# "In Favour of Popery": Patriotism, Protestantism, and the Gordon Riots in the Revolutionary British Atlantic

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**Abstract** In 1778, in response to news of the American alliance with France, the British government proposed a series of Catholic relief bills aimed at tolerating Catholicism in England, Scotland, and Ireland. Officials saw the legislation as a pragmatic response to a dramatically expanded war, but ordinary Britons were far less tolerant. They argued that the relief acts threatened to undermine a widely shared Protestant British patriotism that defined itself against Catholicism and France. Through an elaborate and well-connected popular print culture, Britons living in distant Atlantic communities, such as Kingston (Jamaica), Glasgow, Dublin, and New York City, publicly engaged in a radical brand of Protestant patriotism that began to question the very legitimacy of their own government. Events culminated in June 1780, with five days of violent, deadly rioting in the nation's capitol. Yet the Gordon Riots represent only the most famous example of this new, more zealous defense of Protestant Whig Britishness. In the British Caribbean and North America, unrelenting fears of French invasions and the perceived incompetence of the government mixed with an increasingly confrontational Protestant political culture to expose the fragile nature of British patriotism. In Scotland, anti-Catholic riots drove the country to near rebellion in early 1779, while in Ireland, Protestants and Catholics took advantage of this political instability to make demands for economic and political independence, culminating in the country's legislative autonomy in 1782. Ultimately, Catholic relief and the American alliance with France fundamentally altered how ordinary Britons viewed their government and, perhaps, laid the foundations for the far more radical political culture of the 1790s.

O n Friday, 2 June 1780 the Scottish MP, Lord George Gordon, appeared before a crowd of forty to sixty thousand Britons in London's St. George's Field, located on the south side of the Thames in the laboring district of Southwark.[1] Such a large gathering was rare, even in London, whose long and unparalleled history of radical politics offered

[1] Castro reports that 40,000 Londoners were present, while Rudé says there were 60,000. J. Paul de Castro, *The Gordon Riots* (London, 1926), 28–29; George Rudé, *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest* (London, 1970), 270.

frequent opportunities for widespread popular rioting and protest.[2] The crowd was organized into four battalions: one representing the city of Westminster, the second residents of London, the third those from Middlesex, and the last Scots, presumably who resided in or around London. All were asked to wear "blue Cockades in their hats to distinguish themselves from the Papists, and those who approve of the late act in favour of Popery."[3] Gordon planned for the crowd to accompany him to Parliament, where he intended to present a petition signed by upward of twenty thousand Britons in favor of the repeal of the Catholic relief bill approved by Parliament two years earlier.[4] A correspondent from a local newspaper reported that the immense crowd was determined to resist the "introduction of Popery" in England. That religion was "subversive of all liberty … begotten by fraud and superstition, and teeming with absurdity, persecution, and the most diabolical cruelty. It was a glorious and most affecting spectacle," the writer proclaimed, "to see such numbers of our fellow citizens advancing in the cause of Protestantism."[5]

From St. George's Field, the procession proceeded peacefully toward Westminster, where Gordon met privately with government officials. However, when he reappeared to inform the crowd that Parliament refused to review the petition until the following Tuesday, they erupted into five days of violent rioting. Riotous Londoners attacked obvious symbols of Catholic influence: Catholic chapels and "Popish schools" in Lincoln's Inn Fields, Moorfields, Charles Square, and along Virginia Street were ransacked and burnt to the ground.[6] Angry crowds abused and assaulted prominent and ordinary Catholics, many of whom were Irish, while others paraded through the streets burning effigies of the pope amid cheers of "No Popery!"[7]

Over the following days, the crowd's attacks on symbols of Catholicism coincided with an increasing—and related—opposition toward representations of political and economic authority in the city. Both Tory and Whig members of Parliament were indiscriminately torn from their coaches and assaulted by rioters. Drunken crowds attacked and ransacked the homes of many prominent politicians and leading

[2] George Rudé, *Hanoverian London, 1714–1808,* 2nd ed. (Phoenix Mill, UK, 2003), 162–63; Lucy S. Sutherland, *The City of London and the Opposition to Government, 1768–1774: A Study in the Rise of Metropolitan Radicalism* (London, 1959); Robert B. Shoemaker, *The London Mob: Violence and Disorder in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 2004). For contemporary prints of middling and lower sort political participation, see John Brewer, ed., *The Common People and Politics, 1750–1790* (Cambridge, 1985).

[3] "Protestant Association," *London Evening-Post*, 30 May 1780.

[4] Rudé, *Paris and London*, 270.

[5] "London," *London Evening-Post*, 3 June 1780.

[6] My account of the rioting is drawn from several contemporary newspapers: "Monday, June 5. London," *London Evening-Post*, 6 June 1780; "Wednesday, June 7. London," *London Evening-Post*, 8 June 1780; "Friday, June 9. London," *London Evening-Post*, 10 June 1780. See also Castro, *The Gordon Riots,* and Christopher Hibbert, *King Mob: The Story of Lord George Gordon and the Riots of 1780* (London, 1958). Rudé examines the social composition of the crowd in George Rudé, "The Gordon Riots: A Study of the Rioters and Their Victims," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., no. 6 (1956): 93–114. See also Nicholas Rogers, "Crowd and People in the Gordon Riots," in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Eckhart Hellmuth (Oxford, 1990), 39–55; Clive Bloom, *Violent London: 2000 Years of Riots, Rebels, and Revolts* (London, 2003), 120–41; Eugene Charlton Black, *The Association: British Extraparliamentary Organization, 1769–1793* (Cambridge, 1963), 131–73; Colin Haydon, "The Gordon Riots in the English Provinces," *Historical Research* 63 (1990): 354–59, and *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester, 1993).

[7] Hibbert, *King Mob*, 66–70.

government officials. Others attacked and broke open as many as eight debtors prisons, releasing the prisoners and destroying the buildings.[8] They also tore open the gates of Blackfriars Bridge, demolished the tollhouses, and poured the money into the Thames. Some even attempted to storm the Bank of England, the very symbol of the empire's economic power and prosperity, but British soldiers, led, ironically, by the long-standing symbol of British liberty John Wilkes, held them back. Fire consumed buildings throughout the city as thousands paraded the streets, taking money and goods from people as they pleased. By Thursday, 8 June, nearly a week after the rioting began, more than ten thousand British soldiers patrolled the streets of London, with orders to fire on crowds that refused to disperse.

Pamphlets, broadsides, and miscellaneous ephemera distributed throughout the city during the rioting illustrated the larger ideological significance of this event for popular conceptions of British loyalty and patriotism. The author of *The Thunderer*, one of several seditious pamphlets published during the rioting, encouraged Londoners to resist the government's arbitrary measures. "Be firm, be resolute, be determined," the writer proclaimed, "you have heaven to protect you, and you have justice, truth and virtue on your side; act like men, like Protestants and Britons." The Catholic relief act, the writer argued, was just the latest in a series of attempts by both king and Parliament to weaken the Protestant faith in Britain's Atlantic empire and thus to destroy the very fabric of British society. "The *Quebec* bill, which established the *Roman Catholick* religion in *Canada* about five years since; and the late act in favour of Popery, must convince every dispassionate unprejudiced Englishman of the *Romish* complexion of *Pious* the *third* our *Protestant* king, and his Papist bench of *new* made *Protestant Bishops*." The writer concluded by drawing upon traditional Protestant Whig rhetoric to reaffirm the religious *and* civil liberties of loyal British subjects: "the power which we delegated to [Parliament], was for the preservation of the Protestant religion and our civil liberties, and not for their destruction."[9]

More crudely written broadsides and miscellaneous ephemera found lying in the city streets also focused on the legislation's threat to both the Protestant church and the British state. One proclaimed that "Georg 3$^d$ is a Roman Catholick. No popery Down with it. Dethrone him or else he will Masacree you all. If your king's Not Dethron'd he will be your Utter ruin for he is a true Roman Catholick … he should lose his Head."[10] Another printed card, said to have been carried around by rioters as a badge of support for the cause, read "Damn y$^e$ King and y$^e$ Pope" on one side and "Down with y$^e$ King, Down with Popery. NB: No Popery" on the other side.[11]

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[8] It was later reported that 1,294 prisoners escaped during the riots. "Correspondence and papers relating to [the Gordon] Riots in London, 1780," 15 June 1780, the National Archives (TNA): PRO PC 1/3097.

[9] "The Thunderer," 8 June 1780, TNA: PRO WO 34/103/231–33. Rogers argues that the Quebec Act played an important role in shaping popular opposition to the Catholic Relief Bill after 1778. Nicholas Rogers, "The Gordon Riots and the Politics of War," in *The Gordon Riots: Politics, Culture, and Insurrection in the Late Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Ian Haywood and John Seed (Cambridge, 2012), 25–28.

[10] "Letter from Jn$^o$ Mansel, L$^t$ Col$^l$, 3rd Dragoon, Artilery Ground to [Unknown]," 12 June 1780, TNA: PRO WO 34/103/367–68.

[11] "Letter from Richard Worsley, Hyde Park Camp to [Unknown]," 11 June 1780, TNA: PRO WO 34/103/325–26.

When all was said and done, five days of violent rioting had brought the capital of Britain's immense empire to a near standstill. In the process, at least 450 Londoners and 210 soldiers perished, while numerous city shops, homes, government offices, chapels, and prisons lay in ashes.[12] "I remember the Excise and the Gin Act and the rebels at Derby and Wilkes' interlude and the French at Plymouth, or I should have a very bad memory," wrote Horatio Walpole on 7 June, at the height of the rioting, "but I never till last night saw London and Southwark in flames!"[13]

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The Gordon Riots—the bloodiest, most violent riots in London's long and turbulent history—have received considerable attention from historians. The first two major studies, both published at least a half century ago, positioned the riots as a uniquely London event and portrayed Gordon and the rioters as crazed religious zealots bent on defending beliefs that were becoming unfashionable in an increasingly enlightened and tolerant British society.[14] More recently, however, historians have stressed the broader British Atlantic context of the riots, while not completely abandoning this toleration narrative. The protracted war in the colonies and the recent addition of France into the conflict brought about a renewed sense of a Protestant-based patriotism within the British Isles, along with a mounting distrust of the seemingly incompetent administration of Lord North. Yet the excessive violence and xenophobic motives that lay behind the Gordon Riots are thought to have weakened the growing radical movement within England, which sought to reform the corruption in British politics.[15]

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[12] Rudé, "The Gordon Riots," 99, 105. This is a conservative number based on official government records. Hibbert suggests that the number of dead was closer to 850. Hibbert, *King Mob*, 144n.

[13] Quoted in Rudé, *London and Paris*, 268.

[14] The introductory chapter to Christopher Hibbert's study is revealing titled, "The Mad Scotchman." Hibbert, *King Mob*. J. Pual Castro began his study by quoting Edward Gibbon, who said the riots were marked "by a dark and diabolical fanaticism." *The Gordon Riots*, 1. Eugene Black titled his chapter on the Protestant Association "The Children of Darkness." *The Association*. George Rudé's 1956 landmark study of the social composition of the rioters may have challenged the fanatical, xenophobic nature of the crowd, but it did little to move the riots beyond London city lines. Rudé, "The Gordon Riots." Colin Haydon, in his more recent study of anti-Catholicism in eighteenth-century England, is less critical of the rioters, arguing that they were acting on deeply rooted English plebeian cultural and religious fears that were commonly expressed in the eighteenth century. *Anti-Catholicism in Eighteenth-Century England, c. 1714–80: A Political and Social Study* (Manchester, 1993) and "Popery at St. James's": The Conspiracy Theses of William Payne, Thomas Hollis, and Lord George Gordon," in *Conspiracies and Conspiracy Theory in Early Modern Europe: From the Waldensians to the French Revolution*, ed. Barry Coward and Julian Swann (Ashgate, 2004), 173–95.

[15] Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), 264–69; Nicholas Rogers, "Crowd and People in the Gordon Riots," in *The Transformation of Political Culture: England and Germany in the Late Eighteenth Century*, ed. Eckhart Hellmuth (Oxford, 1990), 39–55; John Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots: London Supporters of Revolutionary America, 1769–1782* (Kingston, 1987); Colin Haydon, "The Gordon Riots in the English Provinces," *Historical Research* 63 (1990): 354–59. In a recent essay, Rogers finds that while the riots may have weakened support nationally for the radical opposition, they had almost no effect on London city politics in the following several years. Rogers, "The Gordon Riots," 21–41. Dana Rabin's essay positions the riots within the debate over metropolitan London's place within an increasingly diverse empire. "Imperial Disruptions: City, Nation, and Empire in the Gordon Riots," in Haywood and Seed, *The Gordon Riots*, 93–114.

Despite these findings, there are still several issues that remain unresolved in the current scholarship. First, while historians have identified a variety of domestic and international events that help to explain the riots in London, no one has yet to offer a comprehensive account of why Lord George Gordon and the Protestant Association were able to gather so much support from the British public, both at home and abroad.[16] Second, conclusions drawn from the public's response to the riots remain largely centered on London and mainland British politics, without any sense as to how the riots affected people and politics elsewhere in Britain's Atlantic empire.[17] Third, and most important, no one has considered how the beliefs and ideas that lay behind the Protestant Association's cause were informed by, and contributed to, a much larger empire-wide public debate over the nature of British Protestant patriotism in the midst of the colonial rebellion in North America.

Situating the Gordon Riots within a broader geographical and ideological context challenges basic assumptions about the relationship among popular politics, patriotism, and empire in the late eighteenth-century British Atlantic. The Protestant Whig patriotism employed by Gordon and the rioters was shaped not necessarily from the imperial center but rather through a complex network of communication that linked Britons living in all corners of the Atlantic empire. A burgeoning Atlantic print culture—namely, in the form of cheap and widely accessible newspapers—helped to create a web of connections between the peripheries of Britain's rapidly expanding Atlantic empire and the capitol in London.[18] In doing so, it helped to foster an *imagined community* of ordinary British subjects who were able to find commonality in a shared sense of a profoundly Protestant patriotic national identity.[19]

This shared identity found new strength and meaning in the recent alliance between the rebellious colonists and Britain's long-standing enemy, Catholic France. The Franco-American alliance of 1778 occurred after more than a decade of imperial crises that had forced ordinary Britons to reassess their patriotic

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[16] Stephen Conway's account remains the most comprehensive to date. *The British Isles and the War for American Independence* (Oxford, 2000), 166–266.

[17] This London-centric approach continues to dominate the most recent literature on the riots. For example, see Haywood and Seed, *The Gordon Riots*. In response to a recent review of their volume, the editors defended their limited geographical approach by wrongly arguing "that the Gordon riots were predominantly a London phenomenon." Author response to Katrina Navickas, review of *The Gordon Riots: Politics, Culture and Insurrection in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Ian Haywood and John Seed. *Reviews of History*, no. 1249 (May 2012), http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1249 (accessed 25 May 2012).

[18] Historians no longer debate that the empire's peripheries shaped mainland British politics, especially during the American war. For example, see Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, 1992); Eliga H. Gould, *The Persistence of Empire: British Political Culture in the Age of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2000); Wilson, *The Sense of the People*; Conway, *The British Isles*. Few, however, have moved beyond this "two-way street" thinking to see British political culture and patriotism as the product of a complex web of connections in which communities on the peripheries were connected with one another and to the imperial center in London. For a later, nineteenth-century example of this approach, see Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race* (London, 2007). The definitive study of the emergence of an English/British Atlantic print culture remains Ian K. Steele, *The English Atlantic, 1675–1740: An Exploration of Communication and Community* (New York, 1986).

[19] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), 44–45, 61, 62. Charles E. Clark makes a similar case for the effect of newspapers on drawing colonial Americans together. Clark, "The Newspapers of Provincial America," in *Three Hundred Years of the American Newspaper*, ed. John B. Hench (Worcester, 1991), 367–89.

attachment to Britain's Protestant empire.[20] The government's decision in 1774 to deny New England colonists their political and economic freedom—both cherished birthrights of all Protestant Britons—while promoting Catholicism in the neighboring province of Quebec, pushed many American colonists to the brink of rebellion.[21] Yet others in the colonies, and elsewhere in the empire, remained attached to their nation, although they were not immune from this highly charged political discourse.

The American alliance with France in 1778, however, completely changed how many Britons understood their nation and the rebellion in North America. The alliance exposed the hypocrisy of an American cause that was allegedly based upon a superior articulation of individual rights and liberties. Britons living in distant, though remarkably connected, Atlantic communities, such as Kingston (Jamaica), Glasgow, Dublin, and New York City, which attracted white Loyalists from across all thirteen American colonies, publicly engaged in a language of Protestant loyalty that no longer struggled to contend with an American revolutionary ideology that challenged their own Whig definitions of Britishness.[22] Instead, as we shall see, the American and French alliance provided tangible proof of the misguided and illegitimate nature of the colonial rebellion.

The alliance also inspired ordinary Britons on both sides of the Atlantic to champion a more zealous defense of their Protestant Whig Britishness. In print and on the streets, Britons everywhere shared in a popular political culture that discounted the American cause by celebrating Britain's Whig supremacy.[23] Crucially, however, the British government did very little to support this renewed patriotic loyalty. Instead, attempts to relieve Catholics when the nation was at war with France increasingly convinced ordinary Britons that their government was conspiring to topple the Protestant nation they so desperately sought to defend. Most famously, this led to the outburst of deadly protests and rioting in the streets of London in early June 1780. Yet the Gordon riots were just one instance of how the government's pro-Catholic policies had pushed patriotic Britons to the brink of rebellion

[20] For the American perspective, see John M. Murrin, "A Roof without Walls: The Dilemma of American National Identity," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American Identity*, ed. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill, 1987), 333–48.

[21] Historians have typically downplayed the significance of the Quebec Act on the movement toward rebellion in the American colonies. Vernon P. Creviston's recent essay offers a persuasive counter to this argument. "No King Unless It Be a Constitutional King": Rethinking the Place of the Quebec Act in the Coming of the American Revolution," *Historian* 73, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 463–79.

[22] All four communities enjoyed a vibrant print culture during the American Revolution. There were two newspapers published weekly in Kingston, and two in Glasgow, in addition to the ever-popular monthly *Scots Magazine*. Dubliners enjoyed the greatest access to news, with as many as six newspapers published during the American War. New Yorkers also benefited from an expansive print culture, with a total of four newspapers published weekly in the final years of the conflict, including arguably one of the most famous newspapers in all of the empire, James Rivington's *Rivington's Gazette*.

[23] The term "popular political culture," while fairly amorphous, can be best understood as the formal and informal political beliefs and culture of ordinary British subjects. This political culture found expression in the eighteenth-century emergence of what Jürgen Habermas called the "public sphere." The space was both real and imagined, and often assumed textual existence in the many newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and broadsides that emerged during this period. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederic Lawrence (Boston, 1989). Simon Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture of the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia, 2000), 5–6.

in the latter years of the American war. The specter of Catholic relief and the war with France also led to a series of similarly violent riots in Scotland in late 1778 and early 1779 and influenced the public's frenzied reaction to the trial of Admiral Keppel in early 1779. Elsewhere in the empire, unrelenting fears of French invasions, the perceived incompetence of the government, and an increasingly radicalized Protestant political culture threatened to expose the fragile nature of loyalty and patriotism among British colonists in the Caribbean and North America. Perhaps most radically, Irish Protestants and Catholics took advantage of this divisive and unstable political culture to make demands for Irish economic and political independence using language and rhetoric that drew heavily from their Protestant Whig heritage. This movement, which despite its radical nature avoided the violence and bloodshed of the rioting on the mainland, culminated in the country achieving legislative autonomy in the "Constitution of 1782." If British imperial considerations in 1774 were critical to the outbreak of rebellion in the American colonies, the Franco-American alliance in 1778, and the subsequent pro-Catholic imperial policies of the British government, provided similar possibilities throughout the empire late in the American war.

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On 14 May 1778, less than two months after news of the Franco-American alliance had reached the British public, a poorly attended Parliament quietly passed the English Roman Catholic Relief Bill. The bill repealed some of the penal laws that restricted the religious and political rights of Catholics living in England. It stipulated that Catholics would still face imprisonment for holding mass, but it removed the £100 reward for anyone who reported on them. Furthermore, the law stated that Catholics could teach at schools so long as they took an oath of allegiance to the king and renounced their belief in the pope's temporal powers within the British empire. Catholics were also free to buy, sell, inherit, and bequeath land at any point in the future.[24] A similar bill was also intended for Scotland.

After an intense debate over the course of the summer of 1778, Irish MPs and the British government agreed to a far more modest Irish relief bill. Protestants feared empowering Catholics, who made up nearly 75 percent of the island's population. As a result, the approved bill only allowed Catholics to lease land for up to 999 years, denying them the opportunity to acquire political rights through land ownership. The bill did, however, abolish the gavel system, which sought to break up the Catholic landed aristocracy by requiring landowners to either divide their land among all sons upon their death or give their land to the eldest son if he converted to Protestantism.[25]

There were several motives for each of the relief bills. First and foremost, the British government needed more soldiers to fight the Americans and their new allies and hoped to draw upon the large number of Irish and Scottish

[24] Robert Kent Donovan, "Voices of Distrust: The Expression of Anti-Catholic Feeling in Scotland, 1778–1781," *Innes Review* 30 (1979): 62–63.

[25] Eamon O'Flaherty, "Ecclesiastical Politics and the Dismantling of the Penal Laws in Ireland, 1774–82," *Irish Historical Studies* 26, no. 101 (May 1998): 33–50; Robert E. Burns, "The Catholic Relief Act in Ireland, 1778," *Church History* 32, no. 2 (June 1963): 181–206; Thomas Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise of the Irish Nation: The Catholic Question, 1690–1830* (Savage, MD, 1992), 82–92.

Catholics.[26] The bills also revealed the increasingly tolerant attitudes of elite British officials toward their traditional Catholic French enemies.[27] The Irish bill, like the Quebec Act passed four years earlier, also sought to ensure the loyalty of Irish Catholics at a time of increased fears of a French invasion.[28] Government officials were encouraged in the spring of 1778 by several loyalty addresses from elite Irish Catholics, even if the majority of ordinary Irish Catholics stood to gain little from the relief measures.[29]

Ordinary Britons, however, were far less tolerant of the proposed Catholic relief. Generally speaking, they had yet to fully embrace the enlightened values emerging within elite British society. By the middle of the eighteenth century, British intellectuals and politicians were arguing for greater religious toleration and attempting to govern the empire in a more pragmatic fashion. Yet the broader British public, particularly in times of war and crisis, continued to adhere to a deeply entrenched worldview that positioned Catholicism and France in direct conflict with the Protestant religious and political values that shaped the British Empire in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[30]

This shared patriotic identity was fashioned in large part through an emerging and accessible empire-wide popular political culture. Well-known public rituals, an elaborate festive culture, and a growing number of cheap and accessible newspapers circulating throughout the British Atlantic employed rhetoric, metaphors, and imagery that linked Catholic political rule with the perceived absolutism, tyranny, and brutality of the religion.[31] In turn, ordinary Britons believed such rule produced a population of backward, barbaric, and subordinate subjects who lacked the ability to think, reason, and mature, both as individuals and more broadly as a nation. This, of course, stood in stark contrast to the celebrated British constitution and government, which, many argued, was a product of a Protestant revolution against Catholic religious and political tyranny. The British political system favored a balanced, representative government that promoted economic prosperity, personal liberty, and religious toleration, all of which created a learned, prosperous, advanced, and free society envied throughout all of Europe.[32] The sheer simplicity of this rhetoric

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[26] By the 1770s, there were roughly 80,000 Catholics living in England (1.3% of the population) and 30,000 in Scotland (2.5%), whereas Irish Catholics amounted to between 70% and 80% of the island's total population of 4 million. Robert Kent Donovan, "The Military Origins of the Roman Catholic Relief Programme of 1778," *Historical Journal* 28, 1 (1985): 82–83.

[27] Doll argues that the government's enlightened pro-Catholic motives were similar to those that led to the passing of the Quebec Act in 1774. Peter M. Doll, *Revolution, Religion, and National Identity: Imperial Anglicanism in British North America, 1745–1795* (Madison, 2000), 146–53.

[28] Karen Stanbridge, "Quebec and the Irish Catholic Relief Act of 1778: An Institutional Approach," *Journal of Historical Sociology* 16, no. 3 (September 2003): 375–404.

[29] Vincent Morley, *Irish Opinion and the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 2002), 177–89; Conway, *The British Isles*, 246–48.

[30] Haydon, *Anti-Catholicism* and "'Popery at St. James's,'" 173–95.

[31] The ritual parading and burning of effigies during annual Pope's Day celebrations was but one example of the various ways in which ordinary Britons defined themselves in opposition to Catholic France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. See Brendan McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688–1776* (Chapel Hill, 2006), 56–70; David Cressy, *Bonfire and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (Berkeley, 1989), 141–55.

[32] Steven Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution* (New Haven, 2009).

enabled ordinary Britons to identify themselves against their enemies in broad socio-political terms that transcended, to some degree, more distinct local or regional identities.[33]

The recent alliance in 1778 between France and Briton's rebellious American colonists only served to further heighten this oppositional anti-Catholic rhetoric. French participation in the American conflict enabled Britons to redefine the Americans as political and religious enemies, while simultaneously celebrating their loyalty and identity within an empire-wide conception of Britishness.[34] The government's seemingly pro-Catholic attitude during a war with France, however, contradicted—or even threatened—this resurgence of Protestant British patriotism. By legislating in favor of Catholics, as they had done against the American colonists in 1774, the king and Parliament risked betraying this identity.[35] Their policies harkened back to monarchs who had threatened national security through pro-Catholic concessions. Their actions even led some to wonder if Lord North's government was embracing the enemy's Catholic, absolute form of rule in order to continue the war in America.

Practically speaking, however, the expansion of the war brought about by the Franco-American alliance strained British military resources already weakened by the Seven Years' War. The British government thus was forced to find new ways of recruiting additional soldiers and seamen for service. Even after the British experienced their own version of a *rage militaire* during recruiting drives in early 1778, inspired by both General Burgoyne's defeat in the colonies and France's entry into the war, the British army and navy were still unprepared for a global war against France and the Americans.[36] Consequently, Lord North and his supporters decided to remove certain penal restrictions so they could recruit greater numbers

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[33] The now vast literature on this subject owes its origins to the groundbreaking work of Linda Colley, especially *Britons* and "Britishness and Otherness: An Argument," *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (October 1992): 309–29. Her work has been refined and challenged by a number of historians. See Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, 2009); McConville, *The King's Three Faces*, 15–80; Gould, *The Persistence of Empire*; Francis D. Cogliano, *No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport, 1995); Jack P. Greene, "Empire and Identity from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution," in *The Eighteenth Century*, ed. P. J. Marshall, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1998) 2:208–30; Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, ed., *Protestantism and National Identity: Britain and Ireland, c. 1650–c.1850* (Cambridge, 1998); Colin Kidd, *British Identities Before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic world, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, 1999) and "North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms," *Historical Journal* 39, no. 2 (June 1996): 361–82; S. J. Connolly, "Varieties of Britishness: Ireland, Scotland and Wales in the Hanoverian State," in *Uniting the Kingdom? The Making of British History*, ed. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (New York, 1995), 193–207.

[34] Stephen Conway has shown how important this alliance was to Britons living in the British Isles, but he has not explored the issue in the wider context of the Atlantic World. Stephen Conway, "'A Joy Unknown for Years Past': The American War, Britishness, and the Celebration of Rodney's Victory at the Saints," *History* 86, no. 282 (April 2001): 180–99, and "From Fellow-Nationals to Foreigners: British Perceptions of the Americans, Circa 1739–1783," *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 2002): 65–100. See also Cogliano, *No King, No Popery*, 71–87; Dror Wahrman, "The English Problem of Identity in the American Revolution," *American Historical Review* 106, no. 4 (October 2001): 1–23.

[35] Creviston, "No King Unless It Be a Constitutional King," 463–79.

[36] Conway, *The British Isles*, 16–20. The term "rage militaire" was first used by Charles Royster to describe the American response to Lexington and Concord in 1775. See Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, 1979), 25–53.

of soldiers from Catholics living in England and from the larger populations in Ireland and the Scottish Highlands.

The decision to target Catholic Highlanders outraged Lowland Scots, many of whom had fully embraced a Protestant British patriotic political culture over the preceding decades to distance themselves from the last failed Jacobite rebellion in 1745. From the summer of 1778 onward, Scottish newspapers trumpeted the misguided intentions of the government in an effort to encourage public opposition to the bill. The situation was made even more tense by rumors of a possible French invasion, along with reports that the infamous American privateer John Paul Jones was poised to attack the west and east coasts of Scotland, Ireland, and England.[37]

In autumn 1778, thousands bypassed formal channels of political protest, such as petitioning their local or parliamentary officials. Instead, they formed far more radical and popular committees of correspondence and associations, modeled on those created by the American revolutionaries during the 1760s, to coordinate and express the public's outrage. In Glasgow and the city's hinterland, members of trade incorporations, elite merchants, politicians, prominent clergymen, and citizens from all levels of society organized themselves as "the Eighty-five Private Societies in and about Glasgow."[38] Within a matter of months they drew up petitions against the proposed legislation, utilizing the local press in Glasgow and Edinburgh to list their grievances and print their proclamations.[39]

The speed, extent, and vehemence of the Scottish response were remarkable. From October 1778 to January 1779, over 350 petitions from churches, towns, and societies throughout Scotland were published. In the Glasgow area alone, organizers claimed to have collected over eighty-eight thousand signatures.[40] For many, fears of the proposed legislation centered less on the religious consequences of enabling Catholics to fight for Britain and more on the broader sociopolitical threat of Catholic relief in Scotland. A writer for the *Scots Magazine* reported that a meeting in Glasgow of "many hundreds of the friends of the *Protestant Interest* … declared it as their unanimous opinion, that such a measure would be highly prejudicial to the interest of the Protestant religion in Scotland, dangerous to our constitution civil and religious, a direct violation of the treaty of Union, inconsistent with the King's honour, and destructive of the peace and security of his best subjects."[41] Just outside the city, the Paisley Ayr Shire Society met and drafted a warning that

[37] Conditions were worse in Scotland, where there was very little military protection and no local militias. See "Letter from Oughton to Lord Suffolk, Edinburgh," 27 April 1778, TNA: PRO SP 54/47/131; "Letter from Oughton to Lord Suffolk, Edinburgh," 19 May 1778, TNA: PRO SP 54/47/135; "Letter from Oughton to George III, Edinburgh," 7 September 1778, TNA: PRO SP 54/47/187; "Letter from W. Hamilton to Lord Viscount Weymouth, Edinburgh," 29 October 1779, TNA: PRO SP 54/47/346–47. See also Robert Kent Donovan, *No Popery and Radicalism: Opposition to Roman Catholic Relief in Scotland, 1778–1782* (New York, 1987), 204–07.

[38] Donovan, *No Popery*, 58; *Transactions of the Eighty-Five Societies, in and about Glasgow: United … to Oppose a Repeal of the Penal Statues against Papists in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1779).

[39] Many of the public declarations made in opposition to the Catholic relief act mentioned France's alliance with the Americans. *Glasgow Mercury*, 7 January 1779, 14 January 1779, and 21 January 1779; *Scots Magazine* 41 (February 1779), 106–08. See also "Supplement to the Glasgow Journal, No. 1957," n.d., TNA: PRO SP 54/47/210–211.

[40] Donovan, *No Popery*, 67.

[41] *Scots Magazine* 41 (February 1779), 107.

relief would "give the death's stab to our civil and religious liberties." In nearby Pollockshaws, the Society of Weavers reminded readers that nearly five years earlier the government had made similar allowances for Catholics living in Canada, which set off a chain of events that ultimately led to the rebellious American colonists allying themselves with those "under-handed, double-dealing, perfidious Papists, our natural enemies, THE FRENCH."[42]

Communities throughout Lowland Scotland emphasized the threat that such legislation would pose to Britain's success in defeating the rebellious American colonists. "Should it become a law," argued both elite and ordinary residents of the nearby town of Govan, "it would alienate many of the subjects from his Majesty's person and government—it would, as every former attempt to encourage Popery hath done, by occasioning emigrations, depopulate the country, and add strength to the Colonies now in arms against the Parent-state."[43] Residents of the parish of Galston argued that repealing the legislation "may speedily prove effectual to re-establish peace and good order in our American colonies."[44]

The Scottish relief bill threatened to undermine the Protestant Whig foundations of British patriotism, and thus challenged the reinvigorated sense of British identity occasioned by the Franco-American alliance. In a letter to Lord Suffolk, the "Eighty-Five Private Societies" in Glasgow argued that such a bill "would actually overthrow the *union*, dissolve the *claim of right*, renew the pretences of an abdicated, Popish family, to the crown, and break down the legal barriers against that arbitrary religion, so pernicious to the interest of Princes, as well as to the freedom of a brave and virtuous people."[45] In a widely reprinted petition from the parish of Carluke, residents drew upon a familiar rhetoric of patriotism in order to express their deep anger at the actions of the government: "Great Britain hath long been considered as the bulwark of the Protestant cause. The power of her arm, and the terror of her right arm, kept the Popish nations in awe. To annihilate, therefore, or diminish her power, is giving a mortal blow to Protestantism.… They [Members of Parliament] have lost America.—The West Indies in danger.—Trade and manufactures in a ruinous state.—Protestant alliances neglected or despised, while the Popish powers are closely united, and our internal safety thereby rendered very precarious."[46] The administration's support of the relief act carried far more significance than just the repeal of certain penal laws against Catholics. It signaled the last in a long series of failures by the government to uphold the nation's Protestant Whig tradition in the midst of a civil, and now global, war. More simply put, many believed the failure of the government to act British would likely lead to the destruction of the once all-powerful British Empire.

[42] "Address of the Paisley Ayr Shire Society," *Glasgow Mercury*, 28 January 1779; "Address of the Society of Weavers in Pollockshaws," *Glasgow Mercury*, 4 February 1779.

[43] "Address from the heritors, kirk-session, society of weavers, and other mechanics in Govan," *Glasgow Mercury*, 25 February 1779.

[44] "Address from the heritors, elders, and people of the parish of Galston," *Glasgow Mercury*, 4 February 1779.

[45] "Letter to Lord Suffolk," in *Transactions of the Eighty-Five Societies*, 7.

[46] "Address from the heritors and heads of families in the parish of Carluke, Lanerk County," *Glasgow Mercury*, 28 January 1779. See also "London," *London Evening-Post*, 9 February 1779; "London, Feb. 9, 10," *Freeman's Journal*, 16 February 1779.

It was not long before Glaswegians took to the streets in protest of Catholic tolera-
tion, first in October 1778 and again in early February 1779. In the first instance, "a
number of disorderly people" directed their anger at a house on High Street that
served as a meeting place for the small number of Catholics living in the city.[47]
They "demolished several pictures, that ornamented the room, and were supposed
to be figures, of saints and the objects of their worship." From there the crowd
grew in size "and behaved in a rude manner, by throwing stones, breaking the
windows, &c. which caused the meeting to dismiss; and the people, in returning
from their place of worship, were maltreated, particularly a venerable old gentleman,
who was carried away in a sedan chair, was insulted in a base manner."[48]

Over the following months, fears over the implementation of the relief bill inten-
sified, culminating in a much more violent and destructive riot in Glasgow in early
February 1779. Incidentally, just days before the riot, Parliament actually agreed to
withdraw the bill from consideration in response to widespread opposition through-
out Scotland. News of Parliament's decision, however, had not yet reached the city
when crowds took to the street on a day originally set aside for public fasting. It
was reported that "the mob assembled and burnt and destroyed the houses of
every Papists they could discover. One Bagnall [an English Catholic living in the
city who held services at his home], I am afraid is totally ruined." Another witness
to the rioting expressed that there was "such a mob as was never seen here. The
Papists are in a poor situation. A house beyond the East toll is entirely burnt, furni-
ture and all. Our fencibles are drawn up, and every thing in confusion." When the
magistrates and soldiers attempted to quell the rioters many were "wounded by
stones and brickbats," until the soldiers were finally ordered "to attack the Mob
with clubbed Musquets; which they did so effectually as to clear the Streets of
them, and they have been quiet ever since."[49]

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Comparatively speaking, Irish Protestants offered far less resistance to their own
relief legislation than the Scots, and they were quick to condemn the violence in
Glasgow and Edinburgh. Letters and essays printed in *Freeman's Journal* criticized

[47] Kaplan points out that the British public was well aware of private Catholic meetinghouses in their
communities into the nineteenth century. They helped to preserve, he argues, "the monopoly of a commu-
nity's official church in the public sphere" by forcing dissenting groups to the private, though known,
margins of society. Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Divided by Faith: Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration
in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2007), 172–97.

[48] *Glasgow Mercury*, 22 October 1778; "A letter from Glasgow of the 22d inst.," *Newcastle Chronicle; Or,
Weekly Advertiser*, 31 October 1778; "Extract of a letter from Glasgow, Oct. 19," *Gazetteer and New Daily
Advertiser* [London], 28 October 1778.

[49] "Letter from J. Oughton to Lord Suffolk, Edinburgh," 12 February 1779, TNA: PRO SP 54/47/
228; *Glasgow Mercury*, 11 February 1779; "Extract of a letter from Glasgow, dated Feb. 9 eight at
night," *London Evening-Post*, 16 February 1779. His surname also appears as Bagnal, Bagnall, and
Baynall in various publications. James D. Marwick and Robert Renwick, eds., *Extracts From the Records
of the Burgh of Glasgow with Charters and Other Documents,* 11 vols. (Glasgow, 1876–1916), 8:547–53.
The riots are all the more shocking considering there were only twenty known communicants in the
entire city. James Darragh, "The Catholic Population of Scotland Since the Year 1680," *Innes Review* 4
(1953): 55. A similar, if not more violent, riot occurred a day later in nearby Edinburgh. "Extra of a
letter from Edinburgh, Feb. 5," *London Evening-Post*, 9 February 1779.

the rioters as illiberal and intolerant, with one writer observing that they resemble "more the irruption of a barbarous Scandinavian banditti of the fifth century, than the operations of a people advanced in letters and philosophy."[50] Another critic lamented that "it is with the greatest regret they [Scots] oppose a measure which hath been dictated by a liberal spirit of humanity."[51] This is not to suggest, however, that Catholic relief did not have an affect on Protestant Irish loyalty to Great Britain. On the contrary, the government's decision to tolerate Irish Catholics while Britain was at war with France gave rise to an Irish-born Protestant volunteer movement that would eventually seek far more radical political reforms than a simple repeal of the relief bill.

Initially founded in spring 1778 with only a limited military aim—to protect the island from a possible French invasion supported by Irish Catholics—the volunteers began to speak out against the ruined state of their country's economy by the early months of 1779.[52] The situation was especially dire in prominent port cities like Dublin, where a majority of the population relied heavily on the British Atlantic trade.[53] Ireland's economy suffered even more after 1776, when the British government responded to American independence by imposing a complete embargo on colonial trade. Tensions increased in 1778, when local newspapers reported that, among other concessions, the government's failed Carlisle Peace Commission planned to offer the rebel colonists the "freedom to trade" within the empire if they agreed to end the war.[54] Increasingly frustrated by their colonial trade status, Irish volunteers and politicians began to push for "free trade" within the British Empire.[55]

Beginning in summer 1778, Irish merchants and politicians made use of American resistance tactics by boycotting all British goods and encouraging the consumption of Irish-made products.[56] When the Irish Parliament convened in late October 1779, the movement took a decidedly more aggressive turn. Volunteer companies in Dublin, with the support of the city's residents, used the occasion of the

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[50] "To the Committee for conducting the Free-Pres [sic]," *Freeman's Journal*, 20 February 1779.

[51] "Dublin, February 16," *Freeman's Journal*, 16 February 1779.

[52] By the summer of 1780, there were as many as 60,000 volunteers. In Dublin, contemporary reports suggest that at least 8,000 men had joined by August 1780, or nearly 1 in every 5 Protestants in the city. Peter Smyth, "'Our Cloud-Cap't Grenadiers': The Volunteers as a Military Force," *Irish Sword* 13 (1978–79): 185–207; Maurice R. O'Connell, *Irish Politics and Social Conflict in the Age of the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1965), 68–102; Ian McBride, *Scripture Politics: Ulster Presbyterians and Irish Radicalism in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1998), 123–33; R. B. McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism and Revolution, 1760–1801* (Oxford, 1979), 239–74; Stephen O'Connor, "The Volunteers of Dublin 1778–84: A Short Study of Urban Volunteering," in *Georgian Dublin*, ed. Gillian O'Brien and Finola O'Kane (Dublin, 2008), 68–77.

[53] For example, see reports of the July 1778 woolen riot and attacks on British soldiers throughout 1778 and 1779. Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 181–83.

[54] Quoted in Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 204.

[55] There is a vast amount of literature on the free trade crisis. See O'Connell, *Irish Politics*, 129–67; Martyn J. Powell, *Britain and Ireland in the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Empire* (New York, 2003), 158–77; Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 223–30; Peter Smyth, "The Volunteers and Parliament, 1779–1784," in *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690–1800*, ed. Thomas Bartlett and D. W. Hayton (Belfast, 1979), 113–20; R. E. Burns, "The Belfast Letters, the Irish Volunteers 1778–79 and the Catholics," *Review of Politics* 20, no. 4 (October 1959): 678–91.

[56] McDowell, *Ireland in the Age of Imperialism*, 253–55; Conway, *The British Isles*, 208–10.

anniversary of William III's birth on 4 November to demand greater economic opportunities for their countrymen.[57] Irish Protestants regularly celebrated William's birthday, particularly in Dublin, which had the largest Protestant population of any city in the country.[58] But the 1779 celebration took on an entirely different importance. Printed accounts highlighted the central role of the volunteer companies in the procession, giving a detailed description of their numbers and uniforms. Typically, British soldiers, as symbols of the state, marched and fired volleys during royal anniversary celebrations. In this case, however, Irish-born Protestants assumed this role, and the author went to great length to express the Irishness of their appearance. The Dublin Volunteers, for example, carried flags "with the never-to-be-forgotten motto of—*the twelfth of October* 1778," which referred to their founding date. Meanwhile, the Merchants Company carried Orange flags, "with Hibernia endeavouring to support her harp, and grasping the cap of liberty."[59] Even more pointedly, days earlier, a writer in *Freeman's Journal* ordered Dubliners to illuminate their windows on William's birthday, "in honour of the Volunteers, to whom we owe every constitutional compliment," and not to "King William, whose partiality has undone this country."[60]

The procession concluded on the College Green, where the companies surrounded the statue of King William and affixed a sign to each of the four sides of the pedestal. The first sign referenced, "The GLORIOUS REVOLUTION," but the other three suggested the overt Irish politicization of this typical Protestant British celebration. The sign on the east side of the pedestal read, "The VOLUNTEERS of IRELAND. Motta, QUINQUAGINTA MILLIA JUNCTA, PARATI PRO PATRIA MORI." On the south side, the sign read, "RELIEF to IRELAND," and on the north, "A SHORT MONEY BILL—A FREE TRADE—Or ELSE!!!"[61] Threats of violence against the British government and the volunteers' willingness to give their lives in defense of their country illustrated the larger political motives underlying the movement for economic reform. The following month when Parliament in London finally agreed to repeal restrictions on Irish trade, the editor of the pro-patriot newspaper *Freeman's Journal* asked residents to refrain from celebrating. "No ILLUMINATIONS—no REJOICINGS—until the ENGLISH PARLIAMENT shall do away all its Acts that in any Manner affect this Country, and OUR CONSTITUTION BE MADE FREE."[62]

By the end of 1779, the government's decision to relieve Catholics while at war with France (and now Spain) had led to major political unrest in Scotland and Ireland. In the Scottish case, opposition to the relief act was deeply rooted in an all-pervasive British Protestant Whig tradition in which Scots professed their patriotism by denouncing the legislation. Irish Protestants, however, responded to Catholic

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[57] Their rise in prominence was partly due to the rumored (though never realized) French invasion months earlier, in which the volunteers were praised for defending their island in a time of crisis. Smyth, "The Volunteers and Parliament," 115–19; Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 198–203.

[58] For a more typical Protestant British celebration, see "Dublin, November 5," *Freeman's Journal*, 5 November 1778.

[59] "Dublin," *Freeman's Journal*, 6 November 1779.

[60] "To the Committee for conducting the Free-Press," *Freeman's Journal*, 4 November 1779.

[61] "Dublin," *Freeman's Journal*, 6 November 1779.

[62] "Dublin, December 21," *Freeman's Journal*, 21 December 1779.

relief and the war with France and Spain by forming volunteer companies that quickly began to push for Irish economic and, ultimately, political reform. When it came to the cause for free trade, they co-opted a traditional British Protestant anniversary date in order to promote a burgeoning Irish patriotism.[63]

<div style="text-align:center">■ ■ ■</div>

Military failures and seemingly arbitrary government policies made Britons increasingly concerned that the government was unable to wage a successful war against the confederated enemy. Throughout Britain's Atlantic empire, except Ireland to some extent, the American alliance with France and Spain may have renewed the patriotic convictions of Protestant British subjects, but it also expanded the disruptive global war. Britons everywhere now faced the combined French, Spanish, and American forces, while in London the government appeared to be weakening their cause. Events such as the No Popery riots in Scotland and the growing opposition to the relief bill in England served both to refine and to strengthen popular conceptions of Protestant British patriotism while heightening the public's concern about a despotic and misguided British government.

This was certainly the case in early spring 1779, when the trial of the decorated British admiral Augustus Keppel gripped the nation.[64] Keppel embodied the troubling ideological conflict inherit in the American Revolution. Initially sympathetic toward the colonial cause, Keppel refused to take up arms at the outset of the rebellion. Yet when news of the French and American treaty arrived in England in March 1778, he was said to have immediately raised his flag on board the *Prince George* in Portsmouth harbor.[65] A year later, he stood trial in London, unfairly accused by his senior officer, Sir Hugh Palliser, of having not done enough to ensure an important British naval victory against the French at the Battle of Ushant in July 1778. Britons throughout the empire closely followed the trial, which many viewed as a political spectacle in which Keppel represented the opposition and Palliser the increasingly unpopular North ministry. When Keppel was finally acquitted on all charges in February 1779, Britons throughout the empire rejoiced. An incredible number of Londoners paraded the admiral through the streets of the city in a display reminiscent of the Protestant Whig-inspired receptions that John Wilkes received on several occasions a decade earlier, while others attacked Palliser's home and those of his sympathizers.[66] Elsewhere in the empire, news of the acquittal led to widespread celebrations that illustrated the public's increasing distrust of what many perceived to be an oppressive and arbitrary government.[67] Keppel, like Wilkes, came to embody the

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[63] Stephen Small, *Political Thought in Ireland, 1776–1798: Republicanism, Patriotism, and Radicalism* (Oxford, 2002), 48–112.

[64] J. H. Broomfield, "The Keppel-Palliser Affair," *Mariner's Mirror* 47 (1961): 195–205; Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 255–69. Rogers examines the popular dimensions of the affair in Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), 122–51.

[65] Sainsbury, *Disaffected Patriots*, 146.

[66] "London," *London Evening-Post*, 18 February 1779. Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics*, 135–36.

[67] Wilson has counted at least seventy-five provincial towns celebrating Keppel's acquittal in Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 257. In comparison, there were seventy-six demonstrations in favor of Wilkes between 1767 and 1771. John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George the Third* (Cambridge, 1976), 175. The *London Evening-Post* listed reports of celebrations in forty-four different towns and

very definition of Protestant Whig patriotism that both the North ministry and the new war with France threatened to dismantle.[68]

It was in this increasingly contentious political climate that Lord George Gordon and his Protestant Association began to gather momentum for the repeal of the English relief bill.[69] In various addresses, often reprinted in newspapers throughout the British Atlantic, the association drew upon an empire-wide patriotic discourse that reminded readers that Catholic relief would threaten the ideological underpinnings of their immense empire.[70] One writer argued that "if the doctrines held by Papists were confined to matters of opinion in religion, and did not include political tenets of the most dangerous tendency, they might expect the same connivance, which has generally been extended to other erroneous sects." However, "when Papists thunder excommunication against all who differ from them in opinion, and their religious profession itself breathes the very spirit of persecution and cruelty, against those whom they anathematize as heretics … what security can be given to any state for their peaceable behaviour? and what claim can they have to toleration under any Protestant government?"[71]

The writer—and the association more broadly—also implored Britons to look beyond political or regional differences and embrace a patriotic cause that sought to protect the very foundations of their empire: "[This Association is not formed to promote the views of party, or to embarrass the measures of government at this important crisis. It consists of Protestants, who will yield to none of their fellow-subjects, in loyalty to His Majesty's person, or in zealous attachment to our happy constitution."[72] Similarly, London newspapers carried an address from the association that asked all "TRUE BRITONS" to unite against Popery: "[I]f we unite, like one man, for the Honour of God, and the Liberties of the People, we may yet experience the blessing of Divine Providence on this Kingdom, and love and confidence may again be restored amongst Brethren."[73]

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villages throughout England and Wales. *London Evening-Post*, 18 February 1779. For examples of celebrations outside of England, see "European Intelligence. London, February 11," *Jamaica Mercury, and Kingston Weekly Advertiser*, 8 May 1779. "Major General James Pattison to Captain Blomfield, New York City, 3 May 1779," in *Collections of the New-York Historical Society, for the Year 1875* (New York, 1876), 51. "Dublin. *February 27*," *Royal American Gazette*, [New York City] 27 May 1779. "Dublin, February 20," *Freeman's Journal*, 18 February 1779; Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 176–77.

[68] Wilson argued that the Keppel riots revealed strong pro-American sentiment in England. Wilson, *The Sense of the People*, 255–69. Rogers, however, correctly points out that there were only a small minority of protests that spoke in favor of the Americans and in several instances the rioters actually called for "a happy and speeding reconciliation with the Americans" but a "severe drubbing to France." Rogers, *Crowds, Culture and Politics*, 143–46.

[69] "The Humble Petition of his Majesty's loyal Protestant Subjects of the Cities of London and Westminster," *London Chronicle*, 8 January 1780; "Protestant Association," *St. James's Chronicle; or, the British Evening Post*, 8 January 1780; "Protestant Association," *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, [London]14 January 1780; "Protestant Association," *St. James's Chronicle; or, the British Evening Post*, 22 February 1780; "Protestant Association," *London Evening-Post*, 11 May 1780. See also Black, *The Association*, 31–130; Gould, *The Persistence of Empire*, 164–78.

[70] For example, see "The following is the Petition of the Protestant Association, agreed upon at a late Meeting," *Supplement to the Royal Gazette* [Kingston], 29 April 1780.

[71] "An Appeal from the Protestant Association to the People of Great Britain" (London, 1779).

[72] Ibid.

[73] "Protestant Association," *London Evening-Post*, 11 May 1780.

In the early months of 1780, the association repeatedly pressured Parliament to repeal the relief bill. When Lord North refused to even present their petitions, one writer in a local newspaper declared him "as black towards their cause, as the crust of a *twelfth-cake*." He also warned, as if to foreshadow things to come, that the association is "determined to persevere in presenting it to Parliament, and going in a body of about sixty thousand to surround the House, and shew Government there are still loyal Protestants left who wish to stem the torrent of Popery, which is now spreading its baneful poison through the kingdom."[74] Gordon even approached the king in late January 1780, reminding him in a published letter that "the House of Stuart had been banished from the throne for encouraging Popery and arbitrary power; and requested him that he should order his Ministers to support the Protestant Religion."[75] In the end, however, the king refused to give in to Gordon's demands, leaving the association with no choice but to march on Parliament.

On 29 May 1780, the Protestant Association held a meeting at Coachmaker's Hall in London that was attended by some two thousand supporters. In a passionate address to the crowded audience, Gordon declared that the only way to stop the dreadful consequences of the spread of popery in England and the rest of the empire was "by going in a firm, manly and resolute manner to the House, and there shew their representatives that they were determined to preserve their religious freedom with their lives." Thereafter he moved "that the whole body of the Protestant Association do attend in St. George's Fields on Friday next [2 June] to accompany his Lordship to the House of Commons on the delivery of the Protestant Petition."[76]

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The rioters who took to London streets in summer 1780 were not crazed, religious fanatics, bent on defending an unenlightened and largely unpopular brand of Protestant British patriotism. Rather, the actions of Gordon and his sympathizers were the product of an increasingly aggressive and patriotic political culture that was shaped by, and found support on, both sides of the Atlantic. Yet as news of the violence began to filter into mainland and colonial newspapers, Britons struggled to come to grips with what had happened in London. Ultimately, local circumstances, more than anything, seem to have shaped their response. In doing so, the riots offered new ways for ordinary Britons to reevaluate the patriotic attachment to the empire.

In Glasgow, Gordon and the cause that he championed continued to be held in high regard long after the riots had ended. Many Glaswegians were members of the Popular Party of the Presbyterian Church, which loyally supported the Protestant Hanoverian succession and believed strongly in the rights and liberties guaranteed through the constitution. As such, they were defiant in their opposition to the religious and political consequences of French Catholicism. In early February 1782, "a Numerous and Respectable Company of the Friends of LORD GEORGE, and

[74] *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, [London] 18 January 1780.
[75] Quoted in Hibbert, *King Mob*, 37.
[76] Quoted in Castro, *The Gordon Riots*, 24–25.

zealous Well-wishers to the *Protestant Cause*" assembled at the Saracen's Head Inn in Glasgow to celebrate the anniversary of Gordon's acquittal on charges of treason. Toasts given throughout the evening not only honored "The Protestant Interest" and "LORD GEORGE GORDON" but also "the Protestant Association at London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, and all the Friends and Well-wishers to the Protestant Interest," thereby linking the loyalty of Glaswegians with British subjects living in the two most important political centers on the British mainland.[77] Months later, during an annual celebration of the king's birthday, the *Glasgow Journal* reported that "a number of gentlemen well affected to government, and zealous wishers to the Protestant interest, assembled at the house of Mr. JOHN PATERSON, Praeses of the different Societies, in order to celebrate the anniversary of the birth of our most Gracious Sovereign." Besides the usual toasts to the King and Queen, those present also gave honor to "Lord George Gordon, [and] the Praeses of the 85 Societies."[78]

In Kingston and New York City, locals read of the rioting in London in great detail in their newspapers. Day-by-day accounts of the event filled several columns and sometimes pages, illustrating the magnitude of the event.[79] Unlike Glasgow, however, residents of these two cities were less inclined to support the radical nature of the riots. Such destructive and violent protests appeared extremely dangerous to Jamaicans, who lived in constant fear of slave revolts and uprisings, and to Britons living in New York City, who were also alarmed by the presence of rebel colonists secretly living in and around the city. When rumors spread in Kingston that the events in London had led to further rioting throughout the British Atlantic, a correspondent for the government's official newspaper, the *Royal Gazette*, reassured residents that rumors of uprisings "in different parts of the kingdom, on the idea that the Protestant Religion was in danger" were untrue.[80]

In fact, the same correspondent noted that such behavior was uncharacteristic of true Protestant British subjects and used the violent riots to emphasize the obvious difference between Britain and its Catholic enemy: "Popery is the religion of blood and violence; Protestantism the child of … mildness, and moderation; in God's name, therefore, let us act like true Protestants, and not disgrace the religion we profess!"[81] A month later, another writer in the *Royal Gazette* reported that "addresses were sent to his Majesty from all parts of his dominions, expressing the most loyal and firm attachment to his person, family, and government, and abhorring the riots and disturbances which then unhappily prevailed."[82] Another account, aimed at the large population of Scottish migrants living in Jamaica, attempted to refute reports that their brethren participated in the lawless rioting despite being avid supporters of Gordon's Protestant cause. One correspondent remarked,

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[77] "Saracen's-Head Inn, 6th Feb. 1781. Ten o'Clock at Night," *Glasgow Journal*, 6 February 1782.

[78] "Glasgow," *Glasgow Journal*, 6 June 1782.

[79] For Kingston, see *Royal Gazette*, 12 August 1780; *Supplement to the Royal Gazette*, 12 August 1780; *Royal Gazette*, 26 August 1780. For New York City, see "Letter from London, dated June 7," *Rivington's Gazette*, 26 August 1780; *Royal American Gazette*, 31 August 1780; "New-York, September 6," *Rivington's Gazette*, 6 September 1780; *Royal American Gazette*, 14 September 1780.

[80] *Supplement to the Royal Gazette*, [Kingston] 12 August 1780.

[81] Ibid.

[82] *Supplement to the Royal Gazette*, [Kingston] 2 September 1780.

"[T]he Scots division (about 800) of the associators … were well dressed, decent looking people." When these respectable Scots perceived "the mob beginning to maltreat and obstruct the Members of both Houses from getting into the House … [the Scots] marched off in a body, and soon after dispersed."[83]

In New York City, newspaper reports placed the blame for the riots on non-Britons in the city to convince readers that true Protestant British subjects could do no such thing. One writer suggested that "it is the Dissenters and Methodists who are secretly blowing up the flame," while another characterized Gordon as a crazed fanatic guided by a "certain American Negotiator in France" and "at the head of his army of assassins and incendiaries."[84] A letter from a Londoner reported that once the military arrived in the city, "all this commotion of French, Americans, Spaniards and Puritans was subdued in two days."[85] Reports such as these helped New York City's Loyalist community make sense of a rather troubling situation. Over the previous decade, they had been the objects of such aggressive and violent attacks by their fellow American colonists. Yet by choosing to escape behind British lines, they were acknowledging that the British government, not the American Congress, was the protector of their rights and freedoms. As such, it was vitally important that New Yorkers were able to define the rioters as either not actually Protestant Britons or, worse yet, traitors, conned into committing violent acts against the state by a crazed leader who was taking orders from their American enemies.

Residents of Dublin also attempted to distance themselves from the rioting in London. One writer placed the entire blame for the riots on Lord Gordon, whom he referred to as a "*bigoted madman*" who attempted to use the "mob … to destroy every individual who differed with his Lordship in opinion.[86] In a letter from London published in *Freeman's Journal* during the riots, the writer found that there were "secret causes that excited the lower order of people to such a dreadful outrage and plunder." Rather than protecting their religion, the rioters sought "the most deliberate plan, to subvert all government and order; and it is not doubted but Lord George Gordon was well acquainted with their scheme."[87]

The riots in London did, however, reignite long-standing tensions between Protestants and Catholics in Ireland. Reports surfaced in Dublin in the middle of June that Gordon and the Protestant Association had been in contact with Irish Protestants, instructing them on how they should proceed.[88] Meanwhile, many feared that the much larger Catholic population, particularly in Dublin, might riot in response to the attacks on their brethren in London.[89] When Dublin newspapers began

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[83] "London, June 20, 1780," *Royal Gazette*, [Kingston] 16 September 1780.

[84] The writer was most likely referring to Benjamin Franklin, the American diplomat in Paris at the time. "New-York, September 6," *Rivington's Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

[85] "Extract of a letter from a gentleman in London to his friend in New-York, dated July 5, 1780," *Rivington's Gazette*, 6 September 1780.

[86] "Dublin, June 10," *Freeman's Journal*, 10 June 1780.

[87] "Dublin, June 24," *Freeman's Journal*, 24, June 1780.

[88] Earl of Hillsborough to Lord Buckingham, 11 June 1780. "Report on the Manuscripts of the Marquess of Lothian Preserved at Blickling Hall, Norfolk" (London, 1905), 367–68. There were also rumors several months earlier of dissenting Irish MPs forming an association modeled after Gordon's. O'Flaherty, "Ecclesiastical Politics," 43.

[89] There are no accurate population numbers for Dublin in 1780. In 1766 there were about 59,000 Protestants in a city of 145,000, but those numbers continued to decline throughout the remainder of the

publishing accounts of the violence in the capitol, leading Catholic clergy circulated a handbill that warned their congregations "to procure the entire preservation of the public peace, lest any should be unwarily engaged on any pretext whatsoever, to the smallest interaction thereof."[90] Several days later, the committee's official minute book noted that "the mob of Dublin, consisting mostly of catholicks, had an intention of destroying the presbyterian meeting-houses in town, in revenge of the causeless outrages committed, by a fanatic multitude, on the catholicks in London." They proposed to submit a loyalty address to the lord lieutenant that described their "inviolable affection for all their protestant fellow-subjects of this kingdom," but the situation improved enough by the following week that they decided against it.[91] In fact, unlike in some areas of the English countryside, there were no violent acts committed against Irish Protestants or Catholics as a result of the riots in London, despite the country and city's long history of sectarian violence.[92]

   The ability of both groups to maintain order in this time of crisis possibly reflects the gradual emergence of a Protestant and Catholic alliance to promote Irish economic and, eventually, legislative independence. At the very least, the absence of violence allowed this relationship to develop further. In the aftermath of the movement for free trade six months earlier, Protestant volunteers and politicians began to push for greater legislative freedom from Great Britain.[93] In doing so, they drew upon the support of elite and middle-class Irish Catholics, who, along with leading patriots, began to reenvision their Jacobite past as a symbol of their long-standing patriotic support for the Irish nation.[94] The process was certainly contentious, but over the following years, more and more Irish Protestants saw their country's political interests directly tied to Catholic relief. Some volunteer companies even began to allow Catholics to join their ranks. In Dublin, a corps composed almost entirely of Catholics formed, somewhat controversially, under the seemingly Protestant patriotic name of the "Irish Brigade."[95] In fall 1781, volunteers (which now almost assuredly included some Catholics) again co-opted William III's birthday celebration to advance an Irish patriot cause. Despite a torrential downpour, it was reported that "innumerable spectators crowded the streets" to watch seventeen city and county volunteer companies parade through the city to the College Green. Once again, they

century. Patrick Fagan, *Catholics in a Protestant Country: The Papist Constituency in Eighteenth-Century Dublin* (Portland, 1998), 44–45.

   [90] "Dublin," *Freeman's Journal*, 15 June 1780.

   [91] R. Dudley Edwards, "Minute Book of the Catholic Committee, 1773–1792," *Archivium Hibernicum* 9 (1942): 47–48. The situation worsened when Parliament passed the Combination Act, which sought to suppress journeymen combinations (preindustrial unions) in Ireland. On 13 June, nearly 20,000 Catholic and Protestant journeymen gathered in Phoenix Park to present a petition to the Lord Lieutenant in opposition to the bill. A riot was avoided only after the volunteers were called out to breakup the protest. "*Extract of a Letter from Dublin, June 14*," *London Chronicle*, 22 June 1780; Maurice O'Connell, "Class Conflict in a Pre-Industrial Society: Dublin in 1780," *Irish Ecclesiastical Record* 103, no. 2 (February 1965): 93–108.

   [92] Haydon, "The Gordon Riots," 354–59.

   [93] For more on the connection between legislative independence and free trade, see Hill, *From Patriots*, 146–53.

   [94] Morley, *Irish Opinion*, 310–11.

   [95] Ibid., 312.

adorned William's statue with signs, this time proclaiming, "Expect a Real Free Trade," along with "A Declaration of Rights." The latter referred to leading patriot MP Henry Grattan's call for Irish legislative independence a year earlier.[96]

The movement gained momentum over the following months, leading to the passage in spring 1782 of a far more radical Catholic relief bill. Irish Catholics still lacked political rights, but now they could own land and practice and teach their faith freely, which persuaded more Catholics to embrace Irish patriotism over loyalty to the British state. The bill succeeded, in part, because of the widely publicized volunteer meeting at Dungannon in February 1782, in which the Irish Protestant attendees agreed to a series of resolutions to promote both legislative independence and Catholic relief. In a speech before the Irish Parliament that was reprinted in newspapers, Grattan recast Irish Catholics as patriotic Irishmen who had displayed a sense of "public virtue" in the campaigns for free trade and legislative independence. During the 1779 French invasion scare, they refused to ally with the enemy, but rather pressed for service "in the ranks of HER GLORIOUS VOLUNTEERS."[97] Shortly thereafter, the new Rockingham ministry granted legislative independence to the Irish, a feat largely achieved as a result of the failing war in America, the success of the volunteer movement, and the rise of a patriotic Irish nationalism that transcended, to some extent, long-held religious divisions.[98] It was of no surprise, then, that when Protestant and Catholic Dubliners gathered to celebrate the king's birthday in June, an inordinate amount of time was spent toasting not George III but "those DELIVERERS OF THEIR COUNTRY THE VOLUNTEERS."[99]

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While most Britons opposed the excessive violence, the attacks on authority, and the threat to political stability in the nation's capital, few would have disagreed with the anti-Catholic motives behind the rioting. The Franco-American alliance of 1778 had transformed the popular political culture of loyalty and patriotism in the British Atlantic World. The alliance also changed how Britons thought about the war. The rebellious American colonists receded in importance as Britons now faced an enemy that presented a far greater threat to the security of their empire. For most Britons, France's involvement reignited a renewed attachment to the nation's Protestant Whig heritage. It also allowed Britons to redefine their American foes as no longer being fellow subjects. They could finally make sense of a war and an enemy who had been so difficult to define.

The very fact that the Americans could unite with the Catholic French seemed a theoretical impossibility to most Britons. In early 1779, while Scots were mobilizing against the relief bill and Gordon was forming the Protestant Association, one

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[96] *Dublin Evening Post*, 6 November 1781; "Dublin, November 6," *Freeman's Journal*, 6 November 1781. For more on Catholic enrollment in volunteer companies, see Morely, *Irish Opinion*, 234–36.

[97] *Freeman's Journal*, 26 February 1782.

[98] Moley, *Irish Opinion*, 262–76; Bartlett, *The Fall and Rise*, 98–102; Ian McBride, "'The Common Name of Irishman': Protestantism and Patriotism in Eighteenth-Century Ireland," in *Protestantism and National Identity*, 254.

[99] "Dublin, June 6," *Freeman's Journal*, 6 June 1782.

New Yorker pointedly asked the rebellious American colonists "where is your liberty now?… You were told that [the rebellion] was to avoid the establishing of *Popery* … is not Popery now as much established by law … as any other religion? So that … all your rulers may be *Papists*, and you may have a Mass-House in every corner of your country."[100] The American colonists were fellow Protestants and had, until their alliance with France in 1778, also professed a Whig identity that defined itself in opposition to the Catholic French. On the road toward revolution, the patriots had regularly taken advantage of a rich vocabulary of anti-Catholic language and symbols to denounce the actions of the king and British government and to assert their claim to a true British Whig identity. Consequently, the alliance struck many Britons as blatantly hypocritical. A correspondent in a New York City newspaper reminded readers that the patriot leaders had heatedly opposed Parliament's passing of the Quebec Act in 1774 and reacted bitterly to rumors of an Anglican bishop in America. "But now," he says, "the Congress are very willing to make us the instruments of weakening the best friends, and of strengthening the most powerful and ambitious enemies of the reformation … towards the universal re-establishment of Popery thro' all Christendom."[101]

In a June 1778 letter from "An American," the writer asked the rebels to accept the recent peace offering from the Carlisle commission and quit the rebellion. The letter closed with an appeal to the patriots: "Rouse, then, my *infatuated countrymen*! Open your eyes. Be no longer cajoled, misguided and trepanned by wicked and designing men, who are laying your country waste, and, *are their selves*, bring Popery in your land," pleaded the writer, "don't lend France a helping hand, to overturn and pull down the *Protestant Church* to its ruins. Don't help the French King and the Congress, your best friends in *imagination*, but worst enemies in *reality*…. Act like *Englishmen*, like *Protestants*, like *Christians*. Be wise betimes, were *it be too late*. Be just, be loyal, be free, be happy."[102] For "An American," like for so many other loyal Britons, an alliance with France could only happen if British subjects were "cajoled, misguided and trepanned by wicked and designing men." But if they acted "like *Englishmen*, like *Protestants*, like *Christians*," then they would be reminded of the superiority of Britain's Protestant Whig tradition, which had produced a just, loyal, free, and happy society.

Reports also circulated in British newspapers that if Britain were to lose the war, the Americans would become subjects of the French. A writer in the *Glasgow Journal* reported late in 1778 that "the rebel soldiery say publicly, that … [Washington] and the Congress aim at absolute power, and mean to sell their country to the French."[103] A few months later, the same newspaper reprinted a letter from Hugh Gaine's pro-British *New-York Gazette*, which reported that the American public had grown "more and more disaffected to the Congress's alliance with a Popish King, and their disgust has greatly encreased since the publication of a resolution of that body … which implies the most abject dependence upon … their *great* and *good* ally, Louis the XVIth."[104] In another report, this time from Philadelphia, the

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[100] "To Mr. Rivington," *Rivington's Gazette*, 6 January 1779.
[101] "New-York, June 13," *Rivington's Gazette*, 13 June 1778.
[102] "An American," *Rivington's Gazette*, 20 June 1778.
[103] "Extract of a letter from New York," *Glasgow Mercury*, 12 November 1778.
[104] "From the New York Gazette," *Glasgow Mercury*, 1 April 1779.

author expressed anger at news that the new French ambassador had pushed his "French politics" on Congress by offering the following solution for a diminishing army, "Press your people hard with taxes, the more beggars, the more soldiers."[105] In May 1779, residents of Kingston read of a supposed riot that had taken place in Hampton, Virginia, between French and American soldiers. At one point during the skirmish, a French officer was said to have encouraged his soldiers to continue the fight, proclaiming, "*the King's marine troops should not be insulted with impunity by his* AMERICAN SUBJECTS."[106]

After 1778, British political culture throughout the empire depicted an alliance that was based upon a self-interested American Congress and an arbitrary and deceitful French nation, both of whom intended to subjugate the American colonists once Great Britain was defeated. These stories were to serve as wake-up call to the American colonists, reminding them of all the dangerous consequences associated with allying themselves with the Catholic French empire. They were also meant to convince Britons that fighting the war in the American colonies was absolutely necessary and that American colonists were gradually realizing the mistake they had made. Finally, these stories enabled Britons to proclaim an ideological victory over the American enemy after more than a decade of intense and often violent attacks on the very definition of Britishness. The American colonists may have won their independence, but even in defeat, Britons believed their country remained the great defender of Protestant Whig patriotism. Such a belief, proclaimed repeatedly on the streets and in newspapers throughout the British Atlantic after 1778, further bolstered the public's opposition to their government's attempts to relieve Catholics.

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In spring 1782, during debates over the second Catholic relief bill and Ireland's legislative independence, Henry Grattan famously asked his fellow MPs, "whether we shall be a *Protestant settlement* or an IRISH NATION?"[107] While the terms were certainly not incompatible, Grattan's question did highlight the impact of the American Revolution on popular conceptions of Protestant British patriotism in Ireland and throughout the empire, for that matter. The decision to relieve Catholics when the nation was at war with France had led to a nascent Irish patriotic movement, which though predominately Protestant in nature, increasingly drew upon the support of elite and middle-class Irish Catholics. The situation came to a head in spring 1782, when a growing number of Irish Protestants and Catholics sought to repeal more restrictive penal laws and demand greater legislative freedom from Great Britain.

Elsewhere in the empire, ordinary Britons were also confronted with a question similar to the one proposed by Grattan: whether or not Britain should be a Protestant empire. While imperial legislation suggested that the government was moving toward a more enlightened, pragmatic view of an increasingly diverse empire, the same could not be said for ordinary British subjects. The American war and the

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[105] "Extract of a letter from Philadelphia," *Glasgow Mercury*, 29 June 1780.
[106] *Supplement to The Jamaica Mercury*, 8 May 1779.
[107] "*Continuation of the Debate on the Catholic Bill on Wednesday last*," *Freeman's Journal*, 26 February 1782.

government's pro-Catholic policies led to a new, more precise, and confrontational articulation of British patriotism that enabled Britons to find commonality in their shared patriotic attachment to the empire. In doing so, however, this renewed patriotic identity also elevated debate and created a more politically conscious British public. Britons became increasingly aware after 1778 of the inability of their own government to live up to the lofty definitions of an identity they now so proudly declared. The contradiction boiled over in summer 1780, when the reinvigorated Protestant Whig spirit of the British public collided with a government that appeared to favor Catholicism as it lost the war.

The 1790s have typically consumed the attention of historians interested in the radical politicization of the British public. Yet in many ways, the divisive latter years of the American war deserve to be included in this conversation. Catholic relief and the war with France encouraged ordinary Britons throughout the Atlantic to think more astutely, and at times more violently, about the relationship between their Protestant Whig ideals and the nature and powers of their government. The Gordon Riots may have represented one such radical moment in this process, but they were actually a part of, and inspired by, a much broader empire-wide Protestant British political culture that came under attack in the turbulent final years of the American War for Independence.