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III



Models

While the founders used classical symbols to create implicit analogies, identifying themselves and their causes with the ancients, they also formulated explicit analogies and contrasts between ancient and contemporary individuals, societies, and governments. Decades after some of the founders lost their facility with the classical languages, they retained a thorough knowledge of ancient history. Ancient history provided the founders with important, if imprecise, models of personal behavior, social practice, and government form. Such models gave the founders a sense of identity and purpose during the struggles of the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods.

The founders' models of personal behavior included mythological figures, Athenians, and Romans. The founders met their mythological heroes in the works of Homer, Hesiod, Virgil, and Ovid. They found their Athenian heroes in Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon, and especially Plutarch. Even as a teenager James Madison typified the founders' regard for the second century Greek historian when he copied into his commonplace book Cardinal de Retz's statement: "The E. of Montrose was the only Man in the World that recalled in me the Ideas of some Heroes who are now to be found only [in] Plutarch's Lives." Similarly, in 1782 Charles Lee declared: "I have ever from the first time I read Plutarch been an Enthusiastick for liberty . . . and for liberty in a republican garb." When John Taylor of Caroline wished to insult the Federalist commercial elite, he stated that few would make good "subjects for a Plutarch."

The founders encountered their Roman heroes in the works of Polybius, Livy, Sallust, Plutarch, and Tacitus. Thomas Jefferson particularly admired Tacitus, whose moralistic *Annals* heaped scorn on the emperors and glorified the republic. In 1808 Jefferson wrote: "Tacitus I consider

the first writer in the world without a single exception. His book is a compound of history and morality of which we have no other example." In 1823 Jefferson reiterated his claim that Tacitus was "the strongest writer in the world." By that time he had quoted Tacitus on the role of the historian: "This I hold to be the chief duty and office of the historian, to judge the actions of men, to the end that the good and the worthy may meet with the rewards due to eminent virtue, and that pernicious citizens may be deterred by the condemnation that waits on evil deeds at the tribunal of posterity." "History" was the ultimate judge, dispensing fame to the virtuous, infamy to the vicious. Reading Tacitus as a young man in 1756, John Adams was filled with horror at the violence of the Roman emperors. John Dickinson praised Tacitus as "that excellent historian and statesman . . . whose political reflections are so justly and universally admired." In his 1774 will Josiah Quincy left his son the works of Tacitus, Francis Bacon, Algernon Sidney, and John Locke, books he considered most apt to instill "the spirit of liberty" in a boy. He described Tacitus' work as "masterly," "elegant," and "instructive." Charles Lee noted regarding the tremendous influence of the ancient historians on the youth of his age: "It is natural to a young person whose chief companions are the Greek and Roman Historians and Orators to be dazzled with the splendid picture."²

The founders also encountered classical models of every variety in popular modern histories of the ancient world, such as Charles Rollin's *Ancient History* (1731–1750). When deprived of the rectorship of the University of Paris for his Jansenist views while still in his thirties, Rollin had begun writing ancient history. A predestinarian with a bleak view of human nature, Rollin's chief message was the same as that of the ancient Roman historians he cited: defeat lurks within victory, since the wealth and power which result from success lead to corruption and, hence, to ultimate ruin. Rollin contended: "Asia [the eastern empire], vanquished by Roman arms, in its turn vanquished Rome by its vices." John Adams reflected this cyclical view of history when he asked Thomas Jefferson in 1819: "Will you tell me how to prevent riches from becoming the effects of temperance and industry? Will you tell me how to prevent riches from producing luxury? Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice, and folly?" Rollin's classical conception of history as training in morality no doubt also enhanced his popularity in eighteenth-century America. Rollin declared that "history may properly be called the common school of mankind,

equally open and useful to great and small . . . History, when it is well taught, becomes a school of morality." Hoping to instill a love of virtue in her son, Abigail Adams passed her days, while John Adams was away at the First Continental Congress, by having John Quincy read passages from the *Ancient History* to her. She wrote to John: "I have taken very great fondness for reading Rollin's ancient History since you left me. I am determined to go thro with it if possible in these days of solitude. I find great pleasure and entertainment from it, and I have perswaded Johnny to read me a page or two every day, and hope he will from his desire to oblige me entertain a fondness for it." Similarly, John Randolph repeatedly recommended the *Ancient History* to a young relative. Members of Princeton's American Whig Society read Rollin's history more frequently than any other modern history of the ancients.³

Many of the founders' heroes originated in Greek and Roman mythology. Thomas Jefferson dubbed Samuel Adams "the Palinurus of the American Revolution," after Virgil's mythical hero, who, having piloted the Trojan ships to Italy past many dangers, fell overboard and drowned. While preparing to replace the Federalist John Adams as president, a relieved Jefferson compared the republican experiment in the United States with the famed *Argos*, the ship which bore Jason's courageous band to the Golden Fleece. Jefferson wrote: "The storm through which we have passed has been tremendous indeed. The tough sides of our Argosie have been thoroughly tried. Her strength has stood the waves into which she was steered, with a view to sink her. We shall put her on a republican tack, & she will now show by the beauty of her motion the skill of her builders." Jefferson continued the analogy late in life, calling the leaders of the American Revolution "argonauts." Charles Thomson compared Patrick Henry with Aeneas, claiming that Congress listened to him with as rapt an attention as Aeneas's audience in Dido's palace.⁴

The most popular mythological model was the legendary Cincinnatus, though the founders considered him a real historical figure. In 1776 John Adams expressed his desire to emulate the Roman hero by resigning his worldly powers and cares. He wrote: "When a few mighty matters are accomplished here, I [will] retreat like Cincinnatus . . . and farewell Politics." In 1780 Samuel Adams emphasized the need for Americans to elect capable and selfless men like Cincinnatus, noting: "How different was Pisistratus from that Roman Hero and Patriot Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, who, tho vested with the Authority of Dictator, was so moderate in his Desires of a Continuance of Power, that, having in six weeks

fulfill'd the Purposes of his Appointment, he resign'd the dangerous office, which he might have held till the expiration of six Months. When we formerly had weak and wicked Governors & Magistrates, it was our Misfortune; but for the future, while we enjoy and exercise the inestimable right of chusing them ourselves, it will be our Disgrace." John Adams probably had Cincinnatus in mind again in 1794, when he wrote to Jefferson, who had resigned as secretary of state a year earlier and had left Philadelphia, then the national capital. Adams declared: "If I had your Plantation and your Labourers I should be tempted to follow your Example and get out of the Fumum et Opes Strepitumque Romae [the smoke, the wealth, and the din of Rome], which I abominate."⁵

Not surprisingly, many of the founders' Athenian heroes were aristocrats who had attempted, unsuccessfully, to rein in the mobs. Indeed, most of the founders admired the sixth-century B.C. reformer Solon for his moderation. In opposing the creation of a national judiciary at the Constitutional Convention Pierce Butler contended: "The States will revolt at such encroachments. Supposing such an establishment to be useful, we must not venture on it. We must follow the example of Solon, who gave the Athenians not the best Government he could devise; but the best they would receive." Similarly, in 1816 Jefferson congratulated Du Pont de Nemours on following Solon's example in suggesting moderate reforms for Latin America, reforms which would give the people "not the best possible government, but the best they can bear." Jefferson later explained: "The institutions of Lycurgus, for example, would not have suited Athens, nor those of Solon, Lacedaemon [Sparta]." In 1790 James Wilson praised Solon for his "wisdom and moderation" and exaggerated his role in western history. Wilson claimed: "His institutions concerning marriage, succession, testaments, the rights of persons, and things, have been disseminated through the jurisprudence of every civilized nation in Europe. The trial by jury, therefore, as well as other establishments may, it is said, refer, with great propriety, its original to Athens."⁶

Themistocles, Xenophon, and Demosthenes also served as models. Thomas Jefferson likened John Adams, a staunch supporter of a strong American navy, to Themistocles, whose success in building an Athenian fleet had led the Greeks to an astonishing victory over the Persians in the fifth century B.C. Jefferson also compared France's universal acclaim with that of the Athenian. After noting that every Greek general had voted himself the best general in the Persian War, and Themistocles the second

best, Jefferson wrote: "So ask the traveled inhabitant of any nation, In what country on earth would you rather live?—Certainly in my own, where all my friends, my relations, and the earliest & sweetest affections and recollections of my life [dwell]. Which would be your second choice? France." In 1775 Jefferson claimed that Benedict Arnold's daring march to Quebec through the dense woods of Maine was equal to Xenophon's famous fifteen-hundred-mile retreat from the heart of the Persian empire in 401 B.C. As a young man in 1763, John Adams likened himself to Xenophon. He claimed: "If engagements to a party are necessary to make a fortune, I had rather make none at all, and spend the remainder of my days like my favourite author, that ancient and immortal husbandman, philosopher, politician, and general, Xenophon, in his retreat." In 1774 Adams contrasted the First Continental Congress' economic response to Parliament's Coercive Acts with the bolder policies of Demosthenes and Cicero. He wrote: "Is it easy to believe they would propose Non Importation? Non Exportation? Non Consumption? If I mistake not, Something a little more Sublime, and mettlesome, would come from Such Kind of Spirits." He noted: "When Demosthenes (God forgive the Vanity of recollecting his Example) went [as] Ambassador from Athens to the other States of Greece, to excite a Confederacy against Philip [of Macedon], he did not go to propose a Non Importation or Non Consumption Agreement!"

The founders' principal Roman heroes were Cato the Younger, Brutus, Cassius, and Cicero, statesmen who had sacrificed their lives in unsuccessful attempts to save the republic in its expiring moments. Typical was Abigail Adams' 1781 compliment to Elbridge Gerry, comparing him with Cato. Only Thomas Jefferson doubted Cato's perfection, calling his mentor, George Wythe, "Cato without the avarice of the Roman." Though self-conscious about his lack of formal education, George Washington modeled himself upon Cato to such an extent that his biographer James Thomas Flexner claimed: "Washington was Cato turned Virginia country gentleman."⁸

George Washington's favorite play was Joseph Addison's *Cato*, a tragedy based closely on Plutarch's lives of Cato and Caesar. The play, which ended with Cato's suicide following Caesar's occupation of Utica, was intensely classical. It contained so many declamations on virtue that Samuel Johnson characterized it as "a succession of just sentiments in elegant language, rather than a representation of natural affections, or of any state possible or probable in human life." Addison went so far out of his way

to avoid alluding to contemporary British politics (even ignoring Queen Anne's hint that she would not be averse to having the play dedicated to her) that both Whigs and Tories praised it. At the play's debut in 1713 each party attempted to surpass the other in applause, in order to prove that theirs was the party of liberty. The Tory Lord Bolingbroke even collected money from friends to give to the actor who played Cato, in order to lay claim to the play. (Bolingbroke collected fifty-four guineas, but gave the actor only fifty—a flagrant violation of Cato's strict ethics.) Similarly, Tory Alexander Pope claimed that Cato called "forth Roman drops from British eyes." In America the play was perceived as a Whigish work and hence was tremendously popular. It underwent nine American editions before 1800 and eight more in the nineteenth century.⁹

Washington associated himself with Cato. In 1775 he prevented the resignation of General John Thomas, who was angered by an unjust demotion, by paraphrasing Cato's line: "Surely every post ought to be deemed honorable in which a man can serve his country." Despite congressional resolutions in 1774 and 1778 prohibiting all public officials from attending plays, Washington ordered *Cato* performed at Valley Forge. He hoped to improve the soldiers' morale by inspiring them with the example of Cato's men, who had demonstrated extreme selflessness in the struggle for liberty. During these difficult times, Washington often repeated another line from Cato: "'Tis not in mortals to command success." Perhaps it was the memory of Cato's willingness to sacrifice his property on behalf of the republic that led Washington to reproach his overseer for placating British troops with grain. Washington declared that the overseer should allow Mount Vernon to be leveled before giving any aid to the enemy.¹⁰

In 1783 Washington turned to *Cato* when his officers, furious over Congress's perpetual inability to pay them, mutinied at Newburgh. The rebels planned to threaten the states with a coup d'état unless they yielded more power to Congress. Although Washington considered the strengthening of the weak Congress vital to national survival, his classical conditioning had taught him to perceive even the threat of a military coup as dangerous and dishonorable. In his speech to the officers he used the same three tactics Cato employed to face down his mutineers in Act III, Scene 5 of Addison's play. First, Washington rebuked the anonymous author of a circular letter which urged mutiny. Cato had also lambasted his rebels, though Washington was able to adopt a friendlier tone

with his audience, since he was able to feign ignorance of the identity of the mutineers.¹¹

Washington's second tactic was to appeal to his officers to maintain the republican honor they had won. He urged them not to "adopt measures which may cast a shade over that glory which has been so justly acquired; and tarnish the reputation of an Army which is celebrated thro' all Europe for its fortitude and Patriotism." Washington returned to the theme at the end of the speech: "You will give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism and patient virtue, rising superior to the pressure of the most complicated sufferings; And you will, by the dignity of your Conduct, afford occasion for Posterity to say, when speaking of the glorious example you have exhibited to Mankind, 'Had this day been wanting, the World had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining.'" This last line was similar to an earlier one (Act I, Scene 4) in *Cato*:

To strike thee dumb, turn up thy eyes to Cato!
There may'st thou see to what a godlike height
The Roman virtues lift up mortal man.

Similarly, in Act III Cato asked:

. . . And will you thus dishonor
Your past exploits, and sully all your wars?
Do you confess 'twas not a zeal for Rome,
Nor love of liberty, nor thirst of honour,
Drew you thus far; but hopes to share the spoil
Of conquered towns and plunder'd provinces?
Fired with such motives you do well to join
With Cato's foes, and follow Caesar's banners.¹²

Washington's third tactic was to appeal to the sympathy and respect which his past service had earned him. Colonel David Cobb recalled that Washington preceded his speech with the statement: "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray, but almost blind, in the service of my country." Cato was even less subtle, reminding his troops of the hardships he had endured in the deserts of Libya, when he had seen to the needs of his soldiers before quenching his own thirst:

Behold my bosom naked to your swords,
And let the man that's injured strike the blow.
Which of you all suspects that he is wrong'd,
Or thinks he suffers greater ills than Cato?
Am I distinguished from you but by toils,
Superior toils, and heavy weight of cares!

...

Have you forgotten Libya's burning waste,
Its barren rocks, parch'd earth, and hills of sand,
Its tainted air, and all its broods of poison?

...

When on the banks of the unlook'd-for stream
You sunk the river with repeated draughts
Who was the last that thirsted?

The soldiers' response to both appeals was the same: tearful remorse.¹³

Even while president, Washington continued to recite lines from *Cato*. Lamenting the difficult decisions of his office, Washington declared: "The post of honor is a private station." Such quotations are all the more remarkable because Washington rarely quoted authors. Since Washington never owned a copy of the play, he must have remembered the lines by heart.¹⁴

Other founders admired Addison's *Cato* as well. The popular play was probably the source of the most famous statements of the American Revolution, those of Patrick Henry and Nathan Hale. In Act II, Scene 4 we find the lines: "It is not now a time to talk of aught / But chains or conquest, liberty or death." In Act IV, Scene 4 we discover: "What pity is it / That we can die but once for our country." Cato had made the latter statement when the corpse of his son Marcus was brought to him after a battle. Hale uttered a paraphrase before the British hanged him as a spy. In the third volume of his famous reader, the first in North America, Noah Webster included most of Act I, Scene 4 of Addison's play, a dialogue between Juba and Syphax on the Roman mission to bring civilization and law to the world. In the same book Webster portrayed Cato's daughter, Marcia, as a model of female modesty. Webster's popular reader underwent seventy-seven editions between 1785 and 1835.¹⁵

While Washington derived a sense of identity and purpose from his emulation of Cato, John Adams derived the same benefits from his lifelong identification with Cicero. In the autumn of 1758 Adams gloried in the fact that law, his chosen profession, was "A Field in which Demos-

thenes, Cicero, and others of immortal Fame have exulted before me!" That winter he confessed to his diary the pleasure he derived from reading Cicero's orations aloud: "The Sweetness and Grandeur of his sounds, and the Harmony of his Numbers give Pleasure enough to reward the Reading if one understood none of his meaning. Besides, I find it a noble Exercise. It exercises my Lungs, raises my Spirits, opens my Pores, quickens the Circulation, and so contributes much to [my] Health." Indeed, after a family quarrel a few days later, Adams "quitted the Room, and took up Tully to compose myself." In 1765 he joined several other Boston lawyers in forming "Sodalitas," a small club whose "main Object" was to "read in Concert the Feudal Law and Tully's Orations." In 1774 Adams urged an aspiring politician to adopt Cicero as his model. He wrote regarding Cicero's proconsulship at Lilybaeum in Sicily: "He did not receive this office as Persons do now a days, as a Gift, or a Farm, but as a public Trust, and considered it as a Theatre, in which the Eyes of the World were upon him." When Rome was short of grain, Cicero managed to feed the city without treating his own province unfairly.¹⁶

When Adams, one of the greatest orators of his day, rose before the Continental Congress on July 1, 1776, to rebut John Dickinson's contention that American independence would be premature, the New Englander thought of Cicero. He recorded in his diary: "I began by saying that this was the first time of my Life that I had ever wished for the Talents and Eloquence of the ancient Orators of Greece and Rome, for I was very sure that none of them ever had before him a question of more importance to his Country and to the World."¹⁷

Adams' admiration for Cicero outlived the American Revolution. He spent the summer of 1796, several months before assuming the presidency, reading the Roman statesman's essays. In 1803 Adams quoted Cicero regarding the true public servant: "Such a man will devote himself entirely to the republic, nor will he covet power or riches . . . He will adhere closely to justice and equity, that, provided he can preserve these virtues, although he may give offence and create enemies by them, he will set death itself at defiance, rather than abandon his principles." No one followed this ethic better than Adams. In the 1760s he had refused the lucrative and prestigious position of admiralty court judge because he considered the juryless British courts unconstitutional. In 1770 he had sacrificed his popularity to defend the British soldiers accused of murder in the "Boston Massacre." As president, in 1799–1800 he had made peace with Napoleonic France, leaving Jefferson the glory of the Loui-

Purchase, at the expense of his own reelection. While no other founder yearned so much for popularity, none so continually sacrificed it to a strict code of ethics. It is not fanciful to suppose that, when making such painful decisions, Adams found consolation in contemplating the Roman statesman's sacrifices and the eternal glory they had earned him.¹⁸

Adams continued to express admiration for Cicero in the correspondence of his twilight years. In his own notes of 1804 in defense of Cicero against Lord Bolingbroke's charge of military ineptitude, Adams cited both Conyers Middleton and Julius Caesar on Cicero's skill. Adams retorted to Bolingbroke's accusation of vanity against the Roman, a charge which Bolingbroke based on Cicero's having "impudently" demanded a triumph: "He did no more than all imperators had done. His Lordship's impudence here is greater than Tully's." In 1805, after chiding Benjamin Rush for destroying documents regarding the American Revolution which Rush had collected, Adams wrote: "The period in the history of the world the best understood is that of Rome from the time of Marius to the death of Cicero [second to first century B.C.], and this distinction is entirely owing to Cicero's letters and orations. There we see the true character of the times and the passions of all the actors on the stage. Cicero, Cato, and Brutus were the only three in whom I can discern any real patriotism . . . Cicero had the most capacity and the most constant, as well as the wisest and most persevering attachment to the republic." Adams explained that he had first become familiar with Cicero through Conyers Middleton's *History of the Life of Marcus Tullius Cicero* (1741), though he had read the Roman statesman in the original Latin shortly thereafter. In an 1808 letter to Rush, Adams again defended Cicero against the frequent charge of vanity, arguing: "What other People call Vanity in Cicero, I denominate Naivete." Cicero was faced with "Jealousy and Envy" of his talents and was surrounded by libelers. Adams continued: "In this distressing Situation he poured out the feelings of his tortured heart with the utmost Naivete . . . He blazoned forth his own Virtues, Talents, and great Services in the Face of the Senate and the whole Roman People . . . It was Self Defense, Independence, Intrepidity, or in one Word, Naivete." Nevertheless, fearful of facing the same charge of vanity for this implicit analogy between Cicero and himself, Adams never dispatched the letter. Although he allowed his son, John Quincy, to read the missive, he told him to burn it afterward.¹⁹

But in the following year what little self-restraint Adams retained collapsed. In a letter to Rush which he did dispatch, Adams cried out:

Panegyric romances will never be written, nor flattering orations spoken, to transmit me to posterity in brilliant colors. No, nor in true colors. All but the last I loathe. Yet, I will not die wholly unlamented. Cicero was libeled, slandered, insulted by all parties—by Caesar's party, Catiline's crew, Clodius's myrmidions, aye, and by Pompey and the Senate too. He was persecuted and tormented by turns by all parties and all factions, and that for his most virtuous and glorious actions. In his anguish at times and in the consciousness of his own merit and integrity, he was driven to those assertions of his own actions which have been denominated vanity. Instead of reproaching him with vanity, I think them the most infallible demonstration of his innocence and purity. He declares that all honors are indifferent to him because he knows that it is not in the power of his country to reward him in any proportion to his services.

Pushed and injured and provoked as I am, I blush not to imitate the Roman.

In 1811, when Adams wished to console Rush upon his son's departure to the national capital and government service, he recalled Cicero's patriotic axiom (*De officiis*, 1.7.22): "Not for ourselves, not for ourselves alone were we born." Finally, in 1812, Adams wrote: "Letters! What shall I say of letters? Pliny's are too studied and elegant. Cicero's are the only ones of perfect simplicity, confidence, and familiarity." Each year of his retirement Adams set aside time to reread Cicero's *De Senectute*, which extolled the virtues of rural life.²⁰

Adams was all too successful in his lifelong attempt to emulate Cicero. Adams' integrity, which found its greatest expression in his unwillingness to endorse party favoritism, led to unpopularity in both parties; and his responses to critics were marked by the same petulance and vanity as the Roman's. The only difference between Cicero and Adams was that Cicero, uninfluenced by Christian notions of humility, had found nothing shameful in vanity. Not only would it have never occurred to Cicero to deny the charge of vanity; it would never have occurred to his contemporaries to make it. Classical heroes were hardly known for their modesty.

Adams merely clung more tenaciously to a theme which the other founders also embraced: the theme of the lone-wolf hero (Socrates, Demosthenes, and Cicero are all good examples) who sacrifices short-term popularity, which can be purchased only by vice, for long-term fame, which can be purchased only by virtue—the aristocrat who saves the ignorant masses, often at the cost of his own life, from themselves. The

classical hero treated the follies of the people and the bribes of monarchs with equal disdain. Likewise, the founders were as disgusted by the fawning courtiers who crowded around George III and his colonial governors in search of preferment as they were by demagogues who manipulated popular passions to increase their own power. This equation of virtue with independence of thought and action, when combined with a concomitant equation of vice with "factionalism" (Roman historians despised the *factio*, the favorite instrument of demagogues), contributed greatly to the antiparty sentiment which dominated the early history of the United States. According to the classical doctrine, membership in a political party inevitably involved defending the indefensible vices of one's allies and attempting to dominate one's fellow citizens in order to satisfy a narrow self-interest. In the eighteenth century the greatest compliment one man could pay another was to call him "disinterested." To be disinterested was to place justice above all other considerations, including one's own interest and those of one's family, friends, and political allies. Both Federalist and Republican leaders decried "party spirit." They considered their own parties temporary aberrations, necessary only to block the antirepublican ambitions of their opponents, and looked forward to the day when they could be safely eliminated. George Washington devoted most of his Farewell Address to an attack on political parties, which he feared might produce civil war. Many Americans breathed a sigh of relief when American politics reverted to a partyless condition following the death of the Federalist Party in 1816. The "Era of Good Feelings" seemed a return to the mythical days of patriot unanimity during the American Revolution. John Quincy Adams inherited his father's determination to resist party favoritism. He refused to remove hundreds of political opponents from federal office. As late as the antebellum period many members of the Whig Party, still tied to classical theory, continued to perceive parties as an evil. They dubbed Andrew Jackson "King Andrew," claiming that his wholesale replacement of opponents resembled the corrupt patronage policy of George III.²¹

In any case, Adams' admiration for Cicero was infectious. In 1780 Abigail Adams exhorted her son, John Quincy, to seize the opportunity afforded by the Revolution to accomplish noble deeds. She wrote: "These are the times in which a Genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life, or the repose of a pacific station, that great characters are formed. Would Cicero have shone so distinguished an orator, if he had not been roused, kindled, and enflamed by the Tyranny of Catiline?"²²

James Wilson also idolized Cicero. Conceding vanity as the sole flaw in Cicero's character, Wilson cited the Roman statesman more often than any other author in his 1790 lectures to law students at the College of Philadelphia. Regarding education, Wilson asked: "What, I repeat it, can be intrinsically more dignified than to assist in forming a future Cicero, or Bacon?" Cicero himself had taught law, even after serving as consul and after representing kings. Wilson quoted Cicero on the importance of the rule of law: "Believe me, a more inestimable inheritance descends to you from the law than from those who have left, or may leave, you fortunes. A farm may be transmitted to me by the will of any one; but it is by the law alone that I can peacefully hold what is already my own. You ought, therefore, to retain the publick patrimony of the law, which you have received from your ancestors, with no less assiduity than you retain your private estates; not only because these are fenced and protected by the law; but for this further reason, because the loss of the law would be deeply detrimental to the whole commonwealth." Wilson exulted: "The jurisprudence of Rome was adorned and enriched by the exquisite genius of Cicero, which, like the touch of Midas, converts every object into gold." He cited Cicero on the Roman jury system. He called Cicero's *De officiis* "a work which does honour to human understanding and the human heart." He quoted the statesman against torture and in defense of property rights. Wilson declared: "'A publick theater,' says Cicero, with his usual luminous propriety, 'is common to all citizens, but the seat which each occupies may, during the entertainment, be denominated his own.'"

The founders revered Caesar's assassins Brutus and Cassius. During the Stamp Act crisis in 1765 John Adams declared optimistically: "Let us take it for granted that the same great spirit which once gave Caesar so warm a reception . . . [and] which first seated the great grandfather of his present most gracious Majesty on the throne of Britain is still alive and active and warm in England; and that the same spirit in America, instead of provoking the inhabitants of that country, will endear us to them forever and secure their good will." In 1767 he quoted Shakespeare: "Cassius from Bondage shall deliver Cassius." Adams also admired Brutus' famous ancestor, Lucius Brutus, who had helped expel Tarquin. In 1777 Adams contrasted Lucius Brutus' sincere republicanism with John Hancock's secret ambition. Denouncing Hancock's well-publicized donation of 150 cords of wood to the poor of Boston, Adams wrote: "Did [Lucius] Brutus in the Infancy of the Commonwealth and before the Army of Tarquin was Subdued, acquire Fame and Popularity by Largesses? No!

These arts were reserved for Caesar in the Dotage and the last expiring Moments of the Republic." (Ironically, Hancock's generosity, so great that it eventually exhausted his vast fortune, was an attempt to prove himself a genuine classical republican, willing to sacrifice his wealth for the good of the republic.) Charles Lee credited the example of the younger Brutus with his love of liberty. In 1790 James Wilson quoted Cicero in praise of Brutus: "Even those against whom he made decisions he sent away unruffled and placated."²⁴

As head of Congress' Board of War during the Revolution, John Adams found military models in the Roman generals Fabius, Scipio Africanus, and Julius Caesar. In 1775 he confessed that although Fabius' patient policy of attrition against the Carthaginians had been "wise and brave," Adams himself was too impatient for such a strategy. He declared: "Zeal and Fire and Activity and Enterprise Strike my Imagination too much. I am obliged to be constantly on my Guard. Yet the Heat within will burst forth at Times." This last statement was certainly true, for in 1776 and 1777 Adams repeatedly complained that American strategy was too cautious. In 1776 he concluded, in a letter to General Henry Knox: "The Policy of Rome in carrying their arms to Carthage, while Hannibal was at the Gates of their Capital, was wise and justified by the Event, and would deserve Imitation if We could march into the Country of our Enemies." Adams understood that British control of the seas prohibited a reenactment of Scipio Africanus' famous amphibious assault on Carthage, but still felt that some offensive action was in order. In this, he anticipated John Paul Jones's daring raids on British commerce. In 1777 Adams wrote to General Nathanael Greene: "It is high Time for Us to abandon this execrable and defensive Plan . . . We must have a fighting, enterprizing Spirit conjured up in our Army. The Army that Attacks has an infinite Advantage and ever has had from the Plains of Pharsalia to the Plains of Abraham." Pharsalia was the plain in Thessaly where Caesar's force defeated Pompey's. Abraham was the plain outside Quebec where James Wolfe defeated Louis Joseph de Montcalm in 1759, resulting in the British annexation of Canada.²⁵

Adams bewailed the fact that the Continental Army possessed no Epaminondas, the fourth-century B.C. Theban general who, with the help of Pelopidas, ended Spartan domination of Greece. Adams wrote: "And perhaps there is not in all Antiquity, if there is in universal History, an Example more apposite to our Situation than that of Thebes, or a Character more deserving of imitation than Epaminondas." The ancient

Thebans, like the modern Americans, were a peace-loving people driven to war by foreign tyranny. Their troops were raw, untrained farmers, who loved liberty and fought hard for it. Thus, Adams related: "Greece saw, with Astonishment, the Spartans defeated by inferiour numbers of Men, who had been held in Contempt . . . Epaminondas, with six thousand Men only, by his admirable disposition of them and their bravery, engaged and defeated three times their number [at Leuctra in 371 B.C.] and soon afterwards marched to the Gates of Sparta and exhibited to that haughty people a Sight they had never before beheld." But the Continental Army, Adams concluded, lacked the Epaminondas who could teach the British the same lesson. Adams even criticized American generals' writing, claiming that their battle accounts lacked the vividness of Sallust's, Xenophon's, and Caesar's. But perhaps worst of all, he once unfairly accused American generals of cowardice. Upset by the American retreat from Canada in 1776, he said: "Flight was unknown to the Romans . . . I wish it was to Americans." This lack of discipline was the fault of the generals, not the troops, and American officers should emulate Polybius in recognizing this fact, rather than slandering their soldiers.²⁶

Adams maintained his admiration for Roman military skill. In 1806 he contrasted President Jefferson's military leadership skills with those of the Romans. Claiming that Jefferson's policies were designed to distract the people from national problems through a war against either Britain or France, Adams wrote: "The Romans were obliged to practice this policy for seven hundred years. But Jefferson is not a Roman. If peace should be concluded between France and England, we shall be in a perilous situation."²⁷

The founders were not merely the formulators of classical analogies and contrasts, but the objects of them as well. Though theoretically an opponent of classical education, Abigail Adams often compared various founders with classical heroes. In 1782 she wrote to her husband, then negotiating a Dutch alliance for his infant country: "Eight years have already past since you could call yourself an Inhabitant of this State. I shall assume the Signature of Penelope, for my dear Ulysses [Odysseus] has already been a wanderer from me near half the term of years that Hero was encountering Neptune, Calipso, the Circes and Sirens." Voltaire compared John Dickinson with Cicero. In 1774, after giving political advice to Samuel Adams, Joseph Warren added that this was "perhaps too much like the declaimer who delivered a lecture upon the art of war to the illustrious General Hannibal." In the South Patrick Henry and

Richard Henry Lee were dubbed "the Demosthenes and Cicero of the American Revolution." Lord Byron and George Mason agreed regarding Henry. Byron called Henry "the forest-born Demosthenes." In 1774 Mason wrote: "He is, in my opinion, the first man upon this continent, as well in abilities as public virtues, and had he lived in Rome about the time of the first Punic War, when the Roman people had arrived at their meridian of glory, and their virtue not yet tarnished, Mr. Henry's talents would have put him at the head of that glorious commonwealth." After the Revolution Brissot de Warville noted, on visiting John Adams' farm: "He has, finally, returned to his retreat, in the midst of the applauses of his fellow-citizens, occupied in the cultivation of his farm, and forgetting what he was [a lowly colonist] when he trampled on the pride of his king, who had put a price on his head and who was forced to receive him as the ambassador of a free country. Such were the generals and ambassadors of the best ages of Rome and Greece; such were Epaminondas, Cincinnatus, and Fabius."²⁸

Benjamin Franklin was the object of numerous analogies. In 1756 Immanuel Kant called him "the modern Prometheus," after the Greek god who gave fire to humankind. Turgot later made the same comparison, adding a Latin statement, meaning, "He snatched lightning from the sky and the scepter from tyrants." Jean-Honoré Fragonard's painting *Eripuit Coelo* (1778) depicted Franklin as half Mars, defeating tyrants, and half Minerva, deflecting lightning from the Temple of Liberty. Georgiana Shipley told Franklin she read everything she could about Socrates, "for I fancy I can discover in each trait of that admirable Man's character a strong resemblance between him and my much-loved Friend, the same clearness of Judgment, the same uprightness of intention and the same superior understanding." A member of the Royal Academy of Sciences compared Franklin with Cato. Wishing the Americans success in their revolution, the Frenchman added, "But I hope that I shall never see the time of saying," and then quoted Lucan's *Pharsalia* (1.128): "If the victor had the gods on his side, the vanquished had Cato." In 1778 John Adams recorded in his diary the story of Franklin's meeting with Voltaire at the French Academy of Sciences. Both heroes being present, a "general Cry" arose that they be introduced to each other. Adams recalled:

This was done, and they bowed and spoke to each other. This was no Satisfaction. There must be something more. Neither of our Philosophers seemed to divine what was wished or expected. They, however, took

each other by the hand . . . But this was not enough. The Clamour continued, until the explanation came out "*Il faut s'embrasser, a la françoise.*" The two Aged Actors upon this great Theatre of Philosophy and frivolity then embraced each other by hugging one another in their Arms and kissing each others' cheeks, and then the tumult subsided. And the Cry immediately spread through the whole Kingdom and I suppose over all Europe. "*Qu'il etoit charmant. Oh! Il etoit enchantant, de voir Solon et Sophocle embrassans!* How charming it was! It was enchanting to see Solon and Sophocles embracing!"

Europeans considered Franklin the Solon, the premier statesman, and Voltaire the Sophocles, the literary giant, of the age.²⁹

Perhaps the most apt analogy concerned the two colossi of the American Revolution, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, who died on the same day, July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. A grandson of John Adams, Charles Francis Adams, laid the two patriots to rest with a classical analogy which both would have relished. He related the story, from Herodotus (1.30.1), of Solon's trip to the wealthy kingdom of Lydia in Asia Minor. Having shown Solon his vast treasury, Croesus, the Lydian monarch, asked the wise Athenian: "Who, of all men that you have seen, do you deem most fortunate?" The Lydian monarch expected, of course, that Solon would answer, "Croesus." But Solon "named two brothers, Cleobis and Bion, who once put themselves to the wagon and drew their mother to Juno's temple, and then, after sacrificing and feasting, went to rest and died together at the height of their reputation of filial piety." Charles Francis concluded regarding Jefferson and Adams: "How much more deserving to be called blessed is the life of these two, who drew their nursing-mother, against strong resistance, to the temple of liberty and who, after a long period of labors and services devoted to her welfare, went to the same rest under auspices a thousand-fold more sublime."³⁰

George Washington was the most common subject of classical analogies. In calling him "the Father of the Country" Americans emulated Cato, who had given that title to Cicero. Alexander Hamilton called Washington the "American Fabius." Fisher Ames, disagreeing with John Adams' earlier assessment of Washington, compared him with Epaminondas, writing: "Some future Plutarch will search for a parallel to his character. Epaminondas is perhaps the highest name of antiquity. Our Washington resembled him in the purity and ardor of his patriotism; and, like him, he first exalted the glory of his country . . . There it is to be

hoped the parallel ends; for Thebes fell with Epaminondas." In 1800, a year after Washington's death, David Ramsay wrote: "Enemies he had, but they were few, and chiefly of the same family with the man who could not bear to hear Aristides always called the just. Among them all I have never heard of one who charged him with any habitual vice, or even foible." In his (in)famous biography of Washington, Parson Weems set a record for the most classical analogies in two sentences, writing: "Washington was as pious as Numa, just as Aristides, temperate as Epictetus, and patriotic as Regulus. In giving public trusts, impartial as Severus; in victory, modest as Scipio—prudent as Fabius, rapid as Marcellus, undaunted as Hannibal, as Cincinnatus disinterested, to liberty firm as Cato, and respectful of the laws as Socrates." Lest any philologist consider this cavalcade of classical analogies insufficient, Weems added regarded Washington's father: "Never did the wise Ulysses take more pains with his beloved Telemachus than did Mr. Washington with George.""

Sometimes analogies became self-fulfilling. Garry Wills has suggested that George Washington not only took notice of the Cincinnatus analogy, but worked consciously to promote it. The comparison captured the imagination of numerous domestic and foreign artists. Horatio Greenough's twelve-ton statue of Washington for the Capitol Rotunda, based somewhat on Phidias' *Zeus* but altered to fit the Cincinnatus analogy, depicted the Virginian in classical dress. Washington's right arm was raised, index finger pointing heavenward, his left arm offering his sword, handle outward. Unfortunately, by the time it was delivered to the Capitol in 1847, its classical garb offended Victorian sensibilities. Philip Hoose complained: "Washington was too careful of his health to expose himself thus in a climate so uncertain as ours." S. W. Wallis added: "The last time I saw Greenough's colossal *Washington* in the garden of the Capitol, some irreverent heathen had taken the pains to climb up and insert a large 'plantation' cigar between the lips of the pater patriae . . . I could not help thinking, at the time, that if Washington had looked less like the Olympian Jove and more like himself, not even the vagabond who perpetrated the trick of the cigar would have dared or dreamed of such desecration." Similarly, Antonio Canova's statue of Washington depicted him in Roman military garb, with his sword laid down and his left hand clutching the Farewell Address, symbols of his two great surrenders of power. Giuseppe Ceracchi's bust portrayed the Virginian with Roman curls. Both John Trumbull and Charles Willson Peale painted

Washington as Cincinnatus. John J. Barralet's engraving *George Washington's Resignation* depicted Washington surrendering power to Columbia, while in the background, oxen, a plow, and Mount Vernon awaited.³²

Poets and laymen proved equally susceptible to the Cincinnatus analogy. Maryland poet Charles Henry Wharton's "A Poetical Epistle" to Washington (1779) exulted:

Thus, when of old, from his paternal farm
Rome bad her rigid Cincinnatus arm
Th' illustrious peasant rushed to the field,
Soon are the haughty Volsii taught to yield:
His country sav'd, the solemn triumph o'er,
He tills his native acres as before.

A Fourth of July toast, offered at Wilmington, Delaware, in 1788, declared: "Farmer Washington—may he, like a second Cincinnatus, be called from the plow to rule a great people." Lord Byron concurred wholeheartedly. His "Ode to Napoleon" contained these lines:

Where may the wearied eye repose
When gazing on the Great;
Where neither guilty glory glows
Nor despicable state?
Yes—one—the first—the best:
The Cincinnatus of the West
Whom envy dared not hate,
Bequeath'd the name of Washington
To make men blush there was but one.

An astonished western world agreed with the judgment of George III. Unable to believe that any military leader would voluntarily surrender such power, the king scoffed that if Washington resigned his commission, "He will be the greatest man in the world." The king's confusion epitomized his inability, throughout the Revolutionary conflict, to comprehend the enormous emotional power which classical republican ideals wielded over American minds.³³

Fully conscious of the Cincinnatus image and determined to nurture it, Washington recognized that his appeal lay not in military victories, of which he had precious few, but in the republican virtue revealed in his

surrender of power. As Wills put it: "People did not admire a conquering Caesar in him, but a Cincinnatus resigning." Hence, Washington never offered to resign as commander of the Continental Army, even after the worst defeats, because he did not wish to spoil, by anticipation, the offer of resignation which he planned once he had, like Cincinnatus, defeated the enemy. Soon after that day arrived in 1783, Washington withdrew completely from public life, even going to the extreme of resigning from his local vestry. In his letters of 1784 Washington referred to Mount Vernon as his "villa," a term he had never before employed in allusion to his estate. Sounding like Horace, he referred to himself as "a private citizen of America, on the banks of the Patowmac . . . under my Vine and my own Fig-tree, free from the bustle of a camp and the intrigues of a court." Indeed, the Cincinnatus analogy benefited from a fact so obvious to every schoolboy it was rarely mentioned: "George" derives from the Greek *georgos*, meaning "farmer." Proud of his position as the first president of the Society of the Cincinnati, an association of Revolutionary War veterans, Washington demanded reforms when popular fears of the organization threatened to destroy the image associated with its name.³⁴

Virtually obsessed with his reputation, Washington agonized over the decision to suspend his retirement and attend the Constitutional Convention. In the end, he served as president of the convention because he feared the accusation that he was neglecting his duty to the republic out of a vain desire to preserve his reputation. Two years later Washington accepted the presidency of the United States for the same reason.³⁵

Washington's dilemma, shared by all the founders in varying degrees, illustrates the demanding nature of classical virtue. Although duty called the virtuous man to political office, he was supposed to prefer the quiet blessings of life on the farm to the wielding of power. Indeed, he must never cease expressing an intense desire to retire from the ordeal of public service to the simple joys of the homestead. Nothing is more ubiquitous in the founders' correspondence than this sentiment, a pretense which can rarely be taken entirely at face value.

Only James Wilson bothered to praise the women of antiquity. After all, the very word "virtue," like "virile," derived from the Latin *vir*, meaning "man." Classical authors equated virtue with the independence of thought and action peculiar to propertied males, vice with "effeminacy," and a servile dependence on luxury with the female dependence on the male. Nevertheless, Wilson noted that Cicero had benefited from hearing the declamations of Laelia, a woman of natural oratorical skill.

Wilson also praised Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi, the second-century B.C. Roman land reformers. When a frivolous lady asked to see Cornelia's jewels, the virtuous Cornelia showed the lady her sons. Wilson quoted Cicero on the mother of these "demagogues": "I have read the letters of Cornelia, the mother of the Gracchi; and it appears that her sons were not so much nourished by the milk, as formed by the style, of their mother."³⁶

The founders also encountered societal models among the ancients. When Samuel Adams prayed that Boston would become a "Christian Sparta," he referred to Spartan frugality, selflessness, valor, and patriotism. Similarly, in his *Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer*, John Dickinson reserved his praise for Spartan calm and courage, writing: "To such a wonderful degree were the ancient Spartans, as brave and free a people as ever existed, inspired by this happy temperature of soul that rejecting even in their battles the use of trumpets and other instruments for exciting heat and rage, they marched up to scenes of havoc and horror, with the sound of flutes, to the tunes of which their steps kept pace—'exhibiting,' as Plutarch says, 'at once a terrible and delightful sight, and proceeding with a deliberate valor, full of hope and good assurance, as if some divinity had sensibly assisted them.'" Americans ought to imitate this calm firmness in resisting unconstitutional taxation. The Boston town meeting publicly thanked Dickinson for his "Spartan, Roman, British Virtue, and Christian spirit joined." In 1790 James Wilson applauded the Spartan emphasis on education: "In Sparta, one of the most respectable members of the state was placed at the head of all the children. Would not some similar institution be eligible with regard to such of them as are deprived of their parents?" In 1814 John Taylor contrasted the virtues of the landed aristocracy of Sparta with the vices of the British commercial elite. Thomas Jefferson celebrated the courage and patriotism of the Spartans under King Leonidas, who had volunteered to give their lives at Thermopylae in 480 B.C. He compared the inane question of which American contributed the most to the American Revolution with the question, "Who first of the three hundred Spartans offered his name to Leonidas?"³⁷

But while the founders admired many of the traits which the Spartans' intense military training had instilled in them, few were prepared to advocate so complete a submersion of individuality. Thomas Jefferson referred to the Spartans as "military monks." In *Federalist* No. 6 Alexander Hamilton noted: "Sparta was little better than a well regulated camp." Federalist Party leader Fisher Ames repeated the criticism of the Athen-

ian Alicibiades: "No wonder the Spartans cheerfully encounter death; it is a welcome relief to them from such a life as they are obliged to lead." John Adams agreed. He called Sparta's communal ownership of goods "stark mad." To the Abbé de Mably's statement "How right Lycurgus was in forbidding the Spartans to communicate with other Greeks!" Adams retorted: "Is it such a felicity to be confined in a cage, den, or cave? Is this a liberty?" The founders sought the Spartans' numerous admirable qualities without the brutal system of socialization which produced them.³⁸

James Wilson applauded the openness of Athens and republican Rome, as well as the frugality and temperance of the latter city. Wilson wrote: "Machiavel, when he inquires concerning the causes to which Rome was indebted for her splendour and greatness, assigns none of stronger or more extensive operation than this—she easily compounded and incorporated with strangers." He also praised the Athenians of Solon's day for their "generous" and unusual policy of recruiting skilled foreigners and granting them citizenship. Regarding the frugality and temperance of the early Roman republic, Wilson contended: "They were the values which nursed and educated infant Rome and prepared her for all her greatness. But in the giddy hour of her prosperity, she spurned from her the obscure instruments by which it was procured; and, in their place, substituted luxury and dissipation. The consequence was such as might have been expected. She preserved, for a time, a gay and flourishing appearance; but the internal health and soundness of her constitution were gone. At last, she fell a victim to the poisonous draughts which were administered by perfidious favourites. The fate of Rome, both in her rising and in her falling state, will be the fate of every other nation that shall follow both parts of her example."³⁹

The founders also turned to the ancients for their models of government, most notably the Greek republics of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. and the Roman republic from the sixth to the first century B.C. In 1764 James Otis contrasted the corruption of modern European monarchies with "the grandeur of the ancient republics." John Adams expressed a common view in 1774 when he wrote: "The Grecian Commonwealths were the most heroic Confederacy that ever existed . . . The Period of their Glory was from the Defeat of Xerxes [king of Persia] to the Rise of Alexander. Let Us not be enslaved, my dear Friend, Either by Xerxes or Alexander." Thomas Jefferson expressed an equally common view in 1795. After speaking in glowing terms of the "experiment" being

undertaken in the United States of basing government "on principles of honesty, not of mere force," he declared: "We have seen no instance of this since the days of the Roman republic." In 1790 James Wilson traced the doctrine of popular sovereignty to the Greeks and Romans. Wilson contended: "Let them be called covenants, or agreements, or bargains; or stipulations, or any thing similar to any of those, still I am satisfied; for still everything mentioned and everything similar to everything mentioned imports consent." He praised the Greeks' love of liberty. Of Athens, he wrote specifically: "At the mention of Athens, a thousand refined and endearing associations rush immediately into the memory of the scholar, the philosopher, the statesman, and the patriot." He added that when Homer listed the Greek forces that fought at Troy (*Iliad*, 2.5.547), he arranged them all under the names of their kings, but when he came to the Athenians, he distinguished them "by the peculiar appellation of 'the people' of Athens," suggesting a popular government as early as the eighth century B.C. Wilson repeated this entire series of statements a few years later, as an associate justice of the Supreme Court, when deciding a states' rights issue in the case of *Chisholm v. Georgia*. In 1814 John Taylor praised the popular governments of the ancients: "As rivals of Rome and Carthage, the contemporary monarchies are almost imperceptible; and above an hundred generations, almost forgetting what the rest of the world at that time [contributed], have transmitted to us an admiration of the little Athenian democracy, which we shall hand down to a fathomless posterity." He particularly lauded the freedom of expression allowed in these societies, remarking: "[Free] Expression is the respiration of the mind . . . It flourished in the climates of Greece and Italy whilst it could breathe freely."⁴⁰

In the Revolutionary period the founders most fervently applauded the Greek and Roman republics' lenient treatment of their colonies. In his 1775 "Letters of Novanglus" John Adams drew a sharp contrast between the colonial policies of the ancients and the British mistreatment of the American colonies. He declared: "But let these 'best writers' say what they will, there is nothing in the law of nations, which is only the law of right reason applied to the conduct of nations, that requires that emigrants from a state should continue, or be made a part of the state. The practice of nations has been different. The Greeks planted colonies, and neither demanded nor pretended any authority over them, but they became distinct, independent commonwealths." Similarly, Adams argued that Romans of the republican era acknowledged the equal rights

of their own colonies in Italy. Hence, when an envoy from a Roman colony threatened rebellion if the colony were not treated fairly, most of the senators coolly concluded: "That they had heard the voice of a man and a son of liberty; that it was not natural or credible that any people, or any man, would continue longer than necessity should compel him in a condition that grieved and displeased him. A faithful peace was to be expected only from men whose affections were conciliated—nor was any kind of fidelity to be expected from slaves . . . That they who regarded nothing so much as their liberty deserved to be Romans." Adams added pointedly: "The Senate and people of Rome did not interfere in making laws for their colonies, but left them to be ruled by their governors and senates. Can Massachusettensis [a prominent Tory essayist] produce from the whole history of Rome, or from the Digest, one example of a *Senatus consultum* or *Plebiscitum* laying taxes on a colony?" John Dickinson told the same story, taken from Livy, identifying the Roman colonists in question as the Privernates. He added that their love of liberty had so endeared them to the Romans that they were made citizens of Rome, "which at that Time could boast of the bravest and most virtuous Subjects of the Universe."⁴¹

Others were also aware of the difference between ancient Greek and British colonial policies. In *An Inquiry into the Rights of the British Colonies* (1766) Richard Bland cited Thucydides' discussion of Corcyra (1.2–3) to prove that Greek colonies had enjoyed independence. In the 1760s Thomas Jefferson copied into his legal and political commonplace book numerous quotations from Abraham Stanyan's *Greek History*, most of which concerned Greek colonization of the Mediterranean. Stanyan noted that each of the Greek colonies had been independent of its "metropolis" (mother city) from the time of its establishment.⁴²

Most of the founders disagreed with Adams' and Dickinson's perception of the Roman republics' colonial policy, however. In 1764 James Otis wrote: "Greece was more generous and a better mother to her colonies than Rome. The conduct of Rome towards her colonies and the corruptions and oppressions tolerated in her provincial officers of all denominations was one great cause of the downfall of that proud republic." The following year Otis responded to Tory Martin Howard's use of the Roman model of colonization: "'Tis well known the Grecians were kind, humane, just, and generous toward their [colonies]. 'Tis as notorious that the Romans were severe, cruel, brutal, and barbarous toward theirs. I have ever pleased myself in thinking that Great Britain since the

[Glorious] Revolution might be justly compared to Greece in its care and protection of its colonies. I also imagined that the French and Spaniards followed the Roman example. But our Letter Writer tells quite a different story." In 1771 Samuel Adams (as "Valerius Poplicola") retorted to Thomas Hutchinson's use of the Roman model in *A History of Massachusetts Bay*: "Why the conduct of Rome towards her colonies should be recommended as an example to our parent state, rather than that of Greece, is difficult to conjecture, unless it was because, as had been observed, the latter was more generous and a better mother to her colonies than the former . . . We are willing to render to her [Great Britain] respect and certain expressions of honor and reverence, as the Grecian colonies did to the city from whence they deriv'd their origin . . . so long as the colonies were well treated."⁴³

Other founders shared this perception of Roman colonial policy. In 1774 Alexander Hamilton wrote: "Rome was the nurse of freedom. She was celebrated for her justice and lenity; but in what manner did she govern her dependent provinces? They were made the continual scene of rapine and cruelty. From thence let us learn how little confidence is due to the wisdom and equity of the most exemplary nations." In the next year Hamilton did not dispute Tory Samuel Seabury's assertion that it was only late in the Roman republican period that Rome's Italian subjects were granted local self-government. Rather, he contended: "The mistress of the world was often unjust. And the treatment of her dependent provinces is one of the greatest blemishes in her history. Through the want of that civil liberty for which we are now so warmly contending, they groaned under every species of wanton oppression. If we are wise, we shall take warning from thence; and consider a like state of dependence as more to be dreaded than pestilence and famine." In 1778 George Mason claimed regarding the Revolution: "The truth is that we have been forced into it, as the only means of self-preservation, to guard our Country & posterity from the greatest of all Evils, such another infernal Government (if it deserves the Name of Government) as the Provinces groaned under, in the latter Ages of the Roman Commonwealth." Similarly, when William Grayson opposed an increase in federal power at the Virginia ratifying convention, he cited the Roman republics' "remarkable" brutality toward their provinces.⁴⁴

But John Adams loved the early Roman republic so much that he frequently compared America with it. As early as 1755 he contended: "If we look into History we shall find some nations rising from contemptible

beginnings, and spreading their influence, 'till the whole Globe is subjected to their sway. When they reach'd the summit of Grandeur, some minute and unsuspected Cause commonly effects their Ruin, and the Empire of the world is transferred to some other place. Immortal Rome was at first but an insignificant Village, inhabited only by a few abandoned Ruffians, but by beginnings it rose to a stupendous Height, and excell'd in Arts and Arms all the nations that preceded it." Similarly, America began as a few scattered settlements, but might soon become "the greatest seat of Empire." The idea that "empire" always moved westward (as, in the past, from the Middle East to Greece to Rome to France to Great Britain) had long been a popular European belief. By 1774 Adams could write: "In Short, as comprehensive [a] Knowledge of Arts and Sciences, and especially of Law and History, of Geography, Commerce, War, and Life, is necessary for an American Statesman, at this Time as was ever necessary for a British or a Roman Senator, or a British or Roman General." When the Chevalier de la Luzerne complimented American eloquence, Adams replied modestly that it was "the Time of Ennius with Us." Ennius was a third-century B.C. Roman epic poet, whose unpolished *Annals* was superseded by Virgil's *Aeneid*.⁴⁵

John Dickinson and Joseph Warren joined Adams in presenting the government of early republican Rome as a model. In 1768, when urging merchants to adhere to the boycott of British goods, Dickinson said: "I would beg Leave to ask whether any People in any Age or Country ever defended and preserved their Liberty from the Encroachment of Power without suffering present Inconveniences. The Roman People suffered themselves to be defeated by their Enemies, rather than submit to the Tyranny of the Nobles." In his famous 1772 speech commemorating the Boston Massacre, Joseph Warren declared concerning the Roman love of liberty: "It was this noble attachment to a free constitution which raised ancient Rome from the smallest beginnings to the bright summit of happiness and glory to which she arrived; and it was the loss of this which plunged her from that summit into the black gulph of infamy and slavery."⁴⁶

During the Constitutional debates of 1787–88, the Antifederalists expressed admiration for the ancient republics' short executive terms. At the Virginia ratifying convention William Grayson protested the president's four-year term, arguing: "The [Roman] consuls were in office only two years [actually, one year]. This quadrennial power cannot be justified by ancient history. There is hardly an instance where a republic

trusted its executive so long with much power." "The Federal Farmer" agreed, noting that no limit had been placed on the number of terms the president might hold office. He explained: "The Roman consules and the Carthaginian suffetes possessed extensive powers while in office; but being annually appointed, they but seldom, if ever, abused them. The Roman dictators often possessed absolute powers while in office; but usually being elected for short periods of time, no one of them for ages usurped upon the rights of the people." Years later John Taylor praised the Roman practice of rotating consuls and bewailed the lack of a constitutional limit on the number of presidential terms. He noted: "The same period demonstrates the error of the objection that rotation causes a loss of talents to the publick. It would have been most likely to produce this loss in military affairs. For seven centuries Rome applied the principle to her generals, and conquered; for five, she trusted to experience and was subdued. The rotary generals and statesmen of the little Athenian republic destined it to live for ever in the annals of fame, and most of its contemporary governments are for ever dead."⁴⁷

The Antifederalists also admired the ancient republics' citizen-armies. They argued that the constitutional clause allowing Congress to maintain a federal army in peacetime was unnecessary. "The Impartial Examiner" contended that the best defense was a "well-regulated militia." He claimed: "By a policy somewhat similar to this, the Roman Empire rose to the highest pitch of grandeur and magnificence." "A Farmer" demanded of his readers: "Are we then to look up to a standing army for the defence of this soil from foreign invasion? Have we forgot that a few freemen of Sparta defended their country against a million of Persian slaves?" Even if we accept Herodotus' exaggerated Persian count, as "A Farmer" evidently did, we must note that the Spartan and Roman armies, though citizen-armies, were also professional armies. Spartan males were trained exclusively in the military life, leaving the foreign population of helots to till the soil. Likewise, a recent scholar has noted that the Romans experienced, at most, fourteen years of peace between 327 B.C. and 116 B.C., so that its army, in the centuries of expansion to which the Antifederalists referred, was also essentially professional. Nevertheless, as late as 1814, during the War of 1812, Thomas Jefferson wrote that the United States should emulate the Greeks and Romans in avoiding standing armies and relying on citizen-armies, like the state militias, whose republican spirit would make them "invincible."⁴⁸

By contrast, some Federalists admired Roman and Persian centraliza-

tion. At the Constitutional Convention James Wilson said that the states should be maintained only as "lesser jurisdictions," similar to the provinces of the Roman and Persian empires. Alexander Hamilton concurred. The states, he said, should be preserved as "subordinate jurisdictions," though the Roman and Persian analogies disturbed him, "the great powers delegated to the Satraps [Persian provincial governors] & proconsuls [Roman provincial governors] having frequently produced revolts and schemes of independence." But in *Federalist* No. 34 Hamilton abandoned this analogy for a far different (and more felicitous) one. He claimed that the Constitution gave the state legislatures "coordinate authority" with Congress, just as legislative authority in Rome had been divided, for a while, between the *Comitia Centurata*, controlled by the patricians, and the *Comitia Tributa*, controlled by the plebeians. Hamilton claimed that "these two legislatures coexisted for ages, and the Roman republic attained to the utmost height of human greatness."⁴⁹

Some founders acquired another model from Tacitus, the primitive republicanism the Roman perceived among the Germanic tribes of the first century A.D. In the colonial period, when Jefferson sought to justify American opposition to British measures, the Germanic model was particularly important. Although British and French writers dominate Jefferson's legal and political commonplace book, the British authors invariably referred to Tacitus' *Germania* to prove that the Anglo-Saxon "constitution" had been republican, consisting of an elected king and parliament reinforced by "allodial" (nonfeudal) land ownership, until the Normans had overturned it. Lord Kames quoted Tacitus to show that the Germanic tribes had possessed free land tenure and that this system had promoted productivity. John Dalrymple cited Tacitus to show that the Germans had prohibited primogeniture, since they deemed illogical the concept that a dead man, who no longer possessed any rights, could alienate property from its rightful heirs. William Somner quoted both Tacitus and Julius Caesar to show that the Germanic tribes had not possessed these feudal trappings. In a marginal note Jefferson concluded regarding Tacitus and Caesar: "If these authors are so to be understood, the person taking the land from the chief does not appear to have owed him any services of a feudal nature; tho' doubtless he was ready to join in defending his country in general."⁵⁰

Jefferson later had the original Latin text of *Germania* collated with his favorite English translation, that of Thomas Gordon (1728-1731). With the assistance of John Trenchard, Gordon had already published the two

most influential Whiggish works of the eighteenth century, the *Independent Whig* and *Cato's Letters*. In the introduction to the *Germania* Gordon declared: "To vindicate the Deity from the impious charge of protecting Tyrants, to maintain the cause of Liberty, and shew its blessings, to assert the rights of men and of society, and to display the sad consequences of public corruption, with the beauty and benefit of public virtue, is the design of these discourses." Gordon interjected into the text his own moralistic "discourses," such as the one in which he explained that the Germans had lived "in a state of chastity well secured, corrupted by no seducing shews and public diversions, by no irritations from banqueting." His translation was more literal in passages denouncing the Roman emperors than in the few which noted their good qualities. Indeed, Tories like Alexander Pope ridiculed the translation. In the *Epilogue to the Satires* Pope wrote: "There's honest Tacitus once talked big / But he is now an Independent Whig."⁵¹

Jefferson's love of Tacitus, as seen through the prism of British Whiggery, manifested itself in his 1774 instructions to the Virginia delegates at the First Continental Congress. Published in pamphlet form as *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, the essay earned Jefferson his first notoriety outside Virginia. In his most complete statement before the Declaration of Independence concerning American resistance to British measures, Jefferson argued that just as the Anglo-Saxons, after immigrating to Britain, owed no obedience to their mother country, American colonists owed no obedience to Britain. Jefferson then added to this natural law argument the force of tradition. Using phrases similar to Somner's, he argued: "In the earlier ages of the Saxon settlement feudal holdings were certainly altogether unknown." Feudalism, he contended, had been foisted upon the Anglo-Saxons by William the Conqueror and the "Norman lawyers" who followed him. Hence, Jefferson concluded that George III had no right to control the colonies' public lands, a happy conclusion, since the king had just doubled their price. Jefferson claimed that he merely desired to return to a golden age when governments had observed natural rights.⁵²

Jefferson idealized ancient Anglo-Saxon society in this fashion throughout his life. When advocating the elimination of fees for public lands in 1776 he asked: "Are we not the better for what we have hitherto abolished of the feudal system? Has not every restitution of the antient Saxon laws had happy effects? Is it not better now that we return at once into that happy system of our ancestors, the wisest and most perfect ever

yet devised by the wit of man?" As late as 1825 Jefferson wrote that the Whig historians of England always dated the origins of the British Constitution, correctly, from the Anglo-Saxon period, while the Tories dated it from the Norman Conquest. Having learned the ancient Anglo-Saxon language by that time, Jefferson was gladdened by the University of Virginia's inclusion of the language in its curriculum. He predicted that students of Anglo-Saxon would "imbibe with the language their free principles of government."³³

Richard Bland and James Wilson joined Jefferson in celebration of the ancient Anglo-Saxons. In 1766 Bland cited Tacitus' *Germania* to prove that the Anglo-Saxons had enjoyed liberty. Wilson cited Tacitus regarding the "nearly indestructible" confederacy of Germanic tribes, arguing that they provided a good model for the American republic. He quoted the Roman historian concerning German republicanism: "On large matters all consult." He cited Tacitus on the Saxons' moderation in punishment, their public trials, their prohibition of infanticide, and their practice of having criminals compensate their victims. He called the *Germania* "a masterly account of the manners of that people." Indeed, so ardent was Wilson's love of both the classical and Anglo-Saxon societies that he inaccurately linked the two, arguing that the Germanic tribes must have received their laudable institutions from the Greeks via the Romans.³⁴

The founders considered the histories of the classical world, England, and America (including their own experiences) their three most significant pasts. Inextricably intertwined in the founders' minds, these pasts were denied separate identities. The manner in which this occurred was complex. The founders often portrayed ancient republicans as early British Whigs. But the Whig writers the founders read were themselves classicists, who derived many of their ideas and most of their examples from Greek and Roman works. Such modern British authors as Joseph Addison and Thomas Gordon engrafted onto the themes of Plutarch, Tacitus, and the other ancient authors the English dialect essential to their vitality within the British empire. But the founders viewed America as the only land in which classical ideals could be translated into reality. John Adams considered it a matter of great importance that his Puritan ancestors had been classicists. Following the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765, Adams boasted of the early colonists: "To many of them, the historians, orators, poets, and philosophers of Greece and Rome were quite familiar: and some of them have left libraries that are still in being, consisting chiefly of volumes in which the wisdom of the most enlightened ages and nations

is deposited." He concluded that his forefathers had detested all of the servile dependencies of the feudal system, since they "knew that no such unworthy dependencies took place in the ancient seats of liberty, the republics of Greece and Rome." America was the only land in which the classical tradition of liberty was pure, unsullied by the stain of feudalism."

So skillfully were the classical, Whig, and American traditions interwoven that the founders considered them one and the same: "the tradition of liberty." No one thought it odd that the membership of Princeton's Cliosophic Society should be divided between classical and Whig pseudonyms—that "Burke" should debate "Pindar," or that "Wilkes" should confer with "Brutus." Nor did anyone sneer when James Warren donned a toga for his 1775 speech commemorating the Boston Massacre—or the following year, when Cliosophic initiate Robert Whorrey took the name "Warren" to honor the patriot, who had, in the meantime, been killed in the Battle of Bunker Hill. *Bickerstaff's Almanac* of 1769 expressed a virtually unquestioned opinion when it asserted: "Locke and Sidney revived the spirit of the ancient republics." Similarly, John Adams later recalled: "Whig principles were the principles of Aristotle and Plato, of Livy and Cicero, and Sidney, Harrington, and Locke."⁶

Classical models gave the founders a sense of identity and purpose. In 1813 Jefferson wrote to Adams: "The same political parties which now agitate the U.S. have existed thro' all time. Whether the power of the people or that of 'the aristoi' should prevail were questions which kept the states of Greece and Rome in eternal convulsions, as they now schismatize every people whose minds and mouths are not shut up by the gag of a despot." This perception of ancient history gave Jefferson the satisfaction of believing that his own democratic exertions were part of a grand universal scheme. To the founders, the study of the past was not a mere antiquarian hobby. The past was alive with personal and societal meaning. Their perception of that living past shaped their own identities.⁷

The conflicts of the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods increased the founders' sense of kinship with the ancients. Proud of America's firm resistance to the Intolerable Acts, Samuel Adams declared in 1774: "I think our Countrymen discover the Spirit of Rome or Sparta." In a 1776 letter to George Wythe, John Adams exulted: "You and I, my dear Friend, have been sent into life at a time when the greatest lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to have lived." In the same

year, shortly after the Declaration of Independence was signed, Charles Lee told Patrick Henry: "I us'd to regret not being thrown into the world in the glamorous third or fourth century [B.C.] of the Romans; but now I am thoroughly reconcil'd to my lot." Edmund Pendleton cherished the memory of the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1776, recalling: "The young boasted that they were treading upon the Republican ground of Greece and Rome." In 1777 George Washington replied to British general John Burgoyne's peace offers: "The associated armies in America act from the noblest motives, liberty. The same principles actuated the arms of Rome in the days of her glory; and the same object was the reward of Roman valour." George Tucker later recalled the excitement of these days, writing regarding Henry's "Liberty or Death" speech: "Imagine to yourself this speech, delivered with the calm dignity of Cato of Utica; imagine to yourself the Roman Senate assembled in the Capital when it was entered by the profane Gauls. Imagine that you had heard Cato addressing such a Senate!" Never mind that to achieve the image he wished to convey Tucker had to join a Roman hero from one epoch with a Senate from another era. The image was real to Tucker. As late as 1805 John Adams declared concerning Middleton's *Life of Cicero*: "I seem to read the history of all ages and nations in every page, and especially the history of our country for forty years past. Change the names and every anecdote will be applicable to us."⁸

Imagine the founders' excitement at the opportunity to match their ancient heroes' struggles against tyranny and their sage construction of durable republics—to rival the noble deeds which had filled their youth. The founders were thrilled by the belief that they were beginning anew the work of the ancient republicans, only this time with an unprecedented chance of success. Cato and Cicero had lost the first round of combat against the tyranny of Caesar and Augustus, but the founders, starting afresh in a virgin country with limitless resources, could pack the punch that would win the second and decisive round. It is not surprising that the founders referred to their classical works as often during the Revolutionary and Constitutional periods as during the leisure of their retirement. They truly believed that ancient history was a source of knowledge which must be utilized in making decisions.