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**The Obedient Servants of Opportunity:
Bermudians in the Revolutionary Eighteenth Century Atlantic World**

**By:
Gretchen Richardson
HIS 490 History Honors Thesis**

**Department of History
Providence College
Spring 2022**

For the future generations of Bermudians.

The questions examined in this thesis is not inconsequential to the island today. Despite a small population, few natural resources, and little ability to defend itself, it has, in essence, knitted itself into existence out of a gossamer of ever-changing global trade. If Bermuda does not shape its own identity and understanding of its place in the Atlantic World, these will be shaped for it. It is my hope that my scholarly contributions might sift out, in their own history, suitable anchorages for their own future.

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Introduction

Born into a family of significant mercantile wealth, Nathaniel Tucker came to appreciate the small island he called home – Bermuda. He was raised alongside brother Henry Tucker and their siblings by patriarch Colonel Henry Tucker and Ann Butterfield Tucker on a plantation on island’s West end. In his early twenties, Nathaniel left the island and relocated to South Carolina, 800 nautical miles west, before he finally resided in his mother country of England until he died in 1807. While living in the mainland colonies, he often visited his brother in Virginia and frequently wrote of the eighteenth-century period of affliction through the art of poetry. During the Imperial Crisis - the eighteenth-century conflict between Britain and her thirteen North American colonies culminating in American independence - Nathaniel “thought of himself as a patriot marooned in an enemy land, able only to play a spectator poet’s part in the struggle of his colonial countrymen for freedom.”¹ In 1774, the young Tucker wrote in his book *The Bermudian* to reminisce on the harmonious, peaceful paradise for which he longed.

The Bermudian was written to honor the island he had called home. “Bermuda, Parent of my early Days, to thee belong my tributary lay,” Nathaniel wrote, “hail Nature’s Darling Spot! Enchanted Isle!”² He then reminisced from South Carolina, writing, “Even now transported to my native Land, Upon the Summit of home Hill I stand; The Cedars view, uncultured as they grow, and all the varied Scenery below. Far at a Distance, as the Eye can reach, Extend the Mazes of the winding Beach.”³ His island served as a nurturing environment for not only his

¹ Craig Yirush, “The Final Imperial Crisis,” *Settlers, Liberty, and Empire: The Roots of Early American Political Theory, 1675–1775*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 215–62; Robert Dennard Tucker, “The Descendants of William Tucker of Throwleigh, Devon, (South Carolina, The Reprint Co., 1991).

² Nathaniel Tucker, *The Bermudian: A Poem*, Rockingham Office, Hull, England, Joseph Simmons, 1808, 1.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

family but his fellow countrymen. Nathaniel went on to describe Bermudians as if “manly Sense, if an extensive Mind, Unswayed by Prejudice, and confined A Judgement happy to decide with Skill, But mind and open to Conviction still, A Voice in polished Numbers taught to roll, Whole Accents was the Music of the Soul, An honest Heart, a Temper that can learn, To love Mankind, and to be loved in Turn.”⁴ Bermuda, in other words, was a haven from the rough political waters beyond the reef. Its inhabitants viewed their island as undisturbed from chaos, yet they were not ignorant of the conflicts they would encounter abroad.

When far from paradise, Nathaniel experienced troubles. Still, he recalled feeling welcome and accepted in the southern colonies, observing, “though Carolina, skilled in social Lore, with open Arms received me to her Shore; Although her Sons, a hospitable Band, have hailed me welcome to their fertile Land.”⁵ The mainland colonies guaranteed stability for inhabitants of the Empire due to social and economic opportunities such as education, expansive acreage, and plentiful resources. While Bermudians capitalized on their neighbors’ resources, inhabitants understood their island’s economy faced significant vulnerability due to its lack of provisions, weak protection and patrol, environmental issues, social conflicts, and disease. The outside world was seen as a window to possibility, yet most Bermudians appreciated the simplicity of their native land. In his *The Bermudian*, Nathaniel anecdotally remarked,

My aged Parents awful Voice I hear, [the Solemn Sound still vibrates in my Ear]
‘Adieu, my Son! With Wings propitious go, Obtain what knowledge Travel can
bestow. Thy Neighbor’s Friend, and Enemy to Strife Uprightly walk the mazy
Path of Life. Let Honor’s Rules thy every Act control, Nor suffer Vice to bend thy
stubborn Soul. Should Sovereign God, the Tyrant of Mankind, Exulting still,

⁴ Tucker, *The Bermudian*, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

prefer the frugal Crust, and spurn, with high Contempt, the guilt Dust. Let all the Storms of Fortune be defied, Virtue thy Friend, and Providence thy Guide.⁶

Elite Bermudian families such as the Tuckers desired the best for their sons and their island. Investments in travel and education were seen as returning a future profit. In 1768, for instance, it was reported by the Council that the island's public school "taught Reading, Writing, Arithmetic and the Latin and French Languages, to the great Benefit and Improvement of the Sons of the most considerable Families in Bermuda."⁷ By 1772, the established Lightbourne family were interested in building a college on the island.⁸ While resources like knowledge were often outsourced, Bermudians soon realized establishing their island with such institutions would promote domestic wealth. The pragmatic inhabitants understood the danger of full dependencies.

Although ambitious in every sector, Bermudians often kept their knowledge, successes, and opinions to themselves. A humbled Nathaniel dedicated the poem to his brother Henry Tucker. Nathaniel admitted to Henry in a letter, "I should have not ventured to make this public."⁹ The Tuckers, like other Bermudians, held their cards close to their chest in the way they expressed themselves, whether artistically, in politics, or in business negotiation. This discreet approach to public life in the eighteenth century ensured their paradise remained somewhat peaceful and reserved for their enterprises- built over the decades out of a single splintered shipwreck would endure well beyond 1609.

⁶ Tucker, *The Bermudian*, 16.

⁷ 1768, Minutes of the Council 1765-1780, Book One, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁸ May 7, 1772, Thomas Lightbourne, Minutes of the Council 1765-1780, Book Two, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁹ Nathaniel Tucker to Henry Tucker, Junior, Esq of Bermuda, *Bermuda Historical Quarterly*, Bermuda Historical Quarterly, Bermuda, Spring, Vol. 4, No. 2, 72.

An Island Between Empire

There is a wealth of scholarship on the mid-Atlantic and colonial North America more broadly. The isolated island has continued to serve as an economic, military, and, most importantly, geographical asset. Bermuda sits six hundred miles off the shores of North Carolina. Sixteenth-century Europeans first discovered her on their way to Jamestown. For a century, the island's treacherous reefs, often concealed by the seaweed of the Sargasso Sea kept passing vessels away. Though the Spanish sailed close to the islands in 1515, it was not permanently settled until the 1609 wreck of the English *Sea Venture* on its journey West to supply the Jamestown Colony. The island would remain a British colony in various forms until colonization became problematic for the British Crown after the World Wars of the twentieth century.

It was in 2002 that the island took on its status as a British Overseas Territory, resulting in no formal British diplomatic or consular representation. It has since developed from a refuge of castaways, wreckers, privateers, fishermen, and farmers to a port city between continents, colonies, and colonizers; it is now a port for the navies of empires and an airbase for superpowers. With limited exportation of salt and onions, Bermuda has successfully gotten by as a mid-way destination. Its pink-sand beaches and crystal-clear waters have attracted tourists for centuries. And while the island's significance may be known today through attractive tourism magazines, Bermuda's historical significance continues to be nearly absent from the shelves with few scholars challenging its omission.

Yet Bermuda, the United States would not be what it is today. In 1610, Virginia settlers lost more than half of their population in Jamestown. Months later, Bermudians arrived in

the *Deliverance* and *Patience* to supply relief – preventing Jamestown from collapsing entirely. This assistance would soon be reversed a century later during the Imperial Crisis. Over time, Bermuda became something of a middle ground port between King George and his North American colonies. While remaining politically loyal to the Crown, the island committed a type of economic treason to endure and profit from the American war for independence. Evidence for such malfeasance can be found in various places, such as journals, records, petitions, and letters.

In his 2010 publication *In the Eyes of all Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783*, Bermudian archaeologist and historian Michael J. Jarvis explores the Atlantic world through the eyes of Bermuda’s seafarers. Jarvis depicts the life of a maritime society consisting of small family-owned cedar sloops sailing between England, the Thirteen Colonies, and the Caribbean. He argues that “motion was the defining characteristic of the Atlantic World,” which explains his investigation of the island’s evolving trade and culture.¹⁰ He agrees with historian David Armitage, who has argued that Atlantic activities overlapped, “stress[ing] transnational networks and cross-cultural sharing, the circulation of peoples, ideas, diseases, and commodities within geographical systems, and the impact of global and Atlantic forces, events, and exchanges in particular communities.”¹¹ Jarvis further reveals that Bermuda was unique compared to the other ports dotting the Atlantic Ocean. Inhabitants of the island operated cautiously since its location was a dichotomy of danger and opportunity.

Until its change of status in 2022, Bermuda was and remained Great Britain’s oldest and smallest colony. Jarvis showcases the island’s culture of pioneers and venturers, who were motivated by the needs and desires of their island and distant kin before the Empire. During the

¹⁰ Michael Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade: Bermuda, Bermudians, and the Maritime Atlantic World, 1680-1783* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

American Imperial Crisis, Bermudian mariners struggled “to remain competitive as American shipping lanes became increasingly crowded in the 1760s.”¹² In his final chapter, Jarvis argues that the “American Revolution shattered the intercolonial networks that Bermudians had built up over a century.”¹³ The island’s inhabitants “faced a desperate choice between famine and treason as their connection with North America and the Caribbean broke down.”¹⁴ Jarvis interprets Bermuda’s treason as a means for profit and survival instead of rebellion. He explains that the inhabitants were “dependent on the thirteen colonies for food and shipbuilding material.”¹⁵ Hence, they “supplied salt, sloops, gunpowder, and munitions to their rebellious neighbors,” primarily through illegal trade out of the west end of the island.¹⁶ Thus, Jarvis suggests that American independence caused a deep-rooted structural change in Bermudian society, as the currents of their maritime economy relied heavily on well-established networks. This thesis highlights elite Bermudian men’s ties to the Thirteen Colonies. Though Jarvis argues Atlantic families such as the Tuckers “helped knit early America together,” my second chapter goes into depth on how they did so. I show that it was through their epistolary networks were protected from the public eye that enabled them to seek opportunity in the wider Atlantic World.¹⁷ Without their private web of letters, Bermudians would not have been able to endure the threat of nearby rebellion.

¹² Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 319.

While Jarvis claims Bermudian families took a neutral course during the war for independence, historian Phillip Hamilton argues that “the Tuckers were remarkably articulate about their personal lives and about the larger events surrounding them” in his 2003 publication *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*.¹⁸ Hamilton suggests that the Bermudian family “proliferated on the island and its wealth, power, and influence grew apace.”¹⁹ His argument provides much-needed historical context for Jarvis’ explanation of the island’s continuing political attachment England.²⁰ Furthermore, Hamilton admits that the Tuckers were frightened by the forces unleashed by the independence movement only a few hundred miles to the west. He reveals that Bermuda’s elites found it “difficult to handle- political democratization, economic change, accelerated westward expansion- all of which steadily undermined their authority and influence.”²¹ Hamilton argues that, over time, wider kinship ties among families such as the Tuckers began to crumble as dire situations resulted in every individual fending for themselves and their nucleus of immediate family members. He goes into depth about the Tuckers’ description of their personal lives and experiences. Without the kin-based ambitions and economic aspirations, the Tuckers and other Bermudian elites would not have successfully smuggled goods to the rebels in return for much-needed provisions. Hamilton’s argument has influenced my own reading of this history; however, unlike Hamilton, I emphasize that the pursuit of opportunity was not solely for their kin but for themselves and their island. The

¹⁸ Phillip Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family: The Tuckers of Virginia, 1752-1830* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

longevity of their family name correlates directly to their success as patriarchs supplying the necessities for their island.

Clarence Maxwell picks up this thread by claiming Bermuda responded to and played a significant role in global events during the eighteenth century and beyond, especially during the revolutionary war. Maxwell recognizes Bermuda's illicit trade as the economics of treason in his 2019 publication, *Prudent Rebels: Bermudians & the First Age of Revolution*. Inspired by his understanding of scarcity, I suggest in my first chapter, "Friends of America," that elite Bermudians like Henry Tucker were economically treasonous and not motivated by precipitous calls for liberty. Maxwell "paints a vivid picture of exactly what Bermudians were doing during that time; what they may have been feeling; what their political and economic motivations might have been; and how these changed over time."²² He seems to answer the puzzling question: What were Bermuda's role as prudent seafaring men of self-interest during the Age of Revolution? Maxwell argues that there was a "genuine Bermudian contribution" to the Empire's Age of Enlightenment which was embodied through "nakedly prudent self-interest."²³ He further examines the "conflicts between the Crown and 'the Country'" that shaped the "characters, circumstances, choices, consequences, and contradictions, and the cause of Bermuda's 'Economics of Treason'."²⁴ *Prudent Rebels* provides a historical interpretation that is centered around the challenges of Bermudians to be loyal to the Crown while financially enduring the crisis. The tug of war that Bermuda experienced between the Thirteen Colonies and England, as Maxwell describes it, was shaped by the individual private, personal, and selfish agendas of the

²² Clarence Maxwell and Theodore Francis Alexandra Mairs Kessler, *Prudent Rebels: Bermudians & the First Age of Revolution*. (National Museum of Bermuda Press, The Keep, The Old Royal Naval Dockyard, Bermuda, and the Government of Bermuda, 2019), 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

island's assemblymen.²⁵ The revolutionary crisis in Bermuda was fueled by maritime commercial interests and the protection of the hydrarchy. The elite's profit-driven desires were showcased in a host of letters that I examined at the Bermuda Archives. The prudent rebels' private exchanges of intelligence, mentioned in my second chapter, expose the significance of their discreet web of networks which would allow their agendas to flourish.

Maxwell insists "Bermuda's 'rebels' were not driven entirely by patriotic feelings for their mother county or by passionate feelings of independence: they acted in the pursuit of profit, in support of their commercial-maritime associations," most prominently the West End hydrarchy, "and their self-preservation."²⁶ Maxwell questions the ideology of prudent pragmatism, which historians had yet to consider above loyalties— what exactly was the definition of "Country" to each Bermudian? For some, like Governor Popple, "Country" was an allegiance to the King. For opportunists like the Tuckers, love for their "Country" was seen through the duty and protection of their kin, networks, tangible assets, and power. Therefore, their illicit works were justified in the grand scheme of things.

Alexandra Maris-Kessler's MARITimes article "Prudent Pragmatism" also considers Bermuda's economic treason during the Imperial Crisis. Maris-Kessler suggests that Bermudians were vulnerable to the economic, political, and social consequences of the nearby war for independence. Living in an island-economy, all Bermudians, of every social sort, appreciated the repercussions of their actions and those around them. Maris-Kessler additionally addresses the difference in experience between the Thirteen Colonies and Bermuda. Inhabitants were conflicted between their opportunistic desires and their Parliamentary duties, yet they understood

²⁵ Maxwell and Kessler, *Prudent Rebels*, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

that their governor held little real power. Their American cousins, however, were forced to house British troops and were constrained by curfews. Their freedoms were stripped under the enforcement of many. Maris-Kessler points out that Bermudians had no common experience with atrocities such as the Boston Massacre of 1770. “Bermuda was not in a position to join the American rebellion,” she suggests instead, “but had familial and business connections up and down the British North American coastline that drove its economy.”²⁷ Maris-Kessler’s comparison of the Bermudian experience and the American experience allows me to explore the difference in not just their stories but how they were written, published, or not discussed on the island compared to the continent.

Jarvis, Hamilton, and Maris-Kessler each emphasize the consideration of self-interest motivations Bermudian men of the day. While they hint at the influences of the maritime slave society, the three scholars do not include the hardships of Bermuda’s enslaved population. In *Prudent Rebels*, Maxwell moves beyond previous scholarship by tracing the significant involvement of enslaved merchant mariners in fueling the island’s economic treason. Black male sailors managed sloops for their Bermudian masters - often white men of the Assembly - out of the treacherous waters of the island to the Caribbean and beyond. Enslaved sailors were highly respected on the seas and in the ports for their navigational and language skills and knowledge of profitable markets and international affairs. Maxwell suggests that although the enslaved merchant-mariner held greater freedoms on the seas than on plantations, the enslaved were still chained to the island’s capitalist system, managed by self-interested, white Bermudian men. Maxwell references historian Sylvia Frey’s idea that a “Triangular War” was felt at the ports of Bermuda since “enslaved men and women were neither wholly Loyalist nor solely rebel,” similar

²⁷ Alexandra Mairs-Kessler, “Prudent Pragmatism,” (National Museum of Bermuda Press, Volume 32, Winter, 2019), 16-17.

to the men who held them captive.²⁸ Enslaved and free blacks were often keenly up-to-date on political, economic, and social intelligence. They were often in high demand since they were both globally aware and uniquely skilled in the most challenging waters.²⁹

In *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda: 1616-1782*, Virginia Bernhard uncovers the unique traits of Bermuda's smaller-scale maritime-based slave system. She offers a fresh, in-depth perspective on the relationship between race and slavery in Bermuda, leading up to the end of the war for independence. Bernhard's scholarship is rooted in the lack and limitations of public records regarding slaves in Bermuda. Her perspective allows fellow scholars to grasp the fear felt by slaveholders due to a lack of land, looming anxiety of revolts, and an evolving, global maritime economy. While the enslaved navigated the open seas under command, they were subjected to harsh punishment and control on the island.³⁰ As the anxieties of losing British support worsened, white male Bermudian slaveholders were fearful of the loss of power and profit without the enslaved sustaining the dangerous journey of the island's economic treason. While this thesis concentrates on the financial practices of a few, it must be kept in mind that Bermudian slaves fueled prosperity and safety of Bermuda. Their multi-lingual capabilities on the high-seas allowed the island to work with both sides without gaining an empire-wide reputation for treason.

The historical confluence of economic worries, political pressures, slave society, and isolation reveal that Bermudians played a role during the Imperial Crisis. While these five texts

²⁸ Mairs-Kessler, "Prudent Pragmatism," 99.

²⁹ Maxwell and Kessler, *Prudent Rebels: Bermudians & the First Age of Revolution*, (National Museum of Bermuda Press, The Keep, The Old Royal Naval Dockyard, Bermuda, and the Government of Bermuda, 2019), 106.

³⁰ Virginia Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda, 1616-1782* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2016), 229.

share a common appreciation for the island's significance, they focus on their own perspectives from seafarers to elite families to a society with slaves. This thesis evaluates a question they all ask: How did the British island, which sits only a few 100 miles from the Eastern seaboard, fit into the complex puzzle of the Imperial Crisis? I wondered: When America rebelled, why would Bermuda remain loyal? Was not Bermuda more like America and less like England? How did Bermudians view their American cousins, and what was it like to straddle this warring family? To answer these questions, I examine the influence, of lack thereof, of the press, the motives driving Bermuda's hierarchy, and how Bermuda fit into the puzzle of the Atlantic World.

The first chapter, "Friends of America," unravels the economic treason committed by the elite few to illustrate that Bermudians were opportunists – not insurgents. The elites' roles in the island's Gunpowder Plot of 1775, are highlighted when mercantile families and their slaves discreetly loaded Bermudian gunpowder aboard two rebel ships from the Thirteen Colonies. Under the terms of the plot, Bermudians would supply the Continental Army with 100 barrels of gunpowder in exchange for exemption from Congress' trade embargo as well as food and other provisions. While negotiating this plot, Bermudian Colonel Tucker exaggerated the island's population threefold for more food. Thus, the elites sought to endure the Imperial Crisis while simultaneously yielding a profit.

The island would not formally join the independence movement, not supply troops, or publish political rhetoric. Instead, as argued here in the second chapter, "The Treasonous Pen," elite Bermudians navigated their treasonous commercial activities by means of expansive epistolary networks. They were obedient servants to neither the Empire nor to the Rebels next door, but instead, obedient servants of opportunity motivated by well-being and prosperity for themselves and their island. They survived on imports and opportunists. Connections across the

Empire allowed supplies and provisions to be imported, children to be educated abroad, and intelligence to direct the decisions of the elite patriarchs. Reputation and maintenance of epistolary networks were vital for the survival of their enterprises. The elite's discreet negotiations, friendships, and complaints allowed the island to escape starvation, invasion, and neglect. Their private media practices allowed the elites, including friend of America Henry Tucker and loyalist Governor Bruere, to manage their agendas without the scrutiny of the public. It will be known that a printing press until 1784, a year after the war of independence, the elites privately maintained non-print epistolary networks to balance their loyalties in secrecy. These private media practices of Bermudians allow us to understand how they capitalized on the lack of a printing press to pursue great opportunities during the Imperial Crisis.

Chapter I

Friends of America

“The rebels declare against you have nothing left but unanimously to join the affectionate parent in bringing her ungrateful children to obedience and submission.”

Proclamation by his honorable Governor Bruere, Bermuda, July 1781

“But while you claim and enjoy the high privileges of British subjects, you will not forget, that it is your Duty, and I doubt not it will be your choice, to demonstrate to the World, that you are the willing subjects of the best and greatest Monarch upon Earth”

Bermuda’s Members of the House of the Assembly, January 1782

In October 1781, the world turned upside down. The American colonists defeated the naval superpower of Britain at the Battle of Yorktown. Their resounding victory, however, not only shocked the world, but affected a neighboring island eight hundred miles east of the victorious cannons. Bermuda, a twenty-one square-mile British colony, was in close proximity to the Thirteen Colonies. The archipelago, essentially equidistant to Boston (775 miles), New York (773), and Roanoke (766) and only a little further from Halifax (854) and the Bahamas (840), were immediately appreciated for their strategic location in the Empire. It was, according to notes from the Colonial Office, “situated in the center between [his] Majesty’s Northern Colonies and the Sugar Islands.”¹ During the Imperial Crisis, Bermuda served as a vital economic hub and middle ground port that was a host to innumerable sloops, sailors, slaves, smugglers, diseases, troops, traded goods, and intelligence. The impending tempest of revolution, however brought with it anxieties of stagnation, starvation, and silence on the island. Bermudians pledged loyalty to the Crown while simultaneously trading with their rebellious neighbors. Though tugged at both ends throughout the crisis, Bermuda prudently navigated the uncertain waters of the American War for Independence.

¹ 18 July 1765, Film No. 352, P: CO 37/37 1760-1766, Colonial Office 1766-1771, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

The island weighed their loyalties so as to avoid war and find gain. Bermudians may have concluded their public letters with assurances of duty and loyalty to their King and Country, but they privately plighted themselves as the obedient servants of opportunity. In this chapter, I examine how the British island fit into the complex puzzle of American independence from the British Crown, and how they, in turn, contributed to Bermuda's success as a remaining British territory. The island underwent several challenges, from the Gunpowder Plot of 1775, to frustrated governors, to starving inhabitants including prisoners of war. Bermudians endured these calamities through their management of social, political, and most importantly, economic networks. I reveal how and why the island balanced her loyalties as she aided the rebelling colonies while remaining herself under the control of Britain's monarchy.

Shipwrecked to Seafarers

During the Imperial Crisis, the island served as a vital economic, geographical, and political asset for both the American colonies and imperial Britain. The island's future was directed by somewhat controlled variables until the revolutionary period. The maritime elites of the island were known to be skilled at managing the tempestuous Atlantic waters. However, Bermudians still ran the constant risk of devastation. Elite men of the hydrachy led both illegal and legal ventures to better the island. Though most inhabitants of Bermuda, including men of the lower sorts, women, and seafaring slaves, were not directly navigating the unpredictable seas of revolution, they shared a spirit of opportunity with those in power. Inhabitants of the island of all sorts were collectively courageous, innovative, prudent, determined, and ambitious. A culture of stout perseverance developed on the shores of the island of castaways over the course of only one century.

Around 1505, Spanish explorer Juan de Bermúdez discovered the barren island. One hundred years later, in 1609, the English *Sea Venture* wrecked on its shores on the way to the English settlement at Jamestown. William Strachey, an English writer, was aboard the vessel. Shipwrecked, he “described the islands as ‘so terrible to all that ever touched on them... The Devils (Islands) and are feared and avoided of all sea travelers alive, above any other place in the world.’”² William Shakespeare, only a year after Bermuda’s settlement spread further the hysteria of avoiding the “Isle of Devils” in *The Tempest*.³ The island, however, proved to be far from the Dante’s Inferno of rumor. Historian Michael Jarvis argues that “Bermudians, along with other Anglo-American colonists, populated the periphery of a London-centered empire, but over time islanders also developed an alternate perspective, one that places them at the center of England’s emerging Atlantic system.”⁴ Though some vessels feared the Isle of Devils’ treacherous reefs, the archipelago served the Empire not by its limited economy but its well-situated location.

The geographic convenience of Bermuda allowed for a steady flow of vessels to pass through its ports. Jarvis observes that “Bermuda lay at the crossroads of the Atlantic world in the age of sail, when one contemporary claimed that nine out of ten vessels sailing between the Caribbean and Europe passed within fifty miles of the island.”⁵ Jarvis later states that the island “was the most central location in England’s American empire, roughly equidistant from all the colonies in a broad-thousand-mile arc from Newfoundland to Antigua. The Gulf Stream to the west, the northeast trade winds to the south, and the Westerlies to the north enabled vessels to

² Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 11.

⁵ Ibid., 587.

sail easily to and from Bermuda.”⁶ Bermuda’s location in the Atlantic Ocean was something of a “middle ground” between multiple trading entrepôts around the Atlantic basin.⁷ It was uniquely responsible for connecting the Old World with the New. Jarvis argues that the island’s “location was a vital asset in an age when people, information, and trade traveled only as fast as wind and waves allowed.”⁸ The geography of the island allowed it to become a port of diverse tongues and thought. This middle oasis, however, found itself bound to slavery.

Bermuda eventually fell under unethical, economic pressures. Humans whom the colonizers viewed as inferior were shackled and forced to work on the limited land and at the open sea. The Virginia Company and the Somers Islands Company were some of the first proprietors of Bermuda. In 1611, “a new supply of provisions and colonists revived the Virginia colony, a number of Virginia Company stockholders hopeful of establishing another foothold in the Western Hemisphere invested the sum of £2,000 to plant a slaved-based colony in Bermuda.”⁹ These companies came to the island with hopes of prosperity and great wealth from its resources. However, they needed more labor to succeed. In August of 1616, the *Edwin* came to Bermuda's shores with one African and one Native American. By 1623, the island imported over one hundred Africans who were then forced into slavery. According to Bernhard, Bermuda was “the first English colony to import African labor, fully three years before Africans arrived in

⁶ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 587.

⁷ Historian Richard White invented this historiographical trop of a “middle ground” to articulate the liminal, geographic, and social area of the Great Lakes region where Native Americans and French Canadians came together in mutually beneficial ways. See Richard White’s *The Middle Ground: Indians, empires, and republics in the Great Lakes region, 1650-1815*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

⁸ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 587.

⁹ Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 3.

Virginia.”¹⁰ The enslaved Africans were taken from the Spanish by English privateers to the island for tobacco cultivation.¹¹ Africans and the Native Americans, made up 38 percent of the population by 1699.¹² With nearly half the population of the island enslaved, the territory became agriculturally profitable. At one point, Bermuda exported more tobacco to England than either Virginia or Maryland. In the seventeenth century, Bermuda set several laws that forced laborers to produce a large sum of the commodity. The Bermudan assembly declared the theft of tobacco a felony with a punishment of death.”¹³ The legal requirement for producing a particular amount of the product for trade correlated to a higher demand for slaves. With the indentured labor force, slave owners in Bermuda prospered financially.

The island quickly transitioned to a maritime economy after resources and fertile land became limited due to population growth. Limited farming gave way to robust enterprises in ship building, privateering, whaling and turtle hunting, fishing, and shipwreck scavenging. When the nearer shores no longer proved profitable, Bermudians designed fast, cedar sloops to take their business across the Atlantic. Elite Bermudian families set up trade networks that connected the island to the Caribbean. The St. George’s Inward Manifest, for instance, reveals continuous trade in salt with islands such as St. Eustacia.¹⁴ This was responsible for transitioning the island’s “society with slaves,” as coined by historian Ira Berlin, to be shifted from agricultural to

¹⁰ Bernhard, *Slaves and Slaveholders in Bermuda*, 588.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁴ St. George Inward Manifest Oct. 1780-Nov. 1788, CU 9/2, L. 2444-001, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

maritime labor.¹⁵ With white patriarchs out at sea managing their crews of indentured servants and slaves, women back on the island felt vulnerable to slave rebellions.¹⁶ Though most slaves were away on the ships of their husbands, many remained to do agricultural and domestic labor on the island. Slaves forced to venture the seas called on ports throughout the Atlantic World. In contrast to other maritime slaves, Bermuda's slaves were respected as skilled seamen and were often entrusted with intelligence to take back to the island. This information from abroad would eventually allow Bermudians to manage the twists and turns of war.

The “Unhappy Situation” of the Eighteenth-Century

The Imperial Crisis posed a threat to Bermuda. Inhabitants worried about the future of private enterprise. Merchant John Esten of the East end called attention to the “unhappy situation” just a few hundred miles away.¹⁷ In a letter written in spring of 1775, Esten remarked that “the occurrences of our little Island at this time scarcely merits attention – some are greatly alarmed at the Resolutions of the American Congress, whilst others flatter themselves that the Mother Country will pursue conciliating measures, which I believe is the ardent wish of every true lover of his Country.”¹⁸ Esten went on to admit that he “was apprehensive that the consequences will be more dreadful than anyone can at present foresee.”¹⁹ By 1775, Bermudians

¹⁵ Ira Berlin. *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009.

¹⁶ 1762, Film No. 352, P:CO 37/37 1760-1766, Colonial Office 1760-1766, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁷ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 29 May 1775, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁸ John Esten, 3 April 1775, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

hoped for a restored peace within the Empire. Inhabitants like Esten understood that their lives and livelihoods would be altered by either peaceful negotiations or “the Blood and the sword alone.”²⁰

After the Declaration of Independence was printed and distributed throughout the Atlantic seaboard and the wider British Atlantic, conflict began to trouble Bermuda’s peaceful shores. In 1778, Governor George Bruere noted that the *HMS Galatea* arrived in Bermuda to sail towards New York with gun powder and arms.²¹ Under the command of Vice-Admiral Lord Howe, the *Galatea* successfully captured several American ships. The loyalist governor hoped “Lord Howe [would] end another man of war cruise off” his island on his return to New York.”²² Bruere understood well that the island was a middle ground in the Atlantic theater. Ships that circled the island hoisted flags of all different loyalties. The stir caused by the revolution led many anxious Bermudians to think constantly about the “dangerous situation” with the American rebels.²³ However, not all inhabitants shared the same unwavering loyalty to the Crown. Bruere confessed that Bermudians were “not in arms, yet they [favored] the American rebels.”²⁴ Tensions over loyalties resulted in distrust among Bermudians. Private endeavors, such as illegal intercourse with the rebels, were motivated by profit and the growing dependence the island had on their Continental neighbors.

²⁰ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 17 September 1775, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

²¹ William Clark Bell, William James Morgan, Michael J. Crawford, (*Naval documents of the American Revolution*, Volume 7. Naval History Division, Dept. of the Navy, (1964); 1778, Governor George Bruere, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

²² Governor George Bruere, 1778, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

Intelligence soon arrived that the First Continental Congress had imposed an embargo on trade with all British colonies. This ban on trade was detrimental for Bermuda. According to minutes from a 1776 council meeting, the elite assemblymen of Bermuda reminded George Forbes, fifth Earl of Granard, that the island was dependent on the American Colonies for provisions and that “cannot possibly exist without such supplies is a Fact.”²⁵ The assemblymen were well versed in the mercantile activities of the island since they often led them, so they understood the threat of “impending Famine” without the assistance of America.²⁶ The pragmatic men recognized that the journey of British ships to the American Colonies from England was limited due to cost, risk, less fresh provisions, and, most importantly, distance.²⁷

By 1778, George Bascome, the clerk of the Assembly, reminded his audience that he and his fellow assemblymen, including several members of the Tucker clan, were “unanimously chosen” to “represent the whole Body of the People.”²⁸ The opinion of the Committee, therefore, represented the elite, white population of Bermuda men. Bascome relayed,

Resolved also as the opinion of the Committee that as there is a general prohibition of provisions from the Continent of America, and present Stock of the Inhabitants is in all probability insufficient for their support during the continuance of such prohibition that it be recommended to every Inhabitant of their Islands to dispose of no part of such Stock to any person whatever other than an Inhabitant and such of His Majesty’s Ships of War as may be in a real want, and that upon requisition first made to the Legislature of these Island, and that if any person infer any pretreat whatever shall forcibly attempt to enter the Store or Warehouse of any ... or to take from them any quantity of Provisions whatever contrary to the transport of these resolutions.... That it be recommended, and it is surely in the most serious and Solemn manner recommended to the Inhabitants of

²⁵ 3 September 1776, Minutes of the Council 1765-1780, Book Two, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 17 February 1781, London to Bermuda, Film No. 365, CO 37/39, 1780-1784, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

²⁸ George Bascome, 5 September 1778, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

these Islands let the quantity of provisions be great as it may not to with any higher price for any bread, flour, rice, corn, or other grain, than what ... nor or lately have been sold for.²⁹

Assemblymen were unhappy about the dispute between Great Britain and America. They had mouths to feed, including not only their families, but their slaves, and the island's prisoners of war. Mercantile elites hoped to venture to "the continent in search of provisions."³⁰ Yet they succumbed to "strict adherence to the Letter of the Laws of Trade thought liable to Seizure by the Offices of the Majesty's Customs."³¹ Though the inhabitants had some sympathy for the rebels' call to independence, Bermudians were primarily preoccupied with how they could survive.

The Gunpowder Plot

Bermudians considered themselves well-positioned onlookers of the war. Assemblymen viewed their positions as "unconcerned spectator[s]" in a difficult situation.³² Inhabitants on the island and of the Empire found it difficult to see through the concealed loyalties of the elites. Henry Tucker, for instance, "was caught between his loyalty to his father, his brothers and cousins, the family business, his wife, and his father-in-law, Governor Bruere."³³ The economic opportunities, from salt to gunpowder, influenced which course the mercantile families of Bermuda would take. Although hundreds of miles north of the Caribbean, Bermudians

²⁹ George Bascome, 5 September 1778, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² "Tucker Letters," December 3, 1771, *Bermuda Historical Quarterly*, Bermuda Historical Quarterly, Bermuda, Vol. 3, 19 May 1772, 143.

³³ Michael Marsh, "The Defining Story of Bermuda's Great Gunpowder Plot 1775," Canada, 2015, 51.

established themselves on islands like St. Eustatius. Mercantile activity was questioned, however, by 1775. In a letter from Governor Bruere to the Lords of Trade and Plantations, Bruere mentioned the Tuckers were traveling to Philadelphia and New York ports “upon Business of Importance, in respect to securing a sufficiency of corn and rice, from vessels that... just arrived from North America and South Carolina.”³⁴ Though denounced by the Crown, partnership between the island and the Continent guaranteed dependability and survival.

Yet the mercantile elites of Bermuda often looked beyond bare necessities. The West Indies, for instance, supplied the American Rebels with ninety percent of their gunpowder in the first few years of the revolution.³⁵ Bermudians would soon join in on this venture by allowing profit to trump patriotism. Unlike the islands in the British West Indies, however, which hesitated to engage in the imperial crisis, Bermuda sent a delegate to the Continental Congress with hopes of a mutually beneficial negotiation. Colonel Tucker, father of Henry Tucker and patriarch of the families’ enterprise, used his continental connections in its favor. He successfully persuaded influential inhabitants to visit Philadelphia and lobby American Delegates. Informal lobbying allowed for the Congress to understand the island was “caught between two rival parties” and was, consequently, near famine.³⁶ Provisions were desperately needed. However, Bermudian leaders like George Bascome and Colonel Tucker exaggerated the population to ensure that a surplus would result. Though they were dealing with the enemy, their motives proved to be continuously in the interest of self, kin, and Country.

³⁴ Governor George Bruere to Lords of Trade and Plantations, 18 June 1775, Film No. 353, Colonial Office 1770-1792, R: CO 37/21, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

³⁵ Marsh, “The Defining Story of Bermuda’s Great Gunpowder Plot 1775,” 65.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 66.

The Tucker family began to use their continental connections to ensure a promising future for Bermuda. In the summer of 1775, Colonel Tucker sent a petition to Philadelphia addressed to Benjamin Franklin and John Dickinson, two delegates of the Second Continental Congress. The petition was presented to Congress less than a month later without the presence of any Bermudian. In the days that followed, Franklin made a motion in the Continental Congress that declared that any vessel carrying gunpowder or arms to America would be allowed to carry away provisions of equal value in exchange.³⁷ The motion passed. Bermuda's petition was considered after intelligence of island's gunpowder accessibility was quietly circulated amongst American Delegates. In a letter addressed to the inhabitants of Bermuda, George Washington acknowledged from Camp Cambridge, three miles from Boston, the opportunity for exchange. "In the great conflict which agitates the continent," Washington wrote, "I cannot doubt but the asserters of freedom and the right of the Constitution are possessed of your most favorable regards and wishes for success."³⁸ He continued in detail:

We are informed that there is a very large magazine in your island under a very feeble guard. We would not wish to involve you in an opposition in which, from your situation, we should be unable to support you; we know not, therefore, to what extent to solicit your assistance, in availing ourselves of this supply; but if your favour and friendship to North America and its liberties have not been misrepresented, I persuade myself you may, consistently with your own safety, promote and further this scheme, so as to give it the fairest prospect of success. Be assured that in this case the whole power and exertion of my influence will be made with the honorable Continental Congress, that your island may not only be supplied with provisions, but experience every other mark of affection and friendship with the grateful citizens of a free country can bestow on its brethren and benefactors.³⁹

³⁷ Marsh, "The Defining Story of Bermuda's Great Gunpowder Plot 1775," 67.

³⁸ Henry Campbell Wilkinson, *Bermuda in the Old Empire: A History of the Island from the Dissolution of the Somers Island Company until the End of the American Revolutionary War: 1684-1784* (London: Cumberlege, 1950), 378.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Washington was optimistic that a deal could be struck between the island and his Congress; however, the Americans decided they would not provide provisions until the Bermudians delivered the barrels from their island's magazine. A letter sent to Bermudian Captain Trimmingham from Franklin expressed the concern that Bermuda would re-export the Congress-supplied provisions to the British West Indies.⁴⁰ Members of the Continental Congress were manipulated by the opportunistic elites. In their negotiation, Tucker quietly exaggerated the island's population to ensure a surplus. Bermudians were both pragmatic and shrewd.

Colonel Tucker understood that the deal must be made in haste due to the severity of the situation on the island. Bermudians needed the American embargo to be lifted. In leveraging their influence, they no longer were spectators in an imperial tug-of-war. Colonel Tucker actively planned the Gun Powder Plot of 1775 with Benjamin Franklin. The *Lady Catherine* from Virginia, along with the *Charles Town* and *Savannah Pacquet* from South Carolina, arrived at the shores of Bermuda soon thereafter. The three rebel ships transported the island's gunpowder from the East End of Bermuda back to the colonies. The American vessels hid on the West End at the estate of Somerset Tucker, son of Colonel Tucker. He had privately included his gunpowder into the negotiation for the sake of personal gain. Colonel Tucker had discreetly taken care of the matter through his letters, and his visits to the Thirteen Colonies. He strategically managed the trusted relationship with his American brethren while devoting himself to the King. "Bermudians were not just mired in issues of self-interest and survival," according to historian Clarence Maxwell, but "were potential supporters of the American cause."⁴¹

⁴⁰ Wilkinson, *Bermuda in the Old Empire*, 380.

⁴¹ Clarence Maxwell and Theodore Francis Alexandra Mairs Kessler, *Prudent Rebels: Bermudians & the First Age of Revolution*. (National Museum of Bermuda Press, The Keep, The Old Royal Naval Dockyard, Bermuda, and the Government of Bermuda, 2019), 90.

This fine line between support and survival was illustrated in a letter Henry Tucker wrote to Virginian delegate Thomas Jefferson. As Colonel Tucker described it,

the Inhabitants are a people who from their immediate Connection and frequent Intercourse with the Continent, have contracted an affection for this Country. They consider the Americans as Brethren, and their Souls are animated with the same generous Ardor for Liberty that prevails on the Continent; they are most Zealous Friends to the Cause of America and would readily join with it.⁴²

Though sympathetic and open to negotiation, the colonel “did not come to Philadelphia to aid the King’s enemies, he had thought himself a loyal subject of the King and had so informed Congress.”⁴³ Tucker was left to decide for himself whether to “abandon the mission or perform the most disloyal of acts.”⁴⁴ This plot, however, was privately negotiated for the sake of Bermuda’s benefit.⁴⁵ At the time, “the leading ‘patriots’ were determined to remain in the empire as loyal subjects of George III.”⁴⁶ With the constant turn of the political winds, Tucker wisely understood his economic agenda must avoid public scrutiny for it to succeed.

For the protection of his reputation in the Empire and the operation’s success, Colonel Tucker formed a secret Committee which included Members of the Assembly and the Council, including St. George Tucker, Henry Tucker of Somerset, James Tucker, George Bascome, Captain Nathaniel Todd, Stephen Judkin of St. George’s, and likely many others.⁴⁷ These

⁴² Bell, Morgan, Crawford, *Naval documents of the American Revolution*, Volume 1., 635.

⁴³ Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution*, 47.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Maxwell and Mairs-Kessler, *Prudent Rebels*, 92

⁴⁶ William R. Polk, *The Birth of America: From before Columbus to the Revolution* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 302.

⁴⁷ Marsh, “The Defining Story of Bermuda’s Great Gunpowder Plot 1775,” 70.

conspirators were responsible for ammunition that would kill their British brothers. Their treason, however, was economic. On 23 August 1775, King George III formally declared the American Colonies were in open rebellion. Ironically, Colonel Henry Tucker's Gunpowder Plot of 1775 took place eight days before the King made his proclamation.⁴⁸ Though leaders of Bermuda understood the scope of the fight only a few hundred miles away, they did commit the theft before the formal declaration of treason was made.

Bermuda's 1767 Powder Magazine was left unprotected in a "remote part of the island."⁴⁹ The magazine was situated near the Government House, inhabited by Governor Bruere, and was conveniently built next to Tobacco Bay.⁵⁰ After the swift theft, the gunpowder was recorded when received in Philadelphia. Minutes from a late August meeting recount,

a letter was this day received by [Captain] Ord of the *Lady Catherine*, from Henry Tucker, Chairman of the Deputies of the several Parishes in Bermuda, enclosing an account for 1182 lbs. of gunpowder shipped by him abroad said vessel, amounting to £161.14.8, that currency, with an account of eight half bars of powder on board said vessel, the property of Captain John Cowper of North Carolina, for which his last powder Mr. Tucker has engaged that this board or Mr. Robert Morris will be accountable for.⁵¹

While nearly half of the powder was spoiled, historian Michael Marsh argues that "Bermuda's contribution would have supplied 1,182 front soldiers with one pound of powder each."⁵² The

⁴⁸ Marsh, "The Defining Story of Bermuda's Great Gunpowder Plot 1775," 73.

⁴⁹ "From George Washington to Nicholas Cooke, 4 August 1775," *Founders Online*, National Archives, [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 1, 16 June 1775–15 September 1775, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985, pp. 221–223.].

⁵⁰ Marsh, "The Defining Story of Bermuda's Great Gunpowder Plot 1775," 80.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, 87.

island, though attempting to remain neutral, was now responsible for blood spilt or shed on the battlefields of the American Revolutionary War.

Governor Bruere's Response

Governor Bruere did not condone illicit intercourse between Bermudians and their neighbors. His son John had been killed defending the Crown at the Battle of Bunker Hill, a mere three months before the sale of Bermuda's gunpowder to the Rebels. The assemblymen had "contributed to the plunder of the magazine [and] the removal of the cannon" that would result in the death of more redcoats, all the while Bruere grieved his own nearby.⁵³ That summer, Bruere lost his son, the already questionable trust of the Bermudian elites, and the protection of his power. The powder and fortification left St. George's port vulnerable to foreign invaders.⁵⁴ Bruere was thus left defenseless. Throughout his time as governor, Bruere continued to question the motives of the assemblymen.

By 1779, Bruere had suggested in several letters his frustrations with the economic treason of the inhabitants. In July of that year, Bruere wrote to Lord Germain,

Your Lordship imagine, will be troubled with an empathy, to present and address to His Majesty, and at the same time, to represent some imaginary grievances, or rather to ...to sail; over several imprudent and notorious proceedings tending towards adjusting and encouraging, the American rebels, by supplying them with large quantities of salt, carried directly from Turks Island and likewise from hances and going to Sea, without any entrance and clearance. And their vessels having been taken in such facts, both by his Majesty ships of war, and several privateers, have induced the general assembly and council, to address his majesty in order to palliate or execute, such like repeated offences.... in choosing

⁵³ Governor George Bruere, 14 July 1776, Film No. 353, Colonial Office 1770-1792, R: CO 37/21, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁵⁴ Governor George Bruere, 31 August 1775, Minutes of the Council 1765-1780, Book Two, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda; Governor George Bruere, 10 October 1775, Minutes of the Council 1765-1780, Book Two, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

Delegates, of which colonial Tucker their empathy, was the President and addressing the Congress. The Robbery committed on the Powder Magazines, must have been assisted at least, by some of the Inhabitants, because their whale boats, towed it off to a Carolina vessel the open and daring attempt of four men of the assembly with others of which their empathy's son in law, a Henry Tucker Junior, the leader of the assembly was one, that went out in a boat, in order to bring back to post, a small sloop that I had dispatched for Boston.⁵⁵

Bruere did not hesitate to accuse his inhabitants of their illicit activities. The governor knew that elite families like the Tuckers were trading with the American continent without licenses. He desired to punish them for supplying the Rebels, yet he did not have the respect, resources, or support to do so.⁵⁶ He was left defenseless, with his reputation at risk of supporting treason.

Bermuda's governor was cautious. He was careful not to avoid being connected to the questionable affairs of his inhabitants. In a letter to Lord Sydney, His Majesty's principal secretary of state for the home department, Governor Bruere warned him of the "alarming situation" of the "affection of many of the Inhabitants to Great Britain."⁵⁷ He accused inhabitants such as salt trader Henry Tucker, of defying the King's order to prevent trade and intercourse with the enemy. He also reported that he had suspended Paul Bascome from his position as an officer at customs. Bascome had taken ships from assembly leaders to trade with the enemy under a private flag of truce.⁵⁸ This behavior was unacceptable. But, like the assemblymen, Bruere was also balancing loyalties. He pledged allegiance to the King, His Majesty's Empire, his newly assigned his

⁵⁵ Governor George Bruere to Lord Germain, 14 July 1779, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37 1-end, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁵⁶ 1749-1784, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁵⁷ Governor George Bruere to Lord Sydney, 1749-1784, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

inhabitants and his daughter. In a twist worthy of Shakespeare, his daughter was married to one Henry Tucker Jr., one of the ringleaders of economic treason. Yet, Bruere's accusations rewarding the men, such as his son-in-law, were never turned into formal charges or trials. According to English law, one was innocent until proven guilty. He had no tangible proof of the assemblymen's involvement in the Gunpowder Plot of 1775. Bruere also understood that his support was limited, so it was unlikely a formal accusation would be viewed favorably on the island. He forfeited a public expression of law and order to avoid the risk of alienations his daughter, as well as the elites who managed his salary and affairs.

Bruere continued to closely observe the assemblymen and their actions. In 1778, he reported to London: "I conceive that large quantities of salt, cleared out from Turks Island, and carried directly from thence to the Rebels and some salt brought from Turks Island is here, and then by stealth carried off again."⁵⁹ The governor noted that goods such as salt, rum, and molasses were frequently redirected to the Continent to feed the enemy. He understood the elite families' motives for income, yet he questioned their associations and sympathies in their illicit operation. Bruere was respected by the elites more in word than in action. He was often isolated in his duties, even denied boats to travel around the island or abroad. Without support from his assemblymen and with limited funds from England, Bruere ultimately took matters into his own hands and demanded order on his island.

By 1779, the governor feared rebellion had finally touched the shores of Bermuda. In a letter to Lord Germain, he admitted, "I have the utmost difficulty, keep the inhabitants of Bermuda,

⁵⁹ Governor George Bruere, 19 March 1778, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

in peace with His Majesty, although they may have done, several unwarrantable acts.”⁶⁰ He hoped for no “interruption within the Body of the Country” and for the inhabitants not to be driven into Rebellion.⁶¹ With intelligence from abroad, Bruere had become aware of the threat of insurrection. A month before the 1775 Gunpowder Plot, the Jamaican Fiftieth Regiment had plotted to strengthen General William Howe’s army in North America. This was a sign of potential insurrection. Stephen Fuller, an English agent in Jamaica, “believed that the conspirators had been influenced by revolutionary ideology and inflammatory statements made by their masters in support of the rebels.”⁶² Though Bermuda was a society with slaves, unlike Jamaica’s slave society, the island shared its fears of starvation and questionable loyalties. Bermudian maritime men pragmatically understood that the island could not survive independently. Bruere, however, feared the elites of Bermuda were not genuinely “securing their own Interest” but were aiding the cause for Liberty.⁶³

Elite Bermudian men were simply economic companions to the Americans, not political Rebels themselves. If they were instead to be enemies, the island’s economy would risk ruin. Governor Bruere diligently worked to prevent the men from becoming insurgents. Bruere desired support to avoid privateers from “infesting these islands and frequently coming to the West End of Bermuda for water or intelligence by which means the Islands of Bermuda may be taken by a

⁶⁰ Governor George Bruere to Lord George Germain, 8 March 1779, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Sylvia R. Frey, *Water from the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 72.

⁶³ 1762, Film No. 352, P: CO 37/37 1760-1766, Colonial Office 1766-1771, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

few rebels or the... of some inhabitants.”⁶⁴ Bermudians often turned to disorderly privateering for the sake of profit. In a dispatch signed by Bruere, the governor mentioned talks of rebellion and the inhabitant’s connection to the General Assembly of Massachusetts. He then revealed that a rebel privateer encountered a Boston merchant and was cleared “as [a] friend to America.”⁶⁵ Bermudians were in constant contact with the rebels on the high seas.

An Island Plagued by Death

Bermudians feared not only loss of opportunity but also starvation. The island relied on a maritime economy instead of agriculture. Provisions from abroad, therefore, were necessary for survival. Yet with the influx of wartime prisoners, assemblymen worried about the starvation of their potential business pawns. In a 1778 deposition, William Murry of Sandy’s Parish remarked that six Bermudians were taken prisoner by rebellious New Jerseyans.⁶⁶ Although Bermudians were known as friends to America in many American continental ports, their networks of trust were not known by all. The maritime elites of the island therefore risked capture on the high seas. In a 1779 letter to Lord Germain, Bruere admitted, “I hope we shall be supplied now with rice, from Georgia and I shall grant them no more license, to the Northward colonies and as they presume again, to go without they must suffer the consequence, of being captured, and made prize

⁶⁴ Governor George Bruere, 10 June 1784, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁵ Governor George Bruere, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39, 1780-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁶ William Murray, 1778, Film No. 353, Colonial Office 1770-1792, CO 37/22 1-end (1779-1782), Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

of.”⁶⁷ Since the inhabitants did not listen to Bruere’s orders, the governor considered drastic consequences.

While Bermudians were taken prisoner abroad, enemy vessels were likewise preyed upon by loyalist families such as the Goodriches. French prisoners were taken off the island’s shores periodically by 1779.⁶⁸ The Assembly began to consider “Americans, French, and Spaniards [as] one consideration.”⁶⁹ In the final years of the war, the Assembly shifted its public allegiance towards the Empire. They were no longer spectators once the Imperial Crisis had brought disorder to Bermuda. Historian Henry Wilkinson noted that in this time of distress, “it was customary for sailors captured on trading vessels to be paroled, but for those from armed ships to be confined in the jail which, though larger than the earlier prison, was still diminutive.”⁷⁰ Bermuda’s treasury was strained, hardly any of the public officials were paid, and provisions were scarce. “Under such circumstances,” Wilkinson indicated, “in November 1779 twenty American and fifteen French prisoners were crowded within this small prison and given an allowance of raw rice as their sole sustenance.”⁷¹ Starvation was soon followed by disease, which led to a high mortality rate not only of prisoners but also of inhabitants. Bermudians had to survive the conflict. Their families were exposed to several threats – one of which being ravenous prisoners. Bermuda’s central, nearby location allowed prisoners to be held for the British at a lower expense. Yet overcrowding was

⁶⁷ Governor George Bruere to Lord George Germain, 14 July 1779, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁸ Governor George Bruere to Lord George Germain, 3 February 1779, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁹ House of Assembly Journal, 1781, L. 3433-003, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁷⁰ Wilkinson, *Bermuda in the Old Empire*, 153.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

inevitable. For years to follow, prisoners would be kept in decommissioned and dismantled ships that served as prison hulks.⁷² Though the management of prisoners brought great distress to inhabitants, moments of hope alleviated their moments of fear. A ship believed to be from South Carolina, for instance, was cleared at the Customs House for the sake of provisions for the island's inhabitants. It was not until the vessel docked that Bermudians realized it was from St. Eustacia and carried flour, bread, and rice. The provisions were paid for because of the burden of starving French and American prisoners.⁷³ Bruere's approval to the foreign vessel restored public faith. Yet death would continue to plague the Isle of Devils.

As the crisis continued, Bermudians were weakened by disease and famine. They were left discouraged, wondering when the conflict would end. Their spirits faltered as Bruere fell ill from chronic stress in July of 1780. Jarvis reveals that "the turning point in Bermudian allegiance occurred in late 1780, following the death of Governor George James Bruere."⁷⁴ Bruere's military funeral showcased the great strength of the overlooked island. The late governor's coffin traveled from the governor's mansion to St. George's church with the presence of over three hundred soldiers. "Lord Germain appointed Bruere's hot-tempered son, George Jr.," who Jarvis describes as unpleasant to both Americans and Bermudians alike.⁷⁵ His term as governor would last only a year. However, his governance was tainted by disdain because of his father's constant intelligence concerning the Bermudians' many treasons and failures to end them.

⁷² Anna McKay, *The History of British Prison Hulks, 1776-1864*, (AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Partnership Student, National Museum & University of Leicester).

⁷³ Governor George Bruere to Lord Germain, May 1779, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37 1-end, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁷⁴ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 428.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

After enduring several wounds from fighting for the crown on the continent, Bruere the Younger arrived at the island in October of 1780. He quickly consolidated power and found success with more loyalists in Bermuda's colonial government. Bruere the Younger itched "to punish the islanders and break their American commerce."⁷⁶ He no longer wanted to provide for the enemy. Therefore, in 1781, he directed all prisoners of war to be sent off to either Charlestown near Boston, South Carolina, or New York.⁷⁷ Bruere hoped to focus on domestic issues by removing distractions like that of prisoners of war. Overcome by frustration towards his father's treatment and death, Bruere demanded an end to the shameful illicit activities of friends of America. Bermudians were now left to wonder not only the fate of their fortunes but their political position in the Empire.

Nearing the End of War

The maritime men of Bermuda were mobilized by economic common sense. Though Bruere the younger feared their rebellious connections, the island's elites traded with an obedience towards opportunity. A call to liberty was not their desire – instead, it was their fear. Bermudians worried more about their purses than their hearts or minds during the conflict. They aspired to manage their island's enterprise and sustain their established loyalties. The Bruere and Tucker families lived parallel lives. While they reacted to the unstable period differently, the patriarchs and sons of the families did not do so in extremes. Instead, they displayed great prudence. Their actions consisted of private frustrations and hesitations that avoided public hysteria or shame. Tucker could have easily persuaded fellow inhabitants to take arms against the British. Likewise,

⁷⁶ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 428.

⁷⁷ Governor George Bruere, 15 January 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39, 1780-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

Bruere could have publicly called for the assemblymen to be hanged – instead, he remained disappointed until the turn of the war.

Official dispatches from the Bermuda Government were continually addressed to Lord George Germain in England regarding the questionable behavior of islanders over the beginning of 1781. Bruere reminisced, “the powder they robbed from the Magazine and the attack of the Dispatch vessel commenced their engagement” with the rebels, leading to distrust amongst privateers.⁷⁸ Sources had also relayed to Bruere that twelve to fourteen Bermudian commercial vessels furnished the rebels in Boston and Newport with salt. Though Bruere had attempted to keep law and order in his ports, Bermudians often skirted his efforts. The governor suggested that he had “the strongest proof of [them] having double papers, thereby to carry on what they gently deem a force trade.”⁷⁹ Bermudian merchants rarely went out of their way to trade with distant England. British ships only entered St. George’s port a few times a month, while trade with the rebels guaranteed constant, fresh provisions.

Merchants traveling between the Continent and the island understood how to hoist certain flag colors and patterns to their advantage in the loosely monitored West End. If a ship were to raise the Rebel stripes, Bermudians would pilot to their vessels with great enthusiasm. If British standards were on display, the inhabitants were more likely to ignore the vessel due to the lack of potential profit. Governor Bruere relayed an anecdote of Captain Mentor of the 20th Gun Privateer *Triumph*: “having several times called off the West End for the same purpose under British Colors, he could never obtain a small boat, by having the advice of his [lieutenant], a Bermudian, hoisted

⁷⁸ Governor George Bruere, 7 January 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39, 1780-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

the Rebel stripes, he was instantly attended to by twelve or fourteen boats, still passing for an American! He was offered every kind of assistance even” a collection of 150 boats.⁸⁰ If Bermudians were politically treasonous, they would have acted against Captain Mentor. Instead, the inhabitants remained passive until an opportunity presented itself. Yet in the eyes of Bruere, treason was treason no matter the distinction.

The Bermuda archives contain a host of dispatches sent from Governor Bruere in the winter of 1781. During the peak of winter, privateering and illicit intercourse allowed for Bermudians to avoid starvation.⁸¹ By February, Bruere had noticed French vessels, bearing a flag of truce, harbored in St. George’s port carrying sugar, indigo, cotton, and coffee.⁸² Foreign trade appeared to be lively on and around the island. Bruere did not favor products from abroad; instead, he proposed Bermudians develop domestic products to avoid international dependencies and risk of disloyalty. The inhabitants, however, saw an opportunity on the high seas, not from their soil.

On the day following Bruere’s observance of foreign trade, he wrote from the Government House a reflection of the island’s position during the Imperial Crisis. He discerned,

Instead of proving themselves attached to the beat of Sovereigns and their Mother Country by joining gloriously in the War of Britain, the Rebels and their Confederates are supplied with that great essential salt some even daring by are not, setting forth publicly that they are only amenable if at all not being particularly specified in the prohibitory act to have their vessels and goods confiscated by the act... of His resent Majesty, prohibiting all trade and intercourse with the colonies in Rebellion Mistaken men, or rather willful

⁸⁰ Governor George Bruere, 7 January 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39, 1780-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Governor George Bruere to Lord Germain, 3 February 1779, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37 1-end, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

deceivers, where is the nation that does not make it treason to correspond with any Enemy! more especially with Rebels?⁸³

Governor Bruere reminded his British audience, likely Lord Germain, of the law set forth by the Crown. Yet he understood that fear of starvation may have been a driving force behind the illicit trade. He suggested that the “want of provisions might have been in time of absolute need a palliative to those who went merely for it, but those who bartered for Tobacco, had no other view than gain even at the expense of the most sacred ties Great Britain is slow to anger, and been mere willing to reclaim her sons than punish; fairly roused!”⁸⁴ Bruere implied the Empire would consider forgiveness for the opportunistic men of Bermuda such as Henry Tucker.

Bruere continued with a reprimanding tone to warn the economically treasonous men of the authority of their mother county. He warned, “resentment will make every enemy tremble - Let then the loyal man’s feast their allegiance by joining their efforts to the trust British subjects, now gallantry and successfully waning by Sea and Land against their Confederate Love of liberty - it a sacred name that has been made a stalking horse to ambitious republic.”⁸⁵ He held a conservative view on the revolution itself. He deemed it foolish to challenge the monarchy. Bruere set this truth before the men asking, them not to deceive themselves of the rebels’ call for change. He concluded, “the relative duties Lowe my Sovereign, my Country the Empire and my Oaths, have required it.”⁸⁶ Like all Bermudians, Bruere aligned his actions with his duty. However, inhabitants’ prioritization was to remain alive, feed the mouths of their families, slaves, and

⁸³ Governor George Bruere, 4 February 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39, 1780-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

prisoners, and continue to harvest opportunities in the evolving Atlantic World. Bruere, instead, prioritized duty to Empire, law and order, and security of the island's assets.

Bruere continuously reported his efforts to reduce his inhabitant's illicit affairs to Germain. In a letter sent in early February of 1781, Bruere boasted about the seizure of six or seven rebel vessels off the shore of Bermuda. Yet he confessed that "some individuals have been helping rebel prisoners to escape."⁸⁷ With every precaution Bruere took, inhabitants, reacted by finding a solution to continue their treasonous economic practices. Bermudians hoped to keep starving American prisoners alive for the sake of a future exchange of either bodies, or more importantly, provisions. Furthermore, they knew exactly how to exploit opportunities. The rebel army was desperate for salt, so Bermudians provided a profitable supply. Bruere admitted that he was confident Bermudians outsourced their affairs for an opportunity in St. Eustacia as middlemen. Inhabitants continued to build "the fine Brigs, Schooners, and sloops for salt, by which the enemy is furnished with faster sailing vessels than are built anywhere else, the Bermuda Cedar being the best wood in the world for constructing Swift vessels."⁸⁸ Bruere was worried about how the maritime men used their talents in the Atlantic World. With rebels and the French circling the isolated and exposed island, Bruere instead dedicated himself to obeying the commands of the Crown. He concluded with a pledge to "continue [his] best efforts to further his Majesty's service."⁸⁹ Bruere wanted to maintain both his own honor and that of his Empire.

⁸⁷ Governor George Bruere, July 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁸⁸ Governor George Bruere, 8 February 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39, 1780-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

Just before the Battle of Yorktown, Governor Bruere crafted a proclamation considering the legislature's conduct and people of Bermuda. Bruere was frustrated by a recent instance of inhabitants' "improper interference with a flag of Truce coming from the enemy" before it was examined by "proper officers appointed by" Bruere himself.⁹⁰ Bruere was embarrassed by the men's actions. The assemblymen were guilty of the gunpowder robbery, denying Bruere a dispatch vessel, trading with Virginia for tobacco, and furnishing the rebels with salt.⁹¹ The association of three-fifths of the assembly with the neighboring enemy resulted in Bruere "publicly retaining a lawyer to commence suits against all those who dared arm against the Enemy of their Country."⁹² The proclamation also called for continuing the capture of rebel traders and for the members of the Assembly to act with authentic loyalty with the liberties and properties "of British subjects acting under the sanction of the laws."⁹³ Within six years of the Gunpowder Plot, Bruere was finally vocal in strengthening his powers of law and order.

Bruere argued that with "order of good government a Country will undoubtedly flourish."⁹⁴ He desired economic, political, and social success not to be sourced from illicit commerce. Yet, Bruere did not face the mercantile pressures of men like Tucker. The assemblymen responded to his proclamation explaining that their actions were for the "genuine interest of Bermuda."⁹⁵ He received this apology as though the assemblymen were disobedient, selfish children, and that was

⁹⁰ Governor George Bruere, July 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

his responsibility, therefore, to bring the Empire’s “ungrateful children to the obedience and submission” of their “affectionate parent.”⁹⁶ Like Bruere, Bermudian men such as the Tuckers appreciated that their King was fond of His island – yet the pragmatic elites also understood His Majesty was bringing in a low supply of provisions only monthly.

The Era of Governor William Browne

As the uncertain winter of 1781 progressed, King George III appointed William Browne, a loyalist from Massachusetts, to govern Bermuda. Lord Germain wrote of the news to Governor Bruere Jr. with hopes the inhabitants of Bermuda would finally “learn to thrive by honest industry and a fair and legal trade” with the guidance from Browne.⁹⁷ The newly appointed governor had served as a judge on Boston’s Supreme Court for several years. Germain noted Browne would “embark for Bermuda in a Neutral Ship” from the Continent.⁹⁸ Once he arrived at Bermuda, the new governor was made aware of the island’s situation. Governor Browne would be responsible for continuing the work of both Brueres yet with an even stricter consideration of law and order.

Summer began to warm the island with opportunity and new approaches to authority. In a letter to Lord Germain, Governor Browne seemed enthusiastic to “adopt the measures of conciliation [his] Lordship” had recommended.⁹⁹ Browne desired to reclaim those on the island that had lost sight of their duties to the Crown. Furthermore, he encouraged the need for the

⁹⁶ Governor George Bruere, July 1781, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁹⁷ Governor George Bruere to Lord Germain, 7 February 1781, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Governor William Browne, 12 January 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

mercantile elites to rectify their mistakes. Browne made it his “study to convince them, the prosperity of their country.” “The felicity of my administration,” Browne affirmed, “equally result from the opportunities they only afford me of representing them, as the... objects of his Majesty’s paternal regard.”¹⁰⁰ Browne feared the spirits of Bermudian men were “industrially infused” to assist the desire of their neighbors. The new governor believed, however, that his loyalist demonstration would inspire the men to end their actions.

By 1782, Governor Browne had been settled on the island for nearly a year. In a report to Lord Germain, Browne conveyed that an increasing number of families in Bermuda began to fit out private ships of war against the Rebels. Yet he matched his excitement with uncertainty. Browne reflected on strained imperial relations during his trip to New York. As a representative of Bermuda, Browne was concerned by “the stressed condition of [his] country to obtain permission to export for... Barrels of Flour and salted Beef” though the “King’s stores were full of Provisions,” and the markets were well supplied. Yet the British refused to send Bermuda provisions.¹⁰¹ Browne wondered, “How it can [expect] that a people should be retained in their Loyalty, and intertwined from trading with the Rebels, when they are denied a morsel of Bread?”¹⁰² The governor explained how Bermudians were “suffering for want of the common necessities of life.”¹⁰³ He informed Lord Germain “if the discovery is wholly left to [himself,] [he] fears [that he] shall be often obliged trouble [his] Lordship with a repetition of the old complaint about [their]

¹⁰⁰ Governor William Browne, 12 January 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Rebel connections.”¹⁰⁴ “If the misuse which [his] Lordship suggested last spring for supplying the troops here immediately from England, could be adopted, the Exports from,” Browne continued, maintaining that “this place might be protected by the same Convoy, which would beat the same time a service to Government and a relief to the inhabitants of their country.”¹⁰⁵ In the year prior, British soldiers were in need of cheap clothing yet trips between the distant shores were uncommon.¹⁰⁶ Browne understood this transactional dilemma and wanted to capitalize on the opportunity for more open ports between the motherland and the starving island.

As governor, Browne had set out to repair Bermuda’s tattered reputation. However, he did not let the memory of the Gunpowder Plot fade. In a letter to Lord Germain from spring of 1783, Browne maintained that “the lots of the powder, which [were] stolen from hence by the Rebels; and the want of the cannon, whichecker sent away by Governor Bruere to prevent a like disaster, are very discouraging circumstances by your Lordship may be assured that nothing shall be wanting on our part, within the extent of our abilities to affectionate the purpose we aim at.”¹⁰⁷ Bermuda’s questionable past was considered disgraceful by fervent loyalists. However, Browne was confident the island’s loyalties to the Crown had been solidified by 1782. The governor concluded his letter enthusiastically: “thirty-four vessels, taken from the Enemy, have been sent into these Islands between the first of January last and the first of their month, us that we flatter

¹⁰⁴ Governor William Browne, 12 January 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ 17 February 1781, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁰⁷ Governor William Browne, 8 May 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

ourselves, we shall not be through unworthy of this Majesty's gracious attention and regards."¹⁰⁸ Browne appreciated the island's consideration in England's agenda. His inclusion was a step towards ending the "growing evil."¹⁰⁹ His authority served as a model for elite Bermudians. However, as seen by the betrayal to Governor Bruere, the island's diplomacy was not the cure to end questionable loyalties.

While peace treaties were negotiated abroad, the conflict contained in Bermuda and on its shores. Governor Browne re-asserted authority. Unlike the Brueres, by 1783 Browne no longer tolerated the actions of the elite Bermuda men: he acted against them. Paul Bascome, from a prominent mercantile and privateer family, was removed from the Office of Searcher of His Majesty.¹¹⁰ In an address of the General Assembly, the conduct of the officers was described as "disagreeable or painful" to the representatives. The Assembly advised Governor Browne that Bascome's "detection or repression of illicit trade appeared to have been the solo or principal Rule of Conduct of the Searcher at the West End."¹¹¹ They defended Bascome's intentions by considering the designs of the sea or acts of malice amongst merchants. "We flatter ourselves your Excellency will not consider [Bascome] as too frivolous a subject for public complaint," they concluded.¹¹² Lieutenant Colonel Donkin later defended Bascome in the "absurd" decision to

¹⁰⁸ Governor William Browne, 8 May 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁰⁹ 16 May 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹⁰ William Browne, 13 February 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹¹ Cornelius Henson, 12 February 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹² Ibid.

regulate the Custom House Officers.¹¹³ Donkin reported Bascome to believe the action to be “unconstitutional, unjust, cruel, and repugnant to all Laws, Rules, and Customs.”¹¹⁴ The lieutenant officer continued by naming frustrations of Bascome: “It had been a crime in your petitioner to be zealous in the service of the king, active and attentive execution of his duty as an officer of his Majesty’s customs.”¹¹⁵ The following day, Bascome was removed from his position. Governor Browne took immediate action, unlike the previous governor’s forgiveness.

On September 3rd of 1783, the United States and British representatives signed the Treaty of Paris. The war for independence was over and the tune “The World Turned Upside Down” rang through the newly independent colonies. Meanwhile, Bermuda’s spirit of optimism continued throughout the island – even with British defeat. Bermuda encouraged the skills of those abroad to innovate their selective skilled population. For instance, they encouraged whalers from Nantucket to settle in Bermuda to improve their seafaring society.¹¹⁶ Although formally considered rivals by the 1780s, Bermudians considered them a source of new possibilities. Furthermore, the “peculiar advantages and opportunities for Trade” seemed to make the commerce of Bermuda an “Object of importance.”¹¹⁷ The governor oversaw the attendance to and protection of the industry for the sake of Bermuda’s future. Inhabitants needed supplies yet the British failed to provide frequent provisions like the Rebel tradesmen.

¹¹³ Paul Bascome to Governor William Browne, 27 February 1783, Film No. 365, *CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers*, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ Film No. 365, *CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches*, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹⁷ January 1782, Film No. 365, *CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches*, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

The governors of the eighteenth century worked diligently to set a standard of British loyalty. Governor Bruere had shared a unique relationship with the Assemblymen of Bermuda. He governed the island for sixteen years until his death and was father-in-law to Henry Tucker. Though he did not hang any of the Bermudian elite for treason, Bruere continuously attempted to remain a role model to inhabitants of the Island. During the war, Bermuda tolerated matters of immorality such as polygamy, incest, prostitution, swearing, and alcoholism. Illicit economic affairs and starvation were not the only worries. The governor encouraged the men not to fall to the gluttonous archetype of privateers. Instead, many of their letters and addresses consisted of Christian allusions and examples to discourage vice amongst their men.¹¹⁸ Yet financial concerns haunted the minds of elite Bermudian merchants greater than the wrath of God or governors.

The Consequences of War

The war brought anxiety across the Empire. In Bermuda, fresh provisions were scarce.¹¹⁹ Even so, inhabitants feared issues beyond starvation – an unvirtuous community, slave rebellion, loss of economic freedoms and opportunities, and the threat of invasion. By June 3rd of 1782, Governor Browne reported to Townshend that he received “preliminary articles of Peace with France and Spain, and the Provisional articles of Peace with the United States.”¹²⁰ The question was, would this relax the anxieties of the people? Or would they be worsened? Would Bermuda, situated so close to the newly independent United States, remain valuable or be seen by the British

¹¹⁸ January 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹⁹ Governor William Browne, 13 February 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹²⁰ Governor William Browne to Townshend, 3 June 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

as a territory no longer worth fighting for? Victory was now in sight but Bermuda's future remained unknown.

Without the resources from the colonies of the Continent, Bermuda now marketed itself as an opportunity for the Empire. Rob Trail awarded the post of receiver of customs in 1780, managed expansive mercantile business ventures primarily by buying and selling slaves. Trail explained to a British Lordship that Bermuda was “almost an equal distant from each part of the extensive Continent of North America and [appeared] to have deigned Mature to be a General Change for America Commerce, and consequently in times of Peace with America.”¹²¹ He then recommended that Bermuda become “one of the greatest marks in the world for the Manufactories of Britain and Ireland particularly if made a free port.”¹²² Trail warned that “a small Corner of the least Island that His Majesty has in the West Indies will produce more real value yearly from the lowers of the Earth taken than ever this heap of sand can be made to do in years, but it may be allowed to predict let me venture to assure your Lordship that if Great Britain grants America here Independence hence, these Islands will be found in a short time to be of greater utility to it than half a dozen West Indie Islands.”¹²³ Though the island was not rich in resources, its greatest strength was its location. Bermuda severed as a middle ground between an old Empire in the East and an emerging nation in the West.

Trail continued to defend Bermuda as an asset to Britain. He reported in his letter to His Lordship the concern of recent intelligence referring to inhabitants' interest in giving up their island if Americans sent forces to their shores. He relayed doubts by his Lordship that this would

¹²¹ Robert Trail, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

happen – “If such information should reach [his] Lordship, rest assured..., its void of Truth – from the Temper and disposition of the people of this time.”¹²⁴ Trail cautioned that such a decision would be detrimental for the island. “I do not know of any greater misfortune or curse that could befall them,” he suggests, and “that to be ceded to American on any Terms.”¹²⁵ If Bermuda were to join the colonies in their new venture to build a new nation, British men like Trail would have considered them foolish. Yet Bermudians carried on their agendas not by a political mind but a conscious of economic opportunity.

Worries of 1783

As the war wavered towards the underdog’s victory, elite Bermudians began to evaluate their position within the Empire. The island offered no agricultural promise like the slave societies in the Caribbean. Instead, Bermuda’s location and connections were its greatest virtue. As spring brought hope of fresh opportunity, elite inhabitants desired the island to be a freeport by 1783. With talks of peace across the Empire, Bermuda needed to strategize how they would not only survive but would prosper beyond their current bleak situation.

In a letter to the right honorable Townshend, Governor William Browne acknowledged peace between Great Britain and the powers that waged war against her. He suspected that England would recognize Bermuda if America could “make their importance to it rightly understood.”¹²⁶ Elite Bermudians had managed both sides during the war. Nevertheless, they returned to their

¹²⁴ Robert Trail, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Governor William Browne to Townshend, 30 April 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

monarch during the peace talks. Inhabitants stepped forth “to suggest that their situation to Great Britain the most inviting prospect for improving their manufactures, multiplying her seaports, and increasing the demand for them, by facilitating their exchange with those who have been taught by experience to give them the preference, which is justly due to them.”¹²⁷ Bermudian mercantile men did not sell themselves short of their skills. Though they lacked skill with the plow, Bermudian elites and their enslaved labor force were unrivaled on the Atlantic due to their cedar sloops and seafaring knowledge. “A careful and candid investigation of our circumstances would doubtless disclose many other prospects favorable to the interests of an enterprising and powerful nation,” admitted Browne.¹²⁸ The governor suggested the island had great promises. “In peace, it may be made the resort of her Friends,” yet Browne warns, “in war, the scoured of her enemies.”¹²⁹ Browne craved Townshend’s friendly intervention with hopes of obtaining “an establishment which being regulated upon liberal principles may conduce to the general welfare of the Kingdom its connections and dependencies.”¹³⁰ Patronage from Townshend would be decisive for the future of Bermuda.

By the summer of 1783, Henry Tucker joined the movement for a free port to encourage economic activity on the island. Simplified procedures at customs and an end to tariffs would allow Bermuda not to fall behind during a period of political chaos. Cornelius Hinson of Pembroke and Henry Tucker desired to “induce Trades from every Quarter of the Atlantic.”¹³¹ In an order from

¹²⁷ Governor William Browne to Townshend, 30 April 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Corneoulus Hinse Tucker, 25 June 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

the Council, the elites of Bermuda desired the islands to be a free port and fortified from potential invaders. The men solicited England's attention to the 1783 situation in Bermuda. They insisted that the island was situated "by the hand of Providence nearly at an equal distance from the greater part of the extensive Continent of America, much in their general Track of the Commerce of the Atlantic."¹³² Bermuda's economic affairs were no longer left unnoticed. By 1783, they remained dangerously close to the victorious United States.

The order by the Council illustrated a dramatic public turn of rhetoric from dutiful to loyal. Hinson and Tucker commenced the letter by saying, "from the Wisdom of your councils' and the valor of your Fleets and Armies to extricate the Nation from Dangers."¹³³ Their tone of imperial pride rang through subsequent letters. Nonetheless their private motivations consistently remained rooted in their desire for opportunity. America was no longer a companion for illicit trade. Newly victorious, the rising nation considered Bermuda a threat of returning occupation due to its location and decision to remain loyal to the Empire. Therefore, the council sought to strengthen their relationships with their mother country by suggesting what the island offered. The elite men suggested a free port would benefit the interests of England. They argued:

By such an establishment as we humbly conceive and population would be increased a misery of seamen so essential to the Support of the welfare of the British Empire most absorbedly prompted, the manufactured of Great Britain advantageously exchanged to a very considerable amount for the produce of the West Indies and of South and North America, and the Mother Country enabled at an early and period to secure to herself the general benefits of a Trade which the jealousy or interest of other European Powers if not timely prevented might lead hem by ever execution period to secure to herself the general benefits of a trade which the jealousy of Interest of other European Powers if not timely prevented

¹³² Corneoulus Hinse Tucker, 25 June 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³³ Ibid.

might lead them to every exertion to attempt the Diversion of into other Channels.¹³⁴

Bermuda would serve as a promising middleman and port of call for the Empire. If the Americans were to invade and conquer the island, English ships would need to risk a five-thousand-mile journey without a midway stop. Elite men argue that England's possession of St. George's port in Bermuda would cause envy amongst all the great powers. Tucker later wrote to Lord North confirming a decree to allow Bermuda to be an open port would not be in "any way hurtful to the British Trade but might be of infinite service to it."¹³⁵ Americans were unlikely to support their former enemy. Therefore, trade between America and the British sugar islands, like Bermudian dominated St. Eustacia, was likely to be ended. Tucker feared illicit trade would run rampant. Thus, the flexibility of a free port would allow Bermudians to provide for themselves while proving to the Empire the importance of their mercantile economy. To survive, Bermudians needed to reaffirm their strategic location was worth defending.

Conclusion: The British are Coming!

In the early autumn of 1768, British troops occupied the colonial city of Boston. The city was increasingly tense over these troubling months with the arrival of British troops. For Bermuda, however, did not become a British garrison until the end of the revolutionary conflict. Unlike the Bostonians, Bermudians welcomed the British troops to their island with open arms. Their hesitations did not mirror Paul Revere's engraving of the British ships of war landing in the port

¹³⁴ Corneolus Hinse Tucker, 25 June 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³⁵ Henry Tucker, 7 November 1783, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

of Boston. Their concern was not over the presence of British troops but of potential occupations by lurking foreign powers. Still, the days of British occupation in Bermuda were not celebrated until the war's end.

In 1778, a few years following the Gunpowder Plot, Governor George Bruere wrote to Lord Germain with excitement concerning the intelligence of a few British soldiers arriving on the island's shores. Bruere was distressed by the Tucker family's economic affairs with the Spanish, the lack of British warships, and rebel privateers in the West End.¹³⁶ Bruere hoped the presence of troops would instill his expectations of law and order. However, his efforts to harvest genuine loyalty were ruined by the troops agitating the West Enders and their illicit operations.¹³⁷ West Ender mercantile elites considered the British not to be a political threat but a menace to opportunity. To prevent trouble, Governor Bruere purchased a large estate to house the troops together instead of in the inhabitants' homes.¹³⁸ The Assembly was expected to provide quarters for the soldiers, yet Bruere was left to manage the accommodations alone. By 1781, prosperity on the island was threaten by the occupying troops. The Minutes of the Council reveals they should have been repaid for the disruption caused by the minor British occupation.¹³⁹ Bruere also used his Majesty's allowance to pay four men to watch the battery and entrance to Castle Harbor and Paget Fort. However, his allowance could not afford the continuation of the protection, so the once guarded areas were left abandoned to the potential seizure by inhabitants and foreign powers.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³⁷ 16 January 1779, Minutes of the Council 1765-1780, Book Two, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³⁸ 28 March 1780, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³⁹ 1778, Minutes of the Council 1765-1780, Book Two, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁴⁰ Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Despatches, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

Though elite Bermudians may have considered the prior years of British presence to be more of a nuisance than a benefit, they did appreciate the necessity of infrastructure and defense. Henry Tucker, wearing many hats, served as public treasurer. He noted the payments taken from the public treasury accommodating of His Majesty's Royal Garrison Battalion that was quartered on the island. Tucker also recorded the several 1781 payments towards repairs of forts, barracks, and magazines.¹⁴¹ Tucker's expense reports illustrate that although Bermudians kept their enemy close to their hearts and pockets, they still were not to be fully trusted. In 1777, for instance, a West End Bermudian ship took up arms against an armed rebel sloop from Charles Town.¹⁴² Mercantile families of the island felt secure in their Continental connections, yet they were not naïve to an outlier agitator looking for trouble.

By 1780, Bruere wrote to Lord Germain about his desire to construct a barracks and stone water cannon to protect the Town of St. George.¹⁴³ The island had then been overwhelmed by prisoners of war, especially from France, who were dying of famine and disease.¹⁴⁴ The island had begun to see the consequences of war on their own soil instead at a distance during their ventures around the Atlantic. By 1782, the island in the center of war was left defenseless. Lieutenant Benjamin Slack of the Corps of Engineers was ordered to inspect Bermuda's military state and defenses. Slack reported conditions of troops, magazines, fortifications, cannons, arms, and

¹⁴¹Henry Tucker, 1781, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁴² 25 March 1777, Film No. 365, CO: 37/39 1-90, 1749-1784 Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁴³ Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37 1-end, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

ammunition to England.¹⁴⁵ This evaluation of the island leading up to its complete military occupation in 1783 explains the Empire's fears of invasion. Bermuda did not provide profitable crops or returns. However, the island's middle ground location would serve the Empire strategically.

Bermuda would transform from a place of questionable exchange to a fortified, loyal island towards the end of the eighteenth century. Economic opportunities with the rebels would be ended. By 1784, the vision of Governor Bruere had finally come to fruition. Their ancestral spirit of opportunism inspired Bermudian families to continue precarious ventures. They favored which those winds which would point their sloops towards profit. In 1775, Colonel Tucker decided that the winds favored trade with the rebels for the sake of provisions. But the winds favored fortification and protection by the British army. Though loyalties, particularly in their finances, were constantly in motion, Bermuda's prevailing wind was towards opportunity. In 1784, a year after the war, the island found itself its newest source of return – a control over the narrative: the loyal *Bermuda Gazette*.

¹⁴⁵ 29 December 1782, Film No. 245, Frame from the Shelbourne Papers, 1715-1782, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

Chapter II

The Treasonous Pen

“But none of the means of information are more sacred, or have been cherished with more tenderness and care by the settlers of America, than the press”

John Adams, *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*, 1765

“Silence can make your Friends neglect you”

Eliza Tucker to St. George Tucker, 1788

From London, in August 1783, Bermudian Henry Tucker Jr. wrote to his brother, St. George Tucker, then of the commonwealth of Virginia, regarding George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the American Continental Army:

By the newspapers, I find Washington has resigned his Command, this is undoubtedly greater to his Honor and Establishes his Character- It appears to us things are not Carried on, nor that Attention paid to Congress in a Manor suitable to the great... in hand for regulating the General Government of the United States if you differ among yourselves you must soon... to pieces and become a prey to whoever will think it their Advantage to conquer you. It is...that a people who suffered so much to obtain their Liberty, should grow so... of a sudden as... the very power they had... Union and ... adherence to the support of Government can only make you a happy people. God bless you all.¹

Bermuda’s assemblymen, including Henry Tucker, were familiar with Washington’s command and intentions, and with his frustrations with the British. Though much of the had Empire considered Washington a traitor, Tucker and many others expressed both concern and quiet admiration regarding his humble resignation. Tucker’s reaction to Washington’s Cincinnatus-like retirement because of King George III who, when told by an American artist that the General

¹ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 17 August 1783, London, Film No. 302, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

intended to resign, admitted that if Washington did so then “he [would] be the greatest man in the world.”²

General Washington was esteemed by many, even among his enemies. He was lionized by the press, creating sympathy for the Revolutionary cause even from readers who experienced neither the pains of frostbite nor the deprivations of warfare. Washington served as a beacon of hope for the cause of Independence wielding a sword first lifted to the Revolutionary words of Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense*- a tract ultimately read in every corner of the Atlantic. Paine’s sentiments had animated the frustrated inhabitants of the Thirteen Colonies yet were considered peripheral - even foolish - on the neighboring island of Bermuda.

The Bermuda Archives are host to materials providing fascinating insight into the island’s complicated involvement in the Imperial Crisis. Yet for an era when the printed word was moving common people to radical action throughout the British Empire, the Archives are remarkably silent about the printing press, mentioning none on the island until 1784. How could Bermuda function without a single printing shop before 1784? How could it thrive as it did during such a period of conflict and competition? Although much of the rest of the Empire had established printing presses long before 1784, inhabitants of the island were somehow nevertheless *au fait* with the intelligence of the capricious Atlantic World.

Ultimately, it was the Bermudian elite’s engagement with Atlantic print culture while traveling abroad which allowed intelligence concerning foreign affairs to reach the island. With no printing capacity of its own, the island would come to rely almost exclusively upon this generally reliable network of private correspondence for news of the Imperial Crisis. In this chapter, I refer to these alternative sources and habits of communication to here as “private media

² George Washington, “George Washington’s Resignation,” 23 December 1783, Maryland State Archives, The Maryland State House, 2007.

practices.” I argue in this chapter that they ultimately shaped much of Bermuda’s self-understanding during the period and enabled it to flex its geopolitical muscle in the Revolutionary Atlantic with influence and reach far beyond its size and local resources.

In many senses, the media of the British Empire -- both public and private – greatly influenced the course of the Imperial Crisis. Thomas Paine’s 1776 pamphlet, *Common Sense*, scandalously laid bare the faults of the British Monarchy. Its widespread re-publication allowed Paine’s words to be digested, read aloud, and discussed throughout the American colonies. By contrast to Paine’s politically treasonous *public* pen, Henry Tucker, of Bermuda, navigated the Imperial Crisis with his economically treasonous *private* pen. Where American print shops profited from Paine’s incendiary rhetoric, Tucker’s words were held close by a select few recipients, securing to them personal and domestic gain. Without an established printing press, the island saw few well-publicized disloyalties. Discretion allowed Bermudians to secure many advantages during the tempest of revolution. Their epistolary networks served as figurative currents to direct ships across the Atlantic – the printing press, or lack thereof, would be the wind, or tide over, of the ship’s sails. As I argued in my previous chapter, the networks of elite Bermudians allowed the island to experience a period of economic opportunity.

Following the Age of Exploration, the Old World eagerly watched the New World develop bustling ports and communities of trusted loyalties. In the heat of the Imperial Crisis, Bermudians found their colonial situation pulled between opposing forces. If the inhabitants were to pledge public allegiance to the American Continental Congress, they would give up their privileges as British subjects. If they, instead, behaved as genuine obedient servants of the King and His Parliament, they would risk being silenced, stagnated, starved, and invaded. The island thus struggled to remain neutral. In their letters, they cagily wrote of admiration but avoided language

of formal allegiances. Although many Bermudians sympathized with the “people who suffered so much for Liberty,” the island’s inhabitants were pragmatic and considered themselves much like a vulnerable king on a chessboard – with limited room to maneuver and subject at any moment to check.³

Alongside physical letters, oral intelligence spread throughout any social and economic hubs where maritime Bermudians might find themselves – the East End’s Custom House in St. George’s, Ms. Randell’s coffeehouse, the illegal operations on the less monitored West End, and busy ports overseas such as Boston and South Carolina, along with Caribbean islands such St. Christopher and St. Eustatius.⁴ Intelligence spread amongst the skilled sea-faring society of slaves, merchants, privateers, and ship owners. Worries would ebb and flow as letters would circulate analyzing each new threat.

The Power of the Printing Press

Since the early seventeenth century, printed publications had taken root in the mainland colonies. Printers such as London-born Benjamin Harris began a rapid expansion down the Eastern seaboard. This tacitly coordinated press vied with other forms of eighteenth-century intelligence for the public’s attention. Print, according to historian Robert Parkinson, was the “most popular and effective medium for convincing the public to support the rebellion.”⁵ In *Revolutionary Networks*, historian Joseph Adelman argues that “printers played a crucial role in the formation

³ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 17 August 1783, London, Film No. 302, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁴ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 294.

⁵ Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 101.

and shaping of political rhetoric during the American Revolution.”⁶ Yet media was also very much a business: “printers learned how to edit and select items for publication- most important paragraphs for newspapers but also texts for publication as pamphlets, broadsides, and other printed material – and how to distribute that information to distant locations.”⁷ These commercial practices influenced political debates.⁸ Newspapers relied on public demand, so “printers worked to publish news that had the greatest impact.”⁹ Communication and its ties to profit emerged as a new preoccupation for the Empire.

Intelligence, whether printed or oral, held influence over the behaviors and actions of inhabitants of the Atlantic World. It circulated orally throughout the Empire in bustling seaports, taverns, coffeehouses, salons, political assemblies, in the privacy of one's home, and the wooden pews of the meetinghouse on Sundays. Intelligence was also increasingly drawn from newspapers. Newspapers served as a centralized source for merchants to learn which ships were inbound and outbound, for farmers and artisans to advertise their products, for slave owners to reclaim runaway slaves, for leaders to address large audiences, and for ordinary men to voice their opinions. While a minor portion of the population added to the papers' headlines, the printers themselves ultimately controlled the narrative.

Through the press, the Thirteen Colonies increasingly sensed an overbearing British presence. By the middle of the Imperial Crisis, countless colonists had come to resent their lack of representation in domestic and international decisions. They began to feel the weight of the heavy

⁶ Joseph M. Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks: The Business and Politics of Printing the News, 1763–1789* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2019), 3.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

taxation imposed to service the Empire's debt from the Seven Years War and the long reach of a Parliament of strangers sitting an ocean away. The distant government seemed preoccupied with dodging financial ruin with little insight into colonial experience. Over time, the Thirteen Colonies grew increasingly anxious of threats to liberty and with the potential to their livelihoods. A growing common identification prompted "patriot leaders [to mobilize] political authority and military resistance to defeat their cultural cousins."¹⁰ Although the press itself was not yet united into a single, continental force by the 1760s, inhabitants of the Thirteen Colonies began to organize their political activities, fueled by the printing press' power and credibility.

As Benedict Anderson famously argued in *Imagined Communities*, national consciousness developed as print capitalism soared.¹¹ By 1765, however, print shops were facing economic ruin from the Stamp Act. Printers attempted to avoid closure while also feeding the hungry minds of subscribers. Print shops "became the objects of protest, as their decisions whether to continue to print, with or without stamps, became a politically charged issue."¹² The anti-Stamp Act sentiment was so robust that, according to Adelman, "continuing to print, even in an imperfect way, was construed as an act of patriotism."¹³

The Public Pen of Thomas Paine

¹⁰ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 21.

¹¹ Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 13; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso Books, 2016).

¹² Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 61.

In a letter to Benjamin Waterhouse in October 1805, John Adams labeled the period of revolution as “the Age of Paine.”¹⁴ Adams argued that “without the pen of the author of *Common Sense*, the sword of Washington would have been raised in vain.”¹⁵ Paine’s forty-six-page pamphlet, reprinted throughout colonial towns, sold tens of thousands of copies.¹⁶ It urged that independence -- republican government -- was not only desirable but inevitable. While, elite mercantile families like the Tuckers encouraged Bermudians to take risks for opportunity, Paine, by contrast, urged the Thirteen Colonies to gamble on independence, union, and the founding of a republic.¹⁷

Paine’s influence on eighteenth-century media sparked cries for change and a rally for war. His words would not just inspire his countrymen to fire their muskets but would precipitate the Imperial Crisis with its revolutionary understanding of rights and independence. Paine “exposed the crimes of a regime” by the stroke of his pen.¹⁸ His 1776 publication of *Common Sense* was the signal fire which would open the eyes of millions to the wrongs of King George III.¹⁹ Out of his words was forged a collective identity which would eventually inspire the most treasonous pens of the crisis – which etched out the signatures on the Declaration of Independence.

¹⁴ John Adams to Benjamin Waterhouse, October 29, 1805, in Adrienne Koch and William Peden (eds.), *The Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams* (New York, 1946), 147-148.

¹⁵ Alfred Young, *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation* (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2011), 89.

¹⁶ Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804* (W. W. Norton, 2016), 157.

¹⁸ Kaldellēs Antōnios Emm and Procopius, *The Secret History with Related Texts* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2010), xiii.

¹⁹ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 101.

Many Loyalists deeply resented Paine's influence.²⁰ Men like Charles Inglis of New York "worried that Paine's reckless words would plunge 'our once happy land' deeper into a 'ruthless war... torrents of blood [would] be split, and thousands reduced to beggary and wretchedness."²¹ Inglis and other Loyalists feared the possible destruction from Paine's call for liberty. Though many admired Paine, some Patriots like John Adams remained fearful of the potential consequences of mob rule and anarchy.²² Thus the small island of Bermuda would be wary of such publicly charged rhetoric.

As Loyalists feared its consequences, many Patriots grew hungry for change. *Common Sense*'s simply cast message was "triple-barreled: independence, republicanism, and confidence in the common people."²³ Unlike the often cryptic private letters of eighteenth-century elites, Paine wrote in a "manly and striking" style which appealed to millions through a standard set of arguments framed in the vernacular.²⁴ Paine's "direct and forceful prose," styled with "perspicuity of expression; happiness of elucidation, and in simple and unassuming language" allowed colonists to imagine a future where their land was "an asylum for mankind."²⁵ His eloquent pen "exposed the King and aristocrats as vicious frauds who duped and exploited common people."²⁶ Furthermore, Paine proposed self-governance, not rule by an island thousands of miles away.²⁷ By

²⁰ Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 158.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Young, *Revolutionary Founders*, 88.

²³ Young, "The Celebration and Damnation of Thomas Paine," in *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 269.

²⁴ Young, *Revolutionary Founders*, 87.

²⁵ Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 155-157.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid, 88.

contrast, while wealthy Bermudians appreciated freedom in governance, many found it, as Thomas Paine remarked, “difficult to get over local or long-standing prejudices.”²⁸

Paine promoted the radical idea of relocating “sovereignty away from a royal family to the collective people of a new nation.”²⁹ His pen thus challenged a society of self-interested privacy and exclusivity. While some traditionalists feared his absolutist rhetoric, Patriots in the Thirteen Colonies were stirred to “make sacrifices needed to win a revolutionary war against [the] mighty empire.”³⁰ *Common Sense* would prompt the subjects of the Thirteen Colonies to see themselves as one republican nation as “it is not in numbers, but in unity, that [their] great strength [lied]; yet [their] present numbers [were] sufficient to repeal the force of all the world.”³¹ A prospect so full-throated, however, would prove unnerving to Bermuda’s sea-faring society.

The Private Pen of Henry Tucker Jr.

Bermudian Henry Tucker’s cares were not so much focused on the founding of a new nation as on the future of his already born kin. His private correspondences, disclosed to his commercial, political, and familial networks, were “written with an eye to posterity.”³² Tucker gave a wide berth to the intellectual movement brewing on neighboring shores to instead safeguard his kin and their fortunes. He and others of the island’s assembly prioritized their account books above divisive discourse. They wished to peacefully navigate the Atlantic World, while also

²⁸ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, Philadelphia, W. and T. Bradford, 1776, 12.

²⁹ Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 158.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Paine, *Common Sense*, 51.

³² “Reverberations in Bermuda of the American Revolutionary War,” Terry Tucker, *Bermuda Historical Quarterly*, Bermuda Historical Quarterly, Bermuda, Spring 1976, Vol. XXXII, No.1, 7.

remaining relevant. The private agendas of influential Bermudians catered to the need for economic growth and societal opportunity.

Elites of Tucker's status held established positions both at home and abroad. The strength of his family's position "had been gained over the decades, not because of the efforts of any one individual but rather a collective determination to advance the entire family's fortune."³³ In *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family: The Tuckers of Virginia 1752-1830*, historian Phillip Hamilton defines the influential family as a "large corporate entity" that had socio-economic ties spanning the entirety of the Atlantic.³⁴ Henry's father, Colonel Henry Tucker, was the first of the Tuckers to arrive on the island, in 1616, as a captain appointed by the Virginia Company and the second Governor of Bermuda.³⁵ His father, a man of great foresight, became "a wealthy merchant shipper, head of the second largest shipping firm, Henry Tucker & Son, and the most influential leader in Bermuda."³⁶ And as for Henry Tucker Jr.'s siblings, Frances, Thomas Tudor, Elizabeth, Nathaniel, and St. George, they all uniquely experienced the tempest of revolution that surrounded them. Tucker's brothers, St. George, and Thomas Tudor, each served in the Continental militia.³⁷ The family had connections to both England and America. Hamilton adds that "in the opening years of the Revolutionary crisis, the Tuckers repeatably worked and cooperated together as a unit to maintain their economic position and social reputation."³⁸

³³ Phillip Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family: The Tuckers of Virginia, 1752-1830* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 8.

³⁴ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 8-9.

³⁵ Michael G. Marsh, "The Defining Story of Bermuda's Great Gunpowder Plot 1775," 2nd ed., (2016), 48.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ 1749-1784, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

³⁸ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 9.

Moreover, “they emotionally supported one another... in efforts to cope with and adjust to their perplexing times.”³⁹ Their selectively distributed letters determined the course Bermuda would take in the Imperial Crisis.

While inhabitants of the mainland colonies were aware of their unstable relationship with the mother country, Bermudians could not relate to the chaos found on their neighbors’ shores. Inhabitants interacted with British merchants and visitors but were not oppressed by a standing army of red coats. Though several inhabitants held significant wealth and political power in the Atlantic World, England’s negligence towards Bermuda’s actions resulted in minimal management or capability for enforcement on the island. The inhabitants inevitably converted their overlooked status to opportunity. Bermudian elites embraced stealth as both writers and privateers and, in doing so, profited and maintained the “cosmopolitan networks that empire had produced.”⁴⁰

The Tucker family approached situations with great diplomacy. They wrote to apprise each other of affairs on the island and the continent. Henry Tucker, for instance, was an important Bermudian political figure who held civil service above most of his commercial ventures.⁴¹ Over time, the island’s neutrality was questioned as negotiations, orchestrated by Henry and his brother St. George, commenced with the Continental Congress.⁴² The family were “better informed of political affairs and promoted by their relatives on the continent.”⁴³ They “took a keen interest in the controversy from the time of the arrival of” intelligence concerning the Boston Tea Party since

³⁹ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 9.

⁴⁰ Loughran, *The Republic in Print*, 102.

⁴¹ Jarvis, “The Henry Tucker House: 280 Years of Bermudian History,” *Bermuda Journal of Archaeology and Maritime History*, (1994), Vol 6., 155-156.

⁴² Marsh, “The Defining Story of Bermuda’s Great Gunpowder Plot 1775,” 52.

⁴³ Wilfred Brenton Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution*, 38.

they had sympathy for the colonists' who were subject "to taxes imposed by the British Parliament" resulted in colonial sympathy."⁴⁴ Yet, to avoid conflict, Bermudians elevated local, island concerns above the sympathy for their troubled neighbors.⁴⁵

In the spring of 1772, Henry Tucker wrote from Bermuda to St. George Tucker of political disputes occurring on the island between Governor Bruere and the House of Assembly. He admitted:

but I hate to talk of politics myself, nor do I believe that you are particularly fond of them... Indeed I am sorry to see the Animosity which prevails among them [refers to the House of the Assembly, the Council, and the Governor, constantly quarrelling], & am afraid there will never be cordial reconciliation again.... For my part, though I consider myself in great measure as an unconcerned spectator, my situation is delicate and in many respects extremely disagreeable. The dullness of the country I am unfortunately [fixed] in... I wish it was in my power to assist my brothers Tommy and Natty in Charleston, but my own situation is much more uneasy than theirs can possibly be⁴⁶

Tucker portrayed himself to be someone with a "spotless integrity."⁴⁷ He had to manage loyalties to his influential father, scattered siblings and cousins, Tucker's enterprise, his wife, and his Loyalist father-in-law, Governor Bruere. Yet "as a man in charge of one of the Island's larger merchant shipping firms at the East End, his underlying interests naturally lay in trying to ensure that the business was successful."⁴⁸ Tucker considered opportunity to be the island's greatest advantage against its external and internal pressures of allegiances.

⁴⁴ Wilfred Brenton Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution*, 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁶ "Tucker Letters," December 3, 1771, *Bermuda Historical Quarterly*, Bermuda Historical Quarterly, Bermuda, Vol. 3, 19 May 1772, 143.; Marsh, "The Defining Story of Bermuda's Great Gunpowder Plot 1775," 51.

⁴⁷ Marsh, "The Defining Story of Bermuda's Great Gunpowder Plot 1775," 51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Though they regarded themselves as merely spectators, the ruling elites of the island's hierarchy did not sit idly during the Imperial Crisis. Henry Tucker, for instance, mobilized seafaring men on the island's West End, away from the eastern customs house in St. George's port. Distant from the reach of law and order, the friends of America committed economic treason by discreetly piloting their *gigs* towards opportunity. Unlike Paine, these men held their cards close to their chests. Their economic treason would be fueled by deception within their letters for personal and domestic gain. Without Bermuda's expansive epistolary networks, the island would have been weakened by greater vulnerability.

The Age of Opportunity

For Bermudians, the era of the Imperial Crisis was what I refer to as an "Age of Opportunity." Since their affairs were not printed for a public audience, Bermudians wrote freely of the "unhappy situation in America."⁴⁹ Though the Tuckers guarded their reputation, they were most anxious about their networks of mixed loyalties. Henry Tucker, however, successfully "managed to remain neutral throughout the long and bitter struggle, maintaining friendly relations with both his family and his in-laws."⁵⁰ His private audience held diverse opinions towards the Monarchy, which Tucker attempted to respect while not taking an allegiance. Maintenance of epistolary networks was driven by not only by the protection of the writer's reputation but also by the island's needs.

The island's networks, however, was indifferent to political loyalty. In a dispatch from the East end, Governor Bruere raised concerns about the frequent visitation of Bermudians to Boston,

⁴⁹ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 29 May 1775, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁵⁰ Jarvis, "The Henry Tucker House, 156.

writing, “the Tucker faction have strained every... Government and against Rebellion; but...influenced of that faction... against privateering persuaded most of the people would now see their interest lies in equipping against the Rebels visiting them, which there is the greatest treason to think at present from the Danish islands under colors at nation.”⁵¹ Bruere argued that most Bermudian families like the Tuckers were “seduced by the American party” for economic gain.⁵²

Within the same year, the general assembly addressed Bruere’s public complaints about their motives. In the House of Assembly Journal, the assemblymen wrote, “in Our address of this Morning having given your Excellency what we conceived to be a truce, and just Representation of the present state of the inhabitants in respect to provision, were in hopes that your Excellency, His Majesty’s Representative would have heartily co-operated with our Endeavors to prevent the horrors of an approaching Famine.”⁵³ In both currency and spirit, elite Bermudian families balanced loyalties with the desire to prosper.

Elite Bermudians sought opportunity for themselves and the island by acting as double agents. While the Tuckers helped to supply America with salt and gunpowder, Colonel Henry Tucker simultaneously warned his son, Henry Tucker Jr., “not to interest himself too far in American politics and suggested that he return home” to Bermuda from the states.⁵⁴ In *Bermuda and the American Revolution: 1760-1783*, historian Wilfred Kerr argues that this letter between father and son revealed the Tucker family’s understanding “that Bermudians ought to maintain a

⁵¹ Governor Bruere to Lord Germain, 17 October 1781, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ House of Assembly Journal, 1781, L. 3433-003, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda

⁵⁴ Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution*, 40.

proper distance between themselves and Americans who traveled dangerous ways.”⁵⁵ Although they attempted to remain a neutral colony, communication with the mainland caused their pens to turn treasonous out of self-interest. Their epistolary networks documented the island’s ongoing anxieties— which were all motives of their questionable actions as “loyal” British subjects.

Fear of Neglect

In their pragmatism, Bermudian elites stood in stark contrast to their American neighbors, who were increasingly moved by idealism and ideology. Instead, inhabitants of the island were pragmatic, especially with their relationships. In a letter following the intelligence of the 1773 Boston Tea Party, Henry Tucker wrote, “I am warmly attached to Liberty as any Man, but I cannot say that I like the Proceedings.”⁵⁶ Although the Tuckers hinted sympathy towards the cause for liberty, they were ultimately realistic men who were affected by changes in their trade. Their purview was the island they inhabited, the expansive routes they traveled, and their families’ experiences abroad. Thus, when Tucker recorded the arrival of a New York schooner “with liberty to call at Bermuda” in the 1782 Book of Protests, the inhabitants were not swayed to join in the foreign movement.⁵⁷ Instead, Bermudians worried about their long-term economic success and, indeed, survival. For John and Henry Tucker, the stress of profit was relaxed by their prized *Friendship* success transporting (often illegal) rum, sugar, and salt throughout the Empire. The

⁵⁵ Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution*, 40.

⁵⁶ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 30.

⁵⁷ Henry Tucker, 1782, Books of Protest from 1781-1786, C.S. 1801/1, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

vessels of Bermudian elites served as the primary source for not only of provisions but also of communication.⁵⁸

Prior to the Christmas season of 1782, Bermudian Donald Campbell wrote to St. George Tucker asking for a favor of safe passage during a period of contention in the Atlantic waters. Campbell intended to depart Bermuda “sometime in January for Virginia- and as then is no way that [he] can get to America from this Island without a flag of Truce. [He] shall be under the necessity of taking [his] passage in one of them” to Virginia.⁵⁹ Campbell feared that “coming from an English Island and in a Flag” that would “not be looked upon in so favorable a light”⁶⁰ He then suggests the powerful reputation of the Tuckers by relaying that he “must depend upon [St. George] paving the way for [him] so that [he] may meet with no difficulty on [his] arrival.”⁶¹ The Tuckers were respected in most Atlantic ports, especially Virginia.

The island was a unique exception to the common eighteenth-century practice of targeting any vessel bearing the flag of the enemy. Bermudians secured less hostile treatment since their ships were trusted by a reliable network of merchants. In fact, their ships traveled to British North America more frequently than they did to England. Their small cedar sloops, along with a lack of demand, resulted in only a few dozen trips between the island and the motherland. Thus, their

⁵⁸ St. George Inward Manifest Oct. 1780-Nov. 1789, 7 November 1780, CU 9/2, L. 2444-002, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁵⁹ Donald Campbell to St. George Tucker, 23 December 1782, Film No. 302 Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

letters traveled along the Eastern Seaboard during a time that Eliza Tucker described, a “sea of uncertainty.”⁶²

Eliza Tucker wrote at length about the concerns for her family’s fortunes. In 1771, she corresponded with St. George. When he first arrived in Virginia with hopes to strengthen the family’s ties with the mainland, Eliza warned, “you are now dear Brother in a strange country.”⁶³ She recommended that he be cautious of foreign lands. Seven years later, she continued to convey the “difficulties and distress” of her young brothers who endeavored “to fix [themselves] in Business in a strange country, without any Capital to support [them] at first and perhaps but a few nominal Friends.”⁶⁴ She then concluded with a prayer that “the Almighty direct him for the best!”⁶⁵ Eliza Tucker would later advise her brothers that “silence can make your friends neglect you.”⁶⁶ Her father, Henry, instilled the fear of silence in both of his sons and daughter. Furthermore, the Tuckers understood that friendships needed to be maintained by constant, genuine communication.

Within close-knit circles, the friends of America behaved as the island’s unofficial ambassadors. Likewise, loyalist families leveraged competing influence in the Atlantic arena. In the winter of 1778, which witnessed loyalists being targeted, members of the Goodrich family escaped Portsmouth, Virginia unscathed. While their father was taken prisoner, his three sons arrived on the island with hopes of a new, stable life. As a result of the loyalist diaspora, Bermuda

⁶² Eliza Tucker to St. George Tucker, 6 September 1778, Film No. 301 Tuckers-Coleman Papers, 1737-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶³ Eliza Tucker to St. George Tucker, 30 September 1771, Film No. 301 Tuckers-Coleman Papers, 1737-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁴ Eliza Tucker to St. George Tucker, 6 September 1778, Film No. 301 Tuckers-Coleman Papers, 1737-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

benefited from an influx of wealthy neighboring loyalists, who supported their weak, local economy. Unlike the Tuckers, the Goodrich family did not attempt to remain neutral. The Goodrich family, for instance, purchased large Bermudian cedar sloops to capture rebel ships.⁶⁷

In 1778, Eliza Tucker informed St. George Tucker of her disappointment with the Goodrich family. She privately expressed that “the resentment of the People ran so high against [Captain Goodrich] that it would have been hazardous for him to have attempted making [Eliza] a Visit in the Country.”⁶⁸ His controversial reputation resulted in the captain’s sojourn in New York, with hopes Bermudians would uncover a “better rumor on his return.”⁶⁹ Without a press, Goodrich’s controversial reputation was known by only a few. Thus, the letters between elites disclosed the constant threat of animosity in their social sphere.

Along with Eliza, the Tucker family included prudent men who represented the island in their Assembly.⁷⁰ Bermudian leaders, who discreetly continued intercourse with the neighboring rebels, risked the complaints of royal snitches. While the Tuckers’ reputation held up relatively well in North America, their actions would have been considered treasonous in England. The family’s “Bermudian roots would be serious liabilities in the eyes of Britain’s ruling elite” class.⁷¹ Thus, stereotypes of avarice posed dangerous threats to the stability of the island’s hierarchy. They risked retaliation from the King and curtailment of intelligence, opportunity, and the already

⁶⁷ Governor George Bruere to Lord Germain, 25 January 1778, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37 1-end, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda; Governor George Bruere to Lord Germain, 3 June 1778, Film No. 364, Despatches, C.O. 37/37 1-end, 1778-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁸ Eliza Tucker to St. George Tucker, 6 September 1778, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, 1737-1780, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ 1749-1784, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁷¹ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 18.

limited provisions from England. During the “Age of Opportunity,” the Tucker family protected both their own interests and those of the island as they “repeatedly worked and cooperated together to maintain their economic position and social reputation” by supporting each other “in efforts to cope with and adjust to their perplexing times.”⁷² But each exchange they risked the chance of their letters reaching the printing presses of the Empire.

Though Henry Tucker was married to Governor Bruere’s daughter, the two men had a tenuous relationship. In a letter to Thomas Lord Sydney, one of His Majesty’s Principal Secretaries of State, Governor Bruere suggested deporting Henry Tucker for his “inappropriate actions.”⁷³ Bruere described Tucker’s motives as “alarming,” especially since the “affection of many of the Inhabitants” was shown towards Great Britain.⁷⁴ He accused his son-in-law, and the other elite members of the Assembly, of treason. The opportunistic men had traded salt illegally after the King declared an explicit end to intercourse with the enemy.⁷⁵ Other Bermudian elites such as Paul Bascome, also had their reputations questioned in Bruere’s letters to Lords in England. The governor called for Bascome to be suspended since he and others sent out ships and granted private flags of truce in return for trade with the enemy. Governor Bruere, therefore, did not approve of to the questionable actions of the impartial families of Bermuda.

Fear of Stagnation

⁷² Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 9.

⁷³ Governor George Bruere to Lord Sydney, 1749-1784, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

The private pens of the assemblymen acted as their ammunition against accusations of disloyalty. Their private networks were secured to ensure the maximization of profit. Although the King forbade it, intercourse with America was non-negotiable for the seafaring men of Bermuda. Inhabitants of the island had little local, domestic opportunities upon which to fall back. In their letters, the Tuckers expressed the lack of progress on the island.⁷⁶ They traveled abroad for their education and some guarantee of financial stability. Though in many ways distant from each other, they “had developed a stubborn attachment to their island and a family feeling for each other.”⁷⁷ Bermudian elites, wherever settled, felt responsible for their country’s prosperity.

American commercial ties were crucial for the economic survival of the island. In a 1777 letter to St. George Tucker, Henry Tucker remarked that while trade was critical to the island’s economy, the management of cargo was a large, expensive part of the process.⁷⁸ He admitted to his brother, “as the affairs of America are very critical at the time we think you should endeavor to get the best flour for any money you may have left after purchasing your Cargo.”⁷⁹ Provision expenses were high and difficult for most inhabitants. The benefits of managing the trade, however, outweighed the costs. For decades, the Tuckers took on responsibility for the island’s economy as middlemen in the salt trade industry. As their sloops sailed from the Turks islands to America, the Tuckers were seen as treasonous by loyalists. However, Tucker rebutted this claim

⁷⁶ Kerr, *Bermuda and the American Revolution*, 13.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 13 January 1777, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

in a letter to Bermudian governor William Browne. Henry Tucker argued that Bermudians had a right to economic opportunity.⁸⁰

While the Tuckers concentrated on commerce, they also knew that mercantile men “encountered social bigotry.”⁸¹ Their concern over status and public perception added to the “stereotypes of greed and avarice [which] followed such men throughout the Empire and often undermined their genteel aspirations.”⁸² Thus, the Tuckers’ reputation was considered a “serious liability in the eyes of Britain’s ruling elite.”⁸³ Accusations against the elites were sent to England – threatening the island’s economic freedom. Tucker calculated that disgrace to their island could result in stricter law enforcement, which would diminish their profits from “trading inappropriately and supplying the enemies to Great Britain.”⁸⁴

Realistically, the journey to England was an impossible task for a small cedar sloop. Transactions with the rebels allowed for an assurance of both provision and profit. Brigs from Liverpool, like the *Rodney* in 1781, delivered goods such as meats, shoes, and loaves of breads to the island.⁸⁵ English ships, however, did not promise consistent arrival. On the other hand, sloops sailing to and from America traveled with low risk and promised dependable revenues. The optimistically named *Hope*, for instance, provided a secure income for Bermuda’s elite Trimmingham and Lightbourne families. Their prized sloop arrived from South Carolina to the port

⁸⁰ Henry Tucker to William Browne, *Bermuda Historical Quarterly*, Bermuda Historical Quarterly, Bermuda, Spring 1944, Vol. 1, No. 2, 86.

⁸¹ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 18.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Governor George Bruere to Lord Sydney, 1749-1784, Film No. 365, Miscellaneous Papers, CO: 37/39 1-90, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁸⁵ St. George Inward Manifest Oct. 1780-Nov. 1789, 13 August 1781, CU 9/2, L. 2444-002, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

at St. George's in the spring of 1780 with imported tar, bread, wine, tea, barley, oil, coal, canvas, rice, and trunks of dry wood to the island.⁸⁶ Other questionably treasonous transactions occurred with both the Northern and Southern colonies. Family enterprises "continued to smuggle essential provisions into America while taking out much-in-demand raw materials and agricultural staples."⁸⁷ And, the goods smuggled in from their Westward neighbor "sold quickly and at a substantial profit."⁸⁸ With risky financial ventures, however, reactions could be unpredictable.

The spirit of opportunism soared in Bermuda as the "Friends of America," who were sympathetic to the patriot cause, as marked by Captain B. Joell in 1780 on a map of houses in St. George's, continued to thrive in their secretive intercourse with the rebelling colonies.⁸⁹ The island's financial success was contingent on the achievements of their neighbors. In 1769, Governor Bruere wrote to England, "I beg leave to offer to your Lordship's consideration, a mode of taxation, that I may give more satisfaction to the colonies, produce a much greater revenue in these islands and be a means to prevent the running or clandestinely importing any goods from foreign trade."⁹⁰ Bruere's commentary on the illegal importations of goods like foreign rum served as foreshadowing of the inhabitant's pragmatism.

Governor Bruere sympathized with his inhabitants' desire for financial accomplishment, yet he did not trust their motives. In 1770, he requested England's approval for whaling off the

⁸⁶ St. George Inward Manifest Oct. 1780-Nov. 1789, 30 April 1780, CU 9/2, L. 2444-002, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁸⁷ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 36.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 36.

⁸⁹ "Friends of America," Map of St. George's Bermuda, ca. 1780, by Capt. B. Joell, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁰ Governor George Bruere, 10 May 1769, Film No. 352, Q: CO 37/20 1-end, Colonial Office 1766-1771, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

shores of the island, which promised great profit.⁹¹ Yet two years later, Bruere admitted his grievances to the Committee. He wrote, “the trade of these islands, disposed as it is a present, affords the greatest opportunity to illicit traders, to the great detriment of his Majesty’s Reverence and Discouragement of the fair trade.”⁹² Though Bruere desired Bermuda’s prosperity, like the island’s elite, his understanding of achieving such opportunity meant unwavering loyalty to the King and his orders. In 1784, Bruere addressed these anxieties to Lord George Germain. He wrote, “My Lord, Government at home is not aware of the hard task” he was given since “the illicit trade generally carried on by the Inhabitants, in great, measure subverted all order and police, from the apprehensions magistrate are under of information being given of their own delinquency.”⁹³ Bruere also desired more order with legal clearance of all vessels to prohibit the elites’ questionable trade.

The governor suggested that the intrigues of Bermudian elites allowed for cargo to be smuggled, rebel prisoners to be protected, and a continuation of “constant correspondence with the rebels in America.”⁹⁴ He further argued that “illicit trade generally carried on to the great prejudice of British men, a feature before the rebellion, and since a continued correspondence and trade with the rebels begun by the breaking of the powder magazine of these Isles..”⁹⁵ Bruere was frustrated by the elite’s motivation to avoid economic inactivity. He desired the island to “be made of service to the Mother Country, instead of [a] haven for smugglers, wreckers, and rebel traders.”⁹⁶ The

⁹¹ Governor George Bruere, 10 May 1769, Film No. 352, Q: CO 37/20 1-end, Colonial Office 1766-1771, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁹² Governor George Bruere, 4 April 1772, Film No. 352, R: CO 37/21 1-32/28, Colonial Office 1766-1771, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁹³ Governor George Bruere to Lord Germain, 26 March 1784, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

confidentiality of Bruere's complaints to a distant, private audience in England, however, allowed him and the island's elites to avoid the consequences of their economic treason.

Fear of Scarcity

Along with the potential for losing networks and entering a period of stagnation, the inhabitants of the island were severely distressed by the threat of scarcity. During the "Age of Opportunity," elite families like the Tuckers, "sought to take advantage of [economic] benefits, with family bonds serving as the glue which held the whole enterprise together."⁹⁷ They were not blind, however, to the fragility of their maritime operations. In 1775, "family members throughout the Atlantic immediately saw that a trade shutdown threatened both the family's pocketbook and Bermuda itself with starvation."⁹⁸ Thus, the conflicting perils and opportunities cast a surge of apprehension throughout the island. While the Tuckers centered their decisions over the "family's collective interests and well-being," they held a concern as well for the common good.⁹⁹ Therefore, the political, social, and economic decisions by members of the hydrarchy would determine the degree to which inhabitants would suffer.

To secure even somewhat limited British assistance, Bermudians affirmed themselves as loyal subjects throughout the Imperial Crisis. In public writings such as the Executive Council Minutes of 1781, the assemblymen described themselves as devoted subjects of the King. Bermudian elites like the Tuckers, Dills, Jennings, and Burrows – many of whom continued to trade with the rebels – congratulated Governor Browne, a loyalist, on arrival to the island. Henry Tucker described his

⁹⁷ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 33.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

fellow assemblymen as the “most dutiful and loyal subjects” who were unhappy with the “disturbance in America.”¹⁰⁰ The hierarchy understood the importance of their reputation. However, they covertly placed the interests of their enterprise and island’s prosperity above their devotion to Britain.

In 1775, Henry Tucker wrote to his contacts in Colonial Williamsburg. He expressed concern over the declaration that trade with American merchants was illegal. Tucker described this situation as “unhappy” since it was impossible to “survive without their allegiance.”¹⁰¹ As a friend of America, Tucker suggested,

should it be urged that we have not [shown] any Inhabitant cover towards the Americans coming into [revolutions] similar to their must deduce that no people are now fond of Liberty than the Bermudians but they can be of no service to... and indeed as little heart, our situation is with that we... intensely at the Mercy of Great Britain who should be offered by such resolutions we undoubtedly distress us, which could effectually be done even to famine by only feuding... vessels of War to the stationed at the East and West ends of the Island which would prevent any vessels coming to us.¹⁰²

Tucker was frustrated by the threat not only to profit but to the availability of provisions. The age of revolutions resulted in sparse resources. Famine was a constant threat to him and other inhabitants.

Throughout the course of the war, Tucker continually emphasized the threat of starvation to his Virginian brother. In a letter to St. George, Tucker relayed,

¹⁰⁰ January 1782, Film No. 365, CO: 37/38 1-end, Miscellaneous Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁰¹ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 29 May 1775, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁰² Ibid.

the unhappy dispatches between Great Britain and American not only affect with the most regret at the Calamities of our fellow... subjects, but are likely to involves us in distress scarcity inform to... theirs – our legislative all armed at the... aspect of approaching famine... in May last prohibiting the exportation of any finds of provisions until... for to supplies form America should be unmoved an application was made soon after the Continental Congress to representing our situation and requesting some relation of their commercial resistance in favor of people incapable of injury or of serving them and solely dependent on them for supplies for at least nine months this year.¹⁰³

The letter also shared evening intelligence from the West End, at Somerset bridge, that a ship from Boston had sailed to Bermuda with provisions. This vessel was a hope for economic and physical survival, but its arrival fueled the rebels. Thus, the friends of America worked diligently to legitimize their trade with the rebels.

Religion served as one justification for the friends of America’s validation. Like Thomas Paine, Henry Tucker was moved by the passion of religious rhetoric. On the island, Alexander Richardson “was the popular rector of St. Peter’s Church” near the Custom’s House and State House in orderly East End of St. George’s.¹⁰⁴ As a leader on the island, he called attention to the distraint of provisions.¹⁰⁵ Tucker similarly advocated for this need in his correspondences. In his letter to the Continental Congress, Tucker quietly exaggerated the population of the island to secure a guaranteed surplus of provisions. The cost of this risky magnification was an act of economic treason – the supply to Washington’s troops. It is likely that rector Richardson “provided Tucker with [the] basic instruction in writing [and] rhetoric...” which served as the structure of Tucker’s

¹⁰³ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 29 September 1775, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹⁰⁴ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 19.

¹⁰⁵ Alex Richardson, House of Assembly Journal, 1779-1783, L. 3433-003, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

trusted negotiations.¹⁰⁶ Tucker's social skills allowed him to captivate his anxious audience through his letter writing. Without the strength of his epistolary network, the island would likely have starved in silence.

In these difficult decisions, the sea-faring hierarchy were influenced by news of tragedies on other islands. A thousand miles from Bermuda, the island of Jamaica experienced great loss from lack of resources and provisions, along with the devastation wrought by a destructive hurricane. As a result, Jamaica relied on food importations, as Bermuda had. The historian Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy suggests that to avoid greater devastation the "planters in Jamaica and the Windward Islands encouraged their slaves to grow their food, making them less dependent on imports from North America."¹⁰⁷ Unlike most islands in the British West Indies, Bermuda did not have the land agricultural labor to rely on local agriculture. Instead, Bermuda was left to rely on its trade networks. England and Bermuda each benefited the other with trade since the island was an "essential source of national power" and self-sufficiency for the motherland.¹⁰⁸ However, the importation of goods from England was vulnerable to minor disruptions in the empire-wide supply chain. The danger of starvation troubled the minds of the island's maritime men – no matter which port they may have favored in the Empire.

The Loyal Pen of Governor Bruere

¹⁰⁶ Hamilton, *The Making and Unmaking of a Revolutionary Family*, 19.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, 2000), 71.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 75.

In mid-October of 1779, British Governor Bruere addressed the Council and Assembly of the island. He shared that he “always sympathized with [them], in the necessities of the Country, and particularly in the want of Provisions.”¹⁰⁹ Bruere admitted that he

...hopes at the same time, that the Scarcity of Provisions is not so alarming and dreadful, as your Apprehensions seem to be... is at this time the season of Potatoes; and it is a doubt, with me, if many People may not... Provisions, and others may be over desirous of Gain, so as to give the alarm, in order to carry on a large Trade for... or very great Profit to enrich themselves, rather than with any intent to serve and supply the Necessities of the Poor at the reasonable advantage. I am sorry to say, that the... temper of the generality of the People is such, that I cannot thinking of trusting them at this time in the height of War, so far as to lay the Port or Trade open.¹¹⁰

Governor Bruere was an idealist. His optimism for British aid contrasted greatly with the experiences of the anxious seafaring society that needed to feed not only themselves but distressed prisoners of war.¹¹¹ Though rice was rare, he hoped it would arrive from the loyal ports of Georgia and New York, and, he implied that visiting merchants who did not have a license would be captured and “must submit to the letter of the Law.”¹¹² Surprisingly supplied with an importation of rice, Bruere then ambitiously assumed that one hundred pounds of flour would arrive in Bermuda. These aspirations were foolish to merchants like Tucker, who dealt firsthand with account books and ship records. While Bruere judged that the island could sustain itself with occasional royal support, the friends of America argued that dependency on their westward neighbor was the only option for survival.

¹⁰⁹ Governor George Bruere, 16 October 1779, House of Assembly Journal, 1779-1783, L. 3433-003, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

Governor Bruere did not endorse the concerns of elite Bermudians. In early February 1781, Bruere publicly reminded his audience of the duties that he and others owed to their sovereign. His report from the island's Government House bore a tone of disappointment. Bruere wrote, "now to the relation we stand into the rest of the Empire! You profess yourselves "Loyal British Subjects, prostrate yourselves at the foot of the Throne," follow then the duties of subjects, or your professions are merely insults! heavily grieved am I to complain of more than a common breach of duty in too many of the Inhabitants of Bermuda."¹¹³ Bruere drew attention to their suspected treason:

Instead of moving themselves a Hacked to the best of Sovereigns and their Mother Country by joining gloriously in the War of Britain, The Rebels and their Confederates are supplied with the great essential salt some even daringly avow it setting forth publicly that they are only amendable if at all not being particularly specified in the prohibiting Act, to have their vessels and goods confiscated by the Act of the sixteenth of his present Majesty prohibiting all Trade and Intercourse with the Colonies in Rebellion mistaken Men of rather willful deceivers Where is the... that does make it Treason to correspond with any Enemy, more especially with Rebels Want of provisions might have been in time of absolute need... to those who... for it, but those who barter for Tobacco, had no other view than gain even at the expense of the most sacred ties.

Bruere then suggested pardon for the assembly's treasonous behaviors. He encouraged reconciliation: "Great Britain is slow to anger, and even more willing to reclaim her Sons than punish family. Her resentment will make every Enemy Tremble. Let then the loyal manifest their Allegiance by joining their Efforts to the true British subjects now gallantly and successfully... by Tea and Land against the confederate foe of Liberty, a sacred name!"¹¹⁴ The governor continued

¹¹³ Governor George Bruere, 1 February 1781, House of Assembly Journal, 1779-1783, L. 3433-003, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

by describing America as a “stalking horse to Ambitious republicanism.”¹¹⁵ He warned the friends of America not to deceive themselves since there was “nowhere to be found so pure and unadulterated as under our limited monarchy.”¹¹⁶ Bruere was disappointed by the inhabitants strong connection to the “rebel states and new-fangled systems.”¹¹⁷

Governor Bruere hoped to still the pens which he considered treasonous. In his letters to England and the island’s Assembly, Bruere separated himself from the elites in question. Continuing his letter of insecurity, Bruere doubled down on his loyalty, “mistake me not for an Enemy! Because I set forth the truth before... The relative duties I owe my sovereign, my Country, the Empire, and my Oaths, have required it.”¹¹⁸ He hoped the Empire would no longer be betrayed by opportunistic men, like that of the illicit “salt trade carried on by people in these Islands with the rebels.”¹¹⁹ Bruere offered no mercy. He ordered their unfaithful practices to cease and for them instead to follow his example. Bruere further proclaimed, “As far as I can and it constitutionally lays with me, I will make my Actions out go my Words against the Rebel Trade.”¹²⁰

Bruere called for a change. He begged the assembly to “fit out [their] Vessels as privateers” since “the French and every Enemy constantly pays close by us, often in our very sight.”¹²¹ Bruere appealed to the elite’s desire for glory. He motivated them to be dutiful with the reward of riches

¹¹⁵ Governor George Bruere, 1 February 1781, House of Assembly Journal, 1779-1783, L. 3433-003, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

and honor. If their conduct proved passionately loyal, then he hinted that the assembly could “act with impunity the detestable double part of subjects to Britain and friends to her Enemies.”¹²² Bruere felt responsible for feeding the mouths of inhabitants while also encouraging opportunity – yet he believed the elite’s approach to this problem was out of disloyalty.

As Bruere worried about his reputation and the island’s trade, he also worried about the threat of invasion. In his letter to the assembly, he reminded the elites of their forefather’s loyalty. He wrote, “it is justly expected from you to provide for the defense of these Islands; your much poorer Ancestors sat a good example by their great attention to every point liable to attack, Nature too has done so much, that is shameful not to complete the little left us to do, which when done, Bermuda might securely bid defiance to every Foe.”¹²³ Bruere appealed to the minds and hearts of his audience while attempting to manifest local pride.

Although uncritically obedient to the orders of Britain, Bruere feared the threats of starvation, silence, and stagnation as much as did the island’s mercantile class. And if the island were to be invaded, all would be lost. The governor informed English lords of domestic troubles to demonstrate his genuine obedience, but also out of his concern for the island’s future. His unapologetically loyal pen was not subject to the prying eyes of the public or victimization from the press. As a less significant British governor, away from the heat of revolution, Bermuda’s friends of America considered him to be weak and irrelevant; however, they did not act with violence against him. Instead, they wisely collaborated with him to balance their loyalties during the turmoil of the Age of Opportunity.

¹²² Governor George Bruere, 1 February 1781, House of Assembly Journal, 1779-1783, L. 3433-003, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹²³ Ibid.

Paradise of Peace

Bermudians navigated treacherous seas in which total neutrality or loyalty was disadvantageous if not outright impossible. While the friends of America professed their loyalty to the Crown, they prioritized the needs of their families, enterprises, and island. British subjects in Bermuda appreciated English law and tradition but also exploited their loopholes. However, they understood themselves as “members of a large family who wished to live in peace with warring realities and gravitated first to one side and then the other; the larger scene was not their sphere, but their objective was merely that of survival.”¹²⁴ Ultimately, whether friend or foe of America, inhabitants of all sympathies prayed for peace in their “Isle of Devils.”

In the summer of 1778, uncertainty plagued paradise. Henry Tucker wrote to St. George Tucker to describe the local affairs of the island. He discreetly relayed, “our situation in Bermuda obliges me not to be silent respecting certain private vessels of War that have obtained Commission from our Governor.”¹²⁵ Bermudian ships now actively sailed into conflict instead of to ports for trade. Although both Tucker and Bruere feared the enemy ships circling their reefs, Bermudian ships adorned in bold, British flags posed as a greater threat. Loyalist privateer families, like the Goodrichs, posed a threat to neutrality through the militarization of the island’s vessels. This threatened stability of the island. Bermuda needed the Americans not for prisoners of war or an honorable casualty list to report to England, but for supply. In the conclusion of his letter, Henry admitted, “it is difficult at this time to speak of public matters. But I trust the days of Peace and

¹²⁴ “William Browne, Governor 1782-1788,” *Bermuda Historical Quarterly*, Bermuda Historical Quarterly, Bermuda, Spring 1956, Vol. XIII, No. 1, 55.

¹²⁵ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 10 September 1778, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

the Establishment of Liberty in the American Hemisphere...”¹²⁶ Tucker wavered in the directionless wind of opportunity— whether that meant independence or defeat for their neighbors. Bermudian elites were not necessarily concerned for who would be the victor but, instead, what would it mean for their sea-faring society.

Inhabitants of the island “feared the end of the Revolution.”¹²⁷ Profit ultimately trumped a paradise of peace. Bermudians were pragmatists who grasped that “danger and stress of [their] treasonous economy had loaded the tables and padded the pockets” of many of their seafaring families.¹²⁸ Yet, “seeing signs of peace, more Bermudians joined the Loyalists among them in privateering for the British for one last big lucrative move before the war ended.”¹²⁹ By 1783, peace seemed likely to emerge turmoil. As the American cause came to an end, intelligence began to stir in the Sargasso Sea. Word of the Battle of Yorktown came in letters of Henry Tucker, from London to St. George Tucker in Virginia. Tucker privately described the battle as a turning in America’s independence movement.¹³⁰

In the spring of 1783, new beginnings blossomed in Bermuda. In the port of St. George’s, Tucker recorded a ship, adorning American colors, that brought intelligence of America’s victory with the promise of “peace with all the world.”¹³¹ Soon after, Frances Tucker joyfully announced

¹²⁶ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 10 September 1778, Film No. 301, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹²⁷ Mairs-Kessler, “Prudent Pragmatism,” 16-17.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 30 October 1783, London, Film No. 302, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³¹ Henry Tucker, 2 May 1783, Books of Protest from 1781-1786, C.S. 1801/1, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

to “thank God it is Peace again” to the Virginian branch of the Tucker family.¹³² The island’s vessels soon sailed into calmer seas. They grew relaxed by the promise of safe voyages- yet they used peace, like how they did conflict, as an opportunity. Many outfitted their vessels that had traded salt illegally, into legalized pirate ships. This shift not only opened a new business venture but reasserted their loyalties to the British government.¹³³

In the 1779 Address of the Majority of the Council and Members of the Late Assembly of the Bermuda or Sommer Islands in America, the assemblymen, including the Tuckers, Jennings, and Trimingham, professed themselves “your Majesty's most dutiful loyal and affectionate subjects.”¹³⁴ While they judiciously indicated the island’s distance from provisions such as bread, they professed gratitude for His Majesty’s government, which they labeled as the “largest extent of civil authority.”¹³⁵ The members of Assembly wished to “prostrate [themselves] at the foot of [His] Majesty’s throne.”¹³⁶ And they described the present commotions in America as unhappy. Like His Majesty, Bermudians desired an end to war. However, they did not fully submit themselves to the “Laws of the Country” as they had claimed.¹³⁷ The assembly men hoped “that [his] Majesty may have the Happiness of restoring peace to the whole British empire.”¹³⁸ With great influence, however, they understood the need to navigate not only their actions but their

¹³² Frances Tucker to St. George Tucker, 11 June 1783, Film No. 302, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³³ Mairs-Kessler, “Prudent Pragmatism,” 16-17.

¹³⁴ 8 July 1779, Film No. 353, Colonial Office 1770-1792, CO 37/22 1-end (1779-1782), Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

proclamation of obedience. As they claimed themselves dutiful servants to the King, they simultaneously launched their vessels illegally from their homes.

Both the private and public pens of elite Bermudians influenced the island's course. The Tuckers, for instance, chose their words to work to their advantage. In a 1781 letter to St. George, Henry wrote, "though from the Difficulty of the Times I am at a Loss what to say or at least feel myself under a disgraceable restraint- I shall forbear to touch on Politics further then to wish for Peace, when the Intercourse between Friends."¹³⁹ He then calmed his American brother by guaranteeing that he was "furnished from your Great & Good Ally."¹⁴⁰ Elite Bermudians employed their pens for the sake of protection – for themselves, their families, and their island. A public profession like that of Paine's would be too great a risk to take, so they instead paddled around actual positions.

Without an established press, wealthy Bermudians did not fall in to ignominy. The words and actions of influential inhabitants may have circulated in the island's coffeehouses, inns, and taverns, and letters, but their reputations of economic treason were never memorialized in print. Instead, their unfaithful actions are implied by unexplainable gaps in official mercantile logbooks, the letters of frustrated governors, the disappearance of the island's gunpowder, the unaccountable importations of provisions, and the unexplainable accumulation of land, wealth, and influence. The silence of economic treason in the Bermuda Archives elucidates the caution taken by the island's mercantile families to continue their quest for opportunity during the Imperial Crisis.

Bereft of a common narrative, the island's politics, society, and economy were directed by the discreet penmanship of only a select few. While chaos surrounded them on the high seas, many

¹³⁹ Henry Tucker to St. George Tucker, 9 August 1781, Film No. 302, Tuckers-Coleman Papers, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the island's inhabitants perceived the colonists weaponized by Paine's pen as imprudent. Hence, economic elitists of Bermuda attempted to balance profit with their quest for peace. During the tempest of revolution, the private pens of influential Bermudians like Henry Tucker Jr. encapsulated an unspoken responsibility for a personal, familial, and island-wide survival. Confidence in their epistolary networks allowed for action to be taken or prevented without potential scrutiny from the public. These economically treasonous pens shielded the island from the storms of stagnation, silence, starvation, and invasion, and shaped its identity for generations in sharp historical relief from both Republican and Monarchist.

Conclusion

A Footing in Two Worlds: The Continuation of Bermuda's Transatlantic Identity into the Twenty-First Century

Bermudians of the eighteenth century navigated troubled waters of uncertainty brought about by war and revolution. The island inhabitants sailed through the Atlantic World with a courageous spirit of opportunism. Though the island remained sheltered, advancement and resources were sought primarily beyond the reefs. With a small population, few natural resources, and little ability to defend itself, Bermuda has, in essence, knitted itself into existence out of a gossamer of ever-changing global trade. The questions concerning the island's understanding of its place in the Atlantic World are not inconsequential for Bermuda today.

The rising generation of Bermudians live in an interconnected world. Modern day Bermuda has dependence on resources, intelligence, and networks like never before. The island continues to be shaped by the constant immigration and emigration of inhabitants to and from the United States, Britain, the Commonwealth, and elsewhere around the globe. In 1774, the island housed 10,655 inhabitants— 5, 632 whites and 5,023 blacks. And likely due to seafaring absenteeism, women typically outnumbered men.¹ Nearly 250 years later, Bermuda's population has grown sixfold to over 60,000 inhabitants – around 20,000 whites, 33,000 blacks, 2,500 Asian, 6,000 mixed, and 2,500 other.² While Bermudian-born inhabitants remain the majority, non-Bermudan expatriates continue to bring their own cultures and identities to this mid-Atlantic island.

¹ 1774, Film No. 245, Frames from the Shelbourne Papers, 1715-1782, Bermuda Archives, City of Hamilton, Bermuda

² Government of Bermuda, Department of Statistics, "2016 Population and Housing Census Report," 31.

The Imperial Crisis exacerbated the inhabitant's natural anxiety about concerning starvation, invasion, and neglect. Today and in the island's recent history, these worries continue to shape the island's geopolitical and economic decisions. For instance, Bermuda transformed into a substantial military base for the Royal Air Force and the United Naval Air station during the Second World War. The island, which had once been a service station for merchants and vessels of the eighteenth-century, continued to use its greatest asset – its location – to remain relevant. However, the island is still only 24 miles long and less than one mile wide. A population and connections multiply, the small, isolated island cannot fully meet the demands both the inhabitants and an increasingly globalized world.

As in the eighteenth-century, Bermudians tend to go offshore for their education, whether for private schooling or university. The island's high cost of living and lack of opportunity deters students from returning to their island. This, along with a decrease in birth rate, has resulted in challenges for those inhabitants who choose to remain. Eighteenth-century and twenty-first-century Bermuda continue to share similar dependencies and threats. For instance, with the danger of COVID-19, the island's tourism industry and international business sector of insurance and reinsurance have been altered drastically. Also, the lack of resources on the island had requires that medical operations be performed abroad. Like the absence of agriculture in the eighteenth-century, Bermuda is now overrun by resorts and golf courses instead of farms and factories. Thus, nearly all provisions and necessities are imported which consequently results in not only less fresh, but also expensive customs duties.

Inhabitants live a life without common consumerism and conveniences, such as chain stores, Ubers and 24/7 operational hours, generates a local pride and non-materialistic way of life. However, at the cost is affordability. Unfortunately, through the decades, it has been more

difficult not only to live on the island but retire there. Bermudians of all ages continue to look beyond its reefs for security, provisions, affordability, and opportunity. However, modern-day Bermudians have greater access to local and foreign affairs than the inhabitants of the past had in the 1770s. Instead of intelligence taking weeks to months to travel the high seas, Bermudians have access to media at the touch of their fingers, from social media to digitized copies of *The Royal Gazette*.

Unlike during the Imperial Crisis, Bermudians of all races, classes, and occupations can directly see the proceedings of their elected and the elites. Reputations are no longer guarded, and decisions are no longer discreet. Though this causes difference of opinion throughout the island, it ensures the island's course is not solely directed by the opportunistic ways of a few. The island's history of overcoming and adapting to change and challenges continues from the first few families of the shipwrecked *Sea Venture* in 1609 to the diverse population of 2022. As Michael Jarvis argues, Bermuda's motto, *Quo fata ferunt*, meaning wherever the fates may lead, "captures the essence of" the island's history.³ Bermudians are skilled in managing moments of crisis – after all, they have been a middle ground caught between conflict since their very beginning.

³ Jarvis, *In the Eye of All Trade*, 459.

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