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To the Heart of Empire: Contesting Capitalism in the Hudson Valley and Pressing Indigenous Land Claims in London, 1766

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In the summer of 1766, a group of Wappinger and Mohican diplomats sailed to London. There, they petitioned the crown to support their land claims against some of New York's wealthiest landlords, who had amassed vast estates on the basis of fraudulent Native titles. These Native diplomats crafted a powerful narrative about their place in the British Empire and had a real impact on British imperial policymakers. The Wappingers' and Mohicans' trip was financed by settlers, who had enlisted Indigenous support in their own contests with New York landlords. In the 1760s, some landlords intensified their approach to market-oriented agriculture, replacing customary lease terms with shorter leases and money rents in an effort to consolidate, rationalize, and "improve" their estates. Tenant farmers responded first with nonviolent resistance, and then with armed insurgency. Only by looking at the tactics and motivations of tenants and Native people side by side can we see the full stakes of this moment for both groups. Just as settlers deployed Native land claims to advance their interests, Native people used settlers' grievances as a potent political tool. At the same time, a shared vision of empire, as well as their own interests, united settlers and Native nations against New York landlords.