

Productions as may best Answer for Returns to Great Britain." Thus the society offered premiums to encourage agricultural and textile technologies. It operated a putting-out linen factory that survived for some eighteen months employing some three hundred workers. (Linen was considered nonprovocative because it challenged continental, rather than British, production.) Nevertheless, the colony's governor had to explain to the Board of Trade that the American linen production did not endanger British mercantile domination. He stated that "No more than fourteen Looms are employed in it, and it was established in order to give Bread to several poor families which were a considerable charge to the city." The society disbanded in the aftermath of the Stamp Act crisis. Meanwhile, in the early stages of the imperial crisis, the colonists distanced themselves from open challenges to British manufactures. "One of the principal arguments made into use by the enemies of our Colonies," wrote an anonymous pamphleteer in 1765, was "that the inhabitants of these settlements have already set up a number of Manufactures, which must not only render the alliance of the mother country still less and less necessary, but materially affect its interest to boot." The colonists, however, "never attempted to set up any Manufactories which could possibly obstruct the Interest of this Kingdom."²⁷

As tensions between the metropolis and the colonies intensified, the British ministry reevaluated its industrial policy. Colonial borrowing and emulating of British technology challenged the basic principles of imperial mercantile policy. The Board of Trade requested in 1766 and 1768 that colonial governors prepare reports on all American manufacturing established since 1734. In 1774, in recognition that the colonies had become an economic adversary, Parliament prohibited the export of all textile machinery and tools to North America. A similar attitude emerged on the American side. The very same year the House of Burgesses directed Elisha and Robert White who set out to establish a woolen factory in Virginia

to import skilled workers from England. Before the first shots of the Revolution were fired, as far as technology was concerned, Britain and the colonists considered each other a rival.²⁸

The colonies rebelled just as the pace of industrialization and technological improvements picked up. Criticism of Britain's polarized society was a standard staple of revolutionary rhetoric. Pro-pagandists often referred to the connection between the emerging industrial political economy and the social and economic inequality that accompanied it, pointing to English urban centers as a prime example of social inequality and human misery. At the same time these very critics could not help noticing the improved productivity of English manufacturing. Reports of English mechanical inventions greatly excited American projectors. Private correspondence and the public press were full of accounts of various new enterprises, from the famous steam-powered grist mill at Blackfriars Bridge in London to innovations in the textile industry. American newspapers and magazines often copied from English and French sources the latest news of technological innovations. Thus, just as they were trying to protect the New World from the corruption of the Old, many became enthusiastic supporters of the mechanization of American industry. Paradoxically, the very same revolutionaries who rejected British society and politics focused from the outset on importing Britain's technology and industry to the United States.²⁹

The parliamentary legislation of the imperial crisis, from the Sugar Act to the Coercive Acts, stimulated efforts to develop local American manufactures. The revolutionaries rejected the efforts to restrict immigration, believing that, as Jefferson declared in 1774, "nature has given a right to all men" to leave "the country in which chance, not choice has placed them" for "new habitations." Nonimportation, the colonists' favorite anti-British measure prior to Lexington, and the successive British restrictions on American economic activities, brought about a spate of attempts to replace British