

Forced founders essay sample

[Sociology](#), [Slavery](#)



In *Forced Founders* by Woody Holton, Holton argues that Indian and slave rebellions were the primary force in the Independence movement in Virginia. It is commonly believed that the land-owning gentry class prompted the revolution in Virginia. Nevertheless, Holton shows how slaves, American Indians, and debtors may have actually played a much greater part in the Independence movement than popular history suggests. Holton's contention is that class conflict acted as a powerful catalyst in the revolutionary movement as the wealthy land owners such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were forced into joining the revolution on account of controlling the Indian rebellions on the Western front and the slave rebels at home.

The Native American tribes in the Western frontier played a major role in the Virginia revolutionary movement. The elite Virginian gentry's desire for Western Native American lands rapidly grew in the mid-eighteenth century. The wealthy Virginians made many attempts to attain these lands and the Native Americans resisted hard to defend what their land. Furthermore, the British government was more accommodating to the Natives than the Virginians wished. Parliament was careful not to incense native tribes for fear of a costly war or rebellion. A British official exclaimed that Indian rebellions (specifically Pontiac's Rebellion) were "expensive and destructive to his Majesty's Subjects." For example, in October 1768, the British imposed the Treaty of Hard Labor, which resulted in the Cherokee Indians retaining land that Virginian Thomas Jefferson had claimed. Two more major British treaties enraged the Virginia land speculators. The treaty of Easton in 1758 decreed all lands west of the Appalachian Mountains to the Indians.

This treaty caused problems for many speculators and farming companies. However, the major calamity to the Virginian gentry was the Proclamation of 1763. Although the proclamation did little to stop settlers from crossing the proclaimed boundary, it did, however, make it impossible for land speculators to sell land that they had claimed. For, one could only legally sell land without the proper title to it. Therefore, since they could not attain a title, they were unable to profit off such lands. Therefore, conflict was inevitable between the gentry and the Indian nations. Many rebellions took place in the years leading up to 1775. Furthermore, many anti-British leagues were forming as the Indian tribes were uniting. In fact Holton writes that if the Cherokees, Creeks, and Choctaws joined the anti-British coalition then ? the new league would be more powerful than any that Anglo Americans had ever faced.

In 1774, the Virginians outrage reached its zenith. In February 1774, the Privy Council abolished land grants. In April, the council banned grants to American veterans. Lastly, in June, the council agreed to continue enforcing the 1763 Proclamation and passed the Quebec Act. Therefore, one can deduce that a clash of policy between Britain and Virginia helped propel Virginia into the revolutionary movement. The Native Americans are often seen as an uninvolved group in the history of American foreign policy, however Holton demonstrates how the Native Americans led by the Shawnees and anti-British league propelled the Virginians into the American revolutionary movement.

Another key but often understated contributor to the Virginia revolutionary movement was the slave rebels according to Holton. It is Holton's contention that in seeking their own freedom, black Virginians indirectly helped motivate white Virginians to declare Independence from Britain. In this way, Virginia slaves not only set a rebellious example to the Virginian elite, but also politically intervened in revolutionary politics. The most imposing threat to the gentry was Governor Dunmore. For in November 1775, Dunmore pledged to grant freedom to the slaves of Patriots if they vowed to fight for his anti-revolutionary cause. In addition to Dunmore's declaration, slave rebellions were becoming more and more commonplace as the black proportion in Virginia grew. Holton cites many occasions when black Virginians rebelled against the elite class. These slave revolts were widespread during the Seven Years' War (1754-1763) and beyond. In the 1770s, noble Virginian's fears of revolt increased.

Rumors stating that Parliament may use slave uprisings as a means to suppress the Revolution were rampant. In addition, James Madison reported that a slave emancipation bill had been initiated in Parliament in 1775. As slave rebellions increased both in frequency and strategic intelligence, the Virginian slave owners believed what they were facing was not just a few scattered outbreaks but a coordinated attack. Indeed, Governor Dunmore was still a major threat to the Patriots regime in 1775. For, Dunmore is believed to have stolen fifteen half-barrels of gunpowder from Williamsburg on April 21, 1775. It is believed that Dunmore did so in order to weaken the White Virginian's defense against a slave revolt and also to weaken the Patriots' overall capabilities.

In addition, Dunmore and Massachusetts governor, Thomas Gage, attempted to seize ammunitions in Concord. Dunmore's actions incensed Patriots all across the colony. In fact, it even pushed two members of the colony's powerful Executive Council from the loyalist to the patriot camp. Historians often underestimate the political power that slaves had in the pre-American colony, however Holton clearly demonstrates how slave revolts as well as Dunmore's tactics were major factors in compelling the Virginians into the American Revolution.

After 1960, common beliefs in American history began to evolve. It was once thought that slaves and American Indians were pawns, controlled by the gentry without backlash. However, Woody Holton reveals that these once accepted truths are not so. In *Forced Founders*, Holton shows that Native Americans and rebel slaves had as much political influence as the British Parliament. Indeed, the wealthy landowners had constant anxiety over slave revolts and warring Indian tribes. Holton proves that [both Indians and slaves] had the ability to pull strings and they, powerfully influenced imperial politics. Indeed the Patriots of the American colony had many gripes with Great Britain, however it is impossible to ignore the external factors that influenced America to go to war with Britain. Slave rebels and Indian tribes were intensely involved in the events that led America to declaring its Independence.