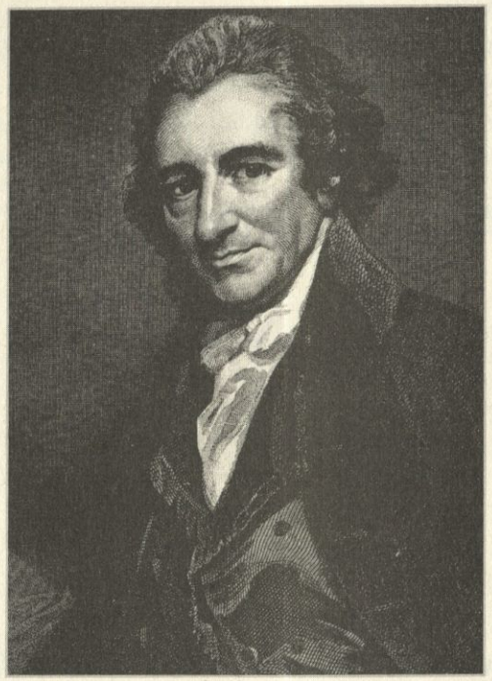
virtue inculcated by women, the nation might overcome the decay of masculine virtue that the war brought on. Women would be the moral bookkeepers and instructors in the new, raw, boisterous American society. It would take another decade after peace arrived in 1783 to complete the refashioning of women of the republic, but the process was under way.

Epilogue

SPARKS FROM THE ALTAR OF '76

In 1802, arriving in Baltimore after an absence from America of fifteen years, Thomas Paine began a series of letters "To the Citizens of the United States." In what he called "sparks from the altar of Seventy-six," he tried to explain to a new generation what the American Revolution was all about. In the eighth letter, published in June 1805, he reminded Americans that "The independence of America . . . was the opportunity of *beginning the world anew,* as it were; and of bringing forward a *new system* of government in which the rights of *all* men should be preserved that gave *value* to independence." For Paine, matters had gone amiss. The rights of all men had never been fully acknowledged, and in the years he had been away the accomplishments of the radical revolutionists to begin the world anew had been sullied. Pennsylvania's revised constitution of 1790 stood as a prime example of betraying the Revolution. After years of inveighing against it, conservatives had finally scuttled the radical constitution of 1776. Gaining power in the state legislature, they had called a new constitutional convention and then ripped out some of the most democratic features of the original constitution. They gave power to veto laws passed by the elected legislature to a governor as well as handing him "a great quantity of patronage . . . copied from England." They replaced the unicameral lawmaking assembly with a



Thomas Paine had left America in 1787, just before the Constitutional Convention convened in Philadelphia, had visited Paris briefly, and then gone to see his aged parents in England. His sojourn there ended in 1792, when the English government hounded him out of the country for what they regarded as seditious libel in the second half of The Rights of Man. *Thereafter, in France, he had been elected to the assembly in the French Revolution and had set the world ablaze with* The Age of Reason, *a no-holds-barred attack on aristocracy and established religion.*

two-house legislature where the upper house was reserved for those with wealth. Worst of all, they scaled back white adult male suffrage, making "artificial distinctions among men in the right of suffrage." It was a constitution unworthy of America, Paine believed, and it was put into place without its ratification by the people.[1]

Four months after Paine's letter on the betrayed Revolution appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper, John Adams was still at work on the autobiography he had started in 1802. Writing from his study in Braintree, Massachusetts,

he, too, was reflecting on the meaning of the American Revolution because he was working on the years of 1776–78 at this very moment. Paine leaped to Adams's mind as he wrote his old friend Benjamin Waterhouse, leader of Harvard's medical school, who had tutored the young John Quincy Adams in Leyden when Abigail and John were there in 1781. Whether Adams had been following Paine's letters to "the Citizens of the United States" is uncertain, but it probably didn't matter. His views of Paine had been fully formed years before. Taking up his pen on October 29, 1805, Adams wrote that Paine was "a mongrel between pig and puppy, begotten by a wild boar on a bitch wolf." Working up a lather at the thought of Paine, he continued that "never before in any age of the world" was such a "poltroon" allowed "to run through such a career of mischief." Yet Adams was an astute observer as well as a maker of history; so thinking further, he conceded that "I know not whether any man in the world has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine." Responding to a letter from Waterhouse in which the eminent doctor had called the revolutionary era the "Age of Frivolity," Adams allowed that he "would not object if you had named it the Age of Folly, Vice, Frenzy, Fury, Brutality, Daemons, Buonaparte, Tom Paine, or the Age of the Burning Brand from the Bottomless Pit, or anything but the Age of Reason." The last reference, of course, was to Paine's scathing attack on aristocracy and organized Christian religion, read the world over since its publication in Paris in 1794. We can imagine Adams sighing as he tried to sum up the response to Waterhouse: "Call it then the Age of Paine."[2]

Did Adams mean the age of *pain* as well as the "Age of Paine"? Probably so, to judge by everything Adams wrote about his revolutionary experiences. For him, self-interest and avarice had repeatedly trumped public virtue, threatening to sunder the republic. And it gnawed at him that his own contributions received so little credit. For the inegalitarian Adams, who had become a Federalist after the states ratified the Constitution of 1787, pain was almost an everyday affair during his presidency from 1797 to 1801. Steering the nation through a near war with France and coping with the French and Haitian revolutions earned him many enemies, and his unpopularity increased for signing the Alien and Sedition Acts under which his administration jailed the most important newspaper editors of the Democratic-Republican Party that opposed him. The scurrilous election campaign against Jefferson in 1800 deprived him of a second term and sent him back to Braintree full of bitterness and remorse.

Many people of the new republic agreed with Adams that it was an age of pain, and some seconded his view that ultrademocratic ideas had gone too far and should be resisted and neutralized in order to secure order and stability. But for many of the nation's peoples, including the Native Americans struggling within the nation's borders, the pain consisted mostly of the unfulfilled promises of revolutionary radicalism. For them, the most radical dreams had been diluted, deferred, or dashed. Yet, as we will see, the leaders of radical reform, and those who followed their lead, were not in the habit of supinely kneeling before those who wanted to return American society to its elitist moorings. For them, sparks from the "altar of '76" still furnished the inspiration to fight on.

The Dream Deferred

African Americans had reached a crossroads during the Revolution, with one large contingent casting their lot with the British and the others hoping against hope that white Americans would honor their founding principles by making all people free and equal. Estimates vary, but historians agree that tens of thousands of adult slaves, along with many of their children, made their declarations of independence by fleeing to England's protective flag. In this gamble, disease turned out to be their worst enemy. It is likely that not more than one-third of those who fled to the British lines survived the Revolution. Of those who were free, most were on their way to the easternmost province of Canada as Americans celebrated peace.

Nova Scotia would not be the land of dreams that Boston King, Thomas Peters, David George, and the others of the latest African diaspora hoped for. Peters settled at Digby, "a sad, grog drinking place," as one visitor called it. About five hundred white and a hundred black families were like so much flotsam thrown up on the shores of Nova Scotia. But once there, the British promises of land, tools, and provisions fell far short of their expectations. Black families found themselves segregated in impoverished villages, given scraps of often untillable land, deprived of the rights normally extended to British subjects, and forced to work on road construction in return for the promised necessities. Gradually they were reduced to peonage.

By 1790, after six years of hand-to-mouth existence in a land of dubious freedom, Peters concluded that his people must find their freedom elsewhere. Deputized by two hundred black families, Peters composed a petition to English authorities and agreed to carry it personally across the Atlantic. Sailing from Halifax that summer, he reached London with little more in his pocket than the plea for fair treatment in Nova Scotia or resettlement "wherever the wisdom of Government may think proper to provide for [my people] as free subjects of the British Empire."[3]

Peters arrived in London at a momentous time. English abolitionists were bringing to a climax four years of lobbying for a bill in Parliament to abolish the slave trade. Though merchant slave trade interests defeated the bill, the abolitionists won approval for chartering the Sierra Leone Company with trading and settlement rights on the African coast. The recruits for the new colony would be the ex-slaves from America then living in Nova Scotia and free blacks from England ready to return to the African homeland.

After almost a year in London, Peters returned to Halifax, and from there he eagerly spread the word that the English government would provide free transport for any black Nova Scotians who wished to go to Sierra Leone. On the African coast, they would receive at least twenty acres per man, ten for each woman, and five for each child. John Clarkson, the younger brother of one of England's best-known abolitionists, traveled with Peters to coordinate and oversee the resettlement plan. Fifty-four years old, Peters now began a journey on foot to spread word of the chance to return to Africa. Working through black preachers, the principal leaders in the Canadian black communities, the two men spread the word. The return to Africa soon took on overtones of the Old Testament delivery of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. Clarkson described the scene at Birchtown, a black settlement near Annapolis, where in October 1791, 350 black people trekked through the rain to the church of their blind and lame preacher Moses Wilkinson to hear about the Sierra Leone Company's resettlement terms. Pressed into the pulpit, the English reformer "rose up and explained . . . the object, progress, and result of the embassy of Thomas Peters to England."[4] Applause burst forth frequently as Clarkson spoke, and in the end the entire congregation vowed its intent to make the exodus out of Canada in search of the promised land. In the next three days, 514 men, women, and children inscribed their names on the rolls of prospective emigrants. They were soon joined by seven hundred more from other black communities.

As black Canadians streamed into Halifax at the end of 1791, Peters and Clarkson inspected each of the fifteen ships sent to convoy the emigrants back to Africa. They ordered some decks removed, ventilation holes fitted, and

berths constructed so this trip across the Atlantic would not mimic the horrors of the passage that every African remembered. On January 15, 1792, under sunny skies and a fair wind, the fleet weighed anchor and stood out from Halifax harbor. Crowded aboard the ships were men, women, and children whose collective experiences in North America described the entire gamut of slave travail. Included was the African-born Charles Wilkinson, who had fought with the British Black Pioneer unit, accompanied by two small daughters and his mother. Also aboard was David George, founder of the first black Baptist church to be formed among slaves in Silver Bluff, South Carolina. There, too, was Moses Wilkinson, who had escaped his Virginian master in 1776 and had become a revered preacher in Nova Scotia. Preacher Boston King, the South Carolina slave who had escaped his master, joined the British, and debarked from New York City in 1783, was also included, as was Harry Washington, who had fled his master at Mount Vernon in 1776. Eighty-year-old Richard Herbert, a laborer, was among the throng, but he was not the oldest. That claim fell to a woman whom Clarkson described in his shipboard journal as "an old woman of 104 years of age, who had requested me to take her that she might lay her bones in her native country."[5]

The winter gales, the worst in the memory of seasoned crew members, created a wretched ocean crossing of nearly eight weeks. Two of the fifteen ship captains and sixty-five black émigrés died en route. Legend tells that Thomas Peters, sick from shipboard fever, led his shipmates ashore in Sierra Leone singing, "The day of jubilee is come; return ye ransomed sinners home." For those who made it, the American Revolution was now complete. Peters lived only four months longer and was buried at Freetown, where his descendants live today. He had crossed the Atlantic four times, lived in French Louisiana, North Carolina, New York, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Bermuda, London, and Sierra Leone. He had worked as a field hand, millwright, ship hand, casual laborer, and soldier. He had waged a three-decade struggle for the most basic political rights, for equality, and for human dignity. His struggle was individual at first, as he tried to burst the shackles of slavery, but he merged his individual efforts with those of thousands of other slaves who made the American Revolution the first large-scale rebellion of Africans in North America. Out of thousands of acts of such defiance and militancy grew a legend of black strength, struggle, and vision for the future.

For the much larger number of African Americans who remained in America, the 1783 treaty recognizing the independence of the United States

was only a diplomatic nicety. In fact, it narrowed their options. With no British military establishment offering freedom to black refugees, African Americans had to carry on the struggle for freedom and equality within a victorious white American society still rankling at the British escape hatch that had offered slaves freedom. Regarding American soil as their own, since it was the place where their toil and tears had made the land flourish, and in most cases their place of birth, they would have to pursue their agenda of freedom and equality within the bosom of the new white republic.

"We are determined to seek out for ourselves, the Lord being our helper," wrote Richard Allen a few years after the Revolution.[6] By this time, free black Americans were congregating in inland towns and seaboard cities where they saw the best opportunities to find jobs, marriage partners, and black churches. Their numbers grew to about 3,500 in New York City, 6,400 in Philadelphia, and 1,350 in Baltimore by 1800. In cities and small towns, most northern African Americans made the transit from slavery to freedom. This often had to be accomplished in the face of white hostility, because many white Americans saw free black people as more threatening than slaves. But in spite of such animosity, they created the foundations of black urban life—churches, schools, self-improvement societies, and mutual-aid associations—while cultivating an ethic of self-reliance that became a key attribute in making the long walk to freedom and equality.[7]

The Last Best Chance

Though the tenth of African Americans who lived in the postwar North began fashioning new lives for themselves beyond the expectations of white Americans, most of whom doubted their ability to function as free people, the greatest radical reform of the revolutionary era pertinent to black Americans, the abolition of slavery, slipped away. This was the great hope of those who believed the Revolution would mark the dawn of a new day for the sons and daughters of Africa. Though the prospect of liberty for slaves was real enough at war's end, it vanished in a few sorrowful years. Of all the missed opportunities in American history, it was the most tragic.

Viewing the political landscape and worrying about how the newly independent American republic could survive while one-fifth of its people were still in chains, Mathew Ridley, a Baltimore merchant, wrote in 1786 that slavery was "one of those evils that will be very difficult to correct [because] of all

*Richard Allen founded the breakaway African Methodist Episcopal Church, which would become the largest black Christian denomination in the world. In raising money to build an independent black church in 1791, Allen's democratic sensibility shone through in his rationale that "men are more influenced by their moral equals than by their superiors . . . and . . . are more easily governed by persons chosen by themselves . . . than by persons who are placed over them by accidental circumstances."**

reformations those are the most difficult to ripen where the roots grow as it were in the pockets of men."[8] Ridley was right, but he was addressing only half of the problem. Reform-minded white Americans confronted two main issues in abolishing slavery: First, how slave owners would be compensated for their immense investment in human labor—the economic problem; second, how freed people would fit into the social fabric of the new nation—the social problem. Solutions to these two thorny matters, freighted with two

*Gary B. Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 113.

centuries of history, hinged on a willingness to make pocketbook sacrifices and to envision a biracial republic. The Revolution's natural-rights underpinnings demanded a resolution of this glaring inconsistency. For many Americans, the question was not about *whether* slavery should be abolished but *when* and *how*. Yet to the crushing disappointment of hundreds of thousands of African Americans, elected white representatives provided little leadership in solving these problems.

It became evident at the Constitutional Convention of 1787 that the revolutionary generation, while providing a constitutional capstone to their achievement, would not do what was essential to create "a more perfect union." Northern as well as southern delegates tried to bury the issue of abolition and leave slavery in place, all the while drawing a thin veil over the problem that even the most talented political theorists could not make disappear. By the time the revolutionary generation was in its grave, the best opportunity for abolishing slavery had been lost.

That this happened was not inevitable. Yes, the obstacles were huge, including the fragility of the newly independent nation, the threat of South Carolina and Georgia to secede if slavery was tampered with, and the reluctance of northern states to be part of a national remedy for a national problem. At the same time, five interlocking factors after the war made this the opportune time for abolishing slavery. First, it was the era when the sentiment for ridding American society of a blood-drenched labor system widely agreed to be abominable was the strongest. Second, it was the moment when the part of the new nation most strenuously resisting abolition, the Lower South, was most precariously situated and thus ill-suited to break away from the rest of the nation.[9] Third, it was a period when the school of thought called environmentalism was in full sway, positing that the degraded condition of slaves was a matter of social conditioning, not innate inferiority, and that therefore no inborn disability stood in the way of emancipation. Fourth, it was a time when the opening of the vast trans-Appalachian West provided the wherewithal for a compensated emancipation, and when the use of this western domain as an instrument for binding the nation together had seized the public mind. Lastly, the outbreak of black rebellion in Saint Domingue in 1791, and the thunderclap 1794 decision of the French revolutionary government to emancipate half a million slaves, fed the belief that the entire Western world was trembling with the prospect of reversing the sordid, three-century history of European-sponsored Atlantic slavery.

What might have removed the formidable obstacles that stood in the way of capitalizing on conditions favorable for ending slavery was inspired leadership from those who emerged at the end of the Revolution as national heroes. But when they were most needed, these leaders failed to lead. North of Virginia and Maryland, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin used little of their political influence and gigantic respect to ally themselves with clergymen and reformers pushing the abolitionist agenda. As northerners, they might not have moved political leaders in the South, where most slaves lived, but they could have worked to convince the North that its contributions toward a compensated emancipation were essential to solving what was not just a regional but a national problem.

Southern leaders, especially Virginia's Jefferson and Washington, were strategically positioned to help the nation pay off the promissory notes contained in the language of the Declaration of Independence and almost every state constitution. Both had huge funds of moral and political capital to draw upon. Both knew of their unusual leverage. And both professed a hatred of slavery and a desire to see it ended in their own time.

Washington, as Henry Wiencek has recently shown, had been troubled for a decade by slavery, calling it the "foul stain of manhood" and contemplating, as the war drew to an end, whether he might be the key figure in securing the unalienable rights of man.[10] Pushing him hard was the dashing young Marquis de Lafayette, who had virtually become Washington's surrogate son.

From abroad, the French nobleman acted on what apparently were earlier talks with Washington about rooting slavery out of America. In early 1783, Lafayette proposed that the nation's conquering hero join him in a grand experiment to free the American slaves. Lafayette promised to purchase an estate on the coast of French Guiana, and there their slaves would be settled in preparation for freedom. "Such an example as yours might render it a general practice," wrote Lafayette, and he even imagined that "if we succeed in America," he would devote himself to spreading the experiment to the West Indies. "If it be a wild scheme," Lafayette concluded, "I had rather be mad this way than to be thought wise in the other tack."[11]

Washington did not dismiss the idea. He knew he might be the exemplar whom others would follow. "I shall be happy to join you in so laudable a work," he wrote Lafayette, and would welcome seeing his adoptive son to discuss the details "of the business." At Mount Vernon the next summer, the two men discussed the experiment. William Gordon, the Boston minister who

would write one of the first histories of the American Revolution, recalled that Washington "wished to get rid of his Negroes, and the Marquis wished that an end might be put to the slavery of all of them." Gordon also played on Washington's enormous clout, urging that, teamed with Lafayette, "your joint counsels and influence" might accomplish emancipation, "and thereby give the finishing stroke and the last polish to your political characters."[12]

Nine months later, in May 1785, the Methodist leaders Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke visited Mount Vernon to solicit Washington's support for a petition they intended to deliver to Virginia's House of Delegates urging a gradual emancipation of slaves. Like everyone else, they knew that Washington's fortitude and integrity had taken root in America's heart and nowhere more so than in Virginia. Washington reiterated his wish to end slavery and told the Methodists that he "had signified his thoughts on the subject to most of the great men of the state." He declined to sign the petition but promised he would "signify his sentiments to the Assembly by letter" if they "took it into consideration."[13]

Virginia's legislature took the petition under consideration in November 1785 and summarily rejected it, though not, according to James Madison, "without an avowed patronage of its principle by sundry respectable members." Among the supporters was the immensely respected George Wythe, law professor at the College of William and Mary and Jefferson's ally in overhauling Virginia's code of laws during the Revolution. Contrary to his promise to Asbury and Coke, Washington did not write the letter supporting a gradual abolition of slavery.[14]

Later that year, Robert Pleasants, from an old-stock slave-owning family of Virginia Quakers, again appealed to Washington's "fame in being the successful champion of American liberty." "It seems highly probable to me," Pleasants wrote Washington, "that thy example and influence at this time towards a general emancipation would be as productive of real happiness to mankind as thy sword may have been." How would history remember him, Pleasants asked, if "impartial thinking men" read "that many who were warm advocates for that noble cause"—the cause of liberty and the rights of mankind—should now withhold that inestimable blessing from any who are absolutely in thy power and after the right of freedom is acknowledged to be the natural and unalienable right of all mankind.[15]

By this time, Lafayette had purchased an estate in French Guiana and was settling his slaves there with promises of freedom. But Washington was now

waffling, much to the dismay of Lafayette, who wrote, "I would never have drawn my sword in the cause of America if I could have conceived thereby that I was founding a land of slavery." Rather than confessing his own change of heart on freeing his slaves, Washington blamed "the minds of the people of this country," who would not tolerate Lafayette's "benevolence" and "humanity." Contrary to James Madison's report that "sundry respectable persons" had argued on behalf of the Methodist petition for a gradual abolition act, Washington claimed it "could scarcely obtain a reading."[16]

The Virginian who, next to Washington, had the greatest moral capital and political influence to trade upon also declined the opportunity to help end the system of coerced labor that he professed to hate and knew compromised the American attempt to create a republic for all nations to emulate. Both for economic and ideological reasons, Thomas Jefferson squandered the respect he enjoyed as a national leader and internationally famous son of the Enlightenment. Dragged into a life of debt by his attachment to never-ending renovations and expensive furnishings at Monticello, he buried the thought of giving freedom to the several hundred slaves surrounding him there. At his death, he left so many debts that almost all of his slaves were sold at auction to satisfy his creditors.

Even if Jefferson's self-indulgence had not hobbled his professed desire to free his slaves, his view of people of African descent as indelibly inferior tainted all his thoughts about repairing the Achilles' heel of the new republic. Jefferson could not imagine white and black people living together in freedom—or so he said, though for most of his life he lived at Monticello surrounded by black people. Africans were "inferior to the whites in . . . mind and body," he contended, because they were "originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances." Some historians today doubt that Jefferson actually believed in this doctrine of the inherent inferiority of black people but instead used it to shield himself from charges of gross duplicity. David Grimsted, for example, wastes no words in calling Jefferson's racist theorizing "obvious self-serving hypocrisy"—a pseudotheory advanced "to palliate the brutal exclusions from all civil and most human rights of those blacks that so contributed to his and his society's convenience."[17]

Nothing could better express the dismay of black Americans over Jefferson's moral retreat than the words of Benjamin Banneker, a free black mathematician and almanac writer. In his fifties, Banneker implored Jefferson in

1791 to rethink his views about African inferiority and tasked him for continuing to hold slaves at Monticello. "I apprehend you will embrace every opportunity to eradicate that train of absurd and false ideas and opinions which so generally prevail with respect to us, and that your sentiments are concurrent with mine, which are that one universal father hath given being to us all and that he hath not only made us all of one flesh but that he hath also without partiality afforded us all the same sensations, and endowed us all with the same faculties." Reminding Jefferson of his oft-quoted words in the preamble of the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal and that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights," Banneker chided the Squire of Monticello for "detaining by fraud and violence so numerous a part of my brethren under groaning captivity and cruel oppression." Should not Jefferson "be found guilty of that most criminal act, which you professedly detested in others"?[18]

If Washington had carried through with his pledge in 1783 to join Lafayette in "the grand experiment," if Jefferson, Madison, and a few other luminous Virginians who professed to hate slavery had stepped forward to support the Methodists' appeal to the Virginia legislature in 1785 for a gradual emancipation plan, and if northern leaders such as John Adams and Benjamin Franklin had drawn on their vast respect to support such a plan, the course of history might have changed at that moment. Eighty years later, more than 600,000 American lives were lost accomplishing the goal of emancipation, roughly one for each of the slaves in the new United States as of 1785.

The Indispensable Enemy

As we have already seen, Native Americans suffered disastrous losses in the war of the American Revolution. Facing a white society that was heavily armed and determined to seize the western lands that the Proclamation Act of 1763 denied white settlers, nations such as the Iroquois, Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandot, Cherokee, and Creek were forced by American commissioners to cede most of their land at gunpoint. White population buildup that had caused straitened economic conditions in seaboard settlements found a safety valve in western lands. Pouring across the Appalachians even before Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay affixed their signatures to the peace treaty with England, thousands of settlers ignored treaty

boundary lines and thumbed their noses at their elected state governments and the Continental Congress. Looking east, Native Americans had to make hard choices while confronting this human torrent.

Joseph Brant, the Mohawk leader we have followed through most of this book, appeared on the scene once more to play a crucial role in attempts to forge a pan-Indian alliance that could stem the white tide in the Old Northwest. Having cowed the tribes closest to the settlers' frontier—the Iroquois, Delaware, Wyandot, Chippewa, and Ottawa—congressional commissioners in 1786 planned to humble the westernmost tribes, the Shawnee, Miami, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, and others. But meanwhile, Brant worked his own woodland diplomacy, trying to gather many tribal leaders together for a grand parley at Detroit late in 1786. He had just returned from his second voyage to England, where he did not receive what he most hoped for—promises of military support. But England promised Brant a generous compensation for Iroquois losses in the war and gave him enough encouragement to return home determined to rally England's wartime Indian allies for further resistance to the overweening Americans. Brant knew that for his own people, the Mohawks and other Iroquois, the future lay in moving north of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario where the British had granted them land in the Grand River region of Lower Canada. Yet he felt compelled to play out his years on a larger stage, working to rally the Ohio River valley tribes in defense of their homelands.

Trekking into Ohio country in September 1786 with fifty-seven Iroquois delegates to parley with the Shawnee at their main town of Wapakoneta (in today's west central Ohio), Brant narrowly escaped a punitive expedition of two thousand militiamen led by George Rogers Clark and Benjamin Logan that burned seven Shawnee towns, killed many warriors, and captured women and children. In another incident of violating the rules of civilized warfare, the Americans slaughtered Old Melanthy, a friendly Shawnee headman, under a flag of truce. "Melanthy would not fly, but displayed the thirteen stripes and held out the articles of the Miami treaty," Colonel Josiah Harmar wrote, "but all in vain; he was shot down, . . . although he was their prisoner." Yet Clark withdrew, still not strong enough to attack the towns farther west of the Wabash River.[19]

Moving on to Detroit, Brant awaited the gathering of headmen from all the western tribes. In December, a moving speech was made, probably by Brant, reviewing the entire course of history since Europeans had invaded

North America. "It is certain that before Christian Nations visited this continent we were the sole lords of the soil. . . . The Great Spirit placed us there! And what is the reason why we are not still in possession of our forefathers' birth rights?" The answer was all too obvious: that intertribal rivalry and ancient animosities had allowed the Europeans to pursue the age-old policy of divide and conquer. "The interests of any one nation should be the interests of us all," the orator counseled; "the welfare of the one should be the welfare of all the others."[20]

The speech carried the day. Ten nations of the Ohio country spoke as one in an address to Congress calling for a reconsideration of the shotgun treaties of Fort Stanwix and Fort McIntosh. They had not been conquered, they insisted, and they had not lost their land except by intimidation and fraud. Until new negotiations took place, the surveyors laying off lands in the ceded parts of Indian country should lay down their instruments. If the United States rejected these requests, the Indian confederacy would fight.

Congress paid little heed to the address. By mid-1787, with the Constitutional Convention drawing up a new plan of government, Congress was near the end of its life. Nor were the western tribes able to maintain a united front, beset as in the past by intratribal and intertribal disputes. Once reorganized after ratification of the Constitution, the United States would do exactly what Pennsylvania's president John Dickinson promised in addressing the western tribes: Unless they quit resistance to the American treaties forced on them "we will instantly turn upon them our armies that have conquered the king of Great Britain . . . and extirpate them from the land where they were born and now live."[21]

The western Indian nations did not bow to such bluster. Preferring death to supine retreat, they resisted. Supplied by the British from Detroit and other posts in Lower Canada, the western Indian confederacy repulsed American invading armies under the command of General Josiah Harmar in 1790 and General Arthur St. Clair in 1791, only to lose to the army of General Anthony Wayne in 1794 at the Battle of Fallen Timbers.

To the south, the Creek leader Alexander McGillivray waged a similar resistance to white settlers coveting the rich lands possessed for centuries by his people. "Our lands are our life and breath," wrote McGillivray. "If we part with them, we part with our blood. We must fight for them." In 1786–87, Creek warriors drove encroaching settlers out of Tennessee's Cumberland River valley and sent them fleeing eastward from the Georgia frontier.

Knowing that Georgians had put a price on his head, McGillivray assured a friend in 1787, a month before the Constitutional Convention began its deliberations, that "if I fall by the hand of such [assassins], I shall fall a victim in the noblest of causes . . . maintaining the just rights of my country. I aspire to . . . meriting the appellation of preserver of my country, equally with those chiefs among you, whom from acting on such principles, you have exalted to the highest pitch of glory." McGillivray was confident that "if after every peaceable mode of obtaining redress of grievances having proved fruitless, having recourse to arms to obtain it be marks of the savage and not the soldier, [then] what savages must the Americans be."[22]

Like the Ohio country Indian nations, the Creeks held their own against the land-hungry Georgians and South Carolinians for a time, and even obtained a treaty with the new American government in 1790 that guaranteed the Creek nation "all their lands within the limits of the United States." The Treaty of New York, writes historian Michael Green, "was an end run around Georgia which reversed the position of the Creek Nation and that state in their relations with the United States" by making illegal Georgia's militant Indian policy and prohibiting Georgia from treating separately with the Creeks.[23] This conciliatory treaty reflected a hard, cold fact—that the revenue-starved federal government preferred peace to a militant expansion of frontiersmen that the government could not back up with regular army units.

Known now by the Creeks as "The Great Beloved Man," McGillivray conducted what in the long run was a losing fight that cost both Creeks and Americans dearly. By the time he died in 1793 at age thirty-four, state militias, newly funded federal armies, and frontier irregulars were finally overwhelming the Indian nations in both the northern and southern regions, culminating in enormous new land cessions. In the course of these wars, the humanitarian language of the "utmost good faith" clause of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was all but forgotten. In its last significant act, the Continental Congress had pledged to native peoples that "their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and in their property, rights and liberty, they never shall be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress." It was a promise honored in the breach. In continuing the war of national expansion, the new nation turned its back on the revolutionary ideal of just and equitable relations with the "first people" of the continent. No political leader, at the state or federal level,

voiced strenuous objection. Only such a man as George Morgan, former Indian trader and Indian agent for the Continental Congress, raised a lonely voice. "At what time do a people violate the law of nations, as the United States have done with regard to the northwestern Indians?" asked Morgan in 1793. "Only when they think they can do it with impunity. Justice between nations is founded on reciprocal fear. Rome whilst weak was equitable; become more strong than her neighbors, she ceased to be just. The ambitious and powerful are always unjust. To them the laws of nations are mere chimeras."[24]

The Chickamaugan Cherokee also knew this. Like McGillivray, Dragging Canoe hoped for a Spanish alliance. The Spanish governor of Florida had assured him that "you, our brothers the red men, are not without friends," and pointed out that "If it had not been for the Spanish and French, the British would have subdued them [the Americans] long ago." Supplied by the Spanish, the Chickamaugan Cherokee continued to attack Carolinian invaders of their lands in 1784–85, while hoping that the Treaty of Hopewell, which included a new cession of land from Chief Old Tassel and other accommodationist Cherokee chiefs in 1785, would stem the American squatter invasion. This was not to happen. "Your people settle much faster on our lands after a treaty than before," Old Tassel complained bitterly in 1786.[25] State governments failed to restrain further white land incursions and countenanced the murder of Old Tassel, who in 1788 had come peacefully to confer with white authorities about boundary disputes and frontier bloodletting. At this, most of the peace-seeking Cherokee moved south to northern Georgia, with most of their warriors joining Dragging Canoe's Chickamaugans.

By the time Dragging Canoe died in 1792, the determined resistance of the Chickamaugan Cherokee had brought some respect from white southerners. In the Treaty of Tellico Blockhouse in 1794, the Cherokee relinquished more land to white Carolinians, but this at least gave them breathing room and fostered a flowering of Cherokee culture in the early nineteenth century. Almost all of the leaders of this era—John Ross, Major Ridge, and John Walker—came from Dragging Canoe's militant Cherokee offshoot.[26]

Can the pro-British stance of most Native Americans and their resistance after the war to onrushing white settlers be counted as a failure of judgment on their part? No. Had they sided with the Americans they would have fared no better, as the dismal postwar experience of the Tuscaroras, Oneidas, and Catawbas demonstrates. The Oneidas and Tuscaroras, though guaranteed by

the Treaty of Fort Stanwix in 1784 that they "shall be secured in the possession of the lands on which they are now settled," quickly lost most of their land to white settler depredations and New York's relentless pressure on tribal chiefs to give up their remaining land. They "dwindled to nothingness in the State of New York," according to Barbara Graymont, the main historian of the Iroquois revolutionary experience. Repeated petitions to Congress for loss of their land and for aid in relieving the sordid poverty they had sunk to by the time Washington became the nation's first president brought them little in return. Thinking itself merciful, Congress awarded the Stockbridge people $200 and the Oneida $148 per year.[27]

Even Indians who had abandoned their own people to support the American cause got little succor after the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Nonhelema, the Shawnee sister of Cornstalk, who was murdered with his son in 1777, is a good case in point. Even after the shameful slaughter of her brother and nephew, Nonhelema served the Americans as a messenger and translator. Congress denied the old and impoverished woman the two thousand acres she requested, but after receiving many pleas awarded her a suit of clothes and a blanket each year, along with rations if she could reach one of the forts in the Ohio country.[28]

Joseph Brant, Alexander McGillivray, and Dragging Canoe were the exemplars of pan-Indian resistance after the peace without peace. The spiritual heirs of such war-tempered Indian chiefs were a new generation of resistance leaders in America's heartland—Tecumseh, Black Hawk, Red Jacket, Handsome Lake, Sequoyah, and many others. In their three-decade struggle to defend their homelands, ending with the War of 1812, they lost in the proximate sense. What they won, however, was a piece of history, for they kept lit the lamp of resistance and passed on their revolutionary struggle to their children and their children's children. Memory of the long and bloody post-revolutionary era lives on yet today. What we proudly call the Spirit of '76 in our white-oriented history books had its counterpart in the red Spirit of '76, which has been at the ideological core of the Indian rights movement of the 1970s and its successors. Today, the descendants of the militant Chickamaugan Cherokees "in Oklahoma and in the mountains of North Carolina," says Dragging Canoe's biographer, "can still repeat with pride Dragging Canoe's statement to the Shawnee delegation: 'We are not yet conquered.' "[29]

The Veterans' Cheat

In fighting the War of Independence, the Continental Congress struggled mightily with a paradox familiar to American lawmakers today: The people want a lot from government but seem almost innately allergic to taxes. Supplying the American army and paying its soldiers plagued Congress from the beginning because Congress had no revenue of its own—not one penny. Rather, it relied entirely on requisitioning appropriations from the thirteen states and depended on their compliance. Not until the Constitution of 1787 was ratified the next year would the federal government have the power to tax. In this improbable situation, Congress faced incessant grumbling, persistent desertion, and repeated mutinies from within Washington's Continental army.

One way to stanch the hemorrhaging of the army was to promise pensions for those who would reenlist. Congress did so only for officers. In desperate straits in 1778, it promised officers half pay for life if they agreed to serve for the remainder of the war and seven years thereafter. In 1780, Congress authorized pensions for the widows and orphans of those who had died. In 1783 Congress reduced the pensions to five years of full pay—not actually paid in cash but in certificates redeemable for cash at some point in the future. None of these provisions affected very many officers for it was uncommon for men to step forward for such indeterminate and lengthy stints of service. In the meantime, enlisted men were promised nothing.

It was hardly in the spirit of yearning for a more egalitarian society that the widows and orphans of enlisted men received no pensions. But even worse, affecting tens of thousands of men, was one of the first decisions made by Congress after Washington became president in 1790—to fund at face value the certificates issued during the war to pay enlisted men's salaries (and the officers' five-year pensions). Most soldiers had sold their certificates to money speculators at war's end for between two and two and a half shillings on the pound (twenty shillings). This was all the pieces of paper could command because it was doubtful they could ever be turned in for full-value payment in specie with interest added. Mostly poor and desperate to rebuild their lives, the soldiers took what they could get. Something was better than nothing.

But in 1790 Washington's secretary of the treasury, Alexander Hamilton,

The 1832 pension act passed by Congress gave full-pay benefits to both enlisted men and officers if they had served at least two full years. Two years later, their widows received pensions. The debates over these pensions may have inspired William Ranney, who had fought in the Texas army in 1836 to secure the Lone Star Republic, to paint this romanticized version of ordinary soldiers returning home. Most returned in rags, many shoeless, and very few had a horse and cart to make the trek back to their villages and farms.

proposed to use federal revenue, much of it derived from sale of western lands, to pay off the certificates at their full face value in hard money plus interest for seven years. As icily self-confident as Robert Morris, Hamilton had little concern that this would be seen as inequitable, for, after all, this windfall for speculators would be the solder that welded them to the national interest. However, a friend of Hamilton, Morris, and the other advocates for a powerful central government run by the nation's financial elite stepped forward on behalf of Joseph Plumb Martin and his band of brotherhood.

Pelatiah Webster, a laissez-faire free-trade and anti–price control advocate during the war, the most skillful political economist of the day, and a part of Robert Morris's conservative nationalist group, strongly opposed a measure that would heap wealth on those who had snapped up the pay certificates

when soldiers were selling them at a fraction of their value. The veterans now learned that everyone would be taxed to pay off the certificates at full value plus interest—a bonanza 800 percent profit for those who held them. By itself, the plan would increase the gap between the rich and poor. In "A Plea for Poor Soldiers," Webster called the plan a "perversion," an "absurdity," and a "shameful injustice." At the end of the war, he argued, fighting men "submitted with patience to accept their discharge" with no real pay but only certificates with numbers written on them, and "returned home as they could with empty hands and dry lips." But now they would get none of the difference between the face value of the certificates and the price they sold them at in their desperation. The subtitle of "A Plea for Poor Soldiers" gave Webster's argument in capsule form: "To demonstrate that the soldiers and other public creditors, who really and actually supported the burden of the war, HAVE NOT BEEN PAID, OUGHT TO BE PAID, CAN BE PAID, and MUST BE PAID."[30] It was a battle lost in the First Congress, which adopted Hamilton's plan for assuming and funding the Revolutionary War debt. But the bitterness of all the losers, most notably those who fought and won the war, lingered for many years.

Not until 1818, thirty-five years after the war ended, did Congress move to reward the soldiers and sailors who survived, and by this time only a small fraction of some 300,000 who served were still alive and able to prove they were impoverished. Fourteen years later, in 1832, Congress passed a comprehensive pension act for any survivor, officer or enlisted man, rich or poor, still alive and able to provide satisfactory proof of at least six months' service. Only a few thousand septuagenarians and octogenarians had the nation's bounty bestowed on them.[31]

Small-Producer Persistence

Just as the war of national expansion did not end in 1783, the revolutionary radicalism of small producers continued after the war and at times even intensified. This would not happen absent the reassertion of power by conservative revolutionaries in the latter years of the war—men bent on constraining the power centered in the popularly elected state legislatures. "During this last phase of the Revolution," writes Alan Taylor, "gentlemen and yeomen who had cooperated against the British fell out over the nature of property, whether power would be diffused locally or consolidated

Deborah Sampson Garnett was among the successful invalided pensioners of the Continental Line. Six years after receiving a pension in 1803, she petitioned Congress that the pension be given retroactively from 1783, the year of her discharge, to 1803. Congress denied the petition.

centrally, and whether extralegal crowds retained any legitimacy in the new republic."[32]

Backcountry unrest grew out of some of the same tensions that had marked the tenant uprisings in New Jersey and New York from the 1740s to 1760s and in the Regulator insurgencies in the Carolinas in the 1760s and 1770s. Access to reasonably priced land, security of homesteaded property, an adequate circulating medium, and equitable taxes were the main concerns of

ordinary farmers seeking escape from the marginal existence that had prevailed in the old areas of settlement. Confiscation of Loyalist property held the promise of distributing land widely, but most of the land in fact fell into the hands of well-to-do men, not poor yeoman farmers. Even opening the frontier lands from which Native Americans were being driven brought struggling men of the soil face-to-face with affluent men seeking even greater landed wealth. For most farmers seeking economic security, the end of the Revolution brought greater freedom from British mercantilist policies, but it did not bring equality or enhanced economic opportunities. The result was renewed popular upheaval—a succession of bloody confrontations between entrepreneurs preaching the doctrine of unrestrained capitalism and small farmers clinging to traditional ideas of fair prices, debt relief, greater economic opportunity, and mutuality of economic exchanges preserved in the name of the community's benefit.

In the aftermath of revolution, the scramble for advantage reignited the earlier Vermont radicalism personified by Ethan Allen. In fact, Allen himself, now old and grizzled, lent his experience to the frontier disputes between rival speculators from Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Spreading sparks from the altar of '76, he told poor Susquehanna settlers in 1785, four years before his death, to "crowd your settlements, add to your numbers and strength; procure fire-arms, and ammunition, be united among yourselves.... Liberty and Property; or slavery and poverty are now before us."[33] Susquehanna territory radicals spoke of "the Vermont Plan" as their stratagem. Though unsuccessful, they provided inspiration for similar breakaway frontier states—Franklin and Transylvania in the Kentucky country, for example—where the hope of cheap land, escape from wealthy land speculators, and light taxes beckoned ordinary men and their families.

Postrevolutionary agrarian radicals spoke the same language of the Green Mountain Boys and Carolina Regulators—"that laboring men had a God-given right to claim and improve wilderness land"—but they were fortified with the righteousness of men who had fought and shed blood on the battlefields where independence had been won.[34] It was virtually impossible to breathe more fire than Ethan Allen, but those who tried had the additional argument that their cause was now against those who were traducing the revolutionary principles of natural rights and social justice.

The key natural right thrown in the faces of great proprietors and companies that controlled the price of land after the war was the old argument

advanced by the Green Mountain Boys and Regulators: The farmer's labor that improved wilderness land gave him a legitimate title to it. The American Revolution for them meant more than independence from England; it offered the possibility of a land where small producers did not live under the rule, as Alan Taylor puts it, of "moneyed parasites who did not live by their own labor but, instead, preyed on the many who did."[35] If the Revolution meant only a continuation of the great landed proprietors' hold on the Hudson River region or the Carolina backcountry or the trans-Appalachian frontier lands opening up, then the Revolution had been lost for its surviving veterans, who would lapse back into economic dependency as tenant farmers or wage workers. Expensive land, excessive rents, heavy taxes, and exorbitant legal fees, all the work of land companies owned by wealthy speculators, paved the way to slavery.

Correlatively, a republic of freedom-loving, slavery-hating men would emerge from widely and fairly distributed land. This was not a radical idea of the revolutionary era but the insistence of America's radical revolutionaries that the wisdom of England's seventeenth-century Levellers and eighteenth-century "commonwealthmen" still provided the best way forward. The seventeenth-century English radical belief that "where there is inequality of estates there must be inequality of power" still pertained: Inequality would spawn dependency, and dependency would destroy political liberty. Now, as in eighteenth-century "commonwealthman" thought, "a free people are kept so by no other means but an equal distribution of property." It followed, then, after the war, that "when men's riches are become immeasurably or surprisingly great, a people who regard their own security ought to make a strict enquiry how they came by them and oblige them to take down their own size, for fear of terrifying the community or mastering it."[36]

This ideology of yeoman farmers and small producers animated not only frontier farmers along the arc of settlement from Maine to Georgia. In New Jersey, the small state pinched between larger, more populous, and richer New York and Pennsylvania, Abraham Clark was a herald of the same message. Clark had signed the Declaration of Independence and served as a New Jersey delegate to the Continental Congress for most of the war. Distressed at how soured postwar conditions had deluged the courts with suits for debt, set creditors upon debtor farmers demanding payment in specie, and jammed jails with ordinary people unable to satisfy their creditors, Clark took up his pen in 1785 to spell out how men of "wealth and renown" were

corrupting the democratic promise of the Revolution. Moneyed men, who were "not . . . under the necessity of getting their bread by industry" were feeding on "the labor of the honest farmer and mechanic." How, after all, had New Jersey been transformed from "a howling wilderness to pleasant fields, gardens, towns, and cities," except by the sweat off the brows of productive laborers?[37]

In *The True Policy of New Jersey Defined* (1786), Clark returned to the labor theory of value that sustained insurgent pre-revolutionary New Jersey farmers. The job of lawmakers, he lectured, was to "help the feeble against the mighty and deliver the oppressed out of the hands of the oppressor." Attacking men of wealth who hoarded hard money and then withheld it from circulation while taking debtors to court for their inability to pay them in specie, Clark deplored this "avaricious thirst for gain" that was causing farms to be "sold far below . . . value, to the breaking of families and increase of poverty." "That inequality of property which is detrimental to a republican government," he predicted, would soon turn a republican state of husbandmen into a European-like aristocratic state of "lords and tenants." "Our boasted liberty may prove but a delusive dream."[38]

In this yearning for a more equitable society, agrarian radicals and laboring men in the cities took satisfaction when some of the new nation's trumpeters of untrammeled capitalism fell from their height; sometimes their love of freedom from price controls, debt-relief legislation, and other curbs on free-market activity proved excessive. Every city knew of such self-inflicted wounds. Philadelphia's Robert Morris was the most spectacular case of riches-to-rags. After stepping down as Congress's superintendent of finance in 1784, he went on a spree of wild speculation in western lands, overextended himself, declared bankruptcy in 1798, and languished in debtor's prison for the last three years of his life. Perhaps thinking of the old saying, "Grasp all, lose all," on his way to debtor's prison, Morris wrote to John Nicholson, his land scheme partner: "My money is gone, my furniture is to be sold, I am to go to prison and my family to starve. Good night." To relieve desperate overcrowding at Philadelphia's prison, the city's board of inspectors sent female prisoners to Morris's huge uncompleted marble mansion a block away.[39]

Curbing the piling up of great wealth or even worrying about the growing disparity between wealth and want was not the main concern of farmers remote from seaboard sites of capital accumulation. The price control failure of the late 1770s had taught them that managing an economy in times of stress

was akin to redirecting a river's course. Rather, maintaining their economic independence, providing for their families, and warding off a descent into poverty were their main concerns. But in the mid-1780s, and many times thereafter, they saw themselves again slipping to the brink of penury and dependency. When this happened, they took the law into their own hands—one of the main lessons of the Revolutionary experience. This occurred most dramatically in central and western Massachusetts in 1786 when Daniel Shays, a Revolutionary War officer, led farmers in militant court closings and sheriff mobbings of the kind that had led Massachusetts into revolution twelve years before. Facing farm foreclosures, unable to pay taxes and small debts in the specie required by the legislature, and knowing that seaboard merchants controlled the limited supply of gold and silver, the farmers rocked the state to its core. In a revolt involving about one-quarter of all adult men, Shays's followers arrayed themselves against their elected government. Governor James Bowdoin's privately financed army eventually suppressed the rebellion (which occurred on a smaller scale in other states). But we can see that ordinary farmers had their limits. With sprigs of pine needles in their farmer's hats, signifying the liberty tree prized in New England, they marched to the tune of England's late-seventeenth-century radical thinker, Algernon Sidney, who maintained that "That which is not just is not law and that which is not law ought not to be obeyed."[40]

The leather-apron men of the inland towns and seaboard cities also wrestled with the less than rosy prospects they faced in the wake of America's world-shaking victory over Great Britain. Many of them were expectant capitalists, hoping for a surge in American-manufactured goods and optimistic about the release of American producers from English mercantilist policies. This often allied them with merchants and lawyers. But for many others, particularly in the lower trades such as shoemaking, coopering, and tailoring, the postwar economic slump and the closure of the huge British West Indian market to American products caused great pain.

What galled craftsmen particularly after the war was the willingness of seaport merchants to import a flood of British-manufactured goods. Merchants forbidden to send locally crafted goods to the West Indian market were glad enough to accept British-crafted goods. This set artisan against merchant, a fracture repaired only when the economy revived later in the 1780s. Out of this conflict, artisans began to understand the need to band together as an interest group. Thus, tradesmen and small manufacturers formed cross-craft societies in all the cities—predecessors of central trade unions. In Boston, the "tradesmen and manufacturers" appealed to merchants "like a band of brothers whose interests are connected." Similar organizations took form in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Charleston. Although they had some success in getting duties placed on imported English goods, giving local craftsmen a bit of an advantage, attempts at uniting the trade policies of the various states—an attempt "to cement a general union"—largely failed.[41]

Many of the artisans and most of the mariners came out of the Revolution with a radical heritage and more sharply defined democratic, antideferential sensibilities. Nowhere was this more evident than in Boston. Merchants and lawyers, supported by some of the wealthier artisans, proposed a reorganization of the town meeting so that the venerable open-air gatherings of the populace, led by a moderator, would be replaced by an elected mayor and aldermen. In theory they would bring order, efficiency, and financial stability to New England's capital seaport. This was the old dream of conservatives for two generations, voted down and seen as an elitist power grab. Proposed again in 1784, it aroused ordinary Bostonians to call it a "detestable Hutchinsonian plan" (aptly associating it with Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson's similar attempt at municipal reorganization in the 1740s) that would "engross the whole power of the town" in the hands of the rich. At a raucous town meeting in 1784, efforts to present the plan were met with shouts of "No incorporation. No mayor and aldermen. No innovations." Faced with "an unabated roaring," the "gentlemen of character" left Faneuil Hall to await another day. Further attempts in 1785 and 1786 met with the same determined defense of the town meeting by the "low people," as one Bostonian called them.[42]

In other cities, craftsmen built on the gains they had made in the course of fomenting the American Revolution by electing men of their own class to local and state governing bodies. In New York, in the first election after the departure of the British along with some 20,000 Loyalists, voters sent artisans and small merchants to the legislature. There they made confiscation of Loyalists' property a legislative priority. Meanwhile, radical politicians, such as Albany's Abraham Yates, championed the rights of productive men while resisting the determination of political centralizers to remove power from the

hands of ordinary people. In Charleston, artisans and maritime workers formed the Marine Anti-Britannic Society in late 1783 to oppose "aristocratical principles endeavoured to subvert and destroy every genuine idea of real republicanism." Crowd demonstrations in 1784–85, threatening British merchants, lawyers, and opulent Charleston families who were believed to be betraying the promise of the Revolution, convinced Edward Rutledge that the previously obscure men who had risen to positions of authority during the war "found it very difficult to fall back in the ranks."[43]

Those embracing unrestrained capitalism were winning the day by the time the Constitutional Convention met in 1787, but the tenacity of commitments to a rough equality of citizens lived on deep into the nineteenth century, not only among working people but in influential writers and intellectuals as well.

Passing the Torch

In 1810, thirty-five years after she first told her husband to "remember the ladies," Abigail Adams was still nudging her aging mate about the need to "destroy the foundation of all pretensions of the gentlemen to superiority over the ladies." Her goal? "[To] restore liberty, equality, and fraternity between the sexes."[44] With all the power he had acquired as an internationally acclaimed diplomat and second president of the United States, John Adams had done little to advance women's rights. But Abigail and many of the women of her generation, though failing to get recognition for women's full rights as citizens, were conceding nothing. She had been a prime voice for change in gender relations as the Revolution got under way; she had achieved little of what she wanted; she had made her peace with her brilliant, irascible husband; but she held true to her vision of a changed society, where a woman's sphere was broadened and a female could fully develop and utilize her talents.

If Abigail Adams could not convince her husband, she could shape the values and commitments of her children. Abigail did not live long enough—she died in 1818, eight years before her husband's death—to see John Quincy Adams address Congress in 1838, where he insisted that women, though they lacked the vote, should have the right to petition the nation's legislative body. We can imagine that Abigail's son, as he spoke on behalf of stopping a gag rule to take women's petitions off Congress's table, had in mind his comment

to his brother at the time of their mother's death: that "her life gave the lie to every libel on her sex that was ever written."[45]

Long before American women became fully involved in the radical abolition movement of the 1830s, where they strode onto public ground that their revolutionary fathers would not yield, their revolutionary-era mothers had become privately involved in benevolent and educational institutions serving the nation's interest. In every city after the war, women founded charitable societies to relieve the miseries of widows, orphans, prostitutes, and the illiterate. Usually connected to churches, these organizations provided opportunities for "female collective behavior." The organizing, writing, publicizing, and speaking skills that women honed within these organizations primed them and their daughters for the abolitionist, suffragist, temperance, penal, public-education, and other reform movements of the 1820s and beyond. This was the work of middle- and upper-class women, for those below them followed lives of labor that afforded little time for public and philanthropic affairs.[46]

If the middle-class revolutionary woman could not be an enfranchised woman, she could become an educated woman with a sharpened political consciousness and a changed sense of herself. The postrevolutionary era bristled with new female academies, bringing education to a much broader swath of American society. The rationale for the educated woman was simple: Republican government would stand or fall on the intelligence, wisdom, morality, and public-mindedness of its citizens. Inasmuch as child-rearing was the mother's main business, the young could hardly be raised properly as citizens without educated mothers. In Philadelphia, Benjamin Rush's "Thoughts on Female Education" (1787) pushed forward a rationale meant to undermine generations of conventional thinking about women's inherently frail minds. Rather than educating women to be dependent upon men, he urged training women to be the molders of young men's character. "Let the ladies of a country be educated properly," he wrote, "and they will not only make and administer its laws but form its manners and character." The proposed curriculum for the Young Ladies' Academy that Rush helped establish departed sharply from English models, which favored subjects that made the woman an ornament of her husband—a "sensible, virtuous, sweet-tempered woman" who knew how to draw, dance, and play drawing room instrumental music. By contrast, the American woman of the new republic needed far more utilitarian knowledge so that she could monitor the morals

of her society and train the children of the republic. Thus, bookkeeping, writing, history, geography, science, and religion must have a place in female education.[47]

Beginning in the 1780s, the sharp literacy gap between men and women began to close. This would narrow over many decades; but "no social change in the early Republic affected women more emphatically," writes historian Linda Kerber, "than the improvement of schooling, which opened the way into the modern world." It was a sign of how much work lay ahead that a Philadelphia male in 1792 sneered at a woman and called her "deluded" for having proposed a "University Established for Women."[48] But this was also a sign that women were seeking what they had never sought before in America—equality of education and a claim to equal intellectual capabilities. It may not be coincidence that this call for a woman's university came shortly after a Philadelphia printer published Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women,* the era's most muscular statement of women's capabilities and the rights they deserved.

By the 1790s, the renegotiation of gender roles and talk of women's rights began to put potent, if half-formed, ideas on the blank slate where Abigail Adams attempted to write them in 1776. The role of republican motherhood, argues Linda Kerber, was a "conservative, stabilizing one" because it created a new and important yet limiting role for women, in which they could not fully capitalize on "the radical potential of the revolutionary experience."[49] Ironically, men would not allow women to become full-fledged citizens, but cast them in the role of training men for full-fledged citizenship. Yet the arrival of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792—quickly republished and widely circulated—began to change all that. Like a sputtering teapot, the Revolution had raised the issue of women's rights intermittently; but now, in the 1790s, the dynamic English radical woman brought water to a boil. "The rights of humanity," she wrote, "have been . . . confined to the male line from Adam downwards," but now she called for extending universal rights to the excluded half of humanity. Within a year, Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* ricocheted up and down eastern North America. "The Rights of women are no longer strange sounds to an American ear," wrote Elias Boudinot, a New Jersey leader, in 1793. "They are now heard as familiar terms in every part of the United States." In effect, the women's rights talk spurred by Wollstonecraft's broadside challenge to male superordination, as historian Rosemarie Zagarri has put it, forced both men and

women to struggle with "two conflicting principles: the equality of the sexes and the subordination of women to men."[50]

The idea of rational, competent, politically sensate, even independent women was brought forth and given potential by the women of the Revolution, not to be realized in their own lifetimes but handed down to their daughters and granddaughters. For several decades, women occupied an ambiguous terrain created by intermediate steps toward citizenship and self-conscious political identity. Once planted, however, the seeds of women's suffrage and equal female rights could not be torn from the soil. But another generation would be born before women could forthrightly play public roles as reformers, public speakers, and religious leaders. As Kerber aptly puts it, "the price of stabilizing the Revolution was an adamant refusal to pursue its implications for race relations and the relations of gender, leaving to subsequent generations to accomplish what the Revolutionary generation had not."[51]

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In *The Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776 as the Declaration of Independence reached England, Adam Smith had written that "civil authority, so far as it is instituted for the security of property, is in reality instituted for the defense of the rich against the poor, or of those who have some property against those who have none at all."[52] This was precisely what conservative revolutionaries had in mind as they tried to squash the popular movements of the early war years. For these reluctant revolutionaries, "freedom," "security," and "order" were the watchwords of *their* revolution. Challenging them from below were those who honored "equality" and "equity" as the watchwords of *their* revolution. For the people whom this book has featured, the Revolution was visionary and experimental. They did not expect it to have an end point, final victory, or triumphant success. Rather it was a revolution of beginnings, of partial achievements, of deferred dreams—in short, an ongoing process where the transformative work must be passed like a torch to the next generation. Philadelphia's Benjamin Rush, no radical himself, shrewdly expressed this in 1787: "The American war is over, but this is far from the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, nothing but the first act of the great drama is closed."[53] In this vein, to think of the American Revolution as incomplete is very different from arguing that it was a failure, even for those with the most expansive ideas about a truly free, just, and equal society.

Revolutions are always incomplete. Almost every social and political convulsion that has gone beyond first disruptions of the *ancien régime* depended on mass involvement; and that in itself, in every recorded case of revolutionary insurgency, raised expectations that could not be completely satisfied. In this sense, there has never been such a thing as a completed revolution. So it was with the American Revolution.

Yet promoting and prosecuting the Revolution instilled in ordinary and subjected people a new sense of themselves, a certitude that they had been instrumental in one of the most mold-shattering, mass action movements of recorded history, and in a comradeship born of fighting against formidable odds. Such awareness of their political importance and their certainty about the justness of their causes insured that the ideas of ardent radicals would not be driven underground. Very seldom in history do a people imagine a new world, see it within their grasp, and then give it up. Every unfulfilled element of the Revolution—abolition of slavery; full citizenship for all free people; greater women's rights; the integrity of Native American land and political sovereignty; the entitlements of laboring people on farms and in cities; more equitable taxes; public education; religious toleration—reemerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of these planks in the radical platform, such as strict limits for legislators or gender equality, are still agenda items today.

Another measure of the Revolution's partial success for the unacknowledged radicals was the grudging concessions made to them by those who wanted their labor but not their political and social involvement. Reasserting power from the top of society, convinced that ordinary Americans had not learned to exercise freedom responsibly and had threatened order and security in the new nation, conservative revolutionaries moved energetically to hobble popularly elected state legislatures as well as county and city governments. Yet if conservatives tried to create a new American ruling class by the late 1780s, this ruling class would have to hold power gingerly, always making accommodations, always negotiating, always returning to the people. Patrician politicians could still refer to the people "out of doors" as a rabble, a mob, or the *canaille;* but they knew, like New York's Robert R. Livingston, that uttering such taunts did not obviate the need to "swim a stream which is impossible to stem, to yield to the torrent if they hoped to direct its course."[54] Having elbowed their way into the political system; having pried open legislative-assembly debates to public view; having institutionalized the rota-

tion of offices, term limits, and annual elections; having elected their militia officers; and having known through intimate experience that they had been instrumental to the genesis and conduct of the Revolution, the common people did not easily give up what they had achieved. This is why elected leaders knew they were obliged to return to a broadened electorate perennially for permission to continue holding power; they knew that ordinary Americans were done with deference. Radical reformers might be contained but not ignored. "We must consult the rooted prejudices [of the people at large]," admitted Boston's Nathaniel Gorham, a merchant accustomed to giving orders, "if we expect their concurrence in our propositions."[55]

By eliminating the boundaries between the rulers and the ruled, always the constructs of entrenched elites, the people examined in this book—all of them animated by a sense of freedom, justice, or dignity denied—could no more step away from the revolutionary agendas they had created than a mountain stream fed by melting snow can halt its rush to the valleys below. What they learned from insurgent experiences—about themselves as well as about strategies for contesting power holders—would be passed down to the next generation, where weighty questions would be asked over and over again: How far should liberty be extended? What kind of men should rule the republic? How much equality would be necessary to keep concentrated economic power from turning into concentrated political power?

Never again would the mass of American people believe that the right to rule public affairs should be pinned to wealth and status achieved in the private realm. But never, not even to this day, could common ground be found on an egalitarian democracy. Radical democrats of the revolutionary era were not able "to begin the world over again," as Tom Paine had thought might happen in midwar. But they had begun to remake America, leaving to their descendants and political heirs the hard work of structuring society more equally in ways appropriate to a democratic polity.