

REVOLUTION

A Culinary Declaration of Independence

How unripe we yet are.

Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*

WHETHER HE DID SO OUT OF SCIENTIFIC IGNORANCE OR A PERVERSE DESIRE TO BULLY THE INCIPIENT NATION KNOWN AS AMERICA, GEORGES-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon, THE FAMOUS FRENCH NATURALIST, CONDEMNED THE LANDSCAPE ACROSS THE ATLANTIC OCEAN AS ENTIRELY UNFIT TO SUPPORT ITS INHABITANTS FOR ANY MEANINGFUL LENGTH OF TIME. THOMAS JEFFERSON, WHO TOOK GRAVE OFFENSE AT SUCH A CHARACTERIZATION, SUMMARIZED BUFFON'S OBJECTIONS TO THE NEW WORLD IN THE FOLLOWING TERMS:

1. *That the animals common both to the old and new world¹ are smaller in the latter;*
2. *That those peculiar to the new are on a smaller scale;*
3. *That those that have been domesticated in both have degenerated in America; and*
4. *That on the whole it exhibits fewer species.*

Clearly, as Buffon first suggested in 1749, something was fundamentally amiss in the American environment. In his *Histoire naturelle* and elsewhere, he portrayed America as a place where the climate's moisture and chill prevented the growth of beneficial organisms, where the "tremendous struggles of elemental forces"² still raged, where thick forestation blocked the sun's warmth, where prolific swamps "replenish the air with heavy and noxious vapors,"³ and where "everything degenerates." It wasn't an assessment that Americans, no matter how vehemently they disagreed with it, wanted to shine a spotlight on. Buffon, after all, was widely respected, and the colonies were struggling to earn cultural respect.

Thus we can only imagine the consternation that ensued when Buffon's gross misrepresentation of America's natural history caught on like wildfire. In *History of Mexico*, Abbé Francisco Clavigero, referring to Buffon, explained how America "has been ... and is at present a very barren country,"⁴ in which all the plants of Europe have degenerated, except those which are aquatic and succulent." Abbé Guillaume-Thomas-François de Raynal, in 1779, revived Buffon's theories when he described America as a place where "every thing carries the vestiges of a malady"⁵ and where "the imperfection ... of nature is not proof of the recent origin of that hemisphere, but

of its regeneration." Bashing the American environment (often through the Native American) was becoming a European sport.

These assessments were further echoed in the opinions of a group of British writers whose justification for upbraiding America was at least more obvious, if no more accurate. In 1767, Adam Ferguson portrayed the American environment as a place with "extensive marshes, great lakes, aged, decayed, and crowded forests⁶ ... that mark an uncultivated country." Ten years later, William Robertson, in his best-selling *History of America*, portrayed the Native American as an inevitable product of the colonies' "coldness and insensibility,"⁷ qualities that kept inhabitants stuck "in [their] rudest state." Even America's ostensibly greatest asset—its rich soil—failed its inhabitants because of its being *too* fertile, actually leading colonists, according to Robertson, to "decrease its fertility in order to cultivate it." Indeed, it was America's "furious growth of vegetation" that explained why "the different species of animals peculiar to it are much fewer in proportion than those of the other hemisphere." The continent's lack of massive lions, elephants, rhinoceroses, and tigers proved that point beyond a reasonable doubt. Under such circumstances, the animals and, by extension, the people of America were doomed to degenerate to the point of total expiration.

Amateur naturalist that he was, Jefferson couldn't hold his tongue. This widespread opinion, after all, flew in the face of a young nation that had just fought and won a revolution due in large part to its unique ability to feed itself with the productions of its own land and the beasts that fed on its grain and grasses. His *Notes on the State of Virginia* dedicates considerable space, accompanied by several precise graphs, to proving Buffon wrong. In a tone both measured and irate, Jefferson explained that the growth of vegetables in America was a phenomenon beyond criticism. "Vegetables are mediately or immediately the food of every animal,"⁸ he snipped, "and in proportion to the quantity of food, we see animals not only multiplied in their numbers, but improved in their bulk, as far as the laws of their nature will permit." In response to the criticism that America suffered too many extremes of cold and dampness to support ample animal growth, Jefferson made an "appeal to experience" and noted that in America "a race of animals ... has been increased in its dimensions⁹ by cold and moisture, in direct opposition to the hypothesis, which supposes that these two circumstances diminish animal bulk, and that it is their contraries heat and dryness which enlarge it." Consider the bear, he implored. John Bartram had and, Jefferson recalled, described an average American bear weighing "400 lb." Compare that with the average weight of an English bear (367 pounds), not to mention the wimpy French bear (141 pounds), and thus the claim that "the animals common to the two [continents] are considerably less in America" proved patently false.

This kind of comparison came naturally to Jefferson's encyclopedic mind. "It may be affirmed with truth," he continued, "that in those countries, and with those individuals of America, where necessity or curiosity has produced equal attention as in Europe to the nourishment of animals, the horses, cattle sheep and hogs of the one continent are as large as those of the other." As for hogs: "I have seen a hog weigh

1050 lb. after the blood, bowels, and hair had been taken from him." Should anyone think this hog's size the result of its English stock, he explained how the "hog was probably not within fifty generations of the European stock." The impressive growth rates of American livestock, moreover, demanded little effort. Goats, which had been "much neglected in America," nevertheless "are very prolific here, bearing twice or three times a year and from one to five kids a birth." The same held true for sheep, which averaged around one hundred pounds compared with sixty-two pounds in Europe. After assembling detailed charts comparing the relative weights of red deer, beavers, flying squirrels, hedgehogs, wolves, and even water rats, Jefferson—who found the American varieties of each to be larger—concluded his defense of America's natural cornucopia on the grounds that "with equal food and care, the climate of America will preserve the races of domestic animals as large as the European stock from which they are derived."¹⁰ On this point, he was being modest. Jefferson surely knew that America far outpaced Europe in its natural endowment.

Jefferson also compiled a welter of evidence concerning animals indigenous to America in order to debunk even further the claim that America was destined to degenerate as a result of an inadequate food supply and an intemperate climate. In the brilliant, if somewhat mocking, step of relying on Buffon's own research for his "ground work," Jefferson reminded the "best informed of any Naturalist who has ever written" that, as the Frenchman's own research proves, "there are 18 quadrupeds peculiar to Europe; more than four times as many, to wit 74, peculiar to America."¹¹ Acknowledging that large swaths of America "remain in their aboriginal state,¹² unexplored and undisturbed by us," Jefferson noted that "no instance can be produced of [America] having permitted any one race of her animals to become extinct; of her having formed any link in her great work so weak as to be broken." The only viable threat to America's aboriginal creatures, he continued, was "the general destruction of the wild game by the Indians, which commenced in the first instant of their connection with us, for the purpose of purchasing matchcoats, hatchets, and fire locks, with their skins." Of the continent's copious supply of native game, he charged, "it does not appear that Messrs. De Buffon and DiAubenton [Louis-Jean-Marie Daubenton] have measured, weighed, or seen" its species, choosing instead to rely on the accounts of "some travellers."

"But who," Jefferson wondered, in a passage that was as aggressive as he got, "were these travellers? Have they not been men of a very different description from those who have laid open to us the other three-quarters of the world? Was natural history the object of their travels? Did they measure or weigh the animals they speak of? Have they not been so ignorant as to often mistake the species?" Jefferson, of course, intended these questions to be rhetorical, and he appropriately finished his refutation by quoting "one sentence of [Buffon's] book [that] must do him immortal honour: 'I love as much a person who corrects me in an error as another who teaches me a truth, because in effect an error corrected is a truth.'"¹³ Jefferson wouldn't have been out of line in expecting a bit of that love.

There's a startling, obsessive, and almost panicked tone to Jefferson's refutation of

the eminent French naturalist. And with good reason. In the 1780s, America was in a precarious position. Free but lacking a federal constitution, ill-served by its Articles of Confederation, unable to tax its populace, and mired in a depression induced by the trade disruption with England, the fledgling nation needed the court of international opinion (especially France's) on its side as it moved toward solid nationhood. Not only that, it needed more immigrants and more investors. America might have been a nation in theory, but in reality it was still very much a mere confederation of states, scattered and tenuously connected through fraying tethers. And although Jefferson had made his mark as a first-rate statesman, and Thomas Paine as a first-rate polemicist, the country as yet couldn't look up to the brilliant constellation of James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. National leaders holding the reins of federal government with confidence were a mere glimmer in the nation's eye. For that reason alone, a man with the national vision of Jefferson bristled with anxiety when a man like Buffon, for whatever reason, slung his mud.

But one aspect of the topic that indirectly came under fire—food—was just as important as the nature of the French naturalist's attack. More than historians acknowledge, food and political independence were intimately linked phenomena. Jefferson's hackles were so sharply raised in part because he knew as well as anyone in America that the defining events of the Revolutionary era were related in one way or another to the broad issue of American food. Food, as we'll see, was at the heart of Britain's most egregious taxation schemes, played a pivotal role in providing common colonists an education in revolutionary politics, and established an essential precondition for America's widespread acceptance of a "radical Whig" ideology. Even more important, the pervasive role that food played in furthering the cause of American independence eventually led Americans to make their first collective attempt to describe what their food was all about, what it meant to them, what they thought about it. The answers that they came up with—frugality, pragmatism, honesty, and a lack of pretension—not only articulated the defining qualities of American food for the next two centuries, but also proved critical to America's embrace of a pastoral ideal that reaffirmed the centrality of food production to American life while distinguishing the new nation once and for all from the continent that it would never again call home.

Economic Development and Food

"No Taxation Without Representation." These immortal words became the rallying cry of the Revolutionary generation. They effectively summarized the underlying constitutional principle that had been repeatedly violated by the mother country during the 1760s to raise revenue after the costly Seven Years' War. The mantra forcefully reminds us that disgruntled Americans decided to fight a revolution based in part on the undeniable reality that their English liberties had been systematically abridged. At the same time, on a more basic level, this phrase also obscures the equally important fact that the items being taxed were very often directly related to food and the

colonists' ability to produce it and trade it among themselves without interference. Everyday patriots responded as much to abstract principles as they did to the concrete reality of their material lives. The connection among food, local trade, and Revolutionary activity mattered so deeply because if there was one single customary right that white colonists throughout the colonies universally and passionately valued it was their ability to produce and consume their own food and gain access to those foods that they didn't produce. In a very real sense, food was freedom.

Insofar as the colonists aimed to be loyal colonial subjects, this self-reliance on food was exactly how it should have been. England hardly wanted to waste time and money supplying its most peripheral colonies with foodstuffs. Instead, it wanted the colonies to become collectively self-sufficient regarding food and dependent on England for nothing but manufactured goods. Throughout their short history, the colonists dutifully met these goals, producing a plethora of food, trading it among themselves, and protesting minimally when Britain discouraged their manufacturing ventures. But, in another sense, what the colonies had gone through to achieve such self-sufficiency made them rightfully—shall we say, defensively—proud of the way in which they had fulfilled their prescribed colonial duty. With varying degrees of regional success, free colonies took a hoe to hard dirt and built farms to feed their families and, later, produced a surplus to sell in regional markets. These regional markets slowly expanded; internal trade pulled the colonial regions together through the charms of sugar, molasses, and rum; the major colonial regions wove themselves into the transatlantic economy through cod, wheat, tobacco, and rice. As these developments transpired, the average free colonists by the middle of the eighteenth century enjoyed something that their ancestors could only have dreamed of enjoying: the ability to eat and drink more or less what they wanted when they wanted it. In exercising this freedom, the colonists had pioneered a way of eating that combined indigenous culinary developments with the more traditional ways of the homeland. Striking this balance was an ongoing process and a hard-earned accomplishment, one that nobody ever took for granted. Jefferson wasn't the only one to guard that privilege with missionary zeal.

Unfettered access to food was, in many respects, a reflection of what historians have only recently come to appreciate as the colonies' especially impressive rate of economic growth. Settlements had grown into societies as the colonial economy expanded by an average annual rate of 3.5 percent between 1650 and 1770, "a truly remarkable performance¹⁴ by any standard," according to John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, authorities on the topic. It was especially remarkable considering the *English* standard, which was a mere .5 percent over the same time period. Per capita income among the free American population over the same period rose from \$572 to \$1,043, or .49 percent a year.¹⁵ While the slave-produced exports of sugar, rice, and tobacco accounted for much of this growth and income, the vast majority of the food cultivated in colonial America—perhaps as much as 85 percent—was consumed *in colonial America*. What this statistic means is that the colonists had succeeded in building a dynamic internal economy—one quite distinct from England's

—under the long cast of the empire's shadow. It was an economy, moreover, that offered immigrants to America a better chance of living lives of relative material comfort. "That the colonists were able to produce significant food surpluses¹⁶ despite the consumption trends of a rapidly growing population," one historian writes, "is one reason for believing, as most economic historians do, that substantial extensive growth was taking place." The fact that the colonial American population expanded from 1.5 million to 2.5 million between 1754 and 1775, and that their standard of living was on the rise, spoke powerfully to that increased opportunity while making the economic growth rate of the colonies seem even that much more impressive.

The years 1668 to 1772 saw the colonies perform especially well with respect to food production and internal trade. Regions had specialized to the extent that they were now producing and exporting some goods to other regions while choosing not to produce but to import other goods. Webs of dependence evolved, for example, as Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina supplied bread and flour to Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Georgia. Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia supplied Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and Delaware with wheat. Corn came to all the New England colonies from every middle and southern colony. Rhode Island, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia produced ample beef and pork for themselves and for Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Maryland. These connections, as already suggested, diminished the regional quirks and trends that characterized cuisines throughout the colonies. They also led to a better balanced diet for a hardworking population whose average annual dietary needs included "2 hundredweight of flour, 11 bushels of corn,¹⁷ and 150 pounds of beef and pork (75 lbs. of each)." In fact, based on the most liberal consumption requirements, Americans—even after overseas exportation—were producing more food than they could consume.

They were also distributing it with relative ease and efficiency, as the case of New England—and Massachusetts especially—demonstrates. For all its success in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in producing all its own food, Massachusetts slightly sacrificed its hard-earned self-sufficiency to dedicate more of its resources to the fish trade.¹⁸ The demands of the cod market drove an economic wedge between coastal fishing towns and inland farming communities. Inland areas continued the relatively self-sufficient habits of their ancestors, while the coastal towns specialized in exporting cod (mainly to the West Indies) and shipbuilding. Ideally, the inland communities would have fed the coastal towns, but they never seemed able to do so reliably. Hence coastal Massachusetts turned to its southern neighbors for the corn, wheat, bread, flour, beef, and pork that enabled it to become a more stable and stronger economy even as it slightly compromised its ability to supply all its own food. Not only did the colony's economy become more powerfully integrated into the transatlantic economy, but, as it did, Massachusetts coastal towns were able to become choosier in the food they ate. Evidence indicates, for example,

that they paid more to import pork from North Carolina rather than from New York or Pennsylvania because of its preferred taste. Here indeed was a healthy, interdependent economy that had grown into a fat target to tap for some extra cash. Which is exactly what England did after the Seven Years' War.

Food and Political Tension

It couldn't, however, have chosen a more incendiary way to go about raising cash than through the regulation of food-related commodities. For if any aspect of the colonial economy stood out as a model of efficiency, food production was it—made from scratch, built up from nothing, profitable, reliable. Nevertheless, England forged fatefully ahead as Parliament, pushed by George III and his ministers, started a reign of legislative terror on food products in 1764 with the Sugar Act. This law built on the Molasses Act of 1733, which aimed to provide the British sugar growers with a monopoly in the mainland market by imposing a tax on the sugar, molasses, and rum imported from the French and Dutch West Indies. Smuggling by American merchants soon made the act a dead letter. But now, thirty-one years later, England decided to pass the Sugar Act as a way to enforce the preexisting duty on sugar and reimpose its monopoly on the sugar trade in the colonies. The Quartering Act followed in 1765. It was one of the most onerous of the legislative bombs dropped on the colonies, if for no other reason than it subjected colonial farm produce to random seizures. The Quartering Act specifically required colonial authorities to do nothing less than provide food, drink, quarters, and fuel to the redcoats stationed in their villages (ostensibly for the colonists' protection after the Seven Years' War, but more precisely to exert authority over the colonies). After the Stamp Act in 1765, the Townshend Duties followed in 1767, placing a duty on many manufactured imports, as well as tea. By imposing arbitrary customs collections, these duties also placed severe restrictions on the colonists' ability to trade both at home and overseas. More insultingly, revenue from the customs duties went toward funding more customs officials, spies, searches and seizures, and writs of assistants, as well as the establishment of the Board of Customs Commissioners in Boston—all of which curtailed the brisk and systematic food trade (among, of course, other trades) that the colonists had been enjoying for decades. These measures inspired a widespread, simmering political response.



British troops docking at Long Wharf

This detail of an engraving by Paul Revere shows the landing of British troops in Boston in 1768, when relations between the American colonies and England were becoming tense.

Acts passed in the 1770s brought the situation closer to a boil. In 1770, things looked as though they might be improving. The Crown repealed the Townshend Duties on every product except—again, just to assert authority—tea. A couple of years of relative peace prevailed because the colonists, who had developed an intense love of tea during the British invasion, were able to buy it from the ever resourceful Dutch smugglers. But the Tea Act, passed in 1773, changed that. Designed to off-load 17 million pounds of tea that the ailing East India Company had accumulated in its bulging warehouses, the Tea Act altered excise regulations to allow the company to pay the Townshend Duty on tea while still undercutting its competitors. In essence, Lord North and his cabinet imposed a direct tax on the

colonists by forcing them—if they continued to drink tea—to buy it from the East India Company. The response was the famed Boston Tea Party. In December 1773, a group of patriots dressed as Mohawk Indians dumped 342 chests of East India tea into Boston Harbor. Their action provoked Lord North to impose the Boston Port Act, which isolated Boston from the rest of the trading world until Massachusetts paid for the destroyed tea. At this point, most colonists agreed, the drift toward war became a possibility. Fifteen months later, about twenty miles from where the tea had been dumped, that possibility became reality.

As historians have long pointed out, war erupted because each and every one of the offensive measures—the Sugar Act, Quartering Act, Stamp Act, Townshend Duties, Tea Act, and Coercive Acts—violated the basic liberties that white colonists had come to assume as subjects of the British Empire they so adored.¹⁹ The British measures were clear cases of imposing taxes without direct representation, a blatant transgression of the natural rights preserved in Britain's unwritten constitution and an unfair tightening of the screws after decades of “benign neglect.” They were thus a perfectly sound, even noble, justification for rebellion. The colonies' official responses to Britain's twelve-year attempt to reduce their inhabitants to total subservience naturally brim with angry references to “the ruin of our liberties,” “the violation of the principles of the *British Constitution*,” “the unrelenting Monarch of Britain,” “the defence of our common rights,” and “the maintenance of our freedom.” Colonial patriots further enriched and intensified the official language of rebellion when they evoked “a corrupt and prostituted ministry … pointing their destructive machines against the sacred liberties of the Americans, [attempting] by every artifice to enslave the American colonies and plunder them of their … *liberty*.” Others thickened the rhetorical brew when they deemed the acts as nothing less than “the ministerial plan for enslaving us,” the policies that would “enslave us forever,” rendering them “slaves to the minister of state.”²⁰

Slavery, of course, meant the absence of freedom. But what, from the perspective of the average colonist, did the absence of freedom exactly entail? What did this concept mean in the mind of the average colonist? These egregious English measures were, as the heated responses suggest, heinous and intolerable examples of the arbitrary abuse of power. It helps to recall, however, that at the same time that these policies tread on the white colonists' most basic constitutional rights, they more immediately stomped on their customary access to material goods—including sugar, tea, and a wide variety of farm produce. These commodities meant more than sweetness, bitterness, and stick-to-the-ribs heartiness. They had come to play critical roles in the society that America had built since 1740. Then, as now, consumer goods didn't have inherent meanings. Instead, as consumers, colonists generated cultural meanings when they produced goods, bought goods, and used goods. The consumption of sugar, tea, and other foodstuffs had become, by the 1760s, vivid manifestations of several cultural values—values inherent in the concept of liberty and its opposite, slavery. They represented concrete aspects of life, such as the colonists' upward mobility, their increasing sense of choice, and even their identity as British

Americans. The widespread acquisition of not only food and drink themselves, but also their visible accoutrements—teakettles, tea chests, china, tankards, bowls, plates, and myriad other manufactured goods—was also a genuinely powerful experience and expression for colonial Americans. These goods provided the language and grammar through which they “sparked the production of meanings.”²¹ They were, as a result, absolutely integral to the sense of liberty that colonists believed was sacred enough to fight the American Revolution to protect.

In the most obvious sense, then, the offensive acts imposed by the British had the effect of pushing colonial Americans to build an apparatus for fighting a revolution. They not only dumped tea in the harbor but dutifully formed organizations such as the Sons of Liberty and Committees of Correspondence, arranged mass boycotts of British goods through nonimportation agreements, undertook propaganda campaigns, took to the streets to protest violators of the boycotts, tarred and feathered loyalists with glee, and ransacked the occasional British official’s residence. Resistance was constant but constantly well ordered, never spilling into the mob violence that even the most radical revolutionaries cautiously feared. Eventually, of course, the patriots came to the conclusion, in the words of Joseph Galloway, that “every spot of the Old World was overrun with oppression,”²² and thus “the logic of rebellion” compelled them to muster their forces and fight. Although historians will disagree over the causes of the Revolutionary War for as long as they write, the basic outlines of the story are as well known as they were once articulated.

A less obvious aspect of the Revolutionary response, however, involves the more subtle justifications that the colonists relied on to inspire their rebellious march toward revolution. Recalling the basic premise that the colonists took great pride in—and were quite defensive of—their ability to produce and acquire the food and drink that they needed and wanted, and recalling that providing and protecting access to that food and drink consumed the vast majority of the average colonist’s time, it comes as no surprise that colonists understood British infractions as—perhaps above all else—an infringement on the material conditions of life that they had worked so hard to achieve. Eleven inhabitants from Boston suggested as much when they tellingly declared, “We Look upon [the Tea Act] as unconstitutional *and a Burden*.”²³ With so little attention devoted to food in the standard histories of the Revolution, the precise nature of this “burden” warrants a more careful look.

Finding reactions to such a burden isn’t especially difficult. It was, for example, front and center in the minds of several Concord, Massachusetts, leaders when, in formulating their official response to the Tea Act, they evoked the toil of their forefathers, who had left to them “a fair inheritance, purchased by a waste of blood and treasure.”²⁴ The British violation of that inheritance, they explained, accounted for their “unhappy situation.” The Braintree Resolves, coming out of Braintree, Massachusetts, as a protest against the Stamp Act, similarly described the offensive measures not only in abstract constitutional terms but in concrete materialistic ones too. It was a “burthen[sone] tax,”²⁵ they explained, because it promised to “drain the country of its cash, strip multitudes of their property, and reduce them to absolute

beggary." Weighing the consequences of Britain's "violent infringement of our rights,"²⁶ nobody relied more on the time-honored language of rights and liberties than Samuel Adams, but he, too, understood that the matter was fundamentally about defending the material self-interests of the colonists. The heinous measures were "unconstitutional and entirely destructive"²⁷ because "our houses are ... exposed to be ransacked, our boxes, chests, and trunks broke open, ravaged and plundered by wretches." He cut to the heart of the matter when he identified the acts passed by Parliament as restrictions on "the produce of our own farms," noting how farmers, in order to avoid new ferry customs, had to travel "near a hundred miles by land" when "passing over a river or water of one quarter a mile ... would have prevented all that trouble." The journey must have reminded many a lukewarm rebel about the true merits of the patriot cause.

Fighting over Food

The conceptualization of political infringements in self-interested terms—and in terms that responded to a population's access to its own food supply—saw its most radical expression in the more than thirty local food riots that raged from 1775 to 1779 alongside the official grievances that fueled the Revolutionary War. Whereas the onerous policies of the British Empire had interrupted the free trade in goods that colonists had come to take for granted, the Revolutionary War erected obstacles even more severe. The resulting scarcity of food both produced locally and imported from the West Indies motivated many merchants to succumb to the unsavory temptation of price gouging. American consumers, however, reacted with an even greater defensiveness than they had honed in the decade before the war when they responded to British infringements on their food supply. As Barbara Clark Smith explains, "Rioters and their allies claimed²⁸ that confronting merchants in their shops was a patriotic action, much like facing redcoats on the battlefield."

The connection between resistance and food supply was manifestly evident in several incidents. In July 1776, a group from Longmeadow, Massachusetts, blackened their faces, wrapped themselves in blankets, and told Jonathan Hale, a local merchant, about their "uneasiness with those that trade in rum, molasses, and sugar."²⁹ They explained that "it is a matter of great grief that you Should give us cause to call upon you in this uncommon way.... We find you guilty of very wrong behaviour in selling at extravagant prices." The crowd looked forward to "a Thorough reformation for time to come" and abruptly handed over a list of acceptable prices. Hale dutifully complied within the hour.

Not every merchant succumbed to popular pressure so easily. After the crowd finished with Hale, they paid a visit to Samuel Colton, another Longmeadow merchant whose prices were deemed "detrimental to the Liberties of America."³⁰ Colton, however, refused to lower the cost of his goods, leading the crowd to confiscate his imports and hide them in a barn. Apparently chastised, Colton "made prayer in

publick" and lowered his prices. A week later, however, he raised them. This time the crowd, who claimed to have dispensed with "moderate measures," broke into his warehouse, confiscated his goods, and destroyed his store. They "ransacked it from top to bottom," Colton complained, causing him "great Fear and Terr'r." The goods were hauled over to the town clerk, who sold them at the requested rates. The profits were later offered to Colton, who refused them, out of spite. Undeterred, the crowd simply dropped the cash at his house and left.

In New York a month later, the issue was tea; the rioters, a group of women; and the recalcitrant merchant, Jacobus Lefferts. Lefferts refused to sell his tea for 6 shillings a pound, as the Continental Congress suggested. Pushing his tea at 9 shillings a pound, a rate that the local newspaper said was designed "to make a prey of the friends of the United States³¹ by asking the most exorbitant price," he ignored a "committee of ladies" who were protesting in front of his store. He did so, however, at his own peril, for they eventually seized the tea, appointed a clerk, parceled up the tea, and sold it to local inhabitants for 6 shillings a pound. Lefferts, however, wasn't fortunate enough to have the proceeds go his way. Instead, the committee sent them to the county's revolutionary committee.³²

These cases show how access to food and food-related goods were integral to the most basic material and cultural values that Americans had shaped over the course of their impressive history of economic growth. When seventeen men from Maryland seized salt from an unscrupulous merchant; when a "quarrel for bread" erupted at a bakery in Massachusetts; when crowds in New York seized food wagons; when sixty women confiscated sugar in Beverly, Massachusetts; when Bostonians forced a French baker to make bread for the town; when Virginians announced that "measures by the MOB" would keep prices down; or when Philadelphians armed with clubs bullied shopkeepers to behave fairly, rebellious Americans—especially women—reiterated the popular assumption that political ideology and action reflected Americans' rightful access to the literal fruits of their labor. "The very honey of our bees,"³³ J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur observed about the American's farm, "comes from this privileged spot." Food, in short, was worth fighting over.

Although the most obvious outbursts over food and access to it erupted in the North, the South's political ideology was also informed by food-related issues. In 1787, between the end of the Revolution and the ratification of the United States Constitution, Americans living in Orangeburg District, South Carolina, inveighed, "No individual has a Right whereby he may deprive the People in its vicinage of those just Rights & Privileges which as Citizens of a free & independent State they are entitled to." In South Carolina, one angry citizen claimed, "the common rights" of the people were being trampled on, leaving the people "totally cut off from availing themselves of the common rights of mankind."³⁴ One might guess—given the heft of this rhetoric—that the issues at stake were nothing less than the weighty constitutional matters that James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and George Mason were hammering out at the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia during that summer. These words were, however, about fish.

Shad, in particular. This “necessary of life” was integral to the Carolina diet and routinely consumed by whites, slaves, and Native Americans. “Cheaper than bacon,” packed with flavor, and emblematic of the region’s semisubsistence economy, American shad ascended Carolina’s rivers every spring to their upstream spawning grounds. When they migrated, a fish trap, line, or dip-net yielded an ample meal, as adult shad range from three to fourteen pounds in weight. Inspiring the outbursts, however, was the increasing construction of dams for sawmills, devices that abruptly negated “the Benefits and Emoluments arising from a Fishery”³⁵ and thereby denied residents “a *necessary of life*, which their fellow citizens living upon other water courses 200 miles above the said Mills enjoy in the Greatest plenty.” As Americans had done before and during the Revolution, Carolinians responded to the infringement of their customary access to food by fighting back in defense of a right that couldn’t have been more central to their political and material freedom. Scores of petitions speak to the colonists’ perception that the dams represented a threat as dire as an overt military affront to their independence. Food supply and independence were understood during these episodes as two sides of a coin.

Petitioners around the Edisto River in South Carolina explained that “the keeping open of the River Savannah,³⁶ is of the greatest importance to the citizens of the back country, as well in consequence of navigation, as the advantages resulting to the citizens generally, by having an annual supply of fishing therefrom.” In North Carolina, arguments by relatively poor inhabitants who had every intention to eat rather than sell their fish led to “an Act to … prevent the stoppage of the passage of Fish³⁷ up the Several Rivers therein mentioned.” A South Carolina law reacted to petitions from four counties by imposing a penalty of £8 on anyone found guilty of obstructing Big Lynches Creek “by fish dams, mill dams, hedges, and other obstructions”³⁸ during spawning season. In 1771, as Revolutionary rhetoric heated up, residents of Guilford County, North Carolina, concerned themselves with “many poor familys who depended on said fishing³⁹ for a great part of their living, it being well known that no River of its size in this province afforded greater quantity of exelant shad and other fish.” Again, whether in a Boston tavern or a backcountry courthouse in South Carolina, the protection of food was consistent with the protection of freedom.

The Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary equation of food and political freedom makes even more sense when placed in the perspective of the Seven Years’ War. This war, which actually lasted for nine years (1754–1763), was a world war that pitted France, Austria, Saxony, Sweden, and Russia against Great Britain, Prussia, and Hanover. The North American theater saw Britain and France battling for control of the vast colonial territory ranging from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. The fight began over ownership of the Upper Ohio River Valley and intensified into a conflict over whose empire the sun would never set on. England, whose resources were stretched thin as a result of the war’s wide geographical range, relied heavily on the colonies not only for military support but also for food. And that’s where the internal spat began.

Much as their behavior during and just after the Revolution suggested, colonists

were none too eager to part ways with their hard-earned access to material goods, even for their own soldiers and the British regiments fighting the French. A typical weekly food allowance for a British soldier during the war was seven pounds of beef, four pounds of pork, seven pounds of bread, three pints of peas or beans, half a pound of rice, and one-quarter of a pound of butter. Parliament attempted to contract with colonial governments to supply these rations, but more often than not, what the soldiers ended up with was scurvy, an ailment resulting from a lack of fresh meat and vegetables. On any given day, about one-quarter of the soldiers of any regiment might be unable to fight because of disease. Fresh garden produce, milled flour, and recently slaughtered meat were rarely and reluctantly forthcoming from American farmers more intent on supplying their own needs and trading surpluses in preestablished channels of exchange than making contributions to a cause to which many were indifferent. Soldiers were routinely left to eat hard salted pork and stale bread without vegetables. In 1759, the men of the Forty-second Regiment sat down to a dinner of "ship's beef" and bacon "which had been in store since the former war and Biscuits full of maggots, so that after endeavoring to clear them of vermin we used to wet them and toast them." The Deputy Commissary of Stores surveyed the troops' food inventory before an expedition in 1758 and lamented that they had to set out with "mouldy Bisket" and "rusty salt pork" that was "extream bad," with much of it being "rotten and stunk." Writing from Fort Stanwix on the Mohawk River, a commander complained of "having had no Vegetables, or scarcely any fresh provisions during the winter, or likely to have any for some time." From Lake George in 1758, Joseph Nicols remarked, "Our army is very much uneasy with their manner of living. Our allowance at present is only flour and pork ... we labor under a great disadvantage."⁴⁰

The lack of food supplies began to take its toll on military performance.⁴¹ To prepare General Edward Braddock for his campaign against the French at Niagara and Crown Point, the army arranged to acquire food and other supplies from New York, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Virginia, and Maryland. The governor of Rhode Island tried to rouse his fellow colonies with a pep talk, explaining, "Hence every Government, concerned in the present Enterprise will, I doubt not, proportion supplies according to the value they put upon their religion, their liberty, their estates, and the freedom of themselves and their posterity." He should have had his doubts. New York failed to supply beef. Albany merchants refused to accept notes from other colonies for peas and bread. Maryland and Virginia delivered rations so damaged that Braddock erupted, "They had promised everything and performed nothing." Virginia would release provisions only if they were earmarked for Virginians. Pennsylvania farmers complained about having to travel long distances to exchange farm produce for cash. Many put off their deliveries, leaving Braddock's regiment reduced to half rations. When the governor of Massachusetts tried to impress horses and wagons from local farmers to make an emergency delivery of food, the farmers violently refused. As Braddock moved toward his target, his men were on the brink of mutiny. While he pulled through, it was in spite of the food supply. The British, described by

one observer as “a poor pitiful handful of half starved, scurvy skeletons,” defeated the French at the Battle of Sainte-Foy only because the French were “melted down to Three Thousand fighting men, most by Inveterate Scurvy.”⁴²

The widespread intransigence on the part of American farmers over providing food for British (and, to a lesser extent, American) soldiers was often met with the kind of aggression that only motivated them to protect their food supply even more stubbornly. Soldiers descended on local farms and confiscated apples from orchards, pigs from pens, and cattle from meadows. British redcoats combed over so many New York farms that Albany, which repeatedly noted robberies of “sheep Fowl & Roots⁴³ of all kinds carried off in the Night,” had to post guards around targeted settlements and fine soldiers who wandered off camp after dark. Much to his chagrin, General Thomas Gage spent considerable time responding to complaints that his troops had plundered local gardens and orchards, often at gunpoint. His task wasn’t made any easier by the fact that many generals sanctioned these pilferings, as Jeffrey Amherst did when his troops picked clean a Massachusetts apple orchard. Obadiah Harris wrote home saying that he and his comrades were “very mad”⁴⁴ at local farmers.

Needless to say, the farmers were none too happy in return. In fact, they responded to raids by practicing the time-honored inflammatory techniques of price gouging and bilking what they could from the government trough. When demand rose among British troops, so did the price of foodstuffs offered to them for sale. Peas that had been selling for 5 shillings a pound suddenly increased to 6 shillings. The cost of bread rose 2 shillings per hundredweight when the soldiers came knocking. As one historian explains, “The lure of war profiteering was greater than patriotism.”⁴⁵ Profiteering was especially rampant after the Crown officially took over the financing of supplies in 1756. Trusting the laxity in government oversight, colonial leaders filed receipts and were often compensated for goods that had nothing to do with war supplies. Rhode Island, for example, managed to get the Crown to foot the bill for a merchant’s shipment of coffee, tea, chocolate, sugar, ham, knives, forks, spoons, and plates—none of which made it to the British soldiers but instead went to Rhode Island cupboards.

British officials didn’t find this behavior particularly endearing. To a very large extent, the intolerable policies that flew in the face of American freedom from 1763 to 1775 were, in addition to crass revenue-generating policies, expressions of anger that the British felt toward the colonists for their antics during the Seven Years’ War. Thus one of the greatest paradoxes of the Seven Years’ War was that, in eliminating the French threat to North American land and security, the British found themselves at odds with their own colonies.⁴⁶ On the one hand, the colonies experienced a surge in British loyalty. They were proud to be part of an empire that single-handedly controlled North America; they were eager to continue benefiting from England’s traditional willingness to allow Americans to pursue their economic self-interest through transatlantic and intercoastal trade. On the other hand, though, the English were irate at the arrogance and presumptuousness of their colonial subjects. In

addition to providing less than impressive supplies, the colonists took advantage of the war to violate trade laws that stretched back to 1651, traded with the enemy when it was convenient to do so, and generally convinced England that it was high time to bring the colonies down a notch or two. Hence the Sugar Act, the Quartering Act, the Stamp Act, the Tea Act, and so on. Historians have described this sudden flip-flop on the part of Parliament and the Crown as a violation of traditional relationships. Again, as the events before and after the Revolution confirm, it was also a violation that transgressed the very item that shaped the social and economic life of the colonists: food.

Food and the Emergence of a Political Ideology

The events of the Seven Years' War, the difficult years of 1763 to 1775, the Revolutionary era, and even the post-Revolutionary period pushed Americans to practice an almost paranoid vigilance over their food supply and material rights. Whether it was through withholding food from British soldiers, rioting over high prices, opposing acts that limited access to sugar, tea, and farm produce from other regions, or fighting to preserve their customary rights to shad during spawning season, landowning Americans reiterated the critical point that they were a people who defined themselves first and foremost according to the land they owned and exploited. Defending land and all that it produced was their political education. It was both that simple and that complex. The land and the produce and profit that they squeezed from it fed their families, allowed them to participate in the market, provided liberal access to foreign and extraregional goods, and generally enabled yeoman farmers to improve their standard of living to an extent that their European ancestors could never have dreamed possible. Remarkably, colonists did this while their numbers burgeoned. If there was any aspect of American life worth gloating over and guarding, here it was.

It was no coincidence, then, that these earnest patriot-farmers—men who only a few years earlier couldn't have been more enamored of their countrymen—now condemned the English in terms that were the direct opposite of how they were coming to idealize themselves. Customs officials, complained James Wilson, were nothing more than “a set of *idle drones*.⁴⁷ Rather than work the soil for an honest living, they existed as “lazy, proud, worthless *pensioners and placemen*.” Whereas the upright colonists served the interests of their families and communities, these “baneful harpies” did nothing more than “serve the *ambitious purposes of great men at home*.” Colonial landowners were born to till the soil and reap the rewards, but the English in their midst were “born with long claws like eagles,” designed to scrape an ignoble profit from others who legitimately earned it with the sweat of their brow. They were “bashaws in their divans,” no better than “wretches” of “infamous character.”

The colonial character, by contrast, evolved in the more rugged context of the land and thus ultimately responded to the pristine principle of *virtue*. There was, it was

thought, nothing more virtuous than making a living from tilling the soil and sowing and reaping its rewards. It was from the act of farming that colonial Americans—in the face of threats to that basic right by the mother country—elevated virtue to something of a secular creed, a national slogan, or a myth to idealize. Making a living from the land, as the colonists came to portray it, allowed the yeoman to practice true virtue, which, during the Revolutionary era, meant the willingness of the individual to subordinate his private interests for the good of the whole.

In embracing that value, if only theoretically, the colonists set themselves up to do something few could have predicted: adopt a coherent political ideology encompassing both virtue and self-interest. In other words, as they struggled against imperial interruptions to their freedom, especially the freedom to grow and catch and shoot and trade what they wanted, the colonists formulated a political theory that blended material acquisition and community interests into a single ideological package. Indeed, as threats to the colonies' food source—and, by extension, their most basic liberties—intensified, and as their characterization of the British officials as lazy parasites took hold, colonists from Georgia to Maine reformulated a version of republican political thought that had its roots in seventeenth-century England: the radical Whig ideology. From that ideology—an ideology that evolved in partial response to materialistic concerns—colonists would go on to recast American culture according to a new set of values, a set of values that would come to define American cuisine well into the nineteenth century and, perhaps, beyond.

When the colonists' adherence to the land and the food it produced inspired their attraction to a hibernating ideology, Americans broke new political ground. Prior to the Revolutionary era, Americans had traced their political ideologies to a variety of sources. Their ideas found precedents in classical antiquity, the Enlightenment, English common law, and even Puritanism. None of these ideologies, however, proved to be universally appealing. As Bernard Bailyn explains, "Important as all of these clusters of ideas were,⁴⁸ they did not in themselves form a coherent intellectual pattern." One reason for their failure to "exhaust the elements that went into the making of the Revolutionary frame of mind" has to do with the fact that none of them single-handedly spoke to the ongoing threat to America's material way of life that the British were perpetuating. None of them, in other words, spoke to the collective heart and soul of America's landowning yeoman, the land he worked, and the food he produced on it.

Not so the radical Whig ideology. The gist of this set of political ideas was that corruption—once unleashed—would undermine virtue and send a republic down the dreadful path of tyranny. In England, supporters of the Whig ideology—whose ideas had evolved by the end of the eighteenth century through the vocal opinions of the "country" party—were part of a radical fringe. They effectively kept themselves on the political radar screen, however, by becoming the "Cassandras of the age."⁴⁹ They spent the entire eighteenth century growing into a kind of governmental watchdog group over England, and they sniffed out corruption of the sort that led to the laziness that colonists saw in the British officers on their own soil. "Cato," for example,

complained in a typical passage how “public corruptions and abuses have grown upon us;⁵⁰ fees in most, if not all offices, are immensely increased; places and employments, which ought not to be sold at all, are sold for treble value; the necessities of the public have made greater impositions unavoidable, and yet the public has run very much in debt; and as those debts have been increasing, and the people growing poor, salaries have been augmented, and pensions multiplied.” To the non-Whig British, such a tone seemed terribly overwrought. But the message to the average colonist couldn’t have been any clearer: without proper vigilance, all of America’s hard work would collapse under a systematic corruption that not only was beginning to infect England but was doing so in a way that violated the most basic American principle that the fruit of a white man’s labor was his own. None of that fruit belonged to the “idle drones” who didn’t work for it. Without vigilance, in short, virtue would wither alongside the colonists’ hard-earned freedom to enjoy the material way of life earned by the sweat of their own (and their slaves’) brows. Here, then, was a political system with some mass appeal.

But, fatefully, only in America. The problem with the radical Whig ideology in England, and the reason it continued to remain a fringe ideology with only the most radical adherents, had to do with the scarcity of land in England. As a result, a critical mass of landholding citizens able to lend the ideology the necessary weight of public opinion was lacking. A minority of Englishmen owned land and the titles that land conferred. A vast majority, by contrast, worked that land as servants, thus losing out on any claim to the land’s productive wealth. In America, however, where up to 75 percent of the white adult male population owned land and, by extension, a political voice, the situation couldn’t have been more different or more beneficial to the popularization of the Whigs’ message that if people weren’t paranoid, they were crazy.

John Norris, an Englishman, recognized this very basic demographic difference between the colonies and England as early as 1712. Speaking of Carolina, he praised it as a place where “any industrious man … with his own labor”⁵¹ could do precisely what he could not do in England: “maintain a Wife and Ten children, sufficient with Corn, Pease, Rice, Flesh, Fish, and Fowl.” Norris reflected the opinions of William Penn, who similarly promoted America as a place for those who, in England, could “hardly live” to acquire “all Necessaries and Conveniences.” Writing about New York, Daniel Denton claimed that men who once could “scarcely procure a living”⁵² could depend on “inheritances of land and possessions, stock themselves with all sorts of Cattel, enjoy the benefit of them while they live, and leave them to the benefit of their children when they die.” Perhaps the most amazing thing about these promotional characterizations of America is that they generally turned out to be true. America was a place where white people *could* cultivate their own garden and live a better life than they would have back home for the simple reason that they owned good land and had the fortitude to make it yield a profit. Hundreds of thousands of white men had come to realize that, in taking the plunge, they and their forebears had indeed fulfilled something of an American dream. They also came to realize that, in doing so, they

were part of a majority, a majority that did not exist in England, and a majority with a potentially powerful political voice.

Thus the idea that Americans had to be vigilant in protecting the virtue on which they built their colonies captivated white Americans. The driving tenets of the radical Whig ideology had been bouncing around the colonies since the 1720s, when two tenacious polemicists named John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon began to publish the popular *Cato's Letters* in American newspapers. By the 1760s, though, especially after the Seven Years' War, this oppositional ideology, according to Bernard Bailyn, "was devoured by the colonists."⁵³ So thoroughly was it consumed, in fact, that when the "logic of rebellion" became apparent, the thirteen colonies—all of which developed along distinct political, social, and cultural lines—united around the radical Whig ideology's guiding principles. These were principles, moreover, that took hold only because so many Americans owned the land that they worked. We mustn't forget that they worked it to provide food—food for themselves, their families, their neighbors, other colonies, and, in many cases, a transatlantic market. That necessary and ongoing and identity-shaping activity, and the threat that England eventually posed to it, motivated the American colonies to unite around the essential political imperative that virtue had to be guarded with vigilance. And, as the successful Revolution proved, it not only had to be watched but, when the loss of pristine virtue seemed imminent, had to be defended by any means necessary. When Americans did just that, they were defending their farms and their rights, which they came to see as one and the same. In this elliptical but nonetheless powerful way, food remained at the core of America's Revolution.

The Dismantling of an Old Cultural Model

And it wouldn't lose its influence when the war ended. As the dust of the battle settled, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, an American farmer, asked a famously simple question: "What then is this American, this new man?"⁵⁴ Six years earlier, in early 1776, Thomas Paine had published a tract that sold hundreds of thousands of copies and succinctly articulated the colonists' justification for rebellion. *Common Sense* obliterated the misconception that had taught too many colonists to "think better of the European world than it deserves."⁵⁵ In so doing, Paine suggested exactly what the new American was not—that is, British.

Foreshadowing Noah Webster's prescient remark that "it is perhaps always true that an old civilized nation⁵⁶ cannot, with propriety, be the model for an infant nation, either in manners, fashions, in literature, or in government," Paine was trying not only to spark a fight but also to tell Americans what they would have to do when they won it. The power of the British invasion still captivated many Americans, even as British policies became increasingly invasive. But the enigmatic, consumer-driven mystique of the empire began to wither when Americans started to ask Crèvecoeur's question, ponder Paine's and Webster's answers, and fulfill the inevitable nationalist prerequisite of creating—or at least mythologizing—a new culture. American culture—

and, with it, American food—was up for grabs, and everyone knew what it could not look like.

What, then, would it be? And, for our own purposes, what, then, would this new American eat? Perhaps anticlimactically, the new American would eat nothing terribly new, at least not until immigrants from southeastern Europe began to pour through Ellis Island after the Civil War. This conclusion shouldn't be all that surprising, especially in light of the fact that Americans fought a revolution primarily to continue pursuing the same material interests that bound them to the colonial past. But none of this is to say that American food didn't change. American cuisine would become "American" not through a change in ingredients but, rather, through the way that Americans *thought* about those ingredients. In essence, America's culinary declaration of independence was an *intellectual* declaration of independence more than a revolution in specific culinary style. Americans would continue to do pretty much as they had done before the Revolution; that is, they would continue to artfully blend the local demands of the immediate regional environment with traditions imported from abroad. But they would look at the basic act of acquiring and preparing food in an entirely new light, imbue food with new values, and often taste food with a self-consciously less pretentious mentality, one that arguably lingers to this day.

There were, of course, those who wanted to announce America's presence with authority. Young, brash Americans in particular hoped to burst on the international scene with an explosion of flag-waving, muscle-flexing innovation in every area of life. Benjamin Franklin cautioned against such an impulse, however, noting that "all things have their season,⁵⁷ and with young countries as with young men, you must curb their fancy to strengthen their judgment." America's act of cultural creation—for better or worse—eventually followed Franklin's avuncular advice, turning to the past rather than the future to find its inspirational font. Joseph Ellis has described Americans' earliest foray into cultural redefinition as an attempt "to ransack their past for cultural accomplishments⁵⁸ in a patriotic effort to provide the new nation with a respectable legacy in the arts and sciences." Before examining the past for the bedrock values that would steadfastly guide American culture into the future, however, Americans couldn't resist the impulse to rhetorically dismantle the culture that, only a couple of decades earlier, they had been building grand pedestals to admire. The process of defining a new American culture—and thus the context for a new American culinary philosophy—began by trashing and thrashing the once revered English culture. It was, in a way, a necessary and therapeutic step in deciding who this new American would be.

The ultimate problem with Europe, as these denunciations repeatedly argued, was that it was old and tired. Its corruption was the result of its age as much as the vile character of its policies. As Webster articulated it, a nation, like a person, "was born, grew up, became old, then died."⁵⁹ In England, "the establishment of an economy based on commerce and manufacturing was a clear sign of the nation's middle age." European culture was, as Webster continued, "highly pernicious" because—in a perversion of Buffon's natural history—it was making "hasty strides to the last stages

of corruption" and extinction. James Murray, writing on the eve of the Revolution, agreed. "The decline of virtue and the downfall of nature,"⁶⁰ he explained, "have always kept pace with one another." The reason, once again, had to do with age. He continued, "The basis of government generally grows weak as its splendor increases. Nations are like trees; they make the greatest show when they flourish in *trade, luxury, and riches*; but they are then weakest and have *least vital strength*." John Witherspoon offered his two cents on the matter when he wrote how "a general profligacy and corruption⁶¹ of manners make a people ripe for destruction."

Many commentators, in a slightly more sophisticated version of the growing-old argument, appealed to what was called a conjectural theory of civilization.⁶² Adam Smith, who was a staunch supporter of this central idea of the Scottish Enlightenment, explained how "savage and barbarous nations,"⁶³ which America once was, evolved according to "the natural progress of law and government and the arts." But a nation could travel only so far on this arc of civilization before crossing the threshold of decline. When commerce and manufacturing endeavors replaced the more virtuous and vigorous work of agriculture, then a nation was set on the path of ruin. This, in fact, is precisely what went wrong, as Franklin put it, in "many parts of England." It had allowed itself to evolve into a nation with "Landlords, great Noblemen and Gentlemen,⁶⁴ extremely opulent, living in the Affluence and Magnificence" and coexisting with a majority who were "tattered, dirty, and abject in Spirit" and living "in the most sordid wretchedness in dirty hovels of Mud and Straw ... cloathed only in rags." One hundred and twenty years later, the silver-tongued William Jennings Bryan told the Democratic Convention, "Burn down your cities and leave your farms,⁶⁵ and your cities will spring up again as if by magic, but destroy our farms and the grass will grow in the streets of every city in the country." Bryan was, of course, speaking about America, but his remark—and the pastoral sentiment supporting it—evoked England and the "wretchedness" into which it had fallen by the late eighteenth century. Americans had no intention of following this example. They would, if they had to, stop themselves cold and put an end to history if grass started to grow in the city. At least this is what they told themselves.

In addition to being old, tired, and caught in the downward spiral of historical decline, Europe, as the young American nation dismantled it, had grown dangerously fond of luxury—luxury on a level that only a handful of Americans, despite decades of equipping themselves with European goods, understood. James Murray, in 1769, wrote by way of historical analogy, "As long as the Romans were virtuous, they enjoyed freedom and liberty;⁶⁶ but when *luxury, bribery and corruption* were introduced, virtue declined ... and the foundations of their government were soon overthrown." In case anyone missed the point, he added, "Great Britain now bears a near resemblance to what ancient Rome was before the final declension of that mighty empire." An Anglican minister from Philadelphia named William Smith echoed a popular sentiment toward England when he wrote how "Plenty begat Ease, and Ease begat Luxury,⁶⁷ and Luxury introduced a fatal corruption of every good and virtuous

principle." On the basis of these characterizations of the Old World, Americans finally came to conclude that, indeed, "an old civilization cannot be ... the model for an infant nation."

The Search for a New Cultural Model

The sun might have been setting on the British Empire, but (with apologies to Ronald Reagan) it was morning in America. Dissecting the perceived evils of the empire was a much easier task than rebuilding a distinctly American culture. Nevertheless, the young nation took solace and found inspiration in Thomas Paine's assertion that it had the "power to begin the world over again"⁶⁸ and that it could commence doing so because it had "a blank sheet to write upon." Young Americans might not be too sure what kind of treatise to fill it with, but they did know that they had just marshaled "virtue enough to defend themselves against the most powerful nation in the world." They could take further comfort in the fact that they had the "wisdom to contrive a perfect and free form of government." Americans might have felt as though they had lost their cultural moorings, but the moorings were still there—they just had to be rerooted. A careful examination of the arguments they used to tarnish English culture reveals the hidden facets of a new American culture that came to define who Americans were and, among other things, how they thought about the food they ate. When Americans dismissed the English as lazy, effeminate, luxury-obsessed, old, tired, and hypercommercialized, they simultaneously conceptualized themselves as hardworking, manly, frugal, young, energetic, and—above all else—agricultural. Exploring these themes brings us yet one step closer to understanding how the white Americans who lived in the new republic came to see themselves and their food as rustic, plain, practical, unpretentious, and—perhaps above all else—intimately tied to the land they worked.

It's easy for historians to scoff at the earliest promotional accounts of North America as desperate exaggerations made by settlement organizers hoping to lure families to the New World. Granted, not every free man who worked hard succeeded in achieving the dreams that America's promoters proffered. But what's especially striking by the middle of the eighteenth century is, as Jack P. Greene puts it, "that thousands upon thousands of people did succeed"⁶⁹ in realizing some significant part of the promise held out by promotional writers." The way they did so, moreover, was lost on nobody, least of all Benjamin Franklin, who exuberantly praised his colonial colleagues for making "a Garden of the Wilderness."⁷⁰ Even the British official Thomas Whatley agreed in 1766 that America had "flourished ... beyond all example in Europe"⁷¹ and that there existed "no Precedence of Example" for the colonies' "improvement." A contributor to the magazine *American Husbandry* pithily encapsulated the agricultural history of colonial America by writing how the colonists "maintained themselves the first year, like the Indians,⁷² with their guns and nets, and afterwards by the same means with the assistance of their lands," and, finally, after

"a few years," they enjoyed farms that allowed them "to maintain themselves and families comfortably." Another writer noted how after only a few years, typical colonial settlers had "made such Farms as afforded them Necessaries⁷³ of Life in Plenty" as well as "clean houses, neat, though homely, Furniture, commodious Barns, and a sufficient stock of Horses, Cows, Hogs, Poultry, &c." J. Hector St. John de Crèvecœur may have best articulated the overall accomplishment of American farming with his assessment that, because of it, "the idle may be employed,⁷⁴ the useless become useful, and the poor become rich." "Rich," however, didn't connote the luxuriant and landed wealth that the English elite enjoyed but, rather, nothing more decadent than "cleared lands, cattle, good houses, good clothes, and an increase of people to enjoy them." In short, simple and practical comforts—the timeless benefits of a young America's advertised version of the good life.

Whereas Americans once worked to overcome the hayseed associations of the frontier, they now embraced and bragged about their relative lack of cultivation—a quality reflected in their strong roots in farming. The virtue of the frontier became starkly and especially clear to proponents of the conjectural theory of history. After all, being associated with the frontier meant being far away from the commercialized threshold that England had so recently crossed. Noah Webster grasped the advantages of the wild frontier and its promise of continued agricultural pursuits when he characterized the evolution away from agriculture as "a period that every benevolent man⁷⁵ will deprecate and endeavor to retard." America, he continued, should "endeavor to preserve our manners by being our own standards." Otherwise, it would be "hurried down the stream of corruption with other nations." On another occasion, Webster remarked, "In the United States everything that has been done hitherto⁷⁶ in the construction of cities is an imitation of the old European ... mode, and of course is wrong."

When the frontier closed, as America learned in the 1890s from Frederick Jackson Turner, commercial and industrial forces garnered power over the nation's economy and life. But until that distant and unwelcome event happened, Americans could and very much did promote the idea that—again, as Franklin phrased it—"Commerce ... is generally *Cheating*,"⁷⁷ while farming "is the only *honest Way* ... to acquire wealth." Whereas the frontier, according to Crèvecœur, represented the nation's "feeble beginnings and barbarous rudiments" as well as "the most hideous parts of our society," it was also the raw material necessary for an "industrious people" to transform into "fine, fertile, well regulated" farms and communities, places where a "general decency of manners" could prevail. A "hundred years ago," Crèvecœur continued, the colonies were "wild, wooly, and uncultivated." Now they comprised an "immense country" marked by "substantial villages, extensive fields ... decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges."⁷⁸ Thus the colonists went from "barbarous" beginnings to a polished culture through the singular and ongoing act of farming. What, Crèvecœur wanted to know, was more American than that?

Perhaps no American—and certainly no American with such a high profile—better

or more enthusiastically sang the praises of the frontier and the agricultural life it fostered than Thomas Jefferson. His oft-quoted pronouncements on the pastoral ideal have become America's secular scriptures. "Those who labour in the earth," he wrote, "are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue." England had succumbed to degenerate behavior as its citizens turned toward manufacturing, but America was—for the time being at least—safe from such a fate because, as Jefferson noted, "corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example." America was truly exceptional in that it could realistically wish "never ... to see our citizens occupied at a workbench, or twirling a distaff." Indeed, "carpenters, masons, smiths are wanting in husbandry; but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe." Those workshops, as England's recent history had shown, bred corruption and made life unnecessarily complicated. And such a turn of events for England was to be expected, Jefferson continued, because dependence on other nations for something as basic as food "suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition."⁷⁹

Jefferson and men like him considered the specific benefits of husbandry to be endlessly fertile, powerful enough to rally white Americans from all regions and backgrounds behind a radical political ideology, and seductive enough to hold them together—however tenuously—after the American Revolution. The thread running through each and every beneficial aspect of farming, however, was a basic notion that was also intricately tied to the frontier: simplicity. Jefferson implored the young American man to avoid Europe, for once there, "he acquires a fondness for European luxury⁸⁰ and dissipation and a contempt for the simplicity of his own country." The simplicity of the farming life enchanted Crèvecoeur, too. After thanking God "that my lot is to be an American farmer," he explained the virtues of his chosen profession. There was the generational connection to his father, who "left me a good farm, and his experience; he left me free from debts, and no kind of difficulties to struggle with." When it came to food, he was set: "Every year I kill from 1500 to 2000 weight of pork,⁸¹ 1200 of beef, half a dozen of good wethers in harvest; of fowls my wife has always a great stock: what can I wish more?" Merely walking onto his farm sent him into rapture: "The instant I enter on my own land, the bright idea of property, of exclusive right, of independence exalt my mind. Precious soil, I say to myself ... what should we American farmers be without the distinct possession of that soil? It feeds, it clothes us, from it we draw even a great exuberancy, our best meat, our richest drink." Richard Price, a Unitarian minister from Virginia, spoke equally approvingly of "an independent and hardy YEOMANRY,⁸² all nearly on a level ... clothed in homespun—of simple manners—strangers to luxury—drawing plenty from the ground—and that plenty, gathered easily by the hand of industry." He declared, "O distinguished people! ... may the happiness you enjoy spread over the face of the whole earth."

This single value—simplicity—inspired commentators to look on the American

Revolution and the values it confirmed and promoted as nothing less than universally applicable. “In great measure,” Paine wrote, “the cause of America is the cause of all mankind.”⁸³ Five years later, in 1781, Abbé Raynal described the American cause as the “cause of the whole human race.”⁸⁴ The American Revolution, men such as Paine and Raynal thought, was a critical step to lending immediate truth to John Locke’s famous claim: “In the beginning⁸⁵ … all the world was America.” With respect to democracy, these optimists may have been onto something. But with respect to food, Americans would enjoin the values of the Revolution with their varied culinary pasts in order to create an “American” food that would find its counterpart nowhere else in the world. American food—growing out of this new American culture of rugged, frontier-inspired simplicity—would indeed become something unique, at least in conception.

Defining an “American” Food

Nobody wrote an early treatise on American food. While America’s political Declaration of Independence had its Thomas Jefferson, the nation’s culinary declaration was delivered more quietly, with less fanfare, without a single voice, in offhand remarks and casual comments dropped at random. While we cannot point to an outstanding document or defining event to confirm that the American Revolution ushered in an “American” style of food, we can hunt down those scraps of evidence that point to a revolution in the way that Americans came to think about their food and, to an extent, cook it.

The agrarian values that colonists fought the Revolution to protect and preserve became the very values that Americans would use to frame their new foodways. As we’ve seen, American food was first forged in the wildness of an unfamiliar frontier, leading to a variety of regional cooking and eating styles that remained largely isolated from one another for decades. By the eighteenth century, these regional styles began—through a number of influences—to converge, and, as they did, Americans began to balance regional traditions rooted in the frontier with the increasingly powerful influence of more formalized English foodways. After the Revolution, however, they would shed their association with England and tilt back in the direction of their frontier roots.

This time, however, the embrace of the frontier way of cooking would be much more controlled, driven less by necessity than by the conscious and purposeful embrace of an ideology that favored values such as youth, simplicity, hard work, honesty, virtue, and a lack of pretension. Americans could finally dictate their terms to the frontier rather than the frontier dictating its terms to them. A telling summary of the foodways that emerged with political independence came from the early American dramatist William Dunlap, who promoted his play *The Father* as “a frugal plain repast,”⁸⁶ contrasting it to the “high seasoned food” dished out by European dramatists. Without in any way intending to, Dunlap points us in the direction of a conclusion to the story of America’s culinary origins.

The development of a unique American cuisine began with an angry rejection of

English culture and, afterward, a polite refusal of French food. It wouldn't have been unexpected if, after the Revolutionary War, Americans had taken a step toward adopting the relatively fancified cooking tradition of the French. There were plenty of reasons to do so. The Americans and French had been loyal allies during the Revolution; Jefferson had become an inveterate Francophile during the war; and the French were gearing up to fight a revolution of their own based on principles adopted from the Americans. A cultural connection of sorts therefore existed. But evidence that, despite the appeal of French food to America's first four presidents, French gastronomy would go virtually nowhere in early America came in 1793 when the Bostonians served their French residents a meal to honor the French Revolution of 1789. The feast began not with the expected pot-au-feu but with the Bostonians hanging a "Peace Offering to Liberty and Equality" sign around the neck of an ox, leading it to Liberty Square, slaughtering it, and eating it with sixteen hundred loaves of bread, corn mush, turkey, and two hogsheads of punch—an American affair if there ever was one.

The more Americans learned about French food, in fact, the more they came to misunderstand and dislike it, and the more they came to realize what theirs was all about. Patrick Henry, the vocal Revolutionary agitator from Virginia, criticized Jefferson's taste in French food as an effete affectation that made him "abjure his native victuals."⁸⁷ Many years later, in 1840, when William Henry Harrison slung mud at his opponent for the presidency, Martin Van Buren, he did so by depicting him as eating pâté de foie gras and *soup à la reine*. Harrison, by contrast, portrayed himself—despite his privileged upbringing—as living in a log cabin and knocking back hard cider on the front porch after a hard day in the fields. The American rejection of French food was, two historians of American food write, "by no means the only demonstration in American history⁸⁸ of the curious fact that in America it is politically disadvantageous to be known as a gourmet, as though there were something unmanly in being discriminating about, or even attentive to, what one eats."

But Americans *did* care about what they ate, and much evidence indicates that they wanted their food to be—like their newly articulated political principles—honest, virtuous, simple, free from artifice, and, in a way, robust. Newspapers printed recipes for such patriotic dishes as Independence Cake, Federal Cake, Election Cake, and Ratification Cake. And when one tired of patriotic cake, there was always Congressional Bean Soup. For those who followed recipes, however, cookbooks were the norm. The cookbooks that were published in early America, as we've seen, were largely relics of the English system of cookery that, more often than not, are more interesting for their plagiarizing from English sources dating back to the 1730s than for their recording of rough-hewn American innovations. Their use is thus somewhat limited because the recipes were very likely more popular from the 1740s to the 1760s than they were after the American Revolution and into the early nineteenth century.

AMERICAN COOKERY,
OR THE ART OF DRESSING
VIANDS, FISH, POULTRY and VEGETABLES,
AND THE BEST MODES OF MAKING
PASTES, PUFFS, PIES, TARTS, PUDDINGS,
CUSTARDS AND PRESERVES,
AND ALL KINDS OF
C A K E S,
FROM THE IMPERIAL PLUMB TO PLAIN CAKE.
ADAPTED TO THIS COUNTRY,
AND ALL GRADES OF LIFE.

By Amelia Simmons,
AN AMERICAN ORPHAN.

PUBLISHED ACCORDING TO ACT OF CONGRESS.

HARTFORD
PRINTED BY HUDSON & GOODWIN.
FOR THE AUTHOR.

1796

Title page of American Cookery, 1796

This cookbook, by Amelia Simmons, is the first to have been published in the United States. Although the recipes were "adapted to this country," they have a heavy British flavor.

That said, some sense of America's culinary "return to homespun" comes through in

several selected recipes. Choices from American cookbooks after 1796 (when the first one was published) use ingredients native to America in their recipes. In *American Cookery*, Amelia Simmons basically lifted recipes from English cookbooks, but still formally introduced Americans to such foods as “cranberry sauce,” “pompkin pie,” Indian pudding, and cornmeal bread. Hannah Glasse’s *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy*, published in Virginia in 1805, also reads like an old English cookbook, with the exception of seven wonderful pages, all included under the subtitle “several new receipts adapted to the American mode of cooking.” These recipes stand out in stark contrast to those in the rest of the book for their simplicity and homespun nature. A brief sampling conveys a taste of this “American mode” while providing a telling point of comparison to European traditions:

TO MAKE MUSH

Boil a pot of water ... and then stir in the meal till it becomes quite thick, stirring it all the time to keep out the lumps, season with salt, and eat it with milk or molasses.

TO MAKE A BAKED INDIAN PUDDING

One quart of boiled milk to five spoonfuls of Indian meal, one gill of molasses, and salt to your taste.

TO MAKE PUMPKIN PIE

Take the Pumpkin and peel the rind off, then stew it till it is quite soft, and put thereto one pint of pumpkin, one pint of milk, one glass of Malaga wine, one glass of rose-water, if you like it, seven eggs, half a pound of fresh butter, one small nutmeg, and sugar and salt to your taste.

TO MAKE BLOOD PUDDINGS

Take your Indian meal ... and scald it with boiled milk or water, then stir in your blood, straining it first, mince the hog’s lard and put it in the pudding, then season it with treacle ... put it in a bag and let it boil six or seven hours.

TO MAKE CRANBERRY TARTS

To one pound of flour three quarters of a pound of butter, then stew your cranberry’s to a jelly. Putting good brown sugar in to sweeten them, strain the cranberry’s and then put them in your patty pans for baking in a moderate oven for half an hour.

TO MAKE A RAISED PORK PIE

Take six ounces of butter to one pound of flour, boil the butter in a sufficient quantity of water to mix with the flour hot, let the paste be stiff and form it in a round shape with your hands, then put in your pork, season to your taste with pepper and salt, and then bake it for about an hour.

TO MAKE PEACH SWEETMEATS

To one pound of Peaches put half a pound of good brown sugar, with a half a pint of water to dissolve it, first clarifying it with an egg; then boil the peaches and sugar

together, skimming the egg off ... till it is of the thickness of a jelly ... pears are done the same way.

TO MAKE A POT PIE

Make a crust and put it around the sides of your pot, then cut your meat in small pieces, of whatever kind the pot-pie is to be made of, and season it with pepper and salt, then put it in the pot and fill it with water, close it with paste on the top; it will take three hours doing.

The recipes are unusual in that they were meant to be followed. Unlike the more traditional English recipes published in Glasse's book, they generally use native ingredients, or at least ingredients commonly available throughout America; they are described in a much more basic manner than the English recipes; and they are much easier to carry out than the other recipes she provides. It would have been quite obvious to seasoned readers at the time that most of her recipes were truncated and scaled-down versions of the English standard. The comparison of American pot pie with English mince pie reveals an obvious attempt to reduce the number of steps involved and ingredients used. Glasse's recipe for a traditional English mince pie, for example, is about four times as long and involved. She calls for raisins; currants "picked, washed, rubbed, and dried at the fire"; "half a hundred pippins pared, cored, and chopped small"; sugar "pounded fine"; cloves, nutmegs, and mace "all beat fine"; and layerings with Seville oranges, lemons, and the addition of a parboiled tongue for added flavor. A similar situation can be seen with pork pie. The simplicity of the American recipe for raised pork pie becomes especially obvious when compared with the English recipe for Cheshire pork pie. In this version, Glasse advised the cook to use a *loin* of pork rather than any old cut, to "lay a layer of pork, then a larger layer, of pippins, pared, cored and a little sugar ... then another layer of pork," and, finally, to add half a pint of white wine.

The pared-down methods characterizing the "American mode" are further evident in a comparison of Glasse's American and English recipes for eel pie. The "American mode" instructed the cook to "skin your eels and parboil them, then season them with pepper and salt, and put them into your paste, with a half dozen raw oysters, one quarter of a pound of butter, and water." Instead of skinning and parboiling eels to clean them, by contrast, the English version demanded that the chef "clean, gut, and wash your eels very well, then cut them into pieces half as long as your finger." It also suggested the addition of "a little beaten mace to your palate." A comparison of how to make sausages reveals an English recipe that insists that the "skin and gristles" be removed and the guts "very nicely cleaned." Neither directive, however, appears in the American version.

The implication couldn't have been any more obvious: the "American mode" had no time and felt no need to remove the guts from eels, cut them into uniform pieces, and pamper the palette with a dusting of hand-milled mace. It saw no need to scrape gristles and skin from a pig before rendering it into sausage. Perhaps it would have

back in 1750, when Americans were in awe of the British. But not in 1805, when Americans were in awe of themselves. The nature of a “frugal plain repast,” the aspects of the changing attitudes toward American food, discouraged such conveniences.

Glasse’s “American mode” section further reflected the reversion to frontier-oriented American food by concentrating heavily on making do with what was available. Her recipes directed brewers to make “spruce beer from shed spruce” and to make treats such as maple sugar, maple beer, and maple molasses. The last of these could “be done in three ways: 1. from thick syrup, obtained by boiling after it is strained for granulation, 2. from the drainings of the sugar after it is granulated, 3. from the runnings of the tree [which will not granulate] reduced by evaporation to the consistence of molasses.” Whichever way they made it, settlers could add it to cornmeal for a hearty meal. Another section unique to the “American mode” speaks to the practical nature of American cooking. Titled “Method of destroying the putrid Smell which meat acquires during the weather,” it advised the cook to “put [the meat] in a saucepan full of water, scum it when it boils, and then throw into the sauce a burning pit coal, very compact and destitute of smoke, leave it there for two minutes, and it will have contracted all the smell of the meat.”⁸⁹ The meat could then be used in a soup.

A focus on cooking as a practical rather than a luxuriant or indulgent endeavor—as a task that should be “plain” and “frugal”—was evident beyond Glassee’s cookbook. A proliferation of post-Revolutionary beer production especially reflected the more rugged frontier mode of drinking that prevailed in the days before cider and rum replaced beer as daily beverages of choice. Speaking within the context of the Revolutionary embrace of national self-subsistence and simplicity, brewing advocates exhorted women in particular to bring brewing back into the kitchen. “Almost any household can brew,”⁹⁰ explained Samuel Deane, “without putting himself out too much.” Deane echoed the reemerging theme of homespun frugality when he wrote, “Instead of a large copper, which is necessary in a brew house, a large kettle or two may answer the purposes,” while “hogshead or barrel tubs, and other vessels, may serve for mashing tubs, backs, coolers, and tins.” A new magazine called the *Practical Farmer* instructed readers on how to build a home brewery. If Americans weren’t going to make their own beer, they should at least—the commentators exhorted—buy American. Sam Adams drove the message home when he took out an advertisement that remarked, “It is to be hoped, that the Gentlemen of the Town will endeavour⁹¹ to bring our own OCTOBER BEER into fashion again … so that we may no longer be beholden to *Foreigners* for a *Credible Liquor*.” Brewers crawled out of the woodwork to heed the call. A Virginia brewer introduced his new business with the comment that “the severe treatment we have lately received from our Mother Country⁹² would, I should think, be sufficient to recommend my undertaking.... [Y]et, the goodness of every commodity is the best recommendation.”

Whether American beer was good or not was open to interpretation and taste, but whether it was “American” or not there was little doubt. Local breweries that

emerged after the Revolution sparked a revival in beer production and consumption for the very reason that, as we've seen, beer was quintessentially a frontier beverage. And, as it turns out, the frontier was de rigueur. Beer was important because it symbolized the recently revived cultural values of health, simplicity, virtue, frugality, and other aspects of America's agrarian tradition. Beer production was a critical example of how early Americans self-consciously embraced the frontier and its values after the Revolution. It was a clear case of drink reinforcing the nation's new cultural values while shaping its unique foodways.

The results of the beer transition were rapid and lasted well into the 1820s. Philadelphians lowered their rum consumption and increased their beer production and consumption to the extent that, in 1789, the British consul in Philadelphia wrote home to report that not only was homemade porter undercutting British sales in Philadelphia, but, even though "the quality is vastly inferior⁹³ even to Bath or Bristol porter," it was about to be "sold at ½ less than the London porter ... to the Southern states." The rapid popularization of domestic beer after the Revolution brought more Americans back to the soil and into their own kitchens and breweries to produce their own alcohol rather than depending on the now foreign West Indies for the ingredients to make rum. While George Hay, James Madison's nephew, complained that "TWELVE MILLION OF DOLLARS have been expended⁹⁴ by the United States in purchasing West India spirituous liquors," J. B. Bordley could soon retort with the hopeful remark that, because of local production, "beer is taking place of diluted spirits." Because of beer, "there is more sobriety now observed in the towns than formerly, when West India rum abounded at a third of its present price." Samuel Sewall and other advocates of sobriety would have been proud.

Beer also reinforced the noble business of farming rather than the supposedly deleterious practice of manufacturing and commerce. When Peter Shiras and Robert Smith opened their Virginia brewery, they did so with an advertisement that read, "Farmers who choose to raise Barley,⁹⁵ may depend upon having the price of Five Shillings per bushel." It was no coincidence that Jefferson, the nation's leading advocate of frontier agriculture, became a master brewer after the war. He actively forged a powerful cultural association between beer and new American values when he brewed beer from Indian corn, lobbied for a brewing company in Washington, and declared brewing an art done best without formal recipes. When James Barbour inquired about a recipe for ale that he had enjoyed at Monticello, Jefferson replied, "I have no receipt for brewing⁹⁶ & I doubt if the operations of malting and brewing could be successfully performed from a receipt." Instead, all one really needed to brew beer were the very same virtues that had served farmers well throughout history and were becoming the buzzwords for a new national character: "great intelligence and diligence."

Although it hardly connoted the kind of health that beer did, whiskey also became a popular beverage after the Revolution, and thus another example of the American effort to consciously promote frontier food and drink as part of a larger process of cultural reconstruction. Despite its frigid place down at -60 degrees on Benjamin

Rush's "Moral and Physical Thermometer," whiskey reflected the young nation's renewed attraction to frontier virtues. It joined cider as the nation's preferred strong drink for several reasons. It could be made from Indian corn and rye, by makeshift stills in the backyard, and with the backcountry's ample supply of fuel and fresh water. It had the added benefit of offering hardscrabble farmers in the backcountry an excellent outlet for grain crops that too often otherwise rotted during overland transportation to coastal markets. Whiskey's most powerful ideological benefit, however, was that it joined beer in driving rum out of business. In other words, it was a frontier beverage that replaced a commercial one, and it was thus a drink fully commensurate with the broader cultural transition toward homespun simplicity. "I reckon every horse exported and returned in rum," wrote one anti-rum zealot, "as ... property lost to the general interest." Chances are that he would have been none too pleased with whiskey as the solution to this problem, but at least a whiskey distiller could—as a young Kentucky man did—mark his bottles with "Born with the Republic"⁹⁷ and sell a brand called "Old 1776."

Through their intended and quite concerted turn back toward culinary simplicity after the Revolution, Americans ate familiar foods—both native and imported—under the assumption that eating was more of a practical activity rather than a ceremonial one. Just as American culture had become more pragmatic, so had its food. The British foreign minister who visited Secretary of State James Madison in 1777 spoke volumes about the emerging distinction of American food when he described Dolley's meal as "more like a harvest home supper⁹⁸ than the entertainment of the Secretary of State." Dolley, who overheard the remark, retorted how "the profusion of my table arises from the happy circumstances and abundance and prosperity in our country." Enough said.

At the time of this frosty exchange, the American frontier that nurtured a rustic attitude about food was raw but limited—hemmed in as it was by the English and the Spanish. In 1803, however, that limitation lifted when America paid a mere \$15 million for the Louisiana Territory. With that acquisition, the frontier became—for all intents and purposes—endless. When Americans began to pour west after 1803, they brought with them their assumptions that food should be simple, rustic, close to home, the fruit of their own labor, honest, and unpretentious. The frontier, suddenly an ever-expanding phenomenon, could—and in many ways did—renew for generations the culinary values that America forged after the Revolution. As the North slowly urbanized and the South evolved into an entrenched plantation society, the West ensured that the foodways of the older regions of America remained true to their Revolutionary roots—rough, simple, honest fare.

The specific ways in which the new frontier around and west of the Mississippi reinvigorated a mode of cuisine not really seen in America since its earliest settlements are evident in the experiences of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Their expedition to explore the plant and animal life in America's newest acquisition began in a fifty-five-foot keelboat loaded with 2,000 pounds of cornmeal, 3,400 pounds of flour, 600 pounds of lard, 750 pounds of salt, 3,705 pounds of pork, and

560 pounds of hardtack. When these staples of a rustic American diet ran out, the explorers were reduced to behaving as their forebears had 150 years earlier. They grubbed for roots, relied on Native Americans for food, and consumed wild sweet potatoes, bitterroot, “Indian biscuit root,” prairie apples, and wapato, which, Lewis said, “are never out of season⁹⁹ … [and are] nearly equal in flavor to the Irish potatoe and afford a very good substitute for bread.” As settlers to America did when they first arrived on the east coast, the expedition’s venturers marveled at the fish and wild game. Sounding like John Winthrop gushing over the New England cod that were practically jumping into his boat back in 1631, Clark wrote in his journal, “The number of dead salmon floating on the Shores & floating in the river is incredible to say and at this season [the Indians] have only to collect the fish Split them open and dry them on their scaffolds.”

Lewis and Clark were soon doing the same. And while it was surely the last thought on their minds as they did so, they were reenacting a culinary habit of adaptation that America had once relied on to turn the earliest east coast settlements into societies. In this way, these men were an apt microcosm of the thousands of American families who would soon pack it up in the East; load a supply of familiar foods onto a wagon drawn by oxen; head west; eat through their provisions; grub, hunt, and barter; build their farms; achieve self-sufficiency; market some surplus goods; acquire a few fineries; improve their standard of living as their own settlement became a society; and, in the process, unwittingly help establish the origins of a national cuisine.

Their kids, once the land was in full use, would then start the process over again. Whether this western expansion breathed new life into American democracy is a thesis that Frederick Jackson Turner proposed and historians have long questioned, but there’s no doubt that the movement west acted to preserve the cultural and culinary values that America imbibed as the lessons of the American Revolution matured and sunk in.

Were Americans aware that they were defining a unique culinary tradition? Given that few Americans today conceive of their country as having such a distinction, it seems unlikely. Interestingly, though, their European contemporaries sensed that a change was under way. In 1804, a Frenchman visiting the United States was struck by the almost proud lack of refinement that characterized supposedly sophisticated meals. “They swallow,” he wrote of his American hosts, “almost without chewing.”¹⁰⁰ The rusticity of the food thoroughly underwhelmed him. The Americans he visited ate “hot bread, half-baked, toast soaked in butter, cheese of the fattest kind, slices of salt or hung beef, ham, etc., all of which is nearly insoluble.” Fearing that he might sound inhospitable, the Frenchman could not help but express his opinions that “at dinner they have boiled pastes under the name puddings, and their sauces, even for roast beef, are melted butter; their turnips and potatoes swim in hog’s lard, butter, or fat; under the name of pie or pumpkin, their pastry is nothing but a greasy paste, never sufficiently baked.” What makes these comments even more revealing about the comparatively rustic nature of American food is the fact that this Frenchman was

Constantin-François Chasseboeuf, comte de Volney. With a name like that, we can be assured that he was not having his snobbish taste buds assaulted in backcountry taverns but, rather, dining in style. Albeit American style.

While the tendency might be to dismiss Volney's opinion as exceptionally snooty, he doesn't seem to have been alone. Twenty-five years later, Harriet Martineau, an English visitor to America and the future author of *Society in America* (1837), graciously referred to the United States as a place where "sweet temper diffused like sunshine over the land." Evidently not, however, over its food. At best, she thought it quaint that Americans relied so heavily on simple fare for their sustenance, and she repeatedly noted the popularity of cornbread, buckwheat cakes, eggs and bacon, broiled chicken, hominy, beefsteak, and pickled fish. "A man who has corn," she wrote, "may have everything."¹⁰¹ In Virginia, however, she found all the food she ate—mainly bread, butter, and coffee—to be stale. The attitudes of her hosts weren't much fresher, in her opinion. "They probably have no idea that there is better food than they set before us," she sneered. A search for mutton turned up nothing, and when Martineau moved from the east coast to Tennessee, her culinary quest actually turned up a gustatory horror. "The dish from which I ate," she recalled after one especially enigmatic meal, "was, according to some, mutton; to others, pork." "My own idea," she concluded, "was that it was dog."

Even in Tennessee, however, they weren't eating dogs. What Martineau failed to understand was that she was visiting a nation that had consciously rejected European culinary habits. Americans had become perfectly at ease with unrefined, unpretentious food. Other foreigners visiting America recognized this defining trait more clearly. Frederick Marryat, an Englishman, observed the offerings at a Broadway market and remarked tellingly on the offerings. "Broadway being three miles long,"¹⁰² he explained, "and the booths lining each side of it, in every booth there was a roast pig, large or small, as the center of attraction. Six miles of roast pig!" François-Alexandre-Frédéric, duc de La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, noted the Americans' seeming contentment with the most simple, monotonous diet. "Indian corn," he wrote, "was the national crop,"¹⁰³ and Indian corn was eaten three times a day" in addition to salt pork. "In the country," he continued, "fresh meat could not regularly be got, except in the shape of poultry or game; but the hog cost nothing to keep, and very little to kill and preserve. Thus the ordinary American was brought up on salt pork and Indian corn, or rye." Not that Americans disliked salted meat. Thomas Ashe, writing in *Travels in America in 1806*, noted that many Americans preferred it, recalling one timber worker who explained that "your fresh meat, that's too fancy"¹⁰⁴ ... and hain't got strength unto it." Charles Dickens confirmed the pragmatism behind American food when he noted a steady stream of "tea, coffee, bread, butter, salmon, shad, liver, steak, potatoes, pickles, ham, chops, black-puddings, and sausages," explaining that "dinner was breakfast again without the tea and coffee; and supper and breakfast were identical." In *The American Frugal Housewife*, Lydia Maria Child offered advice that might be regarded as the essence of early American food: "Nothing should be thrown away"¹⁰⁵ as long as it is possible to

make use of it, however trifling that use may be." The men, women, and children moving west of the Mississippi would have, like their fellow citizens back east, thoroughly understood.

The Big Picture

As Americans who came of age during the Revolutionary era knew better than the historians who have studied them, food didn't exist in a vacuum. Food and drink, in fact, were integral to the period's defining events. In representing nothing less than the material success of an early American dream, food and drink in America became a critical manifestation of independence and the virtues that composed it. Americans defended access to their food sources and the right to trade their food with the utmost passion in the 1760s and 1770s. When the British persisted in violating the colonists' most basic constitutional and material rights, the Americans reinvigorated their defense of a hard-earned material way of life by, among other acts, rioting when merchants tried to sell food at unreasonable prices. But food's influence didn't end there. Food and drink and the land on which Americans produced them also predisposed Americans to adopt a radical political ideology that, while unpopular in England, did an effective job of articulating American political concerns from Georgia to Maine—effective enough, anyway, to help a largely fragmented nation fight and win political independence. The American victory in the Revolutionary War inspired a cultural backlash against the mother country—a conscious rejection of the British culture that Americans had been actively embracing only a decade or so earlier. That rejection led Americans to embrace the virtues of the farming life as an explicit cultural and political cause. Thus the virtues of the frontier, as a conscious choice, rather than out of necessity, became an animating force in American life. Food both coincided with and inspired this cultural transition. As Americans idealized a pastoral vision that stressed such attributes as honesty, frugality, simplicity, and lack of pretension, they highlighted that single aspect of geographical and cultural life that Europe lacked: land, land, and more land to replicate the successful creation of a resource-rich society. The costs of its development were legendary in terms of the human suffering it caused, but the ownership of a frontier patch of land was, nonetheless, the single most important factor in making American food what it was.

In choosing "a frugal plain repast" over the "high seasoned food" of Europe, the young nation set a precedent that lasted well into the nineteenth century as a mainstream cultural and culinary standard. By the twentieth century—with the close of the frontier, the rise of great cities, industrialization, regional economic specialization, deep freezes, refrigerators, restaurants, TV dinners, and fast-food outlets—America's tethers to its past became frayed and worn. And now, in the twenty-first century—with agribusiness, a chain restaurant in every strip mall, genetically modified food, big-box stores, commercial stoves in suburban homes, and mad cows—well, those frayed tethers seem to have broken.

But roots can wander, spread underneath the soil in myriad directions, and break

through in unexpected places and at unexpected times. American food now seems so mature, and, indeed, it might be fair to say that it has gone the way of commercial decadence, just as English culture did in the late eighteenth century. But those of us who value this nation's culinary past wouldn't be amiss in hoping that some of those dormant roots regenerate and allow us to claim once again, as Thomas Jefferson did in 1785, "How unripe we yet are."