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TAMING THE REVOLUTION

1780–1785

"THE PEOPLE FIRED WITH A JUST RESENTMENT [WILL] RISE LIKE A whirlwind and spurn them from the earth and take the power again into their own hands."[1] When Boston newspaper readers scanned this crackling, ominous sentence in the spring of 1780, they no doubt knew that it related to the upheaval of Massachusetts farmers who were struggling with the lack of specie to pay their taxes, the fear of losing their land at auction to satisfy their debts, and continued resentment at the constitution that stripped many of them of the right to vote. Also in everyone's mind was the dismal state of the war effort—British successes in their southern campaign, a Continental army suffering massive desertions and close to disbanding for lack of supplies, and virtually insolvent state and congressional governments. In Congress and in some state legislatures, this had brought conservatives to the fore—men who had disliked radical democratic reform since 1775 and were now moving energetically to curb the power of the people. Their "presiding genius," as one historian has called him, was Robert Morris of Philadelphia, the very man despised by ordinary people for his careful attention to amassing wealth and his faint concern for the lower orders.[2]

A weak central government was what radical revolutionaries wanted, because they prized popular and local control of taxation and the power of an-

nually elected legislators to prevent the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the elite. After all, the Revolution began in reaction to taxes imposed from afar by the English government, where power concentrated in king and Parliament had brought arbitrary rule and invasions of the rights of citizens. But now, for many war-weary Americans, stronger government and new measures to restore fiscal stability seemed unavoidable. Writing in September 1780, when the war against Great Britain for independence was still in doubt and the nation's public credit and fiscal policy were in a state of collapse, the precocious twenty-three-year-old Alexander Hamilton, Washington's aide-de-camp and a skillful writer, pinpointed how conservatives saw the Continental Congress hobbled in prosecuting the war: "The [Articles of] Confederation . . . gives the power of the purse too entirely to the state legislatures. It should provide perpetual funds, in the disposal of Congress, by a land tax, poll tax, or the like. All imposts upon commerce ought to be laid by Congress and appropriated to their use. For without certain revenues, a government can have no power. That power which holds the purse-strings absolutely must rule."[3]

From 1780 until the end of the war in 1783, conservative delegates, led by merchants and lawyers from mid-Atlantic states, gained the upper hand in Congress. Their cardinal idea was to yoke the self-interest of the wealthy, particularly merchants, money holders, and large landowners, to the nation's problems. According to Morris's unsentimental philosophy, it was reasonable to reward the wealthy, even lavishly, to save the nation. Only sound money, taxation to retire discredited paper currency, and a laissez-faire posture toward merchant activity could salvage the struggling republic. This reform also required "a clean sweep of such radical paraphernalia as tender laws, price regulation, embargoes, and anti-monopoly laws," all of which had been passed at the height of radical influence to ease the pain of the worst positioned people of the nation.[4] Taming the social and political radicalism of the Revolution was equally important to the Morris circle.

Along with obliterating populist restrictions, Congress, in Morris's view, must find a reliable source of revenue to restore financial stability and pay for continuing the war. This meant a federal tax of some kind. Of taxes available, one on imported goods became the tax of choice. Though the delegates of twelve states agreed to levy a federal import duty of 5 percent on imported goods, called the "impost," by summer 1782, Rhode Island's delegates scuttled it. Morris predicted disaster; but to the rescue came huge loans and gifts

from Holland and France and sharp reductions in the numbers of state militia and Continental troops—from a height of 90,000 in 1776 to 45,000 in 1780 to 29,000 in 1781. In 1782 and 1783, when Washington conducted only small military operations, these numbers fell to 18,000 and 13,000, greatly reducing war expenditures. Morris's administrative efficiency, along with his ability to get the states to contribute more of their quotas of men and matériel than before, also helped get the nation through until peace came in 1783.

Conservatives were smitten with Morris's acumen, particularly in stabilizing the currency, restoring the credit of the nearly bankrupt nation, and laying the foundations for a strong central government with moneyed men playing key roles. Like trying to purge a sick patient with strong emetics, the physician-financier Morris would administer heroic doses of fiscal reform that might hurt the patient grievously in the short run but rebuild the sick man's constitution for a healthy future.

Morris's policies have been debated vigorously by historians and economists ever since the early 1780s. Doubtless, he satisfied conservatives at the time—most of them known as tepid revolutionaries and some as outright Tories—and rewarded them with policies that would presumably solve the fiscal problems besetting the emerging nation. But Morris's policies attracted sharp criticism from those certain that his grand schemes rewarded the few while wounding the many. By March 1784, when he resigned his post, Morris had aroused great fear that he had built an "Aristocratical Junto" that would "destroy the Liberties of this Country," as Samuel Osgood wrote John Adams, at that time abroad in England.[5]

Robert Morris had contempt for ordinary people, intensified by the Fort Wilson firefight in late 1779. His leathery insensitivity to their struggles and his horror of a government by, of, and for what New Englanders called "the body of the people" provided the adrenaline that sparked his energy. Nothing satisfied Morris more than blunting the radical impulses of the previous years and discrediting the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776. As a man of massive wealth, hugely increased during the depths of the war, he was supremely insensitive to the poor. A former slave trader and present slave owner, he had little sympathy for African Americans. As for Native Americans, his interest was only in the profits he could accrue by speculating in their lands. He was the embodiment of "the acquisitive spirit of wartime Philadelphia," as Thomas Doerflinger, the main historian of the city's revolutionary-era merchants, has said. It was not "virtue and patriotism" that motivated him but

"getting and spending." More than almost anyone else among the Quaker city's shrewd merchants, he "was somehow able to manipulate the fiscal reins of government with one hand while multiplying his fortune with the other."[6] Many believed he was the nation's wealthiest man. Nobody better represented the growing separation between wealth and want. And no leader seemed more intent than Morris to roll back the popular movements that had been essential to precipitating and prosecuting the Revolution.

While the "reign of the financier" played itself out from 1780 to 1784, the vast majority of the many peoples of America had neither the leverage nor the ability to concoct a scheme for rescuing the nation from the collapse of the fiscal system. Their day-to-day life was far more mundane than Morris's and often precarious. Many were still involved in the war with England, both directly and indirectly, with some still in the firing zone while others were disengaging from the war and trying to recoup their livelihoods, reknit their families, and think about how government rewarded or punished them at the state and local levels. It is the ideas, actions, and hopes of the mass of people below Robert Morris that concern us in this chapter. The challenges in the last years of the war differed from group to group, whether African Americans, Native Americans, fighting men, women, or ordinary people of the North and South. But all of them inhabited a world a vast distance from that of Robert Morris.

"Band of Brotherhood"

The glow from the Yorktown surrender that suffused both American civilians and men in uniform in late 1781 did not end the struggle of Washington's army of the poor to get the minimal treatment they had fumed over for six years: promised wages, food sufficient to sustain life, shoes, socks, shirts, and blankets to ward off frostbite, and decent medical treatment. All of these unmet rudimentary requirements of military service haunted the lives of the soldiers as much as they had in 1776 or 1778. The main part of Washington's Continental army marched north through Baltimore, Philadelphia, and New York to Newburgh, where they set up winter quarters in 1781–82 along the Hudson. Other parts of the army moved south, including the unit of the Pennsylvania Line commanded by Brigadier General Anthony Wayne, to fall under the command of Rhode Island's Major General Nathanael Greene. By April 1782, now in Georgia to free the interior from

British control, the men were back to a state of rags and short rations. Putting up placards, the men asked: "Can soldiers do their duty if clad in rags and fed on rice?"[7]

As had happened so many times before, such conditions led to mutiny. This time disaffection hatched a plan to abduct General Greene and hold him hostage until he met the mutineers' demands. But one day before the planned abduction, several soldiers betrayed the mutineers. Singling out Sergeant George Goznall of the Second Pennsylvania as the ringleader, Wayne promptly ordered his execution. Wayne and his motley crew of Pennsylvanians marched southward, where they joined Georgia militiamen. For months, Wayne's men kept the British pinned down in Savannah while skirmishing with Creek warriors supplied by the British. After the British evacuation of Savannah in July 1782, Wayne's contingent moved northward to join General Greene in an attempt to recapture Charleston. When the British withdrew from the South's largest seaport town in December 1782 with four thousand Tory refugees and thousands of slaves, everyone knew that the war was winding down. All Americans now awaited the outcome of peace negotiations in Paris.

Winding down meant that the effusions of blood were nearly over; yet the nation's army still seethed with righteous anger. In the three months before word finally arrived from Paris that the peace treaty had been signed, Washington, his generals, and the Continental Congress had to cope with two crises precipitated by the unmet promises made to the "band of brotherhood," as Private Joseph Plumb Martin called the men of the Continental army.

Just two days before the dispatches from Congress's peace commissioners arrived on March 12, 1783 (having taken fourteen weeks to cross the Atlantic in stormy seas), with the glad tidings that a preliminary treaty had been hammered out, officers in the main part of Washington's army, huddled in winter quarters at Newburgh, New York, addressed their commanding officer with bitter words born of exhausted patience. If Congress failed to rectify their grievances, they would refuse to disband and "retire to some unsettled country," presumably the western frontier. In this event, Congress would lose its army, the nation would be disgraced, and the mutineers would retire with their weapons as a disaffected thorn in the side of the shaky new nation.

Washington's sympathy for his men was real, for he knew intimately about their starvation, the rags that substituted for uniforms, the insufferable ar-

rears in pay, the plunging value of the paper money they intermittently received, Congress's dallying on the promised lifetime half-pay pension for officers, and the uncertainty of the promised land bounties. He remembered well how he had warned Congress on at least seven occasions the previous autumn about the dark mood of the officers "about to be turned into the world soured by penury and what they call the ingratitude of the public, involved in debts, without one farthing of money to carry them home, after having spent the flower of their days and many of them their patrimonies in establishing the freedom and independence of their country, and suffered everything human nature is capable of enduring on this side of death."[8] He also knew that a delegation of officers, headed by New York's Major General Alexander McDougall, had presented the same grievances to Congress two months before to no avail. He probably did not know that Major John Armstrong, Jr., aide-de-camp to General Horatio Gates, had composed the address. But Washington had never wavered in the conviction that the military must always subordinate itself to civil authority. Yet this time, it was his officers who had promised mutiny and withdrawal from the nation, with the inference that the enlisted men under them would follow.

Although the so-called Newburgh Conspiracy seemed to unite the officers with their bedraggled enlisted men, the officers were mostly tending to their own interests. They knew that state and congressional support of the army, limited and insufficient from the beginning, had wavered even more as the fighting drew to a close and everyone awaited the peace treaty. They also knew about the public displeasure with the promised lifetime half-pay pensions for officers, first offered by Congress in 1778 for those who pledged to serve for the duration of the war. Most of the officers were from New England, and they knew that their delegates to Congress had heatedly opposed pensions, regarding them as the foundation of a military-caste anathema to a republic. Such sentiment opposing pensions of any kind for officers grew through 1782 and early 1783, especially among ordinary people struggling under heavy tax burdens.

For Private Martin's "family of brothers," the officers' issue of pensions was not theirs, because nobody at any time had promised them more than a land bounty and monthly wages. Martin never even mentioned the officers' threatened mutiny at Newburgh in his journal of six years' service in the Continental army. What the privates of the army wanted was to go home, but to go home with the promised pay and bounties. General Henry Knox

advised Washington of this as the commander in chief composed his address to the officer mutineers: "Will the three years men who came out upon large bounties and their wages secured by a private contract at home tarry a moment after they are told by Congress they may go?" Washington's mind was made up by Knox's advice to ask the officers, "When the soldiery forsake you, what will be your situation? Despised and insulted, by an enraged populace, exposed to the revenging hand of justice, you will then flee to caves and dens to hide yourselves from the face of day and of man."[9]

In deciding to face the officers down, Washington may also have understood that those in Congress who were campaigning for a stronger central government with the power to impose taxes, led by Robert Morris, were collaborating with some of his officers to threaten civil authority. This would frighten members of Congress who had resisted—and killed—the plan to empower Congress to levy impost taxes in order to rescue the nation from its fiscal crisis. The officers' threat to revolt was just what Robert Morris and the so-called nationalists of his group wanted. Nothing could be more effective than a group of revolting Continental army officers seeking greater central powers. It was reminiscent, as historian E. James Ferguson, has said, of Oliver Cromwell's Roundheads, "who, in an analogous situation during the Puritan Revolution [of the mid-seventeenth century] had turned on Parliament and subdued it when an attempt was made to disband them without pay."[10]

Sizing up the situation with plenty of advice from Henry Knox, the old Massachusetts warrior who had been at Bunker Hill and rose to major general of artillery, Washington defused the powder keg masterfully. Rather than trying to ferret out the precipitators of the officers' revolt and execute them on the spot, he called their bluff and turned an ugly situation to his advantage. Gathering together officer representatives of each regiment on March 15, he read an address he had labored over for nearly five days. "Gentlemen, by an anonymous summons, an attempt has been made to convene you together," he began; "how inconsistent with the rules of propriety! How unmilitary! And how subversive of all order and discipline, let the good sense of the army decide." Here he drew on eight years of leadership and the fund of reverence he had built up for his unwavering service to the nation. In a stroke of genius, he then pulled a letter from his pocket from a member of Congress promising that the officers would not be left in the lurch. Taking his glasses from his uniform to read the letter, he told the men "that he had

grown grey in their service and now found himself growing blind." One of the officers present remembered later that "there was something so natural, so unaffected, in this appeal as rendered it superior to the most studied oratory. It forces its way to the heart, and you might see sensibility moisten every eye."[11] Washington then made his plea—rather more of an order—that the men desist, trust him to promote the interests of his army with Congress, and condemn in their own way Major Armstrong's threatening address. The shamefaced officers withdrew, patriotism won the day, and Washington prevailed.

Three months after the Newburgh Conspiracy, with all of America still awaiting the final peace treaty, the second crisis arose. This time it was enlisted men, not officers, who mutinied—and not high on the Hudson River but in the shadow of the statehouse in Philadelphia where Congress met. Barracked on the edge of the city were hardened veterans of the Continental army supplemented by new short-term Pennsylvania recruits who had never seen a redcoat or fired a gun at the enemy. Their barrack mates also included several hundred men of the Maryland Line. By June 1783, most of the men were grumbling over having received no pay since the previous December. Now their officers told them that Congress had ordered Washington's army to disband and that the Pennsylvania Line would be furloughed and paid in "Morris notes"—certificates to be redeemed at a later point by Congress's superintendent of finance. If this promise-to-pay arrangement rankled, worse still was the order to issue pay notes only for February, March, and April, with January, May, and June payments held in abeyance.

Hearing this, the soldiers revolted. On June 13, 1783, sergeants from each unit joined to send a remonstrance to Congress demanding their full pay. Hearing of this, hundreds of other men of the Pennsylvania Line, barracked at Lancaster, marched to Philadelphia to join their comrades. Two elected captains of the combined units carried their case to the statehouse, where the Continental Congress and the state's executive council had conducted the war for nearly seven years. Years of broken promises and shabby treatment brought tempers to a boil. Surrounding the statehouse on June 21, the insurgent soldiers gave Pennsylvania's president, Joseph Reed, twenty minutes to answer their demands. Without immediate satisfaction "they would turn . . . an enraged soldiery on the [state's Supreme Executive] Council . . . and do themselves justice."[12]

Inside the statehouse, Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council fenced

with Congress. Who would rescue the dignity of the American government? Some volunteered the Philadelphia militia. But the militia's sympathies lay with the soldiers, not Congress or the state executive council. The militia captains told the council that "it would be imprudent" to call on the radical militia—a polite way of saying that the militiamen would just as soon shoot congressional delegates as turn against their brothers. Held hostage, the nation's government searched for a way out of the impasse. Congress's delegates were hardly heartened by the "thousands of citizens" gathered to witness the standoff "crying 'stand for your rights!'" as a veteran of the Pennsylvania Line later recalled.[13]

In midafternoon, the soldiers permitted the nation's government to file out of the statehouse and repair to their lodgings. Unable to gain assurances that it could be protected, Continental Congress president Elias Boudinot glumly ordered Congress to leave the city and move forty-five miles north to Princeton, New Jersey. After receiving promises that they would get full pay, the mutineers melted away. The affronted Continental Congress did not return to Philadelphia thereafter until 1790.

For the mutinous militiamen in midsummer of 1783 and their compatriots furloughed two hundred miles to the north at Newburgh and West Point, the future was as uncertain as it had been when they joined the army of the dispossessed. Private Joseph Plumb Martin remembered it vividly in his old age. He recalled how his captain summoned the men on June 11, 1783, just a few days before the mutiny in Philadelphia, and announced that the men were free to go—not completely released from service but furloughed, which meant "permission to return home, but to return to the army again if required." The soldiery now began to say their goodbyes, as much "a band of brotherhood as Masons and, I believe, as faithful to each other," remembered Martin. Some left "the same day that their fetters were knocked off." Others remained a day or so "to get their final settlement certificates, which they sold to procure decent clothing and money sufficient to enable them to pass with decency through the country and to appear something like themselves when they arrived among their friends."[14] Many of the soldiers trekked down the Hudson River to New York City, just as those furloughed in Philadelphia walked ninety miles north, where "a very great number," with only Morris notes of dubious value in their hands, "offered themselves up for employment" on British ships preparing to evacuate the British army, American Loyalists, and several thousand former slaves who had fought under the ban-

ner of George III. It was much the same for the First Regiment of Rhode Island. Ragged and penniless, many of them lame and sick, they tramped northward from Yorktown for nearly four hundred miles to reach their homes.[15]

Martin recounted the bitterness in their mouths as their "warworn weary limbs" carried them home. "When the country had drained the last drop of service it could screw out of the poor soldiers, they were turned adrift like old worn-out horses, and nothing said about land to pasture them upon." They had been promised one hundred acres of bounty land, and Congress did indeed designate "soldiers' land" in the Northwest Territory. But Martin recalled that "no care was taken that the soldiers should get them. No agents were appointed to see that the poor fellows ever got possession of their lands; no one ever took the least care about it, except a pack of speculators who were driving about the country like so many evil spirits, endeavoring to pluck the last feather from the soldiers." Martin was right that "the soldiers were ignorant of the ways and means to obtain their bounty lands, and there was no one appointed to inform them." Looking back many years as he reflected on his discharge from the army and his "band of brotherhood," he summed up: "The truth was, none cared for them; the country was served, and faithfully served, and that was all that was deemed necessary. It was, soldiers, look to yourselves, we want no more of you."[16]

Apart from the bounty lands, the final cruelty to the soldiers was how the states and Congress handled the resolution of their wages, the problem that had figured so importantly in the recurrent mutinies. Private Martin remembered the terms exactly: six and two-thirds dollars a month in Continental currency, to be paid monthly. But payments stopped in August 1777, according to his recollection, and the payment wouldn't have mattered much after that when a month's salary by 1778 "was scarcely enough to procure a man a dinner." Congress, he believed, "was ashamed to tantalize the soldiers any longer with such trash [promissory notes], and wisely gave it up for its own credit." As for specie payment, he received one month's pay only once, on the march to Yorktown in the summer of 1781. "The country was rigorous in exacting my compliance to *my* engagements to a punctilio, but equally careless in performing her contracts with me; and why so?" Martin asked bitterly. His answer went to the heart of one of revolutionary radicalism's main formulations: "One reason was because she had all the power in her own hands, and I had none. Such things ought not to be."[17]

The men of Rhode Island's First Regiment must have agreed heartily with Martin's stinging comments. Black and white soldiers alike, once back in their home states, tried to get their unpaid wages. For some black soldiers, this struggle went on while former masters attempted to reenslave them. The pay came by dribs and drabs. Some soldiers were still trying to get the balance of their pay in 1789.[18] This would leave thousands of men, many with families, disgruntled, disillusioned, and resentful—a reservoir of men inclined to seek radical solutions to their problems.

Peace Without Peace

As the war in the South reached a spasmodic conclusion in Georgia and the Carolinas after the British surrender at Yorktown in October 1781, war in the West hardly stopped at all. Nor did the 1783 Treaty of Paris bring peace to the interior Indian nations. It might have been otherwise. A few important white leaders experienced in negotiating with Indian chiefs in the *pays d'en haut* thought that peace was achievable on the western frontier if state governments could restrain white land encroachers. Such a man was George Morgan, a former Indian trader who represented the Continental Congress at Pittsburgh from 1776 to 1779. Morgan had worked skillfully with village chiefs to keep Delawares, Munsees, Wyandots, Mingos, and many of the Shawnee neutral for the first three years of war. Contributing to this neutrality was the work of pacifist Moravian missionaries among the Delaware. But Morgan always worked against the grain of frontiersmen. As early as 1777, he reported the frontiersmen's "ardent desire for an Indian war on account of the fine lands those poor people possess." Pennsylvania frontiersmen were hell-bent "to massacre some who have come to visit us in a friendly manner and others who have been hunting on their own lands, the known friends of the Commonwealth."[19]

In 1778, Americans cudgeled the Delaware into an alliance. Promised an adequate supply of trade goods and seeing an opportunity to wrest independence from their Six Nation overlords, Quequedegatha (George White Eyes to white Americans) and other headmen agreed to the Treaty of Pittsburgh, which they believed only committed them to giving free passage to American troops who would build a fort to protect the Delaware villages in Ohio country. The chiefs took an interest in what proved to be a cynical American proposal that the Delaware might join the United States as a fourteenth state and

even have representation in Congress. The treaty also included a first clause that spoke nobly "that all offences or acts of hostilities by one, or either of the contracting parties against the other, be mutually forgiven and buried in the depths of oblivion, never more to be had in remembrance."[20] This clause would soon assume a strange visage.

After the treaty signing, American negotiators insisted that the Delaware warriors join the fight against the British. The rebuilt fort at Pittsburgh became the base from which Brigadier General Lachlan McIntosh, commander of the Western Department, launched an offensive in November 1778. George White Eyes joined the expedition to guide them, though his warriors refused. He never returned. American officers claimed he died of smallpox, but the historical record shows that he was murdered by the militiamen and secretly buried. "Thus was lost," writes historian Randolph Downes, "one of the most trusting Indian friends the American people ever had."[21]

Most Delawares now went over to the British side. Some still hoped for supplies from the Americans and maintained their allegiance. But another treacherous blow by the Americans in 1780 washed away the remaining pro-American sentiment. Captain Daniel Brodhead, commander at Fort Pitt and veteran of Sullivan's scorched-earth campaign two years before, shattered the Treaty of Pittsburgh in April 1781 with an unprovoked attack on the central Delaware town of Coshocton. After razing the cluster of Delaware villages, Brodhead's men executed all but four male Delaware prisoners and tomahawked a Delaware peace emissary from behind as he was negotiating with Brodhead.[22]

By 1781, the bloodlust of the frontiersmen seemed unquenchable. It was true that renegade young Delaware warriors had killed whites, especially those encroaching on their lands. "The backcountry settlers, however," writes historian Richard White, "lumped all Indians together and the results proved disastrous for American Indian policy. Indian haters killed or alienated the very men who were willing to act as alliance chiefs or mediators for the Americans. . . . Indian hating did not concentrate on enemies. Indian haters killed Indians who warned them of raids. They killed Indians who scouted for their military expeditions. They killed Indian women and children. . . . Murder gradually and inexorably became the dominant American Indian policy, supplanting the policies of Morgan, of the Congress, and of the military."[23]

Indian hating and the genocidal policy that it embodied came to a gory

climax as winter descended in late 1782 at the Moravian mission village of Gnadenhutten ("Huts of Grace") on the banks of the Muskingum River in eastern Ohio. German immigrant missionaries had worked among the Delaware people since the 1740s and had seen them through the ravages of the Seven Years' War and Pontiac's Rebellion. As in these earlier conflicts, the Delaware fragments wished only to remain pacifists and devout Christians as the American Revolution ran its course. But when most of the nonpacifist Delawares reluctantly allied with the British near the end of the war, British agent Matthew Elliott insisted in the autumn of 1782 that the Christianized Delawares and their missionaries, John Heckewelder and David Zeisberger, withdraw to the west, where on the banks of the Sandusky River in Ohio country the British and their Indian allies could protect them.[24]

During a difficult winter, the nearly starved Moravian-led Delawares received permission to return through winter snow to their abandoned villages to gather unharvested corn for their people. Before reaching their villages, they ran into a militant Delaware war party that had murdered an American woman and child. Telling their pacifist brethren that they were expecting American militiamen to pursue them, the war party left the village. Hot behind them, Pennsylvania militiamen led by Captain David Williamson fell upon the group of Christianized Indians—twenty-eight men, twenty-nine women, and thirty-nine children—at Gnadenhutten and those brought in from the neighboring Christian village of Salem. Insisting that the pious Delawares had been part of the killing of the American woman and child, Williamson's men voted to execute them, with a minority protesting unsuccessfully that these were harmless Christians who had adopted the ways of whites. The Delawares clung together, sang hymns, and prayed through the night.

On the morning of March 7, 1782, in a grisly replay of the Paxton Massacre of nineteen years before, militiamen dragged the helpless Delawares by twos and threes to a cabin later described by the militiamen as "the slaughter house." One of the militiamen bludgeoned fourteen Indians with a cooper's mallet before turning the job over to another soldier. "My arm fails me," he said. "Go on with the work. I have done pretty well." Williamson's men scalped the corpses and divided the trophies. Burning the village to the ground, they confiscated scores of Indian horses. Only two of the ninety-six Delawares survived to spread the word about the massacre. Hearing a report of the massacre, the Pennsylvania legislature condemned the barbarous
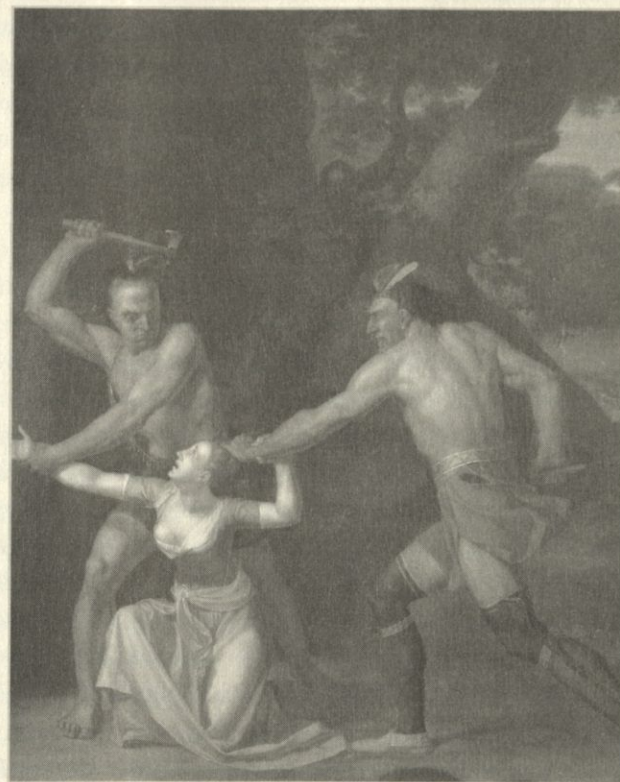
John Vanderlyn, whose life-size portraits of George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette hang in the U.S. House of Representatives to the wonderment of millions of visitors, probably had more impact on Americans with his 1804 painting of the murder of Jane McCrea near Saratoga in 1777. McCrea was the fiancée of a soldier in British general John Burgoyne's army. Vanderlyn shows the ferocious, muscular warriors mercilessly poised to scalp and kill the defenseless young woman (who was, in fact, felled by American bullets). Heralded as an important work of art as Jefferson was finishing his first term as president, The Murder of Jane McCrea *seared into the American mind the stereotype of the Indian as a remorseless savage and justified the dispossession of Indian land in the new republic. No Native Americans could paint their version of savagery, but the historical record is clear that the number of Indian women slaughtered by American warriors far exceeded the deaths of white women like Jane McCrea.*

behavior of the militiamen as "an act disgraceful to humanity." But as would happen so many times on the westward-moving frontier, no action was taken against the commanding officer or the men under him. Neither the Pennsylvania legislature nor the Continental Congress saw fit to investigate the matter. The motto "the only good Indian is a dead Indian" had moved from a generalized feeling among white frontiersmen to unofficial state and federal policy.

The Delawares aligned with the British always had uneasy relations with their Christianized brethren, but the massacre at Gnadenhutten intensified their hatred of the American frontiersmen. Their appetite for revenge was further whetted a few weeks after the Gnadenhutten bloodbath when frontier militiamen continued their rampage of ethnic cleansing on an island near Fort Pitt, where a small group of friendly Delawares were encamped. They had served the Americans at Fort Pitt as hunters and guides; two had been commissioned by the Americans as captains. Driving off a small regular army contingent guarding them, the militiamen killed all but two of the Delawares.

Ten weeks later the Indians got their revenge. Emboldened by the slaughter of pacifist and friendly Delawares, the militiamen under Captain David Williamson wanted to continue westward to wipe out what they regarded as the nests of Ohio country Indians who had repeatedly raided white settlements. This time they were joined by a few regulars from Fort Pitt and a surgeon's mate. Also with them was the personal aide of Fort Pitt's new commander, Brigadier General William Irvine—a Russian nobleman, Count Rosenberg, who had fled his country after a dual, disappeared into the American wilderness, and taken the American name of John Rose. Commanding the men was an intimate friend of George Washington's, Colonel William Crawford, who had fought in the Seven Years' War at Washington's side and was Washington's land agent in the transmontane Appalachians. Nearly five hundred short-term militiamen voted for the officer to lead the expedition, and Crawford nosed out David Williamson, who became second in command.

Heading west in late May 1782, most of them with horses, controlling the militiamen became a test of Crawford's leadership. Unruly, untrained, and opportunistic, the men were difficult to keep together in any kind of disciplined formation for the ten days it took to move west 150 miles from Fort Pitt to the Sandusky plains, where the main Indian towns were located. The slow progress proved fatal. Shadowing the Americans, Indian scouts knew

exactly where the enemy was each day, and the Americans' dawdling pace allowed time for Butler's Rangers to move into the area to join the Delaware, Wyandot, and Mingo warriors of the Sandusky region. They encircled the Americans and engaged them on June 4, 1782. In a brisk skirmish, Indian warriors killed or wounded twenty-four militiamen. Retreating into the woods, the Americans spent the next day arguing about a strategy before deciding to attempt a nighttime retreat. Although they were supposed to withdraw in a column, the undisciplined frontiersmen disintegrated at the first burst of Indian fire. Fleeing eastward for the Ohio River, the panicked militiamen fell by scores to pursuing Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo, and Butler's Rangers. Among those captured was the expedition's commander, William Crawford. All of the built-up hatred, from the Delaware attempts to remain neutral to the assassination of George White Eyes to the Gnadenhutten massacre, fell upon Washington's lifelong friend. Tormented, scalped, and burned at the stake, he perished before the eyes of John Knight, the American surgeon, who escaped as he was being taken to a nearby Shawnee town for execution. It took only a year before Knight's story of Crawford's grisly death came off the press in Philadelphia, to become another key piece of literature feeding indiscriminate Indian hating. The story of the Gnadenhutten massacre of women and children, meanwhile, went untold.

Joseph Brant and the militant Iroquois had ended the war almost as it began: raids against Americans in the Mohawk River valley, along the Hudson River, and even west into Pennsylvania and the Ohio country. Recovering from Sullivan's village-razing expedition, they had once again gained the upper hand from the Mohawk to the Ohio, even obliging the Americans to abandon Fort Stanwix. Through the eyes of Brant, the Iroquois and their allied tribes had more than held their own, a judgment confirmed by historians since. When the Indians heard that the treaty of peace signed by British and American signatories made not the slightest mention of Iroquois interests and ceded all Indian land east of the Mississippi to the Appalachians to the United States, they were thunderstruck. The British fought hard in the peace negotiations to protect the property of the American Loyalists who had held constant to the king, but they made no attempts to bargain on behalf of their Indian allies. In one of the lamest rationalizations in the history of treaty making Lord Shelburne, head of George III's ministry, defended the preliminary articles of peace by explaining that "the Indian nations were not abandoned to their enemies; they were remitted to the care of neighbors, whose

interest it was as much as ours to cultivate friendship with them, and who were certainly the best qualified for softening and humanizing their hearts." "Almost at the lowest tide of effectiveness of its Indian policy," writes Downes, "the vanquished [Americans] had become the victors."[25]

For British officers and Indian administrators in Iroquois country, the British abandonment of their dark-skinned allies was a horrendous embarrassment. Mohawk chief Kanonaron, known to the English as Captain Aaron Hill, upbraided the British commander at Fort Detroit that the Iroquois "were a free people subject to no power on earth." They "were the faithful allies of the King of England, but not his subjects," and therefore George III had "no right whatever to grant away to the States of America their rights or properties without a manifest breach of all justice and equity."[26]

Peace with England actually emboldened American frontiersmen to continue their war against Native Americans. George Rogers Clark launched his second expedition against the Shawnee on November 1, 1782, *after* word had arrived of agreement on the articles of peace. The interior tribes sought help from the British, still at Fort Detroit, and it was in the British interest to support them because they hoped to control the immensely profitable fur trade of the upper Great Lakes area after the war, by itself the main reason for retaining Canada. But in October 1783, Congress announced that it was master of all land east of the Great Miami and Maumee rivers from Lake Erie to the north and the Ohio River to the south—a great part of the unconquered lands of the Delaware, Wyandot, Miami, and Shawnee. One historian writes that "for imperial aggressiveness and outright effrontery this document takes a front rank in the annals of American expansion," and describes it as "nothing less than an open declaration of war."[27]

Fearing that such a policy would cement an uprising of a general Indian confederacy, Congress pursued what has been called a "policy of modified aggression." Yet frontiersmen were still swarming into Indian territory as a treaty with the Iroquois and their allied tribes was called for in September 1784. The Iroquois chiefs had little choice but to meet with the Americans in September and October of 1784 at Fort Stanwix to sign what they believed would be an honorable peace with both sides laying down their weapons. Yet the Fort Stanwix treaty was anything but honorable. The Iroquois, writes Anthony Wallace, "would lose over the council table the lands and the political sovereignty that white armies had been unable to seize by force." Congress operated as if the Iroquois were conquered people who had lost the war and

therefore should be treated as subjects. From the American viewpoint, the British had lost and therefore their Indian allies surrendered their sovereignty, and the ownership of their soil, south of the Great Lakes and east of the Mississippi River. Thus, at Fort Stanwix, the United States would "give" peace to the Iroquois and allow them such pieces of land as they deemed fit. As subjects, they might be "civilized" as the salving water of Christianity gradually washed away their inferiority. Most whites, especially frontiersmen, doubted Indians could be improved or that they could coexist, though some, missionaries in particular, urged the effort. Washington gave blunt expression to the prevailing view: that one way or another Indians must withdraw from the settlers' path once England had surrendered its right to the vast trans-Appalachian west: "The gradual extension of our settlements will as certainly cause the savage as the wolf to retire; both being beasts of prey though they differ in shape."[28]

The Fort Stanwix treaty of 1784 was purportedly signed between Congress and the Iroquois Confederacy, including the Six Nations' western dependents and allies—the Shawnee, Wyandot, Chippewa, Delaware, and so forth. As Wallace describes it, "negotiations were held at gunpoint, hostages were unexpectedly demanded and taken by the United States for the deliberate purpose of coercion of the Indian delegates; the tone of the Continental commissioners was insulting, arbitrary, and demanding; and two Indians given up by the Seneca to be punished according to white law were lynched by a mob shortly after the treaty." Joseph Brant stormed out of the conference in disgust remarking, "we are sent in order to make peace and . . . we are not authorized to stipulate any particular cession of land."[29]

Some of the Iroquois war chiefs resisted the draconian terms dictated by the American commissioners, but the Iroquois were badly split and in a nearly impossible situation. Arthur Lee, one of the commissioners, lectured the chiefs that "You are a subdued people; you have been overcome in a war which you entered into with us, not only without provocation, but in violation of most sacred obligations."[30] All of this was fiction. But with their options severely limited, the chiefs yielded most of their land. Not unexpectedly, the chiefs found that the treaty was deemed unacceptable back in their villages. Yet uncertain of British military support, the Iroquois tacitly accepted it. In 1785, American commissioners forced similar treaties at Fort McIntosh on the western allies of the Iroquois whereby the Wyandot, Ottawa, Chippewa, and Delaware surrendered all but fragments of eastern and southern

Ohio—reservations in the wilderness—where they "were to remain on sufferance."[31] The War of Independence and the war to reform American society had reached climaxes simultaneously with the war of national expansion. Joseph Brant, who knew his Mohawk people could never return to the Mohawk River valley, began paving the way for his people to move to the Grand River region of southern Canada.

The story in Indian country to the south was much the same: murderous attacks carried out by small groups becoming genocidal state policy. Reeling from wartime losses and the collapse of their British allies by 1782, the Cherokee were nearly helpless in fending off the heavily armed frontiersmen pouring onto their lands. Even Dragging Canoe's Chickamauga secessionists wanted peace. But a negotiated peace was not what Virginian and Carolinian frontiersmen wanted. Some of their leaders, such as Virginia's governor, Benjamin Harrison, believed that "Indians have their rights and our justice is called on to support them. Whilst we are nobly contending for liberty, will it not be an eternal blot on our national character if we deprive others of it who ought to be as free as ourselves?"[32] But frontiersmen wanted a dictated peace. In the fall of 1782, John Sevier, as much an Indian hater as George Rogers Clark, led an expedition to raze the Chickamauga towns. In January 1783, the aged Cherokee chief Oconostota gave a talk before the Americans at the Cherokee holy town of Chota. Almost blind and about to die of tuberculosis, one of the Europeans' lethal microbial bullets, the chief spoke of how "All the old warriors are dead. There are now none left to take care of the Cherokees, but you and myself, and for my part I am become very old. And this beloved town of Chota belongs to you."[33]

Nonetheless, Chickamauga Cherokees held out hope that the British, with only Saint Augustine as a foothold in the Lower South, would continue the fight. Some Cherokee warriors trekked northward to live among and fight alongside the Shawnee as the war came to an end. But resistance to the land-hungry Americans was almost suicidal in the face of huge odds—some 150,000 Native Americans were outnumbered sixteen to one by the end of the war. In ceding huge portions of their homelands to the Americans in the Treaty of Hopewell in November 1785, the Cherokees hoped for fixed and durable boundaries beyond which the Americans would not cross. This was not to be.

South of the Cherokee, the Creek confederacy—a loose coalition of town-centered people whose local interests usually trumped loyalty to the Creek

people at large—struggled too with the closing stages of the war. Most of them had refused to join the militant Cherokees during the war and maintained their neutrality until 1778, much sobered by the repeated devastation of Cherokee villages by American expeditions. But as was the case for so many other Indian nations, choices amidst the maelstrom of war hung on maintaining supply links—to either the British or the Americans—and the fear of the swelling white population always eyeing fertile Indian lands.[34] George Galphin, Georgia's most important Creek Indian trader and frontier leader, exerted himself prodigiously to keep the Creeks supplied; but keeping frontiersmen from tangling with Creeks in hopes of gaining their land required just as much of his time and talent.

The British capture of Savannah in December 1778 and their incursions into the up-country toward Augusta, gathering Loyalist support along the way, swung most of the Creeks to the British side. Accompanying the British was Alexander McGillivray, son of the Scottish immigrant Indian trader Lachlan McGillivray, who had married a Creek-French woman from the important Wind Clan. McGillivray was to become the Joseph Brant of the South—thoroughly bilingual and bicultural, and firmly aligned with the British because of his hatred of the voraciously land-hungry white settlers. Joining the British at Savannah with seventy Creek warriors, McGillivray was part of the plundering army that carried off slaves and captured Augusta in September 1780. This victory, however, was actually the beginning of the end. When the Spanish capture of Pensacola and Mobile in spring 1781 dried up the Creeks' source of British trade goods, the tables turned. The 1782 campaigns of Generals Nathanael Greene and Anthony Wayne mopped up British resistance, which ceased with their evacuation of Savannah and Charleston. The war had thus turned against the side the militant Creeks had chosen, leaving neutralists equally vulnerable, as had been the case with accommodationist Cherokee and Delaware.

At the Treaty of Augusta in western Georgia in November 1783, compliant pro-American and neutralist Creek chiefs tried to buy peace in the manner of Cherokee and other tribal chiefs facing land-avid frontiersmen. By ceding eight hundred square miles between the Ocmulgee and Oconee rivers, the Creeks hoped for harmony and security. Alexander McGillivray, their recently appointed chief, knew better. Like Dragging Canoe of the Cherokees, McGillivray refused to participate in peace talks, counting on the British to remember Creek support. Hearing rumors that the British would

cede East Florida to the Spanish, Chief Fine Bones of the principal Creek town of Coweta asked the British commanders at Saint Augustine, "Why will they [the British] turn their backs on us and forsake us? We never expected that men and warriors, our friends, would throw us into the hands of our enemies. . . . If the English mean to abandon the land we will accompany them. We cannot take a Virginian [Creek term for Americans] or Spaniard by the hand. We cannot look them in the face." Gaining power as chief spokesman for the Creek confederacy, McGillivray echoed the thought, complaining bitterly that "this nation gave proofs of unshaken fidelity and at the close of it to find ourselves betrayed to our enemies and divided between Spaniards and Americans is cruel and ungenerous."[35] Thus, the Creeks ended the war like the Cherokees, as a bitterly divided people.

When the definitive Paris peace treaty arrived, McGillivray and other militant Creek chiefs denounced it and strengthened their hand by signing a treaty with the Spanish at Pensacola in June 1784. This put the Creeks under Spanish protection and assured them the crucial supply of trade goods that would protect them, as they put it cleverly, "from the bears and other fierce animals."[36]

Though the Spanish had supported the Americans in the latter stages of the war, they now looked to their own interests across the southernmost tier of North America. For McGillivray, the feeling was much the same as the Chickamaugan Cherokee: Short of support from some other power than the victorious Americans, "we may be forced to purchase a shameful peace and barter our country for a precarious security." Addressing the Continental Congress in 1785, McGillivray spoke for most of the Indian nations now facing the victorious Americans without British allies. "We chiefs and warriors of the Creek, Chickasaw, and Cherokee Nations . . . protest against any title, claim, or demand the American Congress may set up for or against our lands, settlements, and hunting grounds in consequence of the . . . treaty of peace between the King of Great Britain and the states of America." Pointing out that the Indian nations were not participants in the peace negotiations, they vowed "to pay no attention to the manner in which the British negotiators . . . [have] drawn out the lines of the lands in question ceded to the States of America." Georgians and Carolinians, McGillivray continued, "have divided our territories into counties and sat themselves down on our land as if it were their own. . . . While they are addressing us by the flattering appellations of Friends and Brothers, they are stripping us of our natural rights by depriving

us of that inheritance which belonged to our ancestors and hath descended from them to us since the beginning of time."[37] It was through McGillivray's emergence as a power broker between the Creeks and the Spanish that he was able to bring greater political cohesion to the decentralized, often fractious Creek people. This would serve the Creeks well in the next decade.

For all of its power, the victorious new nation found the proud Creek and Chickamaugan warriors capable of holding their own. An English visitor at the end of the war wrote of how "nothing is more common than to hear" the Americans "talk of extirpating them from the face of the earth, men, women, and children." But in 1786–87, Cherokee and Creek war parties, aided by the Shawnee, drove Americans from disputed lands in Georgia and Tennessee, the first of a series of American setbacks that obliged the government to look toward negotiating with Indian leaders instead of "extirpating" them. It occurred to some American leaders, especially Henry Knox, who was appointed secretary of war in 1785, that Indians were the most patriotic of all the combatants involved in the American Revolution if patriotism was defined as the willingness to sacrifice everything for the good of the whole. "Instead of a language of superiority and command," he asked Congress, "may it not be politic and just to treat with the Indians more on a footing of equality?"[38]

Southern Fissures

Hundreds of miles north of the Creek nation, the Marquis de Chastellux, after three convivial days of spirited conversation with Jefferson at Monticello, settled down in Williamsburg to reflect on what he had seen during a month-long trip through Virginia in April 1782. Born to a military family, Chastellux had arrived with the French fleet under Rochambeau at Newport in July 1780, had sailed into the Chesapeake Bay as a major general of the French troops the next summer, took part in the siege of Yorktown in October 1781, and marched northward with the French all the way to New England the summer following Yorktown. A keen observer and accomplished writer, Chastellux puzzled over the European-like conditions he found in the Virginia countryside. Neither in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, New York, nor New Jersey had he seen "the state of poverty in which a great number of white people live in Virginia." "It is in this state, for the first time since I crossed the sea, that I have seen poor people." Stitched between the wealthy

plantations he had visited, "where the Negro alone is wretched," he found "miserable huts ... inhabited by whites, whose wane looks and ragged garments bespeak poverty." Chastellux knew all about the dismal peasantry of France, where he was born in 1754; but the grinding poor of American farmers in the rich soils of Virginia shocked him. How was it, he wondered, "in a country where there is still so much land to clear, [and] men who do not refuse to work," that such men "could remain in misery?" The answer, he learned, was that a small fraction of Virginia's white men owned almost all the good land of the state, concentrated in "immense estates" of many thousand acres, and that these land-rich grandees—men like Washington, Jefferson, Mason, and Madison—refused to "sell [even] the smallest portion of it" because the planters "always hope to increase eventually the number of their Negroes."[39]

Chastellux also witnessed another phenomenon he had never seen in his years of army service in France: The invading British army had plundered the countryside in the spring of 1781, taking "fruit, fowl, and cattle," only to have this "hurricane ... followed by a scourge yet more terrible." The scourge, he related, was "a numerous rabble, under the names of Refugees and Loyalists" who "followed the army, not to assist in the field, but to share the plunder." These were not wealthy Loyalists firmly attached to the king but the poor Virginians who had resisted the draft, resented the unequal burdens that the rich tried to place on the shoulders of the poor, and rioted to stop drafts and military recruitment after the British invasion in 1780. Descending on the plantations of wealthy patriot leaders, they "stripped the owners" of everything but "furniture and clothing." Even the latter became booty, as Chastellux heard from William Byrd III, who related his "distress that they had forcibly taken the very boots from off his feet." Chastellux called them "robbers," but what he was describing was the forced redistribution of property at the hands of Virginia's desperately poor—men for whom lofty principles about natural rights and freedom as trumpeted by wealthy Virginia patriots had little meaning.[40]

Chastellux's comments alert us to the fact that as the War of Independence was winding down after Yorktown, the war against poverty and the yawning gap between rich and poor was far from over. Even the most fervent revolutionary leaders of Virginia, men such as Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee, were focused mostly on the issue of independence from England. None except one advocated even partial leveling of their highly stratified society,

where tenant farmers greatly outnumbered landowners. Jefferson made a truly radical stab by writing into his drafts of the 1776 Virginia constitution a clause giving fifty acres of land to each landless adult white man on the assumption that political democracy was unsustainable without economic democracy. This proved unacceptable to most legislators, and thereafter Jefferson became mostly an armchair radical, speaking of a "natural aristocracy" of virtuous and talented individuals open to all comers and waxing eloquent about a nation of self-sufficient yeoman farmers.

But how could poor Virginians acquire land to become the industrious, incorruptible citizens who would form the bedrock of the republic? Jefferson's first answer was that by abolishing entail and primogeniture wealthy landowners could distribute their property more equally to all their progeny and thus broaden the base of the narrow and powerful aristocracy. Jefferson always prided himself on this reform, telling John Adams that he had "laid the axe to the root of pseudoaristocracy."[41] Primogeniture and entail was the ancient rule of passing one's estate intact to the eldest son, which had been used effectively to perpetuate Virginia's aristocracy. Jefferson's bill to abolish entail in Virginia, which enforced primogeniture, passed by a single vote in 1776. This was indeed an important reform, frightening enough for the land- and slave-rich Landon Carter to call Jefferson a "midday drunkard" for the "cursed bill" that betrayed his class by taking the first step to loosen up the nearly feudal system of concentrated economic power. But it was a reform that redistributed property mostly within upper-level Virginia families, not in Virginian society at large.[42]

Jefferson's second solution for a class-torn society was cheap western land, and he looked to Kentucky as the land bank that would rescue impoverished white Virginians. To be sure, he did his part in cleansing Kentucky of Shawnee and other native peoples in order to open it for white settlement. But providing access to that land also depended on blocking the powerful companies of speculators who sought control of it, and whose prices usually put the land out of the reach of the desperate white farmers who had plundered plantations on the trail of Cornwallis's army. Jefferson was himself only a minor investor in these companies, but he did little to stop them.[43] The problem would eventually fall into the hands of the federal government after the seaboard states relinquished their western land claims to the Continental Congress.

In Maryland, the travails of the poor were usually worsened, not improved,

by the war. Like other southern states, Maryland had great difficulty in filling its quota of soldiers for Washington's Continental army or even getting its county militia units to turn out. Those who were recruited or drafted were mostly poor. If they were married, service in the army further impoverished their families, because wives and children lost a key part of their family's productive capacity. The appeals of the destitute in Charles County, across the Potomac River separating northern Virginia from Maryland, are typical. One man whose five grown sons had joined him in enlisting in the Continental army appealed for aid to support five other young children. Another appealed that the loss of two sons who had enlisted at age sixteen stripped away most of the family's labor, leaving him desperate to "get me and my family the necessaries of life." A woman with two small children and pregnant with a third had only her own labor to support her family, leaving her in "a very distressed situation" where "they must unavoidably suffer exceedingly unless relieved."[44] For those widowed by a husband's death in the army, the situation was nearly irreparable. Yet Maryland's lower classes were better off than those in Virginia because the gentry—under the nation's most conservative state constitution—had enacted radical fiscal reform that reapportioned the tax burden more fairly and gave debtors some relief by making depreciated paper money legal tender.

However, Marylanders could not escape the scarcity of hard money and credit that swept the entire country in the latter stages of the war. This led to a torrent of foreclosures, forced property sales, and imprisonments for debt. Nearly everyone was affected, but the hardest hit were those with the smallest cushion of liquidity. For middling farmers, the war's end brought distress in the form of an economic recession and taxes heavier than they could possibly pay. What raised the tax burden in particular was the states' agreement in 1780, under Robert Morris's urging, to absorb the burden of back pay for Continental army troops. Like every other state, Maryland issued certificates for back pay, but these certificates held their value only through tax collections. This led to tax increases in 1780–83.

When the tax collector knocked on the door and the cupboard was bare, what was an ordinary farmer supposed to do? The answer in Maryland was a pragmatic one, derived from the accommodation that Maryland's elite had earlier been forced to reach with those beneath them. Tax collectors and sheriffs in the mid-1780s, now elected rather than appointed as in colonial days, cut straitened taxpayers some slack, making few attempts to haul delinquent farmers away from their fields and families to fill small county jails. Even magistrates adjourned court sessions in order to postpone judgments. If they did not, they faced what Charles County judges experienced in 1786 when they decided to move ahead with cases leading to imprisonment for debt. Before they could issue judgments, a crowd rushed into the courthouse to stop the proceedings. Supporting the mob from behind the scenes was none other than Walter Hanson, the state's chief justice.[45] When creditors took debtors to court, most magistrates delayed the proceedings or refused to apply the law strictly while waiting for a more robust economy to salvage the situation. Here the informal law of equity, trumping contract law, was one of the fruits of revolution on behalf of the least powerful.

The safety valve for poor Marylanders, and for those in every other state, was to tramp west. One Maryland tenant farmer, concluding that it was "most impossible for the poor man to live," joined the "incessant migrations to the farther regions," as Johann David Schoepf, a visiting observer, described it.[46] As we will see in the epilogue, this was not always the hoped-for remedy. A close friend of Jefferson's, Elizabeth House Trist, traveling through the western lands to which poor Americans were flocking at the end of the war, saw mostly desperate poverty. "Everyone thinks their troubles the greatest, but I have seen so many poor creatures . . . whose situation has been so wretched. . . . Here is a poor family encamped . . . A man and his wife, their father and mother, and 5 children . . . on their way to the Cumberland River and had not a morsel of bread for the last three months. They had buried one of the oldest of their sons a little while before. The poor children, when they saw us, cry'd for some bread."[47] We have no way of knowing whether this was the typical experience of those rushing like lemmings toward the western lands, though it is certain that the better off they were as they left their eastern homes, the better the chances they had of thriving in the lands being vacated by retreating Native Americans.

Farther south, in South Carolina's backcountry, the matter of tax collections and debt recovery was almost minor in view of the beastly experiences in the last years of the war. *Annus mirabilis,* the year of the Yorktown triumph for Americans, had been *annus horribilus.* The sharp division between poor farmers of the backcountry and the wealthy slaveocracy of the coastal low country that had erupted in 1775–76 simmered during the next five years. The patriot state government sitting in Charleston deployed such militia units as could be spared from slave-patrol duty to root out Loyalists between

1775 and 1779, succeeding partially by driving some of them out of the state and convincing others to switch sides. William Henry Drayton, president of the South Carolina Provincial Congress, played the role of a "political missionary" who preached "the gospel of liberty" to "a largely uninterested audience." Offering Cherokee land as bounty for joining patriot militia units, and even suggesting that enslaved Indians would be awarded as well, did not suppress backcountry Loyalism. But generally, South Carolinians, whatever their political allegiances, profited from their remoteness from the war until 1779. "The bulk of the people were scarcely sensible of any revolution or that the country was at war," wrote David Ramsay, a contemporary Charleston physician and historian of the war. Since South Carolina was one of the chief suppliers of provisions for the war-torn northern states, plantation owners, farmers, artisans, and wagoners busied themselves more with making money out of the war than with protecting their liberties.[48]

But as the British mounted their invasion in 1779, to judge by James Simpson, an important Tory leader, "there were still great numbers who continue firm in their opposition and were become most violent in their enmity to those by whom they had been oppressed." However, the British overestimated the number of Loyalists who would spring to action once the king's troops made a show of force. The British also greatly injured their cause by trying to force those preferring neutrality into British units, a policy that backfired and drove many neutrals into the patriot camp. The British occupation of South Carolina and Georgia in 1780 turned a simmering conflict into "a virtual civil war."[49]

This civil war, described by historian Clyde Ferguson as "a fratricidal conflict characterized by ruthlessness and undisguised brutality," was not neatly defined by class categories, but it unmistakably had a classist dimension. Though most up-country Loyalist leaders were men of some wealth, as measured by land and slaves, "in their effort to attract followers they played on widespread resentments against the wealthier planters and merchants of the coast."[50] From 1779 to 1783, the Lower South, as military historian Don Higginbotham describes it, "was ravaged by the war as no other section of the country. Its governmental processes had collapsed, and its society had disintegrated to the point that it approached John Locke's savage state of nature."[51]

That the Loyalist and patriot militia units were about evenly divided, as were the Continental and British army contingents, contributed to the partisan, bushwhacking warfare that kept South Carolina ablaze for several years.

The savagery of the fighting, the ferocity of plundering forays, and particularly the atrocity killings of surrendering men by both sides seemed to have begun with the British killing of captured patriots, though the historical record on this remains cloudy. By June 1781, General Nathanael Greene deplored how "The Whigs and Tories persecute each other with little less than savage fury. There is nothing but murders and devastations in every quarter." Greene's aide, William Pierce, was equally horrified: "Such scenes of desolation, bloodshed, and deliberate murder I never was a witness to before"; patriots and Tories were slitting "each other's throats, and scarce a day passes but some poor deluded tory is put to death at his door. For want of civil government the bands of society are totally disunited and the people by copying the manners of the British have become perfectly savage."[52]

The destruction of the landscape was as thorough as the scorched-earth expedition of General Sullivan into the Iroquois country two years before. In 1782 General William Moultrie, riding one hundred miles eastward from the backcountry after a prisoner exchange, described a countryside previously flush with "live-stock and wild fowl of every kind . . . now destitute of all. It had been so completely checquered by the different parties, that not one part of it had been left unexplored; consequently, not the vestiges of horses, cattle, hogs, or deer was to be found. The squirrels and birds of every kind were totally destroyed." Moultrie's scouts confirmed that "no living creature was to be seen except now and then a few [vultures] picking the bones of some unfortunate fellows, who had been shot or cut down and left in the woods above ground."[53]

Clearly, South Carolinians hated each other as was the case in no other state. Charles O'Hara, a British officer, believed that some hot-blooded temperamental differences among South Carolinians explained the yen for butchery and "no prisoners taken" mentality. "The violence of the passions of these people are beyond every curb of religion and humanity," he wrote; "every hour exhibits dreadful, wanton mischiefs, murders, and violence of every kind, unheard of before." At the end of the war, Aedanus Burke, a jurist and political leader, believed that South Carolina's patriots were so inured to killing indiscriminately that they had "reconciled their minds to killing each other."[54]

The orgy of killing left South Carolina devastated like no other state. After the British withdrew in 1782, state leaders acted quickly to reinstitute civil government and to stop "the daily scenes of the most horrid plundering and murder," where vengeance, as General Greene worried, "would dictate

one universal slaughter." With a policy of pardon and reconciliation toward Tories, the state government largely succeeded. But this did not stop the confiscation of the estates of Tories, many of whom left South Carolina with the British. This was the obvious way to raise revenue for the devastated state, and the desire for it was concentrated in the plundered and replundered backcountry. The first postwar legislature made a gesture toward democratizing landholding by preventing the confiscated Loyalist estates from falling into the hands of land jobbers with ready money to win at auction. Legislators boasted that by limiting the size of tracts to five hundred acres, they had blocked the "voracious appetites" of eager "landjobbers." But the law said nothing about how many tracts an individual could buy. Thus one already land-rich South Carolinian acquired 5,723 acres; another 5,208. Of the eighty-two slaves from one Loyalist estate who went on the block in May 1783, half were purchased by one man. "The wealthy," wrote one observer are . . . invited to a dangerous accumulation of riches."[55]

In the immediate aftermath of war, South Carolina's aristocracy, which in prewar days had ruled with less opposition than in any other part of America, felt itself challenged. Additional seats in the lower house of the legislature for Charleston and backcountry voters did not exactly create a political revolution; but the electorate installed the first artisan lawmakers—a blacksmith, a house carpenter, and a wagon master, for example—and country novices who prided themselves on forming a "malcontented party . . . from the lower class." Men of wealth, accustomed to holding the reins of political power, fumed at accusations that "enormous wealth is seldom the associate of pure and disinterested virtue," or charges that the city was divided into two parties responding to "Democracy and the Revolution" and "Tories and Aristocrats." An expanded press in Charleston reported a disputatious, often bitter, political dialogue where distrust was more often evident than actual issues over which the two emerging parties fought. "There appears to be a swell of insolence and sinister design in many of the leading men," wrote one democracy stalwart in 1784, "which plainly indicates a settled plan of ruling by a few with a rod of iron."[56]

Among the most important points of contention were taxes and the conduct of lawyers. South Carolinians of middling means spilled a great deal of ink attacking lawyers' fees, lawyers' pettifogging, and lawyers' deliberately prolonging court cases. This had been one of the major complaints of backcountry men since before the Revolution. But only in the matter of taxes did

any reform emerge. In 1784, the legislature changed the patently inequitable taxing of marginally productive backcountry land at the same rate as low-country rice and indigo plantation land. Thereafter, land was assessed according to "quality and yield"; "the rice planters agreed to pay to justify their political dominance," as historian Jerome Nadelhaft has said.[57] Seeds were in the ground for a democratization of South Carolina polity. But for now the planter slaveocracy, though rattled, had yielded little.

Northern Struggles for Equity

Like fellow patriots of ordinary means in southern states, northern commoners felt the sting of drastic fiscal reform beginning in 1780. With the war now centered in the South, fierce debates over ramped-up taxation procedures moved to the center of state politics. The stabilization of the currency was a boon for money and security holders, principally seaboard merchants, but a bane for farmers, especially in the western counties. Complaints of impossible tax burdens reeked of class hostility. "A Citizen of the States" in November 1780 railed that ordinary men had "no money in their hands" because it it had "got into the hands of a few fortunate individuals who have amassed great wealth." "That envy which is apt to attend fortunes suddenly acquired," "Citizen" warned, would break out and roil the commonwealth. Even President Joseph Reed, whom nobody accused of radicalism, called Robert Morris "a pecuniary dictator" and believed that "the rich" who hoarded the gold and silver were the main tax evaders because they regarded their hard money "as too sacred to be touched for taxes."[58]

Robert Morris enlisted Tom Paine to pen "The Crisis Extraordinary," in which he gamely tried to convince Americans that their tax burden was not heavy and that the war effort would collapse if Congress could not support the army. But this did not convince farmers standing on the brink of personal collapse. In 1780–82, they threatened tax collectors, refused to sell their land as the only way to pay taxes, and mobbed assessors. The possibility of a new revolution was all too apparent. One writer warned in February 1783 that Pennsylvanians submitting "to one fraction of an over or unjust tax . . . will . . . deserve that slavery which their valor has snatched from them. . . . When one part of the community is to be exacted on to please and serve another, then disorder follows: to this may be imputed many of the Revolutions that [have] laid the world in blood; our own is a recent instance; why then will the men of

influence lay a foundation for another, or is war so desirable as to induce us to contrive a continuation of it among ourselves?"[59]

Though President Reed confided to Washington that "we have miscalculated the abilities of the country and entirely the disposition of the people to bear taxes," conservatives, who had gained a small legislative majority in Pennsylvania, pressed forward with tax collections. They followed Robert Morris's dictum that the nation's credit—and its future—depended on fiscal reliability. Sheriffs' sales at auction to satisfy debts and tax collections rose rapidly by 1782, and foreclosures, mostly on farmers' goods, more than doubled between 1782 and 1784. Public animosity grew as the already fragile tissue of trust that bound the people to the Continental Congress began to disintegrate. In York County in 1784, men of small means complained bitterly that they had sacrificed "blood and treasure to secure . . . independence," only to see their farm goods sold to pay the "grievous and insupportable load of taxes" that were conferring windfall profits for rich men speculating in wartime securities. From another county came angry charges that new fiscal policies allowed a "merciless, rapacious creditor . . . to sacrifice the property of his debtor by a public sale," thus reducing "great numbers of . . . good people . . . from a state of competency to beggary."[60] Those of slender means, at the moment when victory against the British seemed almost assured, believed that their plight overturned the entire idea of a revolution inspired by creating a *novus ordo seclorum* (a new order of the ages).

As in Maryland and Virginia, Pennsylvania farmers and rural artisans were not without defenses. Their elected tax collectors, understanding the plight of friends and neighbors, often refused to dun for taxes or provide the courts with the names of tax delinquents. Elected country justices often colluded by refusing to conduct court proceedings in debt cases. If cases were held, juries sometimes refused to convict. And at auctions to distrain farm goods local people either stayed away or refused to bid. The constitution of 1776, which provided for the public election of tax assessors, sheriffs, and court justices, was serving them well. As peace arrived and economic conditions failed to improve, rural Pennsylvanians did their best to thwart the agenda of Robert Morris and his friends because they saw that it allowed, as one petition to the state government put it, "a few private citizens to acquire an influence in . . . the government subversive to the dearest rights of the people."[61]

For the farmers of Massachusetts, as in Pennsylvania, the pinch of drastic fiscal reform after 1780 was inversely related to access to eastern markets. Western Massachusetts farmers did not enjoy the advantage of yeomen close to the eastern markets, where supplying the armies and navies—either British or American—had often brought good times, if not prosperity. By 1778 farmers of the hill counties of the Berkshires were suffering under heavy war taxes, a chronic shortage of hard money, and the debts they had incurred. By early 1779, farmers in towns such as Hancock, bristling with anger, rioted to keep land they occupied after its Tory owners had been evicted.[62] By May, they were massing to keep the superior court from meeting in Great Barrington since the lack of a state constitution, they reasoned, gave no basis for the courts to meet. In many towns they instructed their delegates to the new constitutional convention that all judges, from justice of the peace to superior court judge, should be elected by the people, that all free men should enjoy the vote, and that elections should be held annually.

Though disappointed with the rigged results of the ratification of the constitution of 1780, most of the western farmers were spent after watching the creaking judicial system function so fitfully during five years of war for lack of a proper constitutional foundation. Yet radical democracy in western Massachusetts was far from dead. Amid economic stress, it resurfaced with explosiveness shortly after the legislature declared the constitution of 1780 ratified. Wartime dislocations struck many parts of the state, but nowhere more than in the western farming communities. Under the superintendent of finance's plan endorsed by Congress, the state legislature in 1781 began retiring paper money issued during the war, repealed the law that made paper money legal tender, and levied heavier taxes to be paid in silver to effect these changes. This may have been sound fiscal policy, but the common farmer saw it only as the growing scarcity of a circulating medium, a manipulation of the unstable money market, and an increasingly onerous tax burden that primarily benefited the rich. The view of "A Citizen of Philadelphia," whose essays on free trade and finance caught the eye of Massachusetts readers when the *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertizer* published them in the spring of 1780, expressed their anger accurately. The new Morris plan, the fourth essay read, "will raise the great money-holders into nabobs so rich there will be no living with them. They have already, it is generally thought, much more than their share." By long experience, "Citizen" continued, "overgrown riches . . . are dangerous to any community" and "will bring the inevitable ruin of many poor people."[63]

Confirming this prediction, falling farm prices, scarcity of hard money (which courts ruled the only medium for discharging debts), and sharply rising taxes drove many farmers to the wall by 1781. These were not the poorest people, who paid little taxes since they owned scarcely any property, but rather the middling farmers looking for a better future. For them, what was especially grievous was a tax system based primarily on land, which shielded from taxation the main source of merchants' income: personal property in ships, money at interest, stock-in-trade, and even unimproved land held for speculative gain. "In no other New England state was the demand for tax reform and relief greater," writes the historian of revolutionary taxation politics, "and in none did it receive a less sympathetic response from government."[64]

Farmers had only two avenues of relief: get their representatives to convince the state legislature to change the tax system and make paper money legal tender for discharging debts and paying taxes, or get a suspension of civil suits in court until economic conditions improved. Beyond that lay only forcible closing of the courts. Western farmers, writes Robert Taylor, their main historian, "worked hard for both solutions."[65] Throughout the western counties of Worcester, Berkshire, and Hampshire, ordinary men flouted the property requirement for suffrage in attending town meetings where petitions to the legislature were drafted. But the legislature, dominated by eastern mercantile interests, blocked legislative remedies. Petitioning the county courts for relief was equally unsuccessful. Now farmers faced bankruptcy and the sale of their farms at auction to satisfy their creditors. Staring them in the face were laws compelling county court judges to issue warrants allowing sheriffs to seize from a debtor whatever goods would satisfy the debt. This did not include a man's clothes, furniture, or tools of trade; but it included cattle, horses, grain, orchard fruit, or anything else that might bring in money at auction. "With money scarce and buyers few," writes Taylor, "a man might see his goods knocked down for a trifle of their real worth to satisfy a small debt. When the sum owed was larger or when sufficient goods were lacking, real estate could be appropriated to satisfy executions. . . . In default of personal or real estate, a debtor went to jail." One petition from a western town in 1782 cried that the tiny jail, twenty-eight by thirty-six feet in size, was bursting with nearly ninety men unable to pay their debts.[66]

Not surprisingly, western farmers, most of whom had fought in the Revolution, reverted to the actions that had pushed the revolutionary movement forward less than a decade before. Calling extralegal town and county con-

ventions, as at Hadley on February 11, 1782, they demanded a suspension of civil actions. Two weeks later in Pittsfield, three hundred townsmen gathered, took a straw vote on whether or not to prevent the court of common pleas from functioning, determined that two-thirds favored such a radical step, and told the judges to adjourn until the next term. A justice of the peace from the tiny town of Lanesborough, serving as the aggrieved farmers' leader, told the judges that "the courts had to be ripped up before the General Court [the state legislature] would listen to petitions from the people."[67]

Western Massachusetts now tottered on the brink of repudiating courts established under the newly installed constitution. Propping them up were creditors in the old commercial towns along the Connecticut River. Gathering a month after the Pittsfield court closing, many Berkshire-region citizens agreed that closing courts and suspending the law augured a "fatal tendency" to the commonwealth. But beleaguered farmers knew that the clerk of this convention was a well-known former Tory and conservative opponent of the democratic reforms urged by most western towns when the state constitution was being written.

Appearing on the scene to lead the protests was an agrarian radical preacher who had never figured before in public affairs. Forty-two years old, Samuel Ely had graduated two decades before from Yale College and then served briefly as an evangelical minister in the small Connecticut town of Somers. Conservative parishioners there disliked his message championing the poor and pronouncing them closer to God than the wealthy. In 1771, he described himself in a published sermon as "much despised by the great and by the fashionable world" and likened himself to Job, who appealed "to God's tribunal for a trial," when the rich denied justice to the poor. Ousted from Somers in 1773, Ely wandered west to the Massachusetts hill country, where he served the unchurched as an itinerant preacher. Already he was known as "the friend of the suffering and oppressed and the champion of violated rights," a man—according to Reverend Timothy Dwight, the conservative Congregational preacher who detested Ely—who "industriously awakened the jealousy of the humble and ignorant against all men of superior reputation as haughty, insolent and oppressive." "This insistence that the righteous poor could defy corrupt earthly authority and ground their actions in a direct appeal to God," writes historian Alan Taylor, "lay at the heart of rural New England's post-Revolutionary insurgencies."[68]

During the war, Ely drifted northward, where he fought against General

John Burgoyne's army as they moved to crush the New Englanders in August 1777. A veteran of the Battle of Bennington, in what would become Vermont, where the Americans achieved a stunning victory, Ely took up residence in Hampshire County at the end of the war. There he became one of the fiercely ascetic itinerant evangelists who were sweeping subsistence farmers into their folds in the hilly frontier towns of northern and western New England. With his volatile mixture of incendiary religion and politics—almost a replica of the North Carolina Regulator phenomenon explored in chapter 2—Ely crystallized the mounting anger at new, merchant-friendly economic policies.[69]

Calling on those gathered in fear of the decisions of the county court of common pleas and the supreme court sitting in 1782, Ely allegedly shouted: "Come on my brave boys, we will go to the wood pile and get clubs enough and knock their grey wigs off and send them out of the world in an instant." The supreme court now faced the same decision that General Gage had confronted eight years before: Retreat in the face of a worked-up crowd or step in quickly to quell a revolt in progress. The supreme court took the latter course. Ordering Ely's arrest, the judges convicted him, fined him fifty pounds, and ordered him jailed in Springfield. But this boomeranged. Joseph Hawley, the old radical from Northampton, warned that war veterans of the river valley towns were coming to the defense of debtors. Having an additional grievance of their own—the state had refused to accept the certificates for back wages they had received in lieu of hard money as payment of taxes—they were "on the point of turning to the mob and . . . will become outrageous and the numbers who will side with them will be irresistible." In mid-June Hawley's warning materialized. Men gathering from various towns marched to Springfield under the leadership of Reuben Dickinson, a Revolutionary War captain, sprang Ely and several debtors from jail, and headed northward. Hot in pursuit came the sheriff with fifty soldiers. Ely escaped amid a bone-bruising fracas. When the sheriff insisted on three hostages, all Revolutionary War officers, for the return of Ely, the insurgent farmers complied. But a day later, six hundred men marched on Northampton to spring the hostages too. Bloodshed was averted only when it was agreed that, if freed, the three army officers would bring Ely in. Three months later, authorities arrested Ely, and he remained in jail until March 1783, when he was released by the general court in a gesture of reconciliation.[70]

Conservatives preferred to think of Ely's Rebellion, as it came to be called, as a local, short-lived flare-up. In fact, it was a prelude to Shays's Rebellion, which erupted three years later in western Massachusetts and was accompanied by rural insurgency in many parts of the new nation. Joseph Hawley, old and infirm, but more moderate than in his radical days, knew that the men of the Berkshire towns who had sprung to arms to fight the British were livid at the betrayal of what they believed they had fought for. What they saw around them were growing divisions between ordinary citizens who worked by the sweat of their brow and wealthy, money-hungry men who seemed to control the apparatus of government. For the benefit of these men, debtors had to pay high court and lawyers' fees, relinquish their personal property, and in many cases go to jail for no other offense than their inability to pay taxes or debts. Meanwhile, the furloughed Massachusetts soldiers of the Continental Line waited vainly for their wages, "vastly in arrear," as one captain told Hawley. "Many of the insurgents say that our soldiers get none of it [state tax revenues] . . . , that it cost them much to maintain the Great Men under George the 3rd, but vastly more under the Commonwealth and Congress," Hawley wrote a friend a few days after the Springfield jailbreak in mid-June 1782. "We have had it huzza[h]ed for George the third within 8 rods of our Court House" and "particular houseburnings have been repeatedly threatened with amazing bitterness." Hawley urged the legislature to send a fact-finding committee to western Massachusetts to study the problems and find remedies for the deep-seated animosity that was growing with "amazing rapidity." "I was told . . . by as calm and sedate a man as any I have seen of their number," he advised a well-placed friend, "that two thirds of these western people" believed that the revolutionary leaders of Boston and eastern Massachusetts "were the men who have brought all their burdens upon them, which they are told they should have been forever free from" by resisting the Hutchinson circle aligned with the British. Hawley learned in no uncertain terms that the insurgents vowed "they would take care how they were catched again."[71]

An aging Sam Adams and two other legislators made their way west as a grievance committee of the legislature, and they sensibly began their fact-finding in the little town of Conway, where Samuel Ely lived. The committee convened a town meeting to air the issues. But true to the spirit of insurgency that had spread throughout the region, the Conway citizens insisted on a convention of all the towns. Thus, delegates from forty-four Massachusetts

towns assembled at Hatfield in early August to present their grievances about heavy taxes; lack of specie to pay debts; high court fees and salaries for government officials; and the suspension of habeas corpus, which the legislature had ordered for six months beginning in June—in sum a system of privilege and inequity that was beggaring the western Massachusetts countryside. The general court met these grievances partway by reducing some court fees and making personal property such as cattle, flour, and pine boards legal tender.

Such partial remedies quieted the western countryside for several years, at least to the extent that no uprisings of ordinary men stopped the courts from functioning. But repeated incidents made sheriffs' work unenviable. In September 1782, a crowd of farmers, led by a Revolutionary War major, rescued a pair of oxen destrained by a sheriff to satisfy a creditor's suit at law. In May 1783, a crowd of sixty marched with bludgeons to keep county judges from holding court. Three months later, in Northampton, one of Samuel Ely's friends tried to spring from jail another Ely supporter. In all these cases, authorities were able to muster enough men to thwart the insurgents. But "tumults and disorders," as several towns petitioning the general court for relief called them, continued because a great many citizens agreed with Justus Wright, an Ely supporter, who asked from jail in a letter published in the *Hampshire Herald*: "Are we not governed by aristocracy, only allowing one word to be transmitted, noble to ignoble; and are not officers in the state, even those who partake of the smallest share of the spoils . . . as great tyrants as Louis the fourteenth—judge ye."[72] Western Massachusetts benefited from a good crop in 1784 and from a reduction of the tax burden that year by the legislature. But radical agrarianism was still smoldering, as would soon become apparent in the farmers' insurgency known as Shays's Rebellion.

Leaving America

For African Americans, the closing years of the long war marked new opportunities, sharp disappointments, and great uncertainties. Much depended on how they had spent the war, where they were located as peace arrived, and what alternatives lay before them. For the thousands who were enfolded in the British armies, the decisions were almost entirely out of their hands. For those who had fought with the Americans or stayed out of the war altogether, the future was anything but certain, though signs appeared that the American victory over England might be capped by the patriots' attempt to redeem

their virtue through resolving the massive contradiction of fighting for freedom while enslaving one-fifth of the population.

In the southern states, a new chapter of the African diaspora began months before the peace treaty of 1783 arrived in the triumphant new nation. Thousands of slaves still in the grasp of their Loyalist masters huddled within British encampments in Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina, mingling with former slaves who had gained their freedom by fleeing their patriot masters and fighting with the British. How would the British deal with this strange combination of the free and the enslaved after American forces reversed early defeats in the British southern campaign of 1779–81, pinning the British regiments thereafter in the coastal seaports?

The British faced the issue first in Savannah. Nobody contested the right of Loyalists with slaves in tow to leave with the British. Already the state government had seized the estates of many of them, selling the land and buildings at auction to patriot bidders. But what about the slaves who had fled their patriot masters and found refuge with the British? When the British fleet came into sight in the spring of 1782 to evacuate the British army and Loyalist supporters, Georgia's legislature urgently petitioned the English commander to allow planters to cross British lines and claim their former slaves. The British commander refused, leaving the Americans to deplore how the Crown officials "hurried away with our Negroes."[73] About four thousand African Americans sailed away from Savannah in July 1782, most of them as slaves. With British shipping inadequate to carry them all, some slaves went with their masters on small private ships, while others in small craft and even canoes traveled southward along the coast to British Florida.

As the British completed the Savannah evacuation, other Crown officials prepared to repeat the process in Charleston. In the summer of 1782, they awaited the decision of the American and British commissioners, who had argued for months over the question of fugitive slaves. The Americans' best card in this diplomacy was the threat to repudiate debts owed to British merchants before the Revolution. On the other hand, the British could return the refugees if the Americans promised not to confiscate the property of South Carolina Loyalists. Finally, officials in London decided not to surrender any refugee slave explicitly promised freedom, or any whose military service for the British might lead to ugly reprisals if the black rebel was forcibly returned to a former master. For the latter, the British promised full compensation to former owners.

Rarely in the history of concluding a war has such a scene as now occurred come to happen. The only way to decide whether a man or woman had been promised freedom or legitimately feared reprisal if returned to his or her master was by hearing the African American's own testimony. Thus, by agreement, a committee of Loyalist civilians and British officers met at the statehouse in early November 1782 to listen to the refugees' stories. Waiting in line by the hundreds to give their accounts, many freed people were cajoled by former patriot masters to return to their plantations. But inducing those who had tasted freedom to refasten their chains was, by definition, an absurdity. One planter "used every argument I was master of to get them to return, but to no effect. . . . Several of them . . . told me with an air of insolence they were not going back."[74] South Carolina planters were sure that sympathetic British members of the board coached the refugees so their stories would be convincing. But what slave needed to know what to say? Major General Alexander Leslie was staggered by the number of slaves who came forward to plead for freedom. "From the numbers that may expect to be brought off," he wrote Sir Guy Carleton, British officer in charge of evacuation, "including their wives and children, if to be paid for will amount to a monstrous expense." As the British officers accepted the black refugee stories, the Loyalist Americans resigned from the committee in disgust. John Rutledge, former South Carolina governor, believed that the commissioners ruled in favor of "almost every Negro, man, woman, and child, that was worth the carrying away."[75]

For the slaves still in the grasp of Loyalists poised to leave South Carolina, the problem was different. To stay off the departing ships, not on them, was their only hope for freedom, because almost the entire British flotilla was sailing for the West Indian slave colonies where sugar planters practiced the cruel institution at its worst. "Secreted away by her friends," wrote one Loyalist master, his enslaved woman "got out of the way of the evacuation and remains" in the state. Another Loyalist reported that his male slave "ran away overnight when they were to embark the next morning."[76] How many slipped away is not known, and only fragments of evidence remain to tell us how many of those who escaped found their way to freedom.

As the British fleet at Charleston prepared the final stages of evacuation in December 1782, an uneasy collection of white Loyalists, their slaves, and free black men and women to whom the British promised freedom filed onto the ships. One debarkation report numbered 5,327 black evacuees out of a

total of 9,127 passengers. Other reports suggest that the total number was at least 10,000 and perhaps even 12,000. Far more of them were slaves than freemen. In one debarkation list, only 160 African Americans were on ships headed for New York, Nova Scotia, and England, and these are the most likely to have been free. About 2,960 others sailed for Jamaica and Saint Lucia in the West Indies, almost all scheduled for a continued life in slavery. Those who went to East Florida, about 2,210, were also bound for the old life of bondage in a new location.[77] Many others, perhaps several thousand, had been trafficked out of Charleston in the months leading up to evacuation, often sold by British officers bent on leaving America with something to show for their trouble.

East Florida was still a wilderness when the British ships began unloading their human cargo in December 1782. Spanish colonization for two hundred years had reduced the Indian population drastically, but Spanish settlers were still scattered thinly, with a small number of slaves. The old fortress and mission town of Saint Augustine was little more than a dusty collection of crude houses. Scattered in the hinterland were small assemblages of refugee slaves living off the land. Now East Florida became a major asylum for Loyalists. East Florida had joined Nova Scotia as a new frontier, pinning the British at the two extremities of the North American Atlantic seaboard. By early 1783, the evacuations of Savannah and Charleston, along with Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, added about 11,000 people to the sparsely populated colony. Sixty percent of them were slaves.

Set to work cultivating rice, indigo, and corn, and producing tar and turpentine from pine forests, some nine thousand slaves found themselves pawns again when England ceded East Florida to Spain in January 1783 as part of the peace negotiations ending the American war. South Carolina and Georgia legislatures tried to prevent their removal in the hope that their planters could recover them. But the Spanish governor resisted, leaving the Loyalist slave refugees in Florida to move to Jamaica, the Bahamas, and other British West Indian islands. Seven years of hoping and fighting for liberty had yielded these evacuees nothing. Thousands of them perished in hurricanes and a deadly yellow-fever epidemic in the late 1780s.

In the North, the other half of the British army prepared to evacuate New York City after word of the final peace treaty arrived in June 1783. Here lived the other large contingent of African Americans who had reached the British lines. But in contrast to those in Savannah and Charleston, these were almost

all free men, women, and children. That did not assure them continued freedom, however. The coming of peace, remembered Boston King, the South Carolina slave escapee, "diffused universal joy among all parties, except us who had escaped from slavery and taken refuge in the English army." For four years he and his wife had been part of roving British forces and had arrived in New York by ship. But now, in 1783, "a report prevailed at New-York, that all the slaves, in the number 2000, were to be delivered up to their masters, altho' some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumor," King related in his autobiographical account, "filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North-Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New-York. . . . For some days we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes."[78]

Then the British officers assured King and his brethren that they would not be surrendered to their former owners. "Each of us received a certificate [of freedom] from the commanding officer at New-York, which dispelled our fears and filled us with joy and gratitude," King remembered. They were to be transported to Nova Scotia—a decision reached painfully by the British. Clearly, the black Loyalists now guaranteed freedom for life could not be taken to any of England's Caribbean sugar islands. Jamaica, Bermuda, Antigua, Barbados, Saint Kitts, Saint Lucia, and all the others were built on slave labor and had no place for a large number of free blacks. England itself wanted no influx of ex-slaves, for London and other major cities already felt themselves burdened by growing numbers of impoverished former slaves seeking public support. Nor was East Florida much of an option since that, too, was a slave colony and in any event was being pawned to Spain. Only Nova Scotia remained, suitable because slavery had not taken root in this easternmost part of the Canadian wilderness, which England had acquired from France at the end of the Seven Years' War. Here, amidst the sparsely scattered old French settlers, the remnants of Indian tribes, and the more recent British settlers, including hundreds of Loyalists from the American colonies, Boston King and all the others clambered off British ships in the winter of 1783 to start life anew. But new lives would have to be created alongside several thousand British soldiers discharged in America after the war, men who chose to move to Canada rather than return to England. To British dischargees and black refugees the British government offered land, tools, and rations for three years.

In the "Book of Negroes," kept exactly by the British in New York, are inscribed 2,775 black Loyalists' names and ages, as well as the places where they had toiled as slaves. Probably another two thousand had earlier left New York City and other northern port towns on merchant and troop ships.[79] If smallpox and camp fevers hadn't wiped out thousands of African Americans who joined the British, the evacuation would have been much larger, probably at least twice as large. Nearly 40 percent of the evacuees were females, and children made up about one-quarter of the whole. They came from every region of the former American colonies, with the largest number from Virginia and the Carolinas. Many had toiled for the "founding fathers" of the new American nation, and it is certainly conceivable that on the voyage to Nova Scotia the slaves of Thomas Jefferson, George Washington, James Madison, Patrick Henry, Charles Carroll, and John Laurens recounted stories of their enslavement and their escape.

Among them were Thomas Peters, the slave from Wilmington, North Carolina, we met in chapter 4, along with his wife and two children. The ship on which the Peters family debarked was blown off course by the late-fall gales in 1783, and had to seek refuge in Bermuda for the winter. They set forth the following spring, reaching Nova Scotia in May, months after the rest of the black settlers had arrived. Peters led his family ashore at Annapolis Royal, a small port on the east side of the Bay of Fundy that looked across the water to the coast of Maine. There he became a leader of the African Canadians for nearly a decade.

Finding Freedom

Of black Americans who survived the war, the vast majority did not leave American shores but remained to toil and carry on the struggle to end slavery where most of them had been born. In the northern states, African Americans and white abolitionist allies tried to capitalize on the promise of revolutionary radicalism. Though a loosely organized national effort had produced American independence, slavery had to be combated state by state, locale by locale, and even person by person. About one in ten African Americans lived in the northern states and perhaps half were still enslaved when the British and Americans signed the Treaty of Paris in 1783. One of them, a slave named Mum Bett, showed how the humblest African descendants could be agents of change.

Mum Bett grew up enslaved in the small town of Sheffield in western Massachusetts and heard her share of the white townsmen's rhetoric in their struggle for freedom from British oppression. Colonel John Ashley, her master, was a wealthy landowner and merchant who had fought for freedom early in the war. Mum Bett's own husband had fallen on a Massachusetts battlefield. But this blood sacrifice for the emerging nation did not bring her freedom, though Massachusetts had opportunities to abolish slavery in its six years of wrestling with a state constitution.[80]

Widowed and the mother of a small daughter, Mum Bett brooded about the words in the Declaration of Independence that she had heard recited. While waiting on Colonel Ashley's table, she told her master that "in all they said she never heard but that all people were born free and equal, and she thought long about it, and resolved she would try whether she did not come in among them." In 1781, an incident occurred, of the sort common to the tension that was built into the relationship between enslavers and the enslaved, that brought the matter to a head. When an argument arose between Mum Bett's sister and their mistress, Mum Bett threw herself between her sister and the angry woman, who swung a heated kitchen fire shovel during the dispute. Mum Bett received the blow on her arm, "the scar of which she bore to the day of her death." Outraged, she stalked from the house and refused to return. When her master appealed to the local court in Sheffield for the recovery of his slave, Mum Bett called upon Theodore Sedgwick, a rising lawyer from nearby Stockbridge, to ask if Massachusetts' new state constitution, with its preamble stating that "all men are born free and equal," did not apply to her.

Sedgwick took the case. He argued before the county court in Great Barrington that Mum Bett and Brom, a fellow slave in the Ashley household, were "not dumb beasts" and therefore entitled to the same privileges as other human beings whose skin was pigmented differently. When the all-white jury agreed that the preamble to the state constitution made no exception to the principle that all men are both free and equal, the case set a precedent. Thereafter, Mum Bett called herself Elizabeth Freeman. Two years later, in the Quok Walker case, where a runaway slave appealed that he should be free, the state supreme court upheld the jury decision in Elizabeth Freeman's case. A century and a half of slavery in Massachusetts ended with the striking words: "Is not a law of nature that all men are equal and free? . . . [Are] not the laws of nature the laws of God? Is not the law of God then against slavery?"

After gaining her freedom, Elizabeth Freeman worked as a housekeeper for the Sedgwicks for many years. She later set up her own household with her daughter. In the hill towns of western Massachusetts, she became a noted midwife and nurse, revered for her skills in curing and calming her patients. Years later, after her death in 1829, Sedgwick's son commemorated Freeman's strength: "If there could be a practical refutation of the imagined superiority of our race to hers, the life and character of this woman would afford that refutation. . . . She uniformly . . . obtained an ascendency over all those with whom she was associated in service. . . . Even in her humble station, she had, when occasion required it, an air of command which conferred a degree of dignity. . . . She claimed no distinction but it was yielded to her from her superior experience, energy, skill, and sagacity." Catherine Sedgwick, her friend, remembered Freeman saying emphatically that "Any time while I was a slave, if one minute's freedom had been offered to me, and I had been told I must die at the end of that minute, I would have taken it—just to stand one minute on God's *airth* a free woman—I would."[81]

Another Massachusetts slave found freedom but not security. Enslaved in the 1720s in what is Ghana today, Belinda served Isaac Royall, one of Boston's wealthiest slave traders and slave owners for many years before he fled to England as a Loyalist in 1775. The revolutionary Massachusetts government confiscated his estate, including his many slaves. Belinda's new owner, whose name is lost to history, freed her, perhaps because at her advanced age she was more a burden than a useful worker. In 1782, at about age seventy, Belinda applied for a small pension. "Fifty years her faithful hands have been compelled to ignoble servitude for the benefit of an Isaac Royall, until, as if nations must be agitated and the world convulsed, for the preservation of that freedom which the Almighty Father intended for all the human race, the present war commenced," read her petition. "The face of your petitioner is now marked with the furrows of time, and her frame feebly bending under the oppression of years, while she, by the laws of the land, is denied the enjoyment of one morsel of that immense wealth, a part whereof hath been accumulated by her own industry and the whole augmented by her servitude." Belinda's argument that she could be paid from the sale of her slave master's large estate convinced the state government to pay her fifteen pounds—but only for one year.[82]

Just as Elizabeth Freeman was unwilling to wait for white conscience to respond to the natural-rights rhetoric of the revolutionary era, a large group

Susan Sedgwick, later an accomplished novelist, painted Elizabeth Freeman in 1811 as a woman nearing seventy. Eighteen years later, Freeman left a will bequeathing to her daughter a black silk gown belonging to Freeman's African-born father and a short gown that her African-born mother had worn. Freeman was buried in the Sedgwick family plot in the Stockbridge, Massachusetts, burial ground.

of slaves in Maryland moved aggressively at the end of the war to get what they believed God gave them. The case began with Mary Butler of Prince Georges County, but the outcome also affected hundreds of other slaves in neighboring counties. All of them were descended from Eleanor Butler (called Nell), an Irish indentured servant who had come to Maryland more than a century before. When Butler agreed to marry an African slave, Lord Baltimore, the colony's proprietor, opposed the marriage, asking Nell "how she would like to go to bed" with Charles, the African slave. Nell, according to the story passed down from generation to generation, replied that "she

rather go to bed with Charles than his Lordship." One of Irish Nell's grandsons and one of her great-granddaughters had sued for freedom before the American Revolution, arguing that they descended from a woman who was white and not herself enslaved. But the court ruled against them. Now, in 1783, the Prince Georges County court passed the tangled matter on to the General Court of Maryland's Western Shore. The matter was resolved only when the Maryland Court of Appeals, after several years of litigation, ruled that Mary Butler was "entitled to liberty" because they could find no proof that her great-great-grandmother, known as Irish Nell, had been sentenced to slavery for marrying an African slave.[83]

Though Mary Butler walked free, all the other slaves descended from Irish Nell had only a precedent to work with and resistant masters to contend with. But scores of them pressed suits. Year by year, well into the 1790s, Irish Nell's descendants gained their freedom, to the dismay of their owners.

African Americans in other states hoped that the end of slavery might come with the end of the war. Pushing their cause were members of the Society of Friends in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Ceaseless prodding by Anthony Benezet and a handful of other Quaker reformers began to build on the crusade they had launched on the eve of the war. The war itself had gone hard with Quakers, some of them exiled from Pennsylvania as Loyalists and others hated for their refusal to bear arms on behalf of the emerging nation. But the war had fulfilled their darkest prophecies of suffering, and many Friends emerged from it convinced that they must return to their former ways of plain living and dedicate themselves to righting the wrongs swirling around them. Nothing was more wrong, they believed, than the continuation of slavery. At the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1783, more than five hundred Friends from Pennsylvania, Delaware, and New Jersey signed a petition to the Continental Congress to prohibit a reopening of the slave trade by those "prompted from avaricious motives" in contradiction of "the solemn declarations often repeated in favour of universal liberty."[84] Congress did not comply and South Carolina and Georgia resumed importation.

Although they failed at the national level, the Quakers were more successful in Pennsylvania, where they took up the enforcement of the gradual abolition act of 1780. Benezet described how black Philadelphians came to him "almost daily and sometimes more" seeking help. Some slave owners were creating loopholes in the abolition act by selling their slaves out of the state,

sending pregnant women across the border to Maryland or Virginia where their children would be born into perpetual slavery, and in other ways circumventing the law. Two dramatic cases of suicide galvanized reform-minded Philadelphians to revive the abolition society they had founded in 1775. One "sensible" free black Philadelphian, Benezet related, was denied a writ of habeas corpus to prevent his forced departure from the city. Desperate to avoid reenslavement, he "hung himself to the great regret of all who knew him." Another African American, "having pressingly, on his knees, solicited a friend, without success, to prevent his being sent away to the southward" from his family, threw himself from the deck of a ship as it sailed down the Delaware River.[85]

After these heart-wrenching suicides, a small group of Philadelphians revived the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, just a few months before Benezet's death. Reaching out to every neighborhood and church in the city, the core group built a mostly middle-class organization of artisans, shopkeepers, and lesser merchants. Shoemaker Samuel Richards became its first president; shoemaker James Starr and schoolteacher John Todd served as treasurer and secretary. But the workhorse was an unassuming forty-three-year-old Quaker tailor, Thomas Harrison. His shop became the listening post, information center, and place of temporary refuge for African Americans fleeing their masters. Harrison and his wife, a Quaker minister, knew pain enough of their own. Sarah Harrison gave birth nine times between 1765 and 1778, and seven times the Harrisons buried children. But the irrepressible Thomas Harrison, described by a contemporary as "a lively, bustling man with a roguish twinkle in his eye," became the abolition society's most important representative, listening to the stories of African Americans, assigning their cases to members of the Acting Committee, posting security with the courts in particular cases, and negotiating with individual masters and mistresses to avoid court action.

As slaves came forward hoping to secure their freedom or that of their children, the PAS litigated at least twenty-two cases in 1784 and many more thereafter as word spread of its work. The aggressive litigation strategy troubled some Philadelphians and more outsiders, who protested that it strained interstate harmony in a nation struggling to establish itself. Arguing on behalf of a fellow Virginian, George Washington put the case strongly. When his acquaintance had entered the state with a slave, the PAS sued on behalf of

the bondman's freedom. Two years later when the case came to trial, the Virginian was obliged to return to defend himself. "When slaves who are happy and contented with their present masters are tampered with and seduced to leave them," wrote Washington to Philadelphia's Robert Morris, and when practices of this kind "fall on a man, whose purse will not measure with that of the Society, and he loses his property for want of means to defend it, it is oppression . . . and not humanity because it introduces more evils than it can cure."[86] The argument that any slaves were content to be living in a perpetual bondage that was passed to all their children must have seemed laughable to PAS members, not to mention the slaves. In any case, Washington's argument did not prevail.

One of the PAS's most important services was to copy out by hand the freedom papers of slaves emerging from bondage. This was invaluable to any freedperson who had the misfortune of losing his or her freedom papers and being seized by bounty hunters whom southern slave masters commissioned to recapture fleeing or presumed runaway slaves. Many free men and women found themselves snatched from the streets and put on ships headed southward. Sometimes it was a case of mistaken identity; other times it was case of kidnapping for a price. The very first freedom paper copied into the large PAS Manumission Books was that of "Richard," with no surname indicated. This was Richard Allen, not much known at the time but soon one of the young men who stepped out of the shadows to become part of the rootstock of postwar black society.

Born in 1760, Allen grew up as a slave to the family of Benjamin Chew, a wealthy conservative lawyer in Philadelphia who maintained a plantation in southern Delaware, where the labor force was mostly enslaved. Chew sold Allen's family to a neighboring Delaware farmer just before the Revolution, and it was here that Richard experienced a religious conversion at the hands of itinerant Methodists. Richard's master also fell to the power of the Methodist message. Nudged along by economic necessity in the war-torn economy, he let Richard and his brother purchase their freedom. In 1780, with the war still raging, the twenty-year-old Richard gave himself the surname of Allen and began a six-year religious sojourn. Interspersing work as woodcutter, salt wagon driver for the revolutionary army, and shoemaker with stints of itinerant preaching, he trudged over hundreds of miles to preach before black and white audiences. In the mid-1780s, he attracted the

attention of Francis Asbury, about to become the first American Methodist bishop. Asbury sent Allen to Philadelphia to preach to the free African Americans who worshiped at Saint George Methodist Church—a rude, dirt-floored building in the German part of the city. Allen soon became the city's foremost black leader. He went on to create the first independent black church in the city, organize the first black school, and found the Free African Society, which ministered to the needs of people coming out of slavery.[87]

Elsewhere, other black men stood forward in the early years of the new republic. Prince Hall became a resolute organizer of free black Bostonians. The slave of merchant William Hall, Prince Hall had worshiped at the church of Andrew Crosswell, a radical evangelist who had preached against slavery since the 1740s. Hall received his freedom in 1770 and established the first black Masonic lodge in America with the aid of British soldiers occupying the town in 1775–76. An associate of Phillis Wheatley, he waged a campaign against slavery during the war. After slavery was abolished by judicial decree, Hall continued his efforts to combat the low pay and deep prejudice that most black Bostonians faced.

Farther north, in Massachusetts, Lemuel Haynes (whom we met in chapter 5) became an inspiration for aspiring African Americans. After the war, he supported himself doing farm labor while preparing for a lifetime in the ministry. "One-time minute man," says John Saillant, his recent biographer, he "never wavered in his patriotism," and "he articulated more clearly than anyone of his generation, black or white, the abolitionist implications of republican thought." Haynes understood what half a million fellow African Americans were up against: Early in the revolutionary struggle, political leaders up and down the seaboard agreed that slavery was an affront to the natural rights on which republicanism was built, but as the war wound down, the dominant theoreticians of republican ideology—men such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison—were seeing black people *themselves,* rather than the institution of slavery, as corrosive to "the great republican experiment." "The eradication of slavery," writes Saillant, "and the extension to blacks of the liberty and security of an antislavery republican state were, in Haynes' mind, essential to republican governance and republican life."[88] Haynes knew that many men who were revered for their leadership roles in the struggle for independence were themselves complicit in the monstrous contradiction of black Americans perpetually trapped in slavery in the midst of a so-called republican experiment.

Licensed to preach in 1780—the first ordained black clergyman in the United States—Haynes led a white congregation in Middle Granville, Massachusetts. There he met Elizabeth Babbitt, a white woman who bucked the tide of prejudice against interracial marriage. Nine children were born of this marriage that lasted for more than fifty years. One white minister, later to become president of Amherst College, remembered that Haynes sermonized with "no notes but spoke with freedom and correctness.... There was so much of truth and nature in [his sermons] that hundreds were melted into tears." In 1788, Haynes became the pastor in Rutland, Vermont, where he served for thirty years. It was here, in a state that had abolished slavery in 1777, that his thoughts ripened on how black Americans would fit into a republican scheme of government. After a long tenure in Rutland, Haynes moved on to his final pastorate in South Granville, New York, where he served through his seventies. After Haynes died, his biographer called him "a sanctified genius," a man whose life story could "hardly fail to mitigate the unreasonable prejudices against the Africans in our land."[89]

Defenders of slavery in the northern states were clearly on the defensive by 1784; it was already clear, to be confirmed by the first federal census in 1790, that free African Americans were to be the rule rather than the exception. In 1785, Jefferson believed that opponents of abolition in the North were no more numerous than the occasional murderers and robbers who roamed the countryside and predicted that "in a few years there will be no slaves northward of Maryland."[90] But in the southern states, where nearly nine of every ten African Americans still lived as peace became official, only guarded optimism about abolishing slavery could be found, and that was only in Maryland and Virginia. Yet the majority of southern slaves lived in the Upper South. If Maryland and Virginia had crossed the Rubicon, could the Carolinas and Georgia have resisted?

As the war drew to a close, many leaders in Maryland, such as Luther Martin and Gustavus Scott, or Virginians such as George Mason, Patrick Henry, George Wythe, Thomas Jefferson, Arthur Lee, and Edmund Pendleton, publicly advocated the gradual abolition of slavery. The Marquis de Chastellux believed that Virginians "in general ... seem grieved at having slaves, and are constantly talking of abolishing slavery and of seeking other means of exploiting their lands." Chastellux was doubtless too optimistic in saying that "this opinion ... is almost universally accepted." But he had inquired carefully into the matter and found that younger men, especially the

educated, were moved by "justice and the rights of humanity." As for their fathers, the concern was more practical—that slave "labor is neither so productive nor so cheap as that of day laborers or white servants" and that "epidemical disorders, which are very common [among slaves] render both their property and their income extremely precarious."[91]

Boosting the chance of expunging slavery from southern republican soil was the rise of radical evangelical Christianity in the South. For populist Methodist evangelists such as Freeborn Garretson and David Rice, slaveholding was interlocked with other sins such as gambling, horse racing, and sabbath breaking—all afflictions of the self-indulgent gentry class. Among the Methodists, the fastest-growing denomination in the South, leaders such as Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke spread the antislavery gospel and circulated resolutions condemning slavery in the early 1780s. At the famous Christmas meeting of 1784, Methodist leaders banned all those who held slaves and called upon all slaveholders to provide for the manumission of their chattel property at specified times. "We view," they wrote, "the practice of holding our fellow creatures in slavery . . . as contrary to the golden law of God on which hang all the law and the prophets, and the unalienable Rights of Mankind, as well as every principle of the Revolution."[92] The Methodists had now joined the Quakers in making allegiance to their faith and allegiance to slaveholding incompatible and unallowable.

The decreasing profitability of slave labor in the Upper South influenced some planters shifting from tobacco to wheat cultivation to liberate their slaves. Still, there was in every emancipating slave owner some sentiment that slavery was immoral, unnatural, and inimical to revolutionary republicanism. Otherwise, slave owners would merely have sold bondmen and bondwomen who could no longer be profitably employed to planters in areas where slavery was still profitable. In some cases, especially in manumitting aged slaves who were no longer able to work, little altruism was involved. But the manumitting documents themselves include language infused with the doctrine of natural rights, often interwoven with expressions of Christian conscience. "The constant reiteration of antislavery ideals," writes historian Ira Berlin, "suggests that most manumitters took them to heart." When one man freed slaves because, to quote one Virginian, "it is contrary to the command of Christ to keep fellow creatures in bondage," his neighbors were often affected.[93]

The rapid growth of the free black population in the Upper South gives a

final, if rough, indication of antislavery sentiment. Maryland's free black population was 1,818 in 1755, rose slowly before the Revolution, and reached 8,000 by 1790 and nearly 20,000 by the turn of the century. In Virginia, where a census in 1782 showed 1,800 free blacks, the number more than doubled in the two years after the liberal manumission law took effect and swelled to nearly 13,000 by 1800. Delaware's free population of African Americans, only 3,899 in 1790, grew to 8,268 in 1800. To be sure, free blacks made up only one of eight Upper South blacks by 1800. Yet in the absence of a compensated gradual emancipation law, thousands of slaveholders were nonetheless disentangling themselves from coerced labor. The idea had indeed spread that a republic based on natural-rights theory could not survive without emancipating the enslaved fifth of the population. A "general consensus" had emerged in the revolutionary era, as David Brion Davis has concluded, "that black slavery was a historical anomaly that could survive for a time only in the plantation societies where it had become the dominant mode of production."[94] A transformative moment seemed at hand.

Women of the Republic

When galloping inflation led to the price-control crisis in seaboard cities in 1779 and Washington's tattered army suffered greatly, two high-visibility women in Philadelphia swung into action. Esther de Berdt Reed was the wife of the president of Pennsylvania's Supreme Executive Council and Sally Franklin Bache was the daughter of Benjamin and Deborah Franklin. Nailing up a broadside around the city titled "The Sentiments of an American Woman," they announced that American women were "born for liberty" and refused to "bear the irons of a tyrannic Government." In earlier societies, they reminded Philadelphians, politically active women had strode into the public arena to save their people. Ancient Rome was "saved from the fury of a victorious enemy by the efforts of Volumnia," and at other times when cities were under siege "the Women have been seen . . . building new walls, digging trenches with their feeble hands, furnishing arms to their defenders, they themselves darting the missile weapons on the enemy." Was it not "the Maid of Orleans who drove from the kingdom of France the ancestors of those same British, whose odious yoke we have just shaken off and whom it is necessary that we drive from this Continent"?[95]

Having prepared the public, Reed and Bache organized a battalion of

In painting this scene of Philadelphia women binding the wounds of casualties of the Battle of Germantown, Peter Frederick Rothermel may have been inspired by the Philadelphia women of the Civil War who launched the U.S. Sanitary Commission in 1861 to provide medical relief to wounded soldiers and sailors.

women to go door to door to raise money for Washington's ragged, demoralized army. Loyalist Anna Rawle sputtered, "Of all absurdities the ladies going about for money exceeded everything." But the women's battalion collected about 300,000 paper dollars and proposed to convert it to specie that would provide each soldier about $2 cold cash. Washington rejected this proposal, afraid it would increase his soldiers' discontent at getting only depreciated paper money for their regular pay. Instead, the women used the money to buy linen and made it into 2,200 shirts for the threadbare soldiers. Historian Linda Kerber has called the Reed-Bache broadside "an ideological justification for women's intrusion into politics that would become the standard model throughout the years of the early Republic."[96]

Jefferson believed that American women would be "too wise to wrinkle their foreheads with politics," but in the latter stages of the war increasing numbers of women believed they could not do otherwise. Some were in a position to think and act forcefully because they were married to leaders such as John Adams. Abigail knew very well that John listened to her and that she was as much a councillor as were Indian women to male tribal chiefs. Moreover, she saw that the emerging republic could be no better than the wisdom and virtue of its young women. "America will not wear chains while her daughters are virtuous," she told a male friend.[97] Even if women were barred from formal politics, the country would still have to rely on them because mothers would have the crucial role of molding the sons and daughters in whom the nation's future resided.

Abigail still grated that John and all his male colleagues would not revise the laws that made women's property "subject to the control and disposal of our partners, to whom the law have given a sovereign authority." This reform awaited the nineteenth century. Yet she and many other women like her remained dedicated to the public welfare though "deprived of a voice in legislation [and] obliged to submit to those laws which are imposed upon us." She reminded her friend that American women's patriotism and sacrifice during the war "equals the most heroic of yours" in spite of the unfair laws they lived under that were "sufficient to make us indifferent to the public welfare."

Abigail was correct as usual in her assertion about "women's patriotism and sacrifice during the war," but she may not have known the full extent of this. Mostly she thought about the women who tended the farms and the shops while their husbands were serving in the army; often she wrote about the economic and psychological burdens that the war placed on nearly everyone. But she had only limited experience with the hazards and hardships of the masses of ordinary women who, during the agonizingly long war, left their homes to follow their husbands, brothers, and sons into the fray or flocked to the army simply to find work. The number who followed the British army—in a case of counterpatriotism—was also very large.

The number of women who nursed the sick and wounded soldiers, washed and mended their clothes, hauled water and cooked their food, satisfied their sexual urges, and served as messengers and ammunition passers cannot be determined, because the women signed no articles of enlistment and had no official status. Modern studies estimate that several thousand women served with the Continental army, and it is possible that as many

served with the British. A British intelligence report in 1778 described "the rebel army" at White Plains, New York, where "friends to government [Loyalists]" estimated the army at 14,000 and "that the women and wagoners make up near the half of their army."[98]

Most of the women were poor, as were the men they served. Many were runaway indentured servants. Washington wrestled with the problem of legions of camp followers for the entire war. On the one hand they slowed down troop movements and intensified the issue of finding food for the army. On the other hand, he knew the army would "lose by desertion, perhaps to the enemy, some of the oldest and best soldiers" if he cast off their wives, relatives, and lovers.[99] Often women had to do with half rations, but that was also true for most of the men during much of the war.

Always trying to limit the number of women following his army, Washington could do no more than issue orders—with scant results. Near the end of the war, he issued a general order establishing a ratio of one woman for each fifteen men. There was no way to enforce this, and it cut against the needs of the men who were already prone to desertion because of the awful conditions they had to endure. Nor could officers always control the women, who almost by definition were a tough lot. Early in the war General Anthony Wayne had to cope with striking laundresses seeking an adequate wage. In another case, when Washington led his army through Philadelphia in 1777, just before the British occupation of the city, he was unsuccessful in his attempt to make the camp followers disappear. "Not a woman belonging to the army is to be seen with the troops on their march through the city," he ordered. But no sooner had his regiments passed by than women sprang from courtyards and alleys and fell in behind the men, "demanding by their very presence, their share of respect."[100]

The army, in fact, could not do without women. In one of countless examples, Mary Frazier, a Pennsylvania farmer's wife, made daily rounds to collect from neighbors what they could spare for the soldiers—blankets, worn-out socks, bits of yarn. As her granddaughter later recounted, she took these castoffs home "where they would be patched and darned and made wearable and comfortable.... She often sat up half the night, sometimes all, to get clothing ready. Then with it, and whatever could be obtained for food, she would have packed on her horse and set out on the cold lonely journey to the camp—which she went to repeatedly during the winter." At Yorktown in

1781, Sarah Osborn, wife of a New York blacksmith, was one of many who cooked and washed for the American troops and brought them food under fire because, as she remarked to Washington, "it would not do for the men to fight and starve too."[101]

Away from the fields of battle, the nation's women found themselves in a conflict without bullets—the refashioning of a new civic role for women. As Linda Kerber explains, it had two connected goals. The first was bursting the old stereotype of women as irrational, unsteady, and incompetent in public affairs; in its place came the model woman who was rational, competent, and steadfast. The second goal was using this competence to stand forth as "monitors of the political behavior of their lovers, husbands, and children."[102] This campaign on the home front gradually took shape as the war trailed off and would be burnished to a gloss in the years after the war.

Women also maintained the standards for civic virtue. Not all women were as punctilious as Abigail Adams in insisting that women should "judge how well her husband and sons met their responsibilities," but this was the ideal created during the course of the long war.[103] What made this urgent was the widespread feeling by the end of the war that the Americans had fashioned a great and dangerous paradox: Victorious against the world's mightiest military power, they had lost the virtue required to maintain an independent republic. "Our morals are more depreciated than our currency," judged David Ramsay halfway through the war, and a few years later he lamented that the "declension of our public virtue" had produced "pride, luxury, dissipation and a long train of unsuitable vices [that] have overwhelmed our country." "Selfishness has so far prevailed over that patriotic spirit which at first wrought wonder through the Continent," echoed William Gordon to Washington, "that I have little dependence on the virtue of the people."[104] The correspondence of wartime leaders, both military officers and politicians, is dotted with similar expressions of anguish over selflessness replaced by selfishness.

Thus "virtue," before the war a masculine quality that citizen-warriors demonstrated by sacrificing self-interest for the common good and sacrificing individual lives for the good of the whole society, had to be retooled and feminized in peacetime if the noble new democratic experiment was to succeed. In this rescue operation, the salvaging of the human traits upon which a republic could be built and sustained lay much in the hands of women. With

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

Epilogue

SPARKS FROM THE ALTAR OF '76

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