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The Decision to Hire German Troops in the War of American Independence

Reactions in Britain and North America, 1774–1776

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ABSTRACT In the 1770s and 1780s as many as 40,000 German soldiers were hired to defend British imperial interests on four continents. The vast majority—at least 30,000—saw service in America. This article focuses on British and American public reactions to the plan in the period between 1774, when rumors about the intended use of foreign troops first emerged, and the summer of 1776, after the first contingents of German troops had arrived in North America but before military encounters with the colonists had taken place. In Britain, the reliance on forces from outside the empire in a conflict believed to be about British liberties provoked strong opposition. Critics used the hire of "barbarians" as evidence of a sinister plot to deprive Englishmen of their liberties. In America, news of the plan to hire Germans gave radicals an effective tool in their efforts to unite the colonists against the British. An analysis of these public debates sheds light on conflicting perceptions of Britishness and "foreignness" during the Revolutionary period.

In the 1770s and 1780s as many as 40,000 German soldiers were hired to defend British imperial interests on four continents: in America, on Gibraltar and Minorca (Port Mahon), in India, and in South Africa.[1] The vast

1. Ernst von dem Knesebeck, *Geschichte der churhannoverschen Truppen in Gibraltar, Minorca und Ostindien* (Hanover, 1845); Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, "German Voices from India: Officers of the Hanoverian Regiments in East India Company Service," *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 32, no. 2 (August 2009): 189–211; Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *German Soldiers in Colonial India* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2014).

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majority—at least 30,000—saw service in America.[2] Of those, around 19,000 were sent to the colonies in 1776. Without these Germans, British efforts to defeat the American rebels would most likely have ended in the war's early stages.[3] In 1778 and 1779 one-third of the British army's strength in North America consisted of German auxiliaries; two years later, the proportion reached 37 percent.[4] Contrary to Lord North's prediction in 1776 that their employment would lead to a speedy resolution of the conflict, the steady supply of Germans kept the war going for another six years.

The employment of thousands of German troops not only allowed Britain to carry on a prolonged war, it also deepened divisions within the British nation and empire. In Britain the reliance on forces from outside the country in a conflict believed to be about British liberties provoked strong opposition. Critics used the hiring of "barbarians" as evidence of a sinister plot to deprive Englishmen of their liberties. In America news of the plan to hire Germans gave radicals an effective tool in their efforts to unite the colonists against the British. Long before the first auxiliary troops set foot on American soil, reports of Britain's intentions encouraged calls for independence. When copies of the first German treaties, signed in January 1776, reached the colonies in late May of that year, the presumably imminent arrival of an army of foreigners in British service had already become one of the most powerful weapons in the hands of Americans calling for a complete separation.

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2. The oft-cited number of 30,000 German subsidy troops who fought on the British side in North America dates to August Ludwig von Schlözer's estimates in "Berechnung des Verlusts deutscher Truppen bei dem Amerikanischen Kriege," *Stats-Anzeigen* 6 (1784): 521–22. See also Edward J. Lowell, *The Hessians and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War* (1884; repr., Williamstown, Mass.: Corner House, 1975), 299–300. Recent studies suggest that the number may have been significantly higher. For example, Hagen Seehase estimates that the number of troops from Hessen was between 20,000 and 25,000, instead of the 17,000 or so listed by Schlözer. See Seehase, "Die hessischen Truppen im Amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg," *Zeitschrift des Vereins fur hessische Geschichte und Landeskunde* 103 (1998): 167. Daniel Krebs puts the total number of Germans in British service at close to 38,000, including troops who remained in Europe. See Krebs, *A Generous and Merciful Enemy: Life for German Prisoners of War during the American Revolution* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 24.

3. Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (New York: Basic Books, 2007), 592.

4. Rodney Atwood, *The Hessians: Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 257. See also Stephen Conway, "The British Army, 'Military Europe,' and the American War of Independence," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (January 2010): 78.

The scholarship on the so-called Hessians is considerable.[5] Much of it, however, is limited to the troops from one particular territory, concerned primarily with military matters, focused on one campaign or battle, or related to genealogical issues.[6] More general discussions of the German subsidy troops over the course of the entire war for the most part date to the nineteenth century.[7] Moreover, despite the increasingly common use of the Atlantic world as a framework for the study of the War of American Independence, the significance of Britain's reliance on thousands of German troops in its efforts to preserve the empire remains overlooked. Similarly, a growing body of scholarship on eighteenth-century Britishness, including especially Linda Colley's work, as well as on the Europeanness of the British, best represented in the work of Stephen Conway, has drawn attention

5. The term *Hessian,* used to refer to *all* German troops hired by Britain during the American Revolutionary War, is misleading. Only around 75 percent of the German troops were hired out by Hessen-Kassel and Hessen-Hanau. Moreover, owing to the general preference of foreign recruits ("Ausländer"), as opposed to natives ("Landeskinder"), an estimated 20 percent of men in Hessian regiments were not from Hessen. See Seehase, "Die hessischen Truppen," 166.

6. Representative studies include Ernst Kipping, *The Hessian View of America, 1776–1783* (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1971); Atwood, *The Hessians;* Jean-Pierre Wilhelmy, *German Mercenaries in Canada* (Beloeil, Q.C.: Maison des Mots, 1985); Melodie Andrews, "'Myrmidons from Abroad': The Role of the German Mercenary in the Coming of American Independence" (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1986); Charles Ingrao, *The Hessian Mercenary State: Ideas, Institutions, and Reform under Frederick II, 1760–1785* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Inge Auerbach, *Die Hessen in Amerika, 1776–1783* (Darmstadt: Hessische Historische Kommission Darmstadt, 1996); Christoph Mauch, "Images of America—Political Myths—Historiography: 'Hessians' in the War of Independence," *Amerikastudien/American Studies: A Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Winter 2003): 411–23; David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Stephan Huck, *Soldaten gegen Nordamerika: Lebenswelten Braunschweiger Subsidientruppen im amerikanischen Unabhängigkeitskrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2011); Krebs, *A Generous and Merciful Enemy.* A wealth of mostly, but not exclusively, genealogical information on the "Hessians" can be found in *The Hessians: Journal of the Johannes Schwalm Historical Association.*

7. Nineteenth-century studies, which remain valuable if not unproblematic sources, include Lowell, *The Hessians*; Friedrich Kapp, *Der Soldatenhandel deutscher Fürsten nach Amerika* (Berlin: Franz Duncker, 1864); Max von Eelking, *The German Allied Troops in the North American War of Independence, 1776–1783,* trans. Joseph G. Rosengarten (Albany, N.Y.: Joel Munsell & Sons, 1893); Joseph G. Rosengarten, "A Defense of the Hessians," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 23, no. 2 (July 1899): 157–83.

to the ways in which the British perceived themselves and others during the late eighteenth century.[8] Conway's work has been especially important in identifying the international character of the British military during the eighteenth century. Little has been written, however, about public reactions to the German subsidy treaties in Britain, particularly the debates carried out in the British press. Occasional references to the issue are, with rare exceptions, brief and uncritical; they generally assume that the hiring of foreign troops was a common, and therefore largely uncontested, practice.[9] Historians have paid even less attention to popular American responses to the king's plan to hire German troops in the war against them. Although some scholars of the Declaration of Independence acknowledge the link between the treaties and independence, they generally do not explain, and appreciate, the significance of this connection.[10]

This article aims to help fill a gap in the scholarship on the Revolution generally, and the German auxiliaries specifically, by exploring the political effect of the king's decision to use German troops in the War of American Independence in Britain and in the American colonies. It focuses on public reactions to the plan in the period between 1774, when rumors about the intended use of foreign troops first emerged, and the summer of 1776, after the first contingents of German troops had arrived in North America but before military encounters with the colonists had taken place. An analysis of the debates in Britain in particular sheds light on conflicting perceptions

8. Linda Colley, "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (October 1992): 309–29; Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); Conway, "The British Army;" Stephen Conway, *The British Isles and the War of American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

9. Among the few studies that pay more than cursory attention to the debates in Parliament are Lowell, *The Hessians,* chap. 3; Conway, *The British Isles,* 150–65; Simms, *Three Victories,* 592–96; Andrews, "'Myrmidons from Abroad.'"

10. American reactions, based only on the *Virginia Gazette,* are discussed in Auerbach, *Die Hessen,* 91–123. Studies that suggest a causal relationship between the treaties and independence without further explanation include Lowell, *The Hessians,* 36; Lyman H. Butterfield, "Psychological Warfare in 1776: The Jefferson-Franklin Plan to Cause Hessian Desertions," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 94, no. 3 (June 20, 1950) (Studies of Historical Documents in the Library of the American Philosophical Society): 234; John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), 476–77; Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York: Knopf, 1997).

of Britishness and "foreignness" during the revolutionary period. In addition, an examination of American reactions to the plan before German troops had actually set foot on American soil contributes to our understanding of the ways in which American radicals managed to convince a majority of colonists to support their agenda. They presented the king's plan not only as the ultimate act of aggression against them, but also as an irrefutable sign that he no longer regarded them as his subjects and himself as their rightful sovereign. An examination of the debates surrounding the decision to employ foreign auxiliaries against British subjects, including those carried out in the British Parliament, the Continental Congress, and the British and American press, deepens our understanding of the growing political divisions within Britain and between Britain and its colonies in the crucial period leading up to Independence.

The king's decision in 1775 to hire foreign troops was consistent with previous British military policy. Britain had fought all its eighteenth century wars with the help of foreign auxiliaries. German troops were employed on multiple occasions, to help defend British interests in Britain and on the Continent, including, most recently, the Seven Years' War.[11] The presence of foreigners in British ranks was also nothing unusual; during the Seven Years' War, as much as 10 percent of the British army was identified as foreigners.[12] Although the practice of using foreign troops was common among most European powers, it was not without its critics. British proponents of the practice saw the availability of a large body of reliable and well-trained troops that could be hired in times of need as a significant asset. Detractors, on the other hand, charged that the practice endangered British sovereignty, not least because it had the potential to entangle Britain in foreign wars. Yet, given Britain's shortage of available native manpower as well as its traditional opposition to a large standing army, the use of foreign troops to protect British interests was unavoidable if Britain hoped to be a major player in European affairs. Generally, Britons regarded German troops as dependable allies in Britain's frequent wars against its traditional

11. See J. A. Houlding, *Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715–1795* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1981), 323n1; John Childs, "The Army and the State in Britain and Germany in the Eighteenth Century," in John Brewer and Eckhart Hellmuth, eds., *Rethinking Leviathan: The Eighteenth Century State in Britain and Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 63–64; Atwood, *The Hessians,* 14–20.

12. Stephen Conway, *War, State, and Society in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 60.

enemy, France, not least because they were Protestant.[13] Although the practice was frequently attacked, it was grudgingly accepted in times of crisis.

The decision in 1775 to hire thousands of Germans in British service triggered debates about the employment of foreign troops that were unprecedented in their divisiveness. These debates reveal competing, and to some extent paradoxical, notions of Britishness and "foreignness" in Britain. In this regard, they mark a period of transition in the development of British nationalism.[14] On the one hand, the king's decision to rely on German auxiliaries to defend his empire was out of step with the sense of Britishness that was emerging during the latter part of the eighteenth century. In previous conflicts, German troops had been used to protect British interests from foreign threats, including especially militant Catholicism. This time, they were hired to fight against British subjects within the British Empire in a war that divided the country as never before.[15] Beginning in 1775, critics began to depict the German troops as savage and tyrannical, regardless of their Protestantism. They questioned the loyalty of "unfree" troops in British service in a war against fellow British subjects. The king was holding on to a practice that, once tolerated, had become disreputable. It was cowardly, dangerous, and unpatriotic. It was incompatible with British nationalism.

On the other hand, the king's decision to treat the Americans like a foreign enemy against whom a foreign army could be employed reflects a perception of the colonists as outsiders, as an "Other" against whom Britons could define themselves. In this regard, his plan was consistent with the forging of Britain as a nation, as it is indicative of an increasingly narrow understanding of Britishness that excluded British subjects who resided in its colonies. The opposition, in contrast, insisted that the Americans were "fellow subjects," entitled to the same rights and privileges as the king's subjects in Britain. They warned that the employment of a foreign army in what they saw as a civil war was destructive to Britain and all it stood for, including Protestantism, prosperity, and liberty.

Soon after the first shots were exchanged between Americans and British soldiers in April 1775, it was clear that Britain's troops in North America would be an unusually diverse group. At that time, Britain had about 8,000

13. Stephen Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Similarities, Connections, Identities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 57–60; Colley, *Britons,* esp. chap. 1.

14. For a discussion of the usefulness of this term, see Colley, *Britons,* 5.

15. Simms, *Three Victories,* 593.

men stationed in its American colonies.[16] Of these, 3,000 men were in Boston, under the command of General Thomas Gage. This, the British government suspected, fell far short of the estimated 20,000 to 25,000 men required to defeat Washington's army. A number of reasons, including lukewarm support among Britons for the war in America, the king's reluctance to create new regiments at home, and the time required to recruit native troops, help explain why the king decided not to rely on the recruitment of troops in Britain.[17] The number of men that could be raised from within other parts of the empire, including Scottish Highlanders, Irish Catholics, Canadian Provincials, Native Americans, and slaves, did not suffice to meet the demand.[18] Large numbers of Protestant German troops, on the other hand, were readily available for hire. The king's decision to raise the necessary manpower by employing Germans was not a last resort, as the administration claimed. Rather, it was the result of careful consideration. Under the circumstances, it was "probably the best way to field a combat-ready army" quickly.[19]

It was not until after the battle of Bunker Hill in June 1775 that George III considered in earnest entering into subsidy agreements with foreign powers. Given Britain's long history of relying on auxiliary troops, the king's decision to use them in this crisis was hardly surprising. France certainly believed that its rival would employ foreign troops in its war against the Americans. In the summer of 1775 the French representative in Kassel, the Comte de Grais, reported to the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, that the landgrave of Hessen-Kassel was secretly preparing to negotiate a subsidy agreement with Britain. In fact, de Grais believed that

16. Edward Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926), 2; Sylvia Frey, *The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975), 6. Charts that show the changing distribution of British soldiers throughout the empire from 1726 to 1776 are in Houlding, *Fit for Service,* 410–13.

17. For a discussion of the king's decision to hire Germans, see Stephen Conway, "The Use of German Soldiers by the British State during the War of American Independence," in Stephen Conway and Rafael Torres Sánchez, eds., *The Spending of States: Military Expenditure during the Long Eighteenth Century: Patterns, Organisation, and Consequences, 1650–1850* (Saarbrücken, Germany: VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, 2011), 83–107; quote on 101.

18. For the diversity of the British army during this period, see Conway, "The British Army," 69–100.

19. Conway, "The Use of German Soldiers," 107. See also Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army,* chap. 3; Frey, *The British Soldier in America,* 3–10.

as early as winter 1774, negotiations between the two powers had already taken place. He speculated that these talks had failed because of the high cost of the troops and because of the landgrave's reluctance to permit the use of his men outside Europe.[20] By late August, however, de Grais was convinced that Hessen-Kassel had agreed to send twelve thousand troops into British service.[21] The tone and contents of de Grais's letters reflect the frantic efforts by France to obtain reliable information about these alarming developments. At that time, France supported the American rebels not so much because it sympathized with their cause, but because it welcomed any developments that had the potential to weaken Britain. An injury to Britain, such as the destabilization of its colonial foundation, amounted to a benefit to France. It was in its own interest to prevent Britain from assembling a military force large enough to put down the American rebellion.

To accomplish this end, France actually tried to prevent the conclusion of a British-Hessian subsidy agreement by hiring the troops itself. In June 1775 de Grais suggested to Vergennes that France negotiate a subsidy treaty with Hessen-Kassel.[22] Vergennes, always eager for a chance to injure Britain, welcomed a plan that would deprive Britain of an opportunity to augment its army. At the same time, such an agreement promised to create closer ties between France and Hessen-Kassel, a next-door neighbor to the electorate of Hanover, a German territory within the Holy Roman Empire that was ruled by the British king. Negotiations went on into the fall. In the end, the high cost of the Hessians prevented the two sides from reaching an agreement. In December, Vergennes ordered de Grais to withdraw from the negotiations, essentially ceding the field to Britain.[23] By that time France was already actively undermining Britain's efforts to put down the rebellion by supplying the Americans with weapons and money.

Hessen-Kassel eventually became Britain's largest supplier of foreign

20. Comte de Grais to Comte de Vergennes, Cassel, July 19, 1775, Archives des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, Correspondence Politique—Hesse-Cassel 14 (1775–1776, Le Comte de Grais) (hereafter cited as AAE, CP, HC 14). See also Ingrao, *The Hessian Mercenary State*, 136. It is important to note that de Grais based this claim on hearsay. So far, I have not been able to locate evidence that supports his claim that negotiations took place in the winter of 1774.

21. Comte de Grais to Comte de Vergennes, Cassel, June 23, July 7, July 19, and August 25, 1775, AAE, CP, HC 14.

22. Ludolf Pelizaeus, "Zwei unbekannte französiche Subsidienvertragsprojekte mit Hessen-Kassel 1775 und 1796," *Zeitschrift des Vereins für hessische Geschichte* 105 (2000): 96–97.

23. Ibid., 97.

troops in the war. But the German territory was not the first stop in the king's search for auxiliary forces. First he turned to Hanover for assistance. The German territory had been ruled in personal union with Britain since 1714, when George I, elector of Hanover and great-grandfather of King George III, had ascended to the British throne. The king's role as elector of Hanover allowed him to offer "his" Hanoverian subjects to Parliament for service in the British army. He intended to send around 4,300 of them to the strategically important Mediterranean posts of Gibraltar and Port Mahon (Minorca) so that British troops stationed there could be used to "augment our Forces employed in subduing the unnatural Rebellion of a Part of our North American Colonies.[24]

British newspapers began to report rumors about the administration's plan to hire foreign mercenaries, as they called them, in the summer of 1775. The king did not inform Parliament and the public about his decision to use Hessian and Hanoverian troops, however, until October 1775, when the latter were already on their way to the Mediterranean. For the most part, Parliament was also kept in the dark about negotiations for a loan of troops from another foreign power, Russia. Since 1741 Britain had regularly concluded defensive agreements and subsidy treaties with Russia.[25] In 1775 Britain had reason to believe that Russia had more than enough men available to meet its demand. Moreover, the Russian troops had a good reputation as a military force. Major General Henry Clinton, the future commander of the British army in America, thought very highly of them. In 1774 he had visited the Balkans to inspect the Russian army engaged in the war against the Turks.[26] He also thought that troops that faced a language barrier in British North America were less likely to desert. The chances that the Russian troops would encounter Russian-speaking colonists were virtually nonexistent, as was the possibility that the Russian

24. George III to Lord North, August 4, 1775, in George III, *The Correspondence of King George the Third with Lord North from 1768 to 1783,* ed. W. Bodham Donne, 2 vols. (London: J. Murray, 1867), 1:259–60; Instructions from Suffolk to Faucitt, included in a letter from Suffolk to Lords of Admiralty and Lord Barrington, August 11, 1775, Great Britain, State Papers, Foreign Correspondence, August 1775–April 1776, Public Record Office SP81/181, accessed on microfilm, DLAR film 726, reel 1. Wilhelmy, *German Mercenaries,* 57; Von dem Knesebeck, *Geschichte der churhannoverschen Truppen,* 10.

25. Auerbach, *Die Hessen,* 27.

26. William B. Willcox, introduction to Sir Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaign, 1775–1782,* ed. William B. Willcox (1954; repr., Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1971), xv–xvi.

troops could speak any of the languages common in North America, including English, German, and French. General Clinton explicitly preferred the use of Russians over the use of Germans because Russians "have no language but their own; they cannot desert."[27]

In any case, it would certainly be most efficient to negotiate one subsidy agreement with one foreign power for the entirety of the desired troops, rather than assembling the army by working out separate treaties with several rulers. In September 1775 King George III asked the czarina for 20,000 men in exchange either for a pledge of mutual defense or for subsidy payments, depending on her demands.[28] The negotiations, conducted between Nikita Panin, the Russian foreign minister, and Sir Robert Gunning, the British minister to Russia, were held in St. Petersburg, a circumstance that made it difficult for the British government as well as Russian representatives in London to gain reliable information about their progress. In early November, when the topic was first broached in Parliament, there remained confusion about whether the Russians would be sent to America or stationed in Great Britain.[29] By the time of these debates, the issue was moot. Catherine the Great had already rejected the request.[30] By the end of the year, the French foreign minister Vergennes, who was watching the negotiations closely, was certain, and relieved, that "there would never be a Russian in America."[31]

British efforts to hire the so-called Scots Brigade from the United Provinces of the Netherlands also failed; the United Provinces' insistence that their service be restricted to Europe rendered the offer unacceptable to Britain.[32] Both Russia and the Provinces signaled with their negative responses

27. Cited in Atwood, *The Hessians,* 24.

28. For a detailed discussion of the British-Russian negotiations, in part based on Russian archival sources, see Auerbach, *Die Hessen,* 25–65. See also Nikolai N. Bolkhovitinov, *Russia and the American Revolution,* trans. C. Jay Smith (Tallahassee: Diplomatic Press, 1976), 6–11.

29. For references to Russians in the fall of 1775, see R. C. Simmons and P. D. G. Thomas, eds., *Proceedings and Debates of the British Parliaments Respecting North America, 1754–1783* (White Plains, N.Y.: Kraus International, 1987) (hereafter cited as *Proceedings and Debates*), 6:148, 150, 172, 174, 222.

30. George III to Lord North, November 3, 1775, in George III, *The Correspondence of King George,* 1:282.

31. Vergennes to Marquis de Juigné, December 6, 1775, quoted in G. Lefèvre-Pontalis, "Un Projet de conquête du Japon: Par l'Angleterre et la Russie en 1776," *Annales de l'Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques* 4 (1889): 438 ("qu'il ne passera pas un Russe en Amérique").

32. A brief summary of the debates surrounding the request in the Provinces was published in [Jan Waagenar], *Vaderlandsche Historie, vervattende de Geschiedenis-*

to the king's request their refusal to enter into alliances with Britain. By the fall of 1775, it was evident that Britain was largely isolated in its conflict with its American subjects.

Critics of the administration in Britain saw Russia's rejection as a blessing. By the fall of 1775, a growing faction in Parliament was vigorously challenging Lord North's increasingly aggressive policies regarding the Americans. The prospect of sending Russian troops to America provided them with powerful ammunition in their attacks on the administration. Even some supporters of North regarded the employment of Russians as unwise, if not outright dangerous. For example, critics believed that France would never have tolerated the shipment of thousands of Russians to America.[33] The engagement of Russians, they warned, guaranteed the entry of France into the war. Moreover, Russians were reputed to be a cruel und untrustworthy people. Edward Gibbon, a reliable supporter of Lord North, referred to them as a "body of barbarians," and Temple Luttrell, a member of the opposition, warned in the House of Commons of "a compact" between the "civilized Britons" and "the barbarians of Russia."[34] Others suspected that Russia harbored colonial ambitions and that Russians would cheerfully take advantage of free passage to North America, only to desert en masse and "to take possession of it themselves, in virtue of that law of conquest, acknowledged by all freebooters."[35] William and Richard Burke, writing under the pseudonym "Valens," abhorred "the idea that Slaves should ever become the Masters of Freemen; or that Russian Ferocity should triumph over English Valour in any Part of the World."[36]

In the eighteenth century the "unfree" with whom Britons contrasted their history and character most consistently were Catholics.[37] In 1775 the

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sen der Vereenigde Nederlanden, uit egte Gedenkstukken onpartydig Zamengesteld, vol. 5 (Amsterdam, 1781), 28–30. See also Jan W. S. Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 19–21.

33. Earl of Shelburne, November 10, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:226.

34. Edward Gibbon to John Holroyd, October 14, 1775, in Edward Gibbon, *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon, Esq.* (London: B. Blake, 1837), 270; Temple Luttrell, November 27, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:298.

35. Duke of Richmond, November 10, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:222.

36. *London Evening Post,* September 28–30, 1775; [Richard Burke], *The Letters of Valens (Which Originally Appeared in the London Evening Post), with Corrections, Explanatory Notes, and a Preface by the Author* (London, 1777), 13.

37. Colley, "Britishness and Otherness," 309–29; Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 9; Gerald Newman, *The Rise*

prospect of engaging thousands of these "unfree" men to defend the interests of Britain triggered vocal opposition. Critics saw the employment of Catholics, including Canadians and Irish troops, against the Americans as an assault on Protestantism and, therefore, as detrimental to Britain.[38] In the mid-1770s, however, critics of the plan made few distinctions among Catholics, Russians, Native Americans, slaves, and Germans. They were all regarded as "unfree," especially when compared to Britons. Labels such as *Catholic, savage, barbarian,* and *foreign* often appeared in one breath, merging several attributes that were deemed suspect, dangerous, and, more specifically, un- or anti-British. Previously, criticism of the employment of German troops had focused on the foreign entanglements that could result from it. Their loyalty to what were regarded as essentially British principles had not been a matter of dispute, primarily because they were reliable Protestant allies in the struggle against Britain's Catholic enemies. In this war, however, they would be facing British subjects. Critics warned that, as the subjects of despotic governments, the Germans could hardly be expected to fight for the preservation of liberty. On the contrary; they were bound to destroy it. The anti-North press seized the plan as further evidence for the ministry's sinister intentions. Previously moderate newspapers, appalled by North's decision to use foreign troops against British subjects, joined in the attacks on the ministry. The *Morning Chronicle,* for example, warned that Britons "now truckle to tyrants for aid, and meanly implore the interposition of European Barbarians."[39] It was "HORRIBLE to relate!" 'Regulus' exclaimed in the *London Evening News* in the fall of 1775: Great Britain invoked "the Aid of *Papists, Negroes, Savages, Russians, Hessians,* and *Hanoverians,* against the natural, constitutional, and chartered Rights of our American Brethren."[40] Critics of the administration found it dangerous, and disgraceful, that free Britons were relying on "barbarians" to fight a war against fellow British subjects who, they argued, were defending their liberties. In 1775 concerns that the use of foreign troops compromised Britain's

of English Nationalism: A Cultural History, 1740–1830 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987); Stephen Conway, "From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, circa 1739–1783," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 75–77; Colley, *Britons,* esp. chap. 1.

38. Lord Shelburne, October 26, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:86. For similar warnings, see *London Evening Post,* November 7–9, 1775.

39. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* October 9, 1775. See also Solomon Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press, 1775–1783* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1967), 60–61.

40. *London Evening News,* October 14–17, 1775; emphasis in original.

sovereignty did not disappear, as the debates about the employment of Hanoverians show. The difference, however, between liberty-loving Britons, and others who were supposedly indifferent about liberty and therefore prepared and willing to participate in its destruction, emerged as the central theme in British debates over the use of foreign troops, even before negotiations with the German rulers had officially commenced. Ironically, as the hiring of thousands of Germans contributed to the Europeanness of the British armed forces, it reinforced British ideas about themselves as a particularly free and enlightened people.

In October 1775 the king informed Parliament of his intention to "put a speedy End to these Disorders by the most decisive Exertions." Almost in passing, the king also reported that he had received "the most friendly Offers of Foreign Assistance" and that he had already sent electoral troops to Gibraltar and Port Mahon.[41] This was his first public mention of his decision to use foreign auxiliaries in the war against the Americans. Although rumors about the use of foreign troops had been circulating for months, the administration had not included Parliament in the deliberations, nor had it informed the public about its intentions. Instead, the king had waited to announce the decision after his proclamation of rebellion and sedition had been issued, and after the actions of the colonists had shown that they "now openly avow their Revolt, Hostility, and Rebellion." The king's timing of the announcement suggests that that he was anticipating serious objections to the employment of foreign troops against the Americans. He presented himself at the time as a benevolent ruler whose sincere and patient efforts to bring about reconciliation and avoid war had failed because of the traitorous actions of a few rebels who had succeeded in deluding the American people. It was evident that only the use of force could return the colonists to a state of obedience. The successful execution of one decisive military campaign could put down the rebellion. Such a campaign required a large military force that, owing to the insufficient manpower available in Britain, had to be augmented with foreign auxiliaries. The king presented his decision to employ foreign troops as a necessary measure if Britain hoped to keep the rebellious colonies within the empire. There was no doubt that coercion had become a settled policy.

In November 1775 Britain officially began negotiations with the rulers of several small German territories within the Holy Roman Empire. The

41. George III, October 26, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:69.

empire consisted of hundreds of separate sovereignties, ranging from a few large territories to numerous tiny states. Many of them did not generate sufficient revenue because of their small size and absence of marketable resources. Their rulers found the hiring out of their troops to be a lucrative business.[42] Other Europeans also used the "trade in soldiers" as an acceptable source of revenue. German rulers were particularly active in the trade, however, and ultimately only Germans agreed to make troops available in the struggle against the American rebels.

On January 9, 1776, the Duke of Braunschweig formally agreed to provide 4,300 men. Reinforcements and replacements over the course of the war eventually resulted in a total of at least 5,000 troops from Braunschweig in British service. By the end of December, a treaty had also been drafted with the Landgrave of Hessen-Kassel. A final version, dated January 15, 1776, stipulated that he would supply Britain with 12,394 troops in exchange for subsidy payments. The total number of troops hired out by the landgrave from 1776 to 1783 was between 20,000 and 25,000.[43] The third treaty was signed with Hessen-Hanau, which agreed to hire out 2,422 men. Over the next two years, Britain concluded additional treaties with the German states of Waldeck, Ansbach-Bayreuth, and Anhalt-Zerbst for a combined 4,738 troops.[44] The troops' service was restricted to Europe and North America (they could not, for example, be sent to the West Indies). It was the first time that German auxiliary forces would serve outside Europe.

Immediately after the king's speech in October, Whig critics in Parliament as well as anti-North newspapers seized on the plan to enlarge the army with foreigners in order to attack, often with significant hyperbole, what they saw as misguided and high-handed policies by the government. The London press, already overwhelmingly critical of Lord North's policies, dominated the public debate about the use of foreign troops virtually unchallenged. During this period, the opinions, facts, and rumors about the foreign troops that filled the London papers, and were copied by the provincial press, were distinctly hostile to the ministry's coercive policies toward

42. For a history of Hessian subsidy treaties, see Peter K. Taylor, *Indentured to Liberty: Peasant Life and the Hessian Military State, 1688–1815* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 21–26.

43. Seehase, "Die hessischen Truppen," 167. For the broad acceptance of the mercenary trade in Hessen-Kassel, see Charles Ingrao, "'Barbarous Strangers': Hessian State and Society during the American Revolution," *American Historical Review* 87, no. 4 (October 1982): 954–76.

44. Lowell, *The Hessians,* 14–26. For the negotiations with Hessen-Kassel, see Atwood, *The Hessians,* 25–28.

the Americans. Virtually unrestrained by censorship laws, editors were largely free to print what they wanted to say about the plan to send foreign troops to America.[45] Although the government aimed to influence public opinion in favor of war, the pro-North press rarely offered explicit support for the employment of foreign troops against the Americans. Instead, it expressed its backing of the administration's plan implicitly by printing loyal addresses, speeches, and letters that supported coercive governmental policies generally, and by keeping critical items out of their pages. As a result, the public debate in the press about the use of foreign troops was heavily biased toward the views of the opposition.[46]

The Hanoverians became the critics' first focus of attack. They did not serve in North America, and they were not part of the auxiliary forces. Their employment to support—if only indirectly—the war against the Americans, however, sparked vigorous opposition in Britain.

Criticism of the use of Hanoverians was as old as the practice of enlisting them in British service. Ever since the first Hanoverian king ascended to the throne of Britain, there had been criticism of Britain's relationship with Hanover, including the use of Hanoverians in previous conflicts. Both George I and George II were repeatedly accused of taking Hanoverian troops into British pay to protect Hanoverian, and not British, interests. George III had never been to Hanover, and even though he retained close connections to German society and politics, he did not show the kind of attachment that the earlier Hanoverian kings had displayed.[47] His use of Hanoverian troops, however, revived old arguments that warned of the introduction of tyranny into Britain. As they had in 1715, when Hanoverians fought on British soil, in 1742, when they had fought alongside British troops on the Continent, and again in 1756, when thousands of Hanoverians were taken to Britain in anticipation of a French invasion, critics in 1775 warned that the employment of the Hanoverians endangered Britain's

45. Lutnick, *The American Revolution and the British Press,* 5.

46. For the influence of the press during this period, see ibid.; Dora Mae Clark, *British Opinion and the American Revolution* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966); Hannah Barker, *Newspapers, Politics, and Public Opinion in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

47. Simms, *Three Victories,* 254–56; Eliga Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 35–38; Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe,* 54–60. For the king's role as Elector of Hanover, see Jeremy Black, *George III: America's Last King* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), chap. 15.

sovereignty.[48] Despite the king's largely indifferent attitude toward Hanover, the plan seemed to prove that the German influence continued to threaten the interests of Britain. Sir Edward Newenham, member of the Irish Parliament and ardent supporter of the American cause, argued vigorously against using them, in part because "German connections were always fatal to the true interests of Old England."[49]

In 1775 critics also objected to their employment because they saw it as an illegal measure: the king had failed to seek Parliament's approval before deciding to use them. They saw it as a violation of the Act of Settlement. That they were employed in an effort to put down the American rebellion only added to the perception that George III was abusing his power. The decision, in other words, served as evidence of the king's increasingly despotic character, already clearly evident in his rejection of the colonists' conciliatory gestures and his determination to go to war with his own subjects.

Although the employment of Hanoverians in British service in 1775 revived old debates about the potentially dangerous Hanoverian connection, they were far less divisive than the controversy that resulted from the planned use of a substantially greater number of German auxiliaries in a domestic war against British subjects. For one, the possibility that the German subsidy treaties that were concluded several months later could result in dangerous entanglements in European affairs was not a concern. Treaty clauses that promised protection by Britain in case one of the German states was attacked barely received attention; the possibility of an attack seemed small.[50] The legality of the treaties was also not a topic of debate since Lord North laid them before Parliament. A more important objection stemmed from the projected expenses. Even some proponents of using military force

48. For opposition to the employment of Hanoverian troops before 1775, see Nicholas Harding, "Hanover and British Republicanism," in Brendan Simms and Torsten Riotte, eds., *The Hanoverian Dimension in British History, 1714–1837* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 301–23. Efforts in Britain to evoke historical memories in the context of the imperial crisis, though without any mention of previous uses of German troops, are discussed in Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chap. 5.

49. The debate in the Irish Commons over plans to replace British troops in Ireland with Germans took place in November 1775. The speeches were summarized in several American newspapers in February and March 1776. For Newenham's speech, see *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet; or, the General Advertiser,* February 19, 1776.

50. The treaties were published in British newspapers. See, for example, *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* (London), February 27–29 and March 2–5, 1776.

against the Americans believed that the cost of engaging foreigners was simply too high.[51] The king, they argued, had chosen an excessively expensive method over more cost-effective means to augment the army, such as the establishment of a native militia. Most important, however, the contentious debates centered on the potentially devastating consequences of using tens of thousands of foreigners to fight against British subjects in a domestic conflict, ostensibly to preserve the empire.

Critics consistently described the hire of Germans as disastrous, predicting that it would contribute to the decline, rather than the preservation, of the empire. They warned, for example, that the German subsidy treaties would result in the entry of Britain's enemies in the conflict. That Britain did not have sufficient manpower to fight the rebellion was not only embarrassing; it was outright dangerous. "It is whispered," one newspaper reported, "that you think of hiring foreign Troops to subdue America. What is the first Comment on such a Thought? That you have not more than Men enough to guard these Islands; that you can spare no more. What a Hint to our Enemies!"[52] Britain could not even launch its first campaign without the assistance of foreigners. Critics claimed that such an obvious demonstration of weakness might turn "Domestick Quarrels" into an international war. They wondered, "with Horror," how Britain could possibly "resist the formidable Attack of powerful Enemies" when it was engaged in "fruitless Expeditions on the other Side of the World." The agreements might even inspire the Americans to enlist the assistance of France or Spain, Britain's traditional enemies that were only waiting for an opportunity to weaken the empire. Even Prussia, which had but recently been an ally, seemed sympathetic toward the Americans.[53] This would turn a bunch of rebels without a professional army and navy into a far more dangerous opponent. In the spring of 1776 Britain was fighting only against the rebels in North America. The treaties with the German princes could potentially result in the addition of several powerful European nations to the list of enemies.

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51. See, for example, *Considerations on the Alleged Necessity of Hiring Foreign Troops* (London, 1778). For objections to the treaties on the basis of projected expenses, see *Public Advertiser* (London), June 28, 1775; Governor Johnstone, October 26, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:110; Address to the King, March 5, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:430; *Middlesex Journal and Evening Advertiser* (London), March 5–7, 1776. For estimates of the charges for hiring the troops from Hessen-Kassel and Braunschweig in the initial treaties, see *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:402–3.

52. *Public Advertiser* (London), June 28, 1775.

53. Address to the King, March 5, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:428.

Moreover, that a mighty empire had to turn to small, impoverished German states for help in controlling its own subjects was humiliating. The ministry was "obliged to go about begging at the door of every petty Court and every venal State of Germany."[54] Regarding the treaties signed with Hessen-Kassel and Braunschweig, Lord John Cavendish remarked that "Britain was to be disgraced in the eyes of all Europe"; it was "in the most mortifying and humiliating manner" that the nation was "compelled to apply to two petty German states" for assistance.[55] One newspaper noted that the "treaty entered into with the Landgrave of Hesse Cassel is considered by some as the most shameful that ever disgraced the annals of England." The author predicted impeachment of the responsible parties.[56] The fact that a Hanoverian king was behind the treaties only increased suspicions of the administration's true intentions. Alderman Bull put it most bluntly when he warned, "Let not the historian be obliged to say that the Russian and the German slave was hired to subdue the sons of Englishmen and of freedom; and that in the reign of a Prince of Brunswick, every infamous attempt was made to extinguish that spirit which brought his ancestors to the throne."[57] Throughout the fall of 1775 and spring of 1776, the decision to hire German troops provided the opposition with plenty of ammunition to depict the administration's colonial policies as contrary to the interests of the entire nation.

There was, of course, the general fear of an army that could be used as a tool of oppression, whether it was augmented with British subjects or foreigners.[58] The opposition labeled *all* troops sent to America, whether British or not, mercenaries hired by a tyrannical government to pursue its selfish goals. The use of Germans, however, received special condemnation. In previous wars, foreign troops had been hired to defend British liberties. This time, critics claimed, they were "sent to subjugate . . . constitutional liberties [of British subjects] in another part of this vast empire."[59] Their use could only be explained with charges of conspiracy and corruption in the administration. After all, the need for foreign assistance showed that

54. Letter V, October 24, 1775, in [Burke], *Letters of Valens,* 38.

55. Lord John Cavendish, February 29, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:405.

56. *Chester Chronicle, or Commercial Intelligencer,* March 7, 1776.

57. Alderman Bull, March 1, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:414.

58. For British controversies related to military and naval mobilization in the 1770s, see Conway, *The British Isles,* esp. 150–65. For the seventeenth-century background, see Lois G. Schwoerer, *"No Standing Armies!" The Antiarmy Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).

59. Duke of Cumberland, March 5, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:436.

British men could not be compelled to aid schemes designed to take away the rights of their brethren. Foreigners had to be paid to do the job. Britons would not fight against Britons defending their liberty. They evidently "secretly abhor any Thing which wears the most distant Appearance of Slavery or arbitrary Power. They never will be brought to act with Alacrity, nor fight with Zeal in a Cause, which is as contrary to their current Opinions, as it is reluctant to Nature."[60] In fact, critics pointed out that the refusal of Englishmen to fight against liberty had ensured that the king's dominions had remained free. Unlike other nations, including France, Britain had been able to resist the temptation to include large numbers of foreigners into the ranks of its army. As the *St. James's Chronicle* explained, "It is from this invincible Propensity to Liberty, and this Abhorrence of Measures directly or indirectly subversive of it, that England has for almost a Century preserved her Liberties, in the Midst of a Standing Army, because that Army has been composed of Natives alone; and by the same Mode of Reasoning we may well presume, that all the other Nations of Europe have for the greatest Part lost theirs, because they have been compelled to surrender them, by Armies of foreign Mercenaries, hired on the Occasion, or kept in constant Pay."[61] In 1775 Britain was about to join the long list of those less fortunate nations that had lost their freedoms to the tyranny of foreign troops, permanently employed in the service of a corrupt government. Even if Britain should be able to win the war, it would do so only after "destroying all the principles which have produced those glorious effects in civil society." The country would be left desolate, and the establishment of "a military despotism in the colonies," with an army of foreign mercenaries, would be inevitable.[62] The plan thus fueled suspicions of a sinister plot to deprive Englishmen of their rights. A tyrannical government hired the subjects of other tyrants to subdue its liberty-loving subjects. "The Intentions of Administration to [hire], and send foreign Mercenaries to America, in order to reduce that Country," wrote the *St. James's Chronicle,* "shews pretty plainly the systematic Designs of those Men, and the perfect Correspondence there is between the Plan laid down, and the Mode of Execution intended."[63]

Suspicions that the German troops would remain permanently in America were encouraged by wild rumors about their intended uses there.

60. *St. James's Chronicle, or the British Evening Post* (London), June 27–29, 1775.
61. Ibid.
62. Governor Johnstone, October 26, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:109.
63. *St. James's Chronicle, or the British Evening Post* (London), June 27–29, 1775.

Critics were not content to warn of the use of Germans during military operations in the colonies. Rather, they claimed that the administration was planning to use them as a long-term, possibly even permanent means to exert control over the Americans. One anti-North paper announced in the summer of 1775 that the administration planned the recruitment of 10,000 Hanoverians, who would be stationed in various North American regions in times of war and peace. They would be housed in specially built fortresses and, after several years of service, receive generous land grants with "proper habitation," furnishings, and more, all financed through duties levied on the colonies.[64] If the vision of a permanent, foreign military rule over the colonists was not enough, the prospect of Germanizing the British colonies struck fear in the hearts of Britons. Critics warned that the introduction of thousands of German troops would result in a dramatic increase of the German population in North America. The *St. James's Chronicle,* emphasizing the dire consequences of this presence especially in New England, ethnically the most British and homogeneous region within the thirteen colonies at the time, claimed that "it is supposed that by the Beginning of the year 1800, there will be no less than a Million of that [German] Nation, including their Offspring, within the four New-England Provinces alone."[65] Concern about the presence of large numbers of Germans in the colonies was not a new development. In fact, two decades earlier, Benjamin Franklin had described most Europeans, including the Germans, as being of a "swarthy complexion," whereas the Saxons and the English constituted "the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth."[66] He warned that the influx of Germans contributed to a "darkening" of colonial society; it threatened to overwhelm its Britishness. On the eve of the French and Indian War, Franklin was deeply distrustful of the loyalty of the German settlers to Britain. In the 1770s critics once again suggested that Germans in the colonies could not be trusted to defend Britain's interests. If the proponents of the plan to hire Germans "have any just idea of the British Americans," one London paper wrote, "they cannot surely be ignorant, that at least one third part of them are Germans, and other foreigners, or their

64. *St. James's Chronicle, or the British Evening Post* (London), July 29–August 1, 1775.

65. Ibid.

66. Benjamin Franklin, *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc* (Boston, 1755), 14. The pamphlet is included, with separate pagination, in William Clarke, *Observations on the Late and Present Conduct of the French, with Regard to Their Encroachments upon the British Colonies in North America* (Boston, 1755).

immediate descendants; and how are we sure that the new adventurers will hereafter exemplify a greater share of obedience and subjection to Britain, than the old ones."[67] Presumed affinities between German colonists and Native Americans added to the fear that their presence posed a threat to Britain. James Luttrell argued that, since the two lived in close proximity and on friendly terms in a number of provinces, it was "most natural to suppose" that the Germans "will easily persuade them *to take up the hatchet* against the King's forces."[68] The introduction of German troops would add to a population that was regarded as potentially disloyal. Even if Britain won the war, it would lose its colonies to the foreigners it had hired to help keep them.

Critics also predicted large-scale desertion among German troops. This belief was based on the assumption that foreign troops in British service lacked patriotism. Whether they were motivated by economic reasons or coerced into service, the hirelings had no interest in the cause and therefor little reason to be loyal to their employer. The opposition warned that the Germans would desert once they realized how happily many of their countrymen lived in North America. That Lord North and his supporters chose not to address these warnings suggests that they, too, regarded desertion as a potential problem. The lure of the colonies as a desirable place of settlement for Germans was well known. At least 85,000 Germans had settled in British North America during the seven decades leading up to the Revolutionary War.[69] Would the German troops not want to take advantage of the opportunity to join their countrymen already living in this rich and promising land? When General Gage suggested the use of foreign troops in June 1775, he noted that they should be employed in regions that were not settled by Germans, who could entice them to desert.[70] In fact, the opposition warned that German troops were likely to plan desertion even before setting foot on American soil. James Luttrell, for example, believed that joining the auxiliary forces offered Germans an opportunity to get to the colonies without violating a ban on emigration issued by Emperor

67. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser,* October 9, 1775.

68. James Luttrell, February 29, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:410; emphasis in original.

69. Aaron Fogleman, *Hopeful Journeys: German Immigration, Settlement, and Political Culture in Colonial America, 1717–1775* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 2.

70. Thomas Gage to Lord Barrington, June 12, 1775, in Thomas Gage, *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763–1775,* ed. Clarence Edwin Carter (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931), 2:684.

Joseph II in 1768.[71] Luttrell, referring to the first major wave of German immigration to North America in the early eighteenth century, noted that the transports carrying the auxiliary troops across the Atlantic "may then be considered as good as the Palatine ships for peopling America with Germans."[72] It was only natural that an "unfree" people like the Germans would want to settle in a free place like America. A London newspaper agreed: "What will the German Troops do when they land in America? Why they will immediately desert, and settle among their once wretched but now happy and wealthy Countrymen, because they have been restrained by several Laws from going into that blessed Land of Liberty."[73] Indeed, in the end, Luttrell warned, Britain might find that it had hired troops to fight against itself.[74] Though the supporters of Lord North regarded the German treaties as essential to the preservation of the empire, critics like Luttrell claimed that they were almost certain to destroy it.

The critics dominated the public debates surrounding the German subsidy treaties carried out in the press. They filled their pages with letters, editorials, and parliamentary speeches that warned, often in hysterical fashion, of the potentially devastating consequences of the administration's plans. Although many opposition politicians and newspapers were openly sympathetic to the American cause, criticism of the government's plan to use foreign troops did not necessarily mean support for American independence. The *Morning Chronicle,* for example, was both anti-North and anti-independence; it attacked coercive governmental policies and urged efforts to reconcile. Generally, opposition to the plan reflected antiwar sentiments that were shared by broad segments of the British people, owing mostly to economic concerns. But in Parliament the anti-North faction was in the minority. Government certainly desired, but did not need, public support for its measures. In the end, most members agreed with Lord North's claim that "reducing America to a proper constitutional state of obedience" was the "great object of Parliament," and the "best and most speedy means of

71. Ingrid Schöberl, "Emigration Policy in Germany and Immigration Policy in the United States," in Günter Moltmann, ed., *Germans to America: 300 Years of Immigration, 1683–1983* (Stuttgart: Institute for Foreign Relations, 1982), 37.

72. James Luttrell, February 29, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:409–10.

73. *Public Advertiser* (London), September 30, 1775.

74. James Luttrell, February 29, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:410. This argument also appeared in a scathingly sarcastic summary of Lord North's reasoning, published in Britain and America, in *London Evening Post,* August 12, 1775; *Constitutional Gazette* (New York), November 25, 1775; *Pennsylvania Evening Post,* November 25, 1775.

effecting so desirable a purpose" was the hiring of German troops. On March 5 a majority in the House of Lords backed the policies. A proposed address to the king, imploring him to stop the Germans' march, cease hostilities, and negotiate terms of reconciliation with the rebellious colonies, received the support of thirty-two peers. One hundred peers voted against it, thus essentially endorsing the treaties. A few days earlier, the treaties had already been approved in the Commons by a vote of 242 to 88.[75] According to Lord North, the decision came down to three points: the German troops were needed, the terms under which they had been procured were advantageous, and they would allow Britain to force the colonies into submission. This might even happen "without any further effusion of blood."[76] *Lloyd's Evening Post,* one of the few pro-North newspapers published during this time, offered a rare endorsement of the plan after the matter was decided. It printed the letter of an unidentified gentleman who, after admitting to being a critic of the administration, had to concede that "the employment of German Protestant troops, at this critical juncture, is a measure full of true wisdom, and sound policy."[77]

By the time of the vote in Parliament in March 1776, the Americans had been discussing the possibility of fighting against German auxiliaries for more than a year. After all, even if Britain had never before employed German troops outside Europe, it had a long history of relying on their assistance. In the fall of 1774, six months before the outbreak of hostilities, American newspapers reported for the first time that Britain might be sending Hanoverians to America.[78] Moreover, the Reverend Thomas Bradbury Chandler, a Loyalist who would shortly leave the colonies for Great Britain, published a pamphlet in which he predicted that Britain would resort to

75. For the address, see *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:427–28; the debate is on 429–53; the vote in the Lords is on 428 and 452; the vote in the Commons is on 415. Technically, the vote in the Commons approved Lord North's motion to refer the treaties with Hessen-Kassel, Braunschweig, and Hessen-Hanau to the Committee of Supply.

76. Lord North, February 29, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:405.

77. *Lloyd's Evening Post* (London), March 20–22, 1776. This letter was printed in the colonies in July 1776. See, for example, *Essex Journal* (Newburyport, Mass.), July 12, 1776.

78. *New York Journal; or, The General Advertiser,* October 27, 1774; *Massachusetts Spy,* November 3, 1774; *Essex Gazette,* November 8, 1774. The papers referred to 1,000 troops.

hiring foreigners if it found that its army was insufficient to put down the rebellion. He explained that "if the army here supposed, should be found unequal to the design of reducing the Colonies, *Great-Britain* could send of her own troops a second, of equal strength to the assistance of the first; to these she could add a third of *Hessians,* a fourth of *Hanoverians,* and so on till the work were compleated." Chandler added that "an army of *Canadians* could be ordered to meet us, and unnumbered tribes of *savages* might be let loose upon us at the same time."[79] Britain, in other words, had a seemingly endless supply of troops at hand, and it would not hesitate to dispatch them to the colonies. Chandler warned that the colonists could never defeat the mighty British army, especially if it was augmented with non-Britons. Resistance was unwise and doomed to failure. Chandler's pamphlet was clearly designed to instill fear and discourage resistance.

The fact that Britain had a history of using foreign troops did not mean that it would be able to rely on the practice in its conflict with the Americans. Charles Lee, a British officer and a future general in the Continental Army, made this argument in a written response to Chandler. It was published in American newspapers in January 1775, several months before the outbreak of violence and one year before the first treaties with the German rulers were signed. Lee claimed that Britain would be unable to secure the aid of foreign troops, and if it did, they would be of no use. He believed that German laws restricting emigration as well as poor relations with several powerful German rulers, including Emperor Joseph II and Frederick the Great, King of Prussia, would prevent the employment of Germans. Moreover, Britain had never used German troops outside Europe. There was reason to doubt that their rulers would enter into agreements that would surely result in the permanent loss of their men, whether through desertion, death, or refusal to return to Europe at the conclusion of hostilities.[80]

More significantly, the mere possibility that Britain might dispatch foreign troops against the Americans allowed the colonists to create competing images of the British and American military that depicted their struggle as a conflict between liberty and tyranny. The image of the American civilian

79. [Thomas Bradbury Chandler], *A Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of Our Political Confusions* (New York, 1774), 27–28; emphases in original.

80. [Charles Lee], *Strictures on a Pamphlet, Entitled a "Friendly Address to All Reasonable Americans, on the Subject of Our Political Confusions." Addressed to the People of America* (Boston, 1775). The pamphlet was first offered for sale in early January; excerpts began to appear in American newspapers later that month (see, e.g., *Virginia Gazette* [ed. Pinkney], January 26, 1775; *Connecticut Courant,* February 6, 1775).

who volunteered to fight for his country contrasted starkly with that of the foreign hireling, who was motivated by greed or coerced into service by despotic governments. The fact that the American army was composed of civilians defending their rights made the colonists' cause morally superior to Britain's. It also made it into a far more powerful military force. As Lee put it, even if Britain succeeded in hiring Germans, they were no match for an "active, vigorous yeomanry, fired with the noble ardor."[81] A "Gentleman of military Distinction in Connecticut" agreed that the Americans "need not blush to encounter an equal number of foreign Troops from any Quarter of the Globe."[82] Lee assured them that they had nothing to fear.

As the crisis intensified, and especially after the first shots had been fired in the spring of 1775, rumors of British plans to hire foreigners began to circulate throughout the colonies with increasing frequency. Some of these stories may have been spread by Loyalists like Chandler in an effort to intimidate the colonists. "The Lies, the Tories make and Spread to keep up the spirits of their Party," John Adams wrote to James Warren in March 1775, "are ridiculous enough. 40,000 Russians 20 Thousand British and Irish Troops, and 16 Capital ships and a Thousand Cutters and all that." Adams believed that such reports did not provoke fear; rather, they increased the colonists' determination to resist. Indeed, he predicted, "Such Steps would produce another Revolution."[83] Thus, while Loyalists might have spread rumors of foreigners in an effort to discourage rebellion, American Patriots exaggerated the troops' alleged numbers and violent temperament to stir up resistance. They knew that the colonists would regard the use of foreign troops against them as an unambiguous sign of the king's rejection of reconciliation and commitment to force. Rather than protecting his subjects, he used foreign troops against them. In July the *Virginia Gazette* noted that Russia had furnished "40,000 Russian bears," to tear the "rebellious Americans" to pieces.[84] A few weeks later the paper reported that "30,000 Hanoverians, 30,000 Hessians, and as many Russians, are shortly expected, when they shall destroy all the rebels at once."[85] Samuel Adams thought that Parliament was about to consider a bill to "enable our most

81. Lee, *Strictures on a Pamphlet,* 6–7.

82. *Boston Evening Post,* March 6, 1775.

83. Adams to Warren, March 15, 1775, in C. James Taylor, ed., *Adams Papers, Digital Edition* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2007), www.masshist.org/publications/apde/index.php (accessed July 14, 2014).

84. *Virginia Gazette* (ed. Purdie), July 28, 1775.

85. *Virginia Gazette* (ed. Purdie), September 8, 1775.

gracious Sovereign to send & employ 16000 Hessians, to subdue his subjects in America."[86] In October the *Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote,* the only German-language newspaper published in North America during the war, reported that Britain planned to send 10,000 German troops to Boston and New York. In the same issue, German Americans learned of British intentions to build permanent fortifications in the colonies, manned by 10,000 Hanoverians and supported with taxes levied on the colonists. In other words, the king planned to use the foreign troops as permanent tools of oppression. This story, copied from British papers, was not as implausible as it may seem, considering that Hanoverians were about to be garrisoned in British possessions in the Mediterranean.[87] Two weeks later, the *Staatsbote* reported that 6,000 Hanoverians and Hessians were already on the march to their place of embarkation.[88] Though the information was inconsistent, and much of it was inaccurate, all agreed that the contingent would be substantial and diverse, and that the majority would be Germans.

In late 1775 and early 1776 the American public was becoming increasingly aware of the British discussions over the use of foreign troops. American newspapers covered the parliamentary debates in detail, printing and reprinting key speeches on the treaties. Most of the news items were taken from London papers, but some information came from individuals and letters from Britain and Germany. One would conclude, on the basis of the coverage of the British debates in American newspapers, that the colonists must have believed that the majority of the British people were strenuously opposed to the hiring of foreign troops. As they had in the London press, opposition arguments clearly dominated. There was, of course, a significant delay in reporting. Typically, it took between three and four months for an item from a London paper to make its way into an American publication. For example, a fiercely critical essay, signed by "Ignotus," appeared in American newspapers in October 1775, four months after its publication in London.[89] John Wilkes's impassioned speech against the government's policies of October 26, 1775, was first printed in American papers in January

86. Samuel Adams to James Warren, October 7, 1775, in Paul H. Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789,* 26 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1978) (hereafter cited as *Letters of Delegates*), 2:138. For similar estimates, see John Hancock to George Washington, October 5, 1775, ibid., 119; Samuel Ward to Henry Ward, October 11, 1775, ibid., 164.

87. *Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote,* October 3, 1775.

88. *Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote,* October 20, 1775.

89. *Providence Gazette, and Country Journal,* October 28, 1775; *Public Advertiser* (London), June 28, 1775.

1776.[90] A couple of weeks later, in February 1776, the *Pennsylvania Ledger* printed a letter from London, dated October 20, that claimed that Britain had failed to secure an expected 30,000 Russians and was now in negotiations to get 10,000 Hessians and some Hanoverians.[91] By the time the American public read these news items, the first treaties with German rulers had been signed.[92]

The American discussions about Britain's plan to employ German troops reflect a more general shift in the colonists' targets of attacks. Before 1775 they had tended to blame the ministers and Parliament for what they considered unjust and oppressive policies. In 1775 they began to see the king as the cause of their problems.[93] That the measure required, and received, Parliament's approval was irrelevant; the fact that the king considered the hiring of foreigners as an appropriate response to the colonists' actions revealed him as a tyrant determined to win the conflict at all costs. As William Hooper put it, the king "had declared (we hear) that he will pawn the Jewels of his Crown or humble America. Indians, Negroes, Russians, Hanoverians & Hessians are talked of as the Instruments to accomplish this blessed purpose."[94] A major consequence of the decision to dispatch foreign troops against the Americans was widespread alienation from the king among the colonists.

Long before the German treaties were published in American newspapers, the use of foreign troops had been added to the growing list of British actions deemed oppressive and unjust by the colonists. Indeed, it soon emerged as the most powerful tool in the radicals' efforts to encourage resistance and support the war against Britain. Unlike other grievances, including unjust taxation, interference in trade, and suspension of local government, this one amounted to a real threat to the lives of Americans throughout the colonies. It allowed the radicals to justify resistance to British policies as a fight for survival. "If foreign mercenaries should come over," a letter from Philadelphia noted in the fall of 1775, "the most cowardly of

90. *New England Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass.), January 18, 1776.

91. *Pennsylvania Ledger,* February 3, 1776.

92. *Pennsylvania Evening Post,* June 13, 1776.

93. The shift toward blaming the king, without reference to the German troops, is discussed in Black, *George III,* 219–20.

94. William Hooper to Samuel Johnston, December 2, 1775, in *Letters of Delegates,* 2:425. For a similar statement, see Josiah Bartlett to John Langdon, May 19, 1776, in *Letters of Delegates,* 4:39. News of the failure of the Russian-British negotiations did not appear in American newspapers until April 1779. See Auerbach, *Die Hessen,* 85.

the Americans will be inspired with courage."[95] Indeed, some colonists were already predicting it would help move the colonies from resistance to independence. The Philadelphia merchant Edward Shippen claimed as early as January 1776 that the arrival of foreign troops would lead to independence. He explained: "This Idea of an Independence, tho some time ago abhorred, may possibly by degrees become so familiar as to be cherished. It is in every body's mouth as a thing absolutely necessary in case foreign Troops should be landed, as if this step alone would enable us to oppose them with success."[96] A few weeks later, a catalog of the many injustices committed by Britain against the colonists included the hiring of foreign troops.[97] It was the duty of every American to rise to the defense of life and liberty, which, these plans showed clearly, Britain was determined to destroy. Of all that Britain had done to violate the rights of the colonists, the hiring of foreigners was consistently depicted as the most cruel and despotic. The Williamsburg, Virginia, Volunteer Company resolved in May "that the landing of foreign troops will be, at the present critical juncture of affairs, a most dangerous attack on the liberties of this country."[98]

The fact that the employment of German troops became a prominent feature in calls for active resistance and independence demonstrates the radicals' conviction that the issue was particularly effective in unifying the American people. Like the British opposition, the American radicals used it as evidence of ministerial intentions to destroy British liberties and, more specifically, the American colonies by going to war with them. Thomas Paine was one of the radicals who saw the plan as a reason for a complete break with Britain. He clarified the link in an imaginary dialogue between the ghost of General Richard Montgomery and an "American Delegate," written in February 1776. General Montgomery, who had been killed in the attack on Quebec only a few weeks earlier, explains to the delegate that the only way to escape "slavery" is independence, and war the only means to attain it. Both the Crown and Parliament had shown with abundance that they were determined to deprive the colonies of their liberty. Their reliance on foreign troops was evidence of their intentions to use utmost force to accomplish this goal. Moreover, like the opposition in Britain, the

95. *London Evening Post,* November 23–25, 1775.

96. Edward Shippen to Jasper Yeates, January 19, 1776, Shippen Papers, 7:190, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

97. "Ihr Americaner! . . . Gedenkt an das dingen fremder Kriegsknechte gegen euch," *Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote,* March 19, 1776.

98. *Virginia Gazette* (ed. Pinkney), May 25, 1775.

Americans claimed that the king was hiring "barbarians" to fight against them. The enemies of the Americans, Montgomery explained, "have done their worst. They have called upon Russians—Hanoverians—Hessians—Canadians—Savages and Negroes to assist them in burning your towns—desolating your country—and in butchering your wives and children."[99] An imaginary dialogue between several colonists, published by the German American printer Henry Miller, reflected similar views. Believing that Britain was driving the colonies to independence, "Jonathan" explained to "Pady" that Britain was reportedly sending commissioners "to settle the affairs of the country; whilst at the same time the king and parliament were hunting the world for barbarians to destroy it." The "barbarians," he explained, were "Romans, Hessians, Indians, &c."[100]

Ironically, while the king hired foreigners to keep the colonists within the empire, the plan encouraged his subjects in America to view themselves as foreigners. His employment of "barbarians" against the Americans suggested to them that the administration no longer regarded them as fellow British subjects. To be sure, for several decades British observers had commented on the growing differences between the colonists and Britons. As Stephen Conway has noted, however, "An awareness of difference did not necessarily lead to the colonists being viewed as foreigners."[101] Throughout the 1760s and early 1770s, voices that described the colonists as non-Britons were in the minority. Most British people generally regarded the colonists as fellow Britons, entitled to the same privileges. They belonged to the same nation. And the colonists certainly based their grievances, and demands, on their status as British subjects.

The outbreak of war in 1775 did not immediately alter this view. Both the British ministry and its critics based their arguments on the claim that the Americans were British. The opposition stressed that the Americans were entitled to the rights of British subjects, whereas the administration regarded them as rebels against their monarch. The administration's decision later that year to hire foreigners to put down the rebellion, however, signaled a shift in its awareness of the colonists as fellow Britons. In Britain

99. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense; with the Whole Appendix . . .* (Philadelphia, 1776), 14–15. See also *Continental Journal* (Boston), May 30, 1776.

100. *Reflections of a Few Friends of the Country, upon Several Circumstantial Points; in a Conference between Sandy, Pady, Simon and Jonathan, and the Parson* (Philadelphia, 1776), 24.

101. Stephen Conway describes the complicated and drawn-out process of this shift in "From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners," 65–100; quote on 83. He identifies the Franco-American Alliance of 1778 as a key moment in these changing attitudes.

critics based their arguments in part on the claim that this was a "cruel Civil War," that the use of foreign forces in this "Domestick Quarrel" was disgraceful and dangerous.[102] In contrast, supporters of coercive measures argued, as Member of Parliament William Innes did in November 1775, that the colonists, partly because of the many non-Britons among them, could no longer be considered "the offspring of Englishmen, and as such entitled to the privileges of Britons."[103] From the perspective of Americans who were urging resistance, the administration's claim that Britain was fighting for peace and unity was unconvincing.[104] News of the treaties not only proved to them that Britain was determined to use force; more important, it convinced them that the differences between the mother country and its American colonies were insurmountable. Instead of strengthening the link between Britain and its colonies, the employment of German troops contributed to its destruction. Britain was treating the Americans like a foreign enemy. As Paine advised them, "You have nothing further to fear from them."[105]

The tendency of Americans to see themselves as foreigners was also reflected in the colonists' belief that their struggle for liberty and against tyranny would find support among some of the more enlightened of the European rulers. More specifically, like the opposition in Britain, they were convinced that certain powerful European states would never allow Britain to use foreign troops against them, and if it did, they would rush to the Americans' defense. In early 1776, for example, American newspapers reported that Prussia, France, and Sweden had foiled British plans to enlist Russians.[106] While Frederick the Great avoided taking sides in the conflict, he was openly critical of the "sale" of "Hessians" for a cause that did not

102. Address to the King, March 5, 1776, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:428.

103. William Innes, November 8 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:203. See also Conway, "From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners," 70. For claims that the colonies were acting like a foreign nation, see the speech of Mr. Acland, October 26, 1775, *Proceedings and Debates,* 6:95.

104. Eliga H. Gould notes that this claim helps explain why so many Britons in Britain supported the decision to go to war. "Fears of War, Fantasies of Peace: British Politics and the Coming of the American Revolution," in Eliga H. Gould and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *Empire and Nation: The American Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 34.

105. Paine, *Common Sense,* 14–15.

106. *Pennsylvania Ledger,* February 24, 1776; *Dunlap's Maryland Gazette,* March 5, 1776; Richard Smith's diary, [entry for March 15, 1776], in *Letters of Delegates,* 3:384.

concern them.[107] France actually was sympathetic to the colonists' cause. In any case, there was little doubt that it would seize an opportunity to weaken Britain by assisting the colonies. As Lord Stirling informed the Continental Congress in March 1776, "if foreign troops were employed [the French] could not be idle spectators."[108] The colonists' conviction that France in particular was on their side reflected a growing sense of separation from Britain. Whereas Britons in Britain compared and contrasted themselves proudly with France, the colonists now regarded France as their potential savior from the cruel and oppressive actions by a tyrannical government. Long before the French entered the war as an American ally, the Americans believed that they could count on them to protect them from British oppression. In a reversal of the traditional British view of Britain as free and France as unfree, the Americans now cast Britain as despotic and France as the protector of liberty. Rumors that France would keep foreign troops out of the colonies did not disappear even after the first German troops had arrived in America. In the fall of 1776 Congress instructed the commissioners appointed to negotiate a treaty with France "to prevail with the Court of France to exert its influence in the most effectual manner" to prevent Britain from securing additional troops for the second campaign.[109] Of course, French support of the Americans only strengthened British efforts to add German troops to its forces. Britain dispatched more than 9,000 Germans to America after the conclusion of the Treaty of Alliance between the Americans and France in February 1778.

Though rumors of British plans to hire foreigners were treated as fact, there remained a considerable amount of confusion about the matter until at least May 1776. Some reports put the number of hirelings at 60,000.[110]

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107. Horst Dippel, *Germany and the American Revolution, 1770–1800: A Sociohistorical Investigation of Late Eighteenth-Century Political Thinking* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1978), 61; Fischer, *Washington's Crossing,* 52.

108. Lord Stirling to the President of Congress, [March 15, 1776], in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives: Fourth Series,* 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: 1837–46) (hereafter cited as *American Archives*), 5:175. See also Lord Stirling to George Washington, March 11, 1776, *American Archives,* 5:184.

109. "The Continental Congress: Instructions to Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee as Commissioners to France," [September 24–October 22, 1776], in Benjamin Franklin, *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin,* ed. William Willcox et al., 41 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951–) (hereafter cited as *Papers of Franklin*), 22:424.

110. Statements of Jacob Le Roy and Dr. William Farquhar, March 15, 1776, in *American Archives,* 5:385. Dr. William Farquhar said it was 30,000. See also Andrews, "'Myrmidons from Abroad,'" 132–33.

At the same time, rumors that Britain was sending a sizable contingent of peace commissioners also circulated throughout the colonies. In early May 1776 American newspapers were beginning to offer details about the first detachments of Germans that were embarking for passage to the colonies. Sources of such news were unconfirmed stories by individuals who had reportedly seen or heard of the troops. While solid evidence remained lacking, few colonists doubted that they were on their way. After printing a detailed report of Hessian regiments preparing for the voyage, an exasperated editor wondered in early May, "*Oh* GEORGE! *Are these thy commissioners of peace and reconciliation?*"[111] And Richard Bache wrote to Benjamin Franklin that he expected the arrival of "45,000 *Commissioners* at least, of different Nations that is to say Hessians Hannoverians &c. &c."[112] News of the imminent arrival of thousands of foreign troops radicalized the colonists. It was, one Philadelphian claimed, "the *Coup de Grace* to the American connection." The news had "already worked wonders in the city; conversions have been more rapid than ever happen'd under Mr. Whitfield."[113] By the beginning of May the colonists were expecting, and preparing for, an invasion by an army made up mostly of foreigners.[114] Indeed, by then, the first detachments of Germans had already departed from Britain. Troops from Braunschweig had sailed from Portsmouth in early April, and a detachment from Hessen-Kassel had left on May 6.

That Britain intended to use foreigners against the Americans undermined the moderates and greatly bolstered the radicals' call to arms. Calls for reconciliation seemed naive and hopeless in light of Britain's determination to go to war. Not a single American newspaper or individual publicly justified or defended Britain's plans. On May 10 Congress approved a resolution that called for the colonies without working governments to form new ones. Five days later, John Adams added a preamble that presented the colonists as an oppressed people desperately trying to protect themselves from the cruel actions of a tyrannical government. "The whole force of that kingdom," the preamble noted, "aided by foreign mercenaries, is to be

111. *Pennsylvania Packet,* May 6, 1776; emphasis in original. For the German-language version, see *Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote,* May 10, 1776.

112. Richard Bache to Benjamin Franklin, May 7, 1776, in *Papers of Franklin,* 22:424; emphasis in original.

113. *New York Journal; or, The General Advertiser,* May 9, 1776; emphasis in original.

114. See, for example, the urgent call for military preparations by the Connecticut Council of Safety, May 6, 1776, *American Archives,* 6:650.

exerted for the destruction of the good people of these colonies."[115] The preamble was narrowly adopted, an indication that resistance to a complete separation was declining.[116]

Moderates resented the radicals' use of the "Hessians" inside and outside Congress to advance their agenda, in part because of the uncertainty and confusion surrounding them. They accused them of deceiving the public by publishing unfounded and one-sided reports about Britain's plans.[117] The colonies, they warned, were rushing into war unprepared and on the basis of unconfirmed rumors. They could not, however, overcome the radicals' claim that Britain's intention to employ foreign troops amounted to a declaration of war. It encouraged the view that it was Britain that cut the ties with the colonies, that Britain had declared the colonies independent by hiring a foreign army to fight against them. There were no "stronger Reasons" for supporting the preamble, Samuel Adams argued, "than that the King has thrown us out of his Protection."[118] One commentator asked whether a king who hired "foreign troops to enable him more effectually to destroy his people" was a "legal sovereign, or a tyrant."[119] The answer was obvious. As Thomas McKean put it, there were "now 2 Governments in direct Opposition to each other."[120] The plan to use foreign troops in the colonies helped shape a persuasive narrative that depicted the king as the one who had rejected his American subjects, rather than the other way around.

There was a general consensus that the Germans were coming, but the radicals knew that they had yet to obtain conclusive and irrefutable evidence of the treaties. Finally, only a few days after the resolution had been passed, proof arrived on their desks, courtesy of the opposition in Britain. Copies of the German treaties were smuggled into the colonies by George

115. *American Archives,* 6:466. The immediate goal of the radicals was to trigger a reaction against Pennsylvania's moderate government.

116. Andrews, "'Myrmidons from Abroad,'" 24, 173–79. See also Jack Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 96–97.

117. See, for example, Carter Braxton to Landon Carter, May 17, 1776, in *Letters of Delegates,* 4:19.

118. Samuel Adams is quoted by John Adams in "Notes of Debates in the Continental Congress," in Diary of John Adams, no. 27, May 13–September 10, 1776, *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive,* www.masshist.org/digitaladams/ (accessed July 25, 2012).

119. *Virginia Gazette* (ed. Dixon and Hunter), May 18, 1776.

120. Diary of John Adams, no. 27, May 13–September 10, 1776.

Merchant, a private in Morgan's Company of Riflemen of Virginia who had been captured by the British in Quebec the previous year. Merchant had been taken to London, where British Whigs successfully agitated for his release. American sympathizers had given him a bundle of papers to smuggle back into America. With the documents sewn into his clothes, Merchant traveled to Halifax in March 1776. In May he reached Washington's headquarters in New York. Washington immediately sent him to Philadelphia to present the papers to Congress. He arrived on May 21.[121]

The radicals immediately used the papers to fuel patriotic fervor within the population, thus strengthening the resolve to resist Britain and support independence. Included in the bundle were copies of the treaties with Hessen-Kassel, Hessen-Hanau, and Braunschweig. Merchant also delivered letters from Arthur Lee that laid out British plans for the next campaign. Lee reported that 26,000 troops were expected to arrive in America within weeks, to join the 8,000 troops already there. They included 7,000 men under Lord Cornwallis, 2,000 Highlanders, 12,000 Hessians, and 5,000 men from Braunschweig, Wolfenbüttel, and Waldeck.[122] Within days, extracts of the treaties began to appear in American papers.[123] The American public for the first time saw irrefutable evidence of Britain's plans. Only a few months before, there had still existed "faint hopes of reconciliation." Separation was seen as a rash step. As one pamphleteer explained in late May, however, "we have since received such incontrovertible proofs of

121. Andrews, "'Myrmidons from Abroad,'" 182–84. Merchant's journey is described in John Langdon to George Washington, May 10, 1776, *American Archives,* 6:501; Josiah Bartlett to John Langdon, May 21, 1776, *Letters of Delegates,* 4:55; Francis Lightfoot Lee to Landon Carter, May 21, 1776, *Letters of Delegates,* 4:57–58; Caesar Rodney to Thomas Rodney, May 23, 1776, *Letters of Delegates,* 4:61–63. Washington forwarded copies of the papers delivered by Merchant to Richard Henry Lee and Benjamin Franklin. Washington to Richard Henry Lee, May 18, 1776, *American Archives,* 6:500–501.

122. Arthur Lee to Lieutenant-Governor Cadwallader Colden, February 13, 1776, in Francis Wharton, ed., *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States,* 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1889), 2:72–74. Lee addressed his letters to the Loyalist governor in case they were intercepted. Other letters to American recipients that confirmed his information include William Palfrey to President of Congress, February 16, 1776, *American Archives,* 6:508–9; Arthur Lee to Sarah Franklin Bache, March 19, 1776, in Wharton, *The Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence,* 2:80–81.

123. See, for example, *Pennsylvania Journal,* May 22, 1776; *Wöchentliche Philadelphische Staatsbote,* May 24, 1776.

the determined intention of the British ministry to enslave us, so as to admit to no other alternative."[124]

The conflicting images of the "Hessians" as victims of despotic governments and those of the "Hessians" as plunderers that continue to dominate popular perceptions of them to this day emerged long before the first military encounter between the Americans and the German troops had taken place. In the spring of 1776 Congress's approach to the prospect of facing thousands of German troops was two-pronged. First, its members hoped to weaken the enemy by encouraging the men to desert. Like the opposition in Britain, they believed that the Germans lacked patriotism and loyalty to the British cause and therefore were likely to desert. They assumed that the Germans would eagerly seize the opportunity to escape oppression by settling in a land that was characterized by prosperity and liberty. Arthur Lee reported that the entire British army, "native and foreign, is averse to the service, so that it is much apprehended that if the provincials are dexterous in throwing among them advantageous propositions, and faithful in performing them, the desertion will be immense."[125] "Advantageous propositions," Congress determined, were offers of land and liberty. A message directly addressed to the Germans encouraged them to exchange the land they "left for happier regions, for a land of plenty and abhorrent of despotism."[126] The Americans subsequently published several offers of land to troops and officers who deserted, including two of which were printed in German. The contents were published in American newspapers, on broadsides, and in at least one German-language newspaper

124. "To the People of Maryland . . . by a Countryman," Baltimore County, May 28, 1776, in Library of Congress, *An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera,* http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/rbpe:@field%28DOCID+@lit%28rbpe02803600%29%29 (accessed August 10, 2012).

125. Lee to Colden, February 14, 1776, in Wharton, *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence,* 2:76–78. A "letter from an Eminent Gentleman in London to his friend in America," dated February 7, 1776, and including similar content, noted, "If offers of settlement, &c., are prepared, to fling into the camp, in *German,* when the *Germans* arrive, it must have a great effect"; *American Archives,* 6:501; emphasis in original.

126. "The Delegates of the Thirteen United Colonies of America to the Officers and Soldiers of . . ." [May ? 1776], in *Letter of Delegates,* 4:110–11. The address was never reported to Congress. For reports that the Germans could easily be persuaded to desert, see also Lee to Colden, February 14, 1776, in Wharton, *Revolutionary Diplomatic Correspondence,* 2:76–78.

in Europe.[127] The appeals offered the colonists an opportunity to portray themselves as a generous people who welcomed fellow subjects of tyrannical governments into their communities. These victims of despotism should be met not with anger but with sympathy.[128]

At the same time, Congress used the imminent arrival of a foreign army to urge the colonial assemblies to prepare for war. In these appeals, the German troops are described as particularly violent enemies "who will be more likely to do the Business of their Masters without Remorse or Compunction."[129] This negative image, which was consistent with popular perceptions of mercenary soldiers, did not necessarily contradict the claim that they were the innocent victims of despotic rulers. After all, their participation in the war was the result of an "infamous Contract between two arbitrary sovereigns."[130] They had been forced to do the dirty work of the British monarch for the benefit of their master. The provincial legislatures used depictions of a merciless enemy hired for money to mobilize their constituents. The Connecticut Assembly, for example, warned that the colonies were "being threatened with the whole force of *Great Britain,* united with

127. *New England Chronicle,* July 4, 1776; *Freeman's Journal,* July 6, 1776; *Connecticut Courant,* July 8, 1776; *Journals of Congress. Containing the Proceedings in the Year, 1776* (York-Town, Pa., 1778), 2:302, 310–11. See also Butterfield, "Psychological Warfare in 1776," 234–35. Copies of the two German-language broadsides are in the Staatsarchiv Marburg, Germany. The offer of land appeared first in the *Pressburger Zeitung* (Bratislava, Hungary), June 29, 1776. An added warning that Germans who refused the offer would be treated like outlaws ("Vogelfreie"), however, was undoubtedly not authored by Congress. It is entirely inconsistent with American approaches toward the German troops. See Digitales Forum Mittel- & Osteuropa, http://difmoe.eu/archiv/calendar?content=Periodika&day=29&kalender=1&month=6&name=Pre%C3%9Fburger+Zeitung&title=Pre%C3%9Fburger+Zeitung&year=1776 (accessed August 2, 2012).

128. The appeals probably had little effect on the number of desertions among German troops, at least during the first three years of the war. Desertion among the troops from Hessen is discussed in Atwood, *The Hessians,* chap. 9; Seehase, *Die hessischen Truppen,* 168–69. Fischer stresses the pronounced sense of obedience among Hessian troops in *Washington's Crossing,* 61. For a discussion of desertion rates among the troops from Braunschweig, including the difficulty of determining desertion rates, see Huck, *Soldaten gegen Amerika,* 167–74.

129. John Hancock to Certain Colonies, June 4, 1776, in *Letters of Delegates,* 4:136–37; *American Archives,* 6:707–8.

130. "Draft Preamble of Committee Report on Inducing Foreign Officers to Desert," [August 27, 1776], in Adams Papers, Digital Editions, www.masshist.org/publications/apde/index.php.

all such foreign mercenaries as they are able to engage to assist in the execution of their causeless vengeance on those devoted Colonies, and to burn and destroy our Sea-port Towns, and to spread rapine, murder, and destruction, throughout the whole."[131] The events surrounding the battles of Trenton and Princeton later that year seemed to confirm the validity of the image, which was subsequently reinforced by publications that detailed incidents of plunder and destruction committed by Hessian troops.[132] Depictions of the German soldiers as particularly ruthless, however, emerged in America before they had even set foot on American soil.

Over the next few weeks, newspapers stirred up support for independence by reminding the colonists of their grievances against Britain. The employment of German troops assumed a prominent position among the complaints. They attacked moderates who naively held out hope for reconciliation, including Dr. William Smith, also known as "Cato." "A Watchman" angrily accused Britain of talking peace while underhandedly negotiating "with foreign powers, Hessians, Brunswickers, our dear cousins the Hanoverians, perhaps Russians, and if these should fail, perhaps Turks next, to cram such a peace down our throats as Cato and his truckling brethren would gladly swallow."[133] Increasing numbers of colonists began to instruct their delegates to support independence.[134] On July 1 Americans opened their newspapers to Alderman Bull's impassioned speech against the hiring of the Germans, given in Parliament on February 29.[135] Three days later, Congress approved a formal Declaration of Independence.

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131. "Persons of every rank and denomination . . . ," Connecticut Assembly, May 1776, in *American Archives,* 5:1629; emphasis in original.

132. See, for example, *Bucks County, December 14, 1776. The Progress of the British and Hessian Troops through New Jersey* . . . [Philadelphia? 1776]. For the German version, see *Bucks Caunty, den 14ten December 1776. Der Fortgang der Brittischen und Hessischen Truppen durch Neu-Jersey* . . . [Philadelphia? 1776]. See also Fischer, *Washington's Crossing,* 64–65.

133. *Pennsylvania Evening Post,* June 13, 1776.

134. "The Pennsylvania Assembly: Instructions to Its Delegates in Congress," June 14, 1776, in *Papers of Franklin,* 22:481; "Instructions to Nathan Cushing, Esq., Representative of the Town of Scituate," June 4, 1776, in *American Archives,* 6:699; "At a General Town-Meeting of the Freeholders, and Other Inhabitants of This Town [Wrentham, Norfolk County] . . . ," June 5, 1776, in *American Archives,* 6:699; "Delegates of Connecticut in Congress Instructed to Propose to That Body to Declare the United Colonies Free and Independent States," June 14, 1776, in *American Archives,* 6:867–68; "Committee," [undated], in *American Archives,* 6:1030; *New York Gazette, and the Weekly Mercury,* June 17, 1776.

135. *Connecticut Currant,* July 1, 1776.

Of all the king's "crimes" enumerated in the Declaration, his use of foreign troops is the only action that the king was accused of committing "at this Time," thus rendering it more immediate than any of the other grievances: "He is, at this Time, transporting large Armies of foreign Mercenaries to complete the Works of Death, Desolation, and Tyranny, already begun with circumstances of Cruelty and Perfidy, scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous Ages, and totally unworthy the Head of a civilized Nation." The language presents a powerful image of impending doom. It suggests the significance of the king's use of foreigners against the colonists as critical in their decision to declare independence. The king's decision to send foreigners across the Atlantic to "complete" their destruction was the culmination of a series of cruel and oppressive acts against them.

Moreover, the king alone bore responsibility for this measure. In an early draft, Jefferson had levied general charges against the Americans' "British Brethren," accusing them of allowing their "general magistrate" to dispatch "Scotch & foreign mercenaries to invade & deluge us in blood." In the final version the reference to foreigners was left general, thus including all the troops, regardless of nationality, who were dispatched by Britain in the war against the colonists.[136] Congress also agreed not to blame the British people for the measure. Instead, by calling it "unworthy of the Head of a civilized Nation" the delegates emphasized the incompatibility of the practice with Enlightenment ideas about the responsibilities of rulers.[137] Indeed, the action placed George III below the rulers of the "most barbarous Ages."

Britain's employment of the German troops did not cause the colonies' separation from Britain. The decision, however, played a pivotal role in their movement toward independence, and, as such, it had a significant effect on colonial opinion. To the colonists, the king's employment of large numbers of foreign troops against them showed that he no longer regarded them as his subjects. Instead, he treated them like a foreign enemy that needed to be conquered with force. Benjamin Franklin explained to Lord Howe later that month how it had come to that final break. It was, he

136. Frank Whitson Fetter, "Who Were the Foreign Mercenaries of the Declaration of Independence?" *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 104, no. 4 (October 1980): 508–13. Fetter mistakenly states that Germans had not yet landed in North America when Jefferson drafted the Declaration. The first contingents had arrived in Canada in May.

137. The most prominent critic of the practice in continental Europe was the Comte de Mirabeau, who published an attack the following year, after the battles of Trenton and Princeton. See his *Avis aux Hessois et autre peuples de l'Allemagne vendus par leurs princes à l'Angleterre* (Cleves, 1777).

wrote, "impossible we should think of submission to a Government that has, with the most wanton barbarity and cruelty, burned our defenceless towns in the midst of winter, excited the savages to massacre our peaceful farmers, instigated our slaves to murder their masters, and is even now bringing foreign mercenaries to deluge our settlements with blood. These atrocious injuries have extinguished every spark of affection for that parent country we once held so dear."[138] On the first anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, the Reverend William Gordon attributed the popular support for independence to news of the treaties. He explained, "It was known that the British ministry meant to employ Indians, Canadians, and Negroes against us." But "when it was found that the commission given to the Howes was to be supported by an army of foreign mercenaries, a change of sentiments among the beguiled Americans commenced, and the advocates for independence multiplied greatly."[139] Of course, from a Loyalist perspective, the colonists were confusing causes with consequences. Thomas Hutchinson complained that the "Acts of a *justly incensed* Sovereign for suppressing a most *unnatural, unprovoked* Rebellion, are here assigned as the *causes* of this Rebellion."[140] The use of foreign troops was a perfectly legitimate and justifiable response by an indulgent sovereign to the actions of his ungrateful and rebellious colonists.

Three decades later, Benjamin Rush condemned the fact that exaggerated reports of an invasion by German mercenaries had justified independence. After all, there was no "difference between being killed by a Hessian and a British bayonet."[141] With the advantage of hindsight, Rush found it "absurd and frivolous" that Britain's decision to hire foreigners had set the colonies on the path toward complete separation. Yet he acknowledged that "many of our patriots" began to support independence when they learned of the king's plan. In their minds, it was the final of many acts of oppression against them.

The decision to employ German auxiliaries may have given Britain a fighting chance to put down the rebellion. In the end, however, it proved

138. Franklin to Lord Howe, July 21, 1776, in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives: Fifth Series,* 3 vols. (Washington, D.C.: 1848–53), 1:482–83.

139. William Gordon, *The Separation of the Jewish Tribes, after the Death of Solomon, Accounted for, and Applied to the Present Day, in a Sermon Preached before the General Court, on Friday, July the 4th, 1777* (Boston, 1777), 25–26.

140. Thomas Hutchinson, *Strictures upon the Declaration of the Congress at Philadelphia in a Letter to a Noble Lord, &c.* (London, 1776), 28; emphasis in original.

141. Rush to John Adams, July 11, 1806, in Benjamin Rush, *Letters,* ed. L. H. Butterfield, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), 2:924.

extremely costly, not least because of its political influence on developments in Britain and the thirteen colonies. It was supposed to help build a powerful military force capable of crushing the rebellion in one decisive campaign. Instead, it deepened divisions within Britain and between Britain and its colonies, months before the first Germans had actually arrived on America's shore.