

Republicanism, Liberalism, and Democracy: Political Culture in the Early Republic

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IN THE YEARS since 'Toward a Republican Synthesis' appeared (1972) there has been a vast outpouring of scholarship dealing with republicanism in late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century America.¹ During the same period, however, a growing number of scholars have challenged the centrality of republicanism for understanding early American culture. These individuals consider liberalism not republicanism to be the great shaping force in this period of American history.² Consequently, for the past several decades historians have attempted to explain

In this piece I have integrated portions of my book *The Roots of Democracy: American Thought and Culture, 1760-1800* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1990) into a coherent essay.

1. For a critique of much of this literature see Robert E. Shalhope, 'Republicanism and Early American Historiography,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982): 334-56. A special issue of the *American Quarterly*, 'Republicanism in the History and Historiography of the United States,' edited by Joyce Appleby offers a variety of stimulating perspectives on republicanism. *American Quarterly*, 37 (Fall 1985). Within the last decade historians dealing with the American South have made extensive use of the interpretative power of republicanism. See particularly J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge and London, 1978); William J. Cooper, Jr., *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (New York, 1983); Harry L. Watson, *Jacksonian Politics and Community Conflict: The Emergence of the Second American Party System in Cumberland County North Carolina* (Baton Rouge and London, 1981); Marc W. Kruman, *Parties and Politics in North Carolina, 1836-1865* (Baton Rouge and London, 1983); J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands* (Middletown, Conn., 1985); Lacy K. Ford, Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800-1860* (New York and Oxford, 1988); and Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850-1890* (New York and Oxford, 1983). Jean H. Baker offers a perceptive analysis of the course of republican thought in the North in the nineteenth century in *Affairs of Party: The Political Culture of Northern Democrats in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (Ithaca and London, 1983).

2. Joyce Appleby is most responsible for the emergence of a clear understanding of

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American thought and culture during the Revolutionary and early national years principally through the perspectives of 'classical republicanism' or 'liberalism.' Advocates of the former view have insisted that Americans adhered to a secularized form of the traditional values of Puritanism. Their watchword was virtue—defined as the willingness of the individual to subordinate his private interests for the good of the community. Thus, American republicanism meant maintaining public and private virtue, internal unity, social solidarity, and vigilance against the corrupting effects of power and the scramble for wealth. For their part, adherents of the second interpretation, that of liberalism, have maintained that Americans in this era manifested aggressive individualism, optimistic materialism, and pragmatic interest-group politics. For them, John Locke's liberal concept of possessive individualism, not Machiavelli's republican advocacy of civic humanism, best explains American thought and behavior during the years after 1760.

This disagreement among historians threatens to cloud our understanding of the formative years of our nation's past by encas-

liberalism in the late eighteenth century. See particularly 'Commercial Farming and the "Agrarian Myth" in the Early Republic,' *Journal of American History* 68 (1982): 833-49; 'What Is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?' *William and Mary Quarterly* 39 (1982): 287-309; and *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York and London, 1984). Also central to the emergence of liberalism are Isaac Kramnick, 'Republican Revisionism Revisited,' *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 629-664; John P. Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York, 1984); and James Oakes, 'From Republicanism to Liberalism: Ideological Change and the Crisis of the Old South,' *American Quarterly* 37 (1985): 551-571.

For an interesting contrast in perceptions of republicanism, see Lance Banning, 'Jeffersonian Ideology Revisited: Liberal and Classical Ideas in the New Republic,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 43 (1966): 3-19, and Joyce Appleby, 'Republicanism in Old and New Contexts,' *ibid.*, 20-34.

A number of recent scholars have attempted to integrate an understanding of republicanism and liberalism. For examples see Joseph J. Ellis, *After the Revolution: Profiles of Early American Culture* (New York, 1979); Michael Lienesch, *New Order of the Ages: Time, the Constitution, and the Making of Modern American Political Thought* (Princeton, 1988); Thomas L. Pangle, *The Spirit of Modern Republicanism: The Moral Vision of the American Founders and the Philosophy of Locke* (Chicago and London, 1988); Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore and London, 1987); and James T. Kloppenberg, 'The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,' *Journal of American History* 74 (1987), 9-33.

ing them within mutually exclusive interpretative straitjackets that distort rather than clarify.³ Certainly Americans living in these years never felt themselves confronted by two sharply contrasting modes of thought—liberalism or republicanism—or that they had some deeply-felt obligation to choose between Locke's modern ideas and Machiavelli's more traditional ones. Such modes of thought are the creation of recent scholars and when historians insist upon forcing individuals or groups from the past into a particular intellectual mold they distort our ability to reconstruct that past in a way that would be recognizable to people of the time who actually experienced it. Americans living in the late eighteenth century could, quite unself-consciously, believe simultaneously in the promotion of their own individual socioeconomic and political prospects as well as in the distinct possibility that their liberty might be endangered by corrupt forces of power within their governments. By this time classical republican traditions and modern social, economic, and political behavior had blended so thoroughly and so imperceptibly that efforts by historians to force historical participants into one or another static frame of mind simply creates a historical anachronism.

Historians dealing with American culture and thought in the last half of the eighteenth century have not yet created a conceptual framework that enables them to convey the complex blending of traditional and modern attitudes and behavioral patterns that characterize the era. Here the anthropologist's conception of a 'marginal' or 'liminal' state of transition provides useful insights.⁴ Ambiguity characterizes such a transitive era. Individuals and groups find themselves separated from the fixed cultural standfasts of an earlier time, but they have not yet created new ones appropriate to their rapidly changing environment. Some cling desperately to outmoded customs of the past, while others graft new

3. Gordon Wood develops this idea more fully in two essays: 'Ideology and the Origins of Liberalism in America,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (1987): 628-49, and 'Hellfire Politics,' *New York Review of Books*, February 28, 1985, 29-32.

4. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, 1969).

modes of thought and behavior to traditional assumptions in ways that seem to translate the realities of their everyday experiences into meaningful cultural patterns. The result is a time of extreme flux and uncertainty: a struggle for predominance between competing cultural forces.

This is what occurred within America during the years after 1760, a period when many Americans began to draw away from the cultural norms that defined their earlier eighteenth-century society. That society had been a hierarchically structured, gentry-dominated one, committed to the ideal of organic unity under the leadership of gentlemen. By midcentury, however, these aristocratic hierarchies, never able to sink roots deeply into the New World environment, began to disintegrate under the pressure of long-developing demographic, economic, and ideological forces. Rather than halting such developments, the Revolution intensified them. The turmoil of the Revolutionary years created a crisis of confidence in an ordered, hierarchical society that gave rise to widespread demands for fundamental changes in law, politics, religion, and the social order itself. From the time of the Revolution through the ascendancy of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency in 1801, an indigenous cultural movement arose within American society that joined those mistrustful of power with vast numbers of traditionally powerless people in a common attempt to break down the cultural hegemony of a genteel elite. The latter, clinging fiercely to earlier cultural values, resisted with all its might. Out of this tension between supporters and opponents of hierarchy arose a complex cultural phenomenon that historians are just beginning to decipher: a vast number of people on a wide variety of fronts—social, political, educational, religious, economic—began to challenge the eminence of a gentlemanly few. Some did this quite as a matter of course in their day-to-day activities; others deliberately spoke, wrote, or otherwise actively organized against the power of mediating elites, against social distinctions of every sort, against any obligation that did not result from purely voluntary consent.

The dialectical tension between liberalism and republicanism that has so perplexed historians also arose out of the struggle against hierarchy. Indeed, it is impossible to comprehend this tension separate from the larger cultural upheaval of which it was an integral part. For this reason, scholars, if they are to gain greater insight into the relationship between liberalism and republicanism, must focus on the cultural transformations taking place in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century America.

By the close of the French and Indian War (1756–63), Britain's North American colonies had, in many ways, taken on the appearance of the home culture. This was particularly true in the more mature areas of each colony where, after several generations, a clearly recognizable, reasonably stable elite had emerged. Members of this American gentry strove mightily to reproduce English society as best they could in the provinces. In their efforts to Anglicize their culture, these individuals espoused a carefully structured hierarchical order of subtly arranged ranks of beings, each with a specific function and allotment of virtue. Each place in the social hierarchy carried with it certain unquestioned obligations and responsibilities to those ranks above and below.

Viewing their society as an organic whole, distinct from and greater than the sum of its individual parts, the gentry stressed the harmony and unity of the people. The family, the church, the community, and the political state bound individuals together and linked them to the natural world of which they were an integral part. The good society envisioned by the gentry consisted of a cohesive social order in which each individual knew his or her proper sphere, moved contentedly within it, observed and respected visible social distinctions, performed the social functions allotted to that station in a diligent and faithful manner, and practiced the individual values of thrift, humility, moderation, and deference. Above all else, individuals must willingly subordinate private interests to the larger communal good.

The American gentry, like their British counterparts, assumed authority to be the natural appendage of affluence and superiority.

They anticipated being called to govern at all levels of colonial society. By and large, particularly in the more settled areas, this was indeed the case. Town fathers or local patriarchs maintained control of affairs in small communities, while individuals distinguished by family, wealth, education, and a bearing that exacted the obeisance of others assumed power at the provincial level. Assuming their positions quite unself-consciously, the gentry took their prominence and power for granted. They presumed that ordinary men would naturally respect and follow them simply by virtue of the fact that they had what commoners did not—character, education, rational minds. Respect for these virtues was the vital element that bound society together.

The ease with which so many of the genteel assumed this sense of superiority resulted from an extensive involvement in the commercial, political, agricultural, and social affairs of the larger world. The flourishing Atlantic trade brought large concentrations of new wealth to the colonies and involved a good many of the gentry in affairs that often extended beyond their local community to the provincial level or even to distant parts of the British Empire. As a result, many of the gentry assumed a cosmopolitanism characteristic of men of broad vision, experience, and commercial expertise. Numerous merchants became intent upon expanding their overseas trade and obtaining the flexibility to operate in a market climate free of restraints on entrepreneurial activity. As a result, their economic decisions increasingly responded to the dictates of the invisible laws of an international marketplace, rather than traditional communal needs. Such an open espousal of the world of international trade and capitalist relations made these gentry appear to be ‘modernizers.’ And yet they remained profoundly conservative in their social philosophy.

For all their efforts to Anglicize their society, the American elite could never enjoy complete success. A hierarchical order was not as firmly rooted or as rigidly structured in America as it was in England. The personal influence that supported vertical lines of dependency in England simply never became firmly entrenched in

American culture. Militia companies elected their officers; congregations hired their ministers; and an unusually broad constituency elected a wide range of political officials. Relatively few landed tenants existed in the American colonies, and vast numbers of yeomen farmers asserted an extraordinary degree of political awareness and independence. Religious and ethnic groups multiplied throughout the colonies, and the outward thrust of thousands of migrants into wilderness areas shattered traditional communal bonds as well as lines of interest or patronage. Aggressive competition between individuals and groups, far exceeding that found in Europe, fed feelings of suspicion and jealousy.⁵

By the middle of the eighteenth century, cracks began to form in the deferential structure of American society. Exacerbated by social and economic tensions affecting various segments of provincial society, these cracks revealed that the due subordination owed by inferiors to superiors could upon occasion prove fitful and unreliable. Nowhere did this prove more true than in the urban areas of the northern colonies, where growing numbers of inhabitants found themselves becoming increasingly involved in a coldly rational market world.⁶ This world opened whole new avenues to wealth and material comforts for some, but at the same time, brought grinding uncertainties and bewildering change for many others. The vagaries of such a market economy produced erratic fluctuations in the demand for goods and services, created periodic unemployment on an unprecedented scale, changed traditional work patterns, generated serious economic disorders, and brought about a massive redistribution of wealth.

Such a bewildering array of changes left most urban dwellers searching to make sense of their lives. As they struggled to adjust to their changing environment, many individuals—simple folk as

5. For wonderful insight into the nature of eighteenth-century colonial society, as well as the transformations taking place in the latter half of the century, see especially, Gordon Wood, 'Social Radicalism and Equality in the American Revolution,' *The B. K. Smith Lectures in History* (Houston, 1976), 5–14.

6. Gary Nash skillfully analyzes the tensions developing in the northeastern cities in *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1979).

well as genteel—began to behave in ways that legitimated private profit seeking. This placed great strain upon the ideal of the traditional corporate society—the organic whole that harmonized individual interests to the greater good of the entire community. No doubt most urban inhabitants still held that old vision of the good society in their minds. True, their day-to-day activities had changed, had had to change in the face of their altered economic environment. But their habits of mind were more stubborn, less flexible. No new ideology had emerged to make sense of their new world, and, lacking that, most people clung to the old ideology of community. Still, in practice, competition rapidly displaced consensus; individuals constantly had to be aware of their own self-interest. Where no organic entity exists, individuals, no matter what their social position, must struggle to profit and protect themselves.

These circumstances belied the harmony envisioned by the corporate traditions that still prevailed in the minds of most urban inhabitants and led some to speak out in frustration. A Bostonian, 'Phileleutheros' drew an organic link between grinding poverty and sumptuous wealth. He exclaimed to that city's workers: 'From your Labour and Industry arises all that can be called Riches, and by your Hands it must be defended: Gentry, Clergy, Lawyers, and military Officers, do all support their Grandeur by your Sweat, and at your Hazard.' And yet the burdens of taxation and the hardships of war 'fall signally upon the middle and inferiour Ranks of Mankind.' In 1765, a New Yorker expressed similar feelings when he noted that 'Some individuals, . . . by the Smiles of Providence, or some other Means, are enabled to roll in their four wheel'd Carriages, and can support the expense of good Houses, rich Furniture, and Luxurious Living. But is it equitable that 99 rather 999, would suffer for the Extravagance or Grandeur of one? Especially when it is considered that Men frequently owe their Wealth to the impoverishment of their Neighbors?'⁷

7. Quoted in *ibid.*, 263.

Such observations not only questioned the ideas of deference and hierarchy but implied that the whole concept of a common good fostered by the disinterested services of those at the top was simply a mask to protect the personal interests of an economic elite. Defining their lives in terms of a moral economy based upon the fair wage and the just price, an economy where it was 'unnatural' for any person to profit from the necessities of others, ordinary colonists faced an economic environment controlled by a cash nexus in which free competition and the laws of supply and demand took precedence over all other considerations. Worse yet, economic changes wrought disturbing social transformations. The emergence of a regionally or even internationally oriented merchant class, tied together through lines of marriage or mutual interest, gave rise to a sensibility and a mode of behavior entirely alien to the traditional attitudes of those accustomed to a local communal economy. In this way the strains becoming manifest in urban areas reflected a larger cultural conflict spreading throughout the American colonies: the clash of values resulting from a confrontation between traditional, local attitudes and modern cosmopolitan ones.

Within each colony, to a greater or lesser extent, people accustomed to simple, austere lives within local communities bound together by mutual obligations faced wrenching changes. A terrible conflict of values involving the very nature of these communities emerged between those devoted to traditional communal values and others whose pattern of life posed a serious threat to these values and the integral world view they represented. This conflict, which underlay social, religious, and economic tensions throughout the colonies in the mid-eighteenth century, contributed significantly to the erosion of the cultural foundations of an ordered, deferential society.

Social struggles appearing throughout the various colonies revealed weaknesses in the established social order. Many simple folk came to doubt the efficacy of social deference in practice if not in theory. Their challenges to authority existed as discrete

manifestations of a silent struggle taking place throughout the American colonies between two cultural forces: the process of Anglicization at the hands of cosmopolitan elites attempting to establish social hierarchy in America was being resisted by an as yet amorphous, fragmented impulse to retain autonomy and control in scattered, disparate, local communities.⁸

The localistic impulse mirrored the isolated, insular nature of colonial American societies. It assumed a variety of forms: religious congregationalism; the secession of hundreds of outlanders in New England in order to be a 'free people'; the opposition of Connecticut and Massachusetts Separates to the state's tax collectors; struggles over land titles along the Hudson; Baptist dissent from the Virginia squirearchy; the Regulation movement in the Carolinas; and the 'judgement seats' of the Green Mountain Boys on the New Hampshire Grants.⁹ Discrete, isolated events, yet all were part of a single phenomenon — the urge to make local leadership, whether religious or political, respond to the needs and values of local communities. Even though scattered, efforts to protect local autonomy shared inner similarities resulting from experiences common to all of the colonies. The great bulk of Americans, regardless of their provincial locale, lived simple, self-sufficient lives. Accustomed to the relative equality of their local communities, such people desired simply to be left alone with the means to remain independent and the right to form their own moral societies. To be assured of this, local inhabitants must retain

8. See Kenneth Lockridge, *Settlement and Unsettlement: The Crisis of Political Legitimacy before the Revolution* (London, 1981) for an excellent discussion of the tension between advocates of hierarchy and localism.

9. For discussions of these tensions, see Kenneth Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (expanded edition, New York, 1985); Richard I. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut* (Cambridge, 1967); William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630-1833* (two volumes, Cambridge, 1971); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill, 1982); James P. Whittenburg, 'Planters, Merchants, and Lawyers: Social Change and the Origins of the North Carolina Regulators,' *William and Mary Quarterly*, 34 (1977): 215-38; Robert E. Shalhope, 'South Carolina in the Founding Era: A Localist Perspective,' *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 89 (1988): 102-13; Edward Countryman, "'Out of the Bounds of the Law': Northern Land Rioters in the Eighteenth Century,' in Alfred Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 39-69.

control of their religious and political leaders. They rejected as immoral a cosmopolitan elite integrally linked with governmental officials and institutions resulting in a centralized hierarchy that engrossed social and political opportunity.

These beliefs gained strength from the conditions of everyday life throughout the colonies. Most people still lived far removed from the sophistication of true gentlemen and market commerce. As a result, they remained elusively remote from the real weight of authority, whether practiced by ministerial consociations, royally appointed sheriffs, or even tax collectors and land registrars. In most areas, a locally validated elite shielded local customs from such outside interference. Localistic feelings and emotions simply asked that such isolation be allowed to continue. With the passage of time, however, such desires became increasingly political and yet, although emanating from the very conditions of American life, they remained inchoate. They were too visceral, too instinctive, and their outward manifestations too occasional, scattered, and ephemeral to assume the force of a generalized social or political ideology.

Such was not the case with the colonial elites supporting an Anglicized society. These wonderfully articulate gentlemen, supported by the authority of two hundred years of European thought, confidently espoused an organic society based upon order and hierarchy. Appalled at localistic mentalities, these men knew the assumption of authority by the rich and the well born to be the precondition of a viable state. They placed their full faith in hierarchy and thus supported the integration of elites into a carefully ordered set of institutions stretching eventually to the crown itself.

And yet, try as they might to impose an unquestioning deferential respect for their social eminence and a dependent loyalty to the political authority they represented, these gentlemen faced continual frustration. An aristocratic order could never sink deep roots in America: the hierarchical principle of legitimacy upon which it depended simply did not correspond with the experiences of the great bulk of Americans. Consequently, hierarchy remained

a painfully artificial creation. If the localist impulse represented an environment without an ideology, hierarchy became a fully articulated ideology without a secure foundation within the environment.¹⁰

Britain's attempt to reorganize its empire during the 1760s greatly heightened tensions within the colonies. While many colonists expressed their disapproval of British actions by supporting economic boycotts, participating in street riots, or voicing approval of legislative protests, the creation of an articulate response in the form of pamphlet literature, broadsides, and newspaper essays fell to the provincial gentry. These literate gentlemen attempted to fashion a rational discourse convincing enough to change British administrative policy. In the process, they created something quite different: a rationale for revolution and regeneration. Under the intense political pressure of events, their ideas were integrated into a comprehensive and forceful image of politics and society that penetrated widely and deeply throughout colonial culture. A comprehensive theory of politics emerged within the American colonies that made sense of the bewildering changes of the mid-eighteenth century for a great many very diverse sorts of Americans.¹¹

This theory of politics focused on the role of power—defined as the control or domination of some men over others—within American lives. For them power lurked behind every political event; it was the ultimate explanation for whatever political behavior they observed. Power became omnipresent in public affairs and always aggressively expanded beyond its proper limits. It was this aggressiveness that so troubled provincial writers, because in their minds justice, equity, and liberty always fell victim to the inordinate demands of power. As a consequence, they perceived the public world separated into two innately antagonistic spheres:

10. Lockridge, *Settlement and Unsettlement*, 104.

11. Bernard Bailyn offers a provocative analysis of this theory of politics in *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967). The following discussion rests upon Bailyn's insights.

power and liberty. The first, constantly and brutally assertive, must always be opposed, while the second, delicate, innocent, and passive, required a ceaselessly vigilant defense.

Such ideas led many colonists to perceive an unmistakable pattern to British actions subsequent to the Stamp Act. Britain was succumbing to the all-too-familiar tendencies seen throughout history for nations to degenerate with age, to fall prey to the corruptions of power. Viewed in this manner, the actions taken by the British represented not only mistaken or even ill-advised behavior, but a deliberately planned attack upon liberty in England that was spreading its poison to the American colonies.

The belief that they faced a ministerial conspiracy against liberty transformed the meaning of colonial resistance in the minds of many colonists from a constitutional quarrel over the power of Parliament to a world regenerative creed. Such a belief in the regenerative quality of their resistance meant that for many Americans the Revolution became more than simply a political revolt; it represented the creation of a fresh, republican world.¹² Consequently, republicanism stood for more than just the substitution of an elective system for a monarchy. It infused the political break with England with a moral fervor and an idealistic depth linked inextricably to the very character of American society.

For Americans, the sacrifice of individual interests to a greater common good comprised both the essence of republicanism and the idealistic goal of the Revolution. Consequently, the Revolution was to be more than a rejection of British corruption. It was to be a reformation within provincial societies as well, a reformation defined in republican terms. For many, republicanism expressed a longing for a secularized Puritanism, one last attempt to control the bewildering impulses generated by the emergence of a capitalistic market economy. Emphasizing a morality of social cohesion, these people hoped to create an organic state by joining

12. The ensuing analysis of republicanism draws upon Gordon Wood's brilliant *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, 1969).

individual citizens together into an indissoluble union of harmony and benevolence: a true republic. Theirs was a lovely, though fragile, ideal because a republic, by definition, depended entirely upon the character and spirit of its citizens. Unique among all polities, republics required the total absence of selfishness and luxury; republics rested upon virtue—the willingness of citizens to place the common good above their own private needs and desires. Thus, the presence or absence of virtue determined whether or not a society would remain republican.

This republican obsession with virtue pervaded the Revolutionary movement and, through time, exerted a shaping influence over American culture. Although seeming to fly in the face of man's natural selfishness, it held out great promise. In an enlightened and optimistic age, the most hopeful among the American Revolutionaries considered man to be a malleable creature and their own society to be in a particularly 'plastic state' where 'the benefactor of mankind may realize all his schemes for promoting human happiness.' Americans in 1776 wanted to 'form a new-era and give a new turn to human affairs.' They intended to shine as the 'eminent example of every divine and social virtue' by becoming that unique type of simple, upright, and egalitarian people that enlightened authors since ancient Rome claimed to be the necessary prerequisite for a republican society.¹³ For most Americans the moral character of their society would form the prime measure of the success or failure of their revolution.

Republicanism in 1776 thus became a fresh attempt to confront and resist the temptations of luxury; it constituted a new, secular check on the selfish proclivities of men, a social restraint providing focus for the efforts of the entire community. For the great bulk of Americans, then, republicanism blended indistinguishably with revolution and regeneration.

While the bulk of Americans espoused republican ideas in their struggle against the British, these ideas did not bear the same

13. Quoted in Gordon Wood, *The Rising Glory of America, 1760-1820* (New York, 1971), 6-7.

meaning for everyone involved. Indeed, with the passage of time, it became clear that republicanism and revolution conjugated differently in various regions of the country and even differently for distinct groups within the same locale. These differing perceptions of republicanism resulted from the fact that social and economic forces at work within eighteenth-century America had created a number of vague, amorphous, but nonetheless very real needs among various groups of people.¹⁴

The great bulk of Americans, living in isolated rural communities, drew meaning in their lives from a traditional corporate world rather than the aggressive, entrepreneurial individualism of those advocating a market economy and a more open, competitive society. Living in an undercommercialized countryside, suspicious of higher authorities and commercial activity, these people desired above all else isolation, independence, and homogeneity. Only such an environment would preserve them from outside interference, internal dissension, and the social disruptions created by the unequal distribution of wealth and power. Locally validated leaders served primarily to insulate local customs and traditions from larger outside interests and allegiances. Rural folk simply wanted to be left alone in their relative equality, with the means to prosper and the right to shape their own moral and political worlds.

The changes taking place during the eighteenth century endangered the desires of these Americans. While such changes affected their economic interests, the greatest threat was to the integral world view from which they drew meaning and identity in their lives. As these threats accelerated, they intensified the urge for independence, homogeneity, and isolation. Disturbed by a growing certainty that the simple, austere, organic world they cherished was slipping away in the face of a malignant world of

14. Kenneth Lockridge offers a wonderful analysis of these needs in 'Social Change and the Meaning of the American Revolution,' *Journal of Social History* 6 (1973): 403-439. My discussion of the various perspectives of Americans in the late colonial era draws upon this insightful essay.

complexity and selfishness driven by mysterious and unintelligible forces, a great many rural Americans became particularly susceptible to calls for moral reformation. They became ripe for a unique form of political mobilization.

Revolutionary republicanism effected this mobilization by providing a crusading ideology that unified rural Americans in support of a profoundly reactionary world view based on essentially pre-modern, localist impulses. Rural Americans drew particular meaning from the gentry's exhortations to political action cast in libertarian terms. They responded positively to rhetoric attacking aristocratic corruption and the hierarchical tyranny resulting from the invasion of power into the realm of liberty. The dark, conspiratorial suspicions of such language resonated perfectly with the localist's fear of change and distrust of hierarchy. They took seriously the gentry's exhortations to grasp control of their own lives, to escape from the tyranny of oppressive and corrupt outside forces, and to return their country to a virtuous course. Primed for a purgative, reactionary crusade, and urged to participate in what they assumed to be just such an effort, rural traditionalists or localists shaped Revolutionary republicanism according to their deepest needs and expectations. They assumed Revolutionary republicanism promised a moral crusade to return traditional communal values to America.

In areas that were experiencing widespread penetration by the market economy several perspectives resulted. The sudden increase in the concentration of wealth in societies that were not overwhelmingly prosperous created concern among many that a few were gaining wealth by abusing a system intended to serve all men equally. These people, puzzled by and perhaps drawn to the values of the market economy, demanded equity within their societies as well as the maintenance of social opportunity for themselves and their children. They joined their rural brethren in viewing republicanism as a means of returning their society to the corporate values of the past.

At the same time, however, a contrasting outlook emerged in

urban areas as well as in increasingly open, diverse, mobile rural regions. There the aggressive, individualistic, acquisitive ethos driving such men as Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys in Vermont, new merchants competing with established traders for economic gain in Boston, upstart planters challenging the Virginia squirearchy at the polls, and thousands of other Americans whose economic activities wrenched them out of the traditional corporate world of their forefathers created quite a different view of republicanism. Republicanism for them was an amalgam of the ideas of John Locke and English country party radicals. Their understanding of Locke, however, came through the writings of men like James Burgh and Richard Price, who saw Locke as an advocate of personal autonomy and popular sovereignty. These men fused such a perception of Locke with a bitter middle-class resentment of the closed, aristocratic nature of the British constitution and the country party's deep distrust of corruption and the misuses of power.¹⁵

While men such as Price and Burgh constantly employed the traditional language of classical republicanism, 'corruption' for them took on a new meaning. It symbolized idleness, profligacy, the lack of productivity, and an absence of talent and merit. A corrupt system rewarded unproductive and talentless drones by denying public careers to men of talent and merit. The true nation lay outside such a decadent government. It consisted of virtuous, diligent, and frugal middle-class individuals as desirous of a meritocracy of ability as they were of a social order of civic virtue. They steadfastly opposed an aristocracy resting on dependency or deference. In its stead, they called for equal opportunity for merit and talent. They shaped Locke's ideas on natural equality to mean a natural right to equal opportunity.

Drawing upon such ideas, the rising middle elements in America looked forward to a society offering a wide array of opportunities

15. Isaac Kramnick, 'Republican Revisionism Revisited,' *American Historical Review* 87 (1982): 629-664. This essay provides excellent insights into the emerging middle-class mentality in America.

to deserving citizens and to a government open to men of talent and ability. A deferential society was anathema to them: it meant an aristocracy of privilege instead of a republic of natural abilities.

The republicanism of the American gentry could not have been more different. They, too, drew upon the ideas of John Locke, but their perception of Locke was similar to that of their English counterparts—men for whom Locke's ideas had seemed sufficiently conservative to be adopted without a second thought as a suitable rationale for the rigidly structured English society of the eighteenth century. The English gentry had assumed that the publication of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* (1690) merely dignified the established legal order of the English polity. His principles helped restore the right of political initiative to the English ruling class by demonstrating that just opposition to the crown could legitimately coexist with a hierarchy of social authority. Therefore a revolution such as the one in 1688 depended upon the constant and firm psychological dependence of the majority of the population upon the ruling class—clergy, gentry, and aristocracy. While each individual might have the theoretical right to destroy the legal order of society in the face of an unjust tyranny, the necessities of the social structure were such that only a very few men could exercise this right responsibly. And, since the entire validity of the right of resistance rested logically on the responsibility with which it was employed, only gentlemen of the ruling class were, by definition, capable of assuming such an awesome moral burden. It was this doctrine that the great English lords readily embraced in 1690, and that served the ruling aristocracy so well throughout the succeeding decades of the eighteenth century. It provided the firmest support for their hierarchical order.¹⁶

The American gentry absorbed these same principles; such ideas underlay their perception of republicanism. For them the affective force naturally linked to the duty to obey social norms—

16. John Dunn, 'The Politics of Locke in England and America in the Eighteenth Century,' in John W. Yolton, ed., *John Locke: Problems and Perspectives* (London, 1969), 45-80.

the internalized structure of social control so necessary to a hierarchy—had been irreversibly dissociated from the legal order of English society by the Revolution. This authority, this affective force itself, however, had not been dissolved; rather, for the American gentry, such an operative authority now resided within their own society. Consequently, members of the gentry assumed that the responsibility for leading the Revolution fell to them. In their minds, the Revolution was a revolt against corrupt officials, not a revolt against the principle of hierarchical authority. Only such authority could hold a society together.

While Americans who supported the Revolution did so for different reasons, they all professed a devotion to republicanism. Just what that meant, though, remained open to question. Some enthusiastically accepted the new world of market relations while others remained deeply anticapitalistic. Some wanted to retain a communal society based on social hierarchy, others desired an open, competitive society without regard for rank or status, while still others preferred a simple, homogeneous society of relative equality held together by deep corporate bonds. These disparate desires emerged as discrete fragments of two cultural impulses—republicanism and liberalism—coursing through the lives of late-eighteenth-century Americans. At times the two seemed to run parallel to one another, at other times they appeared in direct conflict, and at still other times they melded into a nearly indistinguishable whole. In many ways, republicanism—a familiar ideology permeating all walks of life—shaped Americans' thoughts; it provided them with meaning and identity in their lives. Liberalism—still an unarticulated behavioral pattern more than a sharply delineated mode of thought—unconsciously shaped their day-to-day activity. Most Americans clung to a harmonious, corporate view of themselves and their society even while behaving in a materialistic, utilitarian manner in their daily lives. Thus while rapidly transforming their society in an open, competitive, modern direction, Americans continued to idealize communal harmony and a virtuous social order.

This resulted in ambivalence, inconsistencies, and ironic incongruities. Throughout the Revolutionary years, Americans wrestled with changes that transformed their society while continuing to idealize an essentially premodern set of values. These changes began to alter institutions and modes of behavior in a fundamental and dramatic manner. More and more isolated agrarian villages began to be tied into larger commercial networks; opportunities abounded that revealed the unlimited potential for human freedom; and the bonds holding together families, churches, and communities eroded and in many cases simply fell away. And yet the conflict between traditional republican values and newly emerging liberal behavior patterns never became so clearcut as to set one specific set of ideas in opposition to another. Indeed, this tension seethed as fiercely within single individuals and groups as it did between competing elements within American society. The cosmopolitan gentry's competitive economic behavior tore at their own profoundly conservative social views, while the traditional localist's desire for individual equality increasingly conflicted with his professed communal values. As a result, many Americans could, and did, believe simultaneously in corporate needs and individual rights. They never had a sense of choosing between two starkly contrasting traditions—republicanism and liberalism—between Locke the aggressive individualist and Locke the devotee of hierarchy, or between Burgh the embittered middle-class individualist and Burgh the libertarian fearful of corruptive tendencies emanating from the realm of power. Instead, they domesticated classical republicanism to fit their contemporary needs; they unself-consciously amalgamated inherited assumptions with their liberal behavior.

The tension between republican ideology and liberal behavior patterns persisted throughout the Revolution. And yet, the war itself, or rather its victory, prompted most Americans to view their efforts in republican terms and to enshrine republican values in the meaning of the war itself.¹⁷ Most Americans had entered the

17. Charles Royster presents an outstanding analysis of the manner in which Americans came to view their Revolutionary effort in republican terms in *A Revolutionary People at*

Revolution with the millennial expectation of creating a new republican society comprised of virtuous citizens free of Old World corruption. The Revolution carried the promise of regeneration with a desperate insistency born of the doubts and uncertainties arising from transformations already affecting colonial societies. During the course of the war, however, American behavior manifested disturbing and disappointing signs of European vice: sectional, factional, and personal rivalries emerged; public officials and governmental contractors indulged in widespread graft and corruption; farmers demanded usurious prices for their crops, while merchants displayed similar greed in selling their goods; many engaged in a lucrative trade with the enemy, and others employed a great variety of desperate means to avoid military service. The techniques employed to win the war also raised grave questions about the republican character of Americans: the Continental government found itself forced to conscript citizens, to confiscate property, and to engage the mysterious and very likely corrupt financial and administrative talents of shrewd and ambitious individuals. Worst of all, the militia—the backbone of a republican society—proved ineffective; only the creation of a professional army with rigorously disciplined soldiers and self-seeking, ambitious officers saved the cause.

Despite these disheartening experiences, Americans chose to believe that their victory was a splendid confirmation of their moral strengths, a magnificent testament to their republican ideals. At the war's end, Americans celebrated public virtue, not its failure. To preserve their millennial vision of the future, Americans could not recognize the reality of the many questionable expedients employed to win the war. The Revolutionary generation redefined its experiences and made them as virtuous and as heroic as they ought to have been. Thus, victory—gained by the fallible, partial, and selfish efforts of many Americans—allowed an entire generation to ignore these unpleasant realities and to claim that it had remained true to the republican standards of 1776.

War (Chapel Hill, 1979). Royster's insights inform my discussion of American attitudes at the end of the Revolutionary War.

They offered those standards and the image of a unified, virtuous, republican citizenry to future generations. To celebrate the victory was to celebrate the regenerative character of the Revolutionary movement and republicanism.

Idealizing the Revolution did not, however, solve the tensions and anxieties that pervaded America before as well as after the war. Enshrining republican ideals did not ease the social tensions present throughout American society. While these strains had not necessarily caused the Revolution, they did help shape the meaning and expectations that various groups invested in the revolutionary cause. Thus, although the Revolution had mobilized a vast number of Americans of different needs and expectations through its exhortations and political actions, its libertarian rhetoric, and its optimism regarding national regeneration, what American leaders meant by this incitement may well have been quite another thing from the spirit in which many Americans—rural and urban, rising or declining—took them to mean. Americans fit the rhetoric of the Revolution to their innermost needs. What might happen when those needs were not met by the successful completion of the Revolution was obscured by the war itself. The question would, however, arise with renewed intensity once the war ended, for then Americans had to face the question of what form of government and what type of society would actually develop within their new nation.

For their part gentry leaders throughout the various states enthusiastically espoused the sovereignty of the people. Their belief that republican virtue and morality called for a natural hierarchy led the gentry in control of state legislatures during the Revolution to write constitutions based upon much broader suffrage and far more equitable representation than characterized the provincial governments. John Adams, for one, blamed the 'tyranny' of the British, their mistrust of the people, for the problems within the colonies previous to 1776. 'All power, residing originally in the people, and being derived from them, the several magistrates and officers of government, vested with authority, whether legislative,

executive, or judicial, are their subordinates and agents, and are at all times accountable to them.¹⁸ Given this perception as well as his conviction that virtue predominated in American society, Adams willingly supported wide popular participation in the new state governments. Adams and other Whig leaders apparently had little fear that removing the influence of the Crown would expose them as the only proponents of social hierarchy in America and endanger their position within American society. Even if some of them had harbored private doubts about whether their fellow Americans supported their social preeminence in the 1760s, most assumed that their leadership in resisting the British would validate their legitimacy and make clear to all Americans the advantages of a native aristocracy.

Members of the gentry had welcomed their poorer countryman's support in opposition to the British aristocracy but expressed shock and dismay upon discovering these men to be engaged in a crusade against all aristocracy, American as well as British. Shortly after the outbreak of the Revolution, cries had arisen throughout the colonies to the effect that 'we have not cast off a British aristocracy to be saddled with an American one.' In many colonies groups of individuals demanded 'no governair but the governor of the univarse' and pressed for state constitutions eliminating governors and upper houses as well as supporting annually elected lower houses based upon universal male suffrage.¹⁹ Even then, such people did not want a legislature with broad power to interfere in their lives. Worse, in the minds of the gentry, after constitutions had been written, regardless of what sort of governmental structure they created, the people insisted upon electing representatives who were not gentlemen. The whole fabric of social hierarchy seemed to be coming under concerted attack.

In a word, the post-Revolutionary state legislatures were more

18. Quoted in John R. Howe, Jr., *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton, 1966), 44, 59.

19. Quoted in Lockridge, *Settlement and Unsettlement*, 111.

democratic than their provincial predecessors.²⁰ Those who had traditionally enjoyed the exercise of political power—merchants, planters, lawyers, members of orthodox and established churches, cosmopolitan inhabitants of commercial urban centers—now had to compete with artisans, petty traders, shopkeepers, debtors, subsistence farmers, dissenters—ordinary people of little education or experience from small towns or farms deep in the interior—for control of the legislatures. Out of this confrontation, new political configurations began to emerge.

While the states experienced a variety of developmental problems, they all faced a similar set of issues resulting from the war and a need to establish new governmental procedures and institutional arrangements. These problems fostered remarkably similar responses throughout the states. In each state legislature two relatively well-defined opposing political blocs emerged to contest the issues. These groups did not form systematic organizations, nor did they extend into the electorate through institutional forms or organized electioneering. Rather they provided political expression within the legislatures to socioeconomic and cultural tensions that had been building within American society for several decades. While no party labels or appellations appeared during the period, the terms 'localist' and 'cosmopolitan' best capture the essential nature of these opposing legislative blocs.

The differing perspectives of cosmopolitans and localists resulted from their contrasting experiences. The representatives of each bloc drew their support from different areas of the country. Cosmopolitans resided along the Atlantic coast or major navigable streams in long-established counties and townships as well as the urban and more heavily populated districts. Cosmopolitanism thrived in those areas that had been most thoroughly Anglicized. The cosmopolitan delegate pursued an occupation—merchant, trader, lawyer, commercial farmer—that compelled him to deal

20. My analysis of the state legislatures as well as the use of the terms 'cosmopolitan' and 'localist' rests upon Jackson Turner Main's *Political Parties before the Constitution* (Chapel Hill, 1973).

with a broader world and permitted him to share in the cultural and social activities of his community. He enjoyed wealth, or at least comfortable circumstances, that allowed him and his family to live well. He very likely owned slaves or employed servants, had assets well beyond his debts, had served as a Continental officer during the War or in an important civil capacity, and had the benefit of formal education. His view of the world, particularly when compared to his localist colleagues, was extensive.

Localists, on the other hand, represented isolated, independent, and relatively egalitarian communities scattered through the inland regions of the nation located far from or inaccessible to established trade routes. The localist delegate was very likely a farmer and might also, like most of his constituents, be in debt. If he had seen military service, it was as a militia officer, and so the experience was brief and probably did not take him far from home. Few localist delegates had held previous civil office, and if they had, it entailed only local responsibilities. They had little if any formal education and, given their restricted experiences, had difficulty perceiving a world much larger than their own neighborhoods or counties. Their single-minded goal was to represent the needs of their own people—fellow debtors, small propertyholders, and newly emergent market farmers.

Beneath the tension within the legislatures coursed a deep cultural antagonism that repeatedly surfaced in newspaper essays, pamphlets, and public orations. In the minds of cosmopolitans, American society faced a crisis resulting from a combination of licentiousness and excessive democracy. Legislatures should be composed of men of property, independence of mind, firmness, education, and a wide knowledge of history, politics, and the laws of their society. The best delegate, according to a Boston newspaper, 'must, in some considerable degree, be autonomous of his constituents and of his place for support.' Unfortunately, such 'men of sense and property' were being rapidly displaced in the legislative halls of the states; instead, people were electing 'blustering ignorant men.' A Massachusetts gentleman claimed that gov-

ernment was increasingly falling into the hands of those who, though perhaps honest, 'yet from the contractedness of their Education, and whose views never extended further than a small farm or a bond of 50 or 100£ cannot, from long habit, be persuaded to view Matters on a large or national Scale. . . .' Such men, 'being unacquainted with the nature of Commerce view the Merchants as real positive Evils hence as well from Obstinacy as Ignorance, Trade, by which only a Nation can grow rich, is neglected.' Cosmopolitans worried over the future, 'when almost every office is in the hands of those who are not distinguished by property, family, education, manners or talents.'²¹

For their part, localists remained ever suspicious of gentlemen who constantly assumed it to be their privilege to draw power into their hands at the expense of the common people. An incident in South Carolina in 1784, involving an alleged insult to John Rutledge by a tavern-keeper, William Thompson, became a *cause célèbre* and led to a clear articulation of localist resentments—resentments that had festered for years.²² When the state legislature threatened to banish Thompson for his indiscretion against one of its own, the tavern-keeper and ex-captain in the Revolutionary service struck back. His public address of April 1784, a classic articulation of the resentment building against social superiority, spoke out on behalf of the people, or 'those more especially, who go at this day, under the opprobrious appellation of, the *Lower Orders of Men*.' Thompson attacked not only those aristocratic 'Nabobs' attempting to humiliate him, but the whole conception of a social hierarchy under the sway of a gentlemanly elite. He upended the predominant eighteenth-century belief that only a natural aristocracy was peculiarly qualified to rule. Instead, he argued that 'signal opulence and influence,' particularly when united 'by intermarriage or otherwise,' did not prepare men for political leadership in a free government; instead it was 'calculated

21. Quoted in *ibid.*, 401–02.

22. The following discussion draws upon Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 482–83. The quotations appear on those pages.

to subvert *Republicanism*.’ The ‘persons and conduct’ of Rutledge and other ‘Nabobs’ of South Carolina ‘in *private* life, may be unexceptionable, and even amiable, but their pride, influence, ambition, connections, wealth and political principles, ought in *public* life, ever to exclude them from *public confidence*.’ All that republican leadership required was ‘being good, able, useful, and friends to social equality’ because in a republican government ‘consequence is from the *public opinion*, and not from *private fancy*.’ Then, in tones heavy with irony, Thompson related how he, a tavern-keeper, ‘a *wretch* of no higher rank in the Commonwealth than that of Common-Citizen,’ was debased by ‘those *self-exalted* characters, who affect to compose the *grand hierarchy* of the State, . . . for having dared to dispute with a *John Rutledge*, or any of the *NABOB tribe*.’ No doubt, Thompson exclaimed, Rutledge had ‘conceived me his inferior.’ However, the tavern-keeper, like so many others in similar circumstances, could simply no longer ‘comprehend the *inferiority*.’ The animosity between those considering men like Thompson as their inferiors and those like Thompson who would no longer accept such treatment underlay the social ferment that boiled just beneath the surface of the legislatures and throughout American society in the 1780s.

Within such an environment, many cosmopolitan gentlemen became firmly convinced that their society faced a terrible social crisis. For men well versed in eighteenth-century political theory, it was not difficult to diagnose the illness plaguing their society. If British rule twenty years previously had degenerated into a perversion of power, the excesses of the people now had become a perversion of liberty. By this the gentry did not necessarily mean mob violence, although Shays’ Rebellion in the winter of 1786–87 shocked and disconcerted them; rather they meant the quite legal democratic actions of the state legislatures. There, delegates, elected in as fair and open a manner and based upon as equal a representational scheme as the world had ever seen, openly perpetrated the excesses that so disturbed the gentry. In those assemblies, paper money schemes, the confiscation of property, and the

whole panoply of debtor-relief legislation that undercut creditors and violated property rights, achieved legitimacy.

Such a perception led many cosmopolitans to set about reforming the state constitutions that had been written in 1776–77. Hoping to curb the power of the legislatures, these individuals adopted the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 as their model. With a legislature balanced between a House that embodied the people and a Senate apportioned according to property valuation, a strong executive, and a judiciary appointed by the governor, this constitution represented a check on the unrestrained power of the people.

Even with all the changes wrought in state constitutions, the anxieties spreading among cosmopolitans would not subside. Many came to feel that the reform effort must be extended to include the federal government as well if the crisis in the state governments was to be truly resolved. No matter how well structured they might be, state governments simply did not seem capable of creating responsible laws and virtuous citizens. By 1786–87, the reformation of the central government became the primary concern of those worried about America's ability to sustain republican governments and a prosperous republican society. As a result, when the Constitutional Convention gathered in Philadelphia in 1787, it represented the culmination of reform efforts to curb the democratic excesses of the state legislatures and to provide an institutional framework that could safely accommodate the dynamic changes taking place within American society.

The new government created by the Constitution reflected the cosmopolitan perceptions of its authors. According to Alexander Hamilton, it suited 'the commercial character of America'; John Jay felt that it mirrored the true 'manners and circumstances' of the nation, that were 'not strictly democratical.'²³ These observations captured the central tenets of the cosmopolitan frame of mind. The new arrangement must be able to control the democratic excesses of the states by insulating the federal government

23. Quoted in *ibid.*, 467.

from the populist forces that had sprung up with the Revolution. At the same time, the creation of an active, energetic government promised to unleash the commercial potential of the nation that had been restrained and inhibited by state control over commerce.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the changes taking place in their society, Federalists—the name assumed by the cosmopolitan supporters of the Constitution—clung desperately to classical traditions of disinterested public leadership. For them, the Constitution promised a last hope to preserve the republican ideal of a government in the hands of deserving, public-spirited leaders—a true natural elite. If they could no longer expect to reform or regenerate the character of the American public, they might still hope to moderate the effects of the people's increasingly self-centered and aggressive behavior by creating a structure of government controlled by the 'worthy' rather than the 'licentious.'²⁴

For this reason, a great many Federalists accepted James Madison's argument in the tenth *Federalist* paper. The 'better sort' might be overpowered in the many small electoral districts required by state legislatures, but in enlarged Congressional districts men of broad contacts and experience would surely gain election. Thus, the Constitution offered a filtration of talent that seemed to promise the reassertion of genteel authority. Localists might still hold power in the states, but cosmopolitans would gain control of the national government, which, with its enhanced powers, now had the opportunity to shape American society.

To accept the logic of *Federalist* 10, however, involved the Federalists in several paradoxes. First, by recognizing that American society had become fragmented into a multiplicity of conflicting interests—interests that could become overbearing local majorities in particular state legislatures—they accepted a conception of society that undermined the traditional social justification for a natural aristocracy and an elitist style of politics. The notion of the organic unity of society had always undergirded the exis-

24. These are the terms Wood employs in his discussion of the struggle between Federalists and Antifederalists.

tence of a disinterested natural aristocracy. Now, Federalists seemed to believe that such a society no longer existed.

Also, by depending upon the new governmental structure to solve the social and political problems arising from the Revolution, Federalists acquiesced in the very democratic politics that they blamed for the ills of their society. Indeed, democratic elections became the very basis for the perpetuation of the natural elite's continued domination of politics. So long as constituencies could be made large enough to stifle the opportunities for social upstarts to gain office, popular elections held no great danger to the Federalists. Instead, the people would choose their natural leaders once the self-serving local electioneering of ambitious demagogues was contained. Democracy could be made to support an elitist style of politics, and, one hoped, an ordered society as well.

As the Federalists strove to defend the Constitution, they had little difficulty in presenting it as continuing the libertarian tradition of republicanism and the very embodiment of the people's interests. The clearest theme that ran through Federalist arguments in the ratification conventions was the need to distribute and separate traditionally mistrusted governmental power. The old conception of a mixed polity, however, no longer made any sense. America, the Federalists argued, was a new, unique society that had no need to mix and blend distinct social orders to achieve a government that protected the people's liberties. Here in a republican society of talent and ability, there were no distinct social orders, only the people. Therefore, to create a government in which all branches represented the people made perfect sense. All that was necessary was to separate power into distinct executive, judicial, and legislative branches and to balance them against one another. In this way, the entire government became a democracy. All branches represented the people, not just the legislature. Thus, the Federalists presented the new government as a thoroughly democratic entity based on the needs and desires of the people. The Constitution, in their rhetoric, epitomized traditional republican maxims and represented the culmination of the popular thrust of the Revolution itself.

Opponents of the Constitution, the Antifederalists, did not see it that way. Indeed, if any central theme coursed throughout their arguments, it was that the Federalists meant to erect an oppressive aristocracy that would stifle the democratic tendencies fostered by the Revolution. In the New York ratification convention, Melancton Smith warned that the new government 'will fall into the hands of the few and the great. This will be a government of oppression.' A Marylander, Timothy Bloodworth, exclaimed that 'the great will struggle for power, honor and wealth, the poor become a prey to avarice, insolence, and oppression.' A newspaper essay claimed that the Philadelphia convention had created 'a monstrous aristocracy' that would 'swallow up the democratic rights of the union, and sacrifice the liberties of the people to the power and domination of a few.'²⁵

Such observations revealed that Antifederalists opposed the Constitution for the very reasons that Federalists supported it. They recognized that the new governmental structure would prevent ordinary individuals from gaining election to Congress and would thereby exclude local interests from actual representation in that body. Thus, Samuel Chase objected to the Constitution because 'the bulk of the people can have nothing to say to it. The government is not a government of the people' because only the rich and well born would gain election to Congress.²⁶ Members of the minority in the Pennsylvania ratifying convention recognized that because of the election process 'men of the most elevated rank in life will alone be chosen. The other orders in the society, such as farmers, traders, and mechanics, who all ought to have a competent number of their best informed men in the legislature, shall be totally unrepresented.' In a large state such as Pennsylvania, representatives 'from the mode of their election and appointment will consist of the lordly and high minded; of men who will have no congenial feelings with the people, but a perfect indifference for,

25. Quoted in Jackson Turner Main, *The Antifederalists: Critics of the Constitution, 1781-1788* (Chapel Hill, 1961) on 131-134.

26. Quoted in *ibid.*, 132.

and contempt of them. . . .' Melancton Smith in New York remained convinced 'that this government is so constituted that the representatives will generally be composed of the first class in the community, which I shall distinguish by the name of the *natural aristocracy* of the country.'²⁷

The feelings of resentment that boiled over in such statements sprang from a widespread sense of suspicion, hostility, and fear of a hierarchy of outsiders that permeated Antifederalism. The Constitution instituted a government of strangers; worse yet, those strangers were gentlemen who not only had no fellow feeling with simple folk but felt superior to them. Those suspicions had deep roots among the common people. Old Amos Singletary during the Massachusetts ratification convention, voiced the defiant hostility and deep insecurities of the ordinary localist: 'These lawyers, and men of learning and moneyed men, that talk so finely, and gloss over matters so smoothly, to make us poor illiterate people swallow down the pill, expect to get into Congress themselves; they expect to be managers of this Constitution, and get all the power and all the money into their own hands, and then they will swallow all us little folks like the great *Leviathan*; yes, just as the whale swallowed up Jonah.'²⁸

Although the leadership of the Antifederalists included a number of prominent gentlemen—Rawlins Lowndes, George Mason, Richard Henry Lee, George Clinton—these men opposed the Constitution out of a philosophical and intellectual commitment to state government. Antifederalism itself emerged from much more visceral emotions. As much a social and a cultural phenomenon as a political movement, it sprang from a reactionary localism that pervaded American society. Because of the nature of such localistic feelings in the mid-1780s, however, Antifederalism suffered severe handicaps. Antifederalist ideas had yet to coalesce into a coherent political ideology. Consequently, in one state con-

27. The above quotations appear in Cecilia M. Kenyon, ed., *The Antifederalists* (Indianapolis, 1966), 48, 55-56, 383.

28. Quoted in *ibid.*, 1.

vention after another, Antifederalists found themselves bullied, browbeaten and embarrassed by their polished, articulate, unified Federalist opponents.

Still, the Antifederalist cause enjoyed tremendous popularity. Even without many brilliant debaters, clever parliamentarians, newspaper editors, or men of great individual prestige within their ranks and little, if any, organization, the Antifederalists suffered only the narrowest of defeats. As long as the powerful localism that permeated American society remained disparate, inchoate, and disconnected from its natural roots within the New World environment, it could not overcome the well-articulated ideology of the Federalists.

The struggle over the Constitution did, however, produce a number of paradoxes and ironic consequences. The Federalists, elitists who wished to create a powerful centralized government controlled by the rich and the well born, constantly spoke in terms of the sovereignty of the people: they presented their case in the most democratic and radical language. Under this guise they managed to create a government that answered their needs. Or so they imagined. In 1787, they had little reason to believe that the Constitution might also provide a national framework that could, under changed circumstances, just as easily accommodate the rise of a national democracy. The Antifederalists, on the other hand, employed an archaic and anachronistic libertarian language of communalism in their arguments against the Federalists. And yet, in actuality, their behavior belied such an ideal.

In the final analysis, an embryonic individualism was clearly tearing at both the hierarchical and localist bases of authority represented by the Federalists and the Antifederalists. On the one hand, capitalistic economic practices of the Federalists eroded the social foundation underlying their traditional perception of a natural aristocracy. On the other, the egalitarianism characteristic of localism became increasingly manifested in an individualistic, self-interested behavior that fragmented the communal substructure of localism. As Federalists looked backward to an eighteenth-cen-

ture ideal of politics and society, Antifederalists groped toward a new conception of society and politics more consonant with the transformations taking place within American society.

By the last decade of the eighteenth century social, economic, and demographic forces, fueled by Revolutionary republicanism's emphasis upon equality and popular sovereignty, created a cultural ferment within American society. Not only did such ideas support ordinary farmers, mechanics, and shopkeepers in their belief that they were the equal of gentle folk, it prompted them to challenge the idea that a gentlemanly few should provide direction and order for their society. Quite spontaneously individuals and groups in a variety of areas—religious, economic, social, political—actively began to challenge the authority of mediating elites within their society. They opposed any manifestation of social distinction as well as all societal bonds that did not reflect a purely voluntary allegiance. Given such attitudes, any claim by an elite to speak for all the people appeared increasingly anachronistic and self-serving. Such a crisis in confidence in an ordered, hierarchical society gave rise to fundamental demands for reform in religion, the law, commercial activities, and politics. Slowly, then, in an erratic and piecemeal fashion, ordinary workingmen, preachers, and political leaders began to articulate their feelings and, bit by bit, to provide form, content, and legitimacy to their pent-up frustrations.²⁹ Their efforts would culminate in the creation of a political movement to oppose hierarchy in America—a movement that finally formed the inchoate democratic and egalitarian impulses of localism into a powerful national ideology.

This movement, Jeffersonian Republicanism, emerged from

29. For excellent discussions of these feelings, see Maxwell Bloomfield, *American Lawyers in a Changing Society, 1776-1876* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976); Richard Ellis, *The Jeffersonian Crisis: Courts and Politics in the Young Republic* (New York, 1971); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984); Gordon Wood, 'Evangelical America and Early Mormonism,' *New York History*, 61 (1980), 360-86; Nathan O. Hatch, 'The Christian Movement and the Demand for a Theology of the People,' *Journal of American History*, 67 (1980), 545-567.

the unsettling effect Federalist actions of the 1790s had on those Americans bred upon an egalitarian localism. Such people, accustomed to viewing the world about them in terms of a country perspective, had an innate suspicion of distant governments and the men who wielded power within them. And yet localism itself was undergoing a fundamental and crucial transformation. By the 1790s, the forces of change spawned by the Revolution had begun to affect great portions of the American population previously isolated from the mainstream. As commerce and the market economy—with their self-interestedness, individualism, and urge for profit-making—penetrated interior areas, localism's emphasis upon communal egalitarianism gradually became transmuted into an emphasis upon individual success and popular control of government. The old communal distrust of higher authority, the fear that these authorities would erode local customs and doom provincial life styles to extinction gradually gave way to a personal distrust of all social distinctions and elites that would impede the ordinary individual's personal quest for profit and status.

Like so many Americans, those who became Republicans inherited the same Revolutionary ideology as their countrymen. They, too, integrated a strong belief in Locke's insistence upon the protection of property and the good of the people as the only legitimate end of government with a libertarian fear of power and the enslavement of the people at the hands of corrupt officeholders. Along with these ideas, however, Republicans emphasized a peculiar perspective that coursed through the essays and books of a number of English writers—most particularly James Burgh, John Cartwright, Richard Price, and Joseph Priestley. Embedded within the Lockean and libertarian language employed by these men was a cluster of ideas that carried particular meaning for those people who were becoming restive with social distinctions and elites. These authors claimed that mankind was capable of unbounded improvement. Such improvement would come about, however, only in the least constraining civil, political, and religious environment. Progress resulted not from the benevolent pater-

nalism of an elite, they contended, but from the separate efforts of free and equal individuals. Such beliefs hinged upon the related ideas that all men were by nature created free and equal and that whatever distinctions arose in society should result from talent, intelligence, hard work, and merit, not from wealth, status, or birth. Thus, when Cartwright thundered out in *Take Your Choice* that 'All are by nature free; all are by nature equal: freedom implies choice; equality excludes degrees in freedom' he meant the same as James Burgh when the latter exclaimed: 'All honours and powers ought to be personal only, and to be given to no individual, but such as upon scrutiny, were found to be men of such distinguished merit, as to deserve to be raised to distinguished places, though sprung of mean portents.'³⁰ From such a perspective monarchy, aristocracy, and other civil or religious establishments thwarted the natural proclivity of men of talent and ability to prosper and to change society for the better. A natural civil society rewarded talent and merit; artificial manipulations of the political economy by government created privileged elites and spawned corruption and degeneracy.

In the face of beliefs such as these, Hamiltonian fiscal measures created a restlessness among many Americans, a restlessness stemming from grave doubts about the effect such governmental actions would have upon the future development of the young republic. These doubts prompted a searching critique of the role of government in the political economy of the nation and searing indictments of Federalism from a wide variety of individuals.

From the time debates first began in Congress over Hamilton's financial program until the election of Thomas Jefferson to the presidency in 1800, individuals from all regions of the nation and from a wide diversity of callings attacked Federalists and their policies in the most vitriolic manner. In his *Letters Addressed to the Yeomanry of the United States* George Logan, wealthy Pennsylvania landowner and physician, wondered how long Americans would

30. John Cartwright, *Take Your Choice! Representation and Respect: Imposition and Contempt* (London, 1776), 21; James Burgh, *Political Disquisitions* (2 vols, London, 1774), 2: 89-90.

suffer themselves 'to be duped by the low cunning and artifice of half-informed Lawyers and mercenary Merchants' who obtained the passage of legislation sacrificing the productive members of society to 'indolent characters desirous of lucrative government offices supported by the labor of their fellow men.'³¹ John Taylor of Caroline, author of a number of widely circulated pamphlets, declared the National Bank to be the 'master key of that system that governs the [Federalist] administration.'³² Hamilton, 'by administering gilded pills to influential characters,' stimulated 'exorbitant wealth, to provide an aristocracy as the harbinger of monarchy.'³³ In Taylor's mind, 'the *natural interest* . . . ought exclusively to legislate' within a truly republican society.³⁴ This was not the case under the Federalists. By means of their program, 'Government, though designed to produce national happiness, will be converted by a paper junto simply into a scheme of finance. Instead of dispensing *public welfare*, it will become a credit shop only, to dispense *unequal wealth*.'³⁵

Taylor's charge that the Federalists perverted the natural republican order within America by means of self-serving legislation received ample support. In a 1794 pamphlet entitled *A Review of the Revenue System adopted by the First congress under the Federal Constitution*, William Findley, Republican congressman from western Pennsylvania, saw a 'systematic plan for subverting the principles of government' that was creating 'an aristocracy formerly unknown in the United States.' He wondered if 'changing the state of society by a rapid increase of wealth in the hands of a few individuals, to the impoverishing of others, by the artificial aid of the law; the instituting a bank, with an enormous paper capital, and connecting it in such a manner with the government as to be

31. George Logan, *Letters Addressed to the Yeomanry of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1791). The quotations appear on 8, 11, 25, 32.

32. John Taylor, *An Enquiry into the Principles and Tendency of Certain Public Measures* (Philadelphia, 1794), 7.

33. John Taylor, 'Franklin Essay,' *National Gazette* (Philadelphia), March 2, 1793.

34. Taylor, *Enquiry*, 56.

35. John Taylor, *Definition of Parties, or the Political Effects of the Paper System Considered* (Philadelphia, 1794), 7.

a center of influential, ministerial, and speculating influence; and to promote this influence, filling both Houses of Congress with bank directors or stockholders, [was] a national blessing?' All Findley could see was the creation of a 'consolidated government' that would create a 'wealthy aristocracy' by means of 'the funding system without labor.'³⁶

In the pages of his newspaper, *The Farmer's Letter*, and his magazine, *The Scourge of Aristocracy*, William Lyon kept up a constant attack upon Federalists and their policies. Lyon had arrived in America from Ireland as an indentured servant, joined Ethan Allen's Green Mountain Boys, and later became a Republican congressman from Vermont. In his mind, Federalists constituted 'a set of gentry who are interested in keeping the government at a distance and out of the sight of the people who support it.'³⁷ By means of a 'phalanx of falsehood and corruption' they intended to foster an 'aristocratic junto' bent upon 'screw[ing] the hard earnings out of the poor people's pockets for the purpose of enabling the government to pay enormous salaries' and 'vie with European Courts in frivolous gaudy appearances.'³⁸

Republican leaders in urban areas hammered at these same themes. George Warner, a sailmaker in New York City, declared in a Fourth of July oration (1797) that all citizens must acquaint themselves with political affairs and keep a vigilant eye on their leaders. He spoke particularly to 'tradesmen, mechanics, and the industrious classes of society' who for too long had considered 'themselves of *TOO LITTLE CONSEQUENCE* to the body politic.' Far too often, voters had been attracted to men of wealth. Instead, voters needed to turn to 'men of *TALENTS* and *VIRTUE* whatever their situation in life may be.' If this were not done and the present administration was not altered, 'the dividing line between the *rich* and the *poor* will be distinctly marked, and the *latter*

36. William Findley, *A Review of the Revenue System adopted by the First Congress under the Federal Constitution* (Philadelphia, 1794), 48, 52, 41, 63, 110, 127.

37. Quoted from the pages of *The Farmer's Letter* in Aleine Austin, *Matthew Lyon: 'New Man' of the Democratic Revolution, 1749-1822* (University Park, Penn., 1981), 80.

38. *Scourge of Aristocracy*, 2 (1798): 21; 2 (1798): 46-47.

will be found in a state of vassalage and dependence on the former.³⁹

When Federalists mocked the sort of ideas expressed by Warner, Republican leaders responded with sharp newspaper essays tauntingly signed 'one of the swinish multitude' or 'only a mechanic and one of the rabble' that berated Federalists as men who 'despise mechanics because they have not snored through four years at Princeton.'⁴⁰ The most adept of the urban Republican authors, Benjamin Austin, articulated the egalitarian distrust of elites forming within the cities in a series of essays published under the title *Constitutional Republicanism in Opposition to Fallacious Federalism*. In these essays, Austin declared that governments were 'organized for the happiness of the whole people; no exclusive privileges are the birth-right of particular individuals.' Unfortunately, under the Federalists—a "'self-created" body of dictators'—the bulk of the Americans constituting 'the industrious part of the people' had fallen prey to an 'aristocratical junto' and were forced to support 'in idleness a set of stock jobbers.'⁴¹

The Republican cause in America gained two articulate spokesmen when the English radicals Thomas Cooper and Joseph Priestley settled in Northumberland, Pennsylvania in 1794. Cooper's essays, *Political Arithmetic* and *Political Essays* and Priestley's *Letters to the Inhabitants of Northumberland* became Republican campaign literature in the election of 1800. Both men spoke out in the strongest terms in favor of social, political, and economic freedom. Legislation that artificially altered the wealth of the nation in favor of a privileged few subverted republicanism and smacked of Old World decadence and corruption.

The most violent attacks upon Federalism appeared in the pages of Republican newspapers and periodicals that flourished

39. George Warner, *Means for the Preservation of Political Liberty* (New York, 1797), 13-14.

40. Quoted in Alfred Young, 'The Mechanics and the Jeffersonians: New York, 1789-1801,' *Labor History* 5 (1964), 247-76.

41. Benjamin Austin, *Constitutional Republicanism in Opposition to Fallacious Federalism* (Boston, 1803), 3, 16, 33.

throughout the 1790s. From the time that Madison and Jefferson established Philip Freneau as the editor of the anti-administration *National Gazette* in 1791, a burgeoning number of Republican editors bluntly attacked Federalist men and measures in direct language aimed at an ever-increasing political constituency.⁴² Indeed, one editor promised his readers to review the history of the United States in such a way as to reveal the 'origins, progress and alarming influence of that system in iniquity, robbery, bribery, and oppression, hypocrisy and injustice, which may be traced from the attempt of Alexander Hamilton to palm off upon the [Constitutional] Convention a monarchical constitution, through the corrupted mazes of funding and banking, stock-jobbing, and speculating systems, down to the alien and sedition laws, standing army and navy of the present day.' Another exhorted his fellow Americans to 'keep up the cry against Judges, Lawyers, Generals, Colonels, and all other designing men, and the day will be our own.' A fellow editor saw American society divided into those who worked and those who 'live on the stock of the community, already produced, not by *their labor*, but obtained by their *art and cunning*.' In his mind these were 'for the most part merchants, speculators, priests, lawyers and men employed in the various departments of government.'

How effective Republican rhetoric was in influencing the broader populace is difficult to determine. That its primary themes permeated the thoughts of an untutored Massachusetts farmer, William Manning, is clear. In 1798, Manning addressed a lengthy essay, 'The Key to Libberty,' to 'all the Republicans, Farmers, Mecanicks, and Labourers in America' under the signature of a 'Labourer.'⁴³ Claiming to be a 'Constant Reader' of newspapers, Manning, in his own simple, straightforward manner articulated his perception of the condition of the republic. For him, good

42. The following quotations appear in Donald H. Stewart, *The Opposition Press of the Federalist Period* (Albany, 1969), 103, 389, 390.

43. This essay, which was sent to the *Independent Chronicle* in Boston, but never published, is reprinted in its entirety in Samuel Eliot Morison, 'William Manning's *The Key to Libberty*,' *William and Mary Quarterly* 13 (1956): 202-54. The quotations appear on 211, 217, 220.

government meant the protection of life, liberty, and property—a society in which ‘the poor man’s shilling ought to be as much the care of government as the rich man’s pound.’ A free government was one ‘in which all the laws are made judged & executed according to the will & interest of a majority of the hole peopel and not by the craft cunning & arts of the few.’ The failure of free states in the past had always resulted ‘from the unreasonable demands & desires of the few,’ who could not ‘bare to be on a leavel with their fellow creatures, or submit to the determinations of a Lejeslature whare (as they call it) the Swinish Multitude are fairly represented, but sicken at the eydea, & are ever hankerig & striving after Monerca or Aristocracy whare the people have nothing to do in maters of government but to seport the few in luxury & idleness.’

The assault upon Federalism that joined such men as John Taylor of Caroline, the southern slaveholding planter; Matthew Lyon, the aggressive man on the make on the Vermont frontier; William Findley, the self-made political leader from western Pennsylvania; Benjamin Austin, the urban agitator; the radical British emigres, Joseph Priestley and Thomas Cooper; and the simple Massachusetts farmer William Manning produced no quintessential Republican. Rather, a variety of elements throughout the nation—agrarian and urban entrepreneurs resentful of the power and prestige of urban merchants who controlled the Atlantic trade, ambitious, unconnected individuals no longer willing to defer to entrenched elites, radical republicans innately suspicious of the tyranny of a centralized government, old republicans fearful lest the advent of widespread commercial development bring a loss of American virtue, groups caught up in the egalitarianism spawned by the Revolutionary attack on the corporatism of the old order, independent producers frustrated with the elite control and social restraints characteristic of an ordered, paternalistic hierarchy—joined to form Republican coalitions against Federalism.

If Republicanism incorporated a diverse constituency, its adherents spoke an incredibly uniform language. Whether urban rad-

icals or southern gentry, they employed similar ideas, principles, and even rhetoric. This resulted from the fact that their Republicanism drew upon several traditional modes of thought and incorporated ideas long familiar to Americans into its perception of political and social development. Lockean liberalism and classical republicanism provided the essential underpinning for this political persuasion. For Republicans, though, Locke's concept of individual liberty promoted an affective individualism—a concern for one's fellow man and the larger community—rather than the possessive individualism associated with philosophers like Thomas Hobbes. Republicanism thus emphasized the individual, but not as a figure freed from social restraints and set against one another and the community.

Such a perception of the individual blended nicely with the Republican belief in the classical republican tenets of virtue and citizenship. In order to protect an always fragile civic virtue, classical republicanism called for vigilant, well-informed, independent citizens to guard against corruption in government—particularly the executive branch—and to maintain private virtue. Individuals found meaning and identity in their lives through service that promoted the common good. Such republicanism, of course, saw a constant struggle by advocates of liberty to fend off the forces of power—standing armies, unnecessary and unfair taxes, ministerial influence, special privilege, and corrupt elites. In a word, Republicanism instilled a fear of centralization. Centralization came to stand for the corruption of a natural society by an avaricious, depraved set of government officials intent upon subverting republican society in favor of a ministerial government or aristocracy.

The Republican fusion of liberalism (individual needs) and republicanism (communal values) into a well-integrated cultural system rested upon the insights of the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith. Indeed, the Republican persuasion cannot be understood apart from the thought of Adam Smith, particularly his *The Wealth*

of Nations (1776).⁴⁴ In that book Smith elucidated a mysterious force—an ‘invisible hand’—working within a free market economy that could foster virtuous community life by transmuting the actions of the least virtuous individual into socially beneficial behavior. Throughout *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith sought to establish the viability of a free market economy. He did this not to promote unrestrained self-interest in the ruthless pursuit of wealth, but instead to encourage by means of rational methods the magnanimous regard or sympathy that men naturally felt for one another that he first posited in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). There Smith articulated what he felt to be the true nature of man. For him, man was, above all else, a passionate creature motivated principally by an inner drive for self-preservation. Individuals also possessed an innate sympathy for their fellow man—an instinctive, irrational desire to share their pain and to feel genuine concern for their welfare. Passion, therefore, and not reason, created all that was beneficial in society. Consequently the good of society resulted not from rational instruction and guidance at the hands of an educated and responsible elite but instead from arranging public policy in such a way as to release every man’s true psychological nature, to free his instinctual drives so that they might develop in socially creative directions.

Such philosophic breadth underlay *The Wealth of Nations* and contributed to its popularity. The sharply critical tone with which Smith presented his message, however, and the conclusions he drew from his philosophic stance accounted for the book’s incredible appeal and broad impact. In a brilliant synthesis of economic ideas that were everywhere in the air by the middle of the eighteenth century, Smith provided penetrating observations on the vast transformations sweeping across the economic and social

44. The following discussion of Adam Smith draws principally on Joseph Cropsey, *Polity and Economy: An Interpretation of the Principles of Adam Smith* (The Hague, 1957) and Robert Kelley, *The Transatlantic Persuasion: The Liberal-Democratic Mind in the Age of Gladstone* (New York, 1969).

life of mid-eighteenth-century England. These changes had resulted in great fortunes for some and grinding poverty for many. *The Wealth of Nations* offered a trenchant critique of the system that resulted in such maldistribution of wealth and such terrible social disorder.

In Smith's mind, British devotion to mercantilism stifled economic growth and created terrible inequities. All this stemmed from a 'benevolent' system based upon a belief that an aristocratic few, in their infinite wisdom and disinterestedness, knew best how to direct the government so as to produce a vibrant and prosperous economy and society. In the ostensible interests of producing a greater Britain, those in power created navigation laws, privileged monopolies, bounties, tariffs, and a great variety of excise laws. From Smith's perspective this whole panoply of commercial regulations resulted entirely from the greed and monopolizing impulses of British merchants and manufacturers. Under the guise of promoting national strength and prosperity these groups had gained vast governmental subsidies for commerce and industry. The entire system was, therefore, not only ridiculous and corrupt, but counterproductive as well. Only when Britain removed all her commercial restrictions and stultifying mercantile shackles would true prosperity be possible. Trade should be allowed to follow its natural course, not be artificially diverted by subsidies, bounties, and tariffs into channels extremely profitable for a few but seriously damaging to the overall national economy.

A belief that legislators must know their own limitations also formed a basic element in Smith's critique. Governments must base their decisions on natural facts and thus enable a 'system of natural liberty' (Smith never employed the term 'capitalism' or 'laissez faire') to emerge. Any economic system based on natural facts must, above all, take into consideration man's passion for self-preservation. If a national leadership was incapable of creating vast nationwide economic programs, individuals in their own more limited environments would always know what policies best suited their interests. A prosperous, productive society could not result

from the government's trying to teach people virtue; it could, however, flourish if each citizen's desires could be released to take whatever direction that individual felt necessary.

To achieve such a free and open society would require a profound change in the social order. Instead of benevolent rule by a 'disinterested' elite of wealth, status, and education, government would pass into the hands of a natural aristocracy of men who would inevitably emerge from the middle and lower orders once all artificial social and economic restrictions had been removed. Through talent and ability such men would rise to positions of leadership. These men would be peculiarly suited to govern not because of any natural virtues they possessed but because of their ambition, drive to succeed, and dogged determination to hang onto whatever they had gained. Each man's drive for achievement served as a counterweight to every other man's and resulted in a balance that prevented anarchy or tyranny. For Smith, no distinct interest or particular order in society manifested a special capability to govern. Instead, those participating in government would be a heterogeneous mix of individuals who, as a consequence of their talent and ability, had naturally risen above the others. Thus, *The Wealth of Nations* offered a clarion call for a pluralistic and entrepreneurial society and state.

Smith's book provided Republicans with a clear blueprint, a grand design, for creating a genuine republic in America. They must foster a natural social and economic order within the new nation. Smith also identified the enemies of such a society as self-aggrandizing elites subsidized by unfair laws. For Republicans, then, nothing could be clearer. Federalist-inspired legislation was corrupting America in the exact manner Smith so graphically described in his analysis of the devastating effects of mercantilism upon English society. Unjust laws diverted the natural course of trade and commerce in favor of a privileged few at the expense of the larger community. If they wished to preserve a natural order in America, Republicans had no alternative but to oppose the Bank of the United States, a funded debt, excise taxes, tariffs, bounties,

and other commercial measures demanded by the Federalists in their effort to reproduce an aristocratic European culture within the young republic.

More important, Adam Smith allowed Republicans to speak and write with a confidence and optimism grounded in what they considered to be irrefutable authority. In *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith articulated inchoate beliefs that had permeated American society for decades. Republican pamphleteers had long employed ideas drawn from Locke and the Commonwealthmen, but Smith harmonized these into a coherent social philosophy. Most of all, though, his ideas integrated the egalitarian and communal impulses of American localism just as they were breaking apart. Citizens could now find community through their own individual efforts. In many ways, then, individualism was becoming the ultimate localism.⁴⁵

The Republican persuasion that evolved in the last decade of the eighteenth century emphasized individual rights as well as popular control of the government.⁴⁶ For Republicans, the Revolution secured individual autonomy rather than individual freedom. Thus they stressed the affective individualism combining individual independence with moral responsibility to the community so prominent in the thought of John Locke and Adam Smith. They also assumed that the Revolution established for all time that the ultimate decision-making process in government could safely rest with the people. In their minds, Federalism threatened these assumptions. American republicanism suffered from the corrupt, aristocratic tendencies of Federalist measures. Rather than their society being characterized by an open-endedness, where autonomous individuals remained free to change their society for the better, it seemed to be developing in a closed, elitist manner under

45. Lockridge suggests this in *Settlement and Unsettlement*, 51.

46. My discussion of Republicanism draws upon Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York and London, 1984); Drew McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, 1980); and John Zvesper, *Political Philosophy and Rhetoric: A Study of the Origins of American Party Politics* (New York, 1977).

Federalist control. Consequently, Republicans felt they must effect two integrally related revolutions: one economic and one political—both premised upon the idea of equality. The first could be accomplished only by expanding commercial opportunities for a larger number of people in such a way as to promote greater prosperity and equality of opportunity. The other demanded the destruction of an elitist, deferential politics in favor of one that fostered the active participation of all men. Within its broadest parameters, then, the Republican persuasion held out the promise to Americans of autonomy as economic individuals and the right to equal political participation as individual citizens.

Republicans worked to create a revolutionary theory of government integrating a program of economic development with a social policy for nation-building. Believing that industrious, self-reliant citizens represented the natural economy of America, Republicans made the commercial prosperity of ordinary individuals the primary economic base for a democratic, progressive America. In their minds, a dynamic economy that incorporated the majority of Americans would nurture the release of human potential long held in check by artificial governmental restraints. This belief underlay the Republican conception of a democratic republic: a fusion of economic freedom and political democracy. Such a perception rested upon a faith in the innate capabilities of man, an optimistic hope for a new political and social order in America, and a dedication to the natural forces within that society.

For their part, Jeffersonians considered republicanism superior to all other forms of rule precisely because it prevented governments from restraining the free acquisition of wealth. In a republic, all men should enjoy an equal opportunity to acquire a comfortable livelihood. This would be the case, however, only so long as government did not acquire significant powers to control or influence the economic behavior of its citizens. Here many Republicans voiced the classical libertarian's fear that increasing governmental power inevitably meant encroachments upon the realm of liberty. The more powerful the government, the stronger the exploiters

and the weaker the producers. The best hope for a republic remained the constant free access of its citizens both to their government and to the means of getting a living. Consequently, Republicans firmly believed that republican government endured only so long as opportunities for the acquisition of property remained available to an ever-increasing population. By 'property' they most always meant land. Widespread landholding and the predominance of farming in the economy remained essential to republicanism; they created precisely the sort of individual industriousness that spawned the virtue upon which all republican states depended.

The worldwide demand for grain that emerged in the early national period provided a practical material base upon which to build this vision of America. The Republican hope that ordinary men might free themselves from economic and political subservience to their social superiors rested upon the bright promise of commercial agriculture. Rising prices, resulting from an increasing world demand for staples, held out the promise of a flourishing trade in American foodstuffs that could easily be produced on family farms. Rather than stagnating in subsistence farming, the independent husbandman could partake in the spreading economic prosperity. Indeed, the prosperity of the ordinary farmer could now become the basis for a democratic, progressive America. Free land, free trade, and scientific advances in agricultural methods spelled progress and prosperity for Americans, progress and prosperity open to all rather than limited to a special few.

Republicans integrated the virtuous yeoman ideal of classical republicanism with Adam Smith's self-interested individual to form a radical new moral theory of government and society. Dissolving society into its individual human components, they invested each with a fundamental economic character and a natural capacity for personal autonomy. They endowed the independent producer with the moral qualities long associated with the virtuous citizen extolled by classical republicanism. The purpose of government in such a society was to foster an environment that liberated man's self-actualizing capabilities.

The Republican perception of government and society that evolved throughout the decade of the 1790s inevitably brought its advocates into conflict with Federalists—thoroughly eighteenth-century-minded men who clung to a traditional belief in hierarchy. For their part, Republicans believed that self-interest provided every man with the capability of making rational decisions regarding his own personal needs; thus the traditional contention that a gentlemanly elite had a special capacity for governing lost all relevance. Self-interest, as viewed by the Republicans, became a powerful leveling force; it placed all men—ordinary as well as genteel—upon the same level of autonomy and competency.

In this regard the emergence of Democratic-Republican societies that emphasized the right of all people, regardless of their station in life, to participate in the political affairs of their society particularly offended the genteel.⁴⁷ The activities of these societies, however, paled in comparison to the Republican newspapers that sprang up rapidly to spew their venom at will upon genteel individuals of character and status. Federalist gentlemen could accept vituperative attacks upon themselves from men of their own social status; this had been an integral part of Anglo-American political life for over a century.⁴⁸ To endure such vitriol from social inferiors and to have such open criticism and abuse spread throughout the lowest orders of society, however, created terrible indignation and alarm. In the hands of ordinary individuals—Republican editors and members of Democratic societies—such abusive language could seriously damage the public character of governmental leaders and consequently undermine the entire political order. Therefore, convinced of the malicious and traitorous intent of Republican editors, Federalists enacted the Sedition Law (1798) to enable the government to stifle such dangerous elements within American society.

The passage of the Sedition Law inaugurated a discussion be-

47. See Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800* (Westport, Conn., 1976), 3, 7, 8, 11, 26 for material illustrative of the attitudes of these societies.

48. Gordon Wood offers a perceptive analysis of the struggle over the Sedition Law in 'The Democratization of the American Mind,' in *Leadership in the American Revolution* (Washington, D.C., 1974), 63-88. The following discussion draws upon Wood's insights.

tween Republicans and Federalists that went to the heart of their cultural conflict. Federalists clung doggedly to the traditional perception of the universal and constant nature of truth. Truth could always be determined by well-educated, rational men. Republicans argued that a great variety of opinions regarding both the principles of government and elected officials circulated at any given time and their truth or falsity could not be definitively determined by any judge or jury, regardless of how reasonable and intelligent they might be. Thomas Jefferson declared that all opinions, no matter whether true or false, malicious or benevolent, should be allowed to 'stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it.'⁴⁹ Madison echoed these sentiments when he observed that 'some degree of abuse is inseparable from the proper use of every thing'; consequently, it was 'better to leave a few of its noxious branches, to their luxuriant growth, than by pruning them away, to injure the vigor of those yielding the proper fruits.'⁵⁰

Such sentiments left Federalists incredulous. The notion that all free individuals should be allowed to voice their opinions, no matter how scandalous or abusive, remained beyond their ken. Republicans, who had come to believe that a gentlemanly elite no longer had an exclusive right to voice political opinions, not only believed that true and false statements should be tolerated equally, but that all members of society should be equally free to articulate them. Instinctively, Republican theorists viewed public opinion in the same manner as the free-market economy: just as an invisible hand led a great variety of competitors in the marketplace to promote an end that was not part of the conscious intent of any of those involved, so too might the efforts of a great variety of individual minds—intellectual competitors in a free market—create an end result, public opinion, that was not the conscious creation

49. Quoted in *ibid.*, 81.

50. *The Kentucky-Virginia Resolutions and Mr. Madison's Report of 1799* (Richmond, 1960), 63.

of any single group or individual but rather sprang spontaneously from the collective efforts of all men.

By 1800, then, the cultural forces of the previous decades were becoming clearly delineated: Federalists staunchly defended the traditional past and Republicans championed an optimistic, open-ended future. Federalists, in spite of all their promotion of overseas commerce and a national banking structure, remained doggedly skeptical of the emergence of a liberal society, with its culture of self-restrained ambition. Instead, they adhered desperately to a paternalistic world of hierarchy and social order that prompted them to view the emergence of the self-made man with a mixture of fear and disdain. Their encouragement of commercial growth, too, remained entrenched within traditional channels as well. While playing a major role in the expansion of the Atlantic trade that took place in the 1790s, they remained inclined to justify their efforts in the customary and limited terms of mercantilism: expanding profits among merchant groups would revitalize and thereby perpetuate the existing social structure and thus strengthen the republic's chances in the international struggle for survival. Their progressive economic programs were meant to reinforce a conservative social world.

In opposition to Federalism, the followers of Thomas Jefferson called upon the egalitarian spirit of Revolutionary republicanism to protect American society from dangers they perceived in Federalist control of government: the corruption of American society emanating from detestable Old-World 'court' politics, the social inequities resulting from a mercantilist political economy, and the artificial and unfair restraints imposed upon ordinary men by an elitist paternalistic society. Republicans held out the promise of a dynamic republic of independent producers, a nation in which hard-working individuals—farmers, artisans, mechanics, and entrepreneurs—would be able to attain economic independence and thereby strengthen their capacity to fulfill their role of virtuous political citizens. They offered the vision of a virtuous republic in which a limited government would respect the political integrity

and influence of independent citizens, where social freedom would allow autonomous individuals the free exercise of their talents, and where a political economy based on increasing production and territorial expansion would reward the industry and energy of the independent producer. Against the paternalistic and centralized power represented by the Federalists, the Republicans pitted their image of individual opportunity and social mobility. By so doing they endowed their political economy of self-interest with the same moral force to bind the community together that they bestowed upon a social order comprised of autonomous individuals. Independent producers would be the backbone of a virtuous nation. Their vision, grounded in the optimistic hope that the seemingly limitless resources of their young nation could support the prosperity of all citizens, promised an equal commitment to material and moral progress under a government where the ultimate authority for all decision-making rested with the sovereign people. Thus, with the victory of Thomas Jefferson in 1800, Republicans committed the nation to support individual autonomy and popular sovereignty. In this dual commitment lay the roots of modern American democracy.

What kind of society would emerge from the democratic roots being formed in the late eighteenth century was unclear in 1800. Even by that time the perception of personal autonomy and individual self-interest had become so inextricably intertwined that few Republicans had any clear comprehension of the entrepreneurial and capitalistic nature of the social forces shaping their lives.⁵¹ Under the pressure of rapidly-changing socioeconomic conditions the autonomous republican producer—integrally related to the welfare of the larger community—gradually underwent a subtle transmutation into the ambitious self-made man set against his neighbors and his community alike. Ironically, then, eighteenth-century republican traditions formed a fertile seedbed within

51. Steven Watts, *The Republican Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790–1820* (Baltimore, 1987).

which nineteenth-century liberal commitments to possessive individualism, a competitive ethos, and economically self-interested politics would flourish.

By incorporating as its own the dynamic spirit of a market society and translating it into a political agenda, Republicanism had unself-consciously developed a temper and a momentum that would carry it beyond its original goals. Indeed, even by 1800 personal independence no longer constituted a means by which to ensure virtue; it had itself become the epitome of virtue. The process by which this took place was invariably complex, quite often confused, and more often than not gave rise to unintended consequences. Its ultimate outcome resulted, nonetheless, in profound changes in American culture in the nineteenth century.

Republicanism spawned a social, political, and cultural persuasion that quite unintentionally, but nevertheless quite certainly, created the framework within which the nineteenth-century liberal commitments to interest-group politics, materialistic and utilitarian strivings, and unrestrained individualism emerged. Simultaneously, however, Republicanism also fostered a rhetoric of selfless virtue—of honest independence devoted to the communal welfare—that obscured the direction in which American society was moving. By promoting the desire for unrestrained enterprise indirectly through an appeal to popular virtue, Republicanism helped produce a nation of capitalists blind to the spirit of their enterprise. Consequently, the Republican movement enabled Americans to continue to define their purpose as the pursuit of traditional virtue while actually devoting themselves to the selfish pursuit of material wealth. Irresponsible individualism and erosive factionalism replaced the independent producer's commitment to the common good. Still, the free enterpriser, who by the 1850s would include publicly chartered business corporations, fell heir to the Republican belief that an independent means of production attached a man's interests to the good of the commonwealth. Entrepreneurial fortunes became an investment in the general welfare and the entrepreneur himself, freed by the Amer-

ican belief in virtuous independence, could proceed unencumbered by self-doubts in his attempt to gain dominion over a society of like-minded individuals who could only applaud his success as their own.⁵²

The Republican triumph in 1800 rested upon a belief attributed to Thomas Jefferson that 'the public good is best promoted by the exertion of each individual seeking his *own* good in his own way.' This victory initiated a brief period—a 'Jeffersonian moment'—that witnessed the virtues of both republicanism and eighteenth-century liberalism integrated into a cohesive political philosophy offering the bright promise of equal social and economic advancement for all individuals in a land of abundance.⁵³ That the moment was brief stands less as a critique of the individuals who combined to bring Jefferson to the presidency than it is a comment on the forces that impelled them, forces over which they had little control and, perhaps, even less understanding. Just at the time when an ideology finally emerged that translated the realities of the American environment into a coherent social philosophy, those very realities carried American society far beyond the original goals of the Jeffersonian movement as they transmuted eighteenth-century American republicanism into nineteenth-century American democracy.

52. Rowland Berthoff, 'Independence and Attachment, Virtue and Interest: From Republican Citizen to Free Enterpriser, 1787-1837,' in Richard Bushman, et al., *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin* (Boston, 1979).

53. James Kloppenberg, 'The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse,' *Journal of American History* 74 (1987): 9-33.

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