

Washington declared that all along he had believed that the conduct of "Mr. Thomas Digges towards the United States during the War . . . has not only been friendly, but I might add zealous." And those who doubted his devotion to the republic should look no further than "his activity and zeal (with considerable risque) in sending artizans and machines of public utility to this Country I mean by encouraging and facilitating their transportation."⁶

Digges was not the only American industrial spy in England. At least four others traveled around the English countryside in the late 1780s and early 1790s looking to recruit artisans and transport industrial technology to the New World. An anti-emigration pamphlet, published in London in the mid 1790s, declared that "there are plenty of agents hovering like birds of prey on the banks of the Thames, eager in their search for such artisans, mechanics, husbandmen, and labourers, as are inclinable to direct their course to America." The pamphleteer went on to warn potential immigrants that these agents were hired "at a considerable expense" by American manufacturers, "expressly for the purpose of inveigling them to quit their friends and connections" and seek "ideal romantic happiness, in a solitary uncultivated waste, little calculated, and still less capable of conferring the comforts and benefits of society." Digges, the pamphlet declared, was the worst of these offenders, though he was not the only one engaged "in such nefarious practices." The American industrial spy had approached an English gentleman and asked to be informed of "any persons desirous of emigrating to America" and offered to pay two guineas for each artisan and one for each immigrant laborer. Digges was a "designing villain" and a "very dangerous character," and prospective immigrants should shy away from this "artful" confidence trickster who preyed upon the "credulity of his audience."⁷

Digges's financial fortunes improved after his brother, who died in 1793, left him a handsome estate. He nevertheless continued to

engage in industrial espionage. When he heard that Jefferson was working on establishing an American mint he offered to help secure the assistance of Matthew Boulton who "is by far the neatest and best Coiner and has a more excellent Apparatus for Coining than any in Europe." He hoped that his activities would rehabilitate his reputation in the United States. Yet his trials and tribulations in behalf of American industry neither restored his reputation in the eyes of the American elite nor earned him the gratitude of his countrymen. Digges, who returned to his Maryland estate in 1799, lived the remaining two decades of his life in relative obscurity.⁸

The industrial spying career of Thomas Digges stands for the crucial transformation in American ideas about technology diffusion and technology piracy that took place in the 1790s. The first decade of national existence saw the most intense pursuit of English technology on the federal and state level. Initially, the constitutional provision to promote the useful arts was interpreted as a mandate to use the mechanism of the new national government effectively to appropriate forbidden European technology. These efforts were particularly successful in the textile industry as small-scale capacity to build and operate the newest mule spinning and Arkwright technologies sprang up in a variety of spots in the northeastern urban centers.

At the same time, however, a new understanding developed about the proper arena for technology piracy. A self-respecting government eager to join the international community on an equal basis could not flaunt its violation of the laws of other countries. Patterns established under the semi-anarchic circumstances of the Revolution and Confederation were inappropriate behavior for a respected member of the international community. This was all the more important for the nascent Washington administration, whose chief task was establishing legitimacy at home and abroad. To be sure, clandestine appropriation of English technology not only