

PREFACE

in the tumultuous year when the fate of the Constitution hung in the balance.

This nationwide debate, in which every community and every politically conscious person participated, was a sequel to everything that had come before and it was a preface to what was to follow. But while a new national power system emerged from this struggle, it does not mark a sudden break in the ideological history of our national origins. The powerful set of ideas, ideals, and political sensibilities that shaped the origins and early development of the Revolution did not drop dead with the Constitution. That document, in my view, does not mark a Thermidorean reaction to the idealism of the early period engineered by either a capitalist junta or the proponents of rule by a leisured patriciate; nor did the tenth *Federalist* paper mark the death knell of earlier political beliefs or introduce at a crack a new political science. Modifications in the basic doctrines had to be made to accommodate the urgencies that had arisen; fundamental beliefs had to be tested, refined, modernized, and ingeniously reapplied—but they were not repudiated. The Constitution created, of course, a potentially powerful central government, with powers that served certain economic groups particularly well, and this new government could be seen—as many antifederalists saw it—as just the kind of arbitrary, absolute, and concentrated power that the Revolution had set out to destroy. But in fact, as almost all the antifederalists sooner or later realized, especially when the guarantees of the Bill of Rights were in place, it was not. The earlier principles remained, though in new, more complicated forms, embodied in new institutions devised to perpetuate the received tradition into the modern world. The essential spirit of eighteenth-century reform—its idealism, its determination to free the individual from the power of the state, even a reformed state—lived on, and lives on still.

B.B.
1992

FOREWORD

*Bernard Bailyn, The Ideological
Origins of the American Revolution
(Cambridge: Harvard U. Press), 1992.*

This book has developed from a study that was first undertaken a number of years ago, when Howard Mumford Jones, then Editor-in-Chief of the John Harvard Library, invited me to prepare a collection of pamphlets of the American Revolution for publication in that series. Like all students of American history I knew well perhaps a half dozen of the most famous pamphlets of the Revolution, obviously worth republication, and I knew also of others, another half dozen or so, that would probably be worth considering. The project was attractive to me, it did not appear to be particularly burdensome, and since in addition it was related to a book I was then preparing on eighteenth-century politics, I agreed to undertake it.

The starting point of the work was the compilation of a complete bibliography of the pamphlets. This alone proved to be a considerable task, and it was in assembling this list that I discovered the magnitude of the project I had embarked on. The full bibliography of pamphlets relating to the Anglo-American struggle published in the colonies through the year 1776 contains not a dozen or so items but over four hundred; in the end I concluded that no fewer than seventy-two of them ought to be republished. But sheer numbers were not the most important measure of the magnitude of the project. The pamphlets include all sorts of writings—treatises on political theory, essays on history, political arguments, sermons, correspondence, poems—

Sources

FOREWORD

and they display all sorts of literary devices. But for all their variety they have in common one distinctive characteristic: they are, to an unusual degree, explanatory. They reveal not merely positions taken but the reasons why positions were taken; they reveal motive and understanding: the assumptions, beliefs, and ideas — the articulated world view — that lay behind the manifest events of the time. As a result I found myself, as I read through these many documents, studying not simply a particular medium of publication but, through these documents, nothing less than the ideological origins of the American Revolution. And I found myself viewing these origins with surprise, for the "interior" view, from the vantage point of the pamphlets, was different from what I had expected. The task, consequently, took on an increasing excitement, for much of the history of the American Revolution has fallen into the condition that overtakes so many of the great events of the past; it is, as Professor Trevor-Roper has written in another connection, taken for granted: "By our explanations, interpretations, assumptions we gradually make it seem automatic, natural, inevitable; we remove from it the sense of wonder, the unpredictability, and therefore the freshness it ought to have." Study of the pamphlets appeared to lead back into the unpredictable reality of the Revolution, and posed a variety of new problems of interpretation. More, it seemed to me, was called for in preparing this edition than simply reproducing accurately and annotating a selected group of texts.

Study of the pamphlets confirmed my rather old-fashioned view that the American Revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups undertaken to force changes in the organization of the society or the economy. It confirmed too my belief that intellectual developments in the decade before Independence led to a radical idealization and conceptualization of the previous century and a half of American experience, and

FOREWORD

that it was this intimate relationship between Revolutionary thought and the circumstances of life in eighteenth-century America that endowed the Revolution with its peculiar force and made it so profoundly a transforming event.¹ But if the pamphlets confirmed this belief, they filled it with unexpected details and gave it new meaning. They shed new light on the question of the sources and character of Revolutionary thought. Most commonly the thought of the Revolution has been seen simply as an expression of the natural rights philosophy: the ideas of the social contract, inalienable rights, natural law, and the contractual basis of government. But some have denounced this interpretation as "obtuse secularism," and, reading the sermons of the time with acute sensitivity, argue that it was only a respect for world opinion that led the Founders to put their case "in the restricted language of the rational century," and that the success of the Revolutionary movement is comprehensible only in terms of the continuing belief in original sin and the need for grace. Yet others have described the sermons of the time as a form of deliberate propaganda by which revolutionary ideas were fobbed off on an unsuspecting populace by a "black regiment" of clergy committed, for reasons unexplained, to the idea of rebellion. And still others deny the influence of both Enlightenment theory and theology, and view the Revolution as no revolution at all, but rather as a conservative movement wrought by practitioners of the common law and devoted to preserving it, and the ancient liberties embedded in it, intact.

The pamphlets do reveal the influence of Enlightenment thought, and they do show the effective force of certain religious ideas, of the common law, and also of classical literature; but they reveal most significantly the close integration of these elements in a pattern of, to me at least, surprising design —

¹ Bernard Bailyn, "Political Experience and Enlightenment Ideas in Eighteenth-Century America," *American Historical Review*, 67 (1961-62), 339-351.

FOREWORD

surprising because of the prominence in it of still another tradition, interwoven with, yet still distinct from, these more familiar strands of thought. This distinctive influence had been transmitted most directly to the colonists by a group of early eighteenth-century radical publicists and opposition politicians in England who carried forward into the eighteenth century and applied to the politics of the age of Walpole the peculiar strain of anti-authoritarianism bred in the upheaval of the English Civil War. This tradition, as it developed in the British Isles, has in part been the subject of extensive research by Caroline Robbins, forming the substance of her *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman*; in part too it has been the subject of recent research by students of other aspects of English history in this period: Archibald S. Foord, on the history of the opposition in eighteenth-century English politics; Alan D. McKillop, Bonamy Dobrée, and Louis I. Bredvold on the social and political background of early eighteenth-century literature; J. G. A. Pocock, J. W. Gough, Peter Laslett, and Corinne Weston on political thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Ian Christie, George Rudé, Lucy Sutherland, and S. Maccoby on eighteenth-century radicalism. But little if any of this writing had hitherto been applied to the origins of the American Revolution. Convinced of the importance of this influence, I thought it would be useful to identify and analyze all the references found in the pamphlets, and on the basis of that analysis present in both the annotation to the texts and in essay form an interpretation of the sources and character of the American Revolutionary ideology. This essay on sources and patterns of ideas became the nucleus of the General Introduction to the edition of the pamphlets, and subsequently of this book, where it appears as Chapters II and III.

*
Historo-
graphy

Chs
II + III:
interpretation
of sources
& Min. Rev.
ideology

It was in the context of the sources and patterns of ideas presented in these two chapters that I began to see a new meaning in phrases that I, like most historians, had readily dismissed

FOREWORD

as mere rhetoric and propaganda: "slavery," "corruption," "conspiracy." These inflammatory words were used so forcefully by writers of so great a variety of social statuses, political positions, and religious persuasions; they fitted so logically into the pattern of radical and opposition thought; and they reflected so clearly the realities of life in an age in which monarchical autocracy flourished, in which the stability and freedom of England's "mixed" constitution was a recent and remarkable achievement, and in which the fear of conspiracy against constituted authority was built into the very structure of politics, that I began to suspect that they meant something very real to both the writers and their readers: that there were real fears, real anxieties, a sense of real danger behind these phrases, and not merely the desire to influence by rhetoric and propaganda the inert minds of an otherwise passive populace. The more I read, the less useful, it seemed to me, was the whole idea of propaganda in its modern meaning when applied to the writings of the American Revolution — a view that I hope to develop at length on another occasion. In the end I was convinced that the fear of a comprehensive conspiracy against liberty throughout the English-speaking world — a conspiracy believed to have been nourished in corruption, and of which, it was felt, oppression in America was only the most immediately visible part — lay at the heart of the Revolutionary movement. This too seemed to me to be worth developing. It appeared as a chapter of the General Introduction to the edition of pamphlets, extended in a Note on Conspiracy; in expanded form it constitutes Chapter IV, and the Note appended to that chapter, in the present volume.

*
Conspiracy
theory
Chap

Beyond all of this, however, I found in the pamphlets evidence of a transformation that overtook the inheritance of political and social thought as it had been received in the colonies by the early 1760's. Indeliberately, half-knowingly, as responses not to desire but to the logic of the situation, the leaders of colonial thought in the years before Independence forced forward alter-

Ch III
Analyzing the
conspiracy
theory

FOREWORD

ations in, or challenged, major concepts and assumptions of eighteenth-century political theory. They reached — then, before 1776, in the debate on the problem of imperial relations — new territories of thought upon which would be built the commanding structures of the first state constitutions and of the Federal Constitution. This too deserved to be explored, it seemed to me; the results appear in Chapter V. Finally there was evidence that this transformation of thought, which led to conclusions so remarkably congruent with the realities of American life, was powerfully contagious. It affected areas not directly involved in the Anglo-American controversy, areas as gross as the institution of chattel slavery and as subtle as the assumptions of human relations. This "spill-over" effect I have also tried to analyze, with results that appear in Chapter VI.

Ch II
Trans. of
(colonial)
political +
social
thought
(foundations of
Constitution)

Ch III
Effect of trans.
of thought
beyond
Anglo-Am
rel. & into
broader
social/cultural
context

At no point did I attempt to describe all shades of opinion on any of the problems discussed. I decided at the start to present what I took to be the dominant or leading ideas of those who made the Revolution. There were of course articulate and outspoken opponents of the Revolution, and at times I referred to their ideas; but the future lay not with them but with the leaders of the Revolutionary movement, and it is their thought at each stage of the developing rebellion that I attempted to present, using often the shorthand phrase "the colonists" to refer to them and their ideas.

In this way, topic by topic as the story unfolded in the study of the pamphlets, the chapters that first appeared as the General Introduction to the first volume of *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* (Harvard University Press, 1965) were conceived. Two considerations have led me to attempt to go beyond what I had written there and to develop the General Introduction into the present book. First, I found that there was some demand for a separate republication of the Introduction, the necessarily high price of the first volume of the *Pamphlets* having made its use

FOREWORD

particularly difficult for students. And second, my own subsequent work on early eighteenth-century politics and political thought led me to uncover a deeper and broader documentation of the story than that presented in the Introduction; and it led me, too, to see deeper implications in the story than those I had been able to see before. In this separate study of early eighteenth-century politics and political theory (published as *The Origins of American Politics*), I discovered that the configuration of ideas and attitudes I had described in the General Introduction as the Revolutionary ideology could be found intact as far back as the 1730's; in partial form it could be found even farther back, at the turn of the seventeenth century. The transmission from England to America of the literature of political opposition that furnished the substance of the ideology of the Revolution had been so swift in the early years of the eighteenth century as to seem almost instantaneous; and, for reasons that reach into the heart of early American politics, those ideas acquired in the colonies an importance, a relevance in politics, they did not then have — and never would have — in England itself. There was no sharp break between a placid pre-Revolutionary era and the turmoil of the 1760's and 1770's. The argument, the claims and counter-claims, the fears and apprehensions that fill the pamphlets, letters, newspapers, and state papers of the Revolutionary years had in fact been heard throughout the century. The problem no longer appeared to me to be simply why there was a Revolution but how such an explosive amalgam of politics and ideology first came to be compounded, why it remained so potent through years of surface tranquillity, and why, finally, it was detonated when it was.

*
Questions

These new materials and this new dimension I have tried to work into the revision and expansion of the original Introduction and I have tried to do this without destroying the structure of the original chapters. One result has been a considerable enlargement of the annotation. For while the text proper

Chapter I

THE LITERATURE OF REVOLUTION

ABBREVIATIONS

Adams, <i>Diary and Autobiography</i>	Lyman H. Butterfield, <i>et al.</i> , eds., <i>Diary and Autobiography of John Adams</i> . 4 vols. Cambridge, 1961.
Adams, <i>Works</i>	Charles Francis Adams, ed., <i>The Works of John Adams</i> . 10 vols. Boston, 1850–1856.
Bailyn, <i>Pamphlets</i>	Bernard Bailyn, ed., <i>Pamphlets of the American Revolution</i> . Cambridge, 1965, in progress.
CC	Commentaries on the Constitution: vols. XIII–XVI of <i>Doc. Hist.</i>
<i>Doc. Hist.</i>	Merrill Jensen, John P. Kaminski, and Gaspare J. Saladin, eds., <i>The Documentary History of the Ratification of the Constitution</i> . Madison, 1976, in progress.
Elliot, <i>Debates</i>	Jonathan Elliot, ed., <i>The Debates in the Several State Conventions, on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution . . .</i> 2d ed., 4 vols. Washington, D.C., 1836.
Evans	Charles Evans, comp., <i>American Bibliography: A Chronological Dictionary of All Books, Pamphlets and Periodical Publications Printed in the United States of America [1639–1800]</i> . 14 vols. Chicago and Worcester, 1903–1959. (Volumes XIII and XIV were compiled by Clifford K. Shipton.)
Gipson, <i>British Empire</i>	Lawrence H. Gipson, <i>The British Empire before the American Revolution</i> . 15 vols. Caldwell, Idaho, and New York, 1936–1970.
JHL	The John Harvard Library
MHS Colls.	<i>Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society</i>
MHS Procs.	<i>Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society</i>
<i>Pa. Mag.</i>	<i>Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography</i>
W.M.Q.	<i>William and Mary Quarterly</i>

What do we mean by the Revolution? The war? That was no part of the Revolution; it was only an effect and consequence of it. The Revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen years before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington. The records of thirteen legislatures, the pamphlets, newspapers in all the colonies, ought to be consulted during that period to ascertain the steps by which the public opinion was enlightened and informed concerning the authority of Parliament over the colonies.

— John Adams to Jefferson, 1815

WHATEVER deficiencies the leaders of the American Revolution may have had, reticence, fortunately, was not one of them. They wrote easily and amply, and turned out in the space of scarcely a decade and a half and from a small number of presses a rich literature of theory, argument, opinion, and polemic. Every medium of written expression was put to use. The newspapers, of which by 1775 there were thirty-eight in the mainland colonies, were crowded with columns of arguments and counter-arguments appearing as letters, official documents, extracts of speeches, and sermons. Broadsides — single sheets on which were often printed not only large-letter notices but, in three or four columns of minuscule type, essays of several thousand words — appeared everywhere; they could be found posted or passing from hand to hand in the towns of every colony. Almanacs, workaday publications universally available in the colonies, carried, in odd corners and occasional columns, a

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

considerable freight of political comment.¹ Above all, there were pamphlets: booklets consisting of a few printer's sheets, folded in various ways so as to make various sizes and numbers of pages, and sold—the pages stitched together loosely, unbound and uncovered—usually for a shilling or two.²

It was in this form—as pamphlets—that much of the most important and characteristic writing of the American Revolution appeared. For the Revolutionary generation, as for its predecessors back to the early sixteenth century, the pamphlet had peculiar virtues as a medium of communication. Then, as now, it was seen that the pamphlet allowed one to do things that were not possible in any other form.

[The pamphlet [George Orwell, a modern pamphleteer, has written] is a one-man show. One has complete freedom of expression, including, if one chooses, the freedom to be scurrilous, abusive, and seditious; or, on the other hand, to be more detailed, serious and "high-brow" than is ever possible in a newspaper or in most kinds of periodicals. At the same time, since the pamphlet is always short and unbound, it can be produced much more quickly than a book, and in principle, at any rate, can reach a bigger public. Above all, the pamphlet does not have to follow any prescribed pattern. It can be in prose or in verse, it can consist largely of maps or statistics or quotations, it can take the form of a story, a fable, a letter, an essay, a dialogue, or a piece of "reportage." All that is required of it is that it shall be topical, polemical, and short.³

¹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence* (New York, 1958), pp. 215-216, part ii; Philip Davidson, *Propaganda and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1941), pp. 216-224.

² The precise bibliographical definition of a pamphlet is the following: a booklet formed by the folding and stitching loosely together of between two and five printer's sheets, which "gives to a pamphlet, in extreme, twenty pages when printed in folio; forty pages when printed in quarto; and eighty pages when printed in octavo." Charles Evans and Clifford K. Shipton, comps., *American Bibliography . . .* (Chicago and Worcester, Mass., 1903-1959), V, xv. Cf. Lester Condit, *A Pamphlet about Pamphlets* (Chicago, 1939), chap. i.

³ George Orwell, "Introduction," in George Orwell and Reginald Reynolds, eds., *British Pamphleteers* (London, 1948-1951), I, 15. Orwell's spirited introductory essay was sparked by his belief that in twentieth-century society the

THE LITERATURE OF REVOLUTION

The pamphlet's greatest asset was perhaps its flexibility in size, for while it could contain only a very few pages and hence be used for publishing short squibs and sharp, quick rebuttals, it could also accommodate much longer, more serious and permanent writing as well. Some pamphlets of the Revolutionary period contain sixty or even eighty pages, on which are printed technical, magisterial treatises. Between the extremes of the squib and the book-length treatise, however, there lay the most commonly used, the ideally convenient, length: from 5,000 to 25,000 words, printed on anywhere from ten to fifty pages, quarto or octavo in size.

The pamphlet of this middle length was perfectly suited to the needs of the Revolutionary writers. It was spacious enough to allow for the full development of an argument—to investigate premises, explore logic, and consider conclusions; it could accommodate the elaborate involutions of eighteenth-century literary forms; it gave range for the publication of fully wrought, leisurely-paced sermons; it could conveniently carry state papers, collections of newspaper columns, and strings of correspondence. It was in this form, consequently, that "the best thought of the day expressed itself"; it was in this form that "the solid framework of constitutional thought" was developed; it was in this form that "the basic elements of American political thought of the Revolutionary period appeared first."⁴ And yet pamphlets of

press does not adequately represent all shades of opinion. "At any given moment there is a sort of all-prevailing orthodoxy, a general tacit agreement not to discuss some large and uncomfortable fact." He looked back to the days of vigorous, highly individualistic pamphleteering with nostalgia, and hoped that people "would once again become aware of the possibilities of the pamphlet as a method of influencing opinion, and as a literary form." A. J. P. Taylor's introduction to volume II of the same collection is an acerb comment on Orwell's nostalgia.

⁴ Davidson, *Propaganda*, pp. 209-210; Moses C. Tyler, *The Literary History of the American Revolution, 1763-1783* (New York, 1897), I, 17 ff.; Homer L. Calkin, "Pamphlets and Public Opinion during the American Revolution," *Pa. Mag.*, 64 (1940), 22-42.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

was the form one response took to Mayhew's extended attack on the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. Dramatic dialogues — "Between the Ghost of General Montgomery, Just Arrived from the Elysian Fields, and An American Delegate"; "Between a Southern Delegate and His Spouse" — were convenient frames for lurid caricatures, and since they made fewer demands on the skills of the dramatist, they were on the whole more successful than the half-dozen more fully evolved plays that were written for pamphlet publication.¹⁵

And all the detailed linguistic tactics of the classic era of English pamphleeting were present. The pamphlets abound in aphorisms: a section of one sermon is in effect nothing but a mosaic of aphorisms.¹⁶ There are apostrophes, hyperboles, and vivid personifications. There are subtle transitions that seek to ease the flow of thought, and others contrived to interrupt it, to surprise and fix attention. Even the most crudely bombastic harangues contain artful literary constructions.

And yet, for all of this — for all of the high self-consciousness of literary expression, the obvious familiarity with cosmopolitan models and the armory of sophisticated belles-lettres — the pamphlets of the American Revolution that seek artistic effects are not great documents. Next to the more artful pamphlets of eighteenth-century England they are pallid, imitative, and crude. And the higher, the more technically demanding the mode of expression, the more glaring the contrast. There is nothing in

¹⁵ [Thomas Bradbury Chandler], *The American Querist: or, Some Questions Proposed . . .* ([New York], 1774; JHL Pamphlet 47); [John Aplin], *Verses on Doctor Mayhew's Book of Observations* (Providence, 1763; JHL Pamphlet 3). The dialogues, in the order cited, were published in Philadelphia, 1776 (cf. Richard Gimbel, *Thomas Paine: A Bibliographical Check List of Common Sense . . .*, New Haven, 1956, CS 9, p. 74) and [New York], 1774. They are reprinted in *Magazine of History*, 13 [Extra Number 51] (1916); and 18 [Extra Number 72] (1920-21).

¹⁶ Samuel Cooke, *A Sermon Preached at Cambridge, in the Audience of His Honor Thomas Hutchinson Esq. . . .* (Boston, 1770), pp. 11 ff.

THE LITERATURE OF REVOLUTION

the American literature that approaches in sheer literary skill such imaginatively conceived and expertly written pamphlets as Swift's *Modest Proposal* and Defoe's *Shortest Way with the Dissenters*; there is no allegory as masterful as Arbuthnot's *History of John Bull*, and no satire as deft as his *Art of Political Lying*. Indeed, there are not many of the American pamphlets that are as successful in technique as any number of the less imaginative, straight expository essays published in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, essays of which Shebbeare's *Letter to the People of England*, lamenting corruption and excoriating the mismanagement of Braddock's expedition, may be taken as average in quality and Swift's *Conduct of the Allies* as a notable refinement. Why this should be so — why the more imaginative and self-consciously literary of the pamphlets of the Revolution should be manifestly inferior in quality to the English models — is an important even if not a wholly answerable question. For it helps locate and explain the qualities of these documents that are of the greatest distinction.

First and foremost, the American pamphleteers, though participants in a great tradition, were amateurs next to such polemicists as Swift and Defoe. Nowhere in the relatively undifferentiated society of colonial America had there developed before 1776 a group of penmen professional in the sense that Defoe or Franklin's friend James Ralph were professional: capable, that is, of earning their living by their pens, capable of producing copy on order as well as on inspiration, and taught by the experience of dozens of polemical encounters the limits and possibilities of their craft. The closest to having attained such professionalism in the colonies were a few of the more prominent printers; but with the exception of Franklin they did not transcend the ordinary limitations of their trade: they were rarely principals in the controversies of the time. The American pamphleteers were almost to a man lawyers, ministers, merchants, or

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

planters heavily engaged in their regular occupations. For them political writing was an uncommon diversion, peripheral to their main concerns. They wrote easily and readily, but until the crisis of Anglo-American affairs was reached, they had had no occasion to turn out public letters, tracts, and pamphlets in numbers at all comparable to those of the English pamphleteers. The most experienced polemical writer in the colonies was probably William Livingston of New York, who, together with two or three of his friends, had sustained *The Independent Reflector* through enough issues in 1752 and 1753 to fill one good-sized volume.¹⁷ But Swift's formal prose work alone fills fourteen volumes, and Defoe is known to have written at least 400 tracts, pamphlets, and books: his contributions to a single periodical during a ten year period total 5,000 printed pages, and they represent less than half of what he wrote in those years. It appears to have been no great matter for a professional like James Ralph, who attained success as a paid political writer after years of effort in poetry, drama, and criticism and who late in life published an eloquent *Case of Authors by Profession or Trade*, to turn out, amid a stream of pamphlets and periodical pieces, a massive *History of England* whose bibliographical and critical introduction alone covers 1,078 folio pages.¹⁸

No American writer in the half century between the death of Cotton Mather and the Declaration of Independence had anything like such experience in writing; and it is this amateurism,

¹⁷ William Livingston, et al., *The Independent Reflector* . . . (Milton M. Klein, ed., Cambridge, 1963).

¹⁸ On the professionalism of the English political writers in general, see Laurence Hanson, *Government and the Press, 1695-1763* (Oxford, 1936) (on Defoe's productivity, p. 94); William T. Laprade, *Public Opinion and Politics in Eighteenth Century England* (New York, 1936); Robert R. Rea, *The English Press in Politics, 1760-1774* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1963). On Ralph, whose *History* was used by the colonists (see *Letter to the People of Pennsylvania*, JHL Pamphlet 2, text note 1) and whose career stands in such striking contrast to those of the American pamphleteers, see Robert W. Kenny, "James Ralph . . .," *Pa. Mag.*, 64 (1940), 218-242.

THE LITERATURE OF REVOLUTION

this lack of practiced technique, that explains much of the crudeness of the Revolutionary pamphlets considered simply as literature. For while the colonial writers were obviously acquainted with and capable of imitating the forms of sophisticated polemics, they had not truly mastered them; they were rarely capable of keeping their literary contrivances in control. All of the examples cited above for their literary qualities (and as self-conscious artistic efforts they are among the most noteworthy documents of the group) suffer from technical weaknesses. By virtue of its extended simile Chaplin's *Civil State* shines among the sermons of the time, but in the end the effect is almost overcome by insistence; the figure is maintained too long; it becomes obtrusive, and the reader ends more aware of it than of the thought it is supposed to be illuminating. The *Ministerial Catechism* lacks the verbal cleverness necessary to keep it from falling into a joggotrotting substitution-play of words. And while *The First Book of . . . American Chronicles* is a more intricate and extended burlesque, its diction, one critic has noted, "has a synthetic ring and at one point a brief passage of French dialect is jarring."¹⁹ Most of the pseudonymous poses, including Hopkins' cited above, were transparent to begin with, and they were unevenly, even sloppily, maintained; often they were simply cast aside after the opening passages, to be snatched up again hurriedly at the end in a gesture of literary decorousness. Even Bland, as artful a litterateur as America produced in the period, was incapable of fully controlling his own invention. If his elaborate conceit threw his intended victim into confusion, it must have had a similar effect on many of its other readers, for at times the point is almost lost in a maze of true and facetious meanings. Chandler's *Querist* is notably original, but strings of syntactically identical questions can become monotonous unless their contents are unusually clever; fifty of them are almost certain to become wearying;

¹⁹ Granger, *Political Satire*, p. 70.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Thomas Paine, and that strange itinerant Baptist John Allen, who had anything like the concentrated fury that propelled Swift's thought and imagination through the intensifying indirections of literary forms. And in all three cases there were singular circumstances. Quis' passion, the wildness that so astonished his contemporaries, already by 1765 was beginning to lack control: it would soon slip into incoherence. The "daring impudence," the "uncommon frenzy" which gave *Common Sense* its unique power, Paine brought with him from England in 1774; it had been nourished in another culture, and was recognized at the time to be an alien quality in American writing. And Allen too — in any case no equal, as a pamphleteer, of Paine — had acquired his habits of literary expression abroad.²³

The American writers were profoundly reasonable people. Their pamphlets convey scorn, anger, and indignation; but rarely blind hate, rarely panic fear. They sought to convince their opponents, not, like the English pamphleteers of the eighteenth

²³ On Otis, see Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I, Introductions to Pamphlets 7 and 11. The quoted phrases on Paine are from John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography*, III, 330–335, and Charles Inglis, *The True Interest of America . . . Strictures on a Pamphlet Intituled Common Sense . . .* (Philadelphia, 1776), p. vi. Inglis notes later in the pamphlet that Paine's "main attack is upon the passions of his readers, especially their pity and resentment . . . he seems to be everywhere transported with rage — a rage that knows no limits, and hurries him along like an impetuous torrent . . . such fire and fury . . . indicate that some mortifying disappointment is rankling at heart, or that some tempting object of ambition is in view, or probably both" (p. 34). Allen, author of *The American Alarm . . . for the Rights, and Liberties, of the People* and the immensely popular *Oration upon the Beauties of Liberty*, both published in 1773 (JHL Pamphlets 39 and 38), left London in 1769, where he had been a Baptist preacher, after various vicissitudes, including a trial for forgery and some time in debtor's prison. Before arriving in the colonies he had published *The Spiritual Magazine . . .* (3 vols.) and a half-dozen pamphlets, and during his tumultuous stay in New York, 1770–1772, added *The Spirit of Liberty, or Junius's Loyal Address* (1770). His wanderings after he left Boston in 1773 are obscure, but apparently he continued to publish religious tracts; a poem, *Christ the Christian's Hope . . .* (Exeter, N. H., 1789), may also be his. See references cited in Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I, 17n, and, generally, John M. Bumsted and Charles E. Clark, "New England's Tom Paine: John Allen and the Spirit of Liberty," *W.M.Q.*, 3d ser., 21 (1964), 561–570.

THE LITERATURE OF REVOLUTION

century, to annihilate them. In this rationality, this everyday, businesslike sanity so distant from the imaginative mists where artistic creations struggle into birth, they were products of their situation and of the demands it made in politics. For the primary goal of the American Revolution, which transformed American life and introduced a new era in human history, was not the overthrow or even the alteration of the existing social order but the preservation of political liberty threatened by the apparent corruption of the constitution, and the establishment in principle of the existing conditions of liberty. The communication of understanding, therefore, lay at the heart of the Revolutionary movement, and its great expressions, embodied in the best of the pamphlets, are consequently expository and explanatory: didactic, systematic, and direct, rather than imaginative and metaphoric. They take the form most naturally of treatises and sermons, not poems; of descriptions, not allegories; of explanations, not burlesques. The reader is led through arguments, not images. The pamphlets aim to persuade.

What was essentially involved in the American Revolution was not the disruption of society, with all the fear, despair, and hatred that that entails, but the realization, the comprehension and fulfillment, of the inheritance of liberty and of what was taken to be America's destiny in the context of world history. The great social shocks that in the French and Russian Revolutions sent the foundations of thousands of individual lives crashing into ruins had taken place in America in the course of the previous century, slowly, silently, almost imperceptibly, not as a sudden avalanche but as myriads of individual changes and adjustments which had gradually transformed the order of society. By 1763 the great landmarks of European life — the church and the idea of orthodoxy, the state and the idea of authority: much of the array of institutions and ideas that buttressed the society of the *ancien régime* — had faded in their exposure to the open, wilderness

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

environment of America. But until the disturbances of the 1760's these changes had not been seized upon as grounds for a reconsideration of society and politics. Often they had been condemned as deviations, as retrogressions back toward a more primitive condition of life. Then, after 1760—and especially in the decade after 1765—they were brought into open discussion as the colonists sought to apply advanced principles of society and politics to their own immediate problems.²⁴

The original issue of the Anglo-American conflict was, of course, the question of the extent of Parliament's jurisdiction in the colonies. But that could not be discussed in isolation. The debate involved eventually a wide range of social and political problems, and it ended by 1776 in what may be called the conceptualization of American life. By then Americans had come to think of themselves as in a special category, uniquely placed by history to capitalize on, to complete and fulfill, the promise of man's existence. The changes that had overtaken their provincial societies, they saw, had been good: elements not of deviance and retrogression but of betterment and progress; not a lapse into primitivism, but an elevation to a higher plane of political and social life than had ever been reached before. Their rustic blemishes had become the marks of a chosen people. "The liberties of mankind and the glory of human nature is in their keeping," John Adams wrote in the year of the Stamp Act. "America was designed by Providence for the theatre on which man was to make his true figure, on which science, virtue, liberty, happiness, and glory were to exist in peace."²⁵

The effort to comprehend, to communicate, and to fulfill this destiny was continuous through the entire Revolutionary generation—it did not cease, in fact, until in the nineteenth century its

²⁴ Bernard Bailyn, "Political Experience and Enlightenment Ideas in Eighteenth-Century America," *American Historical Review*, 67 (1961-62), 339-351.

²⁵ *Diary and Autobiography*, I, 282.

THE LITERATURE OF REVOLUTION

creative achievements became dogma. But there were three phases of particular concentration: the period up to and including 1776, centering on the discussion of Anglo-American differences; the devising of the first state governments, mainly in the years from 1776 to 1780; and the reconsideration of the state constitutions and the reconstruction of the national government in the last half of the eighties and in the early nineties. In each of these phases important contributions were made not only to the skeletal structure of constitutional theory but to the surrounding areas of social thought as well. But in none was the creativity as great, the results as radical and as fundamental, as in the period before Independence. It was then that the premises were defined and the assumptions set. It was then that explorations were made in new territories of thought, the first comprehensive maps sketched, and routes marked out. Thereafter the psychological as well as intellectual barriers were down. It was the most creative period in the history of American political thought. Everything that followed assumed and built upon its results.

* greatest period of American thought: to comprehend, to communicate, * to fulfill Am's "destiny" as the Land of the Chosen (See p. 20)

In the pamphlets published before Independence may be found the fullest expressions of this creative effort. There were other media of communication; but everything essential to the discussion of those years appeared, if not originally then as reprints, in pamphlet form. The treatises, the sermons, the speeches, the exchanges of letters published as pamphlets—even some of the most personal polemics—all contain elements of this great, transforming debate.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

felt that it was precisely the heavy crust of custom that was weighing down the spirit of man; they sought to throw it off and to create by the unfettered power of reason a framework of institutions superior to the accidental inheritance of the past. And the covenant theologians differed from both in continuing to assume the ultimate inability of man to improve his condition by his own powers and in deriving the principles of politics from divine intent and from the network of obligations that bound redeemed men to his maker.

What brought these disparate strands of thought together, what dominated the colonists' miscellaneous learning and shaped it into a coherent whole, was the influence of still another group of writers, a group whose thought overlapped with that of those already mentioned but which was yet distinct in its essential characteristics and unique in its determinative power. The ultimate origins of this distinctive ideological strain lay in the radical social and political thought of the English Civil War and of the Commonwealth period; but its permanent form had been acquired at the turn of the seventeenth century and in the early eighteenth century, in the writings of a group of prolific opposition theorists, "country" politicians and publicists.

"Spurred
the mind
of the Am.
Rev. gen.
more than
any other
group"

Among the seventeenth-century progenitors of this line of eighteenth-century radical writers and opposition politicians united in criticism of "court" and ministerial power, Milton was an important figure—not Milton the poet so much as Milton the radical tractarian, author of *Eikonoklastes* and *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (both published in 1649). The American Revolutionary writers referred with similar respect if with less understanding to the more systematic writing of Harrington and to that of the like-minded Henry Neville; above all, they referred to the doctrines of Algernon Sidney, that "martyr to civil liberty" whose *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698)

SOURCES AND TRADITIONS

became, in Caroline Robbins' phrase, a "textbook of revolution" in America.¹⁶

The colonists identified themselves with these seventeenth-century heroes of liberty: but they felt closer to the early eighteenth-century writers who modified and enlarged this earlier body of ideas, fused it into a whole with other, contemporary strains of thought, and, above all, applied it to the problems of eighteenth-century English politics. These early eighteenth-century writers—coffeehouse radicals and opposition politicians, spokesmen for the anti-Court independents within Parliament and the disaffected without, draftsmen of a "country" vision of English politics that would persist throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth—faded subsequently into obscurity and are little known today. But more than any other single group of writers they shaped the mind of the American Revolutionary generation.

To the colonists the most important of these publicists and intellectual middlemen were those spokesmen for extreme libertarianism, John Trenchard (1662-1722) and Thomas Gordon (d. 1750). The former, a west-country squire of ample means and radical ideas, was a 57-year-old veteran of the pamphlet wars that surrounded the Glorious Revolution when in 1719 he met Gordon, "a clever young Scot . . . fresh from Aberdeen University,

¹⁶ George Sensabaugh, *Milton in Early America* (Princeton, 1964), chaps. ii, iii; on Milton cf., e.g., Howard, *Sermon*, p. 28; Quincy, *Observations*, in Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 411; and the Hollis-Mayhew and Hollis-Eliot exchanges, in MHS *Procs.*, 69 (1956), 116, 117, 125, and MHS *Colls.*, 4th ser., IV, 403, 412-413. On Harrington, see especially J. G. A. Pocock, "Machiavelli, Harrington, and English Political Ideologies in the Eighteenth Century," *W.M.Q.*, 3d ser., 22 (1965), 549-583; also, H. F. Russell Smith, *Harrington and His Oceana: . . . and Its Influence in America* (Cambridge, England, 1914), chaps. vii, viii; cf., e.g., Otis, *Rights of the British Colonies* (JHL 7), p. 15 and text note 6; John Adams ("Novanglus"), in *Works*, IV, 103-105. On Sidney, see Caroline Robbins, "Algernon Sidney's Discourses . . .," *W.M.Q.*, 3d ser., 4 (1947), 267-296; and cf., e.g., [Stephen Hopkins], *The Rights of Colonies Examined* (Providence, 1765: JHL Pamphlet 9), p. 4; William Stearns, *A View of the Controversy . . .* (Watertown, 1775), p. 18; Adams ("Novanglus"), in *Works*, IV, 80 ff.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

So popular and influential had *Cato's Letters* become in the colonies within a decade and a half of their first appearance, so packed with ideological meaning, that, reinforced by Addison's universally popular play *Cato*³⁰ and the colonists' selectively Whiggish reading of the Roman historians, it gave rise to what might be called a "Catonic" image, central to the political theory of the time, in which the career of the half-mythological Roman and the words of the two London journalists merged indistinguishably. Everyone who read the *Boston Gazette* of April 26, 1756, understood the double reference, bibliographical and historical, that was intended by an anonymous writer who concluded an address to the people of Massachusetts — as he put it without further explanation — "in the words of Cato to the free-holders of Great Britain."

Testimonies to the unique influence of this opposition literature — evidences of this great "hinterland of belief"³¹ from which would issue the specific arguments of the American Revolution

English Statutes in Maryland, Baltimore, 1903), pp. [i], 7, 10, 19. For further identification of Dulany's sources, which include Henry Care's perennially popular *English Liberties* . . . (London, [1680?]), a combination casebook in law, guide to legal procedures, and Anglophilic propaganda piece, the fifth edition of which was reprinted in Boston by James Franklin in 1721, and the sixth in Providence in 1774, see Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I, 742–743.

³⁰ On the complex political history of the play in England, see John Loftis, *The Politics of Drama in Augustan England* (Oxford, 1963), esp. pp. 57–62; on its enthusiastic reception as a libertarian document in America, where it was reprinted four times after 1766, see Colbourn, *Lamp of Experience*, pp. 24, 153. For characteristic uses of the play in political polemics, see *New York Weekly Journal*, January 28, 1733, and the untitled three-page squib, prefaced and concluded by quotations from the play, on the dangers threatening the New York legislature from the governor's "prudent application of posts and pensions" (Evans 3595 [New York, 1732]).

³¹ W. H. Greenleaf, *Order, Empiricism and Politics . . . 1500–1700* (London, 1964), p. 12: "The great books of an age, it may be suggested, are never fully intelligible without an acquaintance with their intellectual background, with . . . 'the great hinterland' of belief. To understand these notions, which men often saw little need to explain because they were so obvious, means a familiarity with more ordinary opinions whatever their coherence or logical status in modern eyes."

SOURCES AND TRADITIONS

are everywhere in the writings of eighteenth-century Americans. Sometimes they are explicit, as when Jonathan Mayhew wrote that, having been "initiated, in youth, in the doctrines of civil liberty, as they were taught by such men . . . as Sidney and Milton, Locke, and Hoadly, among the moderns. I liked them; they seemed rational"; or when John Adams insisted, against what he took to be the massed opinion of informed Englishmen, that the root principles of good government could be found only in "Sidney, Harrington, Locke, Milton, Nedham, Neville, Burnet, and Hoadly"; or again, when he listed the great political thinkers of 1688 as "Sidney, Locke, Hoadly, Trenchard, Gordon, Plato Redivivus [Neville]"; or when Josiah Quincy, Jr., bequeathed to his son in 1774 "Algeron Sidney's works, — John Locke's works, — Lord Bacon's works, — Gordon's *Tacitus*, — and *Cato's Letters*. May the spirit of liberty rest upon him!"³² More often, the evidence is implicit, in the degree to which the pamphleteers quoted from, plagiarized, and modeled their writings on *Cato's Letters* and *The Independent Whig*. Above all, their influence may be seen in the way the peculiar bent of mind of the writers in this tradition was reflected in the ideas and attitudes of the Americans.

The fact is easily mistaken because on the main points of theory the eighteenth-century contributors to this tradition were not original. Borrowing heavily from more original thinkers, they were often, in their own time and after, dismissed as mere popularizers. Their key concepts — natural rights, the contractual basis of society and government, the uniqueness of England's liberty-preserving "mixed" constitution — were commonplaces of the liberal thought of the time. But if the elements of their thought were ordinary, the emphasis placed upon them and the use made of them were not. Pride in the liberty-preserving con-

151
conspiracy
theorists;
Cassandras"

³² Jonathan Mayhew, *The Snare Broken . . .* (Boston, 1766: JHL Pamphlet 20), p. 35; John Adams, *Thoughts on Government . . .* (Philadelphia, 1776: JHL Pamphlet 65), p. 7; Adams, *Works*, VI, 4; Quincy, *Memoir*, p. 350.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

stitution of Britain was universal in the political literature of the age, and everyone agreed on the moral qualities necessary to preserve a free government. But where the mainstream purveyors of political thought spoke mainly with pride of the constitutional and political achievements of Georgian England, the opposition writers, no less proud of the heritage, viewed their circumstances with alarm, "stressed the danger to England's ancient heritage and the loss of pristine virtue," studied the processes of decay, and dwelt endlessly on the evidences of corruption they saw about them and the dark future these malignant signs portended. They were the Cassandras of the age, and while their maledictions "were used for party purposes . . . what [they] said about antique virtue, native liberty, public spirit, and the dangers of luxury and corruption was of general application" and was drawn from the common repository of political lore. They used the commonplaces of the age negatively, critically. They were the enemies of complacence in one of the most complacent eras in England's history. Few of these writers would have agreed with the sentiment expressed by the Lord Chancellor of England in 1766 and concurred in by the overwhelming majority of eighteenth-century Englishmen: "I seek for the liberty and constitution of this kingdom no farther back than the [Glorious] Revolution; there I make my stand."³³ Few of them accepted the Glorious

³³ So too the New York Tory William Smith, Jr., declared, "I am a Whig of the old stamp. No Roundhead — one of King William's Whigs, for Liberty and the Constitution." William H. W. Sabine, ed., *Historical Memoirs . . . 1776 to . . . 1778 . . . of William Smith . . .* (New York, 1958), p. 278. The earlier quotations in the paragraph are from Alan D. McKillop's revealing study "The Background of Thomson's *Liberty*," *The Rice Institute Pamphlet*, XXXVIII, no. 2 (July 1951), 87, 92, where it is argued that "It can hardly be said that one party in this age is for Gothic liberty, the other against it, any more than it can be said that one coherent group opposed or defended luxury. But it came to be the Opposition, the shifting coalition of Tories and dissident Whigs, that stressed the danger to England's ancient heritage and the loss of pristine virtue; and it was the apologists for Walpole who at this point were likely to belittle primordial liberty in comparison with England's gains since 1688." For further discussion of

SOURCES AND TRADITIONS

Revolution and the lax political pragmatism that had followed as the final solution to the political problems of the time. They refused to believe that the transfer of sovereignty from the crown to Parliament provided a perfect guarantee that the individual would be protected from the power of the state. Ignoring the complacence and general high level of satisfaction of the time, they called for vigilance against the government of Walpole equal to what their predecessors had shown against the Stuarts. They insisted, at a time when government was felt to be less oppressive than it had been for two hundred years, that it was necessarily — by its very nature — hostile to human liberty and happiness; that, properly, it existed only on the tolerance of the people whose needs it served; and that it could be, and reasonably should be, dismissed — overthrown — if it attempted to exceed its proper jurisdiction.

It was the better to maintain this vigil against government that they advocated reforms — political reforms, not social or economic reforms, for these were eighteenth- not nineteenth- or twentieth-century English radicals³⁴ — beyond anything admissible in Walpole's age, or indeed in any age that followed in England until well into the nineteenth century. At one time or another, one or another of them argued for adult manhood suffrage; elimination of the rotten borough system and the substitution of regular units of representation systematically related to the distribution of population; the binding of representatives to their constituencies by residential requirements and by instructions; alterations in the definition of seditious libel so as to permit full freedom of the press to criticize government; and the total withdrawal of government control over the practice of religion.

this monograph — the most sensitive effort yet made, as far as the present writer is aware, to distinguish opposition themes from the mainstream tradition of eighteenth-century political thought — see note 37 below.

³⁴ See below, pp. 283-284.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Such ideas, based on extreme solicitude for the individual and an equal hostility to government, were expressed in a spirit of foreboding and fear for the future. For while they acknowledged the existing stability and prosperity of England, they nevertheless grounded their thought in pessimism concerning human nature and in the discouraging record of human weakness. Their resulting concern was continuously deepened by the scenes they saw around them. Politics under Walpole may have been stable, but the stability rested, they believed, on the systematic corruption of Parliament by the executive, which, they warned, if left unchecked, would eat away the foundations of liberty. The dangers seemed great, for they saw, as J. G. A. Pocock has written in outlining "the 'Country' vision of English politics as it appears in a multitude of writings in the half century that follows 1675," that

the executive possesses means of distracting Parliament from its proper function; it seduces members by the offer of places and pensions, by retaining them to follow ministers and ministers' rivals, by persuading them to support measures—standing armies, national debts, excise schemes—whereby the activities of administration grow beyond Parliament's control. These means of subversion are known collectively as corruption, and if ever Parliament or those who elect them—for corruption may occur at this point too—should be wholly corrupt, then there will be an end of independence and liberty.³⁵

This was their major theme, their obsessive concern, and they hammered away at it week after week, year after year, in ringing denunciations of Walpole's manipulation of Parliament and of the dissoluteness of the age that permitted it. The outcries were as loud, the fear as deep, on the "left" of the opposition spectrum as on the "right." So "Cato" warned, again and again, that

public corruptions and abuses have grown upon us; fees in most, if not all, offices, are immensely increased; places and employments,

³⁵ Pocock, "English Political Ideologies," p. 565.

SOURCES AND TRADITIONS

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.³⁶

Bolingbroke was even more insistent that England was faced with the age-old and associated dangers of ministerial usurpation and political corruption. And the prose of his jeremiads—echoed in the more artistic productions of the great Tory satirists of the age, in the writings of Swift, Pope, Gay, Mandeville, even in the less partisan, critical-patriotic rhapsodies of James Thomson, *Liberty and Britannia*³⁷—was even more vivid, more memorable than that of "Cato." He devised a new terminology to describe the urgent danger. "Robinocracy," he wrote, was what was developing under the "prime"-ministry (a term of derogation) of

³⁶ *Cato's Letters*, no. 20, March 11, 1720 (in the London, 1748 ed., I, 140). See also, e.g., no. 17, February 18, 1720 ("What Measures Are Actually Taken by Wicked and Desperate Ministers to Ruin and Enslave Their Country"), and no. 98, October 13, 1722.

³⁷ For the broad literary context of Bolingbroke's pessimism, see particularly Louis I. Bredvold, "The Gloom of the Tory Satirists," in James L. Clifford and Louis A. Landa, eds., *Pope and His Contemporaries* (Oxford, 1949); see also Bonamy Dobréé, *The Theme of Patriotism in the Poetry of the Early Eighteenth Century* (London, 1949). Thomson's *Liberty* (1735–36), a vast, unreadable autobiography of the goddess of that name, detailing the long history of her ancient greatness, her decline in "Gothic darkness," and her ultimate revival in Hanoverian England, proves, in the excellent analysis by Alan McKillop (cited in note 33 above), to be of the greatest importance in the ideological history of the eighteenth century. For not only does this "sweeping synthesis or elaborate piece of syncretism" expose the great array of sources that fed the early eighteenth-century ideas of liberty, but it demonstrates the degree of deviation from the normal pattern that opposition thought involved as it traces the shifts that took place in Thomson's views in the course of writing the poem—from confidence in English politics to concern, from support of the administration to opposition—and that are reflected in it. For the text of *Britannia* (1729), in which Thomson "had already made the transition from 'pointing with pride' to 'viewing with alarm,'" and for a commentary on it, see McKillop's edition of Thomson's *Castle of Indolence and Other Poems* (Lawrence, Kansas, 1961); see also John E. Wells, "Thomson's *Britannia* . . . ,"*Modern Philology*, 40 (1942–43), 43–56. For references to *Liberty* in the Revolutionary pamphlets, see Index listings in Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Robert Walpole. Robinocracy, he explained, was a form of government in which the chief minister maintained the façade of constitutional procedures while he in fact monopolized the whole of governmental power:

The *Robinarch*, or chief ruler, is nominally a *minister* only and creature of the prince; but in reality he is a sovereign, as despotic, arbitrary a sovereign as this part of the world affords . . . The *Robinarch* . . . hath unjustly engrossed the whole power of a nation into his own hands . . . [and] admits no person to any considerable post of trust and power under him who is not either a *relation*, a *creature*, or a *thorough-paced tool* whom he can lead at pleasure into any dirty work without being able to discover his designs or the consequences of them.

The modes of Robinarcal control of a once-free legislature were clear enough. The corrupt minister and his accomplices systematically encourage "*luxury* and *extravagance*, the certain forerunners of *indigence*, *dependance*, and *servility*." Some deputies

are tied down with *honors*, *titles*, and *preferments*, of which the *Robinarch* engrosses the disposal to himself, and others with *bribes*, which are called *pensions* in these countries. Some are persuaded to prostitute themselves for the lean reward of *hopes* and *promises*; and others, more senseless than all of them, have sacrificed their principles and consciences to a set of *party names*, without any meaning, or the vanity of appearing in favor at *court*.

Once in power the Robinarcal ministry feeds on its own corruption. It loads the people with taxes and with debts, and ends by creating a mercenary army ostensibly for the purpose of protecting the people but in fact to perfect its dominance in just those ways, Bolingbroke wrote, that Trenchard had explained years before in his tracts on standing armies.³⁸

Solutions of different forms were advocated by "left" and "right": the former urged those institutional, political, and legal

³⁸ *The Craftsman*, nos. 172, October 18, 1729; and 198, April 18, 1730 (in the London, 1731 ed., V, 152–153, 155, 156; VI, 138 ff.).

SOURCES AND TRADITIONS

reforms which would finally be realized a full century later in the Reform Acts of the nineteenth century; the latter argued the need for that romantic ideal, the Patriot Prince, who should govern as well as reign, yet govern above parties and factions, in harmony with a loyal and independent commons. But if their solutions were different their basic observations and the fears they expressed were identical. Everywhere, they agreed, there was corruption—corruption technically, in the adroit manipulation of Parliament by a power-hungry ministry, and corruption generally, in the self-indulgence, effeminating luxury, and glutinous pursuit of gain of a generation sunk in new and unaccustomed wealth. If nothing were done to stop the growth of these evils, England would follow so many other nations into a tyranny from which there would be no recovery.

But if these dark thoughts, in the England of Walpole and Gibbon, attained popularity in certain opposition, radical, and nonconformist circles, they had relatively little political influence in the country at large. In the mainland colonies of North America, however, they were immensely popular and influential. There, an altered condition of life made what in England were ~~X~~ considered to be extreme, dislocating ideas sound like simple statements of fact. There, the spread of independent landholding had insensibly created a broad electorate. There, the necessity of devising systems of representation at a stroke and the presence of persistent conflict between the legislatures and the executives had tended to make representation regular and responsible and had limited the manipulative influence of any group in power. There, the multiplicity of religious groupings, the need for continuous encouragement of immigration, and the distance from European centers of ecclesiastical authority had weakened the force of religious establishments below anything known in Europe. There the moral basis of a healthy, liberty-preserving polity seemed already to exist in the unsophisticated lives of the

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

independent, uncorrupted, landowning yeoman farmers who comprised so large a part of the colonial population. Yet there the threat of ministerial aggrandizement seemed particularly pressing and realistic, for there, in all but the charter colonies, the executive branches of government—venal surrogates, it so often seemed, of ill-informed if not ill-disposed masters—held, and used, powers that in England had been stripped from the crown in the settlement that had followed the Glorious Revolution as inappropriate to the government of a free people.³⁹

In such a situation the writings of the English radical and opposition leaders seemed particularly reasonable, particularly relevant, and they quickly became influential. Everywhere groups seeking justification for concerted opposition to constituted governments turned to these writers. When in 1735 John Peter Zenger's lawyer sought theoretical grounds for attacking the traditional concept of seditious libel, he turned for authority to Trenchard and Gordon's *Cato's Letters*. When, four years later, an opposition writer in Massachusetts drew up an indictment of the governor so vehement the Boston printers would not publish it, he did so, he wrote, with "some helps from *Cato's Letters*, which were wrote upon the glorious cause of liberty." When in 1750 Jonathan Mayhew sought to work out, in his celebrated *Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission*, a full rationale for resistance to constituted government, he drew on—indeed, cribbed wholesale—not Locke, whose ideas would scarcely have supported what he was saying, but a sermon of Benjamin Hoadly, from whom he borrowed not only ideas and phrases but, in abusing the nonjuror Charles Leslie, the Bishop's enemies as

³⁹ The argument that English opposition theory had a special utility and unique attractiveness in early- and mid-eighteenth-century America as a result of the existence of an archaic preponderance of executive power coupled with an almost total elimination of the kind of political "influence" that Walpole was able to exert over opposition forces in Parliament, I have developed in *The Origins of American Politics*.

SOURCES AND TRADITIONS

well.⁴⁰ When in 1752-1753 William Livingston and his friends undertook to publish in a series of periodical essays a sweeping critique of public life in New York, and in particular to assault the concept of a privileged state, they modeled their publication, *The Independent Reflector*, on Trenchard and Gordon's *Independent Whig*, and borrowed from it specific formulations for their central ideas. And when in Massachusetts in 1754 opponents of a stringent excise act sought models for a campaign of opposition, they turned not only generally to the literature of opposition that had been touched off by Walpole's excise proposal of 1733 but specifically to Bolingbroke's *Craftsman* of that year, from which they freely copied arguments and slogans, even figures of speech.⁴¹ Everywhere in America the tradition that had originated in seventeenth-century radicalism and that had been passed on, with elaborations and applications, by early eighteenth-century English opposition publicists and politicians brought forth congenial responses and provided grounds for opposition politics.

But it did more. It provided also a harmonizing force for the other, discordant elements in the political and social thought of

⁴⁰ Trenchard and Gordon helped similarly to transmit to the Revolutionary generation the reputations of the more notorious clerical absolutists and the belief that "priestcraft and tyranny are ever inseparable, and go hand-in-hand." For their condemnation of Leslie, and of Robert Sibthorpe and Roger Mainwaring, chaplains to Charles I who advocated passive obedience to royal authority and threatened damnation to opponents of crown taxation, see *Cato's Letters*, nos. 128, May 11, 1723; and 130, May 25, 1723 (in the London, 1775 ed., IV, 192, 213).

⁴¹ Leonard W. Levy, *Legacy of Suppression* (Cambridge, 1960), pp. 115-121, 129-137; Stanley N. Katz, ed., *A Brief Narrative of the Case and Trial of John Peter Zenger* (Cambridge, 1963), pp. 15, 9, 10. [Americanus, pseud.], *A Letter to the Freeholders and Other Inhabitants of the Massachusetts-Bay . . .* ([Newport], 1739), p. 1. Mayhew's use of Hoadly's *Measures of Submission to the Civil Magistrates* is detailed in the Introduction to his *Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission* (JHL 1) in Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I. On Livingston's reliance on Trenchard and Gordon, see Klein's comments in Livingston, *Independent Reflector*, pp. 21-28, 450-452; and Livingston's quotation, p. 365. On *The Craftsman* and the Massachusetts excise controversy, see Boyer, "Borrowed Rhetoric," cited in note 22 above.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

the Revolutionary generation. Within the framework of these ideas, Enlightenment abstractions and common law precedents, covenant theology and classical analogy—Locke and Abraham, Brutus and Coke—could all be brought together into a comprehensive theory of politics. It was in terms of this pattern of ideas and attitudes—originating in the English Civil War and carried forward with additions and modifications not on the surface of English political life but in its undercurrents stirred by doctrinaire libertarians, disaffected politicians, and religious dissenters—that the colonists responded to the new regulations imposed by England on her American colonies after 1763.

Chapter III

POWER AND LIBERTY: A THEORY OF POLITICS

In Europe, charters of liberty have been granted by power. America has set the example and France has followed it, of charters of power granted by liberty. This revolution in the practice of the world may, with an honest praise, be pronounced the most triumphant epoch of its history and the most consoling presage of its happiness.

—James Madison, 1792

THE THEORY of politics that emerges from the political literature of the pre-Revolutionary years rests on the belief that what lay behind every political scene, the ultimate explanation of every political controversy, was the disposition of power. The acuteness of the colonists' sense of this problem is, for the twentieth-century reader, one of the most striking things to be found in this eighteenth-century literature: it serves to link the Revolutionary generation to our own in the most intimate way.

The colonists had no doubt about what power was and about its central, dynamic role in any political system. Power was not to be confused, James Otis pointed out, with unspecified physical capacity—with the “mere physical quality” described in physics. The essence of what they meant by power was perhaps best revealed inadvertently by John Adams as he groped for words in drafting his *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*. Twice choosing and then rejecting the word “power,” he finally selected as the specification of the thought he had in mind “dominion,”

Chapter IV

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

Lord Chancellor *Camden* . . . declared . . . that for some time he had beheld with silent indignation the arbitrary measures which were pursuing by the ministry; . . . that, however, he would do so no longer, but would openly and boldly speak his sentiments . . . In a word, he accused the ministry . . . of having formed a conspiracy against the liberties of their country.

— Report of Speech in the House of Lords, 1770

A series of occurrences, many recent events, . . . afford great reason to believe that a deep-laid and desperate plan of imperial despotism has been laid, and partly executed, for the extinction of all civil liberty . . . The august and once revered fortress of English freedom—the admirable work of ages—the BRITISH CONSTITUTION seems fast tottering into fatal and inevitable ruin. The dreadful catastrophe threatens universal havoc, and presents an awful warning to hazard all if, peradventure, we in these distant confines of the earth may prevent being totally overwhelmed and buried under the ruins of our most established rights.

— Boston Town Meeting to its Assembly Representatives, 1770

IT IS the meaning imparted to the events after 1763 by this integrated group of attitudes and ideas that lies behind the colonists' rebellion. In the context of these ideas, the controversial issues centering on the question of Parliament's jurisdiction in America acquired as a group new and overwhelming significance. The colonists believed they saw emerging from the welter of events during the decade after the Stamp Act a pattern whose meaning was unmistakable. They saw in the measures taken by the British government and in the

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

actions of officials in the colonies something for which their peculiar inheritance of thought had prepared them only too well, something they had long conceived to be a possibility in view ~~of conviction~~ ^{*} of the known tendencies of history and of the present state of ~~of conspiracy~~ affairs in England. They saw about them, with increasing clarity, ~~theory~~ ^{actual} ~~evidence~~ not merely mistaken, or even evil, policies violating the principles upon which freedom rested, but what appeared to be evidence of nothing less than a deliberate assault launched surreptitiously by plotters against liberty both in England and in America. The danger to America, it was believed, was in fact only the small, immediately visible part of the greater whole whose ultimate manifestation would be the destruction of the English constitution, with all the rights and privileges embedded in it.

This belief transformed the meaning of the colonists' struggle, and it added an inner accelerator to the movement of opposition. For, once assumed, it could not be easily dispelled: denial only confirmed it, since what conspirators profess is not what they believe; the ostensible is not the real; and the real is deliberately malign.

It was this—the overwhelming evidence, as they saw it, that they were faced with conspirators against liberty determined at all costs to gain ends which their words dissembled—that was signaled to the colonists after 1763, and it was this above all else that in the end propelled them into Revolution.

Suspicion that the ever-present, latent danger of an active ~~conspiracy~~ of power against liberty was becoming manifest within the British Empire, assuming specific form and developing in coordinated phases, rose in the consciousness of a large segment of the American population before any of the famous political events of the struggle with England took place. No adherent of a nonconformist church or sect in the eighteenth century was free from suspicion that the Church of England, an arm of the Eng-

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

cautious in order to increase his notorious engrossment of public office. In Rhode Island it was, to James Otis, that "little, dirty, drinking, drabbing, contaminated knot of thieves, beggars, and transports . . . made up of Turks, Jews, and other infidels, with a few renegado Christians and Catholics"—the Newport junto, led by Martin Howard, Jr., which had already been accused by Stephen Hopkins and others in Providence of "conspiring against the liberties of the colony."

But even if local leaders associated with power elements in England had not been so suspect, there were grounds for seeing more behind the Stamp Act than its ostensible purpose. The official aim of the act was, of course, to bring in revenue to the English treasury. But the sums involved were in fact quite small, and "some persons . . . may be inclined to acquiesce under it." But that would be to fall directly into the trap, for the smaller the taxes, John Dickinson wrote in the most influential pamphlet

* For a succinct explanation of the manifest threat of the Stamp Act, see Stephen Hopkins, *The Rights of Colonies Examined* (Providence, 1765: JHL Pamphlet 9), pp. 16–17. Adams' almost paranoiac suspicions of Hutchinson's hidden motives run through his *Diary and Autobiography*; e.g., I, 306; II, 39; III, 430. See also his "Novanglus" papers, in *Works*, IV, esp. pp. 62–63, 67–71, 87; and references in his correspondence: *Works*, X, 285–286, 298. It is the generality of such suspicions that accounts for the furor caused by the publication in 1773 of Hutchinson's innocuous letters of 1768—letters in which, the publishers wrote in the pamphlet's title, "*the Judicious Reader Will Discover the Fatal Source of the Confusion and Bloodshed*" (JHL Pamphlet 40). Josiah Quincy thought he saw the final proof of Hutchinson's conspiratorial efforts in his maneuverings with the North administration in London in 1774 and 1775: "Journal of Josiah Quincy Jun. . . . in England . . .," MHS *Proc.*, 50 (1916–17), 444, 446, 447, 450, 452. Thacher's suspicions of Hutchinson (whom he called "Summa Potestatis," or "Summa" for short) are traced in the Introduction to his *Sentiments of a British American* (Boston, 1764: JHL Pamphlet 8), in Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I. Otis' phrase is quoted from his abusive pamphlet, *Brief Remarks on the Defence of the Halifax Libel . . .* (Boston, 1765), p. 5. The charge against Howard appeared in the *Providence Gazette*, September 15, 1764, and is part of the intense antipathy that built up in Providence against the royalist group in Newport. See, in general, Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis* (Chapel Hill, 1953), chap. iv; and Introduction to Howard's *Letter from a Gentleman at Halifax* (Newport, 1765: JHL Pamphlet 10).

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

published in America before 1776, the more dangerous they were, since they would the more easily be found acceptable by the incautious, with the result that a precedent would be established for making still greater inroads on liberty and property.

Nothing is wanted at home but a PRECEDENT, the force of which shall be established by the tacit submission of the colonies . . . If the Parliament succeeds in this attempt, other statutes will impose other duties . . . and thus the Parliament will levy upon us such sums of money as they choose to take, without any other LIMITATION than their PLEASURE.

Others saw more drastic hidden meanings and implications in the passage of the Stamp Act. "If the real and only motive of the minister was to raise money from the colonies," Joseph Warren wrote in 1766, "that method should undoubtedly have been adopted which was least grievous to the people." Choice of so blatantly obnoxious a measure as the Stamp Act, consequently, "has induced some to imagine that the minister designed by this act to force the colonies into a rebellion, and from thence to take occasion to treat them with severity, and, by military power, to reduce them to servitude." Such a supposition was perhaps excessive: "charity forbids us to conclude [the ministry] guilty of so black a villainy. But . . . it is known that tyrannical ministers have, at some time, embraced even this hellish measure to accomplish their cursed designs," and speculation based on "admitting this to have been his aim" seemed well worth pursuing. To John Adams it seemed "very manifest" that the ultimate design behind the Stamp Act was an effort to forge the fatal link between ecclesiastical and civil despotism, the first by stripping the colonists "in a great measure of the means of knowledge, by loading the press, the colleges, and even an almanac and a newspaper with restraints and duties," the second, by recreating the inequalities and dependencies of feudalism "by taking from the poorer sort of people all their little subsistence, and conferring it on a set of

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

stamp officers, distributors, and their deputies." This last point was the most obvious: "as the influence of money and places generally procures to the minister a majority in Parliament," Arthur Lee wrote, so an income from unchecked taxation would lead to a total corruption of free government in America, with the result that the colonies would "experience the fate of the *Roman* people in the deplorable times of their slavery."⁵

But by then, in 1768, more explicit evidence of a wide-ranging plot was accumulating rapidly. Not only had the Townshend Duties, another revenue act, been passed by Parliament despite all the violence of the colonists' reaction to the Stamp Act, but it was a measure that enhanced the influence of the customs administration, which for other reasons had already come under suspicion. There had been, it was realized by the late 1760's, a sudden expansion in the number of "posts in the [colonial] 'government' . . . worth the attention of persons of influence in Great Britain"—posts, Franklin explained, like the governorships, filled by persons who were

generally strangers to the provinces they are sent to govern, have no estate, natural connection, or relation there to give them an affection for the country . . . they come only to make money as fast as they can; are sometimes men of vicious characters and broken fortunes, sent by a minister merely to get them out of the way.⁶

By the late 1760's, in the perspective of recent events, one could see that the invasion of customs officers "born with long claws

⁵ Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania . . . (Philadelphia, 1768: JHL Pamphlet 23), p. 55; Warren to Edmund Dana, Boston, March 19, 1766, in Richard Frothingham, *Life and Times of Joseph Warren* (Boston, 1865), pp. 21-22; Adams, *Dissertation*, in *Works*, III, 464; [Arthur Lee], "Monitor VI," in *Virginia Gazette* (R), March 31, 1768. For an elaboration of Dickinson's argument on the special dangers of "imperceptible" taxes, see Mercy Otis Warren, *History of the . . . American Revolution* . . . (Boston, 1805), I, 45.

⁶ Dickinson, *Farmer's Letters* (JHL 23), p. 54; Albert H. Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin* (New York, 1905-1907), V, 83. Cf. Verner W. Crane, *Benjamin Franklin's Letters to the Press, 1758-1775* (Chapel Hill, 1950), pp. 106-107, 277.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

like eagles," had begun as far back as the last years of the Seven Years' War and was now being reinforced by the new tax measures. The wartime Orders in Council demanding stricter enforcement of the Navigation Laws; the Sugar Act of 1764, which had multiplied the customs personnel; and the American Board of Customs Commissioners created in 1767 with "power," Americans said, "to constitute as many under officers as they please"—all of these developments could be seen to have provided for an "almost incredible number of inferior officers," most of whom the colonists believed to be "wretches . . . of such infamous characters that the merchants cannot possibly think their interest safe under their care." More important by far, however, was their influence on government.

For there was an obvious political and constitutional danger in having such "a set of *idle drones*," such "lazy, proud, worthless pensioners and placemen," in one's midst. It was nothing less than "a general maxim," James Wilson wrote,

that the crown will take advantage of every opportunity of extending its prerogative in opposition to the privileges of the people, [and] that it is the interest of those who have pensions or offices at will from the crown to concur in all its measures.

These "baneful harpies" were instruments of power, of prerogative. They would upset the balance of the constitution by extending "*ministerial influence*" as much beyond its former bounds as the late war did the British dominions." Parasitic officeholders, thoroughly corrupted by their obligations to those who had appointed them, would strive to "distinguish themselves" by their sordid zeal in defending and promoting measures which they know beyond all question to be destructive to the just rights and true interests of their country." Seeking to "serve the ambitious purposes of great men at home," these "base-spirited wretches" would urge—were already urging—as they logically had to, the specious attractions of "SUBMISSIVE behavior." They were arguing

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

pamphlet appeared explaining in the fullest detail the bearing of judicial independence on constitutional freedom.

In New York the issue was even more inflamed and had wider repercussions. There, the judges of the Supreme Court, by a political maneuver of 1750, had managed to secure their appointments for life. But this tenure was interrupted by the death of George II in 1760 which required the reissuance of all crown commissions. An unpopular and politically weak lieutenant governor, determined to prevent his enemies from controlling the courts, refused to recommission the judges on life tenure. The result was a ferocious battle in which the opposition asserted New York's "undoubted right of having the judges of our courts on a constitutional basis," and demanded the "liberties and privileges" of Englishmen in this connection as in all others. But they were defeated, though not by the governor. In December 1761 orders were sent out from the King in Council to all the colonies, permanently forbidding the issuance of judges' commissions anywhere on any tenure but that of "the pleasure of the crown."⁹

In balance
of check
system.
Institution
dec. =
power over
judiciary.

All the colonies were affected. In some, like New Jersey, where the governor's incautious violation of the new royal order led to his removal from office, or like North Carolina, where opposition forces refused to concede and managed to keep up the fight for permanent judicial tenure throughout the entire period from 1760 to 1776, the issue was directly joined. In others, as in Massachusetts, where specific Supreme Court appointments were vehemently opposed by anti-administration interests, the force of the policy was indirect. But everywhere there was bitterness at the decree and fear of its implications, for everywhere it was known that judicial tenure "at the will of the crown" was "dangerous to the liberty and property of the subject," and that if the bench

⁹ Milton M. Klein, "Prelude to Revolution in New York: Jury Trials and Judicial Tenure," *W.M.Q.*, 3d ser., 17 (1960), 452.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

were occupied by "men who depended upon the smiles of the crown for their daily bread," the possibility of having an independent judiciary as an effective check upon executive power would be wholly lost.¹⁰

This fear was magnified by the rumor, which was circulating vigorously as early as 1768, that it was part of the administration's policy to have the salaries of the colonial judges "appointed for them by the crown, independent of the people." If this ever happened, the Boston Town Meeting asserted when the rumor was becoming actuality, it would "complete our slavery." The reasoning was simple and straightforward:

if taxes are to be raised from us by the Parliament of Great Britain without our consent, and the men on whose opinions and decisions our properties, liberties, and lives in a great measure depend receive their support from the revenues arising from these taxes, we cannot, when we think of the depravity of mankind, avoid looking with horror on the danger to which we are exposed!

"More and more," as the people contemplated the significance of crown salaries for a judiciary that served "at pleasure," was it clear that "the designs of administration [were] totally to subvert the constitution." Any judge, the House in Massachusetts ultimately stated, who accepted such salaries would thereby declare "that he has not a due sense of the importance of an impartial administration of justice, that he is an enemy to the constitution,

¹⁰ [William H. Drayton], *A Letter from Freeman of South-Carolina . . .* (Charleston, 1774: JHL Pamphlet 45), pp. 10, 20. For other characteristic expressions of the fear of a corrupt judiciary, see [John Allen], *An Oration upon the Beauties of Liberty . . .* (Boston, 1773; JHL Pamphlet 38), pp. 21 ff.; *The Conduct of Cadwallader Colden . . .* ([New York], 1767), reprinted in *Collections of the New-York Historical Society*, X (New York, 1877), 433-467; [John Allen], *The American Alarm . . . for the Rights, and Liberties, of the People . . .* (Boston, 1773: JHL Pamphlet 39), 1st sec., pp. 17, 20, 27, 28; *Votes and Proceedings of Boston* (JHL 36), pp. 37-38; Adams, *Diary and Autobiography*, II, 36, 65-67; III, 297 ff.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

and has it in his heart to promote the establishment of an arbitrary government in the province."¹¹

Long before this, however, another aspect of the judicial system was believed also to have come under deliberate attack. The jury system, it was said, in New York particularly but elsewhere as well, was being systematically undermined. In New York the same executive who had fought the permanent tenure of judges insisted on the legality of allowing jury decisions, on matters of fact as well as of law, to be appealed to the governor and Council. This effort, though defeated within a year by action of the Board of Trade in England, had a lasting impact on the political consciousness of New Yorkers. It was publicly assailed, in the year of the Stamp Act, as "arbitrary" and "scandalous" in its deliberate subversion of the British constitution.¹²

Associated with this but more important because more widespread in its effect was the extension and enforcement of the jurisdiction of the vice-admiralty courts — "prerogative" courts composed not of juries but of single judges whose posts were "political offices in the hands of the royal governors, to be bestowed upon deserving friends and supporters." Since these courts had jurisdiction over the enforcement of all laws of trade and navigation as well as over ordinary marine matters, they had always been potentially threatening to the interests of the colonists. But in the past, by one means or another, they had been curtailed in their effect, and much of their business had been shunted off to common law courts dominated by juries. Suddenly in the 1760's they acquired a great new importance, for it was into their hands that the burden of judicial enforcement of the new Parliamentary legislation fell. It was upon them, consequently, and

¹¹ *Votes and Proceedings of Boston* (JHL 36), p. 20; Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of . . . Massachusetts-Bay* (Lawrence S. Mayo, ed., Cambridge, 1936), III, 278, 279. See also, Gipson, *British Empire*, XII, 47, 139 ff., and Hutchinson, *History*, III, Appendices V, W.

¹² Klein, "Prelude to Revolution in New York," pp. 453-459.

imbalance
of judiciary
legislative

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

upon the whole principle of "prerogative" courts that abuse was hurled as the effect of their enhanced power was felt. "What has America done," victims of the decisions of these courts asked, "to be thus particularized, to be disfranchised and stripped of so invaluable a privilege as the trial by jury?" The operations of the vice-admiralty courts, it was felt, especially after their administrative reorganization in 1767, denied Americans a crucial measure of the protection of the British constitution. "However respectable the judge may be, it is however an hardship and severity which distinguishes [defendants before this court] from the rest of Englishmen." The evils of such prerogative invasion of the judiciary could hardly be exaggerated: their "enormous created powers . . . threatens future generations in America with a curse tenfold worse than the Stamp Act."¹³

The more one looked the more one found evidences of deliberate malevolence. In Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson's elaborate patronage machine, long in existence but fully organized only after the arrival of Governor Francis Bernard in 1760, appeared to suspicious tribunes like Oxenbridge Thacher and John Adams to constitute a serious threat to liberty. The Hutchinsons and the Olivers and their ambitious allies, it was said (and the view was widely circulated through the colonies), had managed, by accumulating a massive plurality of offices, to engross the power of all branches of the Massachusetts government thereby building a "foundation sufficient on which to erect a tyranny."

6th
comp.

¹³ Carl Ubbelohde, *The Vice-Admiralty Courts and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1960), pp. 125-126, 112. For further expressions of antipathy to the admiralty courts, see especially the Laurens pamphlet cited in note 7 above, and also, besides the references indexed in Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I, Adams, *Works*, III, 466-467; *Votes and Proceedings of Boston* (JHL 36), p. 24; and Oliver M. Dickerson, comp., *Boston under Military Rule, 1768-1769 . . .* (Boston, 1936), pp. 46, 54, 56, 68, 72, which documents the popular comparison of vice-admiralty courts and the Court of Star Chamber.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Bernard had all the executive, and a negative of the legislative; Hutchinson and Oliver, by their popular arts and secret intrigues, had elevated to the [Council] such a collection of crown officers and their own relations as to have too much influence there; and they had three of a family on the superior bench . . . This junto, therefore, had the legislative and executive in their control, and more natural influence over the judicial than is ever to be trusted to any set of men in the world.

With encouragement, no doubt, from England, they were stretching their power beyond all proper bounds, becoming "conspirators against the public liberty."¹⁴

The same evil of plural officeholding, tending to destroy the protective mechanism of the separation of powers, was observed to be at work in South Carolina. In both cases the filiation between the engrossing of offices in England and in America could be said to be direct. The self-seeking monopolists of office in the colonies, advancing themselves and their faithful adherents "to the exclusion of much better men," Adams wrote somewhat plaintively, were as cravenly obedient to their masters in power in England as their own despicable "creatures" were to them.¹⁵ How deep this issue ran, how powerful its threat, could be seen best when one noted the degree to which it paralleled cognate developments in England.

John Wilkes's career was crucial to the colonists' understanding of what was happening to them; his fate, the colonists came to believe, was intimately involved with their own.¹⁶ Not only was

¹⁴ John Adams ("Novanglus"), *Works*, IV, 53 ff., 63, and citations in note 29 below; Ellen E. Brennan, *Plural Office-Holding in Massachusetts, 1760-1780* (Chapel Hill, 1945), chaps. i, ii. See also references to Hutchinson, above, note 4.

¹⁵ Drayton, *Letter from Freeman* (JHL 45), pp. 9, 18-19, 32-33; Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina under the Royal Government, 1719-1776* (New York, 1899), pp. 533-535, 710-713; Adams, *Diary and Autobiography*, I, 306; II, 39.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the Wilkes affair in the context of the present discussion, see Pauline Maier, "John Wilkes and American Disillusionment with Britain," *W.M.Q.*, 3d ser., 20 (1963), 373-395.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

he associated in their minds with general opposition to the government that passed the Stamp Act and the Townshend Duties, that was flooding the colonies with parasitic placemen, and that appeared to be making inroads into the constitution by weakening the judiciary and bestowing monopolies of public offices on pliant puppets—not only was he believed to be a national leader of opposition to such a government, but he had entered the public arena first as a victim and then as the successful antagonist of general warrants, which, in the form of writs of assistance, the colonists too had fought in heroic episodes known throughout the land. He had, moreover, defended the sanctity of private property against confiscation by the government. His cause was their cause. His *Number 45 North Briton* was as celebrated in the colonies as it was in England, and more generally approved of; its symbolism became part of the iconography of liberty in the colonies. His return from exile in 1768 and subsequent election to Parliament were major events to Americans. Toasts were offered to him throughout the colonies, and substantial contributions to his cause as well as adulatory letters were sent by Sons of Liberty in Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina. A stalwart, independent opponent of encroaching government power and a believer in the true principles of the constitution, he was expected to do much in Parliament for the good of all: so the Bostonians wrote him in June 1768 "your perseverance in the *good old cause* may still prevent the great system from dashing to pieces. 'Tis from your endeavors we hope for a royal 'Pascite, ut ante, boves,' and from our attachment to 'peace and good order' we wait for a constitutional redress: being determined that the King of Great Britain shall have subjects but not slaves in these remote parts of his dominions."¹⁷

¹⁷ Boston Sons of Liberty to Wilkes, June 6, 1768, MHS *Procs.*, 47 (1913-14), 191. The quotation is from Vergil, *Eclogues*, i, 45: "pasture your cattle as of old."

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Fth
Copy.

By February 1769 it was well known that "*the fate of Wilkes and America must stand or fall together.*"¹⁸ The news, therefore, that by the maneuvers of the court party Wilkes had been denied the seat in Parliament to which he had been duly elected came as a profound shock to Americans. It shattered the hopes of many that the evils they saw around them had been the result not of design but of inadvertence, and it portended darker days ahead. When again, and then for a second, a third, and a fourth time Wilkes was re-elected to Parliament and still denied his seat, Americans could only watch with horror and agree with him that the rights of the Commons, like those of the colonial Houses, were being denied by a power-hungry government that assumed to itself the privilege of deciding who should speak for the people in their own branch of the legislature. Power had reached directly and brutally into the main agency of liberty. Surely Wilkes was right: the constitution was being deliberately, not inadvertently, torn up by its roots.

Meanwhile an event even more sinister in its implications had taken place in the colonies themselves. On October 1, 1768, two regiments of regular infantry, with artillery, disembarked in Boston. For many months the harassed Governor Bernard had sought some legal means or excuse for summoning military help in his vain efforts to maintain if not an effective administration then at least order in the face of Stamp Act riots, circular letters, tumultuous town meetings, and assaults on customs officials. But the arrival of troops in Boston increased rather than decreased his troubles. For to a populace steeped in the literature of eighteenth-century English politics the presence of troops in a peaceful town had such portentous meaning that resistance instantly stiffened. It was not so much the physical threat of the troops that affected the attitudes of the Bostonians; it was the bearing their

J
Copy.

¹⁸ William Palfrey to Wilkes, February 21, 1769, MHS *Proc.*, 47 (1913-14), 197.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

arrival had on the likely tendency of events. Viewed in the perspective of Trenchard's famous tracts on standing armies and of the vast derivative literature on the subject that flowed from the English debates of the 1690's, these were not simply soldiers assembled for police duties; they were precisely what history had proved over and over again to be prime movers of the process by which unwary nations lose "that precious jewel *liberty*." The mere rumor of possible troop arrivals had evoked the age-old apprehensions. "The raising or keeping a standing army within the kingdom in time of peace, unless it be with the consent of Parliament, is against the law," the alarmed Boston Town Meeting had resolved. It is, they said,

the indefeasible right of [British] subjects to be *consulted* and to give their *free consent in person* or by representatives of their own free election to the raising and keeping a standing army among them; and the inhabitants of this town, being free subjects, have the same right derived from nature and confirmed by the British constitution as well as the said royal charter; and therefore the raising or keeping a standing army without their consent in person or by representatives of their own free election would be an infringement of their natural, constitutional, and charter rights; and the employing such army for the enforcing of laws made without the consent of the people, in person or by their representatives, would be a grievance.¹⁹

But the troops arrived, four regiments in all: in bold, stark actuality a standing army — just such a standing army as had snuffed out freedom in Denmark, classically, and elsewhere throughout the world. True, British regulars had been introduced into the colonies on a permanent basis at the end of the Seven Years' War; that in itself had been disquieting. But it had then been argued that troops were needed to police the newly acquired territories, and that they were not in any case to be regularly garrisoned in

¹⁹ *Sixteenth Report of the Boston Record Commissioners*, p. 263.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

peaceful, populous towns.²⁰ No such defense could be made of the troops sent to Boston in 1768. No simple, ingenuous explanation would suffice. The true motive was only too apparent for those with eyes to see. One of the classic stages in the process of destroying free constitutions of government had been reached.

To those most sensitive to the ideological currents of the day, the danger could scarcely have been greater. "To have a standing army!" Andrew Eliot wrote from Boston to Thomas Hollis in September, 1768, "Good God! What can be worse to a people who have tasted the sweets of liberty! Things are come to an unhappy crisis; there will never be that harmony between Great Britain and her colonies that there hath been; all confidence is at an end; and the moment there is any blood shed all affection will cease." He was convinced, he wrote, that if the English government "had not had their hands full at home they would have crushed the colonies." As it was, England's most recent actions tended only "to hasten that independency which at present the warmest among us deprecate." "I fear for the nation," he concluded, and his fears were shared not only by all liberty-minded Bostonians but also, through the stimulation of the "Journal of the Times," a day-by-day account of Boston "under military rule" that was, in effect, syndicated throughout the colonies, it was shared by politically and ideologically sensitive Americans everywhere. Time did not ease these anxieties; it merely complicated them. Fear and hatred became edged with contempt. "Our people begin to despise a military force," Eliot observed a year after the troops had first appeared; they coolly woo away the soldiers and drag offending officers before the courts — which, he grimly added, continue to function "notwithstanding all their efforts." But "things cannot long remain in the state they are now in;

²⁰ Gipson, *British Empire*, X, 200–201, 328–329, 408; cf. Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution, 1759–1766* (New York, 1960), pp. 87–96.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

they are hastening to a crisis. What will be the event, God knows."²¹

And again significant corroboration for America's fears could be found in developments in England, and support furnished for the belief that events in America were only part of a larger whole. On May 10, 1768, a mob, assembled in St. George's Fields, London, in support of the imprisoned Wilkes, was fired upon by the regiment of Foot Guards that had been summoned by the nervous magistrates. Several deaths resulted, the most dramatic being that of a boy, wrongly identified as a leader of the mob, who was tracked down and shot to death on orders of the commander. The political capital made of this episode by the Wilkesites and other anti-government groups in London, who declared it to have been a deliberately planned "massacre," was echoed loudly in the colonies, the more so when it appeared that convictions of the guilty soldiers by normal processes of law were being quashed by the government. Could it be believed to be a coincidence that in February 1770 an eleven-year-old boy was also shot to death in a Boston riot by a suspected customs informer? This was more than a parallel to what had happened in London: the two events were two effects of the same cause.²²

²¹ Eliot to Hollis, Boston, September 27, 1768; July 10, September 7, 1769, in MHS Colls., 4th ser., IV, 428, 442, 444. The "Journal of the Times" was a series of newspaper articles published from October 13, 1768, to November 30, 1769. The pieces, dilating on day-by-day offenses of the military in Boston, were apparently written in Boston but were sent to New York for weekly publication in the *New York Journal* and to Pennsylvania for reprinting in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle*. After these two initial appearances the articles were again reprinted in the *Boston Evening Post*, and thereafter generally copied in American and English publications. The series has been collected by Oliver M. Dickerson as *Boston under Military Rule, 1768–1769*.

²² George Rudé, *Wilkes and Liberty* (Oxford, 1962), pp. 49 ff.; Maier, "Wilkes and American Disillusionment," pp. 386–387; Gipson, *British Empire*, XI, 275, 281. For an example of the currency in personal correspondence of the St. George's Fields "massacre," see William Strahan to David Hall, London, December 30, 1768, *Pa. Mag.* 10 (1886), 468–469. On the role of the shooting of the

9th
Comp.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

10 Comp.

And then, a few weeks later, came the Boston Massacre. Doubts that the troops in Boston constituted a standing army and that it was the purpose of standing armies to terrify a populace into compliance with tyrannical wills were silenced by that event, which, Eliot assured Hollis, had obviously been coming. It "serves to show the impossibility of our living in peace with a standing army. A free people will sometimes carry things too far, but this remedy will always be found worse than the disease. Trenchard's *History of Standing Armies*, with which you formerly obliged me, is excellent . . . Unless there is some great alteration in the state of things the era of the independence of the colonies is much nearer than I once thought it, or now wish it."²³ The same response was generally broadcast in the narrative of the Massacre, written by James Bowdoin and others for the Boston Town Meeting, which was distributed everywhere in the English-speaking world. This famous pamphlet stressed the deliberateness of the shooting and the clarity of the design that lay behind the lurid event; nor was the parallel to the St. George's Fields murders neglected. The acquittal of the indicted soldiers did not alter the conviction that the Massacre was the logical work of a standing army, for it accentuated the parallel with the English case which also had concluded with acquittal; and in Boston too there was suspicion of judicial irregularities. How the murderers managed to escape was known to some, it was said, but was "too dark to explain."²⁴

Snider boy in the Revolutionary movement in Boston, see John Cary, *Joseph Warren* (Urbana, 1961), pp. 91-92.

²³ Eliot to Hollis, June 28, 1770, MHS Colls., 4th ser., IV, 452.

²⁴ Allen, *Oration upon the Beauties of Liberty* (JHL 38), p. xiii; [Bowdoin, et al.], *A Short Narrative of the Horrid Massacre in Boston . . .* (Boston, 1770: JHL Pamphlet 32), reprinted within the year three times in Boston, three times in London and once (retitled) in Dublin; for the association of the Massacre with the problem of standing armies, see *Short Narrative*, p. 8. The annual Massacre Day orators played up this association in lurid detail: see, for example, Joseph Warren, *An Oration . . .* (Boston, 1772: JHL Pamphlet 35), pp. 11-12; John Hancock, *An Oration . . .* (Boston, 1774: JHL Pamphlet 41), pp. 13-15.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

Unconstitutional taxing, the invasion of placemen, the weakening of the judiciary, plural officeholding, Wilkes, standing armies — these were major evidences of a deliberate assault of power upon liberty. Lesser testimonies were also accumulating at the same time: small episodes in themselves, they took on a large significance in the context in which they were received. Writs of assistance in support of customs officials were working their expected evil: "our houses, and even our bedchambers, are exposed to be ransacked, our boxes, trunks, and chests broke open, ravaged and plundered by wretches whom no prudent man would venture to employ even as menial servants." Legally convened legislatures had been "adjourned . . . to a place highly inconvenient to the members and greatly disadvantageous to the interest of the province"; they had been prorogued and dissolved at executive whim. Even the boundaries of colonies had been tampered with, whereby "*rights of soil*" had been eliminated at a stroke. When in 1772 the Boston Town Meeting met to draw up a full catalogue of the "infringements and violations" of the "rights of the colonists, and of this province in particular, as men, as Christians, and as subjects," it approved a list of twelve items, which took seventeen pamphlet pages to describe.²⁵

SUMMARY
of components
of conspiracy

But then, for a two-year period, there was a détente of sorts created by the repeal of the Townshend Duties, the withdrawal

The view of the Massacre held by John Adams and Josiah Quincy, Jr., the lawyers who successfully defended the soldiers in court, is especially important. Both thought the Massacre was "the strongest of proofs of the danger of standing armies" despite their efforts on the soldiers' behalf; Adams saw nothing incompatible between the verdict of the jury and his being invited to deliver one of the orations commemorating the Massacre, and Quincy publicly urged continued discussion of the "fatal effects of the policy of standing armies and . . . quartering troops in populous cities in time of peace." Josiah Quincy, *Memoir of the Life of Josiah Quincy Jun. . .* (Boston, 1825), p. 67; Adams, *Diary and Autobiography*, II, 74, 79; Gipson, *British Empire*, XI, 281. For the complete documentation and an excellent analysis of the trial, see L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel, eds., *Legal Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, 1965), III.

²⁵ *Votes and Proceedings of Boston* (JHL 36), pp. 13-30.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

of troops from Boston, and the failure of other provocative measures to be taken. It ended abruptly, however, in the fall and winter of 1773, when, with a rush, the tendencies earlier noted were brought to fulfillment. In the space of a few weeks, all the dark, twisted roots of malevolence were finally revealed, plainly, for all to see.

The turning point was the passage of the Tea Act²⁶ and the resulting Tea Party in Boston in December 1773. Faced with this defiant resistance to intimidation, the powers at work in England, it was believed, gave up all pretense of legality—"threw off the mask," John Adams said in a phrase that for a century had been used to describe just such climactic disclosures²⁷—and moved swiftly to complete their design. In a period of two months in the spring of 1774 Parliament took its revenge in a series of coercive actions no liberty-loving people could tolerate: the Boston Port Act, intended, it was believed, to snuff out the economic life of the Massachusetts metropolis; the Administration of Justice

²⁶ For an analysis of the motivation behind the opposition to the Tea Act on the part of the merchant community, explicitly contradicting the interpretation of A. M. Schlesinger's *Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution* (1918), see Arthur L. Jensen, *The Maritime Commerce of Colonial Philadelphia* (Madison, Wis., 1963), pp. 193 ff. Jensen concludes that "it is difficult to see how the constitutional question can be lightly dismissed as mere window dressing for the more fundamental economic questions when there is an impressive amount of contemporary testimony, private as well as public, to the contrary."

²⁷ Thus the commonwealthman and regicide Edmund Ludlow described in his *Memoirs* (written 1663–1673) how Charles I, fatally attracted to French and Spanish despotism, "immediately after his ascent to the throne pulled off the mask, and openly discovered his intentions to make the crown absolute and independent" (C. H. Firth, ed., Oxford, 1894, I, 10). Similarly—or perhaps conversely—Governor Hunter of New York, who had for months been seething with indignation at the arrogance of the New York Assembly, finally wrote the Secretary of State in 1712 that "now the mask is thrown off; they have called in question the Council's share in the legislation . . . and have but one short step to make towards what I am unwilling to name [i.e., independence]." E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New-York . . .* (Albany, 1856–1887), V, 296; cf. pp. 255–256. The Secretary of State involved was Bolingbroke, who himself used the phrase in similar circumstances: e.g., *Works* (Philadelphia, 1841), I, 116.

Final
Jennerment

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

Act, aimed at crippling judicial processes once and for all by permitting trials to be held in England for offenses committed in Massachusetts; the Massachusetts Government Act, which stripped from the people of Massachusetts the protection of the British constitution by giving over all the "democratic" elements of the province's government—even popularly elected juries and town meetings—into the hands of the executive power; the Quebec Act, which, while not devised as a part of the coercive program, fitted it nicely, in the eyes of the colonists, by extending the boundaries of a "papist" province, and one governed wholly by prerogative, south into territory claimed by Virginia, Connecticut, and Massachusetts; finally, the Quartering Act, which permitted the seizure of unoccupied buildings for the use of troops on orders of the governors alone even in situations, such as Boston's, where barracks were available in the vicinity.

Once these coercive acts were passed there could be little doubt that "the system of slavery fabricated against America . . . is the offspring of mature deliberation." To the leaders of the Revolutionary movement there was, beyond question, "a settled, fixed plan for *enslaving* the colonies, or bringing them under arbitrary government, and indeed the nation too." By 1774 the idea "that the British government—the *King, Lords, and Commons*—have laid a regular plan to enslave America, and that they are now deliberately putting it in execution" had been asserted, Samuel Seabury wrote wearily but accurately, "over, and over, and over again." The less inhibited of the colonial orators were quick to point out that "the MONSTER of a standing ARMY" had sprung directly from "a PLAN . . . systematically laid, and pursued by the British ministry, near twelve years, for enslaving America"; the Boston Massacre, it was claimed, had been "planned by Hillsborough and a knot of treacherous knaves in Boston." Careful analysts like Jefferson agreed on the major point; in one of the most closely reasoned of the pamphlets of 1774 the Virginian stated unambiguously that though "single

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day . . . a series of oppressions, begun at a distinguished period and pursued unalterably through every change of ministers, too plainly prove a deliberate and systematical plan of reducing us to slavery." So too the fastidious and scholarly John Dickinson, though in 1774 he still clung to the hope that inadvertence, at least on the part of the King, was involved, believed that "a plan had been deliberately framed and pertinaciously adhered to, unchanged even by frequent changes of ministers, unchecked by any intervening gleam of humanity, to sacrifice to a passion for arbitrary dominion the universal property, liberty, safety, honor, happiness, and prosperity of us unoffending yet devoted Americans." So too Washington, collaborating with George Mason in writing the Fairfax Resolves of 1774, agreed that the trouble had arisen from a "regular, systematic plan" of oppression, the English government "endeavoring by every piece of art and despotism to fix the shackles of slavery upon us"; he was convinced "beyond the smallest doubt," he wrote privately, "that these measures are the result of deliberation . . . I am as fully convinced as I am of my own existence that there has been a regular, systematic plan formed to enforce them." The more sensitive observers were to ideological issues—the more practiced in theoretical discourse—the more likely they were to find irrefutable evidence of what Richard Henry Lee called "designs for destroying our constitutional liberties." In 1766 Andrew Eliot had been unsure; the Stamp Act, he wrote, had been "calculated (I do not say designed) to enslave the colonies." By 1768 things had worsened, and the distinction between "calculation" and "design" disappeared from his correspondence. "We have everything to fear and scarce any room to hope," he then wrote to Hollis; "I am sure this will put you in mind of 1641." He was convinced that the English government "had a design to new-model our constitution, at least in this province," and they would already have

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

succeeded had they not been so occupied with other business at home. His friends in Boston concurred, and, beginning in 1770 wrote out in a series of town resolutions, instructions to representatives, and House declarations their conviction that

a deep-laid and desperate plan of imperial despotism has been laid, and partly executed, for the extinction of all civil liberty . . . The august and once revered fortress of English freedom—the admirable work of ages—the BRITISH CONSTITUTION seems fast tottering into fatal and inevitable ruin.²⁸

Specifics were sought, especially as to the date of the origins of the plot. Josiah Quincy—"Wilkes Quincy," Hutchinson called him—found it in the Restoration of Charles II; others traced it to the administration of Robert Walpole; and though John Adams, with one eye on Hutchinson, wrote in 1774 that "the conspiracy was first regularly formed and begun to be executed in 1763 or 4," later he traced it back to the 1750's and 1740's and the administration of Governor Shirley of Massachusetts. Nor were the specific stages of its development neglected. They could be traced, if in no other place, in the notorious Hutchinson letters of 1768–69, those "profoundly secret, dark, and deep" letters which, published in 1773, totally exposed Hutchinson's "machia-

²⁸ [Alexander Hamilton], *A Full Vindication of the Measures of the Congress* . . . (New York, 1774), in Harold C. Syrett, et al., eds., *Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York and London, 1961–), I, 50; Baldwin, *Appendix* (JHL 52), p. 67; [Samuel Seabury], *A View of the Controversy . . .* (New York, 1774), in Clarence H. Vance, ed., *Letters of a Westchester Farmer (1774–1775)* (*Publications of the Westchester County Historical Society*, VIII, White Plains, 1930), p. 123; Oliver Noble, *Some Strictures upon the . . . Book of Esther . . .* (Newburyport, 1775: JHL Pamphlet 58), pp. 28, 26; Hancock, *Oration* (JHL 41), p. 9; [Jefferson], *A Summary View of the Rights of British America* . . . (Williamsburg, [1774]: JHL Pamphlet 43), p. 11; on the development of Dickinson's understanding of the cause of the crisis, see the Introduction to his *Late Regulations* (Philadelphia, 1765: JHL Pamphlet 14), in Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I; Colbourn, *Lamp of Experience*, p. 155; Washington to Bryan Fairfax, August 27, 1774, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington . . .* (Washington, D. C., 1931–1944), III, 241, 242; Gipson, *British Empire*, XII, 36n; MHS Colls., 4th ser., IV, 400, 429, 444; [*Eighteenth*] *Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston . . .* (Boston, 1887), p. 26 (cf. pp. 83–86).

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

vellian dissimulation," John Adams wrote, and convicted him of "junto conspiracy"; they gave proof, the Boston Committee of Correspondence wrote, that God had "wonderfully interposed to bring to light the plot that has been laid for us by our malicious and invidious enemies."²⁹

But who, specifically, were these enemies, and what were their goals? Josiah Quincy, at the center of affairs in London in the winter of 1774-75, was convinced "that all the measures against America were planned and pushed on by Bernard and Hutchinson." But most observers believed that local plotters like Hutchinson were only "creatures" of greater figures in England coordinating and impelling forward the whole effort. There were a number of specific identifications of these master influences. One of the most common was the claim that at the root of the evil stood the venerable John Stuart, Lord Bute, whose apparent absence from politics since 1763 could be seen as one of his more successful dissimulations: "he has been aiming for years . . . to destroy the ancient right of the subjects," and now was finally taking steps to "overthrow both . . . King and state; to bring on a revolution, and to place another whom he [is] more nearly allied to upon the throne." Believing the people to "have too much liberty," he intended to reduce them to the "spiritless SLAVES" they had been "in the reign of the *Stuarts*." So it had seemed to Arthur Lee, who had written from London at the beginning of the period that "Lord Bute, though seemingly re-

²⁹ Quincy, *Observations on the . . . Boston Port-Bill; with Thoughts on . . . Standing Armies* (Boston, 1774), in Quincy, *Memor*, p. 446 (cf. pp. 464-465); Adams, *Works*, X, 242-243 (for Adams' full elaboration of the ministry's "dark intrigues and wicked machinations" so clearly dovetailed with the Hutchinson clique's maneuverings, see *Works*, IV, 18 ff., 62-64, 70, 91-92; *Diary and Autobiography*, II, 80, 90, 119); John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Boston, 1943), p. 332. For other expressions of the fear of "a constant, unremitting, uniform aim to enslave us," see *Votes and Proceedings of Boston* (JHL 36), pp. 30, 37; Allen, *American Alarm* (JHL 39), 1st sec., pp. 8-9, 17, 18, 33; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan* (New Haven, 1962), pp. 263-265.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

tired from the affairs of court, too plainly influences all the operations of government"; the hard facts, he said, lead one to condemn "the unprincipled ambition and partiality of the Scots lord as having produced all the mischiefs of the present period." Eliot too feared "this mysterious THANE," declaring in 1769 that "he has too much influence in the public measures." Five years later John Dickinson still lumped together "the Butes, Mansfields, Norths, Bernards, and Hutchinsons" as the people "whose falsehoods and misrepresentations have inflamed the people," and as late as 1775 an informed American could write confidently from London that "this plan you may be assured was devised by Lords North, Bute, and Jenkinson only."³⁰ A more general version of this view was that a Stuart-Tory party, the "corrupt, Frenchified party in the nation," as it was described in 1766—"evil-minded individuals," Jonathan Mayhew believed, "not improbably in the interests of the houses of Bourbon and the Pretender"—was at work seeking to reverse the consequences of the Glorious Revolution. It was a similar notion that in all probability accounts for the republication of Rapin's *Dissertation on . . . the Whigs and Tories* in Boston in 1773; and it was this notion that furnished Jefferson with his ultimate understanding of the "system" that sought to destroy liberty in America. Still another explanation, drawing no less directly on fears that had lain at the root of opposition ideology in England since the turn of the century, emphasized the greed of a "monied interest" created by the crown's financial necessities and the power of a newly risen, arrogant, and irresponsible capitalist group, that battened on wars and stock manipulation. The creation of this group was accompanied "by levying of taxes, by a host of tax gatherers, and a long

³⁰ Allen, *American Alarm* (JHL 39), 1st sec., pp. 18-19 (cf. the same author's reference to "Scotch-barbarian troops" at the St. George's Fields riot, in *Oration upon the Beauties of Liberty* [JHL 38], p. xiii); Arthur Lee Papers (MSS in Houghton Library, Harvard University), I, 2; II, 26, 33; Eliot to Hollis, December 25, 1769, MHS Colls., 4th ser., IV, 445.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

train of dependents of the crown. The practice grew into system, till at length the crown found means to break down those barriers which the constitution had assigned to each branch of the legislature, and effectually destroyed the independence of both Lords and Commons.”³¹

The most common explanation, however — an explanation that rose from the deepest sources of British political culture, that was a part of the very structure of British political thought — located “the spring and cause of all the distresses and complaints of the people in England or in America” in “a kind of fourth power that the constitution knows nothing of, or has not provided against.” This “overruling arbitrary power, which absolutely controls the King, Lords, and Commons,” was composed, it was said, of the “ministers and favorites” of the King, who, in defiance of God and man alike, “extend their usurped authority

³¹ [Stephen Johnson], *Some Important Observations . . .* (Newport, 1766: JHL Pamphlet 19), p. 15; Jonathan Mayhew, *The Snare Broken . . .* (Boston, 1766: JHL Pamphlet 20), p. 9; [Carter Braxton], *An Address to . . . Virginia; on the Subject of Government . . .* (Philadelphia, 1776: JHL Pamphlet 66), p. 10. Jefferson's explanation appeared first as notes he jotted down on reading François Soulé's *Histoire des troubles de l'Amérique anglaise* (London, 1785) at the point where George III's education is mentioned: “The education of the present King was Tory. He gave decisive victories to the Tories. To these were added sundry rich persons sprung up in the E. I. America would have been too formidable a weight in the scale of the Whigs. It was necessary therefore to reduce them by force to concur with the Tories.” Later he wrote more formally to Soulé: “The seeds of the war are here traced to their true source. The Tory education of the King was the first preparation for that change in the British government which that party never ceases to wish. This naturally ensured Tory administrations during his life. At the moment he came to the throne and cleared his hands of his enemies by the peace of Paris, the assumptions of unwarrantable right over America commenced; they were so signal, and followed one another so close as to prove they were part of a system either to reduce it under absolute subjection and thereby make it an instrument for attempts on Britain itself, or to sever it from Britain so that it might not be a weight in the Whig scale. This latter alternative however was not considered as the one which would take place. They knew so little of America that they thought it unable to encounter the little finger of Great Britain.” *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Julian P. Boyd, ed., Princeton, 1950-), X, 373n2, 369.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

infinitely too far,” and, throwing off the balance of the constitution, make their “despotic will” the authority of the nation.

For their power and interest is so great that they can and do procure whatever laws they please, having (by power, interest, and the application of the people's money to *placemen* and *pensioners*) the whole legislative authority at their command. So that it is plain (not to say a word of a particular reigning arbitrary *Stuarchal* power among them) that the rights of the people are ruined and destroyed by ministerial *tyrannical* authority, and thereby . . . become a kind of slaves to the ministers of state.

This “junto of courtiers and state-jobbers,” these “court-locusts,” whispering in the royal ear, “instill in the King's mind a divine right of authority to command his subjects” at the same time as they advance their “detestable scheme” by misinforming and misleading the people.³²

The notion that, as Eliot put it, “If the King can do no wrong, his ministers may; and when they do wrong, they ought to be h-g-d,” had served for generations in England to justify opposition to constituted government. It had been the standard argument of almost every opposition group from the earliest years of the eighteenth century, and it had been transmitted intact to the colonies, where now it received its final, apocalyptic application. Its expression in the writings of the seventies is legion. It was heard in inland towns, like Farmington, Connecticut, where in 1774 an assembly of 1,000 inhabitants resolved:

That the present ministry, being instigated by the devil and led by their wicked and corrupt hearts, have a design to take away our liberties and properties, and to enslave us forever . . . That those pimps and parasites who dared to advise their masters to such detestable measures be held in utter abhorrence by . . . every American, and their names loaded with the curses of all succeeding generations.

³² Allen, *American Alarm* (JHL 39), 1st sec., pp. 8-9; Noble, *Some Strictures* (JHL 58), p. 6; Allen, *Oration upon the Beauties of Liberty* (JHL 38), p. 29.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

It was heard in the cities—in Philadelphia, where handbills addressed to tradesmen and mechanics warned that “a corrupt and prostituted ministry are 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 property and, what is more, their birthright, *liberty*.” It was heard continuously in Boston, whose Committee of Correspondence condemned the Coercive Acts as “glaring evidence of a fixed plan of the British administration to bring the whole continent into the most humiliating bondage,” and whose Suffolk Resolves, addressed to the first Continental Congress, condemned “the arbitrary will of a licentious minister” and “the attempts of a wicked administration to enslave America.” And it was heard in the Congress itself. The formal address of the first Continental Congress to the people of Great Britain dilated on “the ministerial plan for enslaving us.” The second Congress justified its actions by reference to “the rapid progress of a tyrannical ministry,” and explained in detail, in its plea for support from Canada, “the designs of an arbitrary ministry to extirpate the rights and liberties of all America,” arguing that armed resistance alone would induce the King at long last to “forbid a licentious ministry any longer to riot in the ruins of the rights of mankind.” It was this same protest against the “delusive pretenses, fruitless terrors, and unavailing severities” of what Arthur Lee called “the most unprincipled administration that ever disgraced humanity” that shaped the Congress’ Declaration of the Causes and Necessity for Taking up Arms and its more conciliatory Olive Branch Petition.³³

No fear, no accusation, had been more common in the history of opposition politics in eighteenth-century England; none was

³³ Eliot to Hollis, December 25, 1769, MHS *Colls.*, 4th ser., IV, 446; Gipson, *British Empire*, XII, 173, 91, 150n, 245, 255, 326, 328; Boyd, *Jefferson Papers*, I, 220, 214; Lee Papers, II, 62.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

more familiar to Americans whose political awareness had been formed by the literature of English politics. It had, moreover, a special resonance in New England and elsewhere in the colonies where people generally were acquainted with the Biblical Book of Esther and hence had a special model for a ministerial conspiracy in the story of that “tyrannic *bloodthirsty MINISTER OF STATE*,” Haman, at the court of Ahasuerus. There he was, wrote the Newbury, Massachusetts, minister Oliver Noble in 1775, “*Haman the Premier*, and his junto of court *favorites, flatterers, and dependents* in the royal city, together with *governors of provinces, councilors, boards of trade, commissioners and their creatures, officers and collectors of REVENUE, solicitors, assistants, searchers, and inspectors*, down to *tide-waiters and their scribes*, and the good Lord knows whom and how many of them, together with the coachmen and servants of the whole . . .”—[footnote:] “Not that I am certain the *Persian state* had all these *officers* . . . or that the underofficers of state rode in *coaches* or chariots . . . But as the *Persian monarchy* was despotic . . . it is highly probable . . .” The story was so well known: “. . . now behold the *DECREE obtained! The bloody PLAN ripened!*” The “*cruel perpetrators of the horrid PLOT* and a *banditti* of ministerial tools through the provinces” had everything in readiness. “But behold! . . . A merciful god heard the cries of this oppressed people . . .” The parallels were closely drawn; Haman: Lord North; Esther and the Jews: the colonists; and Mordecai: Franklin.³⁴

But why were not these manipulators of prerogative satisfied

³⁴ Archibald S. Foord, *His Majesty's Opposition, 1714–1830* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 37–38, 51, 53–54, 147–148, 170, 291, 318–319; Noble, *Some Strictures* (JHL 58), pp. 10, 17–18, 12. See also Richard Salter, *A Sermon . . .* (New London, 1768); Johnson, *Some Important Observations* (JHL 19), pp. 39, 55–56; Elisha Fish, *Joy and Gladness . . .* (Providence, 1767). For an earlier use of this Biblical imagery, see Philip Livingston’s angry description in 1747 of Cadwallader Colden as New York’s “Haman,” quoted by Milton Klein in *W.M.Q.*, 3d ser., 17 (1960), 445.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

with amassing power at home? Why the attention to faraway provinces in America? Several answers were offered, besides the general one that power naturally seeks to drive itself everywhere, into every pocket of freedom. One explanation was that the court, having reached a limit in the possibilities of patronage and spoils in the British Isles, sought a quarrel with the colonies as an excuse for confiscating their wealth. "The long and scandalous list of placemen and pensioners and the general profligacy and prodigality of the present reign exceed the annual supplies. England is drained by taxes, and Ireland impoverished to almost the last farthing . . . America was the only remaining spot to which their oppression and extortion had not fully reached, and they considered her as a fallow field from which a large income might be drawn." When the colonists' reaction to the Stamp Act proved that "raising a revenue in America quietly" was out of the question, it was decided to destroy their power to resist: the colonies were to be "politically broken up." And so the Tea Act was passed, not to gain a revenue but, as in the case of the Massacre, to provoke a quarrel. The ministry wished "to see America in arms . . . because it furnished them with a pretense for declaring us rebels; and persons conquered under that character forfeit their all, be it where it will or what it will, to the crown." England did not desire an accommodation of any sort, Lord North's conciliatory plan notwithstanding. "From motives of political avarice," she sought an excuse for conquest: "it is on this ground only that the continued obstinacy of her conduct can be accounted for." Not that the crown was necessarily implicated. Most commentators, until 1776, considered the crown equally the victim of ministerial machinations, one writer reporting to London from Philadelphia late in 1774 that "it is suspected here that a design is regularly prosecuted by the ministry to make His Majesty de-throne himself by the calamities and convulsions his reign is

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

likely to bring on his whole people. Please to inform me what is thought on this point in England."³⁵

Perhaps the most explicit and detailed explanation of the assault upon America by a conspiratorial ministry, encapsulating a century of opposition thought, came from the pen of a country person in Connecticut writing "to enlighten the people of a country town not under the best advantages for information from the newspapers and other pieces wrote upon the controversy." Seeking to rouse the villagers "to a sense of the danger to which their liberties are now involved," the Rev. Ebenezer Baldwin of Danbury explained that during the last war "the state of the colonies was much more attended to than it had been in times past," and "a very exalted idea of the riches of this country" had been conveyed back to England by the returning officers and soldiers. This exciting information fitted the plans of the ministry neatly, for

notwithstanding the excellency of the British constitution, if the ministry can secure a majority in Parliament who will come into all their measures [and] will vote as they bid them, they may rule as absolutely as they do in *France* or *Spain*, yea as in *Turkey* or *India*. And this seems to be the present plan: to secure a majority of Parliament, and thus enslave the nation with their own consent. The more places or pensions the ministry have in their gift the more easily they can bribe a majority of Parliament by bestowing those places on them or their friends. This makes them erect so many new and unnecessary offices in America, even so as to swallow up the whole of the revenue . . . by bestowing these places—places of considerable profit and no labor—upon the children or friends or dependents of the members of Parliament, the ministry can secure them in their interest. This doubtless is the great thing the ministry are driving at, to establish

³⁵ *Four Letters on Interesting Subjects* (Philadelphia, 1776: JHL Pamphlet 69), p. 5; [John Dickinson?] to Arthur Lee, October 27, 1774, Lee Papers, II, 26. For the argument that the Massacre was a deliberate effort of the enemies of Massachusetts "to drive it into that state [of rebellion], whereby in the end they might hope to gratify both their malice and avarice," see Bowdoin, *et al.*, *Short Narrative*, p. 44 (cf. p. A:86).

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

arbitrary government with the consent of Parliament. And to keep the people of England still, the first exertions of this power are upon the colonies.³⁶

Thus the balance of the constitution had been thrown off by a gluttonous ministry usurping the prerogatives of the crown and systematically corrupting the independence of the Commons. Corruption was at the heart of it—the political corruption built on the general dissoluteness of the populace, so familiar in the history of tyranny and so shocking to observers of mid-eighteenth-century England. The evil, public and private, that had appalled Dickinson in 1754 had ripened, it seemed clear, in the subsequent decade. As early as 1765 there had been nervous speculation in the colonies about what would happen

if the British empire should have filled up the measure of its iniquity and become ripe for ruin; if a proud, arbitrary, selfish, and venal spirit of corruption should ever reign in the British court and diffuse itself through all ranks in the nation; if lucrative posts be multiplied without necessity, and pensioners multiplied without bounds; if the policy of governing be by bribery and corruption, and the trade and manufactures of the nation be disregarded and trampled under foot; if all offices be bought and sold at a high and extravagant price . . . ; and if, to support these shocking enormities and corruptions, the subjects in all quarters must be hard squeezed with the iron arms of oppression.

But the writer was still confident, as Franklin had been a decade earlier, that enough virtue remained in England to overcome the deepening corruption. Three years later, however, it was stated that

The present involved state of the British nation, the rapacity and profuseness of many of her great men, the prodigious number of their dependents who want to be gratified with some office which may enable them to live lazily upon the labor of others, must convince us that we shall be taxed so long as we have a penny to pay,

³⁶ Baldwin, *Appendix* (JHL 52), pp. 51, 67–68.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

and that new offices will be constituted and new officers palmed upon us until the number is so great that we cannot by our constant labor and toil maintain any more.

By 1769 a Boston correspondent of Wilkes commented on "that torrent of corruption which 'like a general flood, has deluged all' to the eternal disgrace of the British nation," and suggested that the reason the "arbitrary and despotic" English government had "extended their ravages to America" was because they had found the British Isles too restricted an area for the full gratification of their "incessant cravings of luxury, extravagance and dissipation." In 1770 Eliot wrote Hollis: "The Lord have mercy on Great Britain! for among the great, I fear, there is scarce a virtuous character to be found. I should be glad to hope it was better among the other ranks, but the people could not be sold if they did not first sell themselves." Charles Carroll was even more emphatic: "I despair of seeing the constitution recover its former vigor. The vast influence of the crown, the luxury of the great, and the depravity of the common people are unsurmountable obstacles to Parliamentary independence . . . The English seem to be arrived to that degree of liberty and of servitude which Galba ascribes to the Roman people in his speech to Piso: *imperaturus es hominibus, qui nec totam servitutem pati possunt, nec totam libertatem*. Those same Romans, a few years after that period, deified the horse of Caligula." Three years later, in 1774, he saw the same, ultimate degradation in England: "The insatiable avarice or worse ambition of corrupt ministers intent on spreading that corruption through America by which they govern absolutely in Great Britain, brought the British empire to the brink of ruin, armed (the expression is not too strong) subject against subject, the parent against the child, ready to add unnatural murders to the horrors of civil war."³⁷

³⁷ Johnson, *Some Important Observations* (JHL 19), p. 20; Thomas Bradbury, *The Ass, or, the Serpent . . .* (1712: reprinted in Boston, 1768), p. 12n; William

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

That by 1774 the final crisis of the constitution, brought on by political and social corruption, had been reached was, to most informed colonists, evident; but if they had not realized it themselves they would soon have discovered it from the flood of newspapers, pamphlets, and letters that poured in on them from opposition sources in England. Again and again reports from the home country proclaimed that the English nation had departed, once and for all and completely, from the true principles of liberty: the principles not of "certain modern Whigs," as one English pamphlet of 1774, reprinted in the colonies no less than seven times within a year of its first appearance, explained, but of "Whigs before the [Glorious] Revolution and at the time of it; I mean the principles which such men as Mr. Locke, Lord Molesworth, and Mr. Trenchard maintained with their pens, Mr. Hampden and Lord [William] Russell with their blood, and Mr. Algernon Sidney with both." To those Englishmen who in the 1770's most directly inherited and most forcefully propagated these principles—Richard Price, Joseph Priestley, James Burgh—the situation at home if not abroad justified, even exaggerated, the worst fears for the future of liberty that their predecessors had expressed. For these latter-day radicals had witnessed personally the threatening rise of prerogative influence in the English government and its dramatic manifestation in the Wilkes affair; and they had seen revealed the rapacity and bankruptcy of the swollen East India Company, a revelation which illuminated to them the corruption of their era as dramatically as the collapse of the South Sea Company had revealed the rottenness

Palfrey to Wilkes, February 21 and April 12, 1769, MHS *Proc.*, 47 (1913-14), 197, 199; Eliot to Hollis, June 28, 1770, MHS *Colls.*, 4th ser., IV, 453; Carroll to Edmund Jennings and to William Graves, August 9, 1771, August 15, 1774, in *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 32 (1937), 197, 225. The Latin quotation is from Tacitus, *Histories*, I, xvi; it was translated in *Cato's Letters*, no. 41 (which reprints the whole of Galba's speech, after a discursive introduction), as: "You are about to govern the Romans, a people of too little virtue to support complete liberty, of too much spirit to bear absolute bondage."

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

of the era of George I to Trenchard and Gordon. Everywhere there was cynicism and glutinous self-seeking. What more was needed to convince one that affairs in Britain were plummeting toward complete and irrecoverable collapse? The long-awaited signs of the total degeneration of the moral qualities necessary to preserve liberty were unmistakable, and these English radicals said so, vigorously, convincingly, in a series of increasingly shrill pamphlets and letters that were read avidly, circulated, published and republished, in America.³⁸

But it was not only the radicals. A wide range of public figures and pamphleteers, known and read in America, carried forward the cries of corruption that had been heard in earlier years and directed them to the specific political issues of the day. William Bollan, the former agent and advocate-general of Massachusetts, still well known in America and experienced in analyzing colonial affairs, produced in London in 1768 two pamphlets of blasting condemnation, one "wherein the great mischief and danger of corruption are set forth and proved from its operations in *Greece and Rome*," the other covering, as the title indicated, the whole range of *Continued Corruption, Standing Armies, and Popular Discontents*. In the same vein the prominent London printer and publicist (and political conservative) William Strahan wondered, in letters to the Philadelphian David Hall, publisher

³⁸ [Matthew Robinson-Morris, Lord Rokeby], *Considerations on the Measures Carrying on with Respect to the British Colonies in North America* (2d ed., London, 1774), p. 10. This pamphlet was reprinted three times in Boston, twice in Philadelphia, and once in New York and Hartford in 1774 and 1775. For Abigail Adams' awareness of the identity between Rokeby's views and those of her husband writing as "Novanglus," see her letter of May 22, 1775, in L. H. Butterfield, et al., eds., *Adams Family Correspondence* (Cambridge, 1963), I, 202, 203n11. See also [Joseph Priestley], *An Address to Protestant Dissenters* (Boston, 1774), p. 6; this pamphlet, first published in London in 1773, appeared in three American editions in 1774. And see, in general, Oscar and Mary F. Handlin, "James Burgh and American Revolutionary Theory," MHS *Proc.*, 73 (1961), 38-57; H. Trevor Colbourn, "John Dickinson, Historical Revolutionary," *Pa. Mag.*, 83 (1959), 284; Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge, 1959), chap. ix.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, whether England had "virtue enough to be saved from that deluge of corruption with which we have been so long overwhelmed"—a concern that gnawed at him as he contemplated the "immense sums [that] are daily given to secure seats in Parliament" and that resulted in the selection of "men who in the east, by rapine and plunder, in most cases attended with the most shocking instances of barbarity, have suddenly acquired immense wealth. Such you will perhaps think not the most proper guardians of our constitution and liberties." He could only hope, he wrote, that "before matters come to extremity the nation . . . the happiest nation this world ever contained . . . will come to their senses, and not suffer a fabric, the work of ages and the envy of the rest of the world, to be materially injured."

But far greater voices than these were heard, some in the highest reaches of the English government. In the year of Burke's *Thoughts on the Present Discontents*, the most famous of all the attacks on the plots of "a certain set of intriguing men . . . to secure to the court the unlimited and uncontrolled use of its own vast influence under the sole direction of its own private favor . . . [pursuing] a scheme for undermining all the foundations of our freedom," Burke's patron, the Marquis of Rockingham, explained in a speech in the House of Lords the "total change in the old system of English government" which could be traced to the accession of George III and which alone could explain the secret motivations behind the Stamp Act. But it was left for the colonists' Olympian champion, William Pitt, now Earl of Chatham, to probe the ultimate sources of English corruption. The reason "the constitution at this moment stands violated," this grandson of "Diamond Pitt," East India merchant and governor of Madras, declared, is perfectly clear:

For some years past there has been an influx of wealth into this country which has been attended with many fatal consequences, be-

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

cause it has not been the regular, natural produce of labor and industry. The riches of Asia have been poured in upon us, and have brought with them not only Asiatic luxury but, I fear, Asiatic principles of government. Without connections, without any natural interest in the soil, the importers of foreign gold have forced their way into Parliament by such a torrent of private corruption as no private hereditary fortune could resist. My Lords, I say nothing but what is within the knowledge of us all; the corruption of the people is the great original cause of the discontents of the people themselves, of the enterprise of the crown, and the notorious decay of the internal vigor of the constitution.

Something, he said, must be done, immediately, "to stop the rapid progress of corruption"; he advocated strengthening the health of Parliament as a representative body by increasing the number of representatives from the still independent, unbought constituencies, the counties and the great and growing cities, at the expense of the rotten, purchasable, boroughs.³⁹

All of this was borne to America, and there carried conviction to a far larger part of the population, and bore more dramatic implications than it did in England. "Liberty," John Adams wrote, "can no more exist without virtue and independence than the body can live and move without a soul," and what liberty can be expected to flow from England where "luxury, effeminacy, and venality are arrived at such a shocking pitch" and where "both electors and elected are become one mass of corruption"? It was not hard to see where England stood: it was, Adams declared, precisely at the point "where the Roman republic was

³⁹ The first of Bollan's pamphlets of 1768 is *An Epistle from Timolean . . .*; for an indication of the curious complication of Bollan's reputation in Massachusetts, see Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I, 721–722. Strahan to Hall, February 23, 1763; February 13 and March 12, 1768, in *Pa. Mag.*, 10 (1886), 89, 329, 333. (For the publisher Edmund Dilly's similar fear of "bribery and corruption . . . swarms of placemen and pensioners . . . [which] like leeches suck the very vitals . . . of the constitution," see *ibid.*, 83 [1959], 284.) The Rockingham and Chatham speeches are in T. C. Hansard, *The Parliamentary History of England* . . . (London, 1806–1820), XVI, 742, 747, 752.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

when Jugurtha left it, and pronounced it 'a venal city, ripe for destruction, if it can only find a purchaser.' The analogy to the decline and fall of Rome and its empire was intriguing and informative; others carried it further and became more specific. Like Rome in its decline, England, "from being the nursery of heroes, became the residence of musicians, pimps, panders, and catamites." The swift decline of her empire, which, it was observed, had reached its peak only between 1758 and the Stamp Act, resulted from the same poison that had proved so fatal to free states in classical antiquity: the corruption, effeminacy, and languor that came from "the riches and luxuries of the East" and led to a calamitous "decay of virtue" and the collapse of the constitution. Even Franklin, his old caution and careful optimism gone, agreed, writing in 1775 to his one-time political ally Joseph Galloway, that he would himself, reluctantly, have to oppose Galloway's plan for reconciliation.

. . . when I consider the extreme corruption prevalent among all orders of men in this old rotten state, and the glorious public virtue so predominant in our rising country, I cannot but apprehend more mischief than benefit from a closer union. I fear they will drag us after them in all the plundering wars which their desperate circumstances, injustice, and rapacity may prompt them to undertake; and their wide-wasting prodigality and profusion is a gulf that will swallow up every aid we may distress ourselves to afford them. Here numberless and needless places, enormous salaries, pensions, perquisites, bribes, groundless quarrels, foolish expeditions, false accounts or no accounts, contracts and jobs, devour all revenue and produce continual necessity in the midst of natural plenty. I apprehend, therefore, that to unite us intimately will only be to corrupt and poison us also.

Patrick Henry used a variation of the same argument in discussing Galloway's proposal in Congress: "We shall liberate our constituents from a corrupt House of Commons but throw them into the arms of an American legislature that may be bribed by

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

that nation which avows, in the face of the world, that bribery is a part of her system of government." Even Galloway himself had to agree that "Parliament and ministry is wicked and corrupt." So often, so stridently, and so convincingly was it said in the colonies that in England "luxury has arrived to a great pitch; and it is a universal maxim that luxury indicates the declension of a state"—so often was it argued that vigor was gone, exhaustion and poverty approaching, that those who would defend British policy were obliged to debate the point: to assert the health and strength of English society, arguing, as Samuel Seabury did, that England was a "vigorous matron, just approaching a green old age; and with spirit and strength sufficient to chastise her undutiful and rebellious children" and not at all, as his adversary Alexander Hamilton had pictured her, "an old, wrinkled, withered, worn-out hag."⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Adams ("Novanglus"), *Works*, IV, 31, 28, 54–55; William Hooper to James Iredell, April 26, 1774, in W. L. Saunders, ed., *Colonial Records of North Carolina* (Raleigh, N.C., 1886–1890), IX, 985–986; William H. Drayton, *A Charge on the Rise of the American Empire . . .* (Charleston, 1776), pp. 2–3; Seabury, *A View*, in Vance, *Letters of a Westchester Farmer*, p. 140; Albert H. Smyth, ed., *Writings of Benjamin Franklin*, VI, 311–312; Edmund C. Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress* (Washington, D. C., 1921–1938), I, 53, 54. Analogies to the decline and fall of Rome sprang to the lips of almost every commentator as the crisis in Anglo-American affairs deepened; Arthur Lee's "Monitor" letters, for example—to pick almost at random—are replete with such references (see especially no. II, *Virginia Gazette* [R], March 3, 1768), as are the letters of Charles Carroll. Adams' quotation of Jugurtha's description of Roman venality is from Sallust, *War with Jugurtha*, xxxv, 12–13. Sallust was an invaluable treasury of apothegms and warnings on the consequences of public corruption; it was this theme in Sallust that Thomas Gordon had exploited most fully in the introductory Discourses to his popular translation (1744); note especially Discourse VI. The sentence Adams quotes as of Jugurtha was perhaps Sallust's most memorable phrase for the eighteenth century. It had appeared in *Cato's Letters* (no. 18), and it had been used by Americans to describe England at least as early as 1754 (see Dickinson's letter quoted above, p. 90); it continued to be used throughout the pre-Revolutionary years. Hooper's letter contains a particularly elaborate discussion of Britain, corruption, and the fall of Rome; in it Rome as observed by Jugurtha and England since Walpole are explicitly compared.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The fact that the ministerial conspiracy against liberty had risen from corruption was of the utmost importance to the colonists. It gave a radical new meaning to their claims: it transformed them from constitutional arguments to expressions of a world regenerative creed. For they had long known—it had been known everywhere in the English-speaking world in the eighteenth century—that England was one of the last refuges of the ancient gothic constitution that had once flourished everywhere in the civilized world. And now, in the outpourings of colonial protest, it was again repeated, but with new point and urgency, that by far “the greatest part of the human race” already lies in “total subjection to their rulers.” Throughout the whole continent of Asia people are reduced “to such a degree of abusement and degradation”

that the very idea of liberty is unknown among them. In *Africa*, scarce any human beings are to be found but barbarians, tyrants, and slaves: all equally remote from the true dignity of human nature and from a well-regulated state of society. Nor is *Europe* free from the curse. Most of her nations are forced to drink deep of the bitter cup. And in those in which freedom seem to have been established, the vital flame is going out. Two kingdoms, those of *Sweden* and *Poland*, have been betrayed and enslaved in the course of one year. The free towns of *Germany* can remain free no longer than their potent neighbors shall please to let them. *Holland* has got the forms if she has lost the spirit of a free country. *Switzerland* alone is in the full and safe possession of her freedom.

And if now, in this deepening gloom, the light of liberty went out in Britain too—in Britain, where next to “self-preservation, political liberty is the main aim and end of her constitution”—if, as events clearly portended and as “senators and historians are repeatedly predicting . . . continued corruption and standing armies will prove mortal distempers in her constitution”—what then? What refuge will liberty find?

“To our own country,” it was answered, “must we look for

*New
ideology
city on a hill*

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

the biggest part of that liberty and freedom that yet remains, or is to be expected, among mankind . . . For while the greatest part of the nations of the earth are held together under the yoke of universal slavery, the North American provinces yet remain *the country of free men*: the *asylum*, and the last, to which such may yet flee from the common deluge.” More than that: “our native country . . . bids the fairest of any to promote *the perfection and happiness of mankind*.” No one, of course, can predict “the state of mankind in future ages.” But insofar as one can judge the ultimate “designs of providence by the number and power of the causes that are already at work, we shall be led to think that the perfection and happiness of mankind is to be carried further in America than it has ever yet been in any place.” Consider the growth the colonies had enjoyed in so short a time—growth in all ways, but especially in population: a great natural increase it had been, supplemented by multitudes from Europe, “tired out with the miseries they are doomed to at home,” migrating to America “as the only country in which they can find food, raiment, and rest.” Consider also the physical vigor of the people. But above all consider the moral health of the people and of the body politic.

The fatal arts of luxury and corruption are but comparatively beginning among us . . . Nor is corruption yet established as the common principle in public affairs. Our representatives are not chosen by bribing, corrupting, or buying the votes of the electors. Nor does it take one half of the revenue of a province to manage her house of commons . . . We have been free also from the burden and danger of standing armies . . . Our defense has been our *militia* . . . the general operation of things among ourselves indicate strong tendencies towards a state of greater perfection and happiness than mankind has yet seen.

No one, therefore, can conceive of the cause of America as “the cause of a mob, of a party, or a faction.” The cause of America “is the cause of *self-defense*, of *public faith*, and of the *liberties*

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

of mankind . . . 'In our destruction, liberty itself expires, and human nature will despair of evermore regaining its first and original dignity.'"⁴¹

This theme, elaborately orchestrated by the colonial writers, marked the fulfillment of the ancient idea, deeply embedded in the colonists' awareness, that America had from the start been destined to play a special role in history. The controversy with England, from its beginning in the early 1760's, had lent support to that belief, so long nourished by so many different sources: the covenant theories of the Puritans, certain strands of Enlightenment thought, the arguments of the English radicals, the condition of life in the colonies, even the conquest of Canada. It had been the Stamp Act that had led John Adams to see in the original settlement of the colonies "the opening of a grand scene and design in providence for the illumination of the ignorant and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth." And Jonathan Mayhew, celebrating the conclusion of the same episode, had envisioned future streams of refugees escaping from a Europe sunk in "luxury, debauchery, venality, intestine quarrels, or other vices." It was even possible, Mayhew had added, "who knows?" that "our liberties being thus established, . . . on some future occasion . . . we or our posterity may even have the great felicity and honor to . . . keep Britain herself from ruin."⁴²

⁴¹ Samuel Williams, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country . . .* (Salem, 1775; JHL Pamphlet 55), pp. 21, 22, 23, 25, 26. Cf., e.g., Thomas Coombe, *A Sermon Preached . . .* (Philadelphia, 1775), pp. 19-20; [Richard Wells], *A Few Political Reflections . . .* (Philadelphia, 1774), pp. 38-40, 50.

⁴² Adams, *Dissertation*, in *Works*, III, 452n; Mayhew, *Snare Broken* (JHL 20), pp. 36, 38. The concept of America as a refuge for liberty was by no means an exclusively American notion. As early as 1735 James Thomson had celebrated the idea in his book-length poem *Liberty* (the relevant passage is quoted, and the secondary literature cited, in Bailyn, *Pamphlets*, I, 730). The idea that liberty was drifting steadily westward was commonly accepted; Thomas Pownall invoked the notion explicitly in the opening section of his *Administration of the Colonies*: he had long assumed, he wrote, "from the spirit and genius of the

Centred by
Some literary
ideology

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

Now, in 1774, that "future occasion" was believed to be at hand. After the passage of the Coercive Acts it could be said that "all the spirit of patriotism or of liberty now left in England" was no more than "the last snuff of an expiring lamp," while "the same sacred flame . . . which once showed forth such wonders in Greece and in Rome . . . burns brightly and strongly in America." Who ought then to suppress as "whimsical and enthusiastical" the belief that the colonies were to become "the foundation of a great and mighty empire, the largest the world ever saw to be founded on such principles of liberty and freedom, both civil and religious . . . [and] which shall be the principal seat of that glorious kingdom which Christ shall erect upon earth in the latter days"? America "ere long will build an empire upon the ruins of Great Britain; will adopt its constitution purged of its impurities, and from an experience of its defects will guard against those evils which have wasted its vigor and brought it to an untimely end." The hand of God was "in America now giving a new epocha to the history of the world."⁴³

In the invigorating atmosphere of such thoughts, the final conclusion of the colonists' logic could be drawn not with regret but with joy. For while everyone knew that when tyranny is abroad "submission is a crime"; while they readily acknowledged

people" that the colonies would "become in some future and perhaps not very distant age an asylum to that liberty of mankind which, as it hath been driven by corruption and the consequent tyranny of government, hath been constantly retiring westward" (4th ed., 1768, pp. 44-45). Beyond these specific references to America was the more abstract and general notion that overseas territories were the natural sanctuaries for liberty and virtue bedeviled by domestic corruption and authoritarianism. See, e.g., Andrew Eliot's confession of his thrill in reading of the regicide "honest General [Edmund] Ludlow's account of the generous protection afforded him by the magistrates of Berne, and felt a secret pleasure in the thought that there was such a land of liberty to be an asylum to patriots and virtue in distress." To Hollis, January 29, 1769, MHS *Colls.*, 4th ser., IV, 436.

⁴³ Rokeby, *Considerations*, p. 148; Ebenezer Baldwin, *The Duty of Rejoicing under Calamities and Afflictions . . .* (New York, 1776), p. 38; Hooper to Iredell, cited in note 40 above, pp. 985, 986.

ORIGINS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

that "no obedience is due to arbitrary, unconstitutional edicts calculated to enslave a free people"; and while they knew that the invasion of the liberties of the people "constitutes a state of war with the people" who may properly use "all the power which God has given them" to protect themselves—nevertheless they hesitated to come to a final separation even after Lexington and Bunker Hill. They hesitated, moving slowly and reluctantly, protesting "before God and the world that the utmost of [our] wish is that things may return to their old channel." They hesitated because their "*sentiments of duty and affection*" were sincere; they hesitated because their respect for constituted authority was great; and they hesitated too because their future as an independent people was a matter of doubt, full of the fear of the unknown.⁴⁴

But
hesitated
not because
it doubt in
their cause
truth of
conspiracy

What would an independent American nation be? A republic, necessarily—and properly, considering the character and circumstances of the people. But history clearly taught that republics were delicate polities, quickly degenerating into anarchy and tyranny; it was impossible, some said, to "recollect a single instance of a nation who supported this form of government for any length of time or with any degree of greatness." Others felt that independence might "split and divide the empire into a number of petty, insignificant states" that would easily fall subject to the will of "some foreign tyrant, or the more intolerable despotism of a few American demagogues"; the colonies might end by being "parceled out, Poland-like."

But if what the faint-hearted called "the ill-shapen, diminutive brat, INDEPENDENCY" contained within it all that remained of freedom; if it gave promise of growing great and strong and becoming the protector and propagator of liberty everywhere;

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Some Important Observations* (JHL 19), pp. 21, 23; [Robert Carter Nicholas], *Considerations on the Present State of Virginia Examined* ([Williamsburg], 1774), in the Earl G. Swem edition (New York, 1919), pp. 68, 42.

THE LOGIC OF REBELLION

if it were indeed true that "the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind"; if "Tis not the concern of a day, a year, or an age; posterity are virtually involved in the contest, and will be more or less affected even to the end of time by our proceedings now"—if all of this were true, ways would be found by men inspired by such prospects to solve the problems of a new society and government. And so let every lover of mankind, every hater of tyranny,

stand forth! Every spot of the old world is overrun with oppression. Freedom hath been hunted round the globe. Asia and Africa have long expelled her. Europe regards her like a stranger, and England hath given her warning to depart. O! receive the fugitive, and prepare in time an asylum for mankind.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Braxton, *Address* (JHL 66), p. 19; Seabury, *A View*, in Vance, *Letters of a Westchester Farmer*, pp. 12, 117; [Daniel Leonard] ("Massachusettensis"), *The Origin of the American Contest with Great-Britain . . .* (New York, 1775: JHL Pamphlet 56), p. 84; [Joseph Galloway], *A Candid Examination of the Mutual Claims of Great-Britain and the Colonies . . .* (New York, 1775), p. 31; [Thomas Paine], *Common Sense . . .* (Philadelphia, 1776: JHL Pamphlet 63), pp. [ii], 30, 60.