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YEARS OF INSURGENCE

1761–1766

GIVEN THE RADICAL VIRUSES THAT HAD INFECTED COLONIAL AMERICAN society in the pre-revolutionary generation, it is not surprising that imperial decisions made in England as the Seven Years' War drew to a close sparked anger and upheaval in North America. A key element in this destabilization was the remarkable center-stage appearance of lower-class and enslaved people, whom colonial leaders had always hoped to keep in the wings, if not offstage altogether. In some sectors of colonial society, radical insurgency arose quite apart from England's attempts to rule its overseas colonies with a stronger hand. In other cases, external and internal stimuli of radical behavior overlapped and interacted. Whether stimulated externally or ignited internally, ferment during the years from 1761 to 1766 changed the dynamics of social and political relations in the colonies and set in motion currents of reformist sentiment with the force of a mountain wind. Critical to this half decade was the colonial response to England's Stamp Act, more the reaction of common colonists than that of their presumed leaders.

The Crowd Finds Its Own Mind

When dawn broke on August 14, 1765, Bostonians tramping to work found an effigy of Andrew Oliver, who was as respectable and well heeled a man as anyone in the city, clad in rags and dangling from a giant elm tree at the crossing of Essex and Orange Streets in the city's South End. This is where a narrow neck of land led from Boston to the farm villages west of the town. Attached to the effigy was the verse: "A goodlier sight who e'er did see? A Stamp-Man hanging on a tree!"[1] Strung up alongside Oliver's effigy was a worn "Jack-Boot with a Head and horns peeping out of the top." The boot was painted green on the bottom—"a Green-ville sole," said the sign. The boot was a clever pun on the unpopular earl of Bute, King George's trusted adviser, and George Grenville, first lord of the Treasury and chancellor of the Exchequer. Colonial Americans regarded these two men as the architects of detested new imperial policies, especially the hated Stamp Act passed by Parliament on March 22, 1765, and scheduled to take effect on November 1. Oliver had been appointed as the distributor of the stamps for Boston and the entire colony of Massachusetts.

Before the day was over, laboring Bostonians, joined by middling townsmen, turned the city upside down. The "Stamp Act crisis," as historians have called it, had begun. In the cascading reactions to the Stamp Act, we can see how discontent over England's tightening of the screws on its American colonies merged with resentment born out of the play of events indigenous to colonial life. A perceptive witness of the mass disorder occurring from one end of the colonies to the other over the Stamp Act would have seen that several revolutions were about to erupt simultaneously.

George Grenville had become the chief minister of England's twenty-five-year-old king, George III, at the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763. Facing a national debt that had billowed from 75 to 145 million pounds during the war and trying to cope with a nation of weary taxpayers, Grenville pushed for new taxes in England's overseas colonies. He especially believed that the American colonists should pay to support the ten thousand British regulars left in North America to police French-speaking Canada and the Appalachian frontier. The smartly uniformed troops would also remind unruly American subjects that they were still beholden to the Crown. Some colonists grumbled when Grenville rammed through Parliament the Revenue Act (or

Sugar Act) of 1764, which reduced the tax on imported French molasses from the West Indies from six to three pence per gallon, but added a number of colonial products to the list of taxable commodities that could be exported only to England. The Revenue Act also required American shippers to post bonds guaranteeing obedience to customs regulations before loading their cargoes. In addition, it strengthened the vice admiralty courts, where violators of the trade acts were to be prosecuted without benefit of juries drawn from the colonial population.

On the heels of the Sugar Act came the Currency Act. It extended to all colonies the 1751 ban on the issuance of paper money by New England colonies, a popular measure that had helped keep the wheels of commerce turning. Like the Sugar Act, the Currency Act was seen as a constriction of colonial trade and a blow to debtors who usually benefited from the inflationary effects of paper money issues. Then came the Stamp Act, which required revenue stamps on every newspaper, pamphlet, almanac, legal document, liquor license, college diploma, pack of playing cards, and pair of dice.

These moves confused colonial leaders. The new machinery for tightening control of the colonies, asking them to share the burdens of the empire that brought them many benefits, emanated from Parliament, which until now had usually allowed the king, his ministers, and the Board of Trade to run overseas affairs. In a world where history taught that power and liberty were perpetually at war, generations of colonists had viewed Parliament as a bastion of English freedom, the bulwark against despotic political rule. Now Parliament, too, began to seem like a violator of colonial rights.

Bostonians knew vaguely about the tricky constitutional question raised by the Stamp Act: whether Parliament had the right to pass a tax simply to raise revenue—an internal tax—when the colonies had no representation in Parliament. American colonists, with rare exceptions, agreed that Parliament was entitled to pass external taxes meant to control the flow of trade. But ordinary Bostonians knew something beyond a quibble: that Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson had arranged the appointment of his brother-in-law Andrew Oliver to be the distributor of the hated stamps. Common folk also knew that both men were leaders of the prerogative circle gathered around the royal governor, an imperious group that had recently tried to dismantle Boston's town meeting and showed contempt for ordinary people who dared to think of themselves as entitled to a role in political affairs. All of Boston also knew that their provincial legislature had elected three men to

gather with delegates from other colonies to meet in New York in October 1765 to hammer out an intercolonial protest to Parliament about the Stamp Act. The crowd, however, had no intention to wait for the Stamp Act Congress to meet.

At midmorning on August 14, Hutchinson ordered Sheriff Stephen Greenleaf to cut down the effigies, and at that moment the question of rightful authority moved from the chambers of constituted authority to the streets. Quickly, a crowd assembled to stop the sheriff. All day, common Bostonians detained farmers bringing produce into town along Orange Street until they had their goods "stamped" under the great elm standing at the neck of land. At the end of working hours, a mass of laboring men began forming for a mock funeral. Their leader was Ebenezer MacIntosh, a poor shoemaker and veteran of the Seven Years' War. MacIntosh had been a fireman in one of the city's fire engine companies and had emerged a few years before as a leader of the South End's Pope's Day Company, an artisans' social group that paraded on November 5 each year to celebrate the demise of Guy Fawkes, who tried to blow up Parliament in 1605 as part of a plot to place the Catholic Stuart "Pretender" on the English throne. With MacIntosh acting as "the principal leader of the mob," as Governor Francis Bernard described the action, the crowd cut down Oliver's effigy as dark came on and carried it through the streets toward the Town House, the center of government where the legislature met. Then the crowd headed for the South End wharves, where Oliver had built a brick office for distributing the detested stamps. In less than thirty minutes they leveled the building. Saving the timbers, they "stamped" them in derision of the Stamp Act, and hauled them to Oliver's luxurious house at the foot of Fort Hill. At nightfall, they added the timbers to a bonfire atop the hill. By the light of the bonfire, they beheaded Oliver's effigy and then destroyed Oliver's stable house and his horse-drawn coach and chaise—prime emblems of upper-class affluence. Later in the evening, when Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson and Sheriff Greenleaf tried to stop the destruction, the crowd drove them off in a hailstorm of stones after someone cried out: "The Governor and the Sheriff! To your arms, my boys."[2] For another four hours, deep into the night, the crowd tore through Oliver's house, breaking windows and a looking glass said to be the largest in the colonies, demolishing the elegant furniture, emptying the contents of the well-stocked wine cellar, and tearing up the gardens. The next day the shocked Oliver asked to be relieved of his commission as stamp distributor.

Twelve days later it was Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson's turn. After attacking the handsome houses of the deputy register of the vice admiralty court and the comptroller of Customs, a crowd of men in workaday garb descended on Hutchinson's mansion. Catching the lieutenant governor at dinner with his family, the crowd smashed in the doors with axes and sent the Hutchinsons packing. Working with almost military precision, they reduced the furniture to splinters, stripped the walls bare, chopped through inner partitions until the house was a hollow shell, destroyed the formal gardens, drank the wine cellar dry, stole nine hundred pounds sterling in coin (today this would be about $90,000), scattered books and papers in the street, and carried off every movable object of value. Led again by MacIntosh, the crowd worked into the night, spending almost three hours alone "at the cupola before they could get it down" and then finishing off the building as dawn broke. "Gentlemen of the army, who have seen towns sacked by the enemy," wrote one of the first historians of the Revolution, Boston's William Gordon, "declare they have never before saw an instance of such fury."[3]

Nobody tried to stop the crowd. "The Mob was so general," wrote Governor Bernard, "and so supported that all civil power ceased in an instant, and I had not the least authority to oppose or quiet the mob." The next day, tears in his eyes and bereft of his judicial robes, Hutchinson appeared in his courtroom, savagely discredited in the town he believed he had dutifully served for thirty years. He estimated his property loss at £2,218—nearly one-quarter million dollars today and more than five hundred Boston artisans would earn in a single year. But why "such fury"? Hutchinson knew why his townsmen hated the tightening of trade regulations and the imposition of a new tax. But only by considering the wrath he had incurred among ordinary people over many years could he have understood their determination to bring his house level with the street. He never admitted such understanding in his correspondence or private conversations that have survived in the documentary record. But it is clear that the crowd was giving vent to years of resentment at the accumulation of wealth and power by the haughty prerogative faction led by Hutchinson. Behind every swing of the ax and every hurled stone, behind every shattered crystal goblet and splintered mahogany chair, lay the fury of a plain Bostonian who had read or heard the repeated references to impoverished people as "rabble" and to Boston's popular caucus, led by Samuel Adams, as a "herd of fools, tools, and sycophants." The mobbish attackers were those who had suffered economic hardship while others fattened their

purses. Just the year before, they had listened to their popular leaders condemn those "who grind the faces of the poor without remorse, eat the bread of oppression without fear, and wax fat upon the spoils of the people." They had heard it said over and over that "luxury and extravagance are . . . destructive of those virtues which are necessary for the preservation of liberty and the happiness of the people." They had burned inwardly at hearing some of the wealthy proclaim from their mansions that poverty was the best inducement for industry and frugality and that "the common people of this town and country live too well." And they had cheered James Otis when he replied that "I am of a quite different opinion, I do not think they live half well enough."[4]

The destructive riots of August 14 and 26 demonstrated the fragile, shifting relationship between different elements of Boston's popular party and provided a foretaste of what would occur in the decade leading up to the Declaration of Independence. Lawyer James Otis commanded the columns of the *Boston Gazette*, and brewer Samuel Adams directed the caucus. But who controlled the streets? The Loyal Nine of the Boston Caucus—printer Benjamin Edes, distillers John Avery and Thomas Chase, braziers John Smith and Stephen Cleverly, painter Thomas Crafts, and several other craftsmen—did their best to control the rank and file beneath them. But they left the dirty work of dismantling the houses of the wealthy to the lower artisans, laborers, and mariners. They preferred violence in limited doses and hoped to rein in men like MacIntosh. To this end, Boston's selectmen, equivalent to today's city council, hurriedly expressed their "utter detestation of the extraordinary and violent proceedings of a number of persons unknown against some of the inhabitants" and agreed to form a "military watch, till the present unruly spirit shall subside."[5]

The selectmen's statement was disingenuous, really only an indication that anxious merchants and middle-class artisans of the caucus were distressed that the crowd had developed a mind of its own. But they could not afford to have hundreds of workingmen prosecuted. They knew that the crowds of August 14 and 26 were several thousand strong, and the crowd leaders were by no means unknown to them. Not one Bostonian stepped forward to claim the £300 reward offered by the governor—a huge amount representing an artisan's wages for four years or more—for information leading to the conviction of the riot leaders. How to gain control of the mob while not losing support in the protests against England was the question at hand. Everyone knew that Ebenezer MacIntosh led the swarming crowd, and indeed he was

arrested by Sheriff Greenleaf. But even before the sheriff could confine MacIntosh, several well-to-do Bostonians told Greenleaf that unless he immediately discharged the shoemaker street general, they would cancel the citizens' watch. When a few other suspected rioters were indicted and jailed, all were sprung from confinement by an angry crowd within a few days. Hutchinson sighed that "there was no authority which thought it advisable to make any inquiry after them" once they had escaped.[6] The crowd proved it was more than a match for the authorities when its members were apprehended or threatened with prison.

With the speed of a raging smallpox epidemic, word of the Stamp Act mob attacks in Boston reached other towns. Reports of the sacking of Stamp Distributor Oliver's house on August 14 reached Newport, Rhode Island, in a few days, and firebrands there wasted little time in staging their own demonstration of popular power. On August 27, a crowd gathered at dawn to build a gallows near the Town House. Dispersing to go to work, they reassembled for the midmorning break to carry effigies of Augustus Johnston, Rhode Island's stamp distributor, and two hated conservatives, Doctor Thomas Moffat and lawyer Martin Howard, Jr., through the streets. They hoisted the effigies with halters around their necks fifteen feet high, to the satisfaction of a cheering crowd. The effigies had been carefully prepared: Johnston held the Stamp Act in his right hand and across his chest was inscribed THE STAMP MAN. Doctor Moffat's breast was decorated with THAT INFAMOUS, MISCREATED, LEERING JACOBITE DOCTOR MURFY. Out of his mouth trailed a strip of paper reading "It is too late Martinius to Retract, for we are all aground." Over his shoulder hung a boot with a devil peeping out. Howard's effigy was tattooed with inscriptions. One read THAT FAWNING, INSIDIOUS, INFAMOUS MISCREANT AND PARACIDE MARTINIUS SCRIBLERIUS; another read CURS'D AMBITION AND YOUR CURSED CLAN HAS RUIN'D ME. The posts of the gallows were decorated with "We have an hereditary indefeasible right to a halter . . ." and "That person who shall efface this publick mark of resentment will be deem'd an enemy to liberty and accordingly meet with proper chastisement."[7]

The effigy burning of Johnston, Howard, and Moffat was led by three Newport merchants—William Ellery, Samuel Vernon, and Robert Crook—and workingmen gladly followed their lead. This cross-class demonstration gained the common objective: Johnston's assurance he would resign his office as stamp distributor. But then the crowd moved beyond the control of the

organizing merchants. Newport's workingmen reassembled again at five in the afternoon, built a fire, and turned the effigies and the gallows into ash. This was not enough. The next day they reassembled at dusk and marched on Howard's house, where they worked as efficiently as any employer would have wished. Not to be outdone by Boston's laboring men, they broke all the window glass, reduced the window frames to kindling, smashed all the elegant furnishings, including a collection of oil paintings, hammered down the interior walls, emptied the wine cellar, threw books down a well, tore up the floors, dismantled chimney hearths and chimneys, sawed down two rows of locust trees leading to the entrance, and leveled the fences around the house. The mob then moved on to repeat the performance at Doctor Moffat's house. Finally, at about two o'clock in the morning, they finished their work. Two of the finest houses in a town of about nine hundred homes had been reduced to shells.

As in Boston, a poor man, John Weber, led the rampaging crowd. This offended the town's respectable Sons of Liberty, the local version of a widely organized revolutionary group, which in Newport included the son of a previous deputy governor, wealthy merchants, and provincial officers. They had already achieved their goal, the resignation of the stamp distributor. Weber had arrived in Newport only recently, probably as a ship's mate for he had the respect of mariners and waterfront maritime artisans. When the sheriff arrested Weber and clapped him on a royal vessel in the harbor, the well-to-do Sons of Liberty turned their heads, believing Weber would take the rap for the wholesale violence and "in some measure atone for the part they had acted," according to the humiliated stamp distributor.[8] Newport's workingmen secured Weber's release with threats that they would pull down the houses of some of the Sons of Liberty who had encouraged protests against the Stamp Act even if they did not approve the mansion destruction. The sheriff released Weber, later arrested him again, and released him still another time. Like MacIntosh in Boston, he slipped offstage—or was sent offstage. As in Boston, the respectable Sons of Liberty struggled to regain control, while those beneath them pursued their own more radical agendas.

Historians have argued that the attacks on the homes of Moffat and Howard were a classic case of an intoxicated mob careening out of control. Historian Edmund Morgan has called Weber "a monster" and deemed the property destruction by the crowd he led "disgraceful." Another historian has described the dismantling of the upper-class mansions as the "revelry" and "mischief" of an out-of-control marauding horde.[9] We can accept this

assessment of crowd behavior, however, only by adopting the attitude of the eighteenth-century elite: that the lower orders were by nature unreasonable, entirely moved by passion or alcohol-induced hysteria, not by reason, not by calculation, not by conscious choice. To the contrary, Newport's artisans, mariners, and laborers seem to have acted from brooding resentments, from past experiences, and from knowledge of recent events in other cities where laboring men had settled accounts. They knew particularly of the August 14 crowd destruction of Andrew Oliver's property, and they learned in the *Newport Mercury* of the effigy hangings of London weavers, glovemakers, and other workers who surrounded the Royal Palace and Parliament to protest unemployment caused by a sharp decline in American orders. "Some houses," reported the *Mercury*, had been almost levelled with the ground." It was not necessary to destroy all the emblems of wealth and status—the gilded frames and the oil paintings of *Venus Sleeping*, *Cleopatra*, and *The Countess of Coventry* that hung in Doctor Moffat's parlor—in order to get the stamp distributor to resign his office. Motivating Newport's working people were their day-to-day experiences with Howard as a purse-proud attorney and judge who speculated in Newport land and had the hauteur of an English nobleman. Along with Doctor Moffat and several others, he had been detested since 1761 as part of a clique of foreign-born aristocrats, most of whom worshiped at the Anglican Church. It was an open secret in Newport that this club was in cahoots with Governor Francis Bernard of Massachusetts to create an American "nobility appointed by the King for life." Club members may not have been inside Howard's house, but it was common knowledge that he proudly displayed paintings of the duke of Cumberland and the Jacobite Pretender, figures in England who attracted popular fury for their aristocratic and anti-Protestant views.[10] At a time when Newport's economy had suffered at the end of the Seven Years' War, the opulence, haughtiness, and politics of these men stuck like a bone in the throat of ordinary Newporters.

Ten weeks after the demolition of Hutchinson's house, it was time for Boston's laboring people to celebrate Pope's Day again. By this time, the *Boston Gazette* was calling shoemaker MacIntosh "Commander of the South [End]" and was crediting him for effecting a "treaty" with his North End counterpart, whereby a peaceful and united annual Pope's Day parade would replace the traditional bone-breaking brawl. The governor described how "Captain" MacIntosh, or "General" MacIntosh as he was referred to by some, decked out splendidly in a militia uniform of gold and blue, a gilded chest

gorget, and a hat laced with gold, led two thousand paraders through the town. Peter Oliver, brother of the humiliated stamp distributor, called the orderly ranks of marchers a mob, but he described something more like a military regiment, which, if the reported numbers are correct, would have consisted of half of the city's adult males. MacIntosh led the city's workingmen past the statehouse, Oliver wrote, where the "general Assembly were sitting, to display his power. If a whisper was heard among his followers, . . . holding up his finger hushed it in a moment; and when he had fully displayed his authority, he marched his men to the first rendezvous and ordered them to retire peaceably to their several homes and was punctually obeyed."[11] No wonder, given the startling emergence of an unnoticed and obscure shoemaker, that the elite began to refer to MacIntosh as "a Massaniello." Like the Neapolitan rebel of 1647, he had come from nowhere to take command of a force so powerful that neither the royal governor nor the chief justice nor the sheriff nor the city's affluent merchants could stop him. With so many Boston workingmen at his command, how far might this man go? Could the resentments and physical strength of the street rioters be harnessed by the better-to-do Sons of Liberty?

Although Oliver had already promised that he would give up his stamp distributor's commission, the Sons of Liberty wanted a public resignation. Cornered, Oliver agreed to that by publishing it in the *Boston Gazette*. But the city's common folk wanted more—not only a printed resignation but public humiliation. In a scene to be repeated many times and in many places once the war for independence began, the lower orders, so often spurned by those above them, demanded ritual self-abnegation. Oliver twisted and turned, offering to resign at the courthouse—the home ground of governmental authority. But the radicals would not hear of it. Trapped, Oliver succumbed to having Ebenezer MacIntosh march him across the town in pelting rain to the Liberty Tree in the South End, home turf of working Bostonians. There, a huge crowd watched Oliver eat humble pie. He sardonically declared that he would "always think myself very happy when it shall be in my power to serve this people."[12] The drenched observers cheered and returned to their places of work.

To the south, in New York City, everyone in a position of upholding English authority knew about the power displayed by ordinary people in Boston and Newport. Four days after the dismantling of Thomas Hutchinson's Boston house, James McEvers, a wealthy merchant, resigned his post as New

Woodcuts such as this one were not up to graphic standards today, but they were effective at the time. Here the people controlled the streets, a worrisome prospect for those accustomed to political rule.

York's stamp distributor, fearing that "my House would have been pillaged, my person abused, and His Majesty's revenue impaired." But that was not enough. When the stamps for several northern colonies arrived by ship on October 24, to be carried by a king's regiment to Fort George in New York Harbor, placards appeared throughout the town warning that "the first man that either distributes or makes use of stamped paper let him take care of his house, person, and effects. We dare. VOX POPULI."[13] That convinced New York's merchants, meeting on October 31 (the day before the Stamp Act was to go into force), to agree that they should not import any English goods until Parliament repealed the Stamp Act. But New York's plebeian element was not yet satisfied. Going beyond the respectable leaders of the Sons of Liberty, the lower orders rampaged through the town for four days. Some two thousand strong, they threatened the homes of suspected sympathizers of British policy, attacked the house of the famously wealthy governor Cadwallader Colden, paraded his effigy around town, and built a monstrous bonfire in the Bowling Green into which the shouting crowd hurled the governor's luxurious two sleighs and horse-drawn coach.

Four days later, after what contemporaries called the "General Terror of

November 1–4," the crowd regathered at Fort George. Placards had announced that "the sons of Neptune," that is, seagoing men, would lead a new demonstration. This was the sign that the middle-class Sons of Liberty had lost control of the city's masses. Surging to the walls of Fort George, the crowd of several thousand insultingly addressed Governor Cadwallader Colden as the "Chief Murderer of their Rights and Privileges,"[14] taunted the guards to fire, hurled bricks, stones, and garbage, paraded an effigy of the governor in his actual coach, which they had seized from his carriage house, and finally convinced the governor to hand over bundles of the hated stamps.

The situation in New York City was fluid, with contending groups vying for the privilege of harassing men appointed to distribute stamps. At the end of November, an angry crowd flushed out men residing in New York who were commissioned to distribute stamps for Nova Scotia, Maryland, and New Hampshire. A month later, a crowd "followed the custom of most places in America," as the *New York Gazette* reported, by surrounding the home of a suspected stamp distributor and "defacing his house, destroying some furniture in it, and drawing his winter carriages thro' the streets in flames."[15] Middling men such as Isaac Sears and Alexander McDougall, captains of privateers in the Seven Years' War, and John Lamb, a trader, led the Sons of Liberty; but whether the Sons of Liberty could control the mariners, lower artisans, and laborers remained in doubt. As in Boston and Newport, they came to fear the awful power of the assembled lower-class artisans and their maritime compatriots.

In other seaboard towns, resistance to the Stamp Act paralleled that of Boston, Newport, and New York, though it didn't always escalate into actions against wealthy citizens associated with inflamed local issues that predated the act. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the crowd assembled to stone an effigy of a stamp master held high on a pole in the town square, and this was enough to convince the stamp distributor to resign. Newburyport townsmen down the coast were stagier—suspending an effigy of the stamp distributor from a large elm tree over tar barrels. Igniting the tar, the crowd cut the rope and dropped the effigy into a flaming barrel. Marylanders held mock funerals for the Stamp Act and drove Zachariah Hood, the local stamp distributor, out of the colony after burning down his warehouse in Annapolis, the colony's capital. North Carolinians in Wilmington dragged the stamp distributor through the streets and forced him to resign his commission, while at the same time imprisoning the governor in his own house. In New Bern, they

yanked a superior court judge from his bed in the middle of the night and forced him to defy British orders by holding court without stamped legal documents. In Charleston, South Carolina, an angry mob sprinkled with unemployed seamen burned effigies of the stamp distributor and interred a coffin of "American Liberty." Then they ransacked the house of Henry Laurens, the city's mightiest merchant and slave importer, in search of the hated stamps. "The richer folks" were terrified, according to the *South Carolina Gazette*, by a mob "spirit which [they] themselves had conjured up. . . ."[16] Up and down the coast, people who had never before voted or played any public role surged through the streets to participate in boisterous mock executions, defy royal authority, and initiate themselves in the rituals of revolution.

The reaction of Philadelphians to the Stamp Act was more restrained than in other cities. Just as not all colonists were the same, neither were all colonies nor all seaports. In Philadelphia, a key figure was the rags-to-riches artisan-hero Benjamin Franklin.

Just six months before Parliament and the king issued the Stamp Act, the nasty assembly election of October 1764 colored the response of Philadelphians to the hated measure. Having lost his assembly seat, his first political defeat, Franklin had returned to London as the representative of Pennsylvania and three other colonies. But he was unable to convince Lord Grenville to obtain parliamentary repeal of the Stamp Act, and Franklin's enemies in Philadelphia charged that he had actually helped to write it. Even if that was untrue, there was no dispute that Grenville followed Franklin's recommendation in appointing John Hughes, a baker turned merchant, to the stamp distributor's position in Philadelphia. Philadelphians, though hearing from newspapers about the rioting in Boston and Newport, did nothing to disturb Hughes until September 16. On that evening, after learning that George Grenville had resigned as chief minister, a celebrating crowd assembled at the London Coffee House, owned by William Bradford, printer of the *Pennsylvania Journal* and a member of the Philadelphia Sons of Liberty. Toasts to Grenville's ill health turned to cries that the houses of Franklin, Hughes, and others involved in supporting the Stamp Act "should be level'd with the Street." Only the nimble rallying of artisans who still looked on Franklin as their hero saved his house, where Deborah Franklin stood at an upper-floor window with a musket in her hands. The 1764 issue of instituting royal government had deeply divided the working people of the city, and this permitted upper-class leaders to maintain control. Printer Bradford explained "our

body of Sons of Liberty in this city is not declared numerous as unfortunate dissensions in provincial politics keep us a rather divided people."[17] Hughes never resigned his post, but after the stamps arrived on October 5, he promised not to execute the Stamp Act.

In December 1765, all colonial seaports reopened for trade—without using the hated stamps. Colonial Americans rejoiced at having successfully resisted English authority, even if Parliament would not formally repeal the Stamp Act until the next year. But the sweet taste of victory among upper-class merchants, planters, and lawyers who had attempted to lead the resistance movement was soured by the knowledge that in many alarming instances the protest campaign had slipped beyond their control. In trying to resist the punitive British imperial policy, colonial leaders had welcomed the *vox populi*. In fact, they could not do without it. But once the genie was out of the bottle, how could it be imprisoned again? It was the vigor of ordinary people in defining and pursuing goals beyond resistance to the Stamp Act that raised the specter, in the minds of those accustomed to political domination, of a radicalized form of politics and a radically altered society.

The "mob" has been feared throughout history by upper-class power holders, and historians have not been immune from this fear. The fear's source is in the assumption that the masses are irrational, stirred into paroxysms of violence by irresponsible rabble-rousers, and indiscriminate in selecting their targets. Once unloosed, the mob is capable of almost anything. Thus, eighteenth-century writers, including many patriot leaders, referred to the common people on the move as "the unthinking multitude," the "hellish crew," the "impassioned dregs of society," and the like. This was the spontaneous, frenzied, and unprogrammatic mob. Others saw a manipulated mob, acting robotlike under orders from above. This was the view of the brother of Boston's humiliated stamp distributor, Peter Oliver, a dedicated royal servant who believed that Andrew Oliver had been attacked and insulted by a crowd that was a "perfect machine, wound up by any hand who might first take the winch."[18]

Peter Oliver was intimately aware of the political inner workings of Boston, a town smaller than today's Delano, California, or Hanover, New Hampshire. But Oliver was trapped in his perceptions of crowd protest by his inveterate disdain of common people and his veneration of English aristocracy and royalty. In contrast to Oliver's view, the Stamp Act crowds of 1765 are better understood as large groups of disaffected citizens, drawn heavily

but not entirely from the laboring ranks, who worked in purposeful and coordinated ways to protest British policies, had their own ideas about how an equitable society should operate, and in many cases expressed hatred of oppressive local oligarchs. To be sure, upper-class leaders worked hard to get crowds to do their bidding, and lower-class citizens often looked for leaders above them because deference was not yet dead and educated men in the upper ranks had the money, organizational skills, and literary talents vital to mounting successful protests. Crowd leadership varied from one place to another. In Boston, where the Pope's Day tradition and recurrent street demonstrations since the 1730s had taught the laboring classes the basic lessons of organization and protest, the leader of the urban mass was a poor shoemaker with tenuous ties to those above him. In Newport, Rhode Island, three merchants first led the crowd and then saw an obscure mariner, just recently arrived, momentarily capture the allegiance of disgruntled workingmen. In New York City, where crowd protests had been less common, the Stamp Act demonstrators were led at first by men higher up on the social ladder—ship captains, master craftsmen, and even lawyers—but then escaped their control. In Philadelphia, where local issues divided artisans and shopkeepers, well-to-do lawyers Joseph Galloway and James Allen led the people into the streets.

Despite these differences, the struggle for political control was everywhere highly fluid, and this continued in the years ahead. Thomas Hutchinson believed that a tight chain of command linked Boston's upper, middle, and lower ranks. It began, he thought, with the Merchants Committee, descended to the master craftsmen organized through the Loyal Nine and the Sons of Liberty, and finally tapped the lower craftsmen, laborers, mariners, and servants. Hutchinson was half right, but he was describing mostly how merchants and lawyers *wished* the political system to operate. He overestimated their ability to control the crowd because he underestimated the self-energizing capabilities of common people. "The Boston Mob," wrote General Thomas Gage, who commanded the British regiment in Boston, understood the urban dynamic better. The crowd, he reported to London, "raised first by the instigation of many of the principal inhabitants, [was] allured by plunder, [and] rose shortly after of their own accord." Gage saw the same process unfolding in New York City. "People of property" at first raised the lower class to protest against the Stamp Act, but after five days of tumult the propertied New

Yorkers lost their influence over the crowd and "began to be filled with terrors for their own safety."[19]

Both loyal supporters of English authority and well-established colonial protest leaders underestimated the self-activating capacity of ordinary colonists. By the end of 1765, an extraordinary year in the history of the English colonies, people in the streets had astounded, dismayed, and frightened their social superiors. Resistance to English policies had emboldened people who previously counted for little in the political arena to find a mind of their own. Colonial leaders, warned the perceptive General Gage, "began to be terrified at the spirit they had raised to perceive that popular fury was not to be guided, and each individual feared he might be the next victim to their rapacity."[20]

Restive Slaves

While crowds took to the streets up and down the Atlantic seaboard shouting "liberty and no stamps," it entered the minds of many colonists that the constant talk about liberty—and its opposite, slavery—might become highly contagious, and applied to an issue far more fundamental than a modest tax imposed by England. In every colony, white leaders began to wonder about how restive slaves might react to the rhetoric fueling the disturbances related to the Stamp Act. While seeking freedom from parliamentary taxes, while deploring English tyranny and supposed attempts to "enslave" colonists, the Americans unexpectedly faced a profound contradiction as they scrambled to suppress enslaved Africans with their own urges to be free.

George Mason, Virginia planter-politician and neighbor of Thomas Jefferson, was one of the many Virginia leaders worried over the huge increase in Africans brought across the Atlantic after the end of the Seven Years' War. "Perhaps the primary cause of the destruction of the most flourishing government that ever existed was the introduction of great numbers of slaves," he wrote in 1765 in a bill he introduced in the House of Burgesses, just after the Stamp Act riots surged through the seaboard cities. Mason was soon joined by other Virginians who had been edgy about slave unrest since the beginning of the Seven Years' War. Many white militiamen were fighting on the frontier, and this raised fear that slaves, who represented 40 percent of the population, would capitalize on their absence as slave patrollers to stage a bid

for freedom. "The villainy of the Negroes on any emergency of government is what I always feared," Governor Robert Dinwiddie told Charles Carter, a tidewater planter with scores of slaves, in 1755. Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763 further increased fears of black rebellion. One militia officer told Governor Dinwiddie that the Indians raiding on Virginia's frontier "are saving and caressing all the Negroes they take," and this might "be productive of an insurrection . . . attended with the most serious consequences."[21]

The Indian-African alliance never occurred, but nervousness over the possibility spread as the furor over the Stamp Act filled the air with heated talk about American liberty and British tyranny. In 1766, some of George Mason's slaves joined a plot to mount an insurrection. Other slave rebellions, including ones in Loudoun and Fairfax Counties occurred in 1767, and this convinced the House of Burgesses to double the import duty on slaves in order to limit the number of new Africans entering the colony. In the meantime, white authorities hanged seven slaves, and the heads of four "were cut off and fixed on the chimnies of the courthouse," as a Boston newspaper reported.[22]

In Wilmington, North Carolina, a town of only a few hundred houses on the Cape Fear River, town officials clamped down on the activities of slaves and free blacks. Fearful of slave unrest, white authorities passed ordinances prohibiting an assembly of more than three slaves gathered for the purpose of "playing, rioting, cabaling" and set a curfew at 10:00 P.M. In 1767, north of Wilmington in New Hanover County, shivers went down the spines of white families when about twenty slaves, who had seized their masters' arms, ran away in a coordinated break for freedom.[23]

Charleston, South Carolina, the slave importation center of North America, suffered even greater fears of slave conspiracy after white protesters bandied about assaults on *their* freedom. Black Charlestonians heard and read the word "liberty" repeatedly in the waning months of 1765, and saw the slogan "Liberty and no Stamp Act" emblazoned on a placard hanging from the neck of the stamp distributor's effigy, strung up on October 19, 1765. A few days later, the Sons of Liberty, marching on the elegant house of merchant Henry Laurens to seize bundles of stamps they believed had been stored there, shouted "Liberty, Liberty and Stamp'd Paper." When a huge procession celebrated the resignation of Charleston's stamp distributor, they held aloft a British flag that read LIBERTY.[24]

The repeated use of the word "liberty" was not lost on some five thousand slaves in Charleston. In 1765, the city's grand jury was already apprehensive

"that slaves in Charles-Town are not under a good regulation, and that they at all times in the night go about streets rioting," undeterred by the city's handful of watchmen. Within weeks, restive slaves were gathering in knots. More ominous, in mid-December the wife of a wealthy merchant overheard two slaves conversing about a colonywide insurrection planned for Christmas Eve. "This place has been in an uproar for twelve days past," wrote one townsman. "Every company in town mount guard day and night, and the severest orders given which has prevented it hitherto."[25]

Put on close guard, white Carolinians got through the Christmas season unscathed. But in mid-January "a peculiar incident, revealing in what dread the citizens lived among the black savages with whom they were surrounding themselves," reported Henry Laurens, "was furnished by some negroes who apparently in thoughtless imitation, began to cry 'Liberty.'" Laurens was surely mistaken that this action was "thoughtless imitation," but he was accurate that "the city was thrown under arms for a week and for 10 or 14 days messengers were sent posting through the province in the most bitterly cold weather in 19 years." Almost simultaneously, 107 slaves fled their plantations outside Charleston and "joined a large number of runaways in Colleton County, which increase[d] to a formidable Body."[26] Concerned about their liberty with regard to stamped paper, South Carolinians were even more concerned about the liberty of Africans. More than seven thousand Africans had stumbled off slave ships in Charleston Harbor in the year 1765—a huge increase from previous years that made the colony more than 60 percent African. Quaking over real and imagined black insurrections, legislators passed a three-year stoppage of slave imports to take effect on January 1, 1766. But the black revolution in South Carolina had already begun.

In Georgia, where slaves knew that flight to Spanish Florida was their best chance of gaining freedom, a group of slaves, including women and children, fled to a swamp near the Savannah River in the midst of the Stamp Act turmoil. White officials unsuccessfully tried to root out the small maroon band by offering bounties to Indians for their capture. The maroon settlement apparently survived because four years later the legislature had to send a militia detachment into the swamp to destroy the runaways' enclave.

The arrival of at least 25,000 enslaved Africans in the southern colonies during the years the British were clamping down on trade policies almost guaranteed an increase in servile unrest. "Saltwater" Africans, as colonists termed the new arrivals, had always taken poorly to their captivity. "If he

must be broke," warned a North Carolinian slave owner to those purchasing newly arrived slaves, "either from obstinancy, or, which I am more apt to suppose, from greatness of soul, [it] will require ... hard discipline.... You would really be surprised at their perseverance.... They often die before they can be conquered."[27] Heightening this potential for slave rebellion was the contagiousness of white talk about liberty in the context of the Stamp Act regulations. This potent and dangerous mix of influences was recognized by wary white colonists in the South, who knew that any fissure in white society provided opportunities for black insurgency. There could be no organized black freedom movement at this stage, or even a black radical agenda, for it was not possible for slaves spread across a vast terrain to organize and think collectively. But the single-minded desire for freedom was already surfacing, awaiting the right climate for slaves to take action.

Stricken Conscience

One of the contributing factors to slave unrest during the Stamp Act controversy was news leaking to them that some white leaders were attacking slavery. Making this all the more important to slaves was their discovery that well-known and well-placed white leaders coming to their defense were men very different from such ascetic Quakers as Benjamin Lay, Anthony Benezet, and John Woolman. Rather than basing their opposition to slavery on moral and religious grounds, these proto-abolitionists used economic and political arguments to condemn the practice. Given the battle over the rights of English subjects in the American colonies, it is not surprising that this new secularization of abolitionism took place.

In 1748, the French philosopher Baron Charles Montesquieu published an attack on slavery in his *Spirit of the Laws*, which was circulated widely in the colonies. Residing in the slave-trading port of Bordeaux, Montesquieu "put the subject of Negro slavery on the agenda of the European Enlightenment." Adam Smith condemned slavery as an affront to human progress in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, published in 1764. The attacks on slavery by both Montesquieu and Smith inspired questioning of the legitimacy and utility of slavery among educated colonists. Both figured in James Otis's assault on slavery in one of the earliest defenses of colonial rights. In *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, published in the same year as Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Otis made the uncompromising assertion

that "The colonists are by the law of nature free born, as indeed all men are, white or black.... Does it follow that tis right to enslave a man because he is black? Will short curled hair like wool, instead of Christian hair, as tis called by those whose hearts are as hard as the nether millstone, help the argument? Can any logical inference in favour of slavery be drawn from a flat nose, a long or a short face?"[28]

The work of such men as Montesquieu, Smith, and Otis put the abolition of slavery on the radical agenda of American revolutionists. Otis's attack on slavery was particularly trenchant because he initiated what would become a constant theme over the next decade: that the British infringement of colonial natural rights and the abridgement of African liberties by colonial Americans were joined at the hip. The more Americans cried about British oppression, the more sensitive they were concerning a deadlier oppression of their own. Slave trading and slave keeping, charged Otis, "ha[ve] a direct tendency to diminish the idea of the inestimable value of liberty, and makes every dealer in it a tyrant." "It is a clear truth," he continued, "that those who every day barter away other men's liberty will soon care little for their own."[29]

Otis's pamphlet had an almost immediate effect. In 1765, Worcester's town meeting instructed their delegates to the Massachusetts legislature to propose a law prohibiting the importation and purchase of slaves by any Massachusetts citizen. In May 1766, Boston's town meeting instructed their delegates, including Otis, John Hancock, and Samuel Adams, to push the measure. Legal maneuvering blocked the bill for five years (only to have Governor Thomas Hutchinson veto it when it was finally passed by the legislature), but word was out for all to hear that at least one colony was discussing a new policy to overturn a century and a half of slave dealing. Otis's attack on slavery, soon to be bolstered by others, touched off debates over the legality, let alone the moral justification, of slavery at the College of Philadelphia in 1768 and at Harvard College in 1773. Word of these debates could hardly have escaped the ears of northern slaves. Nor could the thoughts of Nathaniel Appleton, one of the mainstays of Boston's Sons of Liberty. Only months after the Boston town meeting had pushed to stop the importing and selling of slaves, another member of the Sons of Liberty, Benjamin Edes, published Appleton's cogent *Considerations on Slavery: In a Letter to a Friend.* The son of a Cambridge Puritan minister, Appleton had graduated from Harvard and became a merchant in Boston, where he witnessed the workings of the slave trade. In *Considerations on Slavery* he tried to tie the successes of liberty-loving

colonists in contesting the Stamp Act to the budding cause of abolition. "The years 1765 and 1766 will be ever memorable for the glorious stand which America has made for her liberties; how much glory will it add . . . if at the same time we are establishing Liberty for ourselves and children, we show the same regard to all mankind that came among us?"[30] Appleton veered from attacks on slavery rooted in religion and morality. Adopting a pragmatic approach geared to the sensibilities of people in a trading community, he flayed the abominable practice of slavery because it encouraged the slave to "throw off his burden" through rebellion, thus keeping all communities in a state of fear. He also deplored that slave labor took the jobs of lower-class whites, leaving them unemployed or—in the case of women—driving them to prostitution.

The hard-hitting words of Otis and Appleton soon reverberated down the coast in Newport, Rhode Island. An anonymous writer in the *Newport Mercury*, probably a member of the seaport's Quaker community, scorned the Americans' self-righteous language about enslavement by Parliament—a "distant prospect"—while they enslaved at the very moment "thousands of tens of thousands of their fellow creatures!" If they truly meant to stop enslavement from their mother country, they must halt "that hellish practice of deluding and enslaving another part of the human species, I mean Negroes." Was liberty applicable only to whites? No, it was applicable to all humankind, and Africans were Sons of Liberty too. As historian Bernard Bailyn has phrased it: "The identification between the cause of the colonies and the cause of the Negroes bound in chattel slavery—an identification built into the very language of politics—became inescapable."[31]

Southern slaves may or may not have heard about the antislavery pronouncements of Montesquieu, Adam Smith, James Otis, Nathaniel Appleton, and others; and they may or may not have heard that Massachusetts' legislature was considering the end of the slave trade. But a Virginia pamphlet, published as the Stamp Act crisis reached its height in late 1765, could hardly have remained unknown to them. In the context of the arguments over England's new measures to rule the colonies more effectively, Colonel Richard Bland, a member of the House of Burgesses from Prince George County since 1742, and an unrivaled scholar of English constitutional law in Virginia, had declared that "under an English government all *men* are *born free.*" Upon reading this, John Camm, the feisty Anglican professor of

divinity at William and Mary College, rushed into print. Did Bland mean "that *Virginia* is not an *English government,* or that Negroes are not under it *born slaves,* or that the said slaves are not men? Whichever of these confident assertions he undertakes to maintain, and one of them he must maintain, he will find insuperable difficulties to oppose him as soon as he is able to cast an eye on the situation of *Virginia,* the map of America, or on the condition and rational conduct of his own domestics."[32] Reverend Camm and Richard Bland had tangled on a number of issues and cordially disliked each other; but no matter, Camm had gone to the heart of a central contradiction in revolutionary rhetoric: How could Africans, who indisputably were human, be excluded from the principle that freedom was the birthright of all mankind?

By the mid-1760s, knowledge of attacks on slavery was common in Virginia and other southern colonies. The idea that African slavery was incompatible with the natural rights that Americans were coming to depend upon in their argument with the mother country was gaining ground. To be sure, most slave owners, and even people who owned no slaves, did not worry themselves unduly about the contradiction between the enslavement of Africans and the natural rights they were claiming in their mounting fight with England. But slaves did. The vast majority of them could not read, but they could listen; and they could, as inheritors of an oral tradition, spread the word. With the development of larger slaveholdings and the growing population density of slaves from Georgia to Maryland, networks of slave communication grew. Along informal grapevines, as soon became painfully obvious to slave owners, any idea promoting release from slavery moved quickly from one colony to another and from the seaboard towns to the interior hill country. John Adams heard from two Georgia delegates to the Continental Congress in 1775 that "the Negroes have a wonderful art of communicating intelligence among themselves; it will run several hundreds of miles in a week or fortnight."[33] No mass black uprising occurred in the early stages of protest against English policy; but sporadic slave demonstrations that focused on the word "liberty," used repeatedly by Stamp Act protesters, set most white Americans on edge. Considering the odds, still very much against black rebels but soon to change to their advantage, these early foretastes of black revolution were impressive enough to strike fear in the hearts of thousands of slave owners.

The Indian Great Awakening

Restiveness was surfacing in another segment of the peoples inhabiting North America east of the Mississippi River: among Native Americans living in a complex world of villages. As noted in chapter 1, an understanding of the Indians' experience of the American Revolution requires a shift in focus, to events that coincided only in part with those familiar to readers of white revolutionary history. Dramatic events in Indian country in the early 1760s, which set the course for several decades, had their own internal logic. Rather than looking west at Indian country through white eyes, we need to face east, as historian Daniel Richter has urged, to understand events through Indian eyes.[34]

For the powerful Indian nations of the interior, the *pays d'en haut,* as the French designated the midcontinent middle ground, the final stages of the Seven Years' War and the Treaty of Paris that formally concluded it in 1763 had chilling implications. First, after the French surrender at Montreal in September 1761, many Indian nations faced the near certainty of losing their French ally and trading partner. The need for an alternate trade partner was absolute. As Wyandot headmen told the English trader George Croghan a few years before, "You . . . know very well that no Indian nation lives now without being supported either by the English or the French, we cannot live as our ancestors did before you came into our country."[35]

Second, looking to the English for the trade goods that had become essential to their lives, interior Indian people found the English conquerors of New France to be cold and stingy trading partners. At the peace treaty in Detroit in 1761, British general Jeffrey Amherst had demanded the return of Anglo-American war captives, many of whom were white women who had married Indian men and borne them children. (Most had been happily adopted into tribal life in the long-held Indian tradition of replacing their war losses.) Equally offensive, British commanders at Fort Pitt, Detroit, and Michilimackinac withheld weapons, ammunition, and gunpowder upon which the Native American hunters relied in producing the deerskins essential to their trade. But even worse, taking advantage of the new British monopoly on Indian trade goods, Amherst ended the annual "presents" that Indian leaders regarded as tokens of respect and as a kind of rent for land occupied by British forts. On top of all this, Amherst raised the price of English trade goods while offering less for deerskins.

For Amherst, the British had won the war and the Native Americans must accommodate to being subjects of the king. Charged with implementing a policy of financial stringency and knowing that the Indians' military aid was no longer needed, he "blustered into Indian affairs," as historian Richard White puts it aptly, "with the moral vision of a shopkeeper and the arrogance of a victorious soldier."[36] For Native Americans, these were severe blows. For generations they had lived with the French, who were generous in giving gifts, tolerant of native ways (indeed readily adopting Indian customs), and rarely insistent on cessions of land, which the French, with their small settler population, had no reason to acquire. The British, in Indian eyes, were insensitive and greedy, more concerned with subordinating native peoples than in treating, trading, and living with them.

Even for the Iroquois, who had abandoned their long-standing neutrality policy to join the British in the latter stages of the Seven Years' War, the situation became difficult. The Seneca, always the most pro-French of the Iroquois Six Nations, had carried a red wampum belt signifying an intention to go to war to the British garrison in Detroit in 1761, two years before the Treaty of Paris was signed. Although the Iroquois tribes in the Ohio country rejected the Seneca proposal to drive the English back across the Appalachian Mountains, they boiled with resentment at General Amherst's policies. For them, Amherst was renouncing the accommodationist stance the British had always held in order to maintain the allegiance, or at least the neutrality, of the Iroquois people.

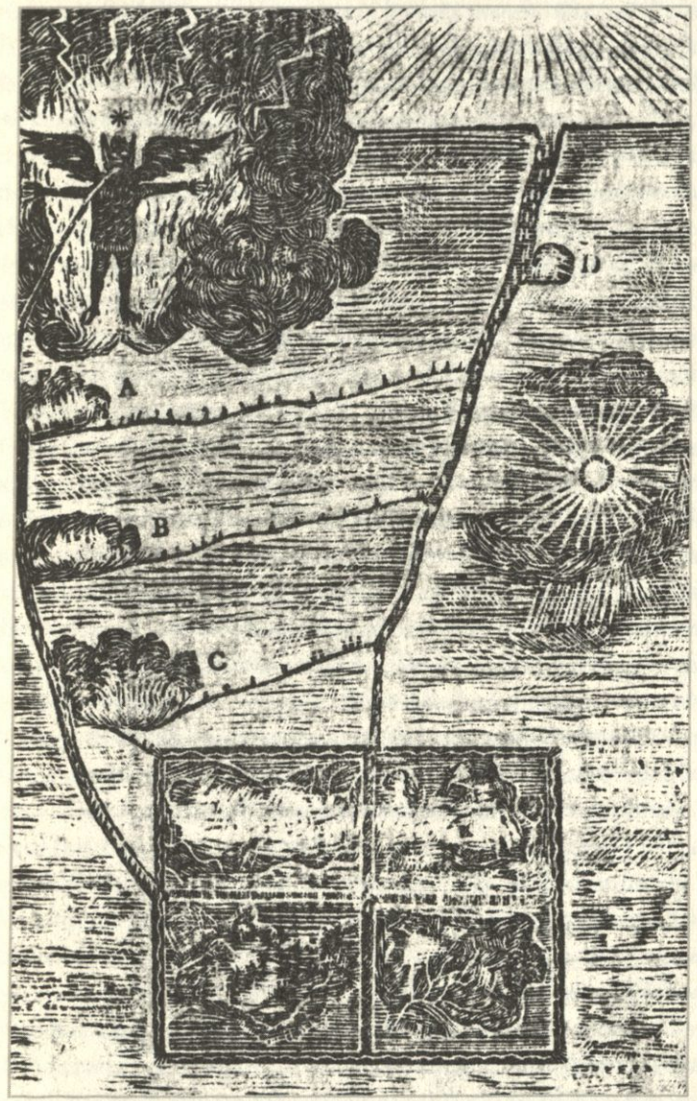
In this state of uncertainty over how to adapt to the severe policies of the English, Native Americans began listening to the visions of Neolin, a young Delaware Indian who acted more like a prophet than a warrior. Neolin's parentage and upbringing have never emerged in the documentary record, but it is known that he lived in Tuscarawas Town in present-day Ohio on a stream flowing southeastward into the Ohio River. He appeared on the scene preaching through the territory of the Delawares that native peoples must return to the "original state that they were in before the white people found out their country."[37] The alternative, he argued, was slow extinction at the hands of the settlers swarming across the mountains. Neolin preached that he had received a vision conveyed to him in dreams by the Master of Life, who told him that the Indians' salvation lay not in adopting Christianity and European culture but in returning to ancient Indian customs. They must forswear rum, abandon the material objects of the Europeans, and curb population increase

through abstinence. Only by regaining sacred power and reviving traditional ways could Indian people escape the desperate trap in which they now found themselves.

Neolin's message had resonance in part because earlier nativist prophecies had circulated in the country of the Delaware people in the 1750s, including those of a female prophet in the Wyoming Valley of western Pennsylvania. By the time of Neolin's vision, the Delawares had already heard that the Master of Life had created Indians separately from Europeans and Africans, and had sent them hard winters and epidemics to warn the original possessors of the land that they must purge themselves of European ways and return to ancient customs. But Neolin's teachings truly captured the minds of many Delawares when he reminded them of how whites were encroaching on their lands, how the deer populations had thinned, and how the heartless new British policy denied Indians the usual gifts and supply of weapons. As Neolin's message took hold, Delaware chiefs who encouraged moderation and patience in their dealings with the British began to lose status in tribal councils.

By the early 1760s, Neolin's message was reaching Indian villages beyond Delaware country, far into tribal lands to the west from the Great Lakes to Illinois and Kentucky country. "Whence comes it that ye permit the Whites upon your lands?" the Master of Life had asked him, preached Neolin. "Can ye not live without them? . . . Ye could live as ye did live before knowing them—before those whom ye call your brothers had come upon your lands. . . . Drive them out, make war upon them. I do not love them at all; they know me not, and are my enemies, and the enemies of your brothers. Send them back to the lands which I have created for them and let them stay there."[38]

Throughout 1762, Neolin's teachings passed by word of mouth and then on inscribed deerskin parchment from one Indian village to another. One who heard him and converted to his doctrine was an Ottawa leader named Pontiac. In 1763, he made Neolin's response to the bleak situation confronting the interior tribes the underpinning of a plan to drive the English away. "It is important for us, my brothers," Pontiac exhorted, "that we exterminate from our lands this nation which seeks only to destroy us." By spring 1763, Detroit Indians conveyed to a French outpost that "the Delawares told us . . . that the English sought to become masters of all and would put us to death. They told us also, Our Brethren, let us die together. Seeing the design of the English is to cut us off, we are dead one way or another."[39]



This chart of Neolin's teachings was drawn from memory by a Pennsylvania frontiersman captured during Pontiac's Rebellion. Delaware Indians at the bottom are blocked from following the Master of Life by layers of corruption borrowed from the Europeans.

The Seneca gave British leaders warning of what was coming. "We had been told," the Iroquois complained in 1763 to William Johnson, superintendent of northern Indian affairs for the British government, "that if you should conquer the French, your hands would ever be open to us, and, that as the English were a wealthy and trading people, we should be supplied with goods at a very reasonable rate. . . . But alas we find it quite otherwise; for instead of restoring to us our lands, we see you in possession of them, and building more forts in many parts of our country, notwithstanding the French are dead. This, together with the dearness of goods which are so high that all our hunting cannot supply our wants, gives our warriors and women the greatest uneasiness and makes us apt to believe every bad report we hear of your intentions towards us." General Amherst, comfortably ensconced in New York City, brushed aside reports of impending war, calling them "meer bugbears."[40]

Even before Amherst uttered this monumental misjudgment, the Ottawa chief Pontiac began an assault on Fort Detroit, the strongest of the British garrisons in the Great Lakes region. Launched in May 1763, it was the beginning of a war to cleanse Indian country of the British. The most important pan-Indian alliance in decades quickly took form as some several hundred Ottawa, Potawatomi, and Wyandot warriors laid siege to the fort. By June, warriors of many Indian nations overpowered British outposts as far east as Pittsburgh (where the infamous incident of distributing smallpox-infected blankets to parleying Indians occurred). Only Fort Niagara survived. In one assault, at Michilimackinac, Chippewas "lured the garrison into complacency by playing lacrosse outside the fort for several days and then used a well-placed stray ball as a ruse to storm through the gates."[41] Chippewa women had smuggled hatchets into the fort and were waiting inside. When the Chippewa men poured in, they took up the hatchets and killed sixteen British soldiers while capturing the rest.

The war dragged on through the summer and fall of 1763. Several thousand traders and frontier squatters from Virginia to Pennsylvania fell to Indian ambushes and assaults. One Indian leader insisted "that all the country was theirs—and that they had been cheated out of it" and "would carry on the war 'till they had burnt Philadelphia."[42]

British reinforcements arrived from the east, creating a standoff by late autumn. Pontiac fought sporadically for another two years, while British soldiers and American colonists listened apprehensively to rumors that he was organizing a grand alliance of eighteen Indian nations. But lacking the vital supplies of powder, shot, and guns, and plagued by a smallpox epidemic that raced through Indian country, the tribes sued for peace. Without trade goods available from another European power in North America, they could not overcome their supply problems.

Londoners first learned about Pontiac's uprising in July 1763. By September, they knew that Amherst's Indian policy had not only failed but had in fact brought a rain of death down on British garrisons in the North American interior. Cashiering Amherst was easy—he was replaced by General Thomas Gage; the difficulty lay in finding a policy to repair the damage with the Indian nations of the *pays d'en haut.* The answer, they hoped, in part was the Royal Proclamation of 1763, signed by England's young king, George III, on October 7. Issued as part of an attempt to forge a long-range enlightened Indian policy that would end the incessant border warfare, the proclamation supported the paramount goal of the Indian nations: protecting their territorial integrity and the political autonomy that came with it. "The several nations or tribes of Indians, with whom we are connected, and who live under our protection, should not be molested or disturbed in possession of such parts of our dominions and territories as, not having been ceded to, or purchased by us, are reserved to them." With this unambiguous imperial promise, it followed that "for the present and until our further pleasure be known" any surveys or land grants beyond the sources of the Appalachian watershed were forbidden, and all white settlers already beyond the Appalachian divide were charged to withdraw east of the line.[43]

For Indian peoples, the proclamation was a welcome sign that the hostile Amherst regime was over. It recognized what William Johnson reported to London, that "The Six Nations, Western Indians, etc., having never been conquered, either by the English or French, nor subject to the[ir] laws, consider themselves as a free people." But would the good words on the parchment be observed? And if not, would they be enforced? Time would tell, but for now Indian leaders were eager to embrace the British shift from military arrogance to diplomatic protocols grounded in mutual trust. For several years, William Johnson succeeded in establishing peaceful and profitable relations with the northern Indian nations. One key to this was the restoration of annual "presents." Listening to Johnson's advice that the best policy was

to "conquer their prejudices by our generosity, [so] they will lay aside their jealousies, and we may rest in security," the English government allocated twenty thousand pounds annually for such presents.[44]

Yet preserving political sovereignty and territorial integrity on paper could not stem the tide of frontier land speculators and farmers. By itself this demographic pressure overcame English efforts to fashion an Indian policy based on respect for land boundaries and political independence. Staggering under an immense debt accumulated in fighting the Seven Years' War, the English government was unwilling to commit resources for maintaining adequate garrisons in the interior to enforce the Proclamation Act. After Pontiac's revolt subsided, the British abandoned most of their interior garrisons and scrapped their plan to coordinate and control the Indian trade and Indian affairs that had been conducted by individual colonies. The line on the map remained, but it was little more than that, simply a thin line on a piece of parchment. Neither colonists nor Indians took it seriously. But for Indian nations of the interior, it seemed at the least that the English king across the Atlantic had repudiated the policies of Amherst and that the new superintendents of Indian affairs—William Johnson in the North and John Stuart in the South—were reasonable men trying to find ways to allow backcountry settlers and native peoples to coexist.

Insurgent Farmers

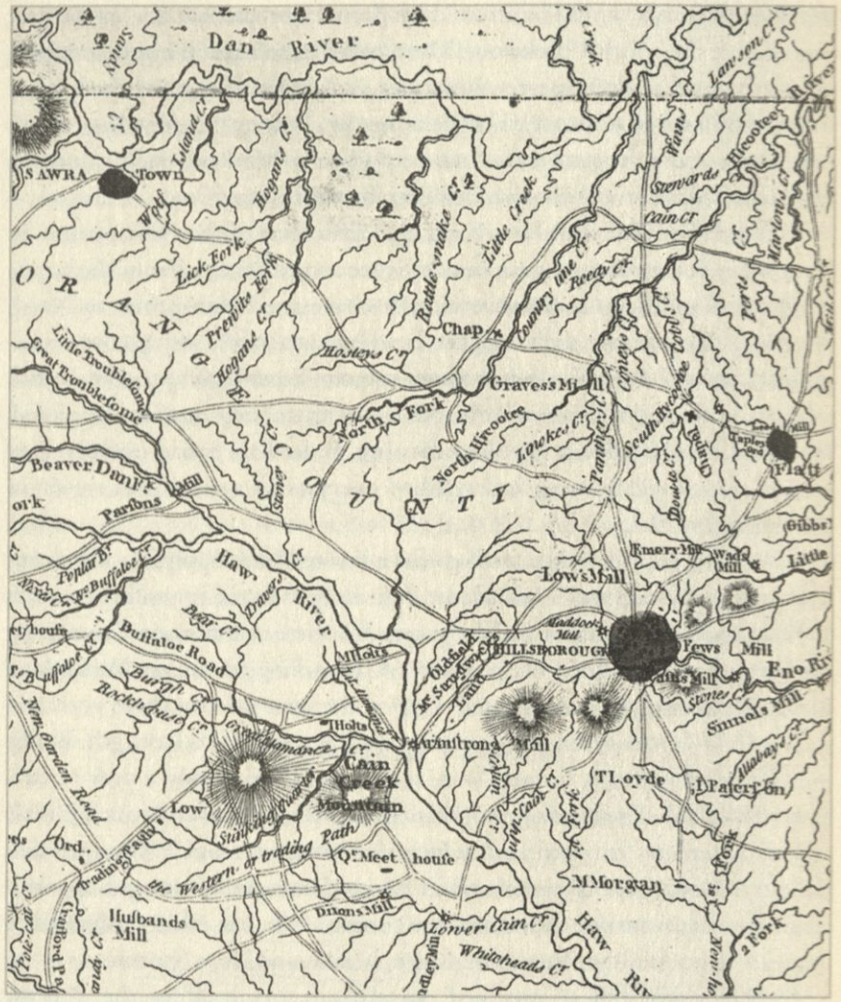
Budding revolutionary leaders, many of them speculating in lands in the forbidden country west of the Proclamation Line, had to worry about poor backwoods poachers squatting on land they hoped to soon gain title to and control. But they had a more immediate concern: backcountry men and tenant farmers staging minirevolutions in the midst of the Stamp Act turmoil. At stake were liberty, equality, justice, and power. The insurgent farmers, however, were not protesting *British* injustice or tyranny. They were protesting against injustice, inequality, and tyranny exercised by fellow colonists, in some cases the very Sons of Liberty in eastern cities who were acting on behalf of the rights of Englishmen. The dynamics involved in these agrarian revolts prefigured the most radical tactics to be employed by those who would pursue revolutionary reforms: civil disobedience, paramilitary action, defiance of established authority, and insistence that human rights in some cases were superior to property rights. They could not know it at the time, but the

small farmers would soon be called upon to support the war against England, and their decisions would be affected by their experiences in the immediate years before the conflict broke out. They would also have in hand, smithied out on the anvil of their pre-revolutionary experience, notions of the kind of society they wanted to create. When it came time to construct new laws to live under and write new state constitutions to govern their lives, their traumatic experiences in the mid-1760s were still fresh in their minds.

In North Carolina and New York, the difficulties of the 1760s, just as in New Jersey during the previous decade, were rooted in land. From the beginning, access to cheap and fertile land had attracted Europeans to North America. Like a great cosmic magnet, land had attracted about 90,000 immigrants from the Rhineland and some 120,000 Scots-Irish into the British colonies in the eighteenth century. Many of them were not disappointed; otherwise, they would not have kept coming. Indeed, the broad ownership of land distinguished farming society from every other agricultural region of the Western world.

Yet a rising population pressed against a limited land supply. Family farms could not be divided and subdivided indefinitely, so by the 1730s farm owners were struggling to provide an inheritance for three or four sons. Decreasing soil fertility compounded the problem of dwindling farm size. When land had been plentiful, farmers planted crops in the same field for three years and then let it lie fallow seven years or more until it regained its strength. But by the eighteenth century, farmers were reducing fallow to only a year or two. Jared Eliot, New England's first agricultural essayist, referred to such intense use of the soil as "our old land which we have worn out." Younger sons drifted to New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania; others sought opportunities as artisans in the coastal towns or took to the sea; others migrated to western Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maine, and Nova Scotia.

Farther south, where sustained population growth along the Atlantic seaboard also spurred heavy migration to the interior, seething discontent emerged by the time the Stamp Act had produced violent seaboard resistance. In three western North Carolina counties, small farmers erupted in 1765. They agreed with some of their superiors that England was unjust, unmindful of American rights, and callously oppressive in passing the Stamp Act. But the backcountry farmers believed that those same charges applied to corrupt and exploitative fellow colonists in their midst who controlled the courts, credit networks, and distribution of land.



This contemporary map shows the western region of North Carolina where the Regulators rose to defend their rights. The "Buffaloe Road" and "Western or trading Path" show ancient routes traveled by Cherokee and other Indian people. The names given to streams—Wolf, Bear, Buffalo, and Beaver—show how close the farmers lived to nature. Note "Great Troublesome" and "Little Troublesome" rivers at left.

In North Carolina's Granville, Anson, and Mecklenburg counties, hard-scrabble settlers in the Sugar Creek area resisted attempts to eject them after they refused to pay heavy rents to a syndicate of speculators that controlled over one million acres of land. George Sims, a farmer and schoolteacher, distilled the complaints of Granville County farmers in "An Address to the People of Granville County," where he attacked the "damned lawyers who practiced numberless . . . devilish devices to rob you of your livings in a manner diametrically opposite to the policy of our State and the intention of our legislature."[45] A year later, the behavior of extortionate local officials brought Orange County farmers to the boiling point. The farmers hated the county court officials appointed by the governor and a legislature dominated by eastern planter interests. Sheriffs and justices, allied with land speculators and lawyers, seized property when farmers—in a cash-starved economy—could not pay their taxes or debts to local merchants. Seeing their farm tools, animals, and land sold at public auction, often at a fraction of their worth, the farmers petitioned the colony's governor and legislature for lower taxes, paper currency, and lower court fees. When they found no relief, they went outside the law.

Leading them outside the law was a man with unswerving principles, a gift for language, and a family background suggesting anything but a career as a radical reformer. Herman Husband was gentry-born in Cecil County, Maryland. Prosperous, Anglican, and slave-owning, his family could have provided him, as the eldest of twelve children, with a substantial inheritance. But reaching adolescence at just the time when the English evangelist George Whitefield preached in Cecil County, Husband had religious visions and a profound conversion experience that carried him away from the Anglican Church to a New Light Presbyterian Church and finally to the Society of Friends, which he found resembled the apostolic, ancient Christian church that he yearned for. Determined to "take up the Cross" and intensely committed to playing a part on the spiritual battleground he saw around him, Husband, by his early twenties, had enlisted in a Bible-based millennial army to prepare the world for Christ's return.

In the late 1750s, by now married and providing for several children, Husband moved to North Carolina's backcountry. Part of the stream of farmers seeking cheap land, he soon encountered corrupt local officials who controlled property titles. He also found the institution of slavery creeping into

what he imagined might be "a new beginning for landless whites to acquire property and build a society based upon small freeholders devoid of a tax supported clergy or slavery."[46] Nonetheless, Husband acquired considerable property in the Granville district. By the time of the Stamp Act crisis, Husband had become the voice of the growing backcountry population of small farmers.

Refusing to pay county and provincial taxes; grating at parish taxes to support the Anglican Church, which they abhorred; forcibly repossessing land taken from them to satisfy debts; and closing the courts to halt judgments against them, the farmers banded together in what they called the Sandy Creek Association. Many of them were Quakers, others Presbyterians, and some Baptists; but all were opposed to the Anglican elite. As their chief spokesman, Husband entered politics for the first time. He preached a doctrine of social justice and the duty of Christians to obtain it. In *An Impartial Relation of the First Rise and Cause of the Recent Differences in Publick Affairs* (1770), Husband asked how the elite could justify the "Conduct of any Government" that had promoted "so many thousands of poor families to bestow their all, and the labour of many years, to improve a piece of waste land, with full expectation of a title," only to refuse the farmers "protection from being robbed of it all by a few roguish individuals, who never bestowed a farthing thereon?" They called themselves Regulators, a term borrowed from England, where it had been used for generations to describe those who reformed "publick grievances and abuses of power."[47]

In challenging and defying men with economic, political, and legal leverage, the Regulators found courage and resilience in the gospel of religious radicalism. Among the people pouring into the backcountry of North Carolina in the middle third of the eighteenth century were Baptists, Quakers, Moravians, and Presbyterians. Like Herman Husband, most of them had been touched by the Great Awakening of the 1740s and 1750s. The Awakeners' message—that if a new wellspring of religious authority was needed, that source was the individual—made a powerful claim on the minds of backcountry farmers. So, too, they came to believe that if they could become the instruments of their own salvation, they might also find ways to neutralize the power of those who trampled on them.

Such ideas spread rapidly through the backcountry of North Carolina in the 1760s. The "New Lights or the Gifted Brethren [who] pretend to inspira-

tion," snorted the crusty Anglican minister Charles Woodmason, "now infest the whole Back Country." Such pretensions of unlicensed and self-educated people were all the more alarming because the "gifted brethren" actually included the gifted sisterhood. Since the founding of the Society of Friends in mid-seventeenth-century England, Quaker women had taken roles denied females in other religious groups. They ran separate women's meetings, played a major role in disciplining wayward Friends, and found their voice as female "Publishers of the Truth," as Quakers called their itinerant early preachers. Now, awakened women in North Carolina's backcountry, particularly among the Separate Baptists, discovered their spiritual gifts and exercised them as exhorters, prophesiers, and leaders of public prayers. Woodmason mocked "a notable She Saint" with supposed "extraordinary illuminations, visions, and communications." Naturally, such subversion of the social order often brought attempts to muzzle such assertive, empowered women. Eunice Williams, who exhorted widely in the 1760s, when charged with taking it "upon herself to exhort and preach Baptist doctrines; was ordered to desist, but not obeying, was (although pregnant at the time), thrown into jail."[48]

The religious radicalism of the Awakened not only dissolved deference to religious and political authority but led to the belief that it was the *duty* of God-fearing people to oppose corrupt governors and their henchmen. Followers of the radical Protestant sects of England's mid-seventeenth-century civil war, the backcountry "enthusiasts," as their detractors called them, used religious commitment as a springboard for political insurgency. Woodmason made the religious-political connection explicit. Speaking in 1767 of the backcountry of both South Carolina and North Carolina, he scorched the Baptist, Presbyterian, "Independent," and Quaker preachers with "Instilling democratical and common wealth principles" into the farmers' minds, "embittering them" against the Anglican Church and "all Episcopal government" and "laying deep their fatal republican notions and principles, especially that they owe no subjection to Great Britain—that they are a free people."[49]

By 1768, the Regulator movement was gathering momentum, almost entirely oblivious to the growing storm between the English government and its American subjects that followed the Stamp Act crisis. Interlocking bread-and-butter issues provided the fuel for the growing conflagration: heavy taxes, assessed regressively, with those best able to pay transferring the burden

to those beneath them; the contraction of the supply of paper money; and the corruption of sheriffs who collected taxes and then pocketed much of the funds. Adding to the backcountry farmers' outrage was legislative appropriation of a stupendous £15,000 to build a palace for Governor William Tryon. In the poorest colony in eastern North America, the money was to be raised by the regressive poll tax, where the richest land and slave owners parted with exactly the same amount as the poorest taxpayers. Under attack by small farmers, who overpowered them to repossess livestock and household goods taken as payment for taxes and debts, sheriffs and other local officials convinced the governor to take action to suppress the Regulators. If he did not defang these "traitorous dogs," they would "become sovereign arbiters of right and wrong."[50]

Governor Tryon moved to kennel the "traitorous dogs" by proclaiming "an absolute insurrection of a dangerous tendency . . . in Orange County" and demanding that "riotous and disorderly persons" end "outrages in open violation of the laws of their country." He called out the militia in adjoining counties to restore order, but most militiamen would not respond. After sheriffs arrested Herman Husband and another leader, seven hundred armed Regulators assembled at Hillsborough, west of present-day Durham, and demanded their release. Frightened officers complied. They knew, as the governor did, that "the people are now in every part and corner of the country, meeting, conspiring, and confederating by solemn oath and open violence."[51]

For months, the two sides tried to resolve the issues. At the same time, people in other colonies were embroiled in the Townshend Acts of 1767, which imposed new taxes on the colonists. Governor Tryon threatened the Regulators with charges of treason if they did not admit their "illegal and unwarrantable conduct." But the Regulators refused to comply and repeated their litany of complaints, written by Husband, that boiled down to "the unequal chances the poor and the weak have in contention with the rich and powerful." Through the tense summer of 1768, charges and countercharges flew back and forth. In September, Governor Tryon called out militia units, and word circulated that the governor intended to "try, hang, and condemn all those who bear the title of regulators." That brought a defiant response. The Regulators vowed that, if nothing would "propitiate" the governor "but our blood," they were prepared "to fall like men, and sell our lives at the very dearest rate."[52]

Bloodshed was averted, for the moment, when the governor agreed to accept the Regulators' petition and consider their grievances. "The whole multitude, as with one voice," recounted Husband two years later, "cried out 'agreed.' That is all we want; liberty to make our grievances known."[53] As we will see in chapter 3, the Regulators' grievances went unanswered and the next encounter would not be bloodless. In the meantime, the Regulators, though told to disband and forbidden to use the toxic term by which they called themselves to emphasize their rightful actions, worked to democratize local government and replace corrupt and parasitic officials with farmers like themselves.

Rural insurgency in New York in the mid-1760s was even more intense than in North Carolina. As in the South, militant rhetoric and radical tactics used by small farmers to combat exploitation formed rivulets that fed the mainstream of revolutionary consciousness. The conditions under which land was held in New York caused resentment, then protests, and finally violence and defiance of the law. In this minirevolution, two men who have almost entirely faded from historical memory took leading roles. One was a ship carpenter turned farmer named William Prendergast; the other was Daniel Nimham, grand sachem of the Wappinger tribe. Both were in their midthirties in 1765 when New York erupted with internal disputes.

The Hudson River valley had long been controlled by a few wealthy families with enormous landholdings, which were so large that they rivaled the manors of English nobility. Rensselaerswyck Manor totaled 1 million acres, Philipse Manor 200,000 acres, and Beekman Manor a mere 100,000 acres. By 1710 every acre of some eight hundred square miles of Dutchess County had been patented to a handful of absentee landlords for token amounts of money. Most of these vast tracts were acquired as virtually free gifts from royal governors, and some were obtained by outright fraud. Henry Beekman, for example, had obtained his vast patent in the 1690s from Governor Benjamin Fletcher for £25. The Philipse patent, covering all of southern Dutchess County, was fraudulently obtained because no purchase for it was made from the original owners, the Wappinger Indians.[54]

Manor lords leased land to tenant farmers, who paid annual rents for the right to farm on modest parcels. By the 1760s, about 1,200 tenants farmed on Philipse Manor and nearly as many bowed when their Van Rensselaer landlords rode by. As if living in days of yore, the manor lords tried to exact medieval subservience from tenants, each year obliging them to perform such

unpaid services to the manor lord as the corvée—labor to build and maintain the manor roads. More troubling to the farmers, landlords did not allow for eventual land ownership by the tenanted occupants, whom they preferred to think of as peasants. When tenants resisted rent increases or purchased land from Indians, who swore that manor lords had extended the boundaries of their estates by fraud, the landlords began evicting them. Rarely were the tenants favored if a dispute reached the local courts.

The landlords dominated local government, including, most importantly, control of the courts. Dutchess County was virtually the political fiefdom of Henry Beekman, Jr., son of the original patentee to the southern part of the county. Livingstons, Philipses, Van Rensselaers, and Van Cortlandts were likewise local oligarchs and by the mid-eighteenth century had a powerful grip on the colony's legislature. Facing such odds, the grievances of tenants against their landlords had only one realistic channel—going outside the law. Even then, the chances were slim.

Tenant uprisings occurred in both the northern and southern sectors of the Hudson River valley. By the 1750s, the land east of the upper Hudson River was ablaze with disputes. Drifting down from New England, thousands of farmers claimed they had freehold title to land granted by Massachusetts and Connecticut in a zone where the boundaries were murky. The fact that New York and the New England colonies had never fixed the boundary between them created a cornucopia of suits for lawyers, but these were suits that defied easy resolution. An uprising of tenants in 1755 on the Livingston and Van Rensselaer manors, at the beginning of the Seven Years' War, ushered in a quarter century of havoc in the Hudson River region. Not all landlords were imperious and heartless, but those who were learned how intensely they were hated. In 1755, Joseph Paine, a longtime tenant, girdled and felled about 1,200 trees on Livingston Manor and told Robert Livingston's servants dispatched to confront him "that the trees were his and he would go and destroy the timber as he pleased and Robert Livingston [could] kiss his a__s."[55]

This outbreak played out quickly in the face of the superior power held by the "patroons," as contemporaries called them. But this was a lull in what would turn out to be a full-scale storm. The farmers who squatted on land claimed by the Philipses, Livingstons, and Van Rensselaers had the cooperation of Stockbridge and Mahican Indians, who hoped to reclaim the land they believed they had been cheated out of because it had never been purchased from them by the great manor lords of the seventeenth century. Sometimes

backed up by the Massachusetts government, which had disputed New York's claims to parts of the upper Hudson River region since the 1730s, Stockbridge and Mahicans made common cause with the antimanorial settlers.

By the time the Stamp Act riots were erupting in the seaboard towns, events leading to what became known as the Great Rebellion of 1766 were under way. The precipitating cause was the determination of Beverly Robinson, a stiff-necked British army officer who had married the daughter of Philip Philipse, to extinguish long-term leases to tenants who had tilled the land for as much as thirty years and replace them with tenants who were given new short-term leases. While the lower Hudson River tenants did not have the support of Massachusetts, which had sparred for years with New York's great landowners in a complex boundary dispute, they had another unusual ally—the Wappinger Indian sachem Daniel Nimham.

Nimham's ancestors were the original owners of a vast territory on the east side of the Hudson River from New York City to north of what is Poughkeepsie today. Over decades of Dutch and English rule, the Wappingers had been devastated by disease and warfare. Once a proud people, they now numbered only a few hundred and had been reduced to an "idle strolling life." Yet they claimed they had never relinquished their ancestral lands to either the English or the Dutch, and certainly not to Adolph Philipse, the original Philipse Highland Patent proprietor. The Wappingers now lived in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, with several other remnants of Indian tribes that had been Christianized over the years. Chief Nimham had taken heart in 1762, when New York's governor, Cadwallader Colden, had promised redress for the unresolved Indian claims in New York. In August 1764, Nimham, working with lawyer Samuel Monrow, issued an announcement that his people were the "Rightful owner" of the vast Philipse Highland Patent, except for five thousand acres, and urged all Philipse tenants to obtain legal conveyances from him, which would specify a token rent. Many tenants gladly accepted this offer, taking out leases from Nimham "for 999 years upon very reasonable terms," such as two peppercorns per year.[56] Nimham urged tenants not to pay rent to Robinson and Philipse while obtaining their conveyances from his tribe.

Predictably, the Philipse manor lords' response was "legal retribution," as Sung Bok Kim, a careful historian of this tangled chapter in the life of New York, describes it.[57] At the end of 1764 the Philipses went to court to obtain ejectment orders against fifteen tenants who had signed Indian leases.

Monrow had arranged with Daniel Nimham that the Wappinger chief would stand trial for all the defendants, a rare case when a colonial court accepted the testimony of a Native American.

Sitting as the high court of chancery, the New York Council heard the case in 1765. To no one's surprise the court was packed with manor lords. Before the bewigged members of the governor's council, the thirty-eight-year-old Nimham testified that Adolph Philipse, the original manor lord, had never purchased title to the 205,000 acres of land he claimed. Furthermore, Philipse's descendants had taken possession of these lands while Wappinger warriors were spilling their blood for New Yorkers and the English king, fighting with British forces in the Seven Years' War. This made no impression on the landlord-jurists, who pronounced Nimham and his legal adviser wrong and indeed guilty of high misdemeanors. They promptly arrested and jailed Monrow in New York City, where he would remain behind bars for two years. Fortified with writs of possession, the jubilant Philipses evicted tenants with Indian leases without compensation for the improvements they had made on their farms. Still determined, Nimham began arranging a voyage to England to present his case before the Crown.

Other manor lords in the lower Hudson River region were beset by tenants and squatters who cared not at all that their exploitative masters were battling British bureaucrats in the heat of the Stamp Act crisis. For example, John Van Cortlandt's tenants in Westchester County had no regard for his leadership as one of New York's Sons of Liberty when they threatened to descend on New York City and pull down his house there. The liberty he was defending in his protests against the Stamp Act made him no less an enemy in his eviction of tenants and squatters.

History is full of situations in which terrible odds cannot deter ordinary people with deep-rooted grievances from taking up arms to fight a battle that in retrospect seems almost suicidal. This, in fact, is how most revolutions have begun. Such a moment now occurred just outside New York City in May 1766, while the metropolis was absorbed in the final stages of the Stamp Act furor. In the face of eviction from their farms and the incarceration of Samuel Monrow, who had provided Daniel Nimham with legal advice, Hudson River tenants and squatters organized to obtain what they thought was simple justice. Banding together, they vowed not to pay the spring rents due on the small farms where they had invested their labor. For landlords, it was

a simple matter to go to court and obtain a writ ordering sheriffs to evict delinquent tenants or those who signed Indian leases. But encouraged by the Stamp Act riots in New York City, which gave the farmers, by one account, the notion that "every thing which had the appearance of resisting government might be undertaken with impunity,"[58] the tenants began to offer stiffer resistance to the landlords. They soon formed their own militia bands; elected their own officers; formed popular courts to try enemies they captured; threatened landlords with death; restored evicted tenants by driving off new farmers installed by the manor lords; and broke open jails to rescue friends. In effect, they formed a countergovernment. From the great landlords' point of view, and from the viewpoint of the British government as well, this was treason.

The man whom several thousand Dutchess County tenants urged to take the lead against manorialism was William Prendergast, an Irish immigrant from County Kilkenny. In the early 1750s, he became a tenant farmer on the estate of Frederick Philipse, and here he labored to improve the land. Here was the kind of person who emerged from obscurity in the revolutionary years. In the crucible of exploitation, ideas began to crystallize that Prendergast had probably thought about only fleetingly in the past. In 1755, at age twenty-eight, Prendergast married seventeen-year-old Mehitabel Wing, a Quaker woman who would bear thirteen children before the end of the American Revolution.

Prendergast was respected in Dutchess County and was later described as "always a saving, industrious man." But he was also a man of determination and courage. When the manager of Philipse Manor demanded in 1765 that tenant farmers surrender their long-term leases for new one- to three-year leases, Prendergast stepped forward to lead angry tenants against this attack on their livelihoods. Vowing to "relieve the oppressed," Prendergast led land rioters on a rampage to reclaim the farms on the Philipse and Van Cortlandt Manors from which they had been evicted.[59]

New York's attorney general, John Tabor Kempe, responded by issuing a bench warrant for the arrest of the tenant rioters, and the Westchester County sheriff nabbed three of them and hustled them to jail in New York City, where they would be beyond the reach of Prendergast and other potential jail breakers. But this brought an even greater number of insurgent farmers to a meeting called by Prendergast. Agreeing unanimously that they

should march on the city "to do justice and relieve the oppressed"—and perhaps pull down the houses of John Van Cortlandt and Kempe as well—some three hundred armed farmers headed for King's Bridge, which connected Westchester County with Manhattan, on April 29, 1766. Warned that he was defying the authority of the English king, represented in New York by its royal governor, Prendergast retorted that "Mobs had overcome Kings before and why should they not overcome now?"[60]

With Prendergast leading, the men were joined at the bridge by several hundred Westchester farmers. There, Prendergast made a spirited speech in which he anticipated that urban workingmen, who had been so active in the Stamp Act riots in New York, would join them. A man of direct, earthy language, like many farmers, he spoke of how, together, the rural and urban radicals would take any person who "offended us . . . to the first convenient place of mud and water, and there duck them as long as we think proper, from whence we should take them to a white oak tree and there whip them as long as we think proper, and thence take them out of the county and there kick their arses as long as we think fit."[61] The farmers had no difficulty wresting meaning out of these words and cheered their leader.

In a classic case of divided laboring people, a problem that would hobble radical movements for many generations, New York's plebeian ranks failed Prendergast's hopes. Perhaps the artisans, mariners, and laborers he counted on were alarmed by the rumor that the tenant farmers would "set the city on fire in several different places at the same time." Perhaps they were overflowing with excitement over the news, which had arrived just five days before, that Parliament had repealed the Stamp Act. At least as important was the fact that some of the oppressive Hudson River landlords had city mansions and had themselves become active leaders of the Sons of Liberty. Included were the tenants' nemeses John Van Cortlandt and Peter R. Livingston. The "Sons of Liberty [are] great opposers to these rioters," noted Captain John Montresor, the commander of the British regiment quartered in the city. "They are of opinion that no one is entitled to riot but themselves."[62] But most important, the possibility of a rural-urban radical nexus was countered by Governor Henry Moore's order for the city's militia and regular troops to attack the farmers, who were armed mostly with pitchforks, barrel staves, and clubs. Faced down by the governor, and failing to get support of the city's laboring men, Prendergast's legion retreated from the city.

Governor Moore ordered the arrest of Prendergast and other tenant leaders on the spot, but sent a city alderman to arrest them. That the city official gave Prendergast a chance to make his escape suggests the sympathy of many New Yorkers for the small farmer rebels. Within days of the insurgents' retreat Governor Moore issued a proclamation offering a £100 reward "for the taking of Prendergast, Chief of the Country Levellers" and £50 for the capture of each of his two secondary leaders. Prendergast eluded the sheriffs, rejected his wife's pleas to surrender, and vowed to "make daylight show thro' " anyone who attempted to seize him.[63] But in July 1766, a British regiment dispatched to Poughkeepsie finally snared Prendergast. Hauled off to the Dutchess County Courthouse, Prendergast found himself charged with high treason.

On August 6, 1766, a special Court of Oyer and Terminer, filled with landlords, tried him under heavy guard in New York City. Witnesses testified that Prendergast had accepted the leadership role because "it was hard," in his own words, that poor people "were not allowed to have *any property*" and were driven from the land where the sweat of their brows had made the land flourish. "There was no law for poor men," Prendergast testified. In such a skewed legal system, going outside the law was justifiable. Moss Kent, a small farmer (and a witness picked by the great landlords) confirmed that evicted tenants believed they were entitled to defy the law because, though they "had an equitable title," they "could not be defended in a court of law because they were poor and . . . poor men were always oppressed by the rich."[64]

The strong-willed Prendergast had public sentiment on his side, because the Hudson River grandees were hardly popular heroes. A New York newspaper called Prendergast a "sober, honest, and industrious farmer much beloved by his neighbors."[65] But the Irish immigrant had little else going for him. Refusing counsel, he defended himself, with his wife taking the stand to offer extenuating points. In this mismatch, Prendergast lost decisively.

When Robert R. Livingston, chief justice of the court, read out Prendergast's sentence, the entire colony learned how greatly the land war had frightened the rich and powerful. Prendergast "shall be hanged by the neck," intoned Judge Livingston, "and then shall be cut down alive, and his entrails and privy members shall be cut from his body, and shall be burned in his sight, and his head shall be cut off, and his body shall be divided into four parts and shall be disposed of at the King's pleasure."[66] In the colonies, this

kind of barbarous punishment was usually reserved for slaves found guilty of murdering their masters or mistresses. As in such slave cases, the point was to terrify miscreants from the bottom of society.

After the court pronounced Prendergast guilty and specified the punishment, his wife rode for seventy miles on horseback to New York to urge the governor to reprieve her husband, but to no avail. Yet if the judges were going to carry out the grisly sentence, they would have to do it themselves. With the execution scheduled for September 26, 1766, the sheriff advertised for assistance in executing Prendergast in the way that was prescribed. Though offering "a good reward" to any takers and promising to disguise them "so as not to be known,"[67] nobody stepped forward. Aware of the widespread sympathy for Prendergast, Governor Henry Moore reprieved him pending the king's approval.

In the northern Hudson River valley, antilandlordism followed a similar course in 1765–66. Robert Noble, a tenant on the Rensselaerswyck Manor, tried again to assert the right to the land that many small farmers had improved. Noble had been a leader in the insurgencies of the 1750s, but this time his followers were more numerous and their determination steelier. The great landed magnates who now became the targets of their tenants' anger were among those same men who protested the Stamp Act and had begun to think about royal tyranny.

The rioters in the upper Hudson River valley attacked those who were loyal to men like Robert Livingston, Jr., but Livingston himself was their main target. In June 1766, they marched on Livingston's manor house, threatening to demolish it and kill him. This led to a bloody confrontation, where a posse organized by Livingston and John Van Rensselaer faced off against Noble's followers. The blood of many men stained the soil, and four did not survive the confrontation.

Trying to cope with this kind of defiance, New York's governor Henry Moore convinced General Thomas Gage, commander in chief of some eight thousand British troops in North America, to dispatch a regiment in the summer of 1766 to break the tenant rebellion. The regiment suffered three casualties in rounding up sixty "miserable, harden'd Wretches" on the Philipse Manor, and their pillaging and burning of the tenants' small houses soon brought about the surrender of about sixty additional insurgents. But on the Livingston Manor, near the Massachusetts border, a British regiment spent two summer months chasing armed tenants who "advance and retire at plea-

sure," as a British captain put it.[68] The British regulars, about 250 strong, finally routed the rioters, stealing their livestock, carrying off their possessions, and driving several hundred families into the woods for refuge.

Although a royal pardon eventually rescued the hero of the insurgent tenantry, William Prendergast, from the gallows, the bitterness of the Great Rebellion of 1766 endured through subsequent years. Nobody involved in the tenant wars of the 1760s forgot the experience. As we will see in chapter 5, those who fought for the British and those who fought for the Americans carried their local interests, grudges, and unfulfilled yearnings into the Revolution.