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Unrequited Toil

A History of United States Slavery

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4

Black Insurgency

Gabriel tore off the veil of a republic founded on liberty and civil rights in a planned rebellion involving up to 1,000 participants. He was born in slavery in 1776 in Henrico County, Virginia, on Thomas Prosser's tobacco estate. As a child he learned to read and write, and along with an older brother, Solomon, he trained as a blacksmith, probably at the urging of his enslaved parents. Gabriel had an imposing physical presence, a "bony face well made," but he was missing teeth and had "two or three scars on his head," the visible marks of fights and punishments. His face was long, his hair was short, and he had charisma. Between six feet two and three inches tall, Gabriel was reportedly "a fellow of courage and intellect above his rank in life."[1] And in his early twenties, he planned a radical sequel to the American Revolution.

When individual bondswomen and men ran off, they eroded slavery, but when enslaved leaders like Gabriel led a rebellion in 1800 Richmond, Virginia, they threatened to crack it apart. Uprisings brought home the high risks and terrible costs of American slavery. Enslaved people became the republic's great "internal enemy who longed for freedom," in one historian's phrasing.[2] Rebellions were political uprisings showing – and in turn forcing authorities to admit – that the republican language of liberty and equality on which the United States was built referred to citizen

[1] Douglas R. Egerton, *Rebels, Reformers, and Revolutionaries: Collected Essays and Second Thoughts* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 27.

[2] Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772–1832* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2013), 8.

property owners rather than the people at large. And insurgents exposed slavery as forced labor and plunder. The Revolution was not complete, they contended, without freedom for the enslaved.

Gabriel's path to rebel leader began in Richmond, Virginia's capital city and a hive of political discontent. Prosser died in 1798 and Gabriel fell to Thomas Henry Prosser, the first owner's son. He was Gabriel's age, but known for his cruelty and ambition. Prosser hired Gabriel and Solomon out in Richmond, collecting their blacksmiths' wages. But the city of some 5,700 residents – half African-descended and one-fifth free black – was fertile ground for enslaved networks. African Americans were seizing hold of a revolutionary set of ideas with which to subvert and destroy slavery. Gabriel was also stealing pigs and was punished in 1799 for an incident that started as hog theft and went bad when Gabriel bit part of the ear off a white man, for which he was branded and whipped. By the following year, he was gathering allies in Richmond.

Sam Byrd, Jack Bowler (also known as Jack Ditcher), and Ben Woolfolk joined Gabriel in what amounted to a revolutionary club. Byrd was free, he could read and write, and he kept a list of recruits. Woolfolk was from the Prosser plantation, and he recalled Gabriel's intent to "purchase a piece of silk for a flag on which they would have written 'death or liberty,'" which was his group's motto. Virginians still recalled a time when Lord Dunmore promised freedom should they fight against Patriot owners. Patrick Henry's valiant defense of American independence and his 1775 speech demanding "give me liberty or give me death!" still resonated. As Thomas Jefferson aspired to the presidency in 1800, Virginia citizens talked of their liberty and the republican institutions they created in the ferment of the American Revolution. Indeed, Jefferson and his Democratic-Republican followers had initially embraced the radicalism of the French Revolution.[3]

But they showed their limited embrace of liberty, fraternity, and equality when opposing black revolutionaries in Haiti. Black Virginians were also well aware of the seeming contradictions between Democratic-Republican protests of their rival Federalists' Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, on one hand, and Virginians' willingness to separate and restrict the

[3] Patrick Rael, *Eighty-Eight Years: The Long Death of Slavery in the United States, 1777–1865* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 152 (first quotation); Patrick Henry, "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death," March 23, 1775 (second quotation), online: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/patrick.asp, accessed: July 8, 2016.

same liberties when claimed by African Americans, on the other. Gabriel discussed the hypocrisy of such an outlook with Charles Quersey and Alexander Beddenhurst, French-born Revolutionary War veterans living in Virginia. Quersey and Beddenhurst were two white expatriates who helped convince Gabriel and his allies that sympathetic whites would join an insurgency led by African Americans, and that class and not race was the common denominator among those who would finish the work of the American Revolution.

While Gabriel cultivated allies in Richmond, Byrd recruited in Petersburg, twenty-five miles south of Richmond. Ben Woolfolk went north to Hanover and Caroline counties. Gabriel approached black workers in tobacco warehouses. He also attracted free African Americans and working-class whites to his cause. Solomon later testified, "[m]y brother Gabriel was the person who influenced me to join him and others in order that (as he said) we might conquer the white people and possess ourselves of their property."[4]

Rumors of an armed revolt spread. A witness in Richmond's jail wrote Thomas Jefferson that "[a] number of [s]words were made in a clumsy enough manner out of rough iron; others by breaking the blade of a [s]cythe in the middle, which thus made two [s]words of a most formidable kind. They were well fastened in proper handles, and would have cut off a man's limb at a single blow." As the insurgents made plowshares into swords, Gabriel's plan came into focus. "The first places Gabriel intended to attack in Richmond were, the Capitol, the Magazine, the Penitentiary, the Governor's house and his person." The plan was to take prisoner Virginia governor James Monroe. "The inhabitants were to be massacred, save those who begged for quarter and agreed to serve as soldiers with them."[5] Jack Bowler co-organized the uprising. Bowler was nearly six feet five inches tall and had long hair tied back behind his head. New recruits like King expressed enthusiasm, pledging, "I am ready to join them at any moment. I could slay the white people like sheep."[6]

[4] Solomon cited in *A Documentary History of North America*, ed. Willie Lee Rose (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 112.

[5] James T. Callendar to Thomas Jefferson, September 1800, cited in Scot French, *The Rebellious Slave: Nat Turner in American Memory* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 15 (first quotation); Solomon cited in *A Documentary History of North America*, 113 (second and third quotations).

[6] King cited in Douglas R. Egerton, *Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 57.

The revolt was planned for Saturday, August 30, but on the appointed day, a violent storm broke, washing out bridges and roads, making it impossible for the armed insurgents to gather. Two members gave into fears and reported to owners, who passed word to authorities. Governor Monroe called up the militia to guard the Capitol. Alarmed citizens locked up some of the rebels, and Gabriel fled on a merchant ship down the James River. He was captured in Norfolk nearly a month later. "They could hardly have failed of success," a jailed witness wrote Jefferson, "for after all, we only could muster four or five hundred men, of whom not more than thirty had Muskets."[7]

White responses were swift and decisive. Virginia authorities arrested and jailed scores of African Americans, and in the aftermath, courts in four counties and Richmond City tried fifty-eight, convicting and hanging twenty-six. One of the condemned compared himself to the martyrs of the American Revolution, announcing to his captors, "I have nothing more to offer than what General Washington would have had to offer, had he been taken by the British and put to trial by them. I have adventured my life in endeavouring to obtain the liberty of my countrymen, and am a willing sacrifice in their cause: and I beg, as a favour, that I may be immediately led to execution. I know that you have pre-determined to shed my blood, why then all this mockery of a trial?"[8] Governor Monroe pardoned thirteen, and eight were transported out of state. Twenty-five more were acquitted. Gabriel was tried on October 6 and hanged four days later. Jack Bowler turned himself in on October 9 and was convicted three weeks later, sentenced to transportation out of state. Ben Woolfolk detailed the plans to authorities in exchange for a pardon, and the two recruits who betrayed the plan in August were also released and rewarded. Wealthy white Virginians breathed a collective sigh of relief as the rebels were hanged or exiled and the uprising unraveled.

But concerns over the black insurgency lingered. Governor Monroe asked the then Vice President Thomas Jefferson for advice on how many public executions Virginia should stage in order to deter other would-be rebels. Jefferson, then running for president, wrote from his Albemarle County home, "there is a strong sentiment that there has been hanging

[7] Callendar to Jefferson, September 1800, cited in French, *The Rebellious Slave*, 16.

[8] "A lawyer," cited in Robert Sutcliff, *Travels in Some Parts of North America* (York: C. Peacock, 1811), 50.

enough. [T]he other states & the world at large will for ever condemn us if we indulge a principle of revenge, or go one step beyond absolute necessity."[9] He did not want to provoke a further uprising of the kind roiling Haiti. Diffusing Virginia's slave population seemed more attractive.

An emerging slave market gave enslavers what they claimed was a safety valve. Jefferson argued that selling off bondspersons concentrated in high-density areas would reduce danger to whites. Rather than hanging Bowler and losing the work capability of his strong arms and his keen leadership skills, authorities cleared his sale to slave traders who took him to Spanish New Orleans. But diffusion was a shallow hypocrisy.[10] Other rebellions took shape as Gabriel's comrades were hanged or sold off. The Easter Plot of 1802 reflected the discontents of thousands of enslaved people. Even as its leader, Sancho, and members of his network were tried and executed, and as ripples of panic roiled whites along the Roanoke and James Rivers, North Carolina insurgents organized, word traveling the inland waterways of a time when the insurgency would erupt. White strategies to isolate and root out rebellion met black counterstrategies to recruit and mobilize bondspersons and free people of African descent who would carry on the work of rebellion.

Two years after Thomas Jefferson left the White House, the republic's largest armed domestic slave rebellion erupted in the heart of his Louisiana Purchase. The German Coast slave rebellion began in 1811 in southern Louisiana when some 500 African-descended rebels marched "On to New Orleans" with plans to kill white people and form a republic modeled on Haiti. (The German Coast on the Mississippi River was named for eighteenth-century Europeans who settled there.) In January, Charles Deslondes – a light-skinned Louisiana Creole – organized enslaved people on the sugar plantation of his owner after killing the son of his owner, Manual Andry. Deslondes had worked as a driver or an enslaved overseer, and after taking over the plantation, he recruited and enrolled other young men in an upstart militia in St. John the Baptist and St. Charles parishes. The men were multiethnic and multiracial. Some were born in Africa and others in America. Some spoke French; others spoke English, Akan, or Kikongo. Some were Christian, others Muslim. Charles, Harry Kenner,

[9] Thomas Jefferson to James Monroe, September 20, 1800, *Encyclopedia Virginia*, online: www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Letter_from_Thomas_Jefferson_to_James_Monroe_September_20_1800, accessed: April 10, 2017.

[10] Edward E. Baptist, *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (New York, NY: Basic, 2014), chap. 1.

and Joseph joined Cupidon, Kooche or Kook, Quamana, Mingo, Diaca, Al-Hassan, and Omar, all united in determination to overthrow white rule.[11]

As in Gabriel's Virginia, the lower Mississippi River Valley was alive with unrest as slave labor camps were built to furnish their owners with cotton and sugar. But the German Coast uprising was inspired by the Haitian Revolution, which brought people together against a common adversary. Many of the enslavers were castoffs or legatees of the uprising in Haiti. Unable to win that struggle, they used the same strategy in Louisiana, forcing people of African descent to toil for their sake and, in an emergency, calling on another army to protect their interests.

Unlike Gabriel's insurgents, the German Coast rebels wore uniforms and faced both US soldiers and local militiamen in the canebrakes. Deslondes's recruits enrolled others, some runaways living along the Mississippi River and others enslaved on adjoining plantations. They raised flags and beat drums, marching down the River Road carrying long knives, axes, and sharp tools, attacking plantations, capturing provisions, and even conscripting some less-than-willing recruits, burning buildings in their wake and killing one enslaver who stood his ground. Deslondes's militia rested after closing half the distance between Andry's plantation and New Orleans, by which time terrified whites had alerted federal authorities in the city. Governor William C. C. Claiborne sent a company of light cavalry upriver to raise alarms, attract local militias, and face the rebel force.

The wounded planter Manual Andry had managed to raise an alarm on the opposite bank of the Mississippi River, and as Deslondes's force pivoted to avoid the US cavalry advancing on its position, it fell between two other white militia forces. About 200 members of Deslondes's army were caught in open sugar fields, the ratoon cane, and young plants offering no cover. The result was a bloodbath of insurgents falling before musket fire, the whites advancing and butchering the survivors, mutilating the corpses. Faced with the enemy on three sides, Deslondes's army fractured, many fleeing into a swamp. Deslondes himself fell on the battlefield, the advancing whites stepping in, cutting off his arms, breaking his thighs with the butts of muskets, and then burning him alive. The whites' fury burned bright.

[11] Albert Thrasher, *On to New Orleans! Louisiana's Heroic 1811 Slave Revolt* (New Orleans, LA: Cypress Press, 1995) (quotation); Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), chap. 1.

Reprisals were swift. Twenty-one captured soldiers were taken to a nearby plantation and tried by a kangaroo court of local planters. All received death sentences. After the executions, Louisiana enslavers cut off the heads of those condemned in the makeshift tribunal, spiked them on polls, and hung them up along the Mississippi River levee as ghastly "insignia of the regime" that condemned them. Twenty-nine more were tried in a New Orleans court where twenty-four were condemned to death, two to flogging and a return to forced labor, and two acquitted. Several of those condemned were executed by hanging on rude scaffolds, their corpses left in nooses to rot, unmistakable symbols that the Empire of Liberty envisioned by architects of the Louisiana Purchase was an empire of slavery as well.[12]

Unlike Jefferson and Monroe in Virginia, Louisiana's territorial governor, William C. Claiborne, gave no doubts that an overwhelming armed response to the German Coast uprising was the way to Americanize Louisiana and prevent future insurrections. He insisted that citizens must be "aware of the many casualties, internal and external to which the [t]erritory is exposed, and must be sensible of the importance of a well-regulated [m]ilitia." The language of the Second Amendment was applied to controlling the internal enemy that was also the labor backbone of the lower Mississippi River Valley.[13] In addition to armed surveillance, Americanization meant stripping rights like Spanish *coartación*, a legally binding covenant between an enslaver and bondsperson in which she paid for freedom in installments, along with the time to work for the wages to do so. It meant incorporating whites into the militias, drawing a color line ever more boldly, and closing other passageways to freedom among the enslaved. The German Coast rebellion was brutally put down and the plantation complex became a series of slave labor camps patrolled by armed guards. Yet uprisings did not end.

The Corotoman plantation in Lancaster County, Virginia, was an unlikely place for an insurgency. It was tucked away on the north shore of the Rappahannock River in Virginia's Northern Neck. It was an old plantation. In 1807, it came into the possession of Joseph C. Cabell, whose wife inherited half, and the new owner ran it like a business, pushing bondspersons to work harder or be sold off. Productivity soared. And Corotoman flourished as a plantation, yielding grain, meat, and other

[12] Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 21 (quotation); 18–22.

[13] Daniel Rasmussen, *American Uprising: The Untold Story of America's Largest Slave Revolt* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 2011), 171.

produce in abundance from 1808 to 1812. Into that cauldron of conflict British warships entered the Chesapeake in February 1813, and enslaved people cautiously greeted the invaders as lifelines to freedom. Charles Ball was living along the Patuxent River in Maryland at the time, a refugee from slavery in South Carolina. He had his own reasons for serving his Patriot masters, but watched as "several thousand black people deserted from their masters and mistresses, and escaped to the British fleet. None of these people were ever regained by their owners," Ball reported, "as the British naval officers treated them as free people."[14]

The Chesapeake uprising during the War of 1812 revealed a great internal enemy. For the bondspersons enslaved there, the freedom struggle was not so much a second American Revolution as it was a shortcut out of grinding labor and the everyday violence to which they were subjected. Instead of reaching out to Revolutionary principals, black people made use of the British naval presence in 1813–14 to run away in groups. Some fled as families and parts of kinships. Others escaped plantation by plantation. History caught up with enslavers in the War of 1812 as estates that had been handed down whole under colonial laws were divided up among American inheritors. With estate divisions came family destruction at the hands of heirs who received parts of estates. Sons, brothers, and sons-in-law divided up enslaved people, splintering neighborhoods and kinships, rifling families for moveable human property. The Corotoman plantation in Lancaster County was one such place that became a microcosm of the liberating potential of a foreign force.

Enslaved people were cautious at first as American owners warned that the British would simply re-enslave them in the Caribbean should they flee. Instead, British vice admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane welcomed them onto his ships. The official British position was that enslaved Americans were not to be taken as slaves but as defectors eligible to serve in "the Black Corps." Cochrane's appeals convinced many to try their luck with the enemy. After British warships anchored in Lynnhaven Bay near Norfolk, Virginia, African-descended people fled in throngs. A British officer reported in 1813, "[t]he [s]laves continue to come off by every opportunity and I have now upwards of 120 men, women and children on board." He reported plans to send them to Bermuda. "Amongst the Slaves

[14] Charles Ball, *Slavery in the United States: A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Charles Ball, a Black Man, Who Lived Forty Years in Maryland, South Carolina and Georgia, as a Slave under Various Masters, and Was One Year in the Navy with Commodore Barney, during the Late War* (New York, NY: John S. Taylor, 1837), 469.

are several very intelligent fellows who are willing to act as local guides . . . and if their assertions be true, there is no doubt but the [b]lacks of Virginia and Maryland would cheerfully take up [a]rms and join us against the Americans."[15]

When four British barges paddled up Carter's Creek off the Rappahannock, chasing American vessels, several young adults, including Canada Baton, Ezekiel Loney, and Tom Saunders, fled their owner and joined the British. Around midnight three days later, they returned, guiding British raiders to Cabell's property, going ashore and rousing family members, friends, and others. Sixty-nine bondspersons fled under cover of darkness, nearly half of Corotoman's bondspersons. One young woman was in labor, reaching the British brigantine HMS *Jasseur* just in time to give birth aboard the small warship.[16]

But not all fled from Corotoman. Some were confused, and armed white responders prevented others from escaping. Young adults, especially parents in their twenties and thirties, led the exodus, and families generally fled together. Tom Saunders persuaded his extended family to flee, taking children and young cousins. Twelve of twenty-four adults fleeing Corotoman were a Saunders or a spouse of one. Twenty-one of forty-five children had a Saunders parent. But it was not just male relatives who led the uprising.

Men may have contacted the British, but women took charge of the escape. Sukey Saunders Carter pulled her husband, Dick Carter, out of slavery by insisting that he join her and their four children, along with her brother. Dick Carter told the furious overseer he was leaving at his wife's behest. "Sisters apparently led the decision to go," argues a historian of the uprising, "for nine of the fourteen departing siblings were women, and they were the oldest in five of the seven lines." Some elderly men stayed put, likely because of weary legs and light work. Ezekiel Loney's older sister Fanny Loney helped persuade several of his nieces to leave parents behind and flee, and the kin of Ezekiel and Tom Saunders who fled were related to other enslaved women, who also escaped.[17] But some families were parted by the flight itself and the confusion of a midnight exodus.

The same month as Saunders and the others fled Corotoman, Admiral Cochrane went a step farther, proclaiming all slaves who presented themselves on British vessels could serve with them or be resettled in Canada or

[15] Jeremy Black, *The War of 1812 in the Age of Napoleon* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009), 220.

[16] Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 235. [17] Taylor, *The Internal Enemy*, 238.

the West Indies. Cochrane began incorporating willing ex-slaves into the Colonial Marines based on the southern tip of Tangier Island in the lower Chesapeake Bay. About 200 African-descended men mustered into the Corps of Colonial Marines, trading their rags for red uniforms. And many others served as scouts, spies, cooks, cleaners, or laborers on fortifications. Thirty black Colonial Marines helped 130 British troops capture an American battery at Pungoteague Creek near Tangier Island, and they supported the British in the Battle of Bladensburg and the burning of Washington, DC, in August 1814. Some African-descended marines rose to become corporals and sergeants, and when African-descended soldiers marched into the national capital to burn it, locals were horrified that they were the advance guard of an insurrection force, memories of Gabriel haunting the British advance and sack of Washington. Three weeks after Bladensburg, the Colonial Marines supported British forces that had been turned back from the invasion of Baltimore.

Uprisings shook but did not shatter slavery in the Chesapeake. The flight of some 6,000 enslaved people jarred enslavers, but did not cause a significant rethinking of slavery. Six thousand was about 1 percent of Maryland and Virginia's slave population counted in 1810, or about equal to twice the number of enslaved people in Lancaster County, Virginia. Instead the defections hastened a process the legislature set in motion in 1806 when liberal manumission laws of the 1780s were repealed and replaced by a statute forbidding any freed black person to remain in Virginia a year after slavery – or face re-enslavement. Enslavers opted for greater security. And south of the Chesapeake African-descended refugees from slavery sought advantages across borders.

While Chesapeake enslavers heightened security, black freedom fighters established a stronghold in Spanish Florida. In 1814, enslaved people fled from American owners south from Georgia and east from Pensacola. British marines officers directed recruitment efforts, beckoning Red Sticks, Seminoles, and African Americans to join them. The strategy was to divert American attention away from British forces and toward maroon and Indian allies south of the border. British recruiters sent volunteers to a fort under construction fifteen miles up the Apalachicola River in Spanish Florida. The fort at Prospect Bluff, called the British Post, was sixty miles south of US territory, and escaped bondspersons joined British-allied Indians there. As elsewhere, British officers offered uniforms and arms, enrolling male recruits into three companies of Colonial Marines. Jackson's forces moved on Pensacola in November 1814, driving out British and Spanish forces. Beleaguered British forces handed the British Post over to African-descended Colonial Marines and their Indian allies.

As the British abandoned the War of 1812, African-descended refugees were increasingly responsible for their own security. American victories drove the British from the region following the Battle of New Orleans and the Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war. One British force sailed to the Georgia–Florida border, appealing to fugitives from slavery to join the evacuating forces and gain freedom. Some made it aboard British ships bound for Bermuda. Hundreds more former slaves gathered on Dauphin Island in Mobile Bay. And despite the treaty requirement obliging British forces to return American bondspersons, officers left it to Americans and Spaniards to retake their human property, carrying off those African-descended allies who stuck with them.

The departure of British forces exposed black refugees to violent reprisals, but the British Post – soon renamed Negro Fort – was a rebel stronghold. By the summer of 1815, the British Post was chiefly occupied by African-descended defenders and Seminole allies. One Creek visitor reported that there were "no British troops there at present now but negroes." He explained that "[t]hey [k]eep [s]entry & the [n]egroes are [s]aucy & insolent, and say they are all [f]ree." Besides "a vast deal of ammunition," the fort's defenders had five cannon and ample stores of corn and rice, and nearby were pastures and plots suitable for growing corn and vegetables.[18]

Negro Fort was a beacon to refugees from slavery and Indians determined to resist American incursions. It was the last stand of the insurgency that broke out during the war. In command of about 300 African-descended men, women, and children were three captains, veterans of the Colonial Marines. One was known as Garçon or Garson, a refugee from the Haitian Revolution who had fought with the British. Thirty-year-old Garson had risen to the rank of sergeant major under British command. The two other captains were Prince and Cyrus, each about twenty-six and also veterans of the Colonial Marines. Despite being abandoned by the British, their position seemed secure in 1815.

[18] Matthew J. Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola: Fugitive Slaves on the Atlantic and Southern Frontiers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 52–53 (quotations); Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), chap. 4; Jane Landers, *Black Society in Spanish Florida* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

They were in Spanish territory, beyond American law and General Andrew Jackson's reach. Besides generous provisions and arrivals of insurgent African Americans, the fort itself had earthen walls fifteen feet tall, eighteen feet thick, and surrounded by a fourteen-foot-wide moat four feet deep at a strategic defensive point on the river. By the summer of 1815, Negro Fort was home to about 1,100 soldiers guarding the sprawling encampments of black and Indian refugees whose settlements were fanning out up and down the river.[19]

But the fort was soon destroyed in an American counterinsurgency campaign. By the spring of 1816, Jackson's forces were chasing enemies he reckoned were still in league with the British or the Red Stick Creeks he had defeated at the Battle of Horseshoe Bend. As cotton rose in importance following the war, so did the imperative of controlling bound laborers. Americans treated a fort controlled by former bondspersons in Spanish Florida as a security risk, and Jackson demanded the Spanish governor destroy the fort. Without orders from Spain, the governor sent a military detachment to scout the fort and return any bondspersons belonging to Spanish owners.

The Americans were not satisfied. Jackson wrote General Edmund P. Gaines that the fort "ought to be destroyed."[20] Gaines ordered US Lieutenant Colonel Duncan L. Clinch to attack the fort. American-allied Coweta Creeks assisted. Besides continuing intra-Creek hostilities, these soldiers were promised a fifty-dollar bounty for capturing ex-slaves. Two US Navy gunboats were sent up the Apalachicola River. The fort's defenders attacked the boats on July 17, killing a handful of American sailors. Garson warned he would sink any vessel attacking the fort, but the Americans now had provocation to attack a fort on foreign soil. They moved in and surrounded the fort. On July 27, 1816, Negro Fort's defenders raised their red flag under the British Union Jack and fired on encroaching forces.

The next day a heated American artillery projectile – a hot shot – landed in Negro Fort's powder magazine. It exploded. "In an instant," a US soldier wrote, "hundreds of lifeless bodies were stretched upon the plain, buried in sand and rubbish, or suspended from the tops of the

[19] Kerry Walters, *American Slave Revolts and Conspiracies: A Reference Guide* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 87–94.

[20] Andrew Jackson cited in Clavin, *Aiming for Pensacola*, 56 (quotation); Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

surrounding pines. Here lay an innocent babe, there a helpless mother; on the one side a sturdy warrior, on the other a bleeding squaw. Piles of bodies, large heaps of sand, broken guns, accoutrements, etc. covered the site of the fort."[21] About fifty more survivors died of their wounds soon afterward, and the Coweta–American forces gathered up 250 dead bodies, burning them on a massive pyre. Several survivors surrendered and were either returned to owners or sold back into slavery. Garson survived but was shot soon afterward, along with one of his Indian lieutenants, who was scalped. And at a blow, the largest maroon fort in American history was destroyed.[22]

Destruction of Negro Fort seriously weakened but did not end the black insurgency in the Florida borderlands. Formerly enslaved African Americans allied with Seminoles. Seminoles relied on their military prowess, language skills, and knowledge of American politics and geography. Freed people relied on Seminole patronage, paying tributes in some cases to live in Seminole areas in towns in which they governed themselves. Several such enclaves were sites of Seminole–black cooperation and mutual defense from American forces. Spanish authorities relied on such coalitions to strengthen their position against American belligerents. The results of that trilateral cooperation included settlements clustered along the Suwanee River in central Florida such as Bowlegs Town, which collected refugees from the destroyed Negro Fort. Other defensive outposts were Powell's Town on the Withlacoochee River and the free black enclave known as Mulatto Girl's Town south of Alachua, which flourished from 1818 to about 1823.[23]

To American citizens, such maroon communities were insurgent outposts. And like Negro Fort, they beckoned runways from cotton country. Still leading volunteers in 1817, Andrew Jackson provoked a crisis with Spain while starting a war against Seminoles in the name of eliminating the internal enemy from the southeast mainland of North America. In doing so, he accentuated an emerging racial justification for making war on Native Americans, now allied with African Americans. Indians and maroons were subject to ethnic cleansing, anticipating Jackson's Indian removal policies as president.[24] In November, General Gaines

[21] Quoted in Walters, *American Slave Revolts and Conspiracies*, 92.

[22] Jane G. Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), chap. 3.

[23] Landers, *Atlantic Creoles in the Age of Revolutions*, chaps. 3–5.

[24] Deborah A. Rosen, *Border Law: The First Seminole War and American Nationhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

attacked and burned the Mikasuki–Seminole village of Fowl Town, which provoked Seminole retaliations. Secretary of War John C. Calhoun appointed Jackson commander of American forces in the area. And Jackson escalated the conflict, starting the First Seminole War and instigating a fight with Spain in the southeastern borderlands. Spain ceded Florida to the United States under the terms of the Adams–Onís Treaty of 1819, extending slavery and invigorating the cotton economy. The Seminole Wars became America's longest-running and most expensive military commitment until the Civil War and a preview of a Manifest Destiny argument for the expansion of a continental empire. And it was relentless. The Third Seminole War did not end until 1858, more than forty years after the destruction of Negro Fort.