawing more and more concern as the decade wore on.⁴⁹

The continued presence of the Spanish in St. Augustine, and the well-known policy of Spanish officials offering sanctuary for runaway slaves, served as an incentive to slaves inclined to run away and further reduced the confidence of slave owners in the

⁴⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, April 18, 1748.

⁴⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, January 30, 1749.

⁴⁹ See *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1732-1750.

likelihood of the return of runaways who were determined to leave the colony.⁵⁰ The record of the examination of Felix Argular by the Council provides some insight into the conditions under which desertion of slaves to St. Augustine occurred. Argular, alias Brigadier, was a runaway slave who was born in St. Augustine to a Spanish father and free black mother. A group of Creek Indians, during a raid in Florida, killed his father and returned north where they sold him into slavery in South Carolina. After spending what was the equivalent of a lifetime in slavery in South Carolina, he took advantage of the opportunity to return to St. Augustine with a gang of slaves on board a stolen barge from the late Governor Johnson's landing. His confidence in the limits of white control of slave labor in this period was enough to encourage him to return to Georgia and South Carolina to work in the countryside encouraging slaves to flee to St. Augustine.⁵¹

Going beyond attempts to undermine the power of the slaveholding class through desertion, some slaves and servants worked to carry out retribution against their masters and the system of servitude. For instance, an advertisement placed in the South-Carolina Gazette in November of 1734 noted that Toney, a "Barbadian born" slave, ran away from his master, Joseph Gibben of Port Royal, South Carolina. Toney reappears years later in a deposition regarding the Spanish invasion of Georgia in 1742. Toney, whom the deponent recognized, explained that he and other runaway slaves from South Carolina, as part of the compliment from St. Augustine, were to be employed in recruiting other slaves to run away to St. Augustine. Slaves who had freed themselves were not the only deserters from South Carolina who were part of the invading army. There were several

⁵⁰ Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida*(Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 29.

⁵¹ *Journal of the Council*, 18th October 1742. Margin notes in the minutes state that Argular had been captured by General Oglethorpe's Indians and had been sent to England, but had returned by the Georgia Packet.

Irish men on board the vessels that brought in the invading army, among whom may have been Bryan Reily's and John CarMichael's runaway Irish servants who had deserted from plantations in the company of two slaves.⁵² While the numbers of fugitive white servants working with Spanish forces is difficult to determine, it is clear that a good number of the free blacks at Mose, the fort and free black community established just outside of St. Augustine that included many deserters from South Carolina, took part in the invasion of Georgia as soldiers, sailors and clandestine incendiary agents working to undermine the economy and thus the defenses of South Carolina. Charles Hicks, a merchant from New York residing in St. Augustine, stated in his testimony to the Royal Council in 1743 that 400 to 500 "Negroes and Mullatoes," presumed to be deserters from British colonies, were part of the Spanish expedition against Georgia, and that their presence was expected to incite the slaves of South Carolina to rise up and join in the attack on white South Carolinians and Georgians. When asked about Spanish spies in South Carolina, Hicks responded that he had not heard of any spies but that Spanish prisoners in Charleston had taken every opportunity available to converse with slaves and promise them that the Spanish would return for them, which the slaves were said to be pleased to hear. Further reflecting the fears of South Carolinians that their former slaves were among the invading forces from Havana and St. Augustine is a letter from General Oglethorpe to the British Board of Trade warning that the loss of the fort at Fredericka to the Spanish

⁵² *South-Carolina Gazette*, November 9, 1734; *Original Correspondence*, February 23, 1743; *South-Carolina Gazette* March 15, 1735.

would mean unhindered conquest of the English colonies all the way north to Virginia, particularly since they “have a correspondence with the Negroes.”⁵³

Former slaves did not wait around for an organized invasion by the Spanish to act against their former masters. Some of these men manned privateers that preyed on shipping to and from Charleston. It was the black and mixed race sailors who caught the eye of the pilot James Elsinore who, upon approaching what he thought was an English trading ship, was alarmed to discover it was an enemy privateer. The experience terrorized Elsinore into remaining in port for several days afterward.⁵⁴ While it is not possible to determine how many of these men had been subject to slavery in South Carolina, another case, this time the capture of a Spanish privateer, supports the notion that many were indeed former slaves. The log of the *Revenge*, a British colonial privateer, notes the capture of Captain Francisco Menendez, the leader of the community of former slaves outside of St. Augustine.⁵⁵ Clearly it was possible and desirable for recently freed black men from St. Augustine to work on board privateers.

Servants or general laborers also deserted and then worked to cooperate with the enemies of the English crown. Note the reference in Alexander Paris’s deposition, detailed above, to some Irish men who fled with slaves to St. Augustine and then worked to pilot the Spanish fleet into Georgia waters. Another Irishman had been captured at sea on board a Spanish vessel and taken to Charleston in 1743 on charges of treason. After nearly a year in jail, he petitioned the governor for the right to be traded as a Spanish

⁵³ Landers, p. 33; also, see translated Spanish documents in *The Collections of the Georgia Historical Society*, 7 (1913): 33-34; *Original Correspondence*, February 1743.

⁵⁴ Affidavit of James Elsinore in *Journals of the Council*, December 23, 1747.

⁵⁵ Landers, p. 22 and John Franklin Jameson, ed., *Privateering and Piracy in the Colonial Period: Illustrative Documents* (New York: McMillan Company, 1923), pp. 402-11.

prisoner of war back to Havana where he had a wife and children. His petition was denied and it was determined that he should be sent to England as soon as possible to stand trial.⁵⁶ In May of 1745, Benjamin Whitaker, a member of the Council, wrote to the Duke of Newcastle to relate that a notorious Spanish privateer captain arrived in Charleston under flag of truce to exchange Irish prisoners, but that the “prisoners” had since disappeared. The captain was allowed to stay two months to repair his vessel and had a view of the incomplete defenses of the harbor and was permitted to “rove about the town.” Whitaker was outraged when this captain returned to the bar some time later with two French privateers and took prizes in sight of the town.⁵⁷ Servants and sailors were just as capable of betraying their masters or king as slaves, and maritime experience was one of the common threads among these “traitors.”

Finally, in explaining the degrees of freedom of maritime workers evidenced in newspaper notices and similar sources, it is worth considering not just the lack of resources made available for the effective forms of control needed, but also the degree to which deserters found refuge with other workers and from those who were white and propertied. As the evidence above often makes clear and what innumerable runaway slave advertisements claim is that laborers in general, and maritime workers in particular, could find assistance in their endeavors to relocate themselves from members of the population that were supposed to assist in the regulation of their movement and activities. For instance, the illegal trading between white shopkeepers and slaves is a well-known

⁵⁶ Petition of George Moore: July 3, 1744, *Original Correspondence*.

⁵⁷ Benjamin Whitaker to Duke of Newcastle, May 8, 1745, *Original Correspondence*.

phenomenon in this period and region.⁵⁸ Compliance among the free white population in the enforcement of various laws was not always forthcoming, as concern for personal economic prosperity came before the concerns for the overall security of the colony.

Legislation directed against the freedoms of maritime laborers, called for by many South Carolinians and British officials alike, would have done little to solve the problems for white property holders described above without a complete overhaul of the law enforcement system. Law enforcement was dependent to such a degree on cooperation and vigilance from the propertied, that a lack of consensus on the need to act rendered officers powerless. Examples of this powerlessness are numerous. Witness the complaints of the Provost Marshall and his deputies in 1746. While traveling in the region south of Charleston to serve a writ, the Provost's deputy Stephen Hamilton deposed that he was twice knocked down and threatened with his life if he dared serve any writs against inhabitants of the area. Rawlins Lowndes, Provost Marshall, testified that he was in fear of great bodily harm due to his knowledge of threats made against him if he dared travel outside of Charleston to carry out his duties.⁵⁹ Contempt for law enforcement officials was not unusual in this period, particularly in the regions somewhat distant from Charleston. This was, in part, the product of an unwillingness of South Carolina's lawmakers to allow the expansion of the court systems into the hinterland as they became more settled. This encouraged a feeling among the settlers of the backcountry that the laws and courts did not represent them or meet their needs. Manifestations of this feeling are seen in the threats made to Charleston constables and in

⁵⁸ See Timothy J. Lockley, "Trading Encounters Between Non-Elite Whites and African Americans in Savannah, 1790-1860," *Journal of Southern History*, 66 (2000), pp. 25-49.

⁵⁹ Affidavits of Stephen Hamilton and Rawlins Lowndes, September 2, 1746, *Original Correspondence*.

the vigilante actions that erupted into the Regulator Movement of the Piedmont region. Additionally, a petition from settlers along the Pee Dee River in an area known as the Welch Tract complained that a group of horse thieves and perpetrators of other felonies from northern colonies had settled there and were continued steal horses, kill cattle and rob houses. When Samuel Goodman, one of His Majesty's Justices from North Carolina arrived with a proclamation for the apprehension and return of 20 of these men signed by the Governor of Virginia, the prisoners he apprehended were forcibly released and Goodman was kept in irons by the felons for some time and then released after being threatened with his life if he dared "molest them any further."⁶⁰

Even in Charleston, some laws were only heeded if they furthered the economic circumstances of the inhabitants. One of the most frequently complained of infractions was the retailing of alcohol in unlicensed taverns or allowing slaves to purchase alcohol in flagrant contempt for the restrictions made clear in the "Negro Act." In Grand Jury Presentments made in March of 1744, 12 individuals were cited for selling alcohol to slaves. Still others paid no heed to court directives, such as John Ward, captain of the *John and James*, who set sail before his scheduled court hearing regarding the theft of a Charleston pilot's slave. Vessels in Charleston and other South Carolina ports as "pernicious and underhand" in trading with the King's enemies in Augustine and the Havana under the protection of flag of truce, trading provisions as well as arms and ammunition and providing intelligence.

The rough handling of and contempt for law enforcement agents, the cases of armed resistance of sailors, the escapes made from the jail and continued complaints of

⁶⁰ Petition, March 25, 1745, *General Correspondence*.

thefts and other criminal activity taken together clearly indicate that law enforcement in and outside of Charleston was difficult without the concerted efforts of most propertied South Carolinians.

By the end of the decade, South Carolina officials were quite aware of the possibility of dangerous cooperation between the free and unfree. The frequent Grand Jury presentments regarding the grievance of individuals trading with slaves and illegally selling alcohol to slaves highlights the difficulty in curtailing the freedom of enslaved or indentured workers to periodically act as free agents in the developing market economy of South Carolina. As the relationship between patron and client developed, traders and tavern keepers might be persuaded to assist a fugitive in return for his or her business. Likewise, the frequent warnings that accompanied notices regarding deserters and runaways threatening litigation against anyone harboring slaves, soldiers or sailors suggests that this was a common occurrence.⁶¹ Sailors, soldiers, servants and slaves had learned that it was possible to offer money or labor in return for assistance in remaining away from their employers or owners, and they likely relied on intelligence regarding who could be “trusted” this way from their fellow laborers.

What is clear in the decade of the 1740s is that public calls for action against desertion such as *Mercator's*, and less public petitions and letters to white authorities in South Carolina and England on the same subject were largely ignored, and the policies and laws that were put in place to protect the colony from the ill effects of this form of labor resistance were not effectively enforced. This left the workers of the Charleston waterfront free to make use of this tool of resistance to gain as much leverage in the

⁶¹ See, for example, the Grand Jury presentments, *South-Carolina Gazette*, November 5, 1744 and March 23, 1747; Governor Glen's order in the Council, *South-Carolina Gazette*, April 1, 1745.

unequal economic and social system as possible. Such gains in leverage were likely lasting ones, and certainly the means for preventing desertion remained virtually unchanged in the following decades leading up to the American Revolution. Opportunities for desertion came and went as the Atlantic world underwent political and economic changes. Staying connected to the waterfront in Charleston was a means for laborers in South Carolina to stay in tune with these changes and take advantage of the opportunities that arose from them.

CHAPTER THREE: SECURING THE WORKERS' WATERFRONT

From January 24th through February 7th, 1749, the Governor and Council of South Carolina devoted nearly all of their sessions to taking testimony and interrogating white and black witnesses and suspects, men and women, regarding a reported conspiracy of free and enslaved workers to rise up against the property holders of South Carolina, destroy Charleston, and make off in vessels for the Spanish territory near St. Augustine. The extensive investigation into this matter is telling, given the timing. The Council received reports of this conspiracy in the immediate aftermath of a decade of warfare, invasion scares, large scale desertions, and frequent attacks on merchant vessels coming to and clearing out from Charleston. The anxiety and desperate attempts to predict and divert disaster for the colony at the hands of European enemies was suddenly turned inward, and they found the activities of their maritime laborers to be alarming. Once the news of a possible insurrection planned by river workers, black and white, reached the governor, he was quick to launch an extensive inquiry (the minutes of which filled over 75 pages of the Council's journal) in order to determine the veracity of the report of the potentially devastating plot. Testimony regarding the plot implicated over 100 slaves and at least 16 white men. Of the 7 white men examined and cross-examined at length, at least 4 were boat hands and others were poor artisans and other members of the lower sort. A much higher but indeterminate number of those slaves accused of involvement in

the planned rebellion were also boatmen on the Cooper River. As witnesses were called back, sometimes several times, and asked the same questions over again or assailed with new ones derived from the testimony of others, the governor and council felt that there were too many discrepancies in the testimony of some. This cast serious doubt on the veracity of the plot's existence.¹ Eventually, the Governor and Council determined that the plot was in fact fabricated. After all of the frantic attempts to find and interrogate accused conspirators, their only actions were to recommend the transport of 4 slaves, who were incidentally discovered to be rebellious, out of the colony and to caution the Cooper River planters to keep an eye on their slaves.

Throughout the 1740s, free and enslaved maritime workers—sailors and dockworkers, boatmen and slave artisans—had taken advantage of the disruptions of war to push for greater freedoms and economic independence. In these efforts, despite the outside distractions of the decade, they faced a great deal of opposition from propertied South Carolinians and, when caught, were severely punished. But, they continued to push. Those who employed maritime workers in and around Charleston turned their full attention inward at the end of the war years, and they were initially as shocked by the liberties that their employees or servants took in their daily work activities and with their free time as the governor and Council were at the news of the river boatmen's conspiracy. Employers and officials alike realized that the economic system of South Carolina was completely dependent on the labor of such mobile and unruly men and women, and any attempt to crack down on them as a group would result in a sharp reduction in the profits

¹ *Journal of the Council*, January 24, 1749-February 7, 1749. Also see Philip D. Morgan and George D. Terry, "Slavery in Microcosm: A Conspiracy Scare in Colonial South Carolina," *Southern Studies*, 21 (1982), pp. 122, 142.

produced by South Carolina's export-based economy. This is the most likely cause for the Council's restraint. While previous conspiracies had, with less convincing testimony, resulted in executions designed to intimidate laborers into submission, this plot, with maritime workers at its center, was dismissed with little more than a reprimand.²

Throughout the 1750s and into the first three years of the 1760s, South Carolina's Lowcountry was, despite the military conflicts between European powers and their colonial possessions incorporated in this span of years, removed from the dangers of invasion, and the inhabitants of Charleston and its environs could focus on internal expansion and the increased market demands for their products created by the distant conflicts. At the same time that opportunities increased in this period for the propertied, it decreased for the workers. Without the distractions of a proximal enemy, employers and masters could devote more attention to control of their hired and servant laborers. In this changed environment, sailors, servants, and slaves walked a fine line between rebellious behavior and resistance activities that secured or added to periods of unsupervised work, increased opportunities for earning money or obtaining goods, and build up some bargaining power needed to exercise autonomy.

Over this 14-year period, servants, sailors and slaves continued to engage in disruptive behavior without prompting any drastic responses from South Carolinians as a whole. Sailors were often leaders in finding ways to push for more freedoms without eliciting harsh reprisals from authorities in this period. In 1755, for instance, Henry

² Morgan and Terry recognize this uncommon restraint and also attribute it to the ending of a disruptive period. However, they assert that it may have been the waning of the Great Awakening that brought a decrease in hysteria. I would argue that it was the distance from the Stono Rebellion of 1739 and the end of hostilities with France and Spain that were the more salient factors. Morgan and Terry also pay little attention to the actions of maritime workers outside of those involved in the plot and place little importance on their role in the effective operation of the export economy. See Morgan and Terry, pp. 142-145.

Laurens, in corresponding with one of his business relations in England, explained that desertion of most of the crew from a ship they awaited delayed its departure. The crew deserted in response to the arrival of the ship of war *Jamaica*, and the subsequent press for men for a week in Charleston. The merchant vessel's hands, who had sought refuge in the country, had only just returned at the time Laurens drafted his letter, and it would take another 5 or 6 days to ready the vessel. The letter contained no condemnation of the sailors for their actions, and there was no corresponding notice in the *South Carolina Gazette* for the return of these deserted seamen, as there would have been in the previous decade. If anything, it was the navy that Laurens deemed worthy of blame, claiming that the officers' actions unduly disrupted merchant trade and delayed the transport of goods.³ Indeed, his letter suggests that sailors had successfully established desertion in the face of naval impressment as a near customary right in the merchant marine of Charleston. While some captains and merchants in the 1740s were equally cavalier about sailor desertion, most responses to such actions in the midst of war were fearful and condemning. The near-constant harassment of the coast and shipping of South Carolina by the French and Spanish in the preceding war created both more sympathy for naval presses and more outrage at desertions when timely and efficient voyages seemed essential. It appears, then, that while the coastal waters of South Carolina were free of a significant enemy presence, sailors could resort to desertion in order to avoid the press, making this action a partially supported, customary right in the context of the Charleston waterfront.

Slaves had the most to gain and lose in the struggles for increased liberties in their

³ Laurens to John Knight & Co., 22 September 1755, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

living and working conditions, and like free sailors and servants with maritime skills, slave boatmen, porters, artisans and sailors, as a group, battled to make certain assertive actions less alarming than irksome. A testament to the success of this strategy is found in a 1761 advertisement for the return of Quamino, a runaway slave. This fugitive was, according to his master James Reid, well acquainted with “black prostitutes” and roguish fellows. The implication in the notice is that Quamino fit in rather well with this crowd, but the tone of the advertisement suggests an almost extreme unconcern with Quamino’s character and actions. Reid offers no reward or threats to those who might harbor Quamino within the milieu of Charleston’s waterfront. He merely states, “whoever will be kind enough to put him in the workhouse will be of service to the community.”⁴ Taken together with the examples above, this last notice implies, among employers and owners of maritime laborers, a level of comfort with certain disorderly activities in Charleston that was hard to find in the public discourse in the 1740s.

The importance of Charleston as an Atlantic port in the history of eighteenth-century South Carolina cannot be overstated. The maritime laborers that frequented the port and allowed it to function were not only extremely difficult to control, as the above examples make clear, but they also could not be effectively separated from the population of slaves living within South Carolina’s plantation regime. This stood at the heart of the anxieties regarding the 1749 conspiracy. Because this clear division could not be established, slaveowners on and off the plantation were forced to adapt, in ways that sacrificed a certain amount of order and control, for the attainment of profit. Not all white South Carolinians were so inclined to accept this “compromise,” and they made

⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 7 November 1761.

periodic attempts to apply the slave plantation controls to maritime laborers in general. However, as will be made clear below, Charleston's maritime workers met such attempts with effective resistance through the employment of tactics established in the previous decade—tactics developed through experiences with and knowledge of the Atlantic economy and work regime. Thus, while it may have seemed that the purpose of the Charleston waterfront was to serve the economic and political interests of its city and colony, in fact it reflected an internal set of rules and social configurations created and maintained by maritime workers that, while meeting many of the immediate economic needs of the propertied, undermined the system that tried to make people without property into property themselves. In a port such as Charleston, merchants, planters, tradesmen and retailers—the employers of free and slave laborers—made a daily decision to gamble that an unruly and mobile group of workers would bring them greater profits than losses as they broke free from supervision and frequently flouted the laws that regulated their work activities and free time.⁵

Evidence of the growth of Charleston as an important Atlantic port is clear. In 1751, Governor James Glen, in a letter to the Board of Trade in England, described the Cooper River as a floating market where river vessels, ranging in size from canoes to medium-sized sailing vessels, jostled one another and the ocean-going sailboats, as goods were brought to town and taken away again. Production and export of rice shot up from 47,652 barrels of rice in 1750 to 79,203 barrels in 1756. While there was a decrease in exports in the last few years of the 1750s, by 1761, South Carolina merchants handled the

⁵ For a discussion of the extent to which merchants and others put profit above the welfare of the colony, see Stuart Stumpf, "Implications of King George's War for the Charleston Mercantile Community," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 77 (1976), pp. 161-188.

export of 101,389 barrels of rice.⁶ From fall through late spring, the wharves and the grid of streets no more than three blocks distant from the wharves, where a majority of the merchants and artisans located their businesses, were filled with men and women handling this increased volume of goods. While many were employed in the loading and unloading of ships, others repaired, serviced and crafted the tools and vessels needed to maintain the maritime and plantation economies of South Carolina.⁷

The circumstances in and around Charleston in the 1750s cannot be fully understood outside the context of the previous decade. The waterfront environment in the 1740s had been particularly chaotic, and the reaction of merchants and planters in Charleston to the end of hostilities with the French and Spanish by 1749 was to engage in a concerted effort to achieve a sense of normalcy in their dealings with waterfront workers, and to focus on expanding their economic endeavors and profit-making. They were no longer faced with the constant threat of large-scale flight of sailors, servants and slaves to the Spanish and French. While Charleston residents' fears of invasion from French-allied Native Americans in the interior had not disappeared altogether, the possibility seemed more geographically distant and less likely. However, in October of 1754, the printer of the *South Carolina Gazette* had reached the conclusion that the months of accounts of troubles in the interior with Native Americans indicated a need for

⁶ These figures are noted in Figure 1 of Chapter 1, and they are drawn from: Converse Clowse, *Measuring Charleston's Overseas Trade*, pp.96-105 ; Peter Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream*, pp. 82-83, 100; Stanley Kenneth Deaton, "Revolutionary Charleston, 1765-1800 (University of Florida Dissertation, 1997), p. 55.

⁷Roy Merrens, *The Colonial South Carolina Scene*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1977), p. 181; Jeanne Calhoun, Martha Zierden and Elizabeth Paysinger, "The Geographic Spread of Charleston's Mercantile Community, 1732-1767," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 86 (1985), pp. 188-191. For additional general descriptions of the Charleston waterfront and the maritime activities of this port, see Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History*(Willwood, New York: KTO Press, 1983), pp. 181, 271, and 274-276; Walter Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!: The History of a Southern City*(Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), particularly pp. 45-81; Bridenbaugh, pp. 43-97.

war.⁸ It was not long before concerns regarding Native Americans and the French made an appearance in the correspondence of Governor Glen. In a letter from Glen to Virginia governor Robert Dinwiddie, he described the devastating potential of the French winning over the Indians and eventually using them to help conquer South Carolina for France. Over a year later Glen was still expressing his concerns, then to the Board of Trade, in accounts of the difficulties in affairs with the Cherokees that he attributed to the presence of the French within their towns.⁹ Members of the Commons House shared the governor's concerns, as evidenced by a letter from the House written to the Board of Trade in April of 1756 that echoed Glen's concerns and was presented in concert with a petition to the King for military aid made by Charles Pinckney, agent for South Carolina, on behalf of the Commons House of Assembly.¹⁰ These examples indicate that most of the attention of Charleston's officials was focused westward when the French and Indian war commenced, and that it was the interior threat of the French-allied Native Americans that drew concern, money and military responses.

This did not mean that property holding South Carolinians were unconcerned with the actions of their free and unfree maritime laborers. Rather than acting as a distracting force for those involved in overseas trade, the beginnings of conflict with the French in America and the subsequent war with France served to heighten concern over the efficiency of maritime activities. South Carolinians and their business partners were determined to take full advantage of any increases in demand and prices brought on by wartime scarcity. Within this context, it became even more important for maritime

⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 October 1754.

⁹ PRO January 1755.

¹⁰ PRO, 2 December 1756.

workers to exercise their agency to secure their customary, if limited, freedoms— freedoms that included choosing masters and employers, remaining unsupervised in work and non-work time, supplementing wages through unauthorized work or unwaged subsistence activities—and to leverage new rights and allowances from the merchants and their client planters who were dependent on their labor.

The danger for maritime workers in this period of intense scrutiny was that the slave regime's system of controls would become dominant along the waterfront, the bastion of relative independence. By working to keep the rules that held sway in Charleston different from those that could and often did prevail on plantations, sailors insisted that they continue to be treated as wage workers, servants and apprentices demanded limited tenure of service, and perhaps most significantly, slaves pushed for more control over the timing of and compensation for their labor. In this way, all maritime workers in Charleston worked to maintain Charleston's waterfront as an effective foil to the plantation slavery system. They continued to flout the regulations designed to keep them in one place and prevent them from determining their own work and living circumstances.

The key to the success of maritime workers' struggles was to make gains in freedoms without bringing about strong reactions and calls for corrective measures from officials and maritime employers. They worked to make their masters and employers accustomed to their unruly actions. That many waterfront employers viewed the unruly actions of sailors, servants and slaves as inconveniences requiring little more than minor adjustments is testament to the general success of the waterfront laborers in achieving this goal. Maritime workers continued to find ways to vex the property holders of South

Carolina and to challenge their system of controls enough to keep Charleston Atlantic in its identity and distinct from the plantation system.

Sailors throughout this period continued to exercise their “time-honored resistance” to impressment in the navy by deserting. While many in Charleston appeared to take this in stride, some officials did not. Upon taking charge of South Carolina in 1756, Governor William Henry Lyttelton thought it worth noting to the Board of Trade, that there were difficulties filling out naval crews in Charleston due to sailors and their employers’ adherence to the Sixth of Anne, a repealed piece of British law that had secured sailors employed on board colonial merchant vessels from impressment.¹¹ Despite Lyttelton’s comments, there is no evidence to suggest that sailors frequently deserted Charleston altogether and looked for escape north or south by land as they had in the 1740s. On the contrary, most sailors advertised as deserters in this period escaped to local places in a effort to try to avoid a particular naval press or service on a vessel that had proven distasteful for one reason or another. It was an important element of maintaining the Atlantic identity of the Charleston waterfront. For example, in May of 1759, the *South-Carolina Gazette* noted the delay in the departure of a convoy of vessels due to bad weather. The news continued with an account of how some vessels, delayed due to "uncommon desertion of seamen in the merchant service," were then able to join the convoy.¹² The notice is very matter of fact and reflects none of the lamentation that accompanied such news in the previous decade.

While desertion certainly did not please employers of maritime laborers in this period, they seemed largely unimpressed with this form of resistance. Indeed, the

¹¹ Governor Lyttelton to the Board of Trade, May 8, 1759, *BPRO General Correspondence*, pp. 98-100

¹² *South-Carolina Gazette* 18 May 1759.

frequent publication of accounts of the British Navy's press gangs in other parts of the world, whether it was intended or not, prepared Charleston's maritime employers for the inevitable outbreak of desertions in South Carolina. For example, issues of the *South Carolina Gazette*, beginning in the middle of 1755 and running through late 1756, noted press gangs taking up vagabonds in various parishes of England. There was an account of official proclamations calling back all British sailors serving on foreign vessels, and the authorization of bounties for volunteers for naval service or rewards for those who aided in identifying unemployed seamen eligible for the press. In another instance, the *Gazette* recounted news of the recall of warrants for surplus tidesmen, or customs searchers, who were then handed over to the navy press gang. These accounts of how naval officers tried to reach their full complements of men in England continued for just over 12 months, concluding with news of the impressment of over 1000 inexperienced men and boys—one group of 78 were described as "boys clothed at public expense." Those found unfit for naval service were transferred to officers of the marines.¹³ The emphasis in these accounts was the details of the actions of the press gangs. Certainly South Carolinians overseas with maritime trade interests looked at this news with a good deal of dismay, imagining the subsequent scarcity of sailors and concomitant increase in wages not unlike what they dealt with in the 1740s. While there was a brief respite for anxious readers of the *South Carolina Gazette*, accounts of rekindled presses appeared in the paper from June to October of 1759.¹⁴

Fortunately for sailors and their employers in Charleston during the 1750s and into the 1760s, the war with the French did not involve significant naval actions off the

¹³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 May 1755, 29 January 1756, 29 May 1756, 8 July 1756

¹⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 9 June 1759, 30 June 1759, 27 October 1759.

Low Country coast, and the area was generally removed from the activities of British naval vessels, particularly in their attempts to fill their crews. This did not mean that sailors in Charleston never deserted their ships when in port in order to avoid impressment. There was a naval presence in Charleston, and impressment was a real possibility, but it was not as likely as in the 1740s. In addition, as the accounts of impressment in England noted above make clear, sailors who shipped back out of Charleston were likely to end up in areas where the press was “hot.” British navy presses were common in many parts of the West Indies in addition to the British Isles, and there is evidence that sailors went to great lengths to escape the presses in these areas. Sailors took over the snow, *Thetis*, on its way from Jamaica to another (unspecified in the newspaper account) British port. Five sailors were noted as the ringleaders of this mutiny that lasted more than 50 hours. While poor treatment at the hands of the captain could have prompted them to lead this mutiny, any British port held out the possibility of impressment into the navy and fear of this is hard to discount as a motivation to mutiny. The five sailors gambled and lost in this particular case, as the captain was able to regain control of the ship by killing all five.¹⁵ The *South-Carolina Gazette* published a rather ambiguous account of direct resistance to impressment in Charleston in 1758. The local news piece described but did not explain an altercation between *New Grace*, a letter of Mark Ship (privateer) from Philadelphia, and 2 naval ships in Rebellion Road (the anchorage just inside the bar in Charleston Harbor). The 2 ships of war fired shots in order to bring *New Grace* about as the crew brought her up to the bar. Whether or not the men on board the letter of Mark Ship felt that they would be the victims of impressment

¹⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette* 13 March 1755. The ship *Thetis* was from Jamaica.

or not, they did not bring their vessel about as ordered, claiming, later, that it was unsafe to do so. Perhaps they believed that if the vessel could be cleared out by the their captain, then at Fort Johnson making the arrangements, before any naval officers came on board, they could avoid having any of their men taken for the man-of-war ships. If so, they gambled and lost, as the firing from the naval ships killed a foremast man and wounded another. The remainder of the crew was impressed and the captain and “second captain” of the vessel were arrested.¹⁶ The newspaper account implies that the incident may have been a case of naval officers trying to assert authority in an instance when they, from the perspective of Charleston residents, had no standing. The implicit condemnation of the violence used to impress the crew of the *New Grace* may be indicative of a general resistance in Charleston and its environs to naval impressment of sailors otherwise employed. If so, it speaks to sailors’ success in making efforts to avoid the naval presses, such as desertion, nearly an acceptable course of action in the eyes of South Carolinians.

For slaves too, the frequent resort to desertion produced an attitude of near resignation among slaveowners that kept the avenues of flight open and maintained Charleston as a destination for those who wished to find temporary or permanent reprieve from their conditions of servitude. Certainly, desertion remained a powerful tool for slaves. The number of published accounts of runaways increased over the average annual number published in the 1740s.¹⁷ But, unlike the 1740s, there were fewer notices for runaways that indicated that the slaves sought asylum in Spanish Florida. St. Augustine’s

¹⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette* 11 August 1758.

¹⁷ The increase in the number of fugitive slave advertisements is not necessarily an indication of an increase in the number of runaway slaves. As circulation of the *South-Carolina Gazette* increased, more planters and other slave owners may have been more inclined to place notices and more confident that such notices would be effective.

reputation as a refuge for fugitive slaves took some time to diminish, however. As late as October of 1749, the *South Carolina Gazette* ran a news piece that stated: “It seems, the *Spaniards* at *St. Augustine*... still continue the old Grievance... of encouraging the Desertion of Slaves [from South Carolina.]” The notice continued, highlighting the policy of granting limited citizenship and protection for the runaways. The final point of the article was to detail how “21 Negroes, own'd at *Port-Royal*, went off from thence, in a boat they stole from Capt. James Mackay.”¹⁸ Thus, it would appear that even though the Spanish were no longer a military threat, slaves hoped to continue to keep their masters on edge with the threat of large-scale desertion to St. Augustine as the period of more settled relations began. However, within a few short years, references to St. Augustine as a destination for fugitives virtually disappeared. The final notice that was accompanied by any commentary was in 1754 when 2 escaped slaves from Georgia purportedly received sanctuary St. Augustine. The editorial comment that, “the practice of enticing slaves” continued there seems to be an overstatement.¹⁹ The change in perception of slaveowners regarding St. Augustine in the 1750s is best demonstrated by the petition from the inhabitants of Georgia to the Lords of the Board of Trade asking for the ban on slave importations to their colony be lifted. They noted that the regulation was initially put in place to avoid the possibility of alliances between enslaved Africans in Georgia and the Spanish to the South, but that the danger had since passed.²⁰ From the end of King George’s War to the British occupation of Florida, the Spanish in St. Augustine lost their position as the most troublesome enemy neighbor of British Low Country settlers.

¹⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 23 October 1749.

¹⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette* April 2, 1754.

²⁰ PRO, 15 November 1750. The Trustees of Georgia wrote the memorial on The 8th of August.

Once it became a British territory, Florida lost much of its allure as a destination for escaped slaves from South Carolina, although the area remained sparsely settled and it was still possible for fugitives to remain at large in remote areas there.

Slave flight in this period, then, primarily took the form of temporary desertion. Flight to local areas where family or acquaintances could provide protection or to Charleston where employment and anonymity were both possible was quite common in the 1750s. These two forms of flight were by no means distinct, as both family and employment were frequently found in Charleston, and as the population of slaves became more diverse, South Carolina slaves could find connections of kinship or employment throughout the Atlantic. An examination of fugitive slave advertisements reveals this diversity and suggests the advantages it held for slaves. A 1752 advertisement described Paul, born in Barbados but well known in town. He had escaped with a fellow slave named Isaac. Both men were said to “pretend to be sailors.”²¹ The implication of this ad was that both men also pretended to be free. Passing as free was the stated goal of many of the escaped slaves in this period, particularly those who were multilingual or had lived for a time in other Atlantic colonies. For example John Louis, a French slave and Strephon, a carpenter who was born in the West Indies and frequently employed on schooners, were both known to or assumed to be masquerading as free men. Like John, a “mulatto fellow” from Virginia who had subsequently been enslaved in South Carolina for five years and described as “plausible in his speech,” all of the above slaves were

²¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 August 1752.

expected by those who advertised for their capture to be adept at creating a believable account of their circumstances and attempting to “get on board an outgoing vessel.”²²

Two cases highlight the inherent danger in making claims of freedom as a black man or woman in Charleston, particularly if the claimants came from another colony. The first example is an advertisement from the warden of the work house noting that he had incarcerated a man who he insisted on being called by his slave name, Primus, even though the man claimed to be free and had adopted the name William Sanders. Sanders was brought to the warden on suspicion of being a runaway, but he claimed to he was sold to a magistrate in Virginia who allowed him to purchase his freedom years ago, and he carried a pass signed by several Virginia and North Carolina magistrates authenticating this freedom.²³ This was apparently insufficient proof. The second example is an advertisement regarding Aaron Francis, also brought to the workhouse on suspicion of being a slave. Francis had apparently left a privateer in the harbor, changed his name, and when challenged, claimed that he was a former apprentice of a man in Rhode Island. Unfortunately for Francis, a merchant in town recognized him as the slave of William Dyer in Rhode Island, which was evidence enough to keep him in the workhouse.²⁴ Successfully passing as free in Charleston was by no means an easy task. Creating a credible account of free status was easier if a slave could demonstrate proficiency in two or more European languages. Thus, an enslaved man like John Louis, noted above as speaking French, advertised as a runaway who could speak English, French and Spanish and was “used to the sea,” and Luke, a slave sailor who spoke

²² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 20 August 1753, 13 October 1758 and 1 January 1759.

²³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12 August 1756.

²⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 8 September 1759.

English, French, Spanish and Dutch--just a few examples of slaves who had picked up knowledge of other languages as mobile Atlantic workers—stood a much better chance of finding work away from their masters and on their own terms.²⁵ Once made a part of the South Carolina slave population, these men shared their experiences as they interacted with recently arrived Africans and native-born African Americans--contributing to the Atlantic character of Charleston's waterfront community.²⁶

Charleston's Atlantic nature held out slightly different opportunities for white servants hoping to improve their circumstances through flight. Anonymity was not as easy to achieve, which left permanent desertion as the only means of altering the conditions of their labor. While the need for skilled labor may have provided some leverage for some of those indentured, the relatively small number of white servants and apprentices made both escape and clandestine activities more difficult. Charleston and the extended waterfront of South Carolina, with the constant flow of ships and sailors, provided the best avenue for escape. One notable case of a repeated runaway servant highlights the advantages and disadvantages of this environment for servants seeking to run away. In January and March of 1756, apprentice cooper Joseph Rose ran away and had been seen after his escape about town in a "sailor's habit" offering himself as a sailor.²⁷ Trying to pass as a free cooper in Charleston would likely have led to his apprehension, whereas, if he worked swiftly and found a willing captain, he could get out of the region rather quickly. By dressing as a sailor, he may also have hoped to avoid

²⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 22 August 1759, and 25 June 1763.

²⁶ For additional examples of runaway slaves with connections to the Atlantic colonies, see the advertisements for: George Preston from Jamaica, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 November 1759; Will and Guy, both West Indians who spoke "very good English," *South-Carolina Gazette*, 26 January 1760; and Toney, born in Bermuda, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 March 1760.

²⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 January and 18 March 1756.

close scrutiny from those with whom he may have been acquainted in his work for his master, Thomas Rose. The reappearance of the ad at a later date suggests that Joseph attributed his failure to avoid capture as bad luck and not that his plan was a bad one. So, apprentices and servants deserted their masters, but unlike sailors and slaves, they ran for good and hoped to put a great distance between themselves and those they were obligated to serve.

A servant running to or from a vessel was a common complaint of those advertising for the return of their laborers. Robert Clason, a carpenter and joiner, as well as a servant to George Marshall on Charleston Neck, ran away and was suspected of trying to gain passage on board a vessel as carpenter or sailor as he had been on several voyages in the past.²⁸ William James advertised for the return of his apprentice, Robert Nelson, who ran from the snow *Isaac*. He had been seen going out of town with a distant relative.²⁹ John Daniel, a French shoemaker, ran away from Benjamin Godfrey with another Frenchman. He was said to work well as a ship's carpenter, and it was thought that he would try to get to Mississippi.³⁰ Other runaway servants were noted to "pretend" to be skilled in several areas, perhaps to convince someone to lend them money for passage out of the colony with the promise of quick repayment at the destination port where they might be easily employed. This seems quite likely in the case of Jacob Prupacher, a German indentured servant who understood Latin and claimed that he was a doctor.³¹ George Michael Waller, a Dutch servant on the run from Peter Sanders,

²⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 February 1755.

²⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 5 December 1754; Also see: 24 December 1753, for an advertisement for John Dick, apprentice, a runaway from the Snow, *Nancy*, captained by Alexander Ritchie.

³⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 September 1753.

³¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 October 1754.

although advertised as only having skill with a plow, appears to have hoped to market himself as both a butcher and baker.³² It is important to note that, ironically, the policy of importation of white settlers designed to bring stability to the colony by offsetting the black population may have actually contributed to instability within the servant-holding households. As the populations of Irish, German, Dutch and others grew, their settlements in the area surrounding Charleston or in the back country became havens for runaway servants who looked for and often received assistance from familial or ethnic kin.³³

Still, the circumstances of servants could not be separated from those of slaves and sailors. Many of the servants who arrived in South Carolina and eventually found themselves indentured to men and women in Charleston or connected to the port, were part of a deliberate trade in such men and women designed to offset the effects of an ever-growing population of African and African American slaves. The intent was to import industrious and “useful” poor Protestants, and many Protestants with limited circumstances were brought to Charleston and Georgetown. The trouble was that the bounty designed to encourage this process led captains or their agents to recruit in such a way that the men and women who arrived were indebted to the captain for their passage and were forced into indenture to pay for it. In some cases, the indentures were not purchased, resulting in an increase of the colony’s poor population in need of public

³² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 22 May 1755.

³³ See advertisements for the return of: Henry George Fowler, a 17 year-old Dutch indentured servant, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 31 October 1754; John Swinn a runaway servant from Virginia, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 17 August 1752; William Madam and Samuel Wright, shoemakers and indentured servants from England, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 17 August 1752; Mark Herman, a German servant, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 16 January 1755; Jane MacKenzi from Scotland, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 3 December 1753; and A Dutch servant, bricklayer, with 3 years to serve as well as his wife, accustomed to dairy and poultry farming and three sons, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 December 1753.

support. Henry Laurens had direct experience with this difficulty when he and his partner George Austin were charged with recovering the costs of sending a cargo of “Palatines,” or German Protestants to South Carolina. It had been some time since the arrival of these men and women who had given bond when their indentures were not purchased, and Laurens indicated in a letter to his client that he was not hopeful that any more money would be recovered.³⁴ Despite these problems, merchants in Charleston were initially strong proponents of such importation schemes because they ensured the arrival of ships that could carry South Carolina produce back to England, the West Indies or Southern Europe. In fact, even after Laurens became disillusioned with dealing with the arrivals of Germans consigned to him, he lamented the end of the “palatine” trade reduced the number of ships in Charleston able to carry rice and indigo overseas and subsequently brought an increase in shipping rates.³⁵ Still, most of the poor Protestants arriving in Charleston unable to pay their passage became servants. Many skilled men were forced to work for their equals, in terms of experience, without compensation equal to the value of their labor. Such circumstances bred discontent and resort to the tools of resistance, such as desertion, that sailors and slaves employed in their battles to make Charleston’s waterfront work for them.

Maritime workers also found ways to push against the restrictions in their work and free time that did not involve desertion. Sailors were particularly unwilling to accept the revised regulations put in place to curtail their traditional resort to taverns and other establishments that retailed alcohol. Such establishments were abundant in Charleston.

³⁴ Laurens to Foster Cunliffe & Sons, 11 September 1756, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

³⁵ Laurens to Devonsheir, Reeve, & Lloyd, 16 October 1755; to Richard Meyler & Co, 8 December 1755; to Thomas Mears & Co., 18 December 1755, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

In a 1750 description of the condition of the colony written for the Board of Trade, James Glen listed the owners or tenants of the lots on the Bay, the main street along the Cooper River. Out of 83 occupied lots, 9 were either taverns or places of lodging. Historian Sharon Salinger points out that, from the early years of settlement, taverns were clustered most heavily in the areas surrounding the wharves. By 1762, there were 101 licenses granted for the retail of liquor and a majority of the establishments licensed were only one block distant from the Bay.³⁶ The large number of taverns and other similar establishments concerned lawmakers who passed a series of statutes designed to limit the number and control the use of these spaces.

Salinger outlines colonial laws regarding sailors and taverns and asserts that from the early date of 1695, in South Carolina, seamen (one-tenth to one quarter of the adult male population in port towns) attached to ships were barred from taverns after certain hours without written permission from the masters of their respective ships. In 1743, in response to the need to update the 1695 statute, sailors were denied credit beyond ten shillings (previously 5 shillings) to prevent delays in vessels' departures as sailors scrambled to find funds for their debts. In 1751, lawmakers revised that law, but kept the regulations intact, demonstrating both that there was a continuing problem and that lawmakers were still determined to curb the actions of sailors. The revision sought to limit access to any given tavern for sailors to one hour in every twenty-four. Salinger asserts that legislators intended to extend this regulation to general laborers and craftsmen, but no such law or amendment was ever passed. Salinger argues that, while such laws may reflect attempts at social control that went beyond merely ensuring a ready

³⁶ Sharon Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), pp.196-199.

workforce for merchant ships, these laws were designed to protect the meager earnings of sailors and curb their reputed tendencies to spend liberally when in port.³⁷ While there was certainly an element of concern for securing the wages in sailors' pockets, this law really reflected little concern for the welfare of sailors, but rather it reflected concerns for the larger community of which sailors were temporarily a part. Penniless sailors were a burden on public resources as they could, although rarely due to exclusionary policies, become wards of the parishes. Worse yet, and this is made explicit in laws regarding sailors and the parallel laws restricting economic activities of slaves and indentured servants, penniless sailors were presumed to engage in crime in order to fill their pockets again. The 1751 update of the law regarding the freedoms of Charleston sailors emphasized the continuing need to curb some of the problematic behavior of the preceding decade. Sailors were required to obtain a pass from their captains if they were discharged, and no one was to hire or entertain them without verifying that they had such a pass. Even their local movements were controlled, as they were not to be allowed to pass over any ferry without producing this ticket.³⁸ Again, Salinger sees the tavern-related aspects of this law as somewhat paternalistic rather than draconian, but she also fails to examine whether or not the statute altered sailors' tavern going experiences.

In fact, this law and others regarding taverns were rather difficult to enforce, given the large numbers of legal and illegal taverns where sailors could imbibe great quantities, often on credit. In skirting the laws, sailors appear to have found many willing accomplices in their disobedience in the form of slaves and servants. Presentments

³⁷ Salinger, pp. 38-40.

³⁸ Act No. 815, 17 May 1751, reprinted in John D. Cushing, *The First laws of South Carolina* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1981), pp. 225-226.

published in May of 1756 complained of tavern owners selling to sailors and slaves and even receiving stolen goods. In one specific complaint, they accused Daniel Matheny of operating a disorderly house for soldiers and sailors.³⁹ In 1760, the alarmed Grand Jury found sailors, soldiers and slaves to be gambling on Sundays and disturbing those attending church services.⁴⁰ Continuous calls made by grand juries for the effectual enforcement of ordinances barring sailors' imbibing to excess or accumulating debt in the process speaks to the continuation of exactly that. At least one merchant captain came into Charleston prepared for the temporary desertion of his men with the assistance of tavern keepers. He placed an advertisement in the *South Carolina Gazette*, stating that he had learned of several tippling houses in town that entertained and harbored sailors, and gave notice that he would both refuse to pay any debts of his sailors in such places and would prosecute those who ignored South Carolina laws regarding seamen.⁴¹ This law, like many others regarding social control, was highly dependent on self-regulation of one of the parties involved; in this case, the tavern keepers.

The difficulty in achieving compliance from tavern keepers lay in convincing them that the ends of the act were in keeping with their own interests. In most cases, they were not. Granting credit to sailors may not have been as risky as the authors of South Carolina's law and those of other colonies thought. While there may have been some cases where sailors ran out on large debts, and there were doubtless suits brought for recovery of various sums, it is more likely that in cases where credit became an issue, tavern operators would have been quite happy to harbor sailors until their ships were

³⁹ Grand Jury Presentments, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 May 1756.

⁴⁰ Grand Jury Presentments, 15 October 1760, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 October 1760.

⁴¹ *South-Carolina Gazette* 20 October 1759, Capt. Robe of the snow *Africa*.

gone and then allow them to find local employment to make payment on their debts. In other words, an alliance between tavern keepers and sailors was more likely than one between tavern keepers and lawmakers. There are suggestions that harboring sailors was a common practice from the 1730s through the Revolution in Charleston. The system of care for the sick and poor reveals a certain amount of such clandestine actions. In January of 1749, St. Philips Vestry gave notice in the *South Carolina Gazette* that the inhabitants of Charleston caring for lame or sick seamen were required to give notification to the wardens as soon as they took in a sailor if they hoped to receive compensation from the public funds. The notice implies that cases of pretended illness for the sake of harboring sailors were presented after the fact to cover up the action and to possibly make a profit at the same time. In return for secreting away sailors, these men and women, many of them likely tavern keepers, may have been promised future business or a portion of a sailor's advance pay on signing onto a new ship of their choosing. This certainly would have been an incentive in the war years of the 1740s when wages ran so high for those who signed on in South Carolina. The notice from the Church Wardens may have effectively reduced fraudulent claims for reimbursement for care of the sick, but it would have done little to uncover schemes to hide sailors in Charleston or to monitor their activities in drinking establishments.⁴²

Licensing laws for South Carolina taverns provide some insight into attempts to control the drinking habits of artisans, apprentices and servants. There was a good deal of talk of trying to limit the access of such men to taverns, but little was done or done effectively. Instead, lawmakers decided to limit licenses for operating public houses to

⁴² *South-Carolina Gazette* 19 January 1749.

those above or outside the world of artisanal labor. It was unlawful for a tradesman to operate a “tippling house” or tavern in South Carolina. In part, this regulation can be viewed as one of several attempts to maintain a population of white artisans in Charleston. The real possibility of a tradesman leaving his trade to keep a tavern full time made such a law necessary within the context of the perpetual concerns for the maintenance of a significant white population primarily in Charleston and in the rest of South Carolina.⁴³

The other factor that likely contributed to the need for a law excluding artisan proprietors of tippling houses was the distrust for the lower orders in the regulation of such establishments. Craftsmen were simply not trusted to adhere to the rules regarding the sale of alcohol to sailors, slaves and servants. Salinger suggests that another fear of lawmakers in this regard was that an establishment run by an artisan was more likely to become an exclusively laboring class establishment. In this situation, lawmakers imagined a greater possibility of criminal activity and the gathering of the discontented that might lead to the plotting of rebellions.⁴⁴ Despite some efforts to the contrary, however, laborers, particularly sailors, continued to gather in taverns and make plans designed to place their needs and desires above those of the masters or employers.

It is clear from some of the examples of tavern regulations and their enforcement that slaves were also known to frequent drinking establishments. The slave population of Charleston was large enough for a degree of anonymity could be achieved. This certainly made it easier for slaves to find their way into taverns without being identified, and also contributed to the success of one of the most effective forms of slave resistance--

⁴³ Salinger, p. 156.

⁴⁴ Salinger, pp. 156-157.

continuing practice of self-hire. While sailors may have allied with tavern keepers on a regular basis, they depended on the men and women in Charleston in need of ready, inexpensive labor. Self-hire was clearly forbidden by law but just as clearly allowed in practice. For example, Kate and her son, who formerly belonged to Mrs. L'Esquot of Charleston, had run away and Kate was known to "go about as a washer woman" and was suspected of being harbored by white persons in exchange for wages.⁴⁵ Similarly, Moll, another runaway, was known as a washerwoman in town.⁴⁶ George, a former chimney sweep of Charleston, ran away from Alexander Fraser of Goose-Creek who implied that George might take up his old profession to support himself.⁴⁷ Sambo would have had little trouble finding work and staying out of the sight of authorities after he deserted. He was a "pettiauger man" who, according to his owner, hired himself out on vessels.⁴⁸ Similarly, Siah, who ran away with two other men, was well suited to find work in Charleston and stay out of sight as he was not only used to hiring himself out as a shoemaker--his trade--but he had experience as a boatman and caulker as well.⁴⁹ Kate, a practiced runaway who had been "harbored" for 23 months in the past, ran again with her children and was assumed to be looking for work in "some of the negro washing-houses or kitchens" in town.⁵⁰ Will who "has followed the sea some time," was absent from John Pettigrew's service, and continued to hire himself out despite advertisements intended to

⁴⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 21 May 1750.

⁴⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 17 December 1753.

⁴⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12 March 1754.

⁴⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 October 1757.

⁴⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 September 1758.

⁵⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 October 1757.

prevent it.⁵¹ Betty, described as a good seamstress, also ran away and pretended to have permission from her master to hire herself out.⁵²

The practice of slaves marketing goods without a specific pass was also common, and frequently brought calls for both stricter regulation of market practices and the elimination of unofficial huckstering. In 1761, the commissioners of the markets reminded patrons that fees must be paid with every use of stalls, and warned slaveholders that goods would be seized from any slaves arriving at the market without a ticket. Again, a look at the runaway advertisements for this period confirms the practice of sending slaves to the markets or allowing them to sell in the streets. For example, Hannah was well known for selling cakes and other goods in the town markets, and Jack was known as a hawker of fruits in the streets of Charleston. Whether or not York worked in the markets, on a boat bringing goods to the market, or simply helped to load and unload canoes and pettiaugers, he was last known to be at the market wharf before he ran away.⁵³

While some maritime workers and those they lived and worked with ignored laws with the cooperation of some South Carolinians, others broke laws with far less local support or resigned acceptance. Observers frequently attributed reported robberies, either through eyewitness testimony or assumption, to sailors who were unemployed, or perhaps self-employed. In either homogenous groups or in cooperation with soldiers or others, sailors engaged in theft in and around town and made off with significant sums of money. In one case, a sailor and soldier duo were apprehended after a theft and carted

⁵¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 5 January 1759.

⁵² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14 March 1761.

⁵³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 December 1751, 26 February 1752 and 18 August 1757.

off to jail. The sailor was not held there long, as he made his escape, prompting the Provost Marshall to offer a reward for his return.⁵⁴

Sailors may have resorted to theft when they ran out of resources in the process of deserting. Certainly slaves frequently resorted to theft when employment was too risky or insufficient to meet their needs after deserting. Throughout this period, slaves were accused of, or caught in the act of robbing houses, stores, warehouses or individuals traveling in or out of town. In one case, the merchants Stead and Evance had 2 pieces of “very good white plains” stolen from their back store. They noted, “its not unlikely that the two pieces of plains were carried into the country for sale by some boat-Negroes or others.”⁵⁵ John Paul Grimke noted that his slaves Cuffee and Sharper frequently stole from him and ran away to be harbored and entertained while their money lasted. Sharper had just run again, and all were warned not to harbor or entertain or sell rum to him.⁵⁶ Dumbar and Young had a store on Broad Street “broken open” by 2 slaves, Quash and Glasgow. Quash was taken, but Glasgow made his escape despite being wounded by a cutlass.⁵⁷ These examples and others suggest that crimes committed by slaves and others in and around Charleston were not unusual and that law enforcement in this period faced serious impediments. In the Grand Jury presentments, along with the ubiquitous citations of tavern keepers for selling to slaves and sailors and other actions contributing to disorder, were frequent reminders that the physical infrastructure for law enforcement was insufficient. The jail was too small, too weak or poorly attended. The watch and patrols were frequently cited for poor enforcement or attendance to duties. Others drew

⁵⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 3 October 1754.

⁵⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 April 1752.

⁵⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 19 January 59.

⁵⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 9 February 1760.

negative comments regarding their enforcement of regulations designed to maintain order, particularly among the population of slaves. In addition, there were frequent calls from Grand Juries to halt practices such as illegal trading on the rivers, particularly of alcohol, gaming and “caballing” on Sundays and the dangerous practice of entrusting slaves and servants with arms during church service.⁵⁸

The fact that Grand Juries repeated these complaints, and there were calls for action all the way through the 1750s and into the 1760s speaks to the limited abilities of the lawmakers to place effective controls on the laboring population of Charleston, dominated by those with maritime experience. Any change in the established patterns of illegal actions would require the cooperation of a large segment of the white propertied population. That this cooperation was not forthcoming was a testament to maritime workers’ successes in legitimizing their actions to such a degree that they were seen as normal and unworthy of the attention of most property holders. So it was that on June 27, 1768, Elias Vanderhorst was forced to place the following remarkable advertisement:

...Ran away last night... A negro man named Tom, born in the Havanna, speaks Spanish and French, a very likely fellow, and somewhat used to the house carpenter’s trade... Peter, a short well set fellow... Pompey, a middle sized [fellow]... [h]e can write and read, and talk good English, [a] wench named Arabella, is very likely, short and slim... and [h]er child [who] answers to the name of Castila... As there is a small schooner or fishing boat missing this day, it’s suspected they may have [gone] off in her; and as some other Negroes are missing, among whom is

⁵⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 May 1756 and 25 October 1760.

a French or Spanish fellow, a fisherman, it is strongly suspected that they are gone to the Southward on their way to the Havanna. Any person or persons apprehending and securing said Negroes so that the subscriber may have them again, shall receive One Hundred Pounds currency reward, besides all reasonable charges.⁵⁹

The fact that such a considerable number of slaves could find the means run together and to commandeer an appropriately sized vessel to get them to Cuba is strong testament to the success of maritime workers in keeping such avenues open and available when circumstances were right for such bold strikes against the plantation labor regime of South Carolina. The next decade leading up to the American Revolution would change the nature of Charleston's population once again and offer new opportunities and challenges for laborers and employers alike.

⁵⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, June 27, 1768.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FURTHER ENTRENCHMENT OF MARITIME WORKERS' CULTURE

In the 1750s, both employers and workers solidified Charleston's identity as an Atlantic port. Through their actions, they intricately tied the colonial port to the larger international economy and its accompanying flow of goods and people. Beginning in the 1760s, the changed environment outside of South Carolina increased residents' confidence in their place in this Atlantic economy. The close of the Seven Years War, by treaty, removed the Spanish from Florida. This presented new opportunities for many land owning and mercantile employers to increase production of marketable goods and expand their wealth, which is reflected in the expanded exportation of rice from 92,000 barrels in 1764 to 126,000 in 1773.¹ This significant expansion of plantation production and the rise in the commercial activities that went with it was fueled by access to land in East Florida and the opening of "new" territory in portions of Georgia previously considered too close to Spanish territory.

This physical expansion was still orchestrated from Charleston, as the center for British-backed financing in the South, despite the fact that much of it occurred in Georgia and East Florida. This forced many masters and employers of maritime laborers to

¹ See Figure 4, and Coclanis, pp. 82-83, 100; and Deaton, p. 55. On average, 110,000 barrels were shipped annually in this 9-year period.

revisit issues of effective supervision and restraint of mobile workers. The close of the French and Indian War in 1763, a war that had required very little participation from South Carolinians, imposed itself in somewhat subtle and less subtle ways. For instance, many of the soldiers and sailors in the conflict, now that they were released from service, flooded into the backcountry and the port city, contributing to Charleston's population increase, from approximately 6,000 in 1750 to approximately 12,000 in 1770.² The increase in population made Charleston even more anonymous and consequently easier to blend or disappear into than it was when John Collings fled the waterfront in the 1740s. Continued problems of poor representation of backcountry residents and little legal recourse intensified and brought problems of roving bands of outlaws that could only be controlled by the creation of unofficial policing force—the extralegal organization of settlers, or Regulators, as they called themselves. For the propertied, the changes that accompanied the opening up of territory and economic expansion complicated matters in relation to labor control. For both free and enslaved workers, these changes presented new opportunities for testing controls and bending rules regarding their work and non-work activities.

For many in this period, attempts to finally create a pliant and efficient workforce took center stage. Particularly revealing is the correspondence of Henry Laurens who had only recently adopted the role of planter. On the one hand, this new venture was quite natural and fitting given Laurens's social and economic ambitions, but on the other hand, it proved quite daunting. In the early period of his activities as a planter he depended on the expertise of his brother-in-law, John Ball, to run his Mepkin and

² Walter Fraser, "The City Elite, 'Disorder,' and the Poor Children of Pre-Revolutionary Charleston," *SCHM*, 1983, p. 167; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, pp. 5, 333.

Wambaw plantations. Still, the fact that he took a direct role in the decision making process for each is clear in both his correspondence to his daughter's husband and to individual overseers before and after his brother-in-law's death.³ Many of the practical aspects of operating a plantation were new to Laurens, and he was forced to uncover a variety of problems and deal with them himself. Thus, some of the assumptions and automatic (and therefore unrecorded) actions, which were second nature to experienced planters, represented revelations to Laurens. His correspondence regarding the plantations provides an unusually detailed look at the labor involved in the plantation economy and the attempts to control those who did that labor. In addition, his concerns and actions are highly representative of both new and well-established planters and propertied residents of Charleston from 1760 onward.

Of primary and near constant concern for Laurens, and an indication of the deep influence of maritime workers on their plantation counterparts, was the movement of the enslaved plantation workers to and from Charleston, by land and by water. For example, at one point, Laurens felt the need to chastise one of his overseers, Abraham Schad, for laxity in discipline after 2 slaves made the trip from Wambaw, located nearly midway between Charleston and Georgetown, to his town residence without permission. From his wry comment that he was left to pay for the ferriage of these 2 slaves just to "satisfy their curiosity" over happenings in Charleston, it is obvious that these men, Jack and Nat, made the trip on their own initiative.⁴ This case suggests that Laurens was concerned that the example of these men might inspire others to make random trips to his house in

³ George C. Rogers, et al, eds., *Papers of Henry Laurens, Volume 4, 1763-1765*(Columbia: University of Sout Carolina Press, 1974), p. xvii. Ball passed away in 1764.

⁴ Laurens to Abraham Schad, 23 July 1765.

Charleston. Another example indicates the nature of Laurens's concerns over slave mobility. Amos was causing Laurens concern due to his willingness to engage in various entrepreneurial activities while delivering goods and messages from town to country. Laurens warned the overseer that Amos was showing "a great inclination to turn rum merchant," and Schad was ordered to seize any rum he found with the man exceeding the one bottle he was apparently allowed for his own use. Similarly, Abram, a slave boatman and future patrol, was deemed troublesome and deserving of punishment. Schad was told to whip Abram severely if and when he made an appearance at the landing near Laurens's Wambaw plantation.⁵ It is unclear what the man's transgression was, but it is possible that since his plans were unclear and his whereabouts unknown, he ran away temporarily or even appropriated the vessel that he was in charge of for his own uses. This latter possibility may not have been so unusual, as in another letter Laurens complained that he was obliged to send out a canoe to locate his boat that was supposed to be collecting shells for delivery to an inland plantation.⁶

Despite his concerns about the untrustworthy nature of men like Amos and Abram, Laurens appeared unwilling or unable to do without them. Indeed, the necessity of minimally supervised and highly mobile laborers is clear in their continued employment and in references to other men who filled similar purposes. For nearly a year, letters between Laurens and his country correspondents never failed to mention that Laurens had received or would send word via his slave Martinico.⁷ In other instances, skilled slaves owned by Laurens earned him money through their wages as they worked

⁵ Henry Laurens to Abraham Schad, 30 April 1765.

⁶ Laurens to James Marion, 10 July 1765 *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁷ Laurens to the following: Timothy Creamer, 25 January 1765; Abraham Schad, 16 May 1765; James Marion, 15 July 1765; *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

on board vessels or moved about to meet the demands for their carpentering and general building skills.⁸ It is clear that the success of Laurens's merchant and planter interests depended on such mobile, often skilled slaves.

The frequent resort of many planters and merchants to laborers like Amos and Martinico, as messengers with varying degrees of responsibility, is also evident in a reading of the South Carolina newspapers. For example, the merchants and factors, Swallow and Poole, had depended on the use of at least one schooner and two of their own slave boatmen to successfully engage in their business centered in Charleston and at Bacon's Bridge.⁹ When they terminated their partnership in 1768, they advertised the sale of the boatmen and schooner, *Little Dorchester*.¹⁰ Elizabeth Richardson, widow of Captain Henry Richardson, placed a similar advertisement in order to sell his schooner and boat hands.¹¹ John Marley's estate also included several schooners, the largest capable of carrying 220 barrels of rice. These vessels were operated by 10 of his boatmen, 3 of whom were patroons.¹² Owners of estates also relied on their own boats and boatmen. Jacob Werner's plantation, 12 miles up the Ashley River from Charleston, included slave boatmen and a pettiauger capable of carrying 6 cords of firewood.¹³ From the details of the notice of the estate sale, it is clear that Joseph Scott's plantation, on which he employed slave boatmen, was some distance from town, as his widow had

⁸ *Henry Laurens Ledger*, see entries with the header October 1766 and August 1768.

⁹ This is likely a reference to an area at the head of the Ashley River, which appears to have received its name from an actual bridge that crossed that river near Dorchester, and was a shipment point for goods produced on plantations above the point of navigation. See footnote 1 on page 114 and footnote 2, p. 570 of *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 June 1765.

¹¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 21 November 1768.

¹² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 March 1773.

¹³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 26 November 1772.

arranged for boats to “attend at Price’s Wharf” to carry passengers to the sale.¹⁴ Traditional reliance on enslaved maritime workers in South Carolina’s plantation economy meant that new demands for transport to and from more distant plantations in this period of expansion, despite drawbacks, were met by the continued and expanded employment of slave boatmen.

With most of the local vessels manned, and sometimes commanded, by free or enslaved black men, merchants and planters like Laurens were sometimes forced to rely on the memory, knowledge, and word of slave boatmen and patroons for instructions on how to handle, where to deliver, and at what price to attempt to sell the goods they delivered. For example, in one instance, there was some confusion over the consignment of a shipment of pitch that arrived by schooner in Charleston from a planter in St. Stephen’s Parish. While Laurens believed the cargo was destined for his storage warehouse, the slave patroon, who made regular trips to and from plantations along the Western Branch of the Cooper River, told him that he thought it was consigned to another merchant. Three or four days later, the pitch was still on the wharf and Laurens was forced to store it before it was ruined by exposure. While there was no clear evidence of intentional deception on the part of the patroon, it is instructive that Laurens had no other recourse than to depend on the information provided by this non-white patroon.¹⁵ Indeed, despite this potentially costly error, Laurens relied on the same man for the delivery of pitch from his brother-in-law John Ball. He depended on the word of the

¹⁴ CJ 29 July 1766.

¹⁵ Laurens to Thomas Cooper, 8 September 1763, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

patroon that he would make a trip to the upriver estate quickly in order to bring the goods down in time to take advantage of a high price for the same.¹⁶

The expansion of landholdings into Georgia and Florida created more demand for coastal water traffic which was met in part by the addition of locally owned vessels and an increase in the number of boat hands and sailors. Like the long-established river and coastal transport system, this new fleet of coasters and its accompanying crew presented additional problems for planters and merchants with interests centered in Charleston. These problems included keeping vessels on time, getting goods to market and getting them handled properly, and keeping reliable captains or patroons and crews. They were all challenging tasks, but essential to successful participation in the expanding plantation economy. A combination of keeping track of vessels, keeping them on time, and seeking supervision for captains and crews had Henry Laurens writing to personal and business acquaintances from Georgetown to St. Augustine throughout the 1760s. For example, in a letter to Joseph Brown, merchant of Georgetown, Laurens thanked him for his assistance to Captain Blythe, master of one of Laurens's schooners, in either loading or unloading a cargo there.¹⁷ In a letter to William Yate, a carpenter employed at his plantation at Wambaw, Laurens explained that he was forced to ask the overseer to make arrangements for the purchase of corn from neighboring plantations as his schooner was delayed in Port Royal and could not deliver the corn that Laurens had available in Charleston in time to reach the plantation and meet its immediate needs.¹⁸ In a letter to Samuel Wragg in Georgetown, Laurens asked that he assist the crew of his schooners,

¹⁶ Laurens to Ball ,2 March 1764, , *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁷ Laurens to Joseph Brown, 22 October 1765, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁸ Laurens to William Yate, 24 February 1766, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

who were “seeking for employ,” in finding a considerable amount of pine planking. He also informed Wragg that he was building a schooner expressly for the lumber trade between Georgetown and Charleston. A revealing comment about vessel crews and dock workers imbedded in the letter notes that since the lumber will be unloaded at his own landing, the typical factor’s charges for “wharfage, portorage, and *pilferage*” [italics inserted] could be avoided.¹⁹

Problems with local boats and crews were nearly constant and even the ostensibly trustworthy white captains of South Carolina’s local vessels proved unreliable. Indeed, Laurens complained frequently in his letters to business associates of the captains of the vessels he owned or employed. If they were not dishonest, they failed to maintain proper control over crews. For example, in a letter to business associates, he complained that Captain Courtin, the previous master of his ship, *Flora*, was mistaken in his accounts with Laurens. He feared that it was more than carelessness or a poor recollection of transactions, as Courtin claimed he was owed for goods given to Laurens, but Laurens claimed to have paid him in coin in sight of his clerk. In addition, Courtin took fees for pilotage on his departure from Charleston. When this amount proved insufficient to pay the pilot in full for services, the captain kept the £30 and simply directed the pilot to seek his fees from Laurens back in Charleston.²⁰ While the replacement for Captain Courtin was much more honest and apparently quite capable, he was not authoritative enough and failed to deal with a troublesome mate, described as a “hinderer of business.”²¹ Laurens complained in another letter that Peter Bachop, master of his schooner *Broughton Island*,

¹⁹ Laurens to Samuel Wragg, 5 April 1766, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

²⁰ Laurens to William Cowles & Co., 18 February 1768, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

²¹ Laurens to Willaim Cowles & Co., 8 February 1768, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

was delayed in departing for St. Augustine because two of Lauren's slave hands for the vessel refused to accompany Bachop on the trip. Much to Laurens's dismay, the schooner captain had allowed the slave sailors to leave the vessel, and they promptly hid themselves in Charleston in order to avoid Bachop and Laurens knowing that their master would order them on the trip.²² A lack of careful accounting deemed intentional, like that of Captain Courtin noted above, also arose in affairs with Captain Doran, whom Laurens employed to transport some Irish Catholic servants to St. Augustine. He was told that, if he was unable sell their indentures there, Laurens would advance sums necessary for their maintenance from another account with someone in Florida. Captain Doran did find ready buyers for the indentures, but he claimed otherwise, and then asked for charges to be made for their care anyway.²³ Constant vigilance on the part of this merchant and planter was needed to maintain minimum control over his boats, and Laurens was prepared to take matters into his own hands whenever it was necessary. Indeed he determined that he would act in the matter of the incompetent or purposely obtuse mate if the captain did not, as he could not afford to have this man slow down preparations for future voyages or even, through his extreme negligence, damage the ship or its tackle. Still, Laurens's ordeals with the *Flora* were not over once the mate was taken care of, as several members of the crew subsequently deserted.²⁴

Lack of control over maritime laborers was just one of the practical challenges facing merchants and planters anxious to take make the most of opportunities in an expanding economy in the 1760s. There were additional dangers involved in water

²² Laurens to James Grant, 31 March 1768, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

²³ Laurens to Henry Cunningham, 25 May 1768, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

²⁴ Laurens to William Cowles & Co., 18 February 1768, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

transport, some of which were more environmental, as seen in the entry in Henry Laurens's ledger that indicated a charge for detaining his schooner *Baker* 2 days after she was loaded and all hands on board to assist in getting up John Harleston's schooner sunk in the river.²⁵ In addition, inattention could lead to damage done to goods. For example, in January of 1765, Richard Beresford filed suit against Stephen Miller, the owner and patroon of a schooner. Beresford, a merchant and operator of a wharf in Charleston, charged Miller with breach of contract due to the improper care of his rice during shipment on Miller's schooner whereby 36 of the 49 barrels on board were spoiled.²⁶ While it was unclear whether or not Miller had made a guarantee for delivery of undamaged goods, Robert Raper, another entrepreneur in the transport business, was careful to state clearly in his advertisement soliciting customers for a transport vessel, described as the "Watboo boat," that the owner was not responsible for any damage or embezzlement of goods taken on board the boat. Of course he wished to assure future customers that all possible care would be exercised in transporting goods.²⁷ While the boatmen and patroon of this vessel were ostensibly trustworthy and skilled, experience had demonstrated that no boatman was completely trustworthy, and real or claimed accidents could happen in the transport of any goods. When placed within this context of unforeseen dangers, and coupled with periodic accounts of lost vessels at sea or along coastal stretches, reliance on water transport, even though it was clearly the least costly and most timely manner of bulk transport in South Carolina, put goods and the potential profits arising from their sale at risk. In this environment of potentially disastrous

²⁵ Henry Laurens Ledger, November 1769.

²⁶ Charles Fraser Commonplace Book, SCDAH, 27 January 1765.

²⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14 January 1764.

accidents and general uncertainty in transport of valuable goods, the resort to employment of the marginally dependable to the outright troublesome among maritime laborers is far more understandable. The ability to take chances was a necessary trait among those who hoped to profit by getting goods to market quickly when prices were high.

With attention so clearly turned toward creating or adding to wealth among white South Carolinians, the perennial problem of lax law enforcement and vigilance, without which officials were virtually powerless, was exacerbated. The fact that two of Laurens's slaves could pass a ferry and get to Charleston without permission speaks to the inability or lack of interest of the larger community in regulating slaves that were not their own. Indeed, in a letter to Joseph Brown in Georgetown, Laurens explained that he was sending a repeated runaway, Sampson, for Brown to sell to the best of his ability. He revealed that the man ran away from his Mepkin plantation and was apparently harbored by a "poor worthless fellow" who employed him in indigo production.²⁸ Laurens wished to be rid of Sampson because he feared the bad example he might set for other slaves. However, the white man who harbored Sampson also particularly outraged him, and he devoted a good portion of the letter to detailing his bad behavior. This was the trouble that Laurens frequently faced, even from those over whom he ostensibly had some control—his overseers. Schad was chastised for not making examples out of transgressors and for allowing the transgressions to be repeated, as the letters referenced above indicate. Many slave owners were frustrated, like Laurens, at the lack of community participation in the monitoring of their slaves, particularly those employed in

²⁸ 28 June 1765 Laurens wrote to Joseph Brown, Georgetown.

maritime pursuits, outside of their plantation or town properties. Such was the case for George Sommers, who gave notice that Domina, his slave, consistently absented himself from the schooner for 3 or 4 days at a time whenever it went to town. He hoped that this might prompt anyone who found Domina away from the vessel to turn him in to authorities or take him back to the boat.²⁹ Similarly, David Rhind warned all cabinet makers, carpenters and others not to employ York, his slave, without his permission, as York hired himself out without permission.³⁰

The “trouble” that freely moving and unsupervised maritime workers caused, highlighted in several of Laurens’s letters above, hindered the profit making endeavors of many property holders in and around Charleston. For instance, when Daniel Greenwood, an apprentice, deserted the *Planters Adventure*, the owner was likely forced to delay departure of the vessel.³¹ Indeed, near-constant complaints of illegal entertainment of servants, sailors and slaves in taverns and unlicensed tippling houses also indicate that workers frequently took themselves out of the work environment. Under these circumstances, controlling the movement of goods and workers from the interior to the Greater Charleston waterfront and back again was not easily done, and the workers involved in this transit did more than just run away or work at their own pace. This is seen in the advertisements of property holders who became the “victims” of the frequently unsupervised, but ostensibly properly employed, maritime workers. These maritime laborers stood to gain a good deal through activities that supplemented their incomes and provided them with opportunities for non-waged subsistence. For example,

²⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette* 7 January 1765.

³⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette* 6 August 1772.

³¹ *South-Carolina Gazette* 1 June 1769.

in one complaining notice, Bull's Island and Vanderhorst's Island (renamed Dewee's Island by new ownership) were separately noted as places where unauthorized hunting and foraging took place. Specifically, “various people” in schooners were singled out as frequent offenders.³² William Edings complained of the loss of timber, horses, and other goods to those who stopped on his sea islands near the mouth of the Edisto River.³³ Similarly, George Ford was compelled to place an advertisement forbidding hunting, fishing or timbering on his property on South Island near Winyah Bar.³⁴ Closer to Charleston, John Holmes complained of people coming to the west end of James Island and calling over to his plantation to be carried across the river or to have letters delivered—he would no longer allow this activity.³⁵ Likewise, John Scott, Jr. forbade patrols and others from going to his plantation on James Island “under pretence of fetching water, cutting wood or digging up ballast.”³⁶ Finally, discovery that “Sheep-Stealing Gentlemen” stopped at the east end of Bull’s Island to “take in new stock” on a regular basis enraged Thomas Shubrick. After the overseer on his plantation determined, by following tracks, that several sheep had been herded by dogs to a nearby landing, Shubrick offered a £50 reward for any seaman who would come forward and inform on any captain of the “northward coasters” that had likely engaged in this thievery.³⁷

Other advertisements and complaints noted that certain points along the rivers near but not in Charleston might have provided unauthorized access to Charleston. Several owners of property on Charleston Neck, the bridge of land providing access to

³² *South-Carolina Gazette* 7 January 1765.

³³ 8 June 1765.

³⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette* 30 June 1766.

³⁵ *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 21 October 1766.

³⁶ *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 28 February 1769.

³⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette* 17 May 1773.

the peninsula town, suspected that the slaves and sailors who passed through their fields did so to engage in theft in the town or sell stolen goods. For example, Thomas Gadsden warned repeat trespassers on his Charleston Neck property that it was newly fenced in and occupied by 2 white men who would enable him to prosecute future trespassers and other offenders.³⁸ Five years later, a group of property owners on Charleston Neck complained of the frequent passage of slaves coming and going from Charleston without tickets and with goods for sale. They stated that they could not tell the runaways from the authorized market slaves and subsequently suffered thefts at the hands of the runaways. Their notice concluded with a warning that slaves without tickets that listed the goods they were authorized to carry would be seized.³⁹ In response to repeated complaints, William Pinckney threatened to prosecute any and all owners of coasting schooners or other craft that were not properly supervised by a white person according to law. He points out that such practices had led to the frequent plundering of plantations along the Ashepoo River.⁴⁰ Criminal activity on and adjacent to waterways was raising more and more alarm among Lowcountry residents. Echoing the frustrations and wishes of many victimized property holders in and around Charleston, the printer of the *South-Carolina Gazette* noted in 1773 that boat and canoe theft had become so common that it seemed appropriate, in order to curb such activity, to treat thieves of these articles as horse thieves (subject to capital punishment) in order to prevent further thefts. The

³⁸ *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 1 December 1767.

³⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette* 22 October 1772; the “inhabitants” were: John-Crew Robinson, John Donovan, Charles Strother, John Douglas, Melchior Werly.

⁴⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette* 2 May 1771.

implied problem with this pattern of theft was that it interfered with the efficient flow of goods and contributed to the unsupervised movement of maritime workers.⁴¹

Many of the advertisements for runaway slaves in the years preceding the American Revolution clearly indicated that slave-owners perceived that the missing men or women were accustomed to going to and from Charleston or other coastal areas with frequency and were essentially unnoticed by residents there. The resort to Charleston by a number of unknown men and women of African descent was noted and complained of by the grand juries of St. Philip's. A 1769 list of presentments from this body included a complaint that the poor of the backcountry and from other colonies converged on Charleston.⁴² This increased both the free white and free black populations and made the oversight of servants in town more difficult. In October of the same year, the grand jury presented a problem related to this increased number of strangers in Charleston by demanding that every free black register with the parish and obtain a badge for identification purposes.⁴³ This was clearly an attempt to limit the ease with which enslaved men and women passed as free people in Charleston. These concerns over runaways had not waned by January of 1770, and the grand jury reiterated the need for a badge system for the free black population and called for limits on property-owning for these men and women. There is no doubt that this last suggestion was meant to prevent the frequency of harboring runaways. This last group of jurors also reiterated the connected concern that Charleston was the frequent refuge for the poor of the colony. Looking for someone to blame for the increased numbers of runaways in Charleston,

⁴¹ *South-Carolina Gazette* 21 June 1773.

⁴² Grand Jury Presentments, 22 April 1769, "Journal of the South Carolina Court of General Sessions, 1769-1776," (JGS) South Carolina Archives Microcopy no. 14.

⁴³ Grand Jury Presentments, 16 October 1769, JGS.

these convened residents of Charleston lashed out at the militia officers who were extremely lax in carrying out the slave patrols. The ultimate fear in this respect did not go unstated, as the jurors warned that these circumstances could easily lead to an uprising of slaves that would endanger all of the white population.⁴⁴

As seen in the accounts above, some of the propertied of the Lowcountry viewed the free movement of enslaved men and women as dangerous and a weakness in the slave plantation system. The specter of a massive slave revolt was ever present. For instance, Lieutenant Governor Bull informed the Board of Trade, with a mixture of alarm and satisfaction, of a planned slave insurrection made known to authorities in late 1765. Historian Robert Olwell suggests that this conspiracy was discovered after a temporary increase in the surveillance of the enslaved population following one or more parades of slaves through the streets of Charleston at night calling for liberty.⁴⁵ According to Bull, the details uncovered indicated that the potential rebels planned their revolt for Christmas, and the Lieutenant Governor called out the patrol and militia to stop the “customary” slave gatherings on the holiday, and thus prevented the plan from coming to fruition. In the same report, Bull indicated that a great number of runaways had created camps deep within the swamps that served as refuge points for other runaways and a home base for raids on travelers and plantations.⁴⁶ The Belfast National Liberator reported in 1767 that there were accounts of several troublesome backcountry gangs,

⁴⁴ Grand Jury Presentments, 19 January 1770, JGS.

⁴⁵ Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects*, p. 225. Olwell draws his evidence from a letter from Henry Laurens to John Lewis Gervais on 29 January 1766. Laurens claimed that patrols were active in the countryside for 10-14 days and that the inhabitants of Charleston created a citizen guard for a week. He also characterizes the uproar as overblown and the sole result was the banishment of one slave who could not be proved guilty of any conspiratorial actions. Laurens to John Lewis Gervais, 29 January 1766, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁴⁶ William Bull to Board of Trade, 25 January 1766, Original Correspondence.

either corroborating Bull by using alternative accounts of this situation or simply reprinting details from his report for its readership.⁴⁷ In either case, it was public knowledge that havens for runaways in the countryside were growing in number and only worsened fears of an organized revolt. Still, little was done to effectively counter this trend.

Bands of runaway slaves and attempted rebellions were only a few of the difficulties in maintaining order and control that the Lowcountry elite faced in this period. With the increase in settlements in the backcountry came problems in the form of lawless behavior that further taxed the law enforcement system of the colony. Free and formerly enslaved banditti preyed on the growing number of plantations and small settlements as well as people that traveled to and from Charleston. The Regulator movement was a response to this situation and further highlights the limitations of state authority in the area. The printer of the *South-Carolina Gazette* passed on news that these “horse thieves and banditti,” who were driven off to West Florida by Regulators, were said to be returning to South Carolina by sea intent on taking up their old habits.⁴⁸ The next year, an account of another criminal band was brought to the attention of the readers of the *Gazette*. Winsler Driggers, a notorious “villain” who escaped jail in Savannah where he was under sentence of death, was taken in Drowning-Creek in the Charraw Settlement. He was the leader of a gang of 50 men who had committed “all manner of depredations upon the industrious settled inhabitants.” Captain Philip Pledger led an armed group of his neighbors in an attack on their camp, and while Pledger lost his arm in the firefight, two members of Driggers’s gang were killed and Driggers was

⁴⁷ *Belfast National Liberator*, 25 September 1767.

⁴⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette* 5 April 1770.

wounded and eventually captured. As a “mulatto,” Driggers was subject to the Slave Codes and he was tried and summarily executed.⁴⁹ These accounts and others, in combination with the published Grand Jury Presentments, indicate that the expanding economy and dispersal of the population over a larger geographic area created opportunities for those who wished to break free from the labor regime of the Lowcountry and either seek retribution on the population of slaveowners and employers of free and bound laborers or simply operate outside the bounds of law and social norms to meet their own needs at the expense of others. They clearly presented new challenges to the proponents of law and order.

Problems with connections to and trade between Charleston and the backcountry also arose in the context of regulation of the markets in Charleston. Inconsistent regulation of the markets and of the slaves who brought goods for sale in Charleston frustrated residents of the port and countryside alike. With limited regulation, those goods that arrived at the market and were not “lost” were sold and purchased indiscriminately. There was a great deal of room for the introduction of stolen goods, as there was no consistent process for verifying that the market slaves had permission to sell what they offered. In addition, market slaves set prices arbitrarily and forced the inhabitants of Charleston to pay exorbitant prices for necessities.⁵⁰ Frustration of planters supplying Charleston’s markets, particularly regarding the lax control of the slaves they entrusted with valuable agricultural products to take to town, increased so much that in 1769, the *South-Carolina Gazette* reported that a group of these “country

⁴⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette* 3 October 1771.

⁵⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, July 5 1773. For a discussion of market slaves and complaints of the high prices they set, see Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects*, pp. 174-175.

farmers” had agreed to boycott the port’s markets. While there were no further accounts of this initiative to determine whether it was either put in effect or, if it was, whether it brought any resolution to the problems faced by those supplying produce or livestock for Charleston, the report highlights the importance of the Charleston market for outlying “farmers.”⁵¹

Added to the constant concerns over mobile labor in the expansion of South Carolina’s economy were the policies of increased oversight and control exercised by the agents of Great Britain in the pursuit of revenue for the mother country in the colonial territories of North America. Merchants and planters were faced with renewed attention of British Colonial officials particularly in the realm of waterborne trade. Indeed, as the owner of vessels engaged in coastal trade to and from his landholdings in Georgia and East Florida, Henry Laurens was saddled with problems that arose from the presence of new customs officers in Charleston. Some minor errors in properly clearing two of his schooners led to their seizure by the Customs Collector, Daniel Moore. The case was put before the court of Vice Admiralty to determine whether the vessels should be forfeited for the violations. In Laurens’s view, knowing that a number of his friends and business relations made appropriate attempts to intercede at the time of the seizure of his vessels but were rebuffed, these actions of the new customs officers represented an attempt to establish new precedents regarding fees and other perquisites of their position. By actively defending himself in court, Laurens, with the support of other Charleston merchants, refused to allow the customs officer the liberty to adjust the system as he saw

⁵¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 June 1769.

fit.⁵² Indeed, Laurens engaged in a media assault on Moore by publishing his own account of the affairs regarding the seizure of his vessels and then consistently and forcefully complained about the collector in letters to his acquaintances in distant ports. He accused the collector of attempting to extort fees above and beyond what the laws required and promising, if these excessive fees were paid, leniency in some matters of local and overseas trade. In a letter to acquaintances in Savannah, for instance, Laurens repeated an account that Moore had encouraged planter and merchant John Wragg to swear an oath that a schooner of his, manned entirely by slaves, was under the supervision of a white patrol in order to avoid the necessity of drawing up a more expensive certificate for the vessel's trade between Charleston and Georgetown.⁵³ Reflecting the building outrage of Charleston's chief inhabitants at alterations in the customary regulation of trade, acting governor William Bull wrote to the Board of Trade and requested special consideration in this period of more strict enforcement of the Navigation Acts. He reported that British sloops of war were disrupting local trade by stopping and seizing coastal trade vessels because they were decked, and according to the Navigation acts, this meant they needed papers stating that they had cleared customs if they carried enumerated goods. Local and customary practice allowed for this traffic to be virtually unregulated, since the goods remained in the colony. In addition, a local act had established a bond system for owners of decked vessels engaged in internal trade as a guarantee that they would not engage in smuggling.⁵⁴ The importance of the coastwise trade for South Carolina merchants and planters in this period is revealed by these

⁵² See editors' notes in the *Papers of Henry Laurens, 1765-1768*, pp. 273-277, and letter from Laurens to James Grant, 12 August 1767.

⁵³ Laurens to James Grant, 5 September 1767, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁵⁴ Bull to Board of Trade, 8 September 1765, Original Correspondence.

concerted responses to attempts by British officials to do away with customary, and somewhat lenient, practices regarding clearances for these locally owned vessels. Indeed, these events and the protests they engendered became intricately linked to vocalization of a broader discontent with British Colonial rule.

A mixture of bitter anger and an intense desire to avoid any further run-ins with customs officials marked Laurens's behavior following this affair. Still feeling the sting of the personal attack on his reputation and the "opp[r]ession, extortion, and every act that insolence and ignorance is capable of,"⁵⁵ Laurens was adamant in a letter to a merchant house in Savannah, that every care be taken to ensure proper handling of his schooner as it cleared in and out of Georgia with rice. He was compelled to remind his correspondents, who were likely quite experienced in coastal trade and well aware of the rules regarding it, of all the necessary paperwork that should be on board the vessel before it sailed for Charleston and that the captain be reminded over and over again to do nothing that would allow officers in Charleston to find fault and seize the vessel. This letter indicates his frustration at not being able to operate with the certainty that he had done all that was necessary by law in his trade transactions.⁵⁶ Later that same year, this prominent Charleston merchant was equally careful in his instructions to captain Peacock, of the schooner *Wambaw*, cautioning him to "be very careful in all [his] steps to comply with the Acts of Trade" in clearing in to Georgia from St. Augustine and then bringing rice to Charleston.⁵⁷ In a letter dated the same day and sent to William Price in Savannah, Laurens asked for assistance for his schooner's captain once he arrived in

⁵⁵ Laurens to James Penman, St. Augustine, 13 October 1767, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁵⁶ Laurens to Clay & Habersham, 26 October 1767, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁵⁷ Laurens to William Peacock, 14 December 1767, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

Georgia.⁵⁸ This was just another drain on the time and energy of Laurens and his fellow merchants and planters—time and energy taken away from direct management of their profit making endeavors in expanding agriculture and overseas trade.

Men like Laurens, as either established merchants or planters, were well-positioned to take advantage of opportunities that this long decade before the Revolution brought and thus increase their already sizeable estates. For others, particularly those new to Charleston, considerable obstacles stood in the path to achieving a comfortable living. It is no wonder, then, that small business owners and struggling artisans bent or broke the rules in order to give them a boost along the way. In so doing, as outlined in discussions of the 1740s and 1750s, they undermined one of the foundations of labor control in and around Charleston—they chose to aid and abet rather than watch for and capture criminals. Thus, anyone from a legal or illegal tavern operator to a shopkeeper could cooperate with sailors, slaves or servants in their attempts to buy alcohol, sell stolen goods or seek a safe haven from an owner or employer and find financial benefits in this assistance. For instance, in 1769, Besheba Brown was charged with and found guilty of running a disorderly house in Charleston. She was fined £10 and sentenced to a month's imprisonment.⁵⁹ This charge included anything from selling alcohol to inappropriate clients (or at inappropriate times) to providing a venue for illegal gambling or providing or allowing prostitution services. Besheba Brown was not the only person targeted for operating a disorderly house in this period. In the same year, Mary Commings, Jane Martin and William Holliday were charged with the same.⁶⁰ The charge

⁵⁸ Laurens to William Price, 14 December 1767, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁵⁹ 21 April 1769, JGS.

⁶⁰ 19 October 1769, JGS.

of receiving goods was also made in waterfront areas. For instance, Joseph Tobias was found guilty in October of 1769 and again in April of 1770 of receiving stolen goods in Charleston. He served jail time after paying a fine and was then forced to guarantee his future good behavior by the payment of £100.⁶¹ Ann Howard was convicted on one of two counts of receipt of stolen goods and received five lashes and paid a fine.⁶² Many others in Charleston over a seven-year period ending in 1776, including both men and women like Mary Fleak and George Keabler who were both out on bail, were charged with receiving stolen goods.⁶³ In the Beaufort Court, outside of Charleston but still connected to the waterfront, Israel Baxter and Winifred Palmer were convicted of receiving stolen goods and were sentenced to time in the pillory and whipping. Likewise, in Georgetown, Martha Brite and Daniel Gerkin were convicted for receiving stolen goods.⁶⁴ Clearly, some of the same white inhabitants that were called on to enforce laws against thefts were just as likely to be encouraging them.

The complicity of more settled inhabitants in the crimes committed by maritime laborers and others only added to the futility of the law enforcement activities of appointed officials. The grand juries of Charleston were vociferous in their critiques of the laws, the legal system and the officials responsible for law enforcement. For instance, one grand jury claimed the magistrates were not enforcing the “Negro Act” as they should. In particular, they allowed "idle" slaves to sell goods in the streets, taking away the livelihood of the deserving poor whites. They also complained that there was an insufficient number of people employed as Charleston's watch and that they lacked the

⁶¹ JGS, 19 October 1769 and 24 April 1770.

⁶² 23 January 1771, 4 November 1771, JGS.

⁶³ 4 November 1771, JGS.

⁶⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 December 1772.

necessary level of vigilance.⁶⁵ Those saddled with the task of dissecting Charleston's social and legal problems also targeted strangers. One particular grievance found in grand jury presentments was directed at the increasing numbers of "irreligious" people who, in groups, took up residence in or made brief forays into Charleston where they encouraged slaves to steal by secretly buying their goods and effectively avoiding the law. The jurors implied that it was the unconcern of Charleston's residents to this danger that allowed the success of these transient men and women, and only confessions of slaves brought attention and prosecution to these people.⁶⁶ Another meeting of the grand jury brought a criticism of the legal system specifying an insufficient number of meetings of justices of the peace to deal with the needs of Charleston.⁶⁷ In addition, the markets were poorly monitored due to the lack of attendance of the commissioners who relied on their clerk to handle basic needs of those attending the markets. In response to the perennial problem of surplus "dram shops" and "tippling houses" that catered "to slaves and other disorderly people," one grand jury blamed the magistrates who were, in their eyes, unwilling to enforce fine penalties or shut down drinking establishments like that of John Mayes, who was charged with retailing alcohol without a license or others that "operated contrary to the laws."⁶⁸

When law enforcement officials or other members of the community did press charges against alleged criminals, convictions in the court of General Sessions were infrequent, and this likely added to the numbers of unpunished crimes that frustrated the grand juries. For example, Thomas Howley and James Farr were simply found not guilty

⁶⁵ 22 April 1769, List of Grand Jury Presentments, JGS.

⁶⁶ 19 January 70, JGS.

⁶⁷ 18 April 1771, JGS.

⁶⁸ 25 January 1771, JGS, 17 April 1770, JGS.

of receiving stolen goods with no indication of why, and men like Edward McFrey, Robert Taylor and Samuel Glove were released from trial due to the absence of witnesses against them.⁶⁹ For Anne Manly, who was found guilty of receiving stolen goods, punishment was avoided by a technical issue—those who brought the charges against her never proved that Manly possessed their stolen property. Her sentence was therefore annulled.⁷⁰ Even David Frantham, who was accused of harboring robbers, was released due to lack of accusers or witnesses appearing in court.⁷¹ Despite some cooperation in terms of identifying offenders and having them charged, Charleston residents concerned with punishing offenders were frustrated by a failure to convict that was in large part due to a lack of cooperation from witnesses. While frustration with the frequency of crime may have led to some hasty accusations that, upon reflection in the intervening time between official charges and the meeting of the court, were deemed erroneous, the grand jury complaints suggest that, barring witness intimidation or bribery, it was simply a matter of the inconvenience of attending court in Charleston that accounted for the lack of convictions. Lack of attendance on the part of witnesses was the root problem. In addition to the embarrassment of so many unsuccessful attempts at punishing crime, the costs of maintaining those accused but unable to provide bail in the parish goal, or local jai, presented a financial dilemma. They called for the court to provide compensation (allowances) for witnesses arriving from the country in hopes of bringing more frequent and successful convictions.⁷²

⁶⁹ 24 April 1770; 26 January 1771; 26 October 1770, JGS.

⁷⁰ 23 January 1771, 15 April 1771, 23 April 71, JGS.

⁷¹ 26 October 1770, JGS.

⁷² 18 April 1771, JGS.

The nature of the flight of slaves in this period demonstrates the ways in which the unfree contributed to the difficulties faced by South Carolina officials and other members of the propertied population. For instance, in January of 1763, an advertisement placed by James Parsons indicated that some slaves understood the long-standing differences between the Backcountry and Lowcountry and used them to their advantage. Over a six-week period, 4 men had run from Parsons, and he feared that they had found their way to the backcountry where they would be kept at work. Those who took them in wrote “purposely blind” advertisements to avoid having the slaves identified by their proper owners. In fact, 2 of the men who ran from Parsons were recently brought to South Carolina, and their successful flight, since it did not take them long to escape, may well have been a result of an easily identified network for escape that assured success.⁷³ The animosity between the coastal population and those hailing from the less densely settled and underrepresented inland regions was a division in the ranks of the propertied white population that may have given slaves extra leverage in their battle against the institution of slavery.

As noted above, there were many weaknesses in the system of slave control and slaves exploited them. The spatial and economic expansion of this period intensified the need for labor and provided additional opportunities for slaves to run away and possibly improve their circumstances. One indication of the perception of increased opportunities for those that ran away was the advertisements for the return of groups of slaves that ran together or in close succession. For instance, when Whan, Jack, Isaac and Christopher ran from a plantation on the Pedee River, taking 3 guns and a cutlass with them, John

⁷³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 22-29 January 1763.

Forbes, the advertiser, assumed they would head for Georgia and St. Augustine.⁷⁴ The weapons they took may have been for defense but were also likely items that they knew they could sell. Heading toward Georgia or St. Augustine was a good choice given that this was where much of the expansion of the plantation economy took place. Similarly, when 6 men, all of them sawyers, ran from Henry Smith's plantation near Bacon Bridge, their proximity to a major water route suggests that they may have left the area for Charleston or beyond despite Smith's suspicion that they were hiding somewhere near the plantation.⁷⁵ As sawyers, their skills were in high demand in areas where people were carving out plantations in previously unsettled areas or in the shipyards near Charleston that were building or refitting vessels to handle the coastal and overseas traffic.

The continued flight of slaves in groups suggests an increased confidence in would-be fugitives that they could successfully avoid recapture. Certainly they were aware of the circumstances that created an intense demand for labor, and they understood how to exploit them. Although not described as skilled like Henry Smith's slaves above, three years later five men ran from Mr. George Austin's Plantation at Pedee, and then, nearly seven years later, another group of six slaves ran from a plantation on the Cypress.⁷⁶ Cudjoe Jemmy, Long Jemmy, Rynah, Venus, and her daughter Dye all ran from Peter and James Sinkler in the spring of 1771. Cudjoe, employed in the coasting business and described as elderly, very artful and capable of influencing the other

⁷⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13-20 August 1763.

⁷⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12-19 November 1763.

⁷⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 29 July 1766.; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 5 July 1770.

runaways, was so well known that a physical description was unnecessary.⁷⁷ Sirrah, Molly, and Glasgow took advantage of their experiences as market slaves to successfully remain in Charleston and out of the hands of their new master who had moved them inland from Christ-Church Parish.⁷⁸ Saul, Charlotte, and Fortune all ran from Peter Porcher. Charlotte was a very accomplished seamstress and she and Saul ran together after stealing a horse. They were pursued, but not captured, heading southward. Fortune, who also ran from Porcher but on a different day, was notorious for his villainy in many parts of the province.⁷⁹ Billy and York, boatmen that were well known in Charleston, and Toney, a bricklayer, ran from William Coachman.⁸⁰ The fact that most of these runaways were well known and ran in groups suggests that a combination of intense demand for labor and an increase in the population of Charleston and other waterfront locations made ease of employment and temporary anonymity possible. Indeed, many of those that ran away in the examples above had either long experience in non-plantation settings or had skills that made them highly employable in Charleston or in the expanding regions of the plantation economy (many south of Charleston) and contributed to their success.

As in previous years, a set of skills and experiences in the realm of maritime labor was by far the most likely to get a runaway slave hired and, knowingly or unknowingly, harbored from his owners. Leeds, who preferred to call himself Jack Lips, exploited the demand for experienced boatmen and sailors on multiple occasions when he ran from Robert Daniell. There is no evidence to determine whether or not Leeds was consistently

⁷⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 11 April 1771.

⁷⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 September 1770.

⁷⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 11 July 1771.

⁸⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 12 May 1767.

employed on boats in the past, but in one instance of escape he had successfully earned a berth on a vessel and served as a member of the crew for an indeterminate amount of time. Leeds either returned on his own or was apprehended, but in either case he was undeterred in his attempt to regain temporary freedom or make his ultimate escape by heading back to Charleston to seek employment as a sailor again.⁸¹ With his familiarity with the system of Atlantic trade and long experience as a sailor, Frank, born a slave in Bermuda, likely found a captain eager to employ him in any one of the maritime trade networks centered in Charleston after he ran from his master Thomas Savage.⁸² Cornelius Dewies suggested in his advertisement that a white person likely harbored the fugitives Abraham and November, experienced ship carpenters.⁸³ Dewies's assumption was based on knowledge, shared by many of Charleston's slaves, that many people along the waterfront and in the surrounding countryside were willing to employ runaway slaves, particularly those with maritime experience. Likewise, James Roulain was compelled to take a conciliatory approach in seeking the return of Agrippa, who had been employed in his schooner for 18 years. Roulain promised forgiveness if his well-known slave who was "Carolina-born" and very fluent in English, would voluntarily return.⁸⁴ If, as the advertisement suggests, Agrippa had previously refrained from flight and other troublesome activities, then his choice to flee in 1770 was inspired by new opportunities for successful escape. Similarly, Will, although not described as previously "well behaved," worked on a schooner for over 15 years and appeared determined to take advantage of the increased opportunities for flight and employment in the waterfront

⁸¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 22 October 1763.

⁸² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 February-3 March 1764.

⁸³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 October 1770.

⁸⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 November 1770.

environment. His determination and confidence in eventual success is evidenced by the fact that he stole a small boat when he fled.⁸⁵

Jockeying for positions of increased autonomy rather than seeking ultimate freedom most likely motivated the many additional maritime slaves, with or without many years of experience, who ran in this period. With no easily reached location, like Spanish Florida, that could guarantee full and immediate freedom, slaves looked to Charleston and the waterfront for opportunities to improve their circumstances. Sam and Phillis ran from a plantation in the country in order to return to Charleston where they had previously worked for a merchant. Clearly understanding how to find steady work in Charleston, Sam made sure he was dressed in sailors' clothing and took an assortment of ship carpentry tools with him. Perhaps Sam had previous experience on the waterfront, which explains how he obtained appropriate clothing and tools for maritime work, but he was confident that he could earn enough, in conjunction with Phillis's work, to procure a place to stay and basic necessities for both of them.⁸⁶ Prince, an experienced sailor frequently employed on schooners, was equally determined to find opportunities for himself in and around the Charleston waterfront. Born in Pennsylvania and "completely fluent" in English, Prince had already made several attempts to pass as free. His repeated flight suggests that he felt that the advantages to be had in hiring himself out on various vessels far outweighed any punishment he may have faced when he was captured or returned on his own.⁸⁷ Jack Brown, although not described as a repeated runaway, probably sought the same advantages when he left David Brown, a shipwright.

⁸⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 28 January 1773.

⁸⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 31 January 1771.

⁸⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 26 September 1774.

Additionally, the fact that he was undeterred in his flight despite being well known in Charleston reveals just how clear it was to him that potential employers were unconcerned with regulating other people's slaves.⁸⁸

In the course of their daily work, skilled slaves' awareness of the intense need for skilled labor and the desire to take advantage of positive market and shipping circumstances meant that opportunities, even outright offers, for better employment were very clear and readily available. For instance, Jack, by trade a shipwright, had frequent contact with both sailors and ships' captains in his work on Linn's Wharf at Hobcaw. Even without expressing interest in such work, he may have been approached by any number of people looking to fill the needs of a ship ready to depart but short on hands. It is also possible that Apollo, as a porter and cooper working along the Charleston waterfront, ran in order to take advantage of a similar offer for employment on either a deep-sea or coastal vessel.⁸⁹ The advertiser for the return of Peter, who ran from his employment on a vessel, acknowledged the common practice of "enticing" slaves into employment when he reported that he knew this slave sailor was already employed on another local schooner.⁹⁰ Well aware of the advantages of maritime employment in and around Charleston, numerous advertised as well as innumerable unadvertised fugitive slaves ran to or between maritime jobs in this period in order to improve their circumstances or find a way out of the system of bondage.⁹¹ Slaves placed by their

⁸⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette* 4 February 1773.

⁸⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12 April 1773.

⁹⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14-21 May 1763.

⁹¹ Runaways with occupations ranging from porters to ship carpenters to sailors all successfully escaped from their owners from or into the Charleston waterfront. See: *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 9 September 1766; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 19 September 1769; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 20 March 1770; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 2 June 1772; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 30 June 1772; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 9

owners aboard one of the many loosely supervised vessels on the rivers or along the coast were in a particularly advantageous position. This appears to be the case for Bob, Bill, and Bill who ran away from Wando in a schooner's canoe and were suspected of being in Charleston.⁹² Likewise, Glasgow ran from a sloop at Hobcaw.⁹³ George, a patroon, and therefore well known on the Cooper and Wando Rivers as well as John's Island and Ponpon, ran from John Marley, while Will, a coasting sailor, ran from John Hatter.⁹⁴ Cloe, one of three slaves who ran from Richard Downes, was seen on board one of Mrs. Ellis's schooners.⁹⁵ Tunes Tebout was looking for Abraham who, despite being a bricklayer, had repeatedly fled from his master's schooner operating from Burn's Wharf.⁹⁶ Perhaps reflecting the frequent turnover of enslaved crews in this way, one advertiser, looking for a man who ran from the schooner *Adventure*, merely described him as enslaved and an experienced sailor and did not provide his name.⁹⁷ The frequent turnover of crew members through legitimate means or through desertion coupled with the growing population of maritime laborers in and around Charleston most likely prompted this defeatist approach to the recovery of the deserted slave. John Scott Junior was still hopeful that he could recover Tom who ran in sailor's garb and took a long

March 1773; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 24 May 1773; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 25 May 1773; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 8 February 1774; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 8 February 1774; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 2 December 1766; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 7 July 1767; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 4 August 1767; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 20 June 1774; *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 3 May 1769; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 11 July 1774.

⁹² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14 November 1775.

⁹³ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 4 February 1766.

⁹⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 25 August 1772 and *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 30 August 1768.

⁹⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 29 August 1769.

⁹⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 9 December 1766.

⁹⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 13 April 1773.

black canoe with him, possibly from the vessel he was working on at the time.⁹⁸ However, if Tom were as savvy as Jemmy, who ran from Isaac Fendin's boat in Charleston, then he would also have been "very apt to say his master had hired him in Charleston."⁹⁹ Apparently no amount of social or political power exempted slaveholders from dealing with desertion of enslaved sailors, as even a man as important as Henry Laurens advertised that Jack ran from his ship *Flora*.¹⁰⁰ All of these examples serve to highlight the ease with which slaves employed on river, coastal or deep-sea vessels could run away. It is clear that both ingenuity on the part of the runaways and difficulty with recovery efforts made the recovery of slaves from employment on the water very difficult.

As the population of Charleston increased in the period, certain occupations presented new opportunities for slaves to remain in the port but still remain outside of the control of their masters or any other white person. For example, in 1763 Nathaniel Blundell sought assistance in recovering Sancho, a fisherman who had spent several years in Charleston and was still seen there regularly.¹⁰¹ While Sancho was probably not a runaway throughout all of the years he was in Charleston, it is likely he was virtually unsupervised for much of that time. When slaves fled from their masters, they looked to maritime pursuits in general as the best option for concealment and employment due to carefully created networks for both. Perhaps even more than other maritime occupations, fishing allowed slaves to be self-employed. They did not need to convince anyone to hire them and therefore had minimal contact with those inclined to enforce

⁹⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 13 January 1767.

⁹⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 20 December 1768.

¹⁰⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 14 April 1767.

¹⁰¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 19-26 February 1763.

regulations regarding the movement of slaves in and out of Charleston. George Sommers was well aware of this when he sought the return of Quamina through a newspaper advertisement. Since Quamina was an experienced boatman and sailor, with acquaintances among slave fishermen, Sommers expressed his fear that this runaway would effectively conceal himself by going fishing.¹⁰² Similarly, Peter, well known in Charleston and adjacent areas, was described as a sensible fellow, a good fisherman, and very handy on board ships or coasters. While John Ward warned masters of vessels not to hire him, there was little to prevent Peter from joining a fishing crew.¹⁰³ Indeed, Jack, a fisherman, was confident that his network of contacts would effectively conceal and shield both him and his wife when they ran from the Chief Justice of South Carolina.¹⁰⁴ Another pair of runaways, a father and son both named Bristol, appeared equally confident when they ran from the estate of John Raven. Raven was careful to point out that the father was a good fisherman.¹⁰⁵ The resumption of unfettered overseas trade and internal expansion brought an increased demand for laborers. As a result, the effectiveness of this network of fishermen and other maritime workers was increased in this period due to the eagerness of employers to hire these people.

While fishermen were certainly well positioned to avoid notice and recapture if they were runaways, particularly given that they had control over the tools they needed to provide for themselves through their occupation, they still faced some hurdles in any attempt to leave the system of slavery. However, slaves with a broader Atlantic background, with or without specific maritime skills, were in a far more advantageous

¹⁰² *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 3 January 1775.

¹⁰³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 21 January 1772.

¹⁰⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 18 February 1766.

¹⁰⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 21 April 1767.

position than their more locally focused contemporaries to move between the Charleston waterfront environment and the waterfronts of other Atlantic ports. Recognition of this produced a great deal of vexation among their owners and employers when they chose to run. For instance, the wording of John Dutarque's advertisement was appropriately pessimistic regarding the recovery of an enslaved man named Luke, a sailor, who spoke English, French, Spanish and Dutch.¹⁰⁶ Dick, described as a boy of seventeen and born in Bermuda, took advantage of an opportunity to leave his employment on a sloop. He took some extra clothes and a watch, which he may have intended to sell. The captain of the vessel he left knew that his experience on boats would make him highly employable, and he warned masters of vessels not to take him on board or carry him out to sea.¹⁰⁷ Toney, a tailor formerly from New Providence, ran from William Mills. Clearly convinced that Toney would easily find employment elsewhere, Mills offered the runaway forgiveness for this offense if he would return on his own. Of course, all masters of vessels were cautioned not to carry him away.¹⁰⁸

As noted above, the white population of Charleston increased, and local officials and others sought a more ordered city, but on the waterfront there was less and less cooperation in monitoring free and enslaved laborers. Advertisements in this period reflect this change. For instance, William Walter was outraged at his slave and those who employed him, which he made clear in an advertisement for the recovery of Bristol, a skilled wheelwright. Bristol was hired out by the month for a time, but had disappeared. Walter claimed that he had lost more than £300 in unrecovered wages since

¹⁰⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 June-2 July 1763.

¹⁰⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12-19 January 1765.

¹⁰⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 28 February 1771.

Bristol's flight.¹⁰⁹ According to Leonard Bodell, the runaway Nanny was seen every night in town since she had absconded.¹¹⁰ Much like Sommers looking for Young Domina, Bodell was likely frustrated at the failure of white inhabitants in Charleston to challenge Nanny when she appeared at night and identify her as a runaway. Limerick, a carpenter by trade, ran from Francis Roche and was suspected of hiding in Charleston, where he was known, and might find work or be hired on an outgoing vessel. Roche's property was located at the head of the Cooper River, making it likely that Limerick had already used one vessel in his escape.¹¹¹ Limus was well-known in Charleston for his saucy and impudent tongue, and Joshua Eden wished the readers of his advertisement to know that they could "flog" him in such manner as they thought proper whenever he was found out without a ticket. Eden likely hoped that this treatment would prompt Limus to reconsider his stance, which he made clear to Eden when he stated, "[I] will be free, that [I] will serve no man, and that [I] will be conquered or governed by no man."¹¹² It is a testament to the nature of life in growing Charleston that Limus could make this statement and, at least for a time, act on it.

Advertisers for other runaway slaves provide numerous examples of less conspicuous slaves who took flight and attained work in Charleston. Such was the case for Jacob and Mary who ran from John Mitchell. Mitchell suspected that Mary easily found employment after running because she was frequently hired out as a nurse and, at other times as a market slave. Jacob was also highly employable in Charleston, as he

¹⁰⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10-17 December 1763.

¹¹⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 3-10 March 1764.

¹¹¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 12-19 March 1763.

¹¹² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 7 November 1775.

worked sometimes as a wheelwright.¹¹³ Tom, a bricklayer, ran away from Rawlins Lowndes immediately after being sold and had since been employed and undertaken jobs in Charleston.¹¹⁴ Hannah, also known as Hannah Bullock, was described by her mistress as someone well known in Charleston for selling cakes and other things in the market.¹¹⁵ Planning for the possibility of being challenged when he entered Charleston, Toney, who had “a good many relations at Mr. Jonathon Scott’s” in Charleston took a ticket with him when he ran from Francis Roche.¹¹⁶ Pall-Mall, otherwise known as Primus, and formerly employed at John Gordon’s tavern, ran from John Cross and was seen headed for Ashley Ferry. He was described as cunning, artful, and able to tell a plausible story to anyone who examined him.¹¹⁷ Prosper, who also called himself Jamel, and sometimes John, was a bricklayer and carpenter who ran from Benjamin Trapier of Georgetown. He was seen, since running, in Charleston where he formerly lived and was likely harbored.¹¹⁸ When Jack and Sapho, described as husband and wife, ran from John Poyas, they headed to James Island where they had lived previously. Poyas was apparently annoyed at this and other actions and was therefore eager to sell the couple. He described them as skilled at plantation work and, in Jack’s case, a butcher and market-man.¹¹⁹ James Island was proximal to Charleston and Sapho and Jack could easily frequent the port to earn wages and remain free from the control of Poyas. Lempster, was very well known in town, especially among other slaves who employed him as a doctor. A reward was offered for

¹¹³ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 3 June 1766.

¹¹⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 26 August 1766.

¹¹⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 30 September 1766.

¹¹⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 9 December 1766.

¹¹⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 15 September 1767.

¹¹⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 4 July 1769.

¹¹⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10-17 September 1763.

his return, dead or alive.¹²⁰ Betty formerly worked for Mr. Gray in his tavern on the bay.¹²¹ Will, who attended the Charleston Market on a regular basis for several years past, ran from Benjamin Elliott. Elliott feared that Will's acquaintances throughout the province would successfully harbor him and therefore offered a reward for his head.¹²²

Claiming freedom by birth or through manumission was a common tactic among skilled runaways who wished to head off questions about their legal status. The frequent resort to this tactic suggests that the population of enslaved people and free blacks in Charleston was either sizeable or unmonitored or both. For instance, Erskyne, frequently called Bruce, ran away dressed in a sailor's jacket and was described as a sly fellow, sensible, artful, and very fluent in English. He played "remarkably well" on the fiddle, and had worked some time in Charleston at the barber's business. He carried with him all of his clothes, some of which, according to the description, were too good for his station. Thus, he could easily change his dress and his name in order to pass as a free man and leave the region in some vessel, and all masters of vessels and others were asked to take notice.¹²³ Dick, who was a skilled shoemaker, ran from David Hopkins and tried to pass as free under the name of John or Tom Macklin. The last accounts of him were from the head of the Tyger River, where he was seen with a couple of noted villains. He was a remarkable whistler and played the violin.¹²⁴ James, born in either North Carolina or Virginia, ran with an iron attached to his leg and a file in his hand from Peter Louzon.

¹²⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette* 3 January 1771.

¹²¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 January 1771.

¹²² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 June 1771

¹²³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 May 1773.

¹²⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14 May 1772.

James could read and write and would likely try to pass as a free man.¹²⁵ James, who played the violin, ran from Miles Brewton and would likely try to pass as free and gain work as a tailor or barber. Since running, at least one witness saw James crossing the Combahee Ferry possibly on his way to Beaufort or Savannah to get on board a vessel. He had a ticket that he showed to people claiming that it was from Brewton.¹²⁶ Abraham, a bricklayer, who was very well-known in all parts of the province and in Georgia, ran and was passing as a free man by the name of Charles. Since running, he had been employed by several people and was clothed in items that he stole from his master when he fled.¹²⁷ Amey ran from a plantation near a ferry and had since been seen in Charleston selling things in the streets and pretending to be free. She was noted to have numerous acquaintances in Charleston.¹²⁸

Attempts to pass as free were likely spurred on by examples of past success. For example, when Saul and Jack ran from a plantation on Santee, the advertiser noted they were formerly free and were well-known in Georgia by the names of Saul and John Winners. Saul was a carpenter and described as very sensible. Jack was not trained in any particular profession but they made their escape in a large canoe and took a quantity of carpenter's tools with them. They were suspected of trying to get back to Georgia. Since they were both born in Bermuda, the author of the advertisement for their return assumed that they would seek employment on a ship and attempt to get back there.¹²⁹ Prince (to be advertised for again in a year's time) was born in New Jersey or

¹²⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 10 June 1766.

¹²⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 28 February 1771.

¹²⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 11 April 1771.

¹²⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 5 December 1771.

¹²⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 23 August 1773.

Pennsylvania and was brought to South Carolina by Captain Blewer. He spoke “very good English” and sometimes endeavored to pass as a free man. He was a tanner who was also employed on a boat.¹³⁰ John, about 40 years old, and by trade a carpenter, and his master, Patrick Hinds, described him as a “smooth-tongued fellow” who would try pass as a free man as he had done before.¹³¹ Sam ran from James Richards and was likely to pass for a free man as he had done in the past. He was a good carpenter and cooper and took with him some workmen’s tools.¹³² John, a tailor by trade, who formerly passed as a free man and was well-known in and about Charleston, went off in a canoe and carried with him a mast, sail, and two oars.¹³³ Robert Lindsey, commonly called Bob, ran from John Poyas. Bob was a house carpenter and well-known in Charleston where he commonly passed as a free man. All masters of vessels were cautioned against carrying him away.¹³⁴

With so many runaway slaves, a sense of barely controlled chaos pervaded. The economy functioned, but based on the complaints above, it did not function with the ease and predictability that many property owners hoped. When news accounts of attempts to regain some control were available, they were circulated quickly.

Scarcely a night has passed, for some weeks, but burglaries have been either committed or attempted in this Town--and shop lifting has become so common, that no less than two men employed in that business, were last week committed to jail. --It therefore becomes the inhabitants, to

¹³⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 4 October 1773.

¹³¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 21 January 1773.

¹³² *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 3 April 1770.

¹³³ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 12 January 1768.

¹³⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette & Country Journal*, 7 April 1772.

be as guarded against these pests of society--as against the ravages of fire, now to be apprehended from foul chimnies [sic] and careless Negroes.¹³⁵

This notice, with its detailing of criminal activities and warnings to the public, printed in the *South-Carolina Gazette* in November of 1773, gives a sense of the extent of crime and the limited effects of public policing for the entire decade leading up to this date.¹³⁶ As the frequent complaints of the grand juries make clear, the population of poor had grown considerably in Charleston, and the continued resort to the port by runaway slaves and those looking to market goods made the possibility of crime both greater and harder to prevent. This is clear from the frequent notices from victims of theft and the less frequent notices of captures and convictions. For example, Catherine Campbell, Joshua Gim, James Wright, Sarah Kelly and Eleanor Kelly were all convicted of petit larceny in 1764.¹³⁷ Over the course of the next year, Lloyd and Neyle had £20 currency and some clothes stolen from their store; a store on Church Street was “broken open” and a variety of cloth was taken as well as a trunk with some cash, Miles Brewton advertised for the return of a stolen silver punch bowl and strainer from his house; Anne Baron had her store robbed of money and cloth which she offered £100 for the return of; and Roger Pinckney's house was broken into and robbed of over £1400, and he offered 25% of the value of any of the money returned to him. Ironically, some of the money taken was in Pinckney's possession, in his role as sheriff, because it was deemed stolen.¹³⁸ Despite repeated the calls for action from grand juries and for vigilance from the printer of the

¹³⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 November 1773.

¹³⁶ This was not the first warning of this kind. See notice of *South-Carolina Gazette* 15 December 1766, remarking on news of robberies made and attempted over the last few nights in Charleston and warning residents to be on their guard.

¹³⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 22 October 1764 vol. 2.

¹³⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 26 January 1765, 11 May 1765, 1 June 1765, 29 June 1765, 28 September 1765.

South-Carolina Gazette, limited cooperation was offered from the general population of Charleston in the efforts to curb lawlessness. Thus, crimes continued despite regular convictions, and it appears that the people brought to trial in this period were a small percentage of the population of those that skirted or blatantly broke the law.

The limited number of notices in local newspapers that were written by dutiful business owners and others actually further reveal the frequency and extent of the “crime” that took place in Charleston. For example, Phillip Gruber “stopped” a slave with a bag of 814 limes that he presumed were stolen and then advertised for the owner to recover the purloined items.¹³⁹ Philip Tidyman seized a small picture set in gold that someone tried to sell to him, while Francis Gottier advertised that a slave had offered him a gold breast buckle.¹⁴⁰ In all of these cases, the advertisers made the assumption that the values of the items offered for sale were too high to be the rightful property of a slave. In another instance, Walter Greenland was suspicious of a slave who offered him a set of carpenter’s tools. Here, the slave’s possession of the tools was not likely the cause for concern, as he could have been a slave carpenter. Rather, it was the attempt to sell these tools that drew suspicion. Finding considerable amounts of money in the hands of slaves without a letter of explanation was also reason to seize the property as potentially stolen. For example, Peter Wealth took a £20 bill from a slave boy and an unnamed advertiser seized “2 halves of 2 fifty pounds bills” from a slave.¹⁴¹ While not as frequent, advertisements for goods taken from white people were also placed, such as the one by

¹³⁹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 19 November 1764.

¹⁴⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 April 1767 and 8 February 1768.

¹⁴¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 July 1769 and 26 April 1773.

another unnamed person who claimed that he or she had taken a silver watch from a white person who was not able to give a proper explanation for their possession of it.¹⁴²

The further entrance of South Carolina into the Atlantic economy and the subsequent growth of the population, many of them transients who arrived, as either regular or temporary maritime laborers, in Charleston and the Lowcountry, increased the frequency and ease of crimes such as the theft of indigo, glass, shoes and other items from warehouses on a particular Charleston wharf.¹⁴³ Additional crimes were committed within the clearly prescribed maritime arena. Some of the “free” people who engaged in active theft included those who could be clearly identified as sailors, and these men made up a significant portion of the transient poor in Charleston. The most common “crime” for sailors was still desertion. One particular case of desertion also included the theft of £20 from the purser of the *Tryal*, Captain James Wallace. Wallace offered a £7 reward for each of the four deserters.¹⁴⁴ In another notice of sailor desertion, Samuel Campbell and John Peters ran from the *Minerva*. Peters was described as Venetian and able to speak only broken English, and witnesses saw both men at the “Sign of the Highlander” a local tavern, in Union Street. Thomas Tillett offered £10 for the return of either of the sailors, and he ran the advertisement for over four weeks.¹⁴⁵ Captain Mark Robinson, of the *HMS Fowey*, appealed to the Royal Governor for assistance in recovering and preventing additional deserters from his crew in 1767, and in 1768, Mansell Corbett and Roberts complained that James Landes and Chapman, both sailors, had picked a lock in

¹⁴² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 July 1769.

¹⁴³ Cogdell and Co., *South-Carolina Gazette*, 15 March 1773; and Daniel Tucker, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 18 October 1773.

¹⁴⁴ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 February 1764.

¹⁴⁵ *South-Carolina Gazette* 24 December 1764, *South-Carolina Gazette* 31 December 1764-7 January 1765, *South-Carolina Gazette* 19 January 1765.

order to steal a yawl and desert from the ship *Constant Friend*.¹⁴⁶ From the letters of Henry Laurens we learn that some deserters were never advertised, which makes these advertisements merely representative of what was likely a common occurrence in this period.

One particularly “outrageous” crime perpetrated within the maritime arena--one that suggests the continued vulnerability of the property of those dependent on maritime labor-- occurred in 1764. A pilot boat belonging to Port Royal, lying at an anchor at a place called the Folly, near the east end of this island, was boarded by a small “schooner boat” that came along side. There were eight “negroes” on the pilot boat, but only one awake, and they were soon secured. The crew of the unknown schooner went off in this pilot boat, and left their vessel behind. These “pirates” were five in number, “two Frenchmen, two mulattoes, and a negro.” The “pirates” were armed with “musquets” and were said to be going to Cuba, which was made known by news from one of the slave pilots permitted to leave the boat, having “signified a disinclination to go with them.” The sloop of war *Druid* was recruited to attempt to capture the stolen pilot boat if it was still on the coast. In addition, a schooner with a Lieutenant and 20 men was sent off to Cuba to seek them out there.¹⁴⁷ This was, however, not the only crime of this kind in this period. Another incident took place on the Savannah River in 1768. William Lyford's new pilot boat was stolen by Alexander Sim, James Coulry and John Roche; a carpenter, boatswain and foremastman, respectively from a nearby vessel. They made off with the

¹⁴⁶ *South-Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 22 December 1767; and *South-Carolina Gazette*, 7 March 1768.

¹⁴⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 26 November 1764.

vessel and the “dark Spanish fellow” who was on board her at the time.¹⁴⁸ Both of these events represent the culmination of the fears expressed by Laurens in his dealings with his own vessels and the crews of others. With limited supervision and physically removed from the limited number of law enforcement officials, maritime laborers were sometimes in a position to engage in these acts that were designed to meet their immediate needs at the expense of one or more members of the population of maritime employers.

The “crises” of relations with Great Britain that marked most of the decade and resulted from new taxes and duties and a closer attention to the long-standing Navigation Acts added another complicating element to the internal conflicts between the proponents of law and order and those pushing for increased freedoms and other opportunities for themselves. In a letter to Joseph Brown of Georgetown in October of 1765, Henry Laurens gave an account of the exhibition and burning of effigies in response to careful enforcement of Navigation acts and the Stamp Act. He suggested to Brown that a few respectable men could have put a stop to the displays, but no one of that nature attempted to interfere, and the “sons of Liberty” showed their true colors by eventually engaging in burglary.¹⁴⁹ One night later, Laurens became the target of this group himself. Several men in disguise, poor ones it turns out as Laurens identified a handful and called them by name, forced their way by threat of violence into his home and made a quick pass through looking for stamped papers. Laurens intuited that the crowd’s secondary purpose was to intimidate him out of friendship with the Royal Governor of East Florida, James Grant, perhaps fearing that royal officials were

¹⁴⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 1 and 8 February 1768.

¹⁴⁹ Laurens to Joseph Brown, 22 October 1765, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

successfully gaining allies among the merchant class. Laurens took an adamant stand against the accusations of the crowd, proclaiming his disgust with the Stamp Act, but refusing to make any oaths regarding his opposition to royal authority and defending the character of the governor. According to Laurens, the group wished him well and left after only a brief stay having done little more damage than terrifying his pregnant wife.¹⁵⁰ In a later account of the event, Laurens estimated that there were 60-80 men altogether, and likely half of them “honest hearted jacks.”¹⁵¹ The Participation of sailors in this event and others indicates that they were not only politically aware and active, as several historians have noted, but they were also exercising their usual liberties in Charleston in direct opposition to the laws and wishes of local officials.¹⁵² The social upheaval of the Stamp Act Crisis did nothing to improve the circumstances that made Charleston a zone of independent, self-serving activity for waterfront laborers in this period.

Traditional historical accounts of the period leading up to the American Revolution take a cameo approach to the treatment of maritime workers, often only highlighting sailors. For instance, Pauline Maier’s work on group protests and actions in this era placed sailors in the crowds, but did little to explain their reasons for participating.¹⁵³ In this way, her work perpetuated a notion of sailors as unthinking muscle for hire in the “tumults” leading up to an in the midst of the Revolution. The publication of Jesse Lemisch’s path breaking work on sailors and their ideology corrected this notion by revealing that seamen had their own group ideology, based on shared

¹⁵⁰ Laurens to Joseph Brown, 28 October 1765, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁵¹ Laurens to James Grant, 1 November 1765, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁵² See Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets,” and Linebaugh and Rediker, *Hydra*. There is no evidence to suggest that Lt. Governor Bull’s attempt to work with ship captains to control sailors was effective.

¹⁵³ Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Rebellion*(New York, Knopf, 1972).

experiences in the face of a multitude of dangers at sea, brutal treatment at the hands of captains and officers in naval and merchant vessels, and resistance to impressment into the British Navy. Lemisch argued that this tradition of resistance provided a model for radical action for the colonists in their struggles with Parliament and King in the 1760s and 1770s.¹⁵⁴ More recently, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, convincingly revealed the nature of sailors' ideology and placed it within the context of labor ideology throughout the Atlantic. Specifically, they argued that sailors, port town laborers, and slaves engaged in a long-term struggle with the perpetrators of oppressive labor regimes that were part of the expanding Atlantic economy. As "vectors of revolution," sailors and other mobile Atlantic workers exerted a powerful force in the British North American colonies and the states of the Early Republic.¹⁵⁵ In conjunction with recent trends of recovering the histories of the non-elite, best exemplified by the works of Alfred Young and Gary Nash, the dynamic lives and interactions of men and women like those who inhabited, worked in, or visited the Charleston waterfront, these works demonstrate that while those who held and controlled property wielded the most power, the non-elite became a force to be reckoned with. As a group, they did as much to shape Early America and the Atlantic world as their masters and employers.¹⁵⁶

In this and the subsequent chapter, the predominantly inarticulate laborers who participated in Charleston's waterfront economy and were a part of its social networks demonstrate the full extent of their collective ability to influence the course of major

¹⁵⁴ Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets," WMQ.

¹⁵⁵ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), pp. 211-247.

¹⁵⁶ See Alfred Young, *The Shoemaker and the Tea Party* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999); and Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 2005).

events in the history of South Carolina and North America in the Revolutionary Era. Similarly, the bold and empowered sailors who made Charleston their permanent or temporary home found it possible to avoid impressment and other undesirable work by taking advantage of networks for concealing and quickly hiring sailors in and around Charleston--networks that were well established in earlier decades of resistance to impressment and employment droughts for sailors. In many ways, the networks of escape and concealment for slaves and sailors overlapped and provided avenues for emancipation of servants as well. Thus, Charleston and its waterfront environment was a space in which maritime laborers could find the resources and support necessary to continue the battle against a violent and expanding labor regime and win full and partial victories even in the midst of a major war.

The advantages maritime workers found in the Revolutionary era are apparent in the difficulties faced by the propertied beyond the Stamp Act crisis that further distracted the ostensibly law abiding population from their duties of vigilance over the waterfront. In 1768, concerns over a variety British policies prompted one of what would be many meetings of mechanics, having designated a live oak tree in Mazyck's pasture as the liberty tree. This particular meeting was called to drum up support for candidates for the Assembly. There was a good deal of drinking there and at Dillon's Tavern. Despite the drinking, the sympathetic printer, Peter Timothy, described the meeting as very ordered.¹⁵⁷ A similar event of toasting and marching, this time in honor of the Massachusetts Stamp Act resisters took place seven days later that also ended at Dillon's

¹⁵⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 3 October 1768.

Tavern.¹⁵⁸ Such activities suggest that the population that was counted on for vigilance in and around Charleston was preoccupied to such an extent that there was additional room for continued “disorders” that were indicated by advertisements for the return of stolen goods and grand jury presentments calling for more attention to laws. Certainly the non-importation agreements had an effect on the maritime community, as ships and crews may have been brought to a standstill with little recourse for earning profits or wages.¹⁵⁹ The responses to imported tea in 1773 prompted similar actions. The Sons of Liberty in Charleston saw the landing of a cargo of tea as an affront, according to Timothy, because the duty applied to the tea was created by the same act of Parliament that produced the Stamp Act. An assembly of landholders was held at the Exchange and they agreed to non-importation of tea.¹⁶⁰ When tea was landed after this date, the customs officials avoided any conflicts like those in Boston by moving the tea quickly early on the morning when the time had expired for the duty to be paid to the basement of the exchange as a seized cargo. Since there was no longer any danger that the tea would be offered for sale, it remained untouched.¹⁶¹ Eventually, the General Committee created to enforce non-importation of tea were forced to act by the arrival of another shipment of tea landed by captain Maitland, but they decided that it could not be removed from collector's office without paying duty or using violence, so they decided to leave it as the first shipment of East India teas had been--in the exchange cellar. The “people” were annoyed by this decision and sought out Maitland, but he managed to slip away and get

¹⁵⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 10 October 1768.

¹⁵⁹ Mechanics and merchants met in July of 1769, the first at the liberty tree and the second at Dillon's, to amend the non-importation agreement, *South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 July 1769.

¹⁶⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 December 1773.

¹⁶¹ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 27 December 1773.

on board HMS *Glasgow*. He then had his ship join him at Rebellion Road where they awaited a good breeze and dared not come to town. Timothy stated that he did not know what the people planned, but he thought they would have simply made a public display of him.¹⁶² Such a public uproar only contributed to the atmosphere in which maritime workers and others could see to their own needs while undermining the interests of their employers and other property holders.

Thus, it is not surprising that near the end of this period leading up to the Revolution, the readers of the *South Carolina Gazette* were confronted with the revelatory news that a criminal conspiracy had been revealed. On the 21st of February 1774, the printer related, “the day before the sessions began, discovery was very opportunely made, by (whom) several of the burglaries and robberies which have been so frequent of late were committed.” He went on to explain that on a Wednesday before the court met, two slaves were tried and convicted for theft and sentenced to be hanged. Information received from the convicted slaves prompted searches which brought to light “part of a most infamous and dangerous set of villains of whom the public had entertained very little suspicion.” John Thompson, an umbrella maker and shopkeeper, Richard Thompson, who kept a livery stable, and George Vargent, a coachman, were charged with receiving stolen goods and were also said to have masterminded thefts that had earned them “many thousand pounds.” When tried, they were convicted without the jurors leaving the room and were to be sentenced within the week.¹⁶³ While these men became notorious for the extent to which they encouraged theft and profited from it, they were not alone in this inclination among the propertied of Charleston. The outbreak of

¹⁶² *South-Carolina Gazette*, 25 July 1744.

¹⁶³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 14 February 1774.

war with England would eventually make this situation of lax law enforcement and frequent daring crimes even worse, as preparations for the conflict and then the occupation of Charleston by the British forces further undermined the efforts of those pushing for tighter social and legal controls.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE BATTLE OVER CHARLESTON IN REVOLUTION AND WAR

On the 9th of October 1776, South Carolina's recently elected President, John Rutledge, laid before the General Assembly a letter received from General Robert Howe in response to the recent repulse of the British attack on Charleston. In the letter, Howe applauded the zeal of the inhabitants in their military victory, and felt compelled to point out the vulnerability of all of South Carolina if the town fell into British hands. Noting the confluence of rivers that would provide ready access to the backcountry, the commodiousness of the harbor, and the ease of defense of the town and harbor for the British if they captured and properly fortified them, Howe recommended an intense preparation for the defense of the port. Failure to do so immediately would hasten a British occupation that would in turn "bring upon our backs every tribe of Indians and call to their banners an host of domestic insurgents."¹ Certainly the stakes were high for the Patriot interests in South Carolina, but the impending conflict in the capital city between the rebelling South Carolinians on the one side and the British and their loyalist supporters on the other was not the only contest over Charleston. The battles fought between maritime laborers and their employers from the 1740s onward continued in this

¹ *Journal of the General Assembly*, 9 October 1776.

period marked by the outbreak of war with England and the eventual occupation and subsequent evacuation of Charleston by the British army.

The larger political conflict of the Revolution necessarily shaped both the long-term conflicts over the uses of the Charleston waterfront and who would benefit from the opportunities available in an Atlantic port. The war, despite some new opportunities in supplying materials for defense, was highly disruptive and potentially disastrous for the profit-making activities for merchants and the planters they represented, but the presence of the British army near, and eventually in Charleston opened up opportunities for sailors, servants and slaves who found new opportunities to gain more leverage in battles over working conditions and forms of compensation with their current or future employers. Clearly the Revolution in South Carolina shaped the struggles along the waterfront, but the long-standing contest over the appropriate uses of waterfront resources also played a significant role in determining how the British approached quelling the rebellion in South Carolina and how the Patriots made preparations for the defense of their state. Both the British military commanders and the rebelling South Carolinians recognized that slave men and women were pivotal in the war effort as agents of change. The waterfront environment was central in the drama that would unfold in these years of war.

Historians' treatment of maritime laborers in and around Charleston during the American Revolution has long been uneven. While historians included enslaved men and women in some of the earliest histories of this period in South Carolina's history, they most frequently portrayed these men and women in overly generalized terms, ignoring the variety of backgrounds and experiences of South Carolina's slaves and omitting any signs of agency. Thus early accounts that included a discussion of the enslaved

population remained focused on the responses of the propertied and elite to British attempts at fomenting rebellion among slaves. Slaves themselves were characterized as a monolithic mass of unskilled field laborers and thoroughly acculturated and intensely loyal domestic servants.² This treatment of slaves and free blacks began to change first with the publication of Herbert Aptheker's *American Negro Slave Revolts* and, second, with Benjamin Quarles's, *The Negro in the American Revolution*. Both authors uncovered obscured or "forgotten" histories that emphasized the agency and importance of men and women of African descent in the history of the American Revolution.³ More recently, Sylvia Frey tackled the specific ways in which enslaved men and women, through their purposeful and often dramatic actions, shaped the nature of the war in the South. She argued that the Revolution gave enslaved men and women an opportunity to engage in large-scale resistance, primarily through desertion to the British.⁴ Cassandra Pybus followed Frey's lead, pulling out additional details of this extraordinary trend in slave self-empowerment. She followed the lives of several self-emancipated slaves beyond the physical and temporal bounds of the American Revolution, and in the process, further revealed the motivations of and mechanisms of flight available to runaway slaves in this period.⁵ In order to explain the success of many of the runaways in this period, both Pybus and Frey emphasized the speedy communication from region to region in the slave South, of first the proclaimed British policy of offering freedom to

² For an example of this treatment, see Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities*.

³ Herbert Aptheker, *American Negro Slave Revolts* (New York: Knopf, 1943); Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961) pp.137-138, 165. Aptheker's work on African American resistance first appeared in pamphlet form in 1939 and was followed by another short work: *The Negro in the American Revolution* (1940).

⁴ Sylvia Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

⁵ Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*.

deserted slaves, and subsequently the exact geographic whereabouts of British forces—the perceived agents of liberty—at any particular point in time.⁶ In other words, existing networks of communication within and between slave communities were an essential part of the mass flight that occurred in this period. Finally, with a particular focus on South Carolina, Robert Olwell argued that the readily informed and active slave population of the Lowcountry forced the hand of their masters and propelled them into the Revolution by prompting the belief that slaves would willingly conspire with the British to destroy South Carolina’s plantation economy and society.⁷ The evidence uncovered by the careful research of historians of the experiences and ideology of the enslaved in South Carolina proved these men and women to be active and radical participants in the American Revolution, not the passive and unthinking population that many historians from the eighteenth through the twentieth century have suggested.

For the enslaved of Charleston and its environs, the period of armed conflict provided new opportunities to pursue real or de facto freedom. Opportunities abounded for flight and the chance to earn freedom in service with the British. The British actively pursued policies in South Carolina and Georgia designed to encourage slaves to flee, and to seek either retribution from their masters or opportunities escape the Lowcountry and gain freedom. These two options were not mutually exclusive, and, regardless of the motivations, the number of runaways remained huge, as demonstrated by contemporary estimates of the number of slaves taken by the British before, during, and after the occupation. The inhabitants of Charleston and its environs drew their sense of the losses from a variety of newspaper accounts and advertisements. For instance, in the fall of

⁶ Frey, pp. 50-58, 64-65, 123, 175.

⁷ Olwell, pp. 228-229, 250.

1779, readers of the South Carolina American and General Gazette learned that British forces under Colonel Maitland evacuated Beaufort for Georgia and left behind an estimated 300 slaves.⁸ From the State Gazette of South Carolina, Low Country residents learned that a great deal of theft and destruction, including the carrying off of "thousands of negroes," followed the disappointed attack upon Charleston by the British and Loyalists by land under General Augustine Prevost.⁹ In one of many advertisements placed for the recovery of slaves, James Stobo sought assistance in the recovery of twenty-one slaves who ran from him said to be lurking about Charleston.¹⁰ Sixteen slaves also ran from Andrew Lord on the Congaree. In his advertisement, Lord opined that promises of freedom enticed his slaves away. Assuming that they had not received their expected freedom after their flight, Lord hoped to bring them back by offering to forego punishment if they would return.¹¹ Still reeling from the effects of mass flight even after the British took Charleston, William Maxwell looked to recover 18 slaves from his southern plantations missing since June of 1779. Among the missing slaves numbered Abraham, a bricklayer said to be in Charleston, and Abel, who had gone with the French.¹² In addition, 6 slaves working in the various Quartermaster's Departments harbored Richard Walter's 15 slaves who ran from him.¹³ The British presence and slaves' knowledge of their willingness to harbor and employ runaways clearly contributed to increased flight.

For decades, planters, merchants and their allies confronted the reality of an

⁸ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 17 September 1779.

⁹ *State Gazette of Sout Carolina*, 9 July 1779.

¹⁰ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

¹¹ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 4 November 1780.

¹² *Royal Gazette*, 16-19 May 1781.

¹³ *Royal Gazette*, 11-14 July 1781.

unruly population of enslaved workers in and around the waterfront. While these elites certainly held most of the power and exercised it in violent retribution for, and in hopes of preventing future rebellious acts of those they employed, it is also true that the determination of slaves in taking and holding on to more and more liberties tested the system of oversight and control. During the Revolution, the slave labor regime did not break, but it bent considerably. Enslaved maritime laborers opened up additional maneuvering room after the outbreak of the war with Great Britain. With the circulation of knowledge of Lord Dunmore's proclamation, permanent, temporary or threatened flight became, as detailed below, a highly effective means for enslaved men and women to achieve increased liberties in the war years. In the meantime, Lowcountry planters and other slave owners, under attack from within and without, felt singled out by British policies encouraging flight. . While daily contact with unruly and assertive slaves in Charleston and along South Carolina's waterways produced annoyance and futile calls for better regulation of the enslaved in the years preceding the war, the suppressed fears of a large-scale desertion and massive slave revolts were unleashed by these real and imagined British policies.

Responses from South Carolinians to these new dangerous circumstances were a mix of cries for assistance to the general public, through the placement of advertisements, and careful but determined acts of terror. The public notices of the loss of slaves as either runaways or "stolen property" served to warn the public, but officials in particular and slaveowners in general worried that they also served to encourage more enslaved men and women to run. Alarm over this trend is seen in less public sources detailing the British practices of harboring and the enslaved people's willingness to seek out their

protection. In these cases, circumspect correspondence and not public notices in the newspapers detailed the actions of runaway slaves.. For example, while on duty as part of the South Carolina forces sent to assist Georgia's patriot forces facing invasion in 1776, Stephen Bull wrote to Henry Laurens and the Council of Safety from Savannah and reported that, while 9 of Arthur Middleton's slaves had recently boarded a British man of war, 40 or 50 of his slaves had "really deserted" and above 150 slaves sought refuge and awaited British protection on Tybee Island.¹⁴ Despite the attempts to keep details of large encampments of fugitive slaves secret, news still circulated. Indeed, even overseas papers carried accounts of the significant numbers of enslaved people who ran to the British or Loyalists. For example, a Belfast newspaper told of an unidentified former Regulator based in Florida who harbored slaves who "flocked to him."¹⁵

Accounts of mass flight spread despite efforts to squelch them, further inspiring slaves to run. Patterns of flight demonstrated the intent of the runaways to reach the British or at least place themselves in or near areas, like Charleston, considered likely to fall into British hands. Indeed, while the British maintained a naval presence in Charleston prior to their failed amphibious assault of 1776, some enslaved people worked to get themselves to Sullivan's Island or directly to the ships in Rebellion Road. In one instance, a slave named Tom took advantage of the hectic and frenzied military preparations to work free from supervision and place himself in a position to take or earn his freedom. Recently from Philadelphia, the 14 or 15 year-old Tom spoke very good English, was sharp, handy and used to "house work." He had run before, and Thomas Radcliffe, the author of the advertisement placed for his capture and return, assumed that

¹⁴ Stephen Bull to Henry Laurens, 13 March 1776, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁵ *Belfast National Liberator*, 20th October 1776.

he would change his name and pretend to be available for hire. He also suspected that Tom lingered around Sullivan's Island, the fort, or some of the camps, where prospects for temporary employment among strangers was greater but, more importantly, the proximity to the British navy was greatest. Tom demonstrated a very strong determination to be free, evidenced by his temporary capture and repeated flight.¹⁶ Jonathan Scott searched for 2 men, Philander and Sam, also skulking about Sullivan's Island, likely hoping to join the British anchored nearby.¹⁷

The actions of enslaved men and women who took matters into their own hands and fled to the refuge found behind British lines or on board British vessels kept South Carolina property holders off balance with constant reminders that there were dangers from both without and within. Even after the British exited the harbor, they still wrought devastation through raids along the coast, by taking advantage of those enslaved persons who worked hard to reach areas of frequent plundering. This was likely Pompey's intent when he fled from Mr. Fenwicke's Island on his way to St. Helena Island to bring in livestock with John Imrie. Pompey was a ship carpenter, and Imrie described him as very cunning and capable of telling a fine story.¹⁸ Further evidence of the concerted efforts of slaves to reach the British is contained in a letter from Henry Laurens to his brother, James, in 1777. In the letter, he noted that one of James's slaves, Ishmael, had been taken with 25 other slaves by British vessels while fishing outside the bar. Laurens noted that he had worried about this and thus had tried to keep Ishmael at his house on Sundays

¹⁶ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 25 September to 2 October 1776.

¹⁷ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 12-19 January 1776.

¹⁸ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 10-17 April 1776.

rather than allow him his own time to go fishing.¹⁹ The fear of mass flight of slaves to the British was real enough for planters like Laurens. With pride and perhaps a sense of surprise or relief, Laurens wrote to his son, John, that all of his Savannah River property slaves remained loyal to him and had not deserted to the British. This was somewhat contradicted, however, in a letter sent by Lachlan McIntosh Jr., a frequent correspondent of Laurens's and a resident of Georgia, to his father. McIntosh noted that the overseer of New Hope, one of the Savannah River properties Laurens remarked upon to his son, had secretly sailed to Florida with 5 of Laurens's slaves.²⁰ While Laurens continued to believe that his slaves could be loyal to him, evidence suggests that his slaves and others would willingly abandon their situations under the right circumstances.

Even when the British were particularly hard to locate or reach, or if enslaved men and women refused to gamble that they would find what they sought with the "enemy," they still took advantage of the disruptions that the war brought in order to get to Charleston and the opportunities that awaited them there. An additional piece of correspondence in the Laurens collection provides some insight into the continued uses of Charleston by enslaved people hoping for an improvement in their circumstances in the midst of war. John Lewis Gervais wrote to Laurens to provide an account of one of Laurens's slaves named Collonel [sic] from his Mepkin plantation. Collonel arrived in Charleston from Mepkin without permission and Gervais sent him to the workhouse for a "gentle correction." While Collonel was there, he witnessed the execution of another

¹⁹ To James Laurens from Henry Laurens, 7 June 1777, *Papers of Henry Laurens*. In the same letter, Laurens recounted an attempt of another of his brother's slaves to break free from regular supervision. Joe had disagreed with Mr. Creighton, his overseer or employer, and was subsequently allowed by Laurens to "work out" and bring in his wages instead of continuing with Creighton.

²⁰ Laurens to John Laurens, 14 August 1776, *Papers of Henry Laurens* and *Collections GHS*, XII, 54-55, noted by the editors of *Papers of Henry Laurens* in a footnote to the cited letter.

slave caught trying to board a man of war with 3 women and 2 children. Gervais told Laurens that authorities made Collonel believe that his unauthorized trip to Charleston would bring the same punishment. He then begged Gervais forgiveness and found himself sent back to Mepkin where Gervais believed the experience would be made common knowledge at the plantation and deter others from coming to town.²¹ The fact that an enslaved man was executed for attempting to board a British vessel demonstrated the sense of urgency, perhaps even feelings of powerlessness, of South Carolina officials and slaveowners to prevent the mass desertions. In addition, if Collonel spread news of his experience as Gervais hoped (whether he knew what crime the executed man had committed or not), it had little effect, as enslaved men and women continued to flee to Charleston. For slaves, the port town continued as the location of choice for potential freedom through additional flight or deception and “passing” as free.

This was the case in December of 1776, when George Smith advertised for the return of Jack who had run from Paul Pritchard’s shipyard at Hobcaw where he had lived for more than 7 years. Jack, described as artful and sensible, likely went into Charleston to take advantage of maritime connections he cultivated before being spotted on a pettiauger headed southward, possibly en route to Port Royal or Georgia.²²

There was a growing trend of slaves making such attempts to follow the British south. Certainly the consistent presence of the British in Florida, a territory where residents made no attempt to break free from British rule, and then the capture of Savannah, created circumstances for South Carolinians that virtually replicated the situation of the 1740s when the Spanish offered a haven for runaways fleeing the

²¹ From John Lewis Gervais to Laurens, 2 August 1777, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

²² *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 12-19 December 1776.

Lowcountry. Slaves knew this well and their actions reflected this knowledge. In a letter sent to Henry Laurens from Joseph Clay in 1777, Clay informed Laurens that a growing number of slaveowners in South Carolina and Georgia suffered from the fact that “domestics [were] running to [Florida Loyalists].”²³ For the enslaved men and women hoping to gain protection from the British, the span of time from the departure of the British navy from Charleston Harbor to the capture of Savannah was particularly challenging as their destination was unclear and the path to it filled with unknown hindrances. Once the British established a hold in Georgia, much of the uncertainty was taken away and flight was a far more viable option. Clearly aware of the British presence in Georgia, it is likely that Hampshire, a carpenter, Sally, his wife, Mingo, a cooper, Bob and Pheby, Bob’s wife, all ran away from Maurice Simons’s plantation in St. John’s Parish to seek protection and freedom from the British, and not to return to Mr. Brewton’s plantation south of Savannah, as their new owner thought.²⁴ The escape of Jamie, Peter and York provides another example of slaves seeking refuge southward with British or Loyalist forces. John Fisher, who advertised for their recovery, believed that the three former cabinetmakers would journey to St. Augustine by land or water.²⁵ Similarly, Jemmy ran away from Jonathan Scott “about the time Mr. Poaug’s wench attempted to go on board the English ships off our bar last month.” He spoke “good English” and served as a ship carpenter, good seaman and coasting pilot. As such, coasters and ship builders of Charleston knew him well. Scott thought that he might try

²³ Joseph Clay to Henry Laurens, 16 October 1777, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

²⁴ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 7 April 1779.

²⁵ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 31 July 1777.

to get to St. Augustine or find passage out of the colony.²⁶ With similar skills and perhaps confident of his chances of finding employment in Charleston, or hoping to return to Bermuda, his birthplace, Joe, a sailmaker, found an opportunity to disappear while the ship *General Moultrie* was moored at Rose's Wharf.²⁷

The frequent flight of slaves in this period was a product of the successful establishment and maintenance of maritime networks for the passage of people and news that was centered in Charleston. These networks were maintained, in part, by slave boatmen and other enslaved people connected to the waterfront. It is not at all surprising, then, that a significant number of runaways from the Lowcountry in this period were experienced maritime workers.²⁸ For example, at nearly the same time that Jack Fell sought his freedom on board any vessel that would take him, Sam, a slave sailor from Bermuda, ran away from the brigantine *Anne*, captained by James Darrel. He took a parcel of seamen's clothing with him and likely looked to ship out on another vessel, but as his owner also hailed from Bermuda, he may have had another port in mind as his ultimate destination.²⁹ June, who ran from Richard Cole, had extensive experience as a sailor, having been formerly owned by Captain Josiah Young and having served on board the *Fair American*. Cole thought that June would probably attempt to ship himself on board a vessel as a free person.³⁰ Similarly, Toney and Marcus, both frequent workers on board vessels, ran from their respective masters.³¹ Able to rely on his experiences in 2 or more Atlantic ports, Mingo Piton of Bermuda, described as above 40 and a good sailor,

²⁶ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 14 August 1777.

²⁷ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 7 July 1777.

²⁸ From 1777 to 1778 alone, 10 out of 52 (nearly 20 percent) advertised runaways in the *Gazette of the State of South Carolina* were noted to have current or past experience in maritime occupations.

²⁹ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 4 August 1777.

³⁰ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 16 December 1778.

³¹ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 15 May 1777 and GSC, 10 February 1779.

ran away from the sloop *Diana* in Charleston.³² Tom, accustomed to work on board vessels as a cook, ran from Hopson Pinckney at Haddrel's Point. Pinckney imagined Tom would claim to be free and attempt to sign onto a vessel.³³ Will, a painter and glazer, ran from James Keith and was thought to be "skulking around Charleston or on board some vessel or in the river boats, as he [understood] patrooning in both rivers and [was] a good boatman."³⁴ In another instance, Luke, belonging to the schooner *Pocotaligo* Packet, the property of Richard Wayne and Co., ran away and was advertised for by Jacob Valk. Not only was he apt to have very useful experience from work on the schooner, but he also spoke French and was therefore thought to be among the French in Charleston where he might find passage out of South Carolina.³⁵ Wareby, 40 and formerly the property of James Durand, ran from John M'Ilraith. His master thought that some slaves in town harbored him as he used to be a fisherman.³⁶ Moses, artful and creative in convincing captains and others to employ him, ran from John M'Culloh and had been seen fishing and working on board a vessel in the harbor.³⁷ Pompey ran from the schooner *Polly* possibly to find employment on another vessel. He was described as artful and articulate, and those who knew him imagined he could easily pass as free.³⁸ Caesar, described as a handy oarsman, jobbing carpenter and a cook, was just as likely as Pompey to find work on board a vessel with such a set of skills.³⁹ Finally, Mick, who hailed from the French West Indies and was recently purchased by Thomas Forbes of

³² *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 10 April 1777.

³³ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 19 February 1778.

³⁴ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 7 May 1778.

³⁵ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 19 March 1778.

³⁶ *South Carolina & American General Gazette*, 30 July 1779.

³⁷ *Royal Gazette*, 30 June-4 July 1781.

³⁸ *Royal Gazette*, 15-18 May 1782.

³⁹ *Royal Gazette*, 21-28 September 1782.

East Florida, was an excellent sailmaker and a good sailor. Forbes suspected that he would attempt to pass as free and get on board a vessel in the harbor. Clearly, greater opportunities for employment on board vessels existed in this period judging by the concerns of those advertising for the return of maritime slaves.

Men were not alone in seeking freedom via water routes. The patterns of flight employed by women reflected a trend among many runaways in seeking the assistance of sailors and boatmen. Witnesses saw Mary-Ann, who ran from George Noddings, in many places about town and particularly on Major Butler's schooner with his boatmen. Not only did she break free from her master's supervision, but she also took advantage of a group of enslaved men who, although not runaways, were also free from constant supervision. All masters of vessels were cautioned not to carry her "off the state."⁴⁰ Additionally, Tenar ran from Margaret Peronneau and was seen on a schooner headed to John's Island when the British were there. However, after being seen in town "at the houses that sailors frequent" Peronneau sought her out there.⁴¹ Additionally, a married couple, Judy and Cato, ran away from J. Lockwood in the company of Stepney, a man employed on Lockwood's boat, while the three remained in Charleston.⁴² Also relying on the connections and skills of one of their party, Dick, Primus, Apollo and Leena, with her child, all ran from Sampson Clarke after the surrender of Charleston. Apollo had formerly worked for Captain Thomas Cochran and would be able to reconnect with maritime slaves to gain assistance in the group's endeavors to be free.⁴³ Isaac, a young boatman used to going in a schooner up and down the rivers of Georgia, also appeared

⁴⁰ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 11 August 1779.

⁴¹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 15 October 1779.

⁴² *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 27 October 1779.

⁴³ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 3 January 1781.

willing to help others escape when he ran away from Andrew Lord with 2 other men.⁴⁴ Clearly, the enslaved women and men referenced above knew the maritime networks that had been built up and maintained over time to assist runaways in their escape, and they used them in large numbers in this period to take advantage of the disruption, brought about by a war that also brought them new and better opportunities for success in staying out after fleeing.

A common tactic of many past runaway slaves who did not have maritime skills or existing connections to the maritime world was the adoption of the characteristics, through dress and mannerism, of a sailor. A convincing actor could find ready employment on ships heading out of Charleston and other embarkation points in South Carolina. This was the case for Jack Fell, or Eboe Jack, an enslaved tailor in Charleston. While he was not an experienced sailor or boatman, he was observed on several occasions boarding vessels along the waterfront after his escape from James Henry Butler. Fell likely attempted to convince captains that he was both free and experienced on boats. He may have been quite convincing in his claims due to his very confident demeanor encapsulated in Butler's comment that Fell was "remarkable" in "carrying his head high and looking up."⁴⁵ Many other slaves took advantage of indirect but frequent connections to the maritime world in order to better their chances of successful flight. For example, 16 year-old Abraham from Virginia ran from J. White. Abraham was neither a sailor nor a boatman, but he was practiced at "beat[ing] the drum," and he was described as likely, artful, active, and "fond of the sea." Thus, White assumed that he

⁴⁴ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 7 May 1778.

⁴⁵ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 14 October 1777.

would be lurking about the wharves or on board some vessel.⁴⁶ The saddler, Will, previously owned by Captain Tearse, also sought a maritime route for his escape. After he ran from John Callaghan, evidence from witnesses suggested that he was on board “some vessel in the harbor.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Tom, who may have changed his name to Frohawk, took this approach when he ran from John Remington. Witnesses reported seeing him working on board a ship bound for Liverpool.⁴⁸ When Toby ran from Alexander Inglis, witnesses reported that he was frequently working on the wharves and at General Gadsden’s in Charleston. Toby was successful in finding work and avoiding recapture passing as a free sailor for six weeks.⁴⁹ Similarly, Brutus stayed out for 2 months and continued to avoid capture. Much of his time after he ran may have been spent on board Captain Brown’s schooner, where at least one witness claimed to see him.⁵⁰ Finally, Lewis, who preferred to call himself Scotland, ran from George Fardo and had made an attempt to get on board a packet in the harbor. Scotland, described as smart and sensible, spoke French, and Fardo, thought he would attempt to get on another vessel in the harbor.⁵¹ With demand for hands on local and deep-sea vessels so high, pretended experience as a sailor or boatman opened up many opportunities for fugitive slaves.

As the armed conflict progressed and military preparations and actions became more common, opportunities for running, staying out, or finding paths to permanent freedom through waterfront connections increased. More soldiers in and around

⁴⁶ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 3 March 1779.

⁴⁷ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 15 May 1777 and GSC, 29 September 1779.

⁴⁸ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 12 June 1777.

⁴⁹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 18 June 1778.

⁵⁰ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 5 March 1778.

⁵¹ *Royal Gazette*, 22-25 August 1781.

Charleston allowed slaves to take advantage of an increased anonymity that came with crowding, as well as the near-constant movement of people into and out of Charleston. In addition, the hurried aspect of trade activities within the context of perpetual anticipation of a siege on Charleston made the already expediency-minded merchants and ship captains even more willing to forego the requirements of laws designed to prevent illegal hiring or harboring of slaves. One of many slaves who clearly understood this situation was Jemmy, a waiting man for Charles Clifford. Jemmy was already immersed in the military camp environment when he chose to run away. Clifford served in the 1st Regiment at the time of Jemmy's flight, and the knowledge of how the camps worked likely helped Jemmy remain hidden from his master. Jemmy took advantage of the fact that he was one of many commonly employed slaves in the camp, and would have earned enough money to assist him in remaining out. Jemmy's next step was to cultivate the notion that he was free and look for a way to distance himself from his master. Knowing that many of the ships in Charleston Harbor were anxious to fill their holds and complete their crews, Jemmy approached the captain of a French vessel and may have successfully secured a position on board.⁵²

Still, the intense work to fortify Charleston in advance of another British attack demonstrates the extreme effectiveness of the networks for harboring runaways and providing avenues for escape. At this time, a return of the intense anxiety and vigilance had masters and overseers on their guard. Even so, some slaves found a way to escape from supervision. For example, Charles, who called himself George, ran away from the public works at Haddrell's Point in 1777. When Benjamin Mazyck wrote an

⁵² *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 26 August 1778.

advertisement for his return in 1779, he noted that Charles had been seen recently on South Bay at the fish market wharf dressed in a “tarry frock and trowsers,” in the company of some sailors from one or more of the state vessels.⁵³ Andrew, described as “very artful and ingenious,” ran away from the public works. Witnesses spotted him on board vessels at the wharves and on the gallies.⁵⁴ Fortune ran from Charles Atkins, whose son, who was an officer in Colonel Hamilton’s regiment at Camden, claimed Fortune as his property. Fortune would have lived and traveled with the regiment while serving the younger Atkins, as his father suspected that the runaway had left town with the troops.⁵⁵ Clearly, with every advertised instance of such creative approaches to gaining increased or complete freedom, slaveowners implicitly acknowledged in the wording of their advertisements that there were and would continue to be innumerable unreported cases of slave flight.

Frustration among masters like James Parsons was increasing in this period. The flight of Abraham made Parsons particularly anxious and angry, and he threatened to assure the hanging of any boat or ship captain who took the runaway on board their vessel. Abraham’s past employment on a schooner indicates that he was among the population of slaves who were most successful in flight in this period, and on top of this, he was described as a thief and rogue. Witnesses spotted him on Port Royal Island where Parsons assumed that he would try to get on board a vessel in Beaufort or, after finding his way southward, in Georgia.⁵⁶ Frustration and the threat of violence were not limited to this one instance. When Devar ran away from the state shipyard at Hobcaw where he

⁵³ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 30 July 1779.

⁵⁴ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 27 August 1779.

⁵⁵ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 20 December 1780.

⁵⁶ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 23 October 1777.

was working for Paul Pritchard, John Calvert warned that he should return within 10 days to save his life, as the same reward of \$20 offered for his capture would also be offered for his head.⁵⁷ The resort to such violent threats is a clear indication of the helplessness slaveowners felt in this period as they faced growing numbers of runaways.

The Revolution did not bring positive changes and improved circumstances for all slaves in and around the Charleston waterfront. In fact, additional examples of runaways in this period suggest that the war may have negatively affected the living and working situations of some slaves, and that they ran away in order to regain lost advantages and then perhaps further improve their circumstances. For example, John Smyth sought the return of York and Jack. These men worked in rum distillery but they also frequently traveled “in a schooner up the Cooper.” Smyth had recently sold these men to a planter in the backcountry, perhaps to “protect” them from possible seizure by the British forces. This may have spurred them to take flight and, according to Smyth, seek out the assistance of acquaintances at Goose Creek, or the anonymity and possible employment at a military camp.⁵⁸ Bob Lindsay, who was likely a long-time resident of Charleston when the war broke out, was a skilled carpenter and may have spent a great deal of time working as a hired slave in the port town. What is certain is that his third master, William Brisbane was intolerable—possibly because he removed him from his position of relative autonomy in the port. Lindsay worked in Savannah before, and in the months after he ran from Brisbane, he was seen working in both Charleston and Georgetown.⁵⁹ Prince’s master assumed he would try to ship himself on board an outgoing vessel after

⁵⁷ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 17 December 1778.

⁵⁸ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 13 October 1779.

⁵⁹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 14-21 November 1776.

he ran, as he had formerly been employed by a captain and became “accustomed to the sea.”⁶⁰ Returning to the example of the runaway slaves who fled with six free white men from the *Comet*, Edward Allen spent some time informing readers of his advertisement of the past experiences of the runaway slaves. George Rogers frequently passed as a free man and spoke clear and fluent English. Rogers had joined with Black Sam, described as a good drummer and fife player, and Joe, who had previous sailing experience on board the brigantine *Defense*. Allen believed all these slave men to be experienced and comfortable in the maritime environment. Having determined that their recruitment on board the *Comet* resulted in a worsening of their condition, they were prompted to desert, confident of finding employment on other vessels.⁶¹ Perhaps also missing the freedoms of his earlier employment on Mr. John Ash’s schooner, Isaac ran from John Jarvis of Stann’s Island.⁶² Likely faced with the possibility of relocation, Senty, 15 years old and described as “artful,” ran from the plantation “late of Mr. Isaac Godin,” in Goosecreek, about six weeks prior to the placement of the advertisement for his return. He had been seen in town in a sailors garb and was thought to have found employment on a vessel.⁶³

For those slave men and women hesitant to take their chances in flight, motivation for making this gamble was fueled by the rumors of possible invasion by the British and the hurried efforts at fortifying the town. Slaves with or without maritime experience may very well have decided that they should leave before a siege, and perhaps return to the area or the port on their own terms after battles had ceased. This may have

⁶⁰ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 12 March 1778.

⁶¹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 1 May 1777.

⁶² *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 26 February 1778.

⁶³ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 16 April 1778.

been the case for Jem who ran from James Cooke. With the frenzied efforts to get vessels loaded and fit for sea before a British blockade was put in place, Cooke assumed that someone from “the last St. Eustatius fleet” had decoyed him away.⁶⁴ Bob also ran from John Brailsford at this time supposedly heading for the Southern part of the state, where he had become well known. He ran with 2 horses and a fowling piece and likely made his way to Georgia.⁶⁵ Paddy, well known in Charleston and Georgetown, had hired himself to a Frenchman to go to the fleet, and the author of the advertisement for his recovery assured readers that men in Charleston or Beaufort would pay the reward for his recovery.⁶⁶ Certainly the actions of these slaves frustrated slaveowners and local officials alike with their ability and willingness to make their escape.

After the British took over Charleston, slaves still found the means to run away despite British attempts to establish tight controls over Charleston’s “paroled” inhabitants, and the policy of the occupying force and government to identify, recover and protect the “property” of Loyalists. In choosing flight from Charleston, it appears that many men and women owned by Loyalists still hoped to find freedom with the British, and sought areas under British control where their masters would not be able to track them down and identify them as someone enslaved to a Loyalist. James Clarke, since the surrender of Charleston and while the fleet was on North Edisto River, lost Shoreham, Jehu and Cyrus. Clarke obtained permission to seek the slaves out from Clinton.⁶⁷ Will ran from Paul Hamilton on James Island after being sent to the Sugar house for correction. He had been seen since his escape and had been very insolent to

⁶⁴ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 3 December 1779.

⁶⁵ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 3 December 1779.

⁶⁶ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 3 December 1779.

⁶⁷ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 28 October 1780.

white people as he carried on a fishing business between Charleston and James Island.⁶⁸ Will ran from Captain John Collett of the Prince of Wales's American Regiment and stole some items at the time of his flight.⁶⁹ Certainly men and women not claimed by Loyalists tried to take advantage of the transition of power in Charleston to make their escapes. Soon after, and certainly taking advantage of a partial reduction in the power of Patriot sympathizers in Charleston, Quamina, well known in Charleston for his impudent behavior, ran from John Fisher. Prior to running, Quamina had told Fisher, "he can go when he pleases, and I can do nothing to him, nor shall I ever get a copper for him." He was a carver and chair maker by trade.⁷⁰ Others ran from their Loyalist or Patriot masters in Charleston at this time as well. Joe ran from Edward Oats, who forbid his employment on any vessel except in his majesty's service.⁷¹ Samuel Baas of No. 35, on the Bay, searched for Prince who spoke very good English and worked as a carpenter employed recently by the Quarter Master General's Department in Charleston and in Monck's Corner. He was ordered back to Baas, but had afterwards disappeared and was sighted near the Quarter Master's yard in Charleston.⁷²

While a considerable number of South Carolina's slaves chose to flee slavery in this period, flight was not the only proactive strategy for enslaved men and women in and near the Charleston waterfront. For many others, the option of remaining with their masters, or at least within reach of their masters, seemed a more advantageous situation or at least a more pragmatic choice. In fact, there is evidence that some slave men with

⁶⁸ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 18 November 1780.

⁶⁹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 6 December 1780.

⁷⁰ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 21 February 1781.

⁷¹ *Royal Gazette*, 3-7 March 1781.

⁷² *Royal Gazette*, 17-21 March 1781.

maritime experience went to great lengths to stay connected to Charleston and the larger waterfront community when the opportunities to join the British were handed to them. For example, when a British privateer captured a pettiauger owned by Rose and Torrans, the slave boatmen retook the vessel and came back to Charleston with enemy prisoners.⁷³ In 1779, after 20 to 30 men from privateers landed at Waccamaw Neck and stole 21 slaves, 4 of the captured slaves made their escape from the party of privateersmen and returned to report the incident to authorities.⁷⁴ A similar example of the considerable exertions made by slave boatmen or sailors to counter the British can be seen in the above mentioned recovery of Mr. Bellamy's schooner, accomplished only with the help of the captured slave sailors. Less militaristic, but equally determined, were those who continued to make Charleston itself a zone for increased freedoms while awaiting the final outcome of the conflict between their masters. In other words, in the midst of this conflict from which periods of chaos reared up, many slaves demonstrated their willingness to work carefully to keep communication and movement lines open, poised to take advantage of more certain or potentially advantageous opportunities that might arise for temporary or permanent freedom or material improvements in their circumstances.

For sailors, the armed phase of the Revolution brought a renewal of the concerns present in the 1740s when the colony was a frequent focal point for the conflicts between England and its foes, France and Spain. The dangerous prospect of impressment into British naval service perhaps loomed largest in the period leading up to the British retreat from Charleston Harbor, prompted by their failed attempt to take the port in 1776. Indeed, evidence of desertion from the British naval service is found in the frequent

⁷³ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 8 December 1779.

⁷⁴ *State Gazette of South Carolina*, 5 May 1779.

communications between naval captains and the newly created Council of Safety. The Royal Navy was a clear and troubling presence for the Patriot leaders of South Carolina. William Campbell, the Royal Governor, had been forced to leave his house and take up residence on one of the ships of war in the harbor, and from this position, with the threat of the navy's cannon, he worked to undermine the Patriot movement. For instance, Captain Tollemache, commander of the British naval forces in the harbor, threatened to "distress the trade" of Charleston if deserters from his service who had enlisted in the South Carolina regiments were not returned to his ships. The Council of Safety advised Colonels Moultrie and Huger to respond to Tollemache and claim ignorance of any such men.⁷⁵ In another case, Elisha Painter, released from his employ as a boatswain of the *Swallow Packet*, a Patriot vessel, applied for assistance to the Council of Safety. He claimed to have deserted from the British vessel the *Cherokee*, and the Council members agreed to give him a pass to go to Georgia in order to find passage back to his family in England.⁷⁶ Several American sailors, whether signed on or pressed into service, deserted from the British navy immediately after the failed attempt to take Charleston in 1776. They made themselves immediately useful by providing South Carolina authorities with intelligence regarding the British operations in the area.⁷⁷ While not a typical sailor, Mr. Pharaoh, a pilot from Charleston taken away and pressed into Royal navy service, returned to Charleston from St. Augustine after making his escape in a small boat with nine enslaved fishermen taken from their boats by frigates.⁷⁸ A similar example of escape from the British, perhaps in lieu of engaging in their service, came when a

⁷⁵ *Council of Safety*, 26 June 1775.

⁷⁶ *Council of Safety*: 2 December 1775.

⁷⁷ Walsh, *Writings of Christopher Gadsden*, 1 July 1776 letter to Colonel William Moultrie.

⁷⁸ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 14 July 1777.

schooner was taken off the South Carolina coast. Mr. Bellamy, who was on board the vessel, managed to regain command and bring it back to Charleston. The appearance of a brig from North Carolina inspired Bellamy, who with the assistance of 8 of his slaves also on board, combated and overpowered the privateer crew.⁷⁹ Even after the occupation of Charleston by British forces, desertions of free white sailors could not be halted. For instance, John Coudil deserted from the sloop *Loyalist*.⁸⁰ These accounts, reflecting traditional patterns of desertion and avoidance of press gangs in British occupied ports, suggests that the fear of forced service for the Royal Navy remained a major preoccupation of sailors in Charleston.

Sailors did not limit their desertion to the British navy in this period; sailors also refused to be locked into any situation that they felt might force them into danger or interfere with their long-term economic goals. In order to avoid capture and impressment by the British or to meet other needs of their own, sailors deserted from American vessels or fled from Charleston, forcing South Carolina civil and military officials to adopt restrictive policies or offer incentives for the acquisition or retention of seamen. For example, six men, described variably as “Scotchmen,” “Irish,” and a “North-bred Indian,” all deserted from the *Comet*, Brigantine of War, commanded by Edward Allen, assigned to cruises along the coast to protect against British raiding parties. Several enslaved men joined them in their escape, and Allen assured readers of his advertisement for their return that all had freely and willingly signed on for service. Of course, their freedom of choice came to an end when they signed papers agreeing to serve on Allen’s

⁷⁹ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 8 December 1779 and *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 10 December 1779.

⁸⁰ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 21 November 1780.

vessel, and their captain had no qualms about threatening prosecution for anyone found harboring the free or enslaved sailors.⁸¹ In 1779, responding to a message from the Governor emphasizing the need for coastal defense and the scarcity of seamen, the House of Representatives passed a resolution setting wages for the galleys employed in defense of the state. Pay for the captain and lieutenant was \$4 and \$3 each day respectively, the doctor, master, boatswain, gunner, purser, and carpenter would receive \$60 per month, and able-bodied seamen \$45. A \$100 bounty awaited every officer and able-bodied seaman that signed on. In addition, speaking to both the limited number of sailors available and the dire need for security along the coast, twenty able-bodied slave sailors would be employed on each of the galleys at \$40 per month. In addition, they were to be appraised, and a system of compensation set up for their masters in the event of death or capture of the slaves.⁸² Early in 1780, with the imminent threat of invasion from a British fleet the Senate urged the House of Representatives to quickly pass an ordinance placing an embargo on all exports, hoping to prevent the further exodus of ships and sailors from the port.⁸³ Through desertion and avoidance of recruitment or impressment, sailors worked hard to keep their own interests at the fore.

Of course, sailors found that the Revolution could hold some promise for immediate or long-term social or economic gain, and they acted accordingly. At times, the potential gains that could be made in the midst of war outweighed even the perennial fear of miserable treatment, poor living conditions, and death in the British navy. In one instance, a man, identified by a newspaper account only as Finlay, a former Carolina

⁸¹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 1 May 1777.

⁸² *Journals of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, 31 August 1779, p. 179.

⁸³ *Journals of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, 11 February 1780, p. 291-292.

coasting captain, became a privateer captain for the British, operating out of Bermuda. He had been successfully taking prizes and, on one occasion, was bold enough to set his prisoners ashore in Bull's Bay near Georgetown. At a later date, not long after privateers “plundered” 47 slaves from Benjamin Guerard's plantation near Port Royal, a group of militiamen intercepted raiders attempting to steal more goods and carry off additional slaves in the same area. Local militia captured a wounded lieutenant of the raiding privateer along with Sabert Oglesby, a known Lowcountry inhabitant serving as a guide for the British along the coast. Oglesby was brought to town under guard.⁸⁴ Free sailors who hailed from or spent time in Charleston or its ancillary ports during the Revolution also became implicated in other disorders in the capital city, which will be discussed below.

Like sailors, servants faced with the turmoil of the war found some new opportunities for changing their circumstances. With sailors scarce and their wages subsequently high, the chances for running away and taking positions on vessels greatly improved.⁸⁵ Any compliance that servants’ masters may have gained from ship captains, tavern keepers, and others in the past in identifying and refusing to employ indented teenagers or adults seemed to vanish, as many stood to gain from looking the other way. Thus, the apprentice William Lord may have found some willing assistants in running from Thomas Baldwin.⁸⁶ Certainly with his connections to ship captains and sailors, Daniele Caine’s flight from William Gibbes, factor and wharf owner, may have been

⁸⁴ Gazette of the State of SC, 14 October 1778 and Gazette of the State of SC, 14 April 1779.

⁸⁵ Evidence to suggest higher wages for sailors is found in a letter from Henry Laurens, as president of the Committee of Safety to Elisha Sawyer authorizing the recruitment 200 sailors in Bermuda with bounty of £10 Carolina money and wages at £21 per calendar month and provisions, January 19, 1776, *Papers of Henry Laurens*. Henry Laurens also complained in a letter to Colonel Bull, in 1776, of a shortage of available vessels and a concomitant shortage of sailors, 25 January 1776, *Journal of the Council of Safety*.

⁸⁶ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 20 March 1777.

eased considerably. Caine had been trusted in the past with purchasing goods on Gibbes's account, and the latter feared that the former might have used this privilege to purchase his way on board an outgoing vessel.⁸⁷ Despite the lack of any obvious connections to the waterfront, William Bland ran from John McCall who had apprenticed him as a tailor.⁸⁸ Joseph Roper advertised for the capture and return of his apprentice, James Allen, who had fled after arming himself with a pistol.⁸⁹ Cornelius O'Neale appeared to be done with both his master and service for the military when he ran from the *Betsey*, transport. Joseph Young-Husband would no longer be able to count on O'Neale's tailoring skills.⁹⁰ Thomas Hicks ran from Abraham Pearce, cabinetmaker. Described as 18 or 19 and "negligent" in how he wore his hair and clothes, he had on sailor's clothes when he left.⁹¹

British control of the area seemed to offer little deterrence to apprentices, as opportunities for flight and the inclination to run continued for apprentices after the British occupied Charleston. John Robinson, an apprentice to Thomas Randall, ran from his service with the naval victualler.⁹² With such an obvious connection to the maritime world, Robinson, whether new to waterfront interactions or not, clearly found the avenues for escape too tempting to resist. Similarly, James Taylor and Thomas Hill, both apprenticed to John Wade, found that their work on the ship *Jenny* offered the opportunity for a fresh start free from service to anyone.

The trial and execution of Thomas Jeremiah for planning a slave rebellion

⁸⁷ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 31 July 1777.

⁸⁸ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 12 March 1778.

⁸⁹ Perhaps Allen felt that he would need a weapon to ensure his safety while he was escaping, or he may have hoped to sell it. *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 4 June 1778.

⁹⁰ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 29 November 1779.

⁹¹ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 24 June 1778.

⁹² *Royal Gazette*, 23-26 January 1782.

provides one notable example of the ways in which circumstances brought on by the war could create a dangerous situation for slaves and their fellow laborers. The increased surveillance by masters and supervisors put many in danger, as the case of Thomas Jeremiah illustrates. Jeremiah, frequently referred to as simply Jerry, appeared in the historical record on several occasions before standing accused of fomenting rebellion. As a fisherman and pilot, Jeremiah was noted for successes and failures in assisting ships over the Charleston bar. During a major fire in 1766, he had rendered assistance noteworthy enough to warrant a mention in the local paper accounts of the tragedy. A few years later, he received some free advertising when the *South Carolina Gazette* noted that he possessed a “well boat” for selling fresh fish in Charleston.⁹³ All of this evidence indicates that Jeremiah was a free black entrepreneur intimately acquainted with the waterfront of Charleston, and as such, perhaps distrusted even before the American Revolution propelled him into the limelight. Henry Laurens, at the time of his execution, referred to Jeremiah as, “a forward fellow puffed up by prosperity, ruined by luxury and debauchery and grown to an amazing pitch of vanity and ambition.”⁹⁴ Prior to his indictment, Jeremiah found himself in a rather desirable position, if Laurens’s assessment of his economic standing is correct. Yet the condemnation of his character brought out by his trial by the slaveowning community suggests that Jeremiah would never be recognized as a legitimate member of the free population of South Carolina. In other words, legal freedom did not lead to real freedom for Jeremiah, and the upheaval of the war may have been the moment he was looking for to turn the slave system that still

⁹³ *South-Carolina Gazette*, 6 February 1755; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 7 May 1756; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 13 October 1766; *South-Carolina Gazette*, 20 June 1768.

⁹⁴ Laurens to John Laurens, Charleston, 20 August 1775, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

bound him on its head. Certainly he provided the kind of example that slaveowners may have feared. Jeremiah's economic success and material security challenged the basic tenets of a system that enslaved Africans and their descendents. As a clear presence in Charleston's waterfront community, Thomas Jeremiah threatened white authorities and property holders. His conviction of fomenting slave rebellion only confirmed their fears of his influence and designs. Certainly, the slaveholding class and local officials intended to take brutal action when deemed necessary in order to maintain their dominance and the security of their lives and property.

Officials and property holders in and around Charleston made varied and only partially effective responses to the disorders, desertions, and flight of slaves, sailors and servants. Certainly employers and masters, Loyalist and Patriot, as members of the propertied segment of the South Carolina population wished to hold onto Charleston because, as General Howe outlined in his letter to Governor Rutledge urging the General Assembly to action, continued control over the economy and the laborers that made it run remained paramount. Initially, with the outbreak of war and the non-military conflicts with Royal officials in Charleston, the property-owning inhabitants of the port town maintained an intensity of vigilance that, on the surface, appeared effective in preventing the disorders of the waterfront that had been so commonplace in the years preceding the war. For instance, early in 1776, in a letter to his daughter, Henry Laurens stated that the "disorderly mobs and riots of the populace which were frequent before you left Carolina" had ceased and that the town was as quiet as any town could be for the last six months, as "the people" were willing to "submit" to the Congress and the Council of Safety.⁹⁵ When

⁹⁵ Letter from Henry Laurens to Martha Laurens, 29 February 1776, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

Laurens wrote to Oliver Hart and Elhanan Winchester later in the spring of 1776, he noted, after complaining that the British had done much to incite slaves to rebellion, that the town was “as quiet as ever since the Governor’s departure.”⁹⁶ It appears that those South Carolinians who had long called for tighter controls of slaves and others in and around the waterfront had finally achieved their ends at the outset of the war with England. However, the intense watchfulness of Charleston’s inhabitants quickly evaporated, as the amount of time and energy needed to closely regulate the city became too great for most. Thus, in October of 1776, not long after Laurens had boasted of the quietness of the town, the General Assembly received a memorial from over 297 “divers [sic] inhabitants” of Charleston asking that the petitioners be relieved from constantly doing “every kind of military duty” in Charleston. They believed their private concerns to be “injured by the attention to the defense of the town night and day” and hoped that a watch could continue this work with minimal additional expense.⁹⁷

Laurens and other residents of Charleston and its environs convinced themselves that their brief spurt of intense vigilance had been effective, and they felt satisfied and confident that scaled-down surveillance would suffice by the close of 1776. They were relieved that Thomas Jeremiah had been foiled in his planned uprising and executed. In the interior, authorities uncovered and quashed another planned rebellion by executing a slave and then reprimanding and eventually silencing a plantation owner implicated in the plot due to his preaching to slaves in the area.⁹⁸ Back in the Charleston area, a contingent of 54 rangers attacked a group of runaway men and women and captured 4 slaves, killed

⁹⁶ Laurens To Oliver Hart and Elhanan Winchester, 30 March 1776, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

⁹⁷ *Journals of the South Carolina General Assembly*, 7 October 1776, p. 122-123.

⁹⁸ Letter of 5 July 1775 to Henry Laurens as Pres of Council from Thomas Hutchinson, *Journals of the Council of Safety*.

3 or 4 others, burned everything, and took away some white prisoners on Sullivan's island. In describing the action to Colonel Richardson, Henry Laurens expressed his confidence that this would be an effective check to the effects of Lord Dunmore's recruitment and arming of slaves and Lord Campbell's harboring of runaways on Sullivan's Island. He felt that the success of the rangers would "serve to humble our negroes in general."⁹⁹ Constant attention to internal affairs and keeping a close eye on the British seemed to be paying off, and the successful defense of Charleston from an invasion attempt provided a major boost to morale. However, from a variety of sources, it is clear that, if the goal was to achieve peace and order for the city, the call for a return to a more limited watch system and Laurens's confidence were both premature.

Beyond the ineffective attempts to control the flight of slaves, the Patriot element of the Lowcountry's planter and merchant population attempted to bring the backcountry in line with the political cadre in and around Charleston. In this endeavor they achieved limited effectiveness. In fact, William Henry Drayton and the Reverend George Tennent's Council of Safety sponsored missions to various inland areas did little to persuade a majority of non-coastal inhabitants to abandon their longstanding grievances with the coastal elite.¹⁰⁰ By January of 1776, a number of groups opposing the Patriot cause took up arms in allegiance to Great Britain with the intent of undermining Patriot efforts to gain independence. Faced with the possibility of being outnumbered by disaffected settlers from the interior, and fearing that harsh treatment would further alienate backcountry settlers, Patriot leaders decided to let them go. They hoped that such treatment would convince these potential loyalists that the cause of the Revolution better

⁹⁹ Laurens to Col. Richardson, 20 December 1775, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁰⁰ *Journal of the Council of Safety*, 23 July 1775.

served their interests.¹⁰¹ A list of orders produced by the Council of Safety in 1776 for the proper defense of Charleston called for a company of horse or foot patrols in the back part of town to prevent any “disorders” when the town came under attack.¹⁰²

Even those connected to the Charleston waterfront hesitated to make sacrifices to the Patriot cause, as Laurens complained that cooperation in the defense of Charleston was hard to secure. Laurens informed Colonel Bull in Beaufort, “we cannot get boats of any sort sufficient for our daily purposes in this harbor.”¹⁰³ Laurens’s complaint came soon after the Committee of Safety ordered Moultrie to find boats to cruise the waters around the harbor and inlets to prevent any “irregular” intercourse with the British ships.¹⁰⁴ He was likely frustrated in his efforts. By the fall of 1777, the actions of sailors and the fear of major upheaval from within their ranks spurred South Carolina’s President to issue a proclamation designed to curb some of the more troubling habits of sailors. The President ordered that all seamen return to their respective ships every day by 6:00 and not come ashore again until the same hour in the morning. In addition, perhaps to cover those not assigned to a vessel or to prevent the concealment of sailors, they could not be entertained in any tippling houses between the same hours. The proclamation also singled out slaves, banning them from drinking establishments entirely. The final regulations were more universal, as the Governor prohibited the assembly of “bodies of men” in a riotous or tumultuous manner, and any of these men who carried firearms would be disarmed.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 5-12 January 1776.

¹⁰² *Journal of the Council of Safety*, 22 January 1776.

¹⁰³ Laurens complains in letter to Col. Bull, 25 January 1776, *Papers of Henry Laurens*.

¹⁰⁴ *Journal of the Council of Safety*, 14 December 1775.

¹⁰⁵ *Gazette of the State of South-Carolina*, 30 September 1777.

Vigilance could not be constant. The quiet that Laurens boasted of was limited in extent and time. Certainly, as time passed, the common problems of Charleston emerged in newspaper notices and local accounts. Crime continued, requiring the frequent recourse of advertisements in the Charleston newspapers to attempt redress or recovery of goods. In 1776, for example, Jonathan Scott claimed that 3 soldiers stole a canoe from his landing in Christ Church Parish.¹⁰⁶ Additional crimes involving the theft of everything from gold rings to guns to cloth and clothing were advertised in the newspapers throughout the remainder of 1776.¹⁰⁷ These notices of crimes in Charleston suggest that “quiet” Laurens boasted of was relative. Crimes continued through the next year in Charleston and its vicinity. No item appeared too bulky, and not even the well-established and respected members of Charleston were immune from theft as demonstrated by the theft of a large quantity of Indigo was stolen from the scale house owned by Jacob Motte. The value of the goods stolen is suggested by Joseph Ball’s offer of £100 as a reward for information leading to the conviction of the thief or thieves. Indications of the lack of respect for the effectiveness of law enforcement, as well as an attitude of everyone for themselves, are perhaps most apparent in the activities of former soldiers. In the summer of 1777, Mordecai (alias Morris) Clark and George Ferrer stole a boat which they loaded with some furniture, a hogshead of rum, a barrel of sugar, and other goods belonging to Thomas Patterson, and then sold them without his permission in town and made their escape. Clark, 40 years old and described, in an attempt to smear

¹⁰⁶ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 12-19 January 1776.

¹⁰⁷ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 2-9 February 1776; *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 23 February-8 March 1776; *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 20-27 March 1776; *South Carolina and American General Gazette* 10-17 April 1776; *South Carolina and American General Gazette* 17 April--1 May 1776; *South Carolina and American General Gazette* 25 September--2 October 1776.

his character, as “addicted to horse racing” and fond of liquor, had served as a soldier under Huger the previous year. Ferrer, ten years Clark’s junior, had military experience as well, serving in “first the blue and then the red regiments.”¹⁰⁸ The Camden jail, not too distant from Charleston and easily reached via the Cooper River, was “broken open” and James Moon, committed for robbery and horse stealing and formerly enlisted in Huger’s regiment, and Isaac Williams, tall and talkative and “of a brown complexion,” both made their escape.¹⁰⁹ All of these examples undermine Laurens’s contention that the port and ancillary maritime locales had been quieted by surveillance and patrolling of the residents.

Indeed, the cases of crime alarmed the grand jury of Charleston to the degree that they accused the magistrates of ineffectiveness and of encouraging slaves and others in thefts.¹¹⁰ Despite this call for action, newspaper accounts of petit larceny and more serious crimes continued. For example, William Rhand of Christ Church Parish was found dead and stripped in Bedon’s Alley. Subsequently, a soldier found with one of his shirts was taken into custody.¹¹¹ 2 white men assaulted Joseph Roper and robbed him of his pocket book outside of town.¹¹² John Raven Bedon had a large amount of continental cash taken out of his chest at night.¹¹³ Thieves looted a trunk from Mr. Bryan’s house on Union Street containing £2000 currency belonging to Thomas Cole. The author of the notice suggested that John Dunbar (aliases Barnaby Baxter, John Davis) perpetrated the crime and offered a £200 reward for the capture of Dunbar and his associates. A

¹⁰⁸ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 17 April 1777 and 10 July 1777.

¹⁰⁹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 7 August 1777.

¹¹⁰ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 13 November 1777.

¹¹¹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 1 January 1778.

¹¹² *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 12 November 1777.

¹¹³ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 30 September 1777.

"disorderly" group of men, pretending to be a patrol, plundered Plowden Weston's plantation.¹¹⁴

Thieves appeared to seek out greater quantities of easily sold or exchanged items when news of an imminent invasion circulated, much like the increase in determination of deserting sailors and slaves. In an economy short on currency, either printed or coined, those holding significant amounts could likely easily identified. More than \$3000 was stolen from a chest kept by John Raven Bedon.¹¹⁵ Someone stole a gold watch from William Bull Jr., and he offered a \$1000 reward for both the discovery of the thief and the return of the purloined item.¹¹⁶ Susanna Mazyck's trunk was stolen from her house on the upper end of Broad Street containing £2-300 and some other valuables.¹¹⁷ Some took a more direct approach to benefiting from the scarcity of cash by counterfeiting their own. In the fall of 1779, authorities brought the counterfeiters Benjamin Cook, John Stine, and William Strother to town under guard along with their printing implements. According to the news account, they comprised part of a chain that stretched throughout the continent, likely encouraged by the British. This final example is indicative of the struggles of South Carolina officials to prevent such extralegal solutions and the willingness of many to resort to crime in the face of the economic hardships of the war years.¹¹⁸

Just as the British occupation of Charleston appeared to have little impact on the frequency or effectiveness of flight among laborers, the establishment of British civil

¹¹⁴ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 29 July 1778.

¹¹⁵ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 10 March 1779.

¹¹⁶ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 15 September 1779.

¹¹⁷ *The Charleston Gazette*, 3 November 1778.

¹¹⁸ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 6 October 1779.

officers responsible for maintaining order in Charleston did little to put a stop to the crime wave in and around the port. This was not from a lack of effort, as Nisbet Balfour, the British Commandant after occupation, recognized the importance of controlling the waterfront and quickly established regulations regarding the area and for the security of vessels laying at the wharves at Charleston. These regulations required port masters to appoint patrols to make rounds from dusk to dawn and ordered them to check for fire hazards and allow no fires or lanterns after 9 o'clock in the evening. In addition, like the Charleston watch under President Rutledge's orders, patrols would take up anyone on the wharves after dark unable to provide a satisfactory account for their presence there and take them to the town guard.¹¹⁹

Still, crimes against Patriots and Loyalists alike continued despite the policies and efforts of the British officials who had taken over the port town. For instance, James Fallows identified 6 men who robbed him of large amounts of Continental, South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia currency. Fallows offered a 20 Guinea reward for each of the men if they were taken to jail or to the British ship *Vigilant*.¹²⁰ In addition, British soldiers, rather than acting as a deterrent to crime, apparently engaged in theft themselves in the surrounding countryside. Observers complained of groups of these soldiers, traveling by land and in boats, taking livestock and other provisions when not in need and giving improper receipts that prevented repayment.¹²¹ In addition, an official printed notice reported many people selling liquor without a license "to the encouragement of ill health among soldiers and thefts and disorders among slaves." The

¹¹⁹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 23 August 1780.

¹²⁰ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 16 August 1780.

¹²¹ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 23 August 1780.

notice warned that future offenders would be fined £20, with half of the fine to go to the informer.¹²² Still, the thefts continued, with an assortment of goods ranging from easily used or sold food and clothing, to paper currency and coins as the objects of choice for individual thieves and “banditti.” British officers themselves suffered from thievery. Such was the case for Lieutenant Conroy staying at 18 Tradd Street who suffered the loss of several items of clothing.¹²³ In addition, some goats disappeared from the Commodore's house and a watch was stolen from an officer's trunk on James Island.¹²⁴ Perhaps the best indication that the British were ineffective as a deterrent to crime was the report that 6 sailors and 2 slaves robbed Dalziel Hunter of Hobcaw at his house, despite the nearness of an armed galley that was ostensibly on patrol.

The reputation of Charleston under British occupation for ineffective enforcement of the law may have spread beyond the borders of South Carolina, as evidenced by a report that authorities took up Ned, a free man notorious for "rogueries" in Pensacola before it fell to the Spanish, on suspicion of being involved in a robbery on Broad Street. Clearly a determined foe of British legal authorities and confident in his ability to move about freely, Ned tried to make his escape but was recaptured.¹²⁵ In combination, these examples demonstrate the determined efforts of the lower sort to find ways to improve their circumstances and meet their own needs, at the expense of the propertied. This occurred despite the clear presence of British authorities and announced policies designed to protect property and maintain order. The eventual evacuation of the British from the Lowcountry would leave South Carolina officials with a series of challenges as they took

¹²² *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 7 October 1780.

¹²³ *South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 11 November 1780.

¹²⁴ *Royal Gazette*, 27-31 July 1782.

¹²⁵ *Royal Gazette*, 27-31 July 1782

hold of the reins again.

Returning to General Howe's letter and his call for the spirited defense of Charleston, it is clear that the inhabitants had experienced a two-fold failure. Not only had the town fallen to the British, but residents had also fallen short in controlling the "host of domestic insurgents." It may be instructive to note that the years between the first successful repulse of the British to the eventual surrender in 1780 has been characterized by at least one historian as a period when fortunes were more easily and rapidly made than in any other time of peace in the history of the colony and state.¹²⁶ Thus, like other periods of economic growth for the port and its environs, concern for profit among individuals may very well have outweighed community concerns for order and control along the waterfront. The cooperative efforts that prompted Laurens to feel confident in the tranquility of the town and its waterfront did not last. In fact, the uncertainty of the period, with no clear sense of when and if Charleston would fall, may have added to the intensity of concerns with private affairs, and undermined efforts to control the free and unfree inhabitants of the Charleston waterfront. Certainly the sailors, servants and slaves of the area willingly took advantage of any laxity in labor control, as evidenced by their actions noted above.

The special circumstances that arose in the midst of the war allowed the lower sort to take greater liberties. These men and women worked hard to gain their increased freedoms and control over the nature and amount of work they did. As they fought hard to keep what they had earned and stolen, and this put them squarely at odds with the propertied of the Lowcountry as they struggled to reestablish Charleston's place

¹²⁶ David Ramsay, *The History of the Revolution of South Carolina*, Vol. 1, pp. 17-77.

in the Atlantic market economy. The waterfront was still a contested space, and the laborers who traversed its landscape frequently defined or redefined the nature of this contest. Thus, the termination of the war did not end the battle over Charleston, as the property of Charleston still relied on the labor and skills of the non-elite members of the waterfront community, and this gave them the leverage they needed in to hold off yet another effort to establish tighter controls over their work and leisure activities.

CHAPTER SIX: THE CONTINUED BATTLE OVER CHARLESTON

Whereas from a certain Thomas Barron's (a British subject) imprudently and grossly insulting a [French] citizen as he was passing by on Tuesday evening last, a fray (as well between them and others) ensued, which, it seems, has occasioned irregular assemblages of persons the two succeeding evenings, to the great interruption of the good order and quiet of the town, and, if not checked, may be repeated, and in the end prove of very serious consequences.

To put a stop to so great a disgrace to any community, striking at once at the root of all good government and order, I have thought proper, by and with the advice and consent of the Privy Council, to issue this my proclamation, to inform all strangers as well as citizens, so highly offending against the laws of the State in future, that they shall be prosecuted with the utmost vigor of the law in such cases, and to exhort the judges, Justices, Peace Officers, and all good citizens to be aiding and assisting in suppressing and discouraging a conduct of such an alarming tendency...¹

The "riots" and protests of the summer of 1783, not long after South Carolinians regained control of Charleston from the British, continued through the next year, despite Guerard's hope that he could halt them. The end of the Revolutionary War and the subsequent removal of the British army did not bring an immediate return of "business as usual" in Charleston. Indeed, the disorders were the product of the failure of the British to make a complete evacuation. Many of the British merchants who conducted business in Charleston during the occupation expressed concerns about the recovery of their recent investments. With enormous credit extended to the cash-poor residents of Charleston and the Lowcountry planters, they were unwilling to leave the

¹ *Journals of the Privy Council*, 11 July 1783, p.70.

area and essentially abandon these loans. Instead of evacuating, these merchants negotiated with returning state officials in order to secure some physical and legal protection that would allow them to remain in Charleston to wrap up their business dealings.²

The disorders that prompted Guerard's proclamation were sparked by disagreements over the Charleston public's acceptance of the presence and influence of British merchants like Barron. Animosity toward the British and Loyalists in the South had built steadily over the course of the war, and these feelings of ill will were only exacerbated by the failure of the British to fully evacuate at the war's end. Certainly, South Carolinians had every reason to resent the British. In the period leading up to the withdrawal of British and Loyalist troops from Charleston in 1782, soldiers had burned and pillaged settlements and plantations in the region surrounding the port city. In addition most of the slaves "removed" by the British, which contemporary historians, reflecting strong bias against the British, estimated at 20,000 to 25,000, were taken just before the evacuation. While these numbers are clearly exaggerated, and more recent estimates suggest 7,000 to 8,000 slaves left with the British, many of the Lowcountry planters were still left without a workforce.³

Charleston's white middling and elite inhabitants not only faced divisions within their own ranks, but they also faced continued challenges from below. The most obvious and violent of these challenges were most clearly revealed to all through the reports of frequent and serious robberies perpetrated in and around Charleston. For example, Simon Berwick was shot by "ruffians" at the crossroads at the Cyprus, about 36 miles from town, after refusing to hand over

² John A. Hall, "Quieting the Storm: The Establishment of Order in Post-Revolutionary South Carolina," unpublished dissertation, Oxford University, 1989, pp. 18-19.

³For the exaggerated numbers, see Hall, p. 18, quoting William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*, pp. 351-352. For a more careful and more recent estimate, see Casandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Freedom* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), p. 60.

his purse. In another instance, a schooner captain came to town and reported that his vessel had been captured by another boat 30 miles up the Ashepoo River.⁴ Engaging in crime on a grander scale, a party of “refugees” from West Florida raided inland portions of the state, taking horses, slaves, and sundry items. While these thieves were pursued to Pensacola, captured, and delivered to the Spanish governor, their actions in South Carolina suggest that lawlessness was endemic to the entire state.⁵

Historians have noted the post-war years for the former colonies as particularly disruptive ones from economic recession and enormous inflation to crises of authority that often stemmed from these economic woes. From Shays’s Rebellion to the resurgence of crime in the backcountry areas in many of the states, common people, and sometimes even the elite, showed their discontent through protest and disregard for what was sometimes newly established authority. As highlighted below, this set of social and political situations offered more opportunities maritime laborers to take advantage of preexisting avenues of resistance to protect or further their autonomy and self-sustaining activities.⁶

Less dangerous forms of resistance were also apparent to most inhabitants in their daily activities in the town. In the spring of 1783, for instance, the commissioners of the markets and workhouse reported that they had received complaints that slaves commonly sold "goods, wares and Merchandize" in the streets and markets of the town. They reminded readers of the Charleston’s newspapers that any goods sold by slaves in this manner should and would be

⁴ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, April 8, 1783.

⁵ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, September 30 - October 4, 1783.

⁶ See David Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection*(Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980); Gary Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, pp. 306-422; Jerome Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War: The Revolution in South Carolina*(Orono: University of Maine Press, 1981); Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, pp. 57-72.

seized and disposed of by law.⁷ Not long after, the Grand Jury of Charleston presented, at the behest of the commissioners of the markets, the numerous “dram shops and tippling houses” on the waterfront, particularly those near the market, because they catered to sailors and slaves who were responsible for “great and frequent irregularities” at the market. The aim of the grand jury was the immediate “suppression” of these businesses.⁸

With disorder in and out of Charleston, it is not surprising that, on August 23, 1783, the State government incorporated Charleston. A City Council was formed and began working with the Intendant (chief executive) to create a system of effective controls. This was a unique opportunity for the long-time proponents of law and order in Charleston. Those who lived and did business in Charleston were now able to elect their own officials, who would ostensibly be more responsive to the needs and demands of Charleston propertied people. Indeed, the incorporation of Charleston put maritime workers face-to-face with this determined and empowered segment of Charleston’s propertied residents, who were anxious to reshape the waterfront environment into a space that better reflected their desire for efficient and ordered trade.

The battle lines were clearly drawn in two of the first ten city ordinances passed by the City Council; both had as their primary focus the waterfront, and the activities of its maritime laborers. The first ordinance, passed by the City Council in October of 1783, defined the duties of a Harbormaster for the Port of Charleston. Essentially a policing agent for the harbor and wharves, this official was to examine all ships to determine their tonnage; keep a register of names of the master, mariners, and passengers on board every vessel; order a bell to ring one

⁷ *South-Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser*, 29 March 1783. Colonial laws, continued by the State Assembly were referenced here, as the local ordinances had not yet been passed.

⁸ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser* 10 June 1783.

hour after sunset in order to give notice to all seamen to return to their ships; prevent slaves from being clandestinely carried away (with a 10 shillings reward to be paid by such slaves' masters); and seek out deserted sailors on board other vessels, and return them to their assigned ships, for 5 shillings a head. The Harbormaster was invested with the power of a justice of the peace, and had the right to call in constables to assist him with his duties.⁹

The second ordinance passed by the City Council also targeted the waterfront. The City Council ordered that, “if any person or persons whatsoever, shall...on any pretence, give a credit, loan or trust, to any mariner belonging to any ship or vessel...exceeding the sum of five shillings...that then and in such case, he, she, or they shall for every such offence, lose all the monies or goods so credited or trusted...and shall over and above... forfeit double the value thereof.” They went on to state that, “no tavern keeper [shall] harbour [sic] seamen for more than one hour in twenty-four or sell food or drink in that hour exceeding the value of 2 shillings [or face a] 40 shilling penalty.” This body of regulations was clearly intended to rein in sailors who proved difficult to control, and had recently demonstrated tendencies to engage in group actions to protect their interests, and those of their fellow laborers. None of these laws applied to those sailors who were properly discharged, and held a certificate from either their ship’s captain or the Court of Wardens verifying this fact.

The regulations packaged in this second ordinance included a mixture of penalties and incentives designed to secure compliance from those persons who were expected to monitor the sailors. For instance, masters of vessels were required to provide certificates of discharge, and to demand to see them before hiring on new sailors; there was a £10 penalty for noncompliance.

⁹ *Digest of the Ordinances of the City of Charleston*. [352 C38d, 1818-1832, Digest of Ordinances; and 1783 Ordinances, 975.79111 C380, 1783-1784]. Throughout the colonial period, a harbor master was assigned, but with limited effectiveness and for limited periods of time. When the British occupied Charleston during the war, the officer in charge of the port assigned a harbor master with similar responsibilities.

Conversely, a 10 shilling reward was authorized for any constable who caught a deserter, and either returned him to the ship, or took him to the jail or workhouse. The master of the sailor's ship was required to pay the reward. If this reward were not paid, the sailor would be taken to any ship in need, and *that* master would pay the 10 shillings. Tavern keepers had to pay 20 shillings per offence for keeping sailors after the evening bell without the masters' written permission. The ordinance also required the main guard to confine until the morning all sailors they discovered "about town" after the curfew without their masters' permission; this offence held a fine no more than 20 shillings. The City Council agreed that all fines would be split between the enforcing city officials and any informants.¹⁰

Oversight of maritime trade was also an issue, and Charleston officials ordered that Fort Johnson, the traditional point of control, be maintained in order to enforce trade regulations. Colonel Senf, the assigned commanding officer at the fort, drafted all of the relevant instructions and signals for incoming vessels reporting to this customs waypoint. Senf's instructions mandated that all vessels check in at the fort before proceeding in or out, and that the officers present their vessel's clearance papers at the fort. Approved clearance for vessels was indicated by the half-mast of flags so that vessels could continue without waiting for the return of the officers in the boat sent ashore. Following precedents for the regulation of the coasting trade, Senf issued six-month passes for these smaller local vessels.¹¹

The explicit purpose of these ordinances and port regulations was to ameliorate the current and anticipated problems that were the result of the war and post-invasion recovery. Seen in a historical context, however, they were clearly written in response to concerns about the unruly activities of Charleston's waterfront workers that far predated the war and its aftermath.

¹⁰ *Digest of the Ordinances*, 6 October 1783.

¹¹ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 5 July 1783, p. 67.

Particularly challenging to the City Council was the task of controlling the enslaved population throughout the city and surrounding countryside. Borrowing from colonial legislation, the local ordinance for the “better ordering and governing of Negroes, and other slaves, and free Negroes, Mulattoes, and Mustizoes, within city of Charleston,” was designed to deal with specific concerns regarding urban slavery. The ordinance prohibited the hiring of any enslaved or free black person without a badge or ticket, with a £3 fine for failure to comply. The annual fee for badges was set at five to 40 shillings, depending upon the skill of the person available for hire. No slave was allowed to market anything for anyone without a ticket; any slaves who failed to comply had to forfeit their goods. Even when slaves were able to provide a ticket, they were allowed to sell their goods only in the market. and not on street corners, alleys or wharves. Slaves also were forbidden from renting any house, room or shop, and from owning their own boats, unless they were licensed as fishermen. Furthermore, while the authors of the ordinance did not wish to limit the abilities of artisans to train their own slaves, they set clear restrictions on the rights of slave mechanics. One white apprentice or journeyman was required in a shop or artisans household for every 2 slave mechanics. No slave was to operate a shop alone, and none was allowed to take another slave as an apprentice. Unsatisfied with merely controlling the enslaved and enterprising free blacks, Council members added that all free blacks over 16 must wear a 5 shillings badge, and that they must register themselves and their families.¹²

The ordinances passed by the City Council reflect their confidence in their ability to control, through the long arm of the law, the maritime environment and its denizens. As their predecessors experienced before them, however, local officers faced considerable challenges in implementing these regulations. Circumstances in the port city were not at all conducive to the

¹² *Digest of the Ordinances*, November 1783. All ordinances were ratified from 23 September 1783 to 10 August 1784.

recruitment of the “respectable” residents needed to enforce tight controls along the waterfront. Indeed, the altercation and “riot” in the streets of Charleston in July of 1783 (referred to by Governor Guerard in his proclamation) prompted further “assemblages” of people that lasted for at least two nights. Members of the State’s Privy Council, realizing that there were no other recognized figures of authority in Charleston, went out into the streets to prevent a third night of group protests. In accounts of these events, commentators noted that such tumult was the “recourse of a despondent people under a subverted government with no other recourse in the face of just complaints being neglected or mocked.” In this gentle chastisement of the protestors, the printer both justified the group actions of the recent Revolution, and called for an end to such activities, now that local authority and representation had been put into place. Perhaps expressing his tacit approval, the printer went on to announce a planned orderly meeting at the Exchange, the purpose of which was to voice complaints regarding British merchants, and to remonstrate to the governor.¹³ A few days later, however, the same newspaper published a less forgiving letter to the public, in which “A Patriot” labeled the assemblers enemies of good government, and called for an immediate end to their gatherings; the author observed that these gatherings not only reflected contempt for the government, but they also made it easier for foreign enemies to foment rebellion.¹⁴ The election of an Intendant, Richard Hutson, and the establishment of local officials, brought some calm, but it was only temporary, and there was no indication that residents viewed incorporation as a remedy for their concerns.

Indeed, resentment toward British merchants, and those who approved of their presence, continued to distract Charleston’s elite. In April of 1784, Governor Guerard issued a proclamation calling for the end of the public postings that listed “enemies to the city;” the

¹³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 12 July 1783.

¹⁴ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 15 July 1783.

governor viewed these postings as forms of intimidation. He offered a \$1000 reward for information leading to the conviction of the authors of any postings that threatened violence to the “enemies” of South Carolina, all of them British merchants. While Guerard did not deny that people had reason to be angry at those listed, he emphasized that they should seek legal, rather than violent, recourse; Guerard’s primary goal was to end the public’s usurpation of authority.¹⁵ Also in response to renewed public gatherings and protests, the City Council resolved to sound St. Michael's bells, as they would in case of a fire, any time a riot was detected, in order to call the Intendant and wardens to their duties.¹⁶

However, at least two residents of Charleston were not at all reassured by the City Council’s plans for enforcing the law and protecting them against angry crowds. Alleged British Loyalist Gilbert Chalmers, perhaps hoping an appeal to the community at large would dissuade his tormentors, since city officials were ineffective in this matter, gave notice in the newspaper that large groups of men in disguise surrounded his house at night, and shouted threats to terrorize him. According to Chalmers’s account, members of this crowd claimed that he had cooperated with the British in their destruction of town property prior to their evacuation. In this newspaper notice, Chalmers asserted his innocence, insisting that the Assembly had acquitted him, and begging that the public to recognize this and leave him be.¹⁷

Patrick Dougherty went through a similar experience some time earlier, when he responded to accusations that during the war he had run a tavern in British-occupied New York where he harbored refugees and “concerned with them in piratical trade.” Dougherty declared

¹⁵ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 27-29 April 1784.

¹⁶ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 29 April--1 May 1784.

¹⁷ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 29 June-1 July 1784.

that for most of the war he was in the Dutch and Danish West Indies working as a sail maker.¹⁸ The fact that both of these men sought protection by appealing to the larger community's sense of fairness and justice speaks to the lack of confidence both men had in the abilities of Charleston's officials to deal with instances of extralegal group actions. Indeed, the resort to group action indicated a more general lack of confidence in the legal system led by the Intendant and City Council members.

The "great riot" that occurred on the 7th of July 1784 further undermined the public's confidence in Charleston's newly elected officials. Determining that the powerlessness of the city authorities to prevent or end the riot was due to their insufficient numbers, state officials agreed that the Governor should call out the militia for the next several nights.¹⁹ Later, testimony regarding the riot suggested city residents' continued resentments over the lenient state policies regarding Loyalists. In one instance, a witness suggested that the riot began when a crowd assembled outside the house of a carpenter, James Cook, who was described as a notorious Loyalist and active cooperator with the British during the occupation of Charleston. The crowd threatened to hang him, as they had recently done in effigy, if he was found in Charleston the next day. Another witness's account indicated a more generalized contempt for the authorities, relating their failed attempts to disperse a group of parading protestors that same evening, and describing the brawl that, in fact, had subsequently ensued. Hoping to curb these extralegal group activities, the Privy Council was still advising that the militia guards be maintained in the city after the presentation of this and other eyewitness accounts.²⁰

When the militia, expressing sympathy toward those engaged in the public

¹⁸ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 19 August-23 August 1783.

¹⁹ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 8 July 1784, p. 116.

²⁰ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 9 July 1784, p. 117.

demonstrations, proved unwilling to assemble or act, Intendant Hutson resorted to the formation of “a volunteer corps of horse,” under the command of Colonel Washington and Thomas Pinckney. Colonel Washington’s volunteer corps was to assemble either at his house or the State House at the first sign of another “riot,” and they had nearly unlimited authority in suppressing any demonstrations. Indeed, if they received information of an ensuing “mob” action, they were authorized to enter all suspicious buildings and remove any arms found within. They could arrest any and all suspicious people, and imprison them at Fort Johnson, where the prisoners would be held until the legislature convened. In addition to these measures, the Privy Council recommended that, in the event of a disturbance, the City Council order all seamen to vacate Charleston after sunset while the “riots” continued, stating that, “they are generally hirelings for such wicked purposes.”²¹

The reelection of Hutson as Intendant in 1784 did not bring the debates over how the British merchants should be treated to an end. James Miller, a local printer and supporter of the Corporation, did not refrain from openly judging his opponents in his newspaper. He described them as “duped” into recourse to violence, suggesting that the election involved additional street actions in response to the policies of the Corporation.²² A letter published along with the news of Hutson’s reelection expressed similar sentiments, with the unnamed author lamenting the common sentiment among many Charlestonians that returning collaborators with the British should all be hanged, and that those who did not think so should be treated with contempt. This animosity toward the British appeared particularly unfair to the author, given that it was directed at all of the returning citizens who had been banished for accepting British protection, regardless

²¹ *Journal Privy Council*, 12 July 1784, p. 119.

²² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 11-14 September 1784.

of their past actions.²³ Taking the other side in a 1785 letter, "Homespun" bemoaned the arbitrary powers of the Intendant; particularly odious to this editorial writer was the Corporation's policy of allowing Hutson to call together constables and other law officials if he determined that "a tumult or riot" was imminent. The author of these letters provided the "hypothetical" example of an unarmed parade in demonstration against the Intendant that was broken up by charging horsemen who subsequently terrorized the city for several hours.²⁴ Homespun continued to provide readers with examples of arbitrary and abusive power, suggesting that, despite the fact that the Grand Jury determined that the supposed riot was nothing more than a parade, the participants, many of them injured by authorities, were jailed and required to pay fees owed for their imprisonment. In this telling, the Intendant and Corporation members were likened to tyrants.²⁵ The prolonged conflict between the propertied in Charleston heightened the sense among Lowcountry residents that a power vacuum existed in the years that followed the evacuation of the British from the capital.

By the end of 1785, much of the wrangling among the propertied of Charleston over who was in charge in the port city had ended, but the maneuvering of others, particularly participants in the waterfront environment, continued on. From the standpoint of many Charleston's officials, the many "disturbances" that characterized that time period were all the more dangerous, because they rendered the officials' attempts to control workers much more difficult. Indeed, as the lines hardened between the protesters against the "oligarchy and tyranny" of the Charleston officials, on the one hand, and those who demanded order and the speedy resumption of trade, on the other, waterfront workers realized and took advantage of the opportunities for pushing against

²³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 11-14 September 1784.

²⁴ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 2 June 1785.

²⁵ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 6 June 1785.

the constraints of the labor regime. This political crisis would continue well through 1785, preoccupying the would-be agents of order and control on the waterfront, and consequently providing more room for maritime laborers and their peers to carve out additional spaces for themselves in Charleston's Atlantic environment.²⁶

In the early days of incorporation, officials also struggled to recruit law enforcement agents who could effectively monitor the spaces of the working people of Charleston. Failing to find ready recruits, the City Clerk, in November of 1783, advertised for watchmen in the newly created wards of the city. In the same newspaper issue, responding to a specific complaint, the City Council, reflecting the helplessness of having no active policing body, published a proclamation in which the Corporation offered a reward for information leading to the discovery and conviction of those responsible for breaking lamps throughout the capital. Indeed, recruitment was hindered, it seems, by the fact that wages for agents of the law were not guaranteed; around the same time, City Council members approved a lottery to raise money for the creation and maintenance of a police force in Charleston.²⁷

Further evidence of the failure to win the cooperation of the public in Charleston can be seen in the notices published by the City Council calling for closer monitoring of the retailing of alcohol in the port town. Unlicensed retailers were deemed the culprits and the cause of "irregularities and enormities" among "domestics and sea-faring people in the city."²⁸ By July of 1784, the printer of the *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, at the behest of the Corporation, reprinted the liquor license act that, the printer claimed, had been "egregiously ignored" by the public. Additionally, a letter from an anonymous reader requested that the

²⁶ Hall, pp. 18-19.

²⁷ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 27-29 April 1784.

²⁸ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 27-29 April 1784.

Corporation act forcefully; suggesting that they call out the “Main Guard” on Sundays to control the large numbers of drunk and riotous slaves.²⁹ As late as October of 1785, the Grand Jury was still calling attention to the “large numbers of gambling and tipling houses entertaining slaves to all hours” and the continued practice of slaves selling goods in and about the market without proper authorization, and sometimes “making riots.” These latter notices in particular suggest that officials not only perceived the seriousness of their task, but also realized that a great deal of effort was needed to combat the visible problems facing the propertied inhabitants of Charleston.³⁰

In the late spring of the next year, the meeting of the grand jury for Georgetown revealed that similar problems of order and control existed there. Specifically, they identified the problems of large numbers of “idle and troublesome” strangers and a lack of effective policing.³¹ News of crimes and criminals continued throughout the end of 1784 and into 1785. There were reports, for example, of unidentified thieves robbing James Mitchell's house in Goose Creek.³² In Beaufort, James Booth was convicted for a separate robbery and sentenced to death by hanging. Commentary that accompanied this news noted that Booth’s service to his country in the army, and the death of his father and brother as soldiers were well-known, and duly accounted for in his trial. His sentencing, then, served as reminder to the public that “no amount of political [merit] or services could atone for breaking the law.”³³ In Charleston—perhaps doomed to serve as similar examples--Daniel Bonnel was hanged for robbery, and George

²⁹ *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 22-24 July 1784 and *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 28 July 1785.

³⁰ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 20 October 1785.

³¹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 8-11 May 1784.

³² *Gazette of the State of South Carolina*, 4-6 November 1784.

³³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 11-13 November 1784.

Armstrong and Jacob Hale for forgery.³⁴ While we do not know exactly when these men were caught, it is clear that crimes such as these continued to proliferate during this period; in May of 1785, for example, two slaves robbed George Young, taking money from his apartment while he was waiting on customers in his shop. One of the thieves was Young's own slave; both were eventually captured and incarcerated in the Sugar House.³⁵

State officials appear to have recognized that crime in the Lowcountry was fed, to some extent, by the public's lack of confidence in law enforcement, and their consequent uncooperative attitude of many property-holders and slaveowners. Unlike their city government counterparts, state officials were willing to invest money and human resources in order to deal with specific threats to law and order. The House authorized a reward of £10 sterling for each armed runaway slave who could be identified as part of a group who committed various "depredations" in the southern part of the state.³⁶ Similarly, Thomas Pinckney wrote to Judge Arnoldus Vanderhorst that he called out the Berkley County militia to capture armed runaway slaves near Stono who were too numerous to be quelled by normal patrol.³⁷

In order to further counter notions of the impotency of South Carolina's government, the Governor suggested, and the House approved, the use of military force to establish the clear authority of the state in the face of roving bands of thieves. In 1783, under the command of Jacob Rumph, who was distinguished as an effective leader in actions against Loyalist militias, the South Carolina Rangers were constituted, and ordered to guard the roads around Charleston and pursue outlaws as far as Camden and Orangeburg.³⁸ The successes of these militia were

³⁴ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 19-21 October 1784.

³⁵ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 23 May 1785.

³⁶ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 22 March 1787, p. 186.

³⁷ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 6 August 1787, p. 203.

³⁸ Hall, pp. 256-257, 261-262.

highlighted by the newspapers, which in turn promoted the idea that the state was actively protecting citizens and their property. Such was the case in relation to the capture of James Booth, reported as “a notorious offender” who was apprehended by Captain Simmons.³⁹ This, and subsequent similar accounts, did much to build public confidence in the military, and to assuage public anxieties about their safety. So much so that when the Privy Council learned from the Lieutenant Governor that Joseph Williams had been murdered by a group of slaves in Christ Church Parish, Council members confidently recommended that the militia send out parties to find the murderers.⁴⁰

While the actions of state officials did much to restore the confidence in law enforcement in the countryside, and planters no longer sent their goods to Charleston in caravans of wagons under armed guard, they failed to set any precedents for this restoration in Charleston. In the port city, even the most punitive measures employed by law enforcement failed to guarantee that runaways and criminals, once apprehended, would remain in custody. When James McBride placed an advertisement for the recovery of his Irish indentured servant hairdresser, Michael Coffey, who escaped from the Sugar House in July of 1784, he was foreshadowing news of a more endemic problem.⁴¹ In the following issue, John Gerley, the warden of the Workhouse (temporarily housed in the Sugar House), gave notice that 17 men had escaped from confinement. Michael Coffey was one of three “free” men who included Walter Abbett, labeled a transient, and Cato Johnson, a free black man. The remaining escapees were slaves who had been taken into custody due to their inability to account for their presence in Charleston, or for

³⁹ 1785-1786 *Journals of the South Carolina House of Representatives*, p.174, 1 mar 1785.

⁴⁰ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 22 May 1786, p. 176.

⁴¹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 3-6 July 1784.

punishment by those who claimed them as property.⁴² Certainly the escape of this many prisoners at once implies that the resources needed to construct and effectively staff prison facilities were not available. In addition, the fact that all these men fled at once suggests that they were confident they could remain free once escaped, and avoid the punishment that would follow recapture.

Further evidence from this time period indicates that the problems of financing and properly maintaining an effective jail system in Charleston would extend beyond the midway point of the 1780s. As late as 1786, Isaac Huger requested assistance in supporting those incarcerated in the jail, as the money from the sheriff's office was not forthcoming and the expense was beyond his ability to handle from his personal accounts.⁴³ In response, Judge Thomas Grimke, after highlighting the limitations of the current jail, recommended the Sugar House as a proper alternative. He referenced a 1786 Grand Jury presentment, and the protest of the former sheriff in response to frequent escapes. The City Council agreed that the Sugar House should be purchased from Mr. Brailsford.⁴⁴ Moving the jail to the Sugar House, however, did not immediately remedy the problem, as an inquiry into some jailbreaks revealed: when the sheriff was questioned about how group of men escaped, and why they were not recaptured, he stated that the relocated jail facility was not sufficiently secure, and irons were not yet finished. In addition, according to the sheriff, the constables failed to act effectively in the recapture of the prisoners because the booty taken by the escaped prisoners, acquired either during the escape or from the crimes that resulted in their imprisonment, was greater than the reward offered for their capture. The implications of bribery were clear but unstated in the transcript of the sheriff's

⁴² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 6-8 July 1784.

⁴³ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 4 August 1786, p. 180.

⁴⁴ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 14 April 1787, pp. 189-193.

testimony.⁴⁵ A similar situation may have worked in favor of Clark Johnston and Jacob Jones, who successfully escaped from the Beaufort Gaol, and the control of sheriff John Leacraft, several years earlier.⁴⁶

Real and imagined implications for the lack of effective law enforcement included contempt for Charleston's and, by extension, South Carolina's government abroad. Evidence of this may be found in papers that Mr. Hasford, attorney to Mr. Pawley of Georgetown district, presented to the Privy Council, informing them of a case of stolen slaves who were located in Massachusetts, but not returned. According to these papers, the slaves had been taken in 1779 from Pawley's plantation, and then to Massachusetts, whereupon the group was handed over to an agent of Pawley's, with the understanding that they would be returned to South Carolina. But judges in Massachusetts issued a writ of habeas corpus and, after some consideration, liberated the slaves. The South Carolina Privy Council advised the Governor to remonstrate against this "illegal action," and demand that they be returned to their owners. In another instance, Judge Aedanus Burke informed the governor that George Hancock had performed an "outrageous assault" on Colonel Jonas Beard, and then fled to Georgia. The Council approved the Governor's plan to demand Hancock's return from Georgia to be brought to justice.⁴⁷ Similar circumstances surrounded the apprehension of Booth, noted above. When he was initially captured in Augusta, authorities in Georgia ordered his captors to send him down to Savannah for trial, where there was an indictment against him and, according to Georgia's Governor Houston, good evidence to bring a successful conviction. However, the man responsible for transporting him, according to one or more informants, headed for Charleston instead. Upon

⁴⁵ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 1 September 1787, p. 208.

⁴⁶ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 10 June 1783.

⁴⁷ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 1 October 1783, p. 82 and 22 October 1783, p. 86.

hearing this news, John Houston was forced to request that South Carolina Governor Guerard send Booth on to Savannah.⁴⁸ In the first instance, Massachusetts's judges may have refused to recognize a South Carolinian's claims that his property rights in slavery should extend beyond his own state. The system of slavery had recently begun to be challenged there, in the Quock Walker case, and the Supreme Court of Massachusetts had determined that the state's constitution did not recognize slavery. In the second and third instances, the need for a demand from one governor to the other suggest that even neighboring states were reticent in recognizing one another's laws and the need to maintain law and order.⁴⁹

The inability of South Carolina's officials to gain outside recognition of their state's laws, authority, and respect for their policing power was potentially devastating. Governor John Mathews expressed very specific fears in this regard. In a letter to Commodore Alexander Gillon in 1783, he noted that when South Carolina regained control of Charleston, all of the disaffected of the town, and parts of Georgia, would flee to St. Augustine, "soon revive the lost name of Buccaneers of America," and infest the coast. Mathews provided this as the primary reason for requesting that Gillon arrange for the protection of South Carolina by sea; but he also no doubt hoped that this would build its reputation for law and order, and thus deter these potential enemies.⁵⁰ Evidence of contempt for South Carolina's authority abroad is found in Governor Guerard's published remonstrance against the residents of New Providence, who abused and assaulted "American merchant marine," some of them South Carolinians. Identifying the perpetrators of these acts as "refugees" or "loyalists," Guerard called upon them to desist.⁵¹ It is not clear what Guerard hoped to gain by this proclamation, beyond a verbal scolding of South

⁴⁸ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 15 September 1784, p. 149.

⁴⁹ Gary Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, p. 408.

⁵⁰ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 16 May 1783, p. 37.

⁵¹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 1-3 June 1784.

Carolina's enemies, but he was certainly in no position to act in defense of the sailors and merchants who were subject to these abuses.

Many of the concerns over upholding the reputations of Charleston's and South Carolina's governing bodies, and their ability to maintain law and order in the port and state, were directly connected to desires to reestablish the state's economic position in the Atlantic economy. Indeed, this concern over securing the profits of old, and to find new opportunities, are reflected in the near flood of advertisements published by many of the established and newly active entrepreneurial businessmen of Charleston's waterfront. Charles Ferguson, for example, advertised his intent to sell a small house on Motte's wharf,⁵² and Joshua Lockwood advertised that he had craft ready to fetch produce from any part of the state. Allen Bolton informed the public that he operated ferries at Mount Pleasant near Haddrill's Point (formerly known as Hibben's Ferry), and at John Fields at 65 Queen Street; in addition, Bolton advertised, Legge's Ferry on the Ashley River was repaired and available for lease.⁵³ Established wharf owner and merchant William Gibbes had repaired the upper part of his wharf, and continued the factorage business with room for lumber in a yard, and a schooner capable of carrying 130 barrels.⁵⁴ The owners of Russell's Wharf, adjoining Rose's at the north end of Bay, advertised that it was for lease; this advertisement included an enticement for ship carpenters by noting that the wharf "may be made commodious" for ship building or repair. In the same newspaper issue, David Cruger advertised that he had the "care" of Prioleau's wharf and planned to take on the role of wharfinger (manager) and factor there.⁵⁵

The export economy of South Carolina was devastated by the war years. In 1783, only

⁵² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 12 April 1783.

⁵³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 5-8 June 1784.

⁵⁴ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 26 April 1783.

⁵⁵ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 31 May 1783.

24,000 barrels of rice were exported from Charleston. This was down from the 119,000 barrels exported in 1774. By 1785, exports had only climbed to the comparatively low number of 64,000 barrels of rice.⁵⁶ Reflecting both the intense desire to resume commercial activities as quickly as possible, and the willingness to take advantage of the war's aftermath to secure economic advantages over their erstwhile peers, enterprising merchants and factors quickly took over and repaired war-damaged or confiscated properties along the waterfront. For example, the Commissioners of the markets, anxious to prevent the property from falling into private hands, requested a postponement of the public auction of John Champneys's wharf, a part of his forfeited estate which would likely have sold quickly. The Commissioners hoped to convince the City Council to buy it and the adjoining property for a new market.⁵⁷ Jane Russell wasted little time in repairing the wharf she had inherited, which she advertised as available for rent.⁵⁸ Speedy repairs of large and long-established wharves, such as Gibbes's wharf (mentioned above) and Roper's and Beresford's wharves, allowed their owners to advertise them as open for business.⁵⁹ Indeed, throughout 1783 and into 1784, many wharves, and their accompanying warehouses and shops, changed hands, and the new owners repaired or improved them as expediently as possible in preparation for the anticipated resumption of trade. Those without the resources to own entire wharves still clearly hoped to take advantage of the void left by evacuated Loyalists, and the reestablishment of active maritime trade, by leasing small businesses on or near the wharves. Charles Ferguson, for example, opened a grocery shop on Motte's Wharf,⁶⁰ Patrick Dougherty advertised his services as a sail maker on Amen Street,⁶¹

⁵⁶ See Figure 4.

⁵⁷ *Journal of the Privy Council*, 11 June 1783, p. 64.

⁵⁸ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 17-19 August 1784.

⁵⁹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 28 October-1 November 1783 and 10-13 April 1784.

⁶⁰ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 29 March 1783.

and Colcock and Gibbons took over some large “new stores” on Beale's Wharf ,where they hoped to offer their services as auctioneers.⁶²

Still others hoped to profit from the resumption of trade by offering vessels for sale. John Tucker, for instance, anticipating their value and utility as ferry vessels or commodity transports, offered his 5 cypress canoes for sale.⁶³ Similarly, Daniel Stout hoped to find a ready buyer for a schooner capable of carrying 50 to 60 barrels.⁶⁴ Paul Pritchard, a local shipbuilder, clearly anticipated a market for coastal transport vessels in post-war Charleston, and built a schooner in 1782; he hoped to sell it two years later, after it had proven to be a fast sailor, and capable of easily carrying 80 to 90 barrels,⁶⁵ Similarly, Thomas Buckle advertised that the schooner *Nancy*, rebuilt at Pritchard's shipyard, was for sale.⁶⁶ Ready buyers were available in Charleston, as was clear from the advertisement placed by Russell and Jenkins that noted their recent purchase of two schooners, one large and one small, to start a business in the coasting trade; they were seeking customers in need of crop transport.⁶⁷ Even state officials hoped to take advantage of anticipated demand for water transport, renting out the State Shipyard, and later offering it for sale.⁶⁸

Other entrepreneurs counted on the manpower needs of resumed water transport to make money, as did one advertiser who offered three enslaved seamen for sale.⁶⁹ Similarly, a merchant partnership offered not only two Bermuda-built whaleboats for sale, but also a slave sailmaker

⁶¹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 6-8 January 1784.

⁶² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 16-20 September 1783.

⁶³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 7 June 1783.

⁶⁴ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 12 July 1783.

⁶⁵ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 8-10 June 1784.

⁶⁶ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 24-27 January 1784.

⁶⁷ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 16-18 December 1783.

⁶⁸ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 16-20 September 1783 and 26-29 June 1784.

⁶⁹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 2 September-6 September 1783.

who “has been brought up to the trade since a boy.”⁷⁰ Indeed, slaves with a variety of skills were offered for sale in this period of intense focus on economic gain after years of turmoil in the pre-war and war years. Cudworth, Waller, and Company advertised that they wished to sell a slave carpenter with nine years experience in the trade. In a separate advertisement, they gave notice that they were also selling an enslaved sawyer, and an experienced boatman, along with their wives and children. Advertisers of estates, reflecting their awareness of the market for maritime slaves, were careful to single out in their advertisements the boatmen and other slaves with maritime-related skills, among the 30 to 40 slaves offered for sale.⁷¹ Indeed, a ready market for the skills and maritime experiences of enslaved people existed in Charleston, as evidenced by an advertisement placed by an unnamed person looking to hire three experienced boatmen familiar with Stono, Cooper, and the Wando Rivers.⁷²

With the increase in trade came an increase in the numbers of maritime and waterfront workers, and, as in pre-war years, business owners and aspiring business owners anticipated and met the needs of this swelling waterfront workforce. Charleston’s residents knew that, regardless of whether they were enslaved or not, these workers had wages to spend, and catering to their needs and tastes was a profitable endeavor. Taverns and smaller businesses selling alcohol opened or reopened throughout Charleston, but particularly along the wharves and proximal streets. Allen Bolton, who advertised the opening of his ferries noted above, also ran “houses of entertainment” at the termini of the ferry routes.⁷³ Other establishments, such as John Howard’s coffee house and tavern opening on Elliott Street, and Mrs. Ramadge’s coffee house on the corner of Broad and Church streets, were likely intended for a non-laborer clientele, but if they

⁷⁰ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 23-27 December 1783.

⁷¹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 18-21 October and 15-18 November 1783.

⁷² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 23-25 March 1784.

⁷³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 26 April 1783.

had been unsuccessful in wooing the wealthier members of Charleston's population, anyone who could pay would likely have been welcomed as customers.⁷⁴ In addition, Grand Jury complaints and calls for action often stressed the plethora of small and illegally operated drinking establishments of the waterfront area. The lists of liquor licenses granted, along with the complaints from various authorities, suggest that drinking establishments continued to play a central role in the waterfront environment, and that the numbers may have increased in the period following the recovery of Charleston from the British.

With the intense activity involved in reestablishing maritime trade and other commercial activities in Charleston, men and women with skills and services to offer in the waterfront environment came forward to meet the need for labor, and take advantage of the opportunities for improving their circumstances; for the enslaved, this might include finding temporary, or even permanent, freedom. As evidenced above, some of these opportunities involved crime. For example, taking advantage of the disorganization and crowded nature of the waterfront in the period after the British evacuation, thieves emptied William Wells's trunk of a number of papers while it was on dock opposite the jail. Wells suspected that this robbery was planned in advance, but it was incomplete due to low value of papers and other contents removed from the trunk.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, thieves removed a sea chest containing clothing, account books, and other items of value from a house on Tradd Street.⁷⁶ Another chest, this one filled with bags of coins, was taken from a house on Church Street.⁷⁷ On two other occasions, a silver-mounted pistol and a valuable silver item were stolen from a tavern and a store, respectively, on

⁷⁴ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 24 June 1783 and 2 May 1783.

⁷⁵ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 8 July 1783.

⁷⁶ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 11-14 October 1783.

⁷⁷ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 16-18 March 1784.

Bay Street.⁷⁸ Even as late as the end of 1784, a merchant partnership advertised that someone stole cloth and blankets from the cellar of their business on Church Street.⁷⁹ And in an example of a particularly dangerous crime, arsonists set a fire on Gadsden's wharf that burned stores that included a portion of the cargo from the ship *Glasgow* from the West Indies. In response to this crime, Edward Penman petitioned the Governor, requesting that the state offer a 100 guinea reward for the discovery of the perpetrators. When the proclamation was issued, Governor Guerard speculated that the fire was set to give thieves access to portions of the West Indian cargo.⁸⁰

During this period, these crimes frequently were linked with the slave population, primarily because of the detection of stolen goods in their possession; usually this occurred when they attempted to sell the items. A number of advertisements noted items that were "stopped" or seized from slaves who offered them for sale. For example, John Grant Stopped a gold ring set in garnets from a slave woman.⁸¹ Frederick Grabenstine of Market Street "stopped" a silver watch from a slave.⁸² Robert Grant took a gold watch from a slave man who, when questioned, claimed that he had held it for 5 months.⁸³ The boldness of these slaves in so openly offering goods for sale suggests that, despite the laws requiring such actions, it was unusual for potential purchasers to ask questions, and to seize items that were assumed stolen. Certainly slaves were not the only ones who stood to gain from the theft and resale of valuables; tavern keepers, in particular, were singled out in past criminal cases, and may well have been active in encouraging slaves in their thefts.

⁷⁸ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 24-26 June 1784 and 28-30 September 1784.

⁷⁹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 13-16 November 1784.

⁸⁰ *Journals of the Privy Council*, 24 September 1783, p. 81; *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser* 27-30 September 1783.

⁸¹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 15-17 January 1784.

⁸² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 30 September-2 October 1784.

⁸³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 22-25 May 1784.

Desertion was still a common tactic for maritime laborers seeking to improve their circumstances during this period. For example, John Kione, an Irish indented servant tailor, deserted from the ship, *Peggy*, which was commanded by John Scott.⁸⁴ Robert Jennings, an Irish man, ran from the "Vicar's Tavern, the 4 mile house, the sign of the Buck."⁸⁵ Peter, a mulatto sailor, ran from the sloop *Fox*, under the command of Thomas Tucker.⁸⁶ Prince, who was a house carpenter by trade, ran from Thomas Buckle.⁸⁷ These last three men all had particular sets of skills, some more in demand than others, and they likely hoped to find employers with little curiosity, and the ability to pay for their services.

Theft and desertion went together during this period, and advertisements for the return of free or enslaved deserters often noted the accompanying theft of money or other items of value. This, interpreted in conjunction with the numerous complaints about the illegal hawking of goods by slaves in and around the market, suggests that a network of thieves, and those willing to buy stolen goods, thrived during this period. The scramble to make money quickly may explain the success of this form of illegal economic activity. So while the boatswain, sailor, and cabin boy who ran from the snow, *Goedeverwagling*, would be able to simply spend the £11 sterling that they took from the captain's desk, Victoire Mary, a man from Normandy who spoke little English, hoped to find ready buyers (who would not ask questions) for the 150 guineas worth of merchandise he stole from his master when he ran away from his position at a shop in Charleston.⁸⁸ Similarly, Jamie, Andrew Cunningham's waiting servant, stole a 13-foot fishing vessel when he ran. This could have served the dual purpose of providing a means for rapid

⁸⁴ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 1-3 January 1784.

⁸⁵ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 13-15 April 1784.

⁸⁶ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 9 May 1785.

⁸⁷ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 7 July 1785.

⁸⁸ *South-Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser* 18 December 1783 and 19 August-23 August 1783.

escape, and future cash if Jamie could find a buyer for the vessel.⁸⁹

The Revolution left a mixed legacy for many enslaved men and women, and this is reflected in the advertisements placed for the return of fugitive slaves. In some cases, the disruptions of the war in South Carolina worsened the circumstances of slaves. Many slaves were removed from positions that provided a semblance of leverage against the caustic forces of the slaves system, and/or were separated from family members, and consequently lost their opportunities to use their skills to earn small amounts of time and money; often these slaves found recourse in flight. Examples of this are numerous. Richard Bolan sought the return of Sam, who was formerly owned by Clement Lempriere. Sam may have experienced quite a bit of freedom of movement and accompanying independence as he worked on the ferryboat of Lempriere, a Charleston pilot and ship captain.⁹⁰ Frank, described as artful and sensible, had recently arrived from New York as the property of Maurice Simons of Watboo Landing. As New York was a British stronghold throughout the war, Frank may have been promised or granted freedom by the British, but then failed to prove it, or gain passage with the evacuating British. His flight may be an indication of this frustrated plan, and Frank may have hoped to find his way back to the British at any number of Atlantic locations.⁹¹ A similar case of an ultimately disastrous attempt to gain freedom can be found in the experiences of Dublin. Taken to the workhouse after he was recovered from a vessel at sea, he claimed to be from Mr. Galphin's property near Silver Bluff. Dublin left and joined the British at some point before the evacuation of Charleston, and he went with a contingent of the army to Jamaica. From there, he claimed that he was sold and taken to Cape Francois. Dublin was in the process of escaping from this last

⁸⁹ *Gazette of the State or South-Carolina*, 18 November 1784.

⁹⁰ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 22 August 1785.

⁹¹ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 8 September 1785.

location when he was taken up with some other slaves.⁹²

Similarly, Jemmy resided in Charleston for nearly a year, where he “formed many connections,” before Anthony Bourdeaux removed him from the city after transferring ownership from one of his relatives. While it is not clear what Jemmy did while he was in Charleston, Bourdeaux’s advertisement, which described Jemmy as artful and plausible, suggests that the slave was unsupervised in the port, and worked for himself. Jemmy objected to his removal from the port and ran back to Charleston.⁹³ In another example, Benbo, who ran from John Postell at Horse-Shoe Bridge, may have objected to both his new master and a change in work demands. According to Postell, Benbo was previously a waiting man, and also worked on a schooner.⁹⁴ And finally, a slave named Frank objected to a change in the nature of his employment--from working for the ship captain and pilot Thomas Tucker to working on Maurice Simons’s plantation near the landing at Watboo—and ran away. In his advertisement, Simons described Frank as an artful, sensible fellow who would try to pass as free.⁹⁵

The chaos of the war and its aftermath also created a kind of space and freedom in Charleston in which slaves could, to some extent, attempt to reinvent their past. Jack, for instance, when he was incarcerated in the workhouse, claimed that he and his master were captured in Virginia by the British and brought to Charleston, and that his master then died of smallpox.⁹⁶ Nancy claimed that she had been freed in 1776 while she was in New York with her master, John McNeil. McNeil had subsequently gone to Scotland and Nancy had lost the papers proving her freedom (it is not clear how she arrived in Charleston). Nancy’s assertion that New

⁹² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 20-22 April 1784.

⁹³ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 13 October 1785.

⁹⁴ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 3 September 1783.

⁹⁵ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 8 September 1785.

⁹⁶ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 21 July 1785.

York was the location in which she had been granted her freedom suggests that she was familiar with the British policy at that time of emancipating slaves who joined them in New York; no doubt she hoped to use this knowledge to convince the South Carolina authorities that she was indeed not a slave.⁹⁷ Sarah, relating that she came from the property of Timothy Ford near Georgetown, explained that she was in Charleston without a master because the British had brought her from Ford's plantation.⁹⁸ Similarly, Jack had worked his way up to Charleston from Savannah, and he argued that his master had fled from Georgia and sold all of his slaves in St. Augustine.⁹⁹ Amey claimed that Joseph Pendarvis was her owner, but that he was now in St. Augustine. Also noting a very distant owner, Dick, incarcerated after working his way northward to Charleston from Georgia, claimed that the British took him from Boston and then left him behind after the evacuation.¹⁰⁰ Betty Scott was taken up in Charleston and brought to the workhouse in 1784. She told the warden that she was born free in Bermuda and that she came to South Carolina's capital during the British siege, and had remained after the evacuation.¹⁰¹ Arriving from an even greater distance, Peter was taken up in Charleston after arriving from London; he claimed that he was originally owned by a Charleston resident, but was now claimed by someone in Maryland.¹⁰²

The accounts these enslaved men and women gave their captors clearly seemed designed to ensure the continuation of their freedom from a local master. Whether or not they were accurate, they were plausible, in that they reflected the real experiences of many enslaved people immediately following the Revolution. Sometimes these tactics worked, and sometimes they did

⁹⁷ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 28-30 October 1784.

⁹⁸ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 24-27 July 1784.

⁹⁹ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 29 September 1785.

¹⁰⁰ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 19-22 June 1784.

¹⁰¹ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 10-13 July 1784.

¹⁰² *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 16-18 September 1784.

not. John, for instance, when he was taken up in Charleston after arriving on a ship from Jamaica, ended up in the workhouse, despite his claim that he was born free at French Santee. He likely hoped that the turmoil of the war would make his tale believable, but apparently he transgressed some legal or social protocol, and his story failed to convince authorities that he was not enslaved to someone in the area.¹⁰³

The reputation for freedom of movement and employment opportunities in Charleston made it a beacon for slaves, and many were drawn from locations far from the South Carolina Lowcountry. For instance, John came to Charleston in a schooner from St. Eustatia and successfully escaped from the vessel, but was captured afterwards and committed to the workhouse. Another enslaved man named John was taken up in Charleston after making his way from North Carolina.¹⁰⁴ James Henry Carter was taken to the Workhouse after somehow drawing the attention of authorities in Charleston. He claimed to be from Barbados and the property of Mrs. Sarah Carter of that island. He spoke only broken English, and there was no explanation of how he had arrived in South Carolina.¹⁰⁵

With or without a clear connection to the recently evacuated British, runaways in this period were numerous and bold, taking advantage of perceived lapses in the systems of control for laborers. William Todd was looking to recover Bow, a man who ran from the schooner *Britain*. Bow could be identified by a slit in his right ear that Todd noted as a characteristic of a rogue, and the “wide wales” on his back were proof “of his being an old offender.” Bow had changed his name to Jack and stole several changes of clothing from the schooner.¹⁰⁶ Quasha

¹⁰³ *South Carolina Gazette & General Advertiser*, 16-18 September 1784.

¹⁰⁴ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 1 September 1785.

¹⁰⁵ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 25 July 1785.

¹⁰⁶ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 8 January 1784.

and George ran away from the ship *Commerce*.¹⁰⁷ Mary Russel, of White Point, was looking for Frances, who, according to accounts since her escape or from previous periods of flight, pretended to be hired out.¹⁰⁸ Joe and his wife Matilda ran away from Richard Ham and took along 2 children when they left. In the course of their escape, they met Henry Blandchard and Stephen Oldfield at Monck's Corner, who recognized them as Ham's slaves. Joe and Matilda explained that they had been sold to John Singleton, silversmith in Camden, and that he had rented the wagon for them to carry their belongings there; Blanchard and Oldfield accepted this story and allowed them to continue on their way. Fearing that Joe and Matilda would continue to have success avoiding capture through deception, Ham warned all masters of vessels not to carry them off.¹⁰⁹ Perhaps feeling too much confidence in his ability to escape any attempts to confine and punish him, an enslaved man named Peter boldly insulted and struck a white person, and subsequently found himself incarcerated in the workhouse. Peter's stated owner, Miss Sarah Blake of Santee, failed to appear to claim him, and he was advertised for sale. This could hardly be the outcome he desired, as he would likely be removed from Charleston, and the possibilities for temporary or permanent liberty the port city provided.¹¹⁰ In general, however, the slaves' creativity, and their knowledge that Charleston was struggling to establish law and order, allowed great numbers of them to successfully flee from servitude, even if it was only for a short time. As Charleston regained its place in the Atlantic economy, many slaves were able to find some element of freedom and control over both their bodies and their time.

When the British evacuated Charleston, the South Carolina elite was handed the opportunity to, if not start from scratch, at least significantly reshape the social order in the port

¹⁰⁷ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 6 October 1785.

¹⁰⁸ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 15 January 1784.

¹⁰⁹ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 2 August 1784.

¹¹⁰ *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, 22 September 1785.

city. The incorporation of the city indicated that this potential for change was not lost on those in power, as they worked to establish closer controls over the social and economic aspects of life in Charleston. The ordinances passed by the Corporation reflected some of the long-term concerns of the propertied regarding the actions of maritime laborers and those they interacted with. However, just as such calls for closer control of the waterfront and waterfront laborers had met with resistance in the past, so too did the newly crafted ordinances. As reflected in the riots over the nature of authority and social control, property holders themselves contested the notion that stricter controls were necessary and desirable. Particularly odious to many of these middling to elite protestors was the willingness on the part of elected officials to employ large bodies of armed men to back up their authority. These protests, although they contributed significantly to a period of lax enforcement of both newly created and traditional legal and social codes of conduct, and increased anxiety among the proponents of strict law and order, were actually quite limited in duration. Authorities' efforts to clamp down on maritime laborers ultimately were no match for the tenacious and effective efforts of these maritime laborers and those they worked with to hold onto their traditional modes of resistance. Thus, waterfront workers continued, and inspired others, to engage in particularly flagrant actions such as desertion and theft, as well as the less direct but equally damaging acts of self-hire, frequent resort to legal and illegal drinking establishments, the fencing of goods, and the harboring of fellow laborers in flight. All these acts of resistance worked to counter the actions of the newly created city corporation and the traditional elite. By continually ignoring regulations for their behavior, sailors, servants and slaves carved out space for themselves and maintained their moments of autonomy--moments that sometimes were brief, but often were prolonged. The waterfront workers found creative ways to meet their own needs; in this era of economic uncertainty and social turmoil, these

laborers took advantage of shopkeepers and employers hoping to make or save money. A somewhat free and ready body of laborers was essential to the long-term health of the export economy of South Carolina. Rather than crack down on waterfront workers by spending a great deal of money and effort on policing, employers and retailers gambled that this unruly population ultimately would bring them more profit than harm. Throughout this period, the ruling class continued to look the other way, and ask no questions, during their daily interactions with the mobile waterfront workers.

CONCLUSION

In March of 1799, Jacob Read, South Carolina senator, wrote a letter to then governor James Jackson of Georgia to warn him of imminent danger to both South Carolina and its southern neighbor. Referring to the arrival in Charleston of “our copper coloured neighbors” on board a ship from Haiti, Read warned of a potential plot by French agents to instigate a slave insurrection in the Southern states. Read suggested a level of surveillance of incoming vessels that amounted to a lock-down of the southern ports, particularly Charleston and the rising port of Savannah. The tone of this letter reflected, first, the assumption that these areas were the likeliest points of entry for any foreign “agents;” and second, a continued sense among officials that the waterfront environment remained a poorly regulated area that required the additional mustering of manpower to effectively monitor and control those who inhabited its spaces.¹ Thus, in his letter of 1799, Senator Jacob Read called for yet another rallying of elite power to stamp out what he feared would be a new attempt by the ostensibly servile to exercise their power to make a direct assault on the property and persons of the white elite. At the end of the eighteenth century, then, the Charleston waterfront was still a space of contradictory potential, with elite power and enormous profit on the one hand and worker autonomy and resistance on the other.

As demonstrated in the preceding pages of this study, Charleston, as South Carolina’s primary port, offered a great deal of opportunity to its inhabitants and would-be inhabitants from

¹ Jacob Read to James Jackson, March 23, 1799, *Jacob Read Papers*, South Caroliniana Manuscripts Collection.

just before the midpoint of the eighteenth century to its end. First of all, for the elite, it was the center for the display of their power, culture and economic accomplishments, most evident in the edifices they constructed, from private and highly ostentatious mansions, many of them constructed North and South of the business center of Charleston but still overlooking the water, to public buildings such as the Exchange. The elite also called for public recognition of their status through style of dress, the use of elegant, four-wheeled carriages with teams of horses and coachmen (all imported from England), and the demand for special accommodations in taverns, so readily apparent in advertisements placed by the proprietors of such businesses. Wealthy merchants and planters looked to Charleston as a space for validation of their economic and social dominance. In so doing, they permeated the port with a culture, among the propertied, of extravagance and leisure.²

For the aspiring elite, Charleston was a dynamic environment with great possibilities, but only for those few who were able to succeed in the intense competitions for space, influence, and resources needed to rise up out of the ranks of the middling to achieve wealth. This could be seen not only in the advertisements of artisans and shopkeepers, but also through the petitions and group actions of this segment of Charleston's population, who took to the streets over the handling of public matters by the post-Revolution city government. The aspiring elite, many living and working in the business center, on or near The Bay, or in their combined houses and shops in the growing periphery areas on Market and King Streets, scrambled to secure their place in a society that reserved the greatest social and political power for those who no longer needed to labor themselves, but commanded others to do their work in their respective occupations.

² Fraser, "*Charleston! Charleston!*" pp. 120-121; Rogers, pp. 60-62; Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, pp. 19-20, 248.

Of course, maritime laborers played a central role in shaping this environment that held such great opportunity for so many. This segment of the working poor, free and enslaved, looked to Charleston as both a beginning and end point for resistance activities, as the Charleston waterfront could uniquely provide the resisting laborer with either a haven or a jumping off point for a new start elsewhere in the Atlantic world. These opportunities for resistance did not just organically appear within the maritime community, but rather were actively created by an extremely mobile, savvy, and determined group of sailors, slaves, and apprentices who understood and therefore could exploit the nature of South Carolina's export economy and their important place within it. The examples of resistance that fill the pages of this study amply demonstrate the willingness and ability of maritime workers to ignore, break, and reset the rules regarding their work and non-work behaviors.

The activities of maritime workers had major long-term effects on the region. While certain activities, such as desertion, did much to open up separate spaces for worker autonomy along maritime routes to and from Charleston, or within the growing city itself, the resistance had an even greater impact upon the infrastructure that the elite and other propertied whites created to meet their economic and social needs. For example, as demonstrated in the previous pages, docks and wharves in the mid-eighteenth century were not merely points for loading or unloading the valuable goods that brought profits to the propertied white inhabitants of South Carolina. Rather, they became hubs for the transfer of stolen goods, provided runaway slaves with opportunities to find employment, and served as key points of embarkation for flight from South Carolina. Similarly the markets, rather than just providing points of sale or purchase for planters and merchants and other members of the white population, became areas for assertive behavior by slaves, and an additional arena for the sale and resale of stolen goods.

Furthermore, repeated waves of crime and disregard for the legal system prompted the creation of a larger and more secure workhouse and jail. In this way, the actions of the waterfront workers forced the political leaders among the elite to spend resources on an infrastructure aimed at social and economic control rather than symbols of economic success. Indeed, the constant complaints frequently published as grand jury presentments throughout the period of this study represent moments when, faced with overwhelming evidence of waterfront workers' dangerous resistance to oversight and control, select members of the elite were compelled to call for change. At particular moments, these calls resulted in the reallocation of time and money on infrastructure devoted to social control. For the most part, a majority of those in power, feeling themselves removed from the real and potential effects of worker resistance, responded to these calls with ineffective and superficial measures or completely ignored them.

These responses of the elite to the challenges they faced in Charleston, particularly in those areas immediately connected to the waterfront, reflect common themes in eighteenth-century urban development. The more dismal commentary on the poverty and perceived lawlessness that invariably arose in conjunction with population growth in urban centers tempered the celebration of urban areas by the moderately wealthy and elite as centers of culture and refinement.³ This certainly was the case for Charleston, and its position as a major Atlantic port greatly contributed to it becoming a center for working poor communities. In Charleston, these communities of non-elite were highly active and, as we have seen, very adept at reshaping or creating areas within the urban center to meet their needs.

³ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*(New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp.142-152.

Charleston's waterfront workers also reshaped the ways in which the aspiring elites engaged with and contributed to the urban environment. Their ability to obtain cash through waged or unwaged activities forced business owners, new and established alike, to accept slaves, sailors, and servants as customers, despite regulations barring their activities as free agents in Charleston's economy. Indeed these shopkeepers, tavern operators and others seemed to adapt rather quickly to the practice of accepting money and goods from those who should have been penniless, and even assisting in what was essentially the fencing of stolen items. The nature of the plantation economy, with its emphasis on profit-making through the exploitation of free and enslaved laborers, encouraged these behaviors: merchants and business owners seemed willing to undertake any activity that enabled them to gain an edge in the competition for land and resources, or at least to secure the labor necessary to ensure continued profit. Maritime workers in this capacity fed the divisiveness among the propertied, both by encouraging the notion that restricting independent movement, self-hire, "pilferage," and long- and short-term desertion among workers would require huge investments of time and money, *and* by making their illicit activities potentially profitable for the lower echelons of the white elite.

Certainly a great deal of the criminal activity highlighted in this study was a form of resistance and, as such, signaled the underclass's struggle against the more debilitating effects of developing capitalism. The free and enslaved working poor, trapped within a system that offered little to no remuneration, also found themselves stripped of the ability to engage in non-waged subsistence. As the elite claimed more and more resources as their own, the more common forms of subsistence activities became criminalized, and waterfront workers, from sailors to slaves, struck back at the elite by seizing whatever time or goods they could to supplement their meager provisions or wages. In response, the elite implemented the terror of brutal punishments

and public executions, as evidenced in the display of the decapitated heads of the Stono rebels, and the hanging and burning of Thomas Jeremiah.⁴

Under the right circumstances, then, waterfront workers' resistance activities moved from costly and troublesome to truly debilitating for the propertied of Charleston and South Carolina as a whole. Frequent and consistently aggressive actions ranging from temporary flight to small-scale theft clearly and purposely cut into the plantation economy and the connected Atlantic market, causing small but steady losses in the efficiency and profit-making abilities of the elite. During periods of major upheaval (e.g., the war between the European powers), however, the more damaging acts of armed resistance to authority, and mass flight from owners and employers caused a gaping wound in the labor regime that hemorrhaged power and profit. This was the consistently feared and often realized result of worker resistance, particularly that which was enacted among the highly mobile population of maritime workers in Charleston and throughout the Atlantic.

Within the context of North American port cities, Charleston exhibits very unique qualities. Unlike Nash's northern ports, Charleston was *not* a seedbed for a burgeoning mechanic ideology. Circumstances there did not, as they did in Philadelphia and its northern counterparts, lead to the political activism that empowered the middling sort in their battles to wrest power away from an exploitative elite. Rather, artisan political activities in Charleston were limited in both their extent and impact. While the actual numbers of artisans increased over time during the eighteenth century, the dominance of slave labor—most successful artisans

⁴ On the role of developing capitalism in the criminalization of the actions of the poor, see Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. xx-xxv, 52-53.

owned and employed their own slaves—stood in the way of artisan solidarity and the development of a clear sense of class consciousness.⁵

While the nature of the dominant rice trade encouraged the use of British-made and owned deep sea vessels, Charleston's extensive local and regional maritime trade required construction, mooring, and repair facilities of large size and number, and it was skilled slaves who were largely responsible for manning these facilities. Indeed, the slave population dominated the trades: slaves built the vessels for local and regional shipping needs and provided the skilled labor necessary for facilities in and around Charleston that handled the repairs and refitting of vessels of any size. The dominance of slave labor within the crafts disguised the nature of Charleston as a full-service port, leading to the mischaracterization of it as a mere shipping point in Price's categorization of British Atlantic ports.⁶ An expanded view of port functions and activities, as outlined in recent port city literature, highlights the essential role of the waterfront of Charleston in relation to the South Carolina and Atlantic economies.⁷

As considered within Linebaugh's and Rediker's framework of the Atlantic world, Charleston can be understood as having been a "typical" port. The evidence presented in this dissertation reveals a high degree of cooperation among the Charleston maritime laborers in the realms of desertion and other forms of resistance, including theft and the sale of stolen goods. Despite the outward signs of cultural and racial differences among Charleston's waterfront workers, they demonstrated their obvious connection to the Atlantic labor ideology described by

⁵ Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979).

⁶ Jacob M. Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns," in *Perspectives in American History*, VIII: 1974, pp. 128-163.

⁷ Peter Reeves, Frank Broeze and Kenneth McPherson, "Studying the Asian Port City," in Frank Broeze, editor, *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia From the 16th-20th Centuries* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), pp. 29-53; and Frank Broeze, "Brides of the Sea Revisited," in Frank Broeze, editor, *Gateways of Asia: Port Cities of Asia in the 13th-20th Centuries* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1997), pp. 1-16.

Linebaugh and Rediker—an ideology that encouraged cooperative action and resistance across these divides in the face of oppressive working conditions.⁸

This examination of the Charleston waterfront adds to the growing body of work on slave resistance, particularly that which occurred within the South Carolinian slave system. While Morgan and Olwell have argued that the slave artisans of the waterfront and the boatmen and sailors on the rivers and employed in open-water vessels and ships were a co-opted population that did not require control, I have demonstrated that, conversely, they were a highly independent, rebellious, and disloyal group of workers who actively pursued maritime work for the “liberties” it offered. This study, like Cecelski’s work on nineteenth-century North Carolina slave watermen, demonstrates how slaves used maritime work as a tool for gaining the additional agency and independence they needed to counter planter and merchant power.⁹

Charleston’s waterfront was the site of an ongoing struggle between the port city’s elite and its waterfront laboring population beginning with the elite’s panic-driven efforts to regain control over all workers—on the plantations and the waterfront—in the aftermath of the devastating Stono Rebellion, and culminating with the incorporation of Charleston in 1785. The cooperative acts of resistance of the free and enslaved maritime laborers directly shaped the plantation slave system and the export economy of South Carolina. Unable to strike a balance between extensive maritime trade and the control of maritime laborers in the face of such resistance, authorities in South Carolina and Charleston eventually sacrificed control over workers on the altar of profit.

⁸ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

⁹ Philip Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves, and Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Low Country, 1740-1790* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); David Cecelski, *Waterman’s Song* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

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