The Maryland Disease:
Popish Plots and Imperial Politics in the Seventeeth Century

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By Owen Stanwood

The Center for the Study of Democracy:
A Better Understanding of Maryland and the World

Although we often focus on contemporary issues associated with democracy and liberty, the Center for the Study of Democracy was originally inspired by the historical importance of St. Mary's City and the discussion of innovative 17th-century ideas about politics that helped establish effective civil government in the Maryland colony. This occasional paper brings us back to our 17th-century roots.

Among the most important principles of civil government instituted at St. Mary's City is 'freedom of conscience'—a principle that remains in practice today and one that continues to act as the bedrock for many other core democratic values in the United States. This principle not only provides support for democratic liberties concerning freedom of speech and freedom of the press, but also directly supports the legal notion of separation of church and state. In the early years of Maryland's founding, colonists, through the Assembly of Maryland, officially separated religion from civil government by passing An Act Concerning Religion. This act, as Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson points out "…represented the first time in the English-speaking world that government formally renounced by legislative enactment the right to dictate to its citizens what they must believe or how they must evince it." It allowed settlers of different Christian faiths to vote and hold public office without a religious test and it remains a foundational civil liberty in the United States today; citizens of all faiths are entitled to freely participate in our democracy, irrespective of religious beliefs.

This occasional paper by Judge Jackson explores the political motivations of George Calvert's 'Maryland Designe' and its connection to the religious tensions in English politics during the 17th century. Jackson's essay shows how Maryland's early attempt to establish religious toleration in the New World was deeply connected to English politics beginning with the rule of King James I. The reverberations of English politics continued to shape the Maryland colony throughout the century, while ultimately contributing to the demise of Maryland's experiment in secular civil society in 1692.

This essay invites us to reflect on the significance of 'liberty of conscience' and the 'Maryland Designe' for American democracy. However, it also asks us to reflect on the state of religious freedoms today—both in our country and throughout the world. How can religious animosities be reconciled in modern states? Are these animosities best reconciled by democratic liberties? The Center for the Study of Democracy invites you join us in thinking about these issues, while visiting St. Mary's College of Maryland and Historic St. Mary's City. I suggest you visit our Web site at www.smcm.edu/democracy to see the full array of programs we provide for our students and our community.

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In the early modern era political theorists usually described the state as a body: the body politic. Thus anything that afflicted that body, that made the state operate less well, was a disease. These diseases differed from place to place. The Virginia disease, according to one royal governor, was poverty – the fact that thousands of penniless former servants lived in the colony and made problems for their leaders. At the same time, another imperial official described the "New England disease," which he saw as a lack of respect for royal authority and an attachment to local control. But what of Maryland – what was its disease?

The Maryland disease, put simply, was a tendency to view all of politics as a plot, and specifically, as a popish, or Catholic plot. This was a common disease in English places, but the Maryland variety was slightly distinct. Marylanders believed that the plot was a Catholic one and an Indian one – that papists had hired Indians to cut off, or kill, the colony's Protestants. This fear caused a great deal of political chaos. During the seventeenth century Maryland experienced five rebellions or near rebellions, all of them inspired by fear of a Catholic-Indian conspiracy. In the end, these fears doomed the Calverts' colony and removed them from authority.

Catholic Subjects of an English King

In mid-16th century, Henry VIII had dispossessed the Pope of his English properties and his ecclesiastical authority and proclaimed himself prelate-in chief of the Protestant Church of England—the Anglican Church. When his Catholic daughter, Mary Tudor, by his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, was enthroned in 1553, she almost succeeded in returning England to the Roman fold. Her brutal persecution of Protestant "heretics" during her short reign—she had them burned at the stake—earned her the title of "Bloody Mary" and intensified the enmity between her Protestant and Catholic subjects. Elizabeth I, who followed her in 1558, and then James I and Charles I, all Protestants, were mostly indifferent towards their Catholic subjects, but by the Baltimores' time the penal laws enacted by Parliament required all Englishmen to acknowledge the supremacy of the King rather than the Pope in matters of religious belief. The Vatican still aspired to temporal as well as spiritual power, in which it was supported by its powerful ally, ultra-Catholic Spain. England and Spain had been intermittently at war for many years, and English Catholics were regarded by their Protestant countrymen as a dangerous subversive element. Indeed, in the year Cecil Calvert was born, Catholic terrorists had attempted to blow up Parliament.

Catholicism was officially outlawed in England when Cecil Calvert first settled Maryland. Catholics were forbidden to worship publicly. Those who adhered to their faith did so in private, clandestinely, ever conscious of the penal laws that, when enforced, governed every aspect of their lives. Like all English subjects, Catholics were required to attend Anglican services 52 Sundays a year and on numerous feast days; to pay the tithes that supported the Anglican clergy; and in order to hold public office to swear oaths of allegiance to the monarch as the supreme magistrate, both spiritual and temporal. Jesuit priests were outlaws, and any person who gave aid or comfort to them was guilty of a felony. To receive written orders from the Vatican was treason. Catholics were forbidden to leave the country or to travel any distance from home without official permission. The affairs of state and church were still deeply entangled in the 17th century, with both secular power and civil liberty requiring a religiously correct imprimatur.

This would be an interesting topic in the history of early Maryland, but in fact it was more than that. The Maryland disease, like any good epidemic, moved beyond the bounds of the colony. By 1689 fears of a Catholic-Indian plot infected politics throughout English North America, and had a great impact on the way the empire came together in the eighteenth century and beyond. In fact, the idea of a Catholic-Indian conspiracy was Maryland's most important contribution to Anglo-American political culture.

This is all terribly ironic, given that Maryland's founders hoped to make a very different contribution to imperial politics. The Calvert family founded Maryland as a place that would be a refuge for Catholics in the empire, and specifically a place that demonstrated Catholics could be faithful subjects of a Protestant monarch. To do this the Calverts created a remarkable state, a place in which religion and politics remained separate, where toleration extended far beyond almost any other English place, and where Catholics could even build a structure like the old Jesuit church in St. Mary's City. And yet that dream lasted only a few decades, and in the end had little impact beyond the colony. Maryland's gift to English America would not be tolerance, but racialized antipopery, a virulent fear that combined ancient English animosities with homegrown American ones.

English Antipopery and the Calvert Family

The story begins with the Calvert family, the founders of Maryland, the world they inhabited, and the remarkable colony they founded in 1634. The first Lord Baltimore, George Calvert, was a secretary of state in James I's England, a powerful and well-connected man. But he had a secret. While he had officially converted to Protestantism, Calvert remained a Catholic, and by the 1620s he decided to reconvert to his faith, meaning that he gave up future public employment. England, of course, was a famously anti-Catholic place during the seventeenth century. But the effects of this antipathy toward "popery" were neither simple nor predictable. Antipopery, as most historians call it, was not merely a prejudice against a religious minority group. It was a set of discourses and images that allowed Protestants to define the fundamentals and limits of their own faith. Early modern people were fond of thinking in binaries, and as Protestants argued about what Protestantism should be, they often turned to "popery" as its binary opposition. At least they could agree that their church was not Catholic. Thus English Protestants tried to purge their church of its "popish" remnants, and ensure that those within it did not act in ways that seemed to be imitating the enemy.

There are at least three aspects of English antipopery that are relevant to us here. First, it was a theological vision. Antipopery rested on the belief, common to Reformed Protestants, that the pope was the Antichrist from scripture: a servant of Satan sent to the world to trick people into serving the devil by pretending to be holy. Second, antipopery had a political bent. The pope, using the armies of Catholic powers and the subtle intrigues of the Jesuits, wanted to infiltrate and bring down Protestant princes, the bulwarks of the Reformed faith. Thus, Protestant rulers had to keep vigilant against internal enemies. Finally, Catholics had a reputation for savage violence. They would

use whatever means at their disposal to destroy their enemies.

All of these things led Protestants to be extremely fearful of Catholic plots of all sorts – to infiltrate the court, to destroy the church, to murder Protestant people. And it should be noted that while the vast majority of Catholic plots were fictional, a few were real, like the famous Gunpowder Plot of 1605. On a global scale, Catholics had a great deal of power and some of them did have ambitions to destroy what they viewed as a Protestant heresy. But England's Catholic minority – between two and three per cent of the population – generally remained loyal. Most wanted, like Calvert, to live their lives without interference from the authorities.

This desire stood behind Calvert's plans for a colony in Maryland. He wanted to prove that Catholics could be loyal subjects of a Protestant king, while also providing a place where English Catholics could worship – and serve – without the onerous legal system that abridged their worship in England.

Conspiracies and Rebellions in Maryland, 1650-1681

The colony that the Calverts built in Maryland reflected George Calvert's desires – though it was George's son Cecil who actually made good on his father's plans. The first Maryland colonists went to a colony that dealt with the problem of religion by essentially ignoring it. The colony intentionally chose not to provide for any kind of religious establishment, and in the famous "Act Concerning Toleration" in 1649 set out a broad program of freedom of religion. These laws led to the creation of remarkable colony with a fair amount of diversity: there were some Catholics, though not much more than 10% of the population, but far more dissenting Protestants. Quakers came in large numbers, as did Puritans who fled the less friendly rule of Sir William Berkeley in Virginia. At the same time that they set up a society that allowed a high degree of religious freedom, the Calverts also set up alliances with local Indians, including the Piscataways and Patuxents. Indeed, by the admittedly low standards of the time, Maryland's proprietary government had a good record with the natives. Aside from the leaders themselves, Jesuit priests set up missions in the backcountry. This worried even other Catholics. Indeed, when Cecil Calvert had a theological fight with the Jesuits during the late-1630s, he worried that they might use the Indians as a fighting force to force the proprietary leaders to do their bidding. As time went on, these fears would become even more widespread.

On its face, early Maryland looks if not like a utopia, at least like a functional and forward-looking polity, one that managed to avoid both the religious persecution common in New England and the terrible racial violence of Virginia. But most people who lived in the colony, especially the large numbers of radical Protestants, failed to see things so positively. This combination of factors – Catholic rule, religious toleration, good relations with Indians – seemed to suggest only one thing: a conspiracy was afoot. Over the next few decades conspiratorial fears became increasingly widespread, and the colony's peculiar version of antipopery – one that combined fears of Catholics and Indians –turned Maryland into one of English America's most unstable polities.

The troubles started early, in the 1650s. In the wake of England's civil war, which had ended with

the execution of King Charles I, who many had feared to be a secret papist Protestants in Maryland feared that the proprietor and his allies were attempting to undermine Protestantism.

Cecil Calvert (1605-1675)

It seemed unwise to allow a Catholic to remain in power during such times. More than that, Marylanders came to think that Lord Baltimore aimed to create a "receptacle for Papists, and Priests, and Jesuits," and he intended to bring in 2000 Irish settlers who "would not leave a Bible in Maryland," very alarming as in 1641 Irish Catholics had risen up against Protestant rule. According to another anti-proprietary activist, Baltimore had added Indians to his list of shadowy allies. In 1655 the proprietor's men had faced off against rebels at the Battle of the Severn, and according to the author, "the Indians were resolved in themselves, or set on by the popish faction, or rather both together to fall upon us: as indeed after the fight they did, besetting houses, killing one man, and taking another prisoner."

At this point the connection between evil Catholic masterminds and vicious Indian subordinates was far from certain, but from 1655 on it became a standard line of Maryland Protestants as they protested the proprietor's rule. In 1676, for instance, in the wake of Bacon's

Rebellion in neighboring Virginia, Protestants in Maryland lodged yet another complaint against the proprietor's rule, which by this time had changed hands to Charles Calvert, the third Lord Baltimore. The petition, delivered by agents to the Committee on Trade and Plantations in London, claimed "the platt form is, Pope Jesuit determined to over terne Engld with feyer, sword and distractions within themselves, and by the Maryland Papists, to drive us Protestants to purgatory, with the help of French spirits from Canada." In addition, the petitioners claimed that Lord Baltimore had encouraged the recent Susquehanna attacks on Maryland and Virginia.

All of these complaints demonstrated the degree to which antipopery inflected Maryland politics. Having Catholics rule over Protestants was bad enough, but beyond that, the Calverts tended to adopt a style of rule that bypassed the lower house of the legislature and therefore corresponded to Protestant beliefs that popery and arbitrary government went hand in hand. But what is interesting is how this variety of antipopery differed from its English equivalent. Marylanders quickly racialized antipopery; they added Indians to the popish plot, and this made it more worrisome. The next example of this occurred in 1681, and it nearly brought down the proprietorship.

During the summer of 1681 some murders occurred on the upper reaches of the Patuxent and Potomac Rivers. It was a tense time; fears of a popish plot raged in England itself, which had become inflamed over whether or not the heir to the throne, the Catholic duke of York, should be allowed to become king. Thus when the killings occurred, it was perhaps not surprising that some colonists began whispering "that it is the Senaco Indians" who had committed the murders "by the Instigation of the Jesuits in Canada and the Procurement of the Lord Baltimore to cut off most of the Protestants of Maryland."

The players in the plot were interesting. There was the proprietor, of course, French Jesuits, who were quickly turning into the primary villains in all of North America, and the "Senacos." This was a fictional Indian nation. There was a real Seneca nation, the westernmost Iroquois tribe in New York, but Marylanders tended to call any strange Indians Senecas. It was a name that conjured up great fear, and little information.

Depositions help us to reconstruct how these rumors started. They probably began with a man named Daniel Mathena. When the murders occurred, Mathena remembered that several years earlier he had entertained an Indian who carried several letters that he carried to the Seneca Indians from Lord Baltimore. Mathena asked how the Indians could read the letters, and the messenger replied "that the French were hard by and could read the letters." With the benefit of hindsight, Mathena realized that these letters must have been orders from Baltimore "to come and cut off the Protestants." He told his neighbor, a former governor and enemy of the proprietor named Josias Fendall, who passed the word his friend John Coode, a member of the lower house and militia captain in Calvert County. Soon they were on a mission to bring down Baltimore.

Coode and Fendall acted out of a genuine fear. They also acted for self-interest. Fendall wanted to be elected to the assembly, and thought that acting against the Catholic-Indian plot would make him more electable. Coode seems to have been a little insane. But the fact that these two men managed to gain such a following shows how much purchase such fears had in Maryland at this time. The

two men even traveled to Virginia, where they tried to convince that colony's secretary that he was in danger as well. They breathlessly related "that the Papists and Indians were joined together." The secretary downplayed these fears, at which point Coode exploded and swore "God damn all the Catholick Papist Doggs" and resolved to "be revenged of them, and spend the best blood in his body."

Baltimore attempted to solve the crisis by going after the men who spread the rumors. He arrested Fendall and Coode, comparing them directly to Nathaniel Bacon, the rebel who had burned down Jamestown five years earlier. This approach backfired, because the men were quite popular. The lower house refused to even dismiss Coode, and a Charles County justice of the peace engineered an unsuccessful bid to break the two men out of prison. Eventually Fendall was convicted and banished to Virginia, but Coode was acquitted, and remained in a position of power. Put simply, Maryland politics in the 1680s was inherently unstable, and this instability rested on a very specific kind of paranoia. Anytime there was a disturbance involving Indians, or even rumors of trouble, suspicion immediately fell on Lord Baltimore. He tried to expose his accusers as liars and frauds, but with little success. As Virginia's governor wrote just after the crisis, "Maryland is now in ferment, and not only troubled with our disease, poverty, but in very great danger of falling into pieces whether it be that the old Lord Baltimore's political maxims are not pursued or followed by the son, or that they will not do in this age."

By the old Lord Baltimore's political maxims, the writer Thomas Culpeper could have meant a number of things, but foremost among them was the belief in toleration. Was this a utopian vision that "will not do in this age"? Culpeper thought so, and events bore him out.

Fears Travel: The Glorious Revolution

During the 1680s, meanwhile something remarkable happened: the Maryland disease, which seemed to come out of this peculiar political situation, traveled around the colonies. In particular, it caught on in the very different climate of New England. Once they started to travel, fears of a Catholic-Indian conspiracy had the potential to do more than just bring down one proprietor: they could bring down the whole imperial system.

First, some brief background. Before the 1680s New England was one of the most independent parts of the English empire, and it was ruled by Puritans, radical Protestants, who stood on the opposite side of the religious spectrum from the Calverts. These people, like their Protestant counterparts in Maryland, loved a good popish plot, but before the 1680s antipopery did not play a major role in New England's politics. Even when they had problems with Indians, as in King Philip's War (1675-76), few New Englanders blamed Catholics for the problems. They disliked Indians, and they disliked Catholics, like the French in nearby Canada, but they had no reason to conflate the two.

Then, in the 1680s, New England faced a period of political reckoning. The English crown decided to reform the empire, and they started with New England, revoking the Massachusetts charter and setting up a new polity, the Dominion of New England, in which a royally appointed

governor ruled by fiat without a legislature. Eventually this polity stretched from Maine to New Jersey. Some New Englanders were not shy about charging the new regime with being "popish," especially after the Catholic James II came to the throne in 1685.

And yet – at first the Dominion proved, if not popular, at least more popular than Baltimore's regime in Maryland. No one thought of taking up arms against the regime. Then slowly rumors started circulating, rumors that looked nearly identical to those more common in Maryland. They first appeared in the mid-1680s, when reports spread that Abenaki Indians in New Hampshire and Maine intended to rise up against the English, just as they had during King Philip's War. But this time was different, as according to New Hampshire's governor the Indians were "well armed by the French which makes them very insolent."

There were two kinds of enemies that lurked in the backcountry, who the English assumed were behind the violence. First were Jesuit missionaries, who had set up several missions to the Abenakis that converted them and, accordingly, set them against the English. Then there were the French fur traders, who intermarried with the Indians and then gained great influence over them. The worst was a character named the baron of Saint-Castin, who set up a trading post among the Abenakis, married the daughter of a chief, and convinced all the Indians to serve the French. English officials almost universally believed it was French intrigue, rather than Indian motives, that caused conflicts.

Things got worse in 1688. There were raids in Maine and western Massachusetts that resulted in several dead English settlers. The new governor of the Dominion of New England, Sir Edmund Andros, attempted to deal with the crisis by impressing men from New England towns for an expedition against the Indians, but this just increased suspicion. Could this be a ruse to drain the towns of men they needed for defense? Did not the governor work for a Catholic king? Could the governor be a Catholic himself and a secret ally of the French? These whisperings became more common in early 1689, when colonists heard, though not definitively, that the Catholic king James II had abdicated the throne to the Protestants William and Mary, and that he had fled to France. Once these rumors spread, all hell broke loose. Soon conspiratorial fears had spread around the colonies, and threatened not to bring down just one or two governments, but nearly all of them.

The rumors started in the West Indies in late 1688: reports that a motley coalition of French, Irish, and other fearful outsiders intended to rise up in a bloody rebellion to make sure that James II remained king in America. When the reports reached the North American mainland, virtually everyone reached the same conclusion: Indians must be partners in the plot.

The rumors initially proved most virulent in New England, and specifically in the Province of Maine. Soldiers in the expedition reported on odd events and statements by their superiors. One soldier suggested that Andros call on his allies the Mohawks for help; Andros objected that "they may be of use to me another time." This seemed to indicate that Andros would use the Indians against the colonists, and it was the beginning of persistent rumors of a "Mohawk plot." (To New Englanders the Mohawks were similar to the Seneca for Maryland, a frightening but misunderstood force beyond the borders.)

In January a colonist in Newbury, near the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border, found a "paper

by the highway" with a crude poem that started "New England rise and be armed/ Let not papist you charme." The poem also alleged that Andros had undertaken the assault on eastern Indians as a ruse to drain Massachusetts towns of their young men, and was putting together a force of "Indians French and papists" to preserve the colonies for James II.

Further details of the plot came from the report of an Indian named Solomon Thomas, a Christian from the town of Natick, who related details of a conversation with Andros to neighbors in Sudbury. Thomas claimed that the governor had visited Natick in an attempt to bring the Christian Indians in as auxiliaries in the plot. He explained that "in the spring french and Irish would Com to Boston" with a large number of Indians. After destroying the capital the popish army would continue to "the Countery townes." To remove any doubt of his motives, Andros gave the Indian "a booke that was better than the bible" that contained pictures of the Virgin Mary and the twelve apostles, and claimed that "all that would not turn to the governor['s] reledgon and owne that booke should be destroyed."

All of these rumors made a few things clear: a plot was afoot, the French were working with James II and his lieutenants to make sure that William and Mary never ruled in the colonies. Their main allies in this task were Indians, who would inflict savage violence on the Protestant colonists, but this time in the name of Catholicism. And it was clear what they needed to do: resist. In March 1689 soldiers in Maine deserted en masse and marched toward Boston, where they seemed intent on deposing the governor. To prevent a "bloody revolution," a coalition of local leaders called up the militia and, after huge protests that filled the streets of Boston on April 18, they threw the governor in jail and essentially dissolved the government. The people had spoken, and while there were lots of reasons to dislike Andros, it was fears of a Catholic-Indian plot that finally brought them to the streets. The Maryland disease had spread, and it had already claimed one colonial governor as its first casualty.

This was not the end, however. The rumors traveled farther. Soon after Boston's rebellion settlers in New York, another part of the Dominion of New England, concocted a similar story that Andros intended to bring in a force of French and Indians to invade the colony. A colonist claimed that a local sachem visited him and said Andros "did promise him a brib of twelf pounds to be ready with a Company of Indians so many as he could get at Manhatans Island in the month of April." Rumors spread around the province, until by the end of May the New York City militia had taken control, and one of their first actions was to disarm Catholics and throw in prison anyone suspected of popish leanings. The official alliance with the Iroquois kept people from publicly speaking very loudly about an Indian role in the popish plot, but depositions do reveal that even there some people suspected that even their native allies were secret Catholic agents.

Then the rumors returned to the place in America most influenced by conspiratorial politics: the Potomac River Valley of Maryland and Virginia. The problems there started, as usual, with the proprietary government. Charles Calvert was in England, but his deputies refused to declare William and Mary, and even took the step of calling in people's arms, supposedly to fix them in case of a Dutch invasion. This awakened old fears that resembled those in New England: perhaps the taking of weapons was a ruse to make the general slaughter of Protestants easier to

accomplish.

In March 1689 reports circulated that made people more alarmed. The reports started, predictably, when English colonists, this time in Stafford County, Virginia, overheard "some discourse that was talked by the Indians." The natives claimed they had been approached by Henry Darnall, a Catholic convert and one of Baltimore's allies, to join a coalition force against the Protestants. Darnall urged them to act quickly before Protestants murdered all the colony's Catholics and Indians.

Annapolis, Capital of the State of Maryland

As these rumors spread, first to neighboring counties in Virginia and then across the border to Maryland, colonists scrambled to arms, convinced that they stood on the precipice of doom. Soon some ringleaders appeared, who called on proprietary government to protect them from the threat, or they would consider themselves "betrayed to the common enemy."

Baltimore's administration managed to survive the crisis by returning colonists' arms and showing that the reports were false, but the fear remained. As spring turned to summer authorities still refused to admit that James II was no longer king, and new rumors spread "that the Papists had invited the Northern Indians to come down and cutt off the Protestants and that their descent was to be about the latter end of August." A familiar figure, the Calvert County militia captain John Coode, raised up a substantial force of colonists to march on St. Mary's City and take over the colony. As they marched on the capital, the proprietor's defenders gradually defected or faded away. As one inferior officer told

his commander, "they were willing to march with him upon any other occasion, but not to fight for the papists against themselves." This was interesting: "the papists" were not "themselves." Clearly, Catholics were outsiders, even if in this case they were the outsiders who had been ruling the colony for its entire history.

By the beginning of August Baltimore's allies had surrendered to Coode and the Calverts' experiment was done. As a condition of surrender, the former rulers pledged that "noe papist in this Province" occupy "any Office Military or Civil." It was a revolution at the top, one that replaced the proprietary elite, many of them Catholic, with a new class of leaders, all Protestant, who had previously exercised power mostly at the county level. Eighteenth-century Maryland, while still a place with a powerful Catholic minority, would not be a haven of tolerance. The chapel in St. Mary's City, the symbol of this system, was gone by the early-1700s.

It's fitting to reflect for a moment on how we got here. The Calverts hoped that they could use the New World to build a society that was impossible in England: a society where Catholics could rule freely and have positions of authority, and where people of all Christian faiths could coexist. That is not what they got. Instead they found that the animosities and divisions of the Old World followed them to the New, but added some new wrinkles. The new racial logic that emerged from the stresses of a multiracial society combined with antipopery to create, new virulent fears. These fears, of Catholics and Indians banding together, proved more powerful than the Calverts' hopes. By the end of the seventeenth century, indeed, these anxieties had spread far beyond Maryland. They had brought done not one colonial government but three, and had changed the face of imperial politics. During the eighteenth century a new empire came together, one based on the belief that the empire would defend Protestants from Catholic and Indian enemies. It was an empire based on fear, and based on a kind of fear that first appeared in Maryland, and proved quite portable.

Postscript: The Fake Baron of
Saint-Castin

In 1692 a group of strange people showed up in Cecil County, Maryland, on the plantation of a local planter named Casparus Herrman. Herrman was an interesting character, and lived in a way that beckoned back to the Calverts' vision for Maryland. In particular, Herrman welcomed both Indians, who he considered to be valuable trading partners, and religious dissidents. During the 1680s he even briefly planned to welcome a group of Labadists, an obscure and unpopular Dutch Calvinist sect, to settle on his land. No one could have better symbolized what the Calverts had in mind: a colony where people could practice their commerce without worrying about religious divisions back home.

Yet in 1692, Herrman's guests proved quite unwelcome to his neighbors. They included a large group of foreign Indians and a single European man who appeared to have gone native. He even had a tattoo on his chest that read "M.C." The Indians were actually Shawnees, and the man in their company a Frenchman named Martin Chartier, a former soldier in the Illinois Country who, with the Indians, decided that migrating east to Maryland would be a good economic decision. They came as invited guests, and clearly believed that Maryland would be a good place to do business.

This turned out to be a poor decision. When settlers in Cecil County saw Chartier and the Shawnees, they thought he was someone else. In particular, they thought he was the baron of Saint-Castin, the frightening nobleman trader "who together with the said Northern Indians imbrued their hands in so much Protestant Blood." The evidence was overwhelming: not only did a local person who had fought in Maine claim that an Indian on the plantation resembled Saint-Castin's wife; he also had the initials MC on his chest: Monsieur Castine.

On one hand, this story is unsurprising. Whenever trouble occurred, Marylanders explained it in reference to a Catholic-Indian plot, and here was yet another manifestation of that same old fear. Given that England and France were at war at the time, such alarms were even less surprising. And yet the details of the plot reveal something very interesting. Now the leading villain was no longer a local proprietor, but a French trader who lived hundreds of miles to the north. Colonists around North America had started to consider themselves partners in the same cause: an effort to preserve the continent from Catholic and Indian enemies. These undesirable outsiders had to be exposed and removed, and Maryland's new government took depositions and information. It soon became clear that Chartier was not in fact Saint-Castin, but soon he and the Shawnees decided to move again anyway, this time to the Pennsylvania backcountry. Maryland was not a place for such strange characters.

End Notes

Photograph Reference

Acknowledgements

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The Center for the Study of Democracy was founded as a joint initiative of St. Mary's College of Maryland and its partner institution, Historic St. Mary's City, the site of Maryland's first capital. The purpose of the Center is to explore contemporary and historical issues associated with democracy and liberty in national and international contexts. The Center provides a forum for presentations by government officials, journalists, and scholars; publishes scholarly writings on subjects of civil governance; encourages and supports public participation in political processes; and engages undergraduate students in study and research on related subjects.

Founded in 1634, the English colony of Maryland represented the first attempt in English-speaking world to establish effective civil government unencumbered by concerns with the religious beliefs of its citizens. "Liberty of conscience" in religion, representative political practices, freedom of the press, the importance of the rule of law, defense and liberty as well as minority rights are all a part of the history of St. Mary's City as Maryland's first capital. Although Maryland's experiment in religious toleration did not survive, the Center commemorates that effort by examining the origins and causes of dysfunction in democratic process, religious and otherwise, and celebrating its accomplishments in the quest for just and durable popular government.

St. Mary's College of Maryland