

# THE GLORIOUS CAUSE

The American Revolution  
1763-1789

*Revised and Expanded Edition*

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• Adv. Dis. EU. - 1776

WAR in North

→ B of LI - Howe vs Lee

DISCUSS:

- Articles of Confederation
- Swif -
- Indians in WAR

Retreat - no chase by H  
Trenton + Princeton - surprise

next plan - Cornwallis - no  
Burgoyne + Howe - 2 plans

Phila + Swif - 5000

French alliance - why -  
Evacuation of Phila - by the  
navy to west Indies

Peace Commission - 1778  
no success

WAR moves south - by  
close to W



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## 2

## The Children of the Twice-Born

English rigidities in government and in political imagination did not cramp the eighteenth-century American colonies. The colonies owed allegiance, and paid it, to the same king as England itself, but because their experience was different from the parent country's, this connection and those to imperial agencies of government did not restrict them. Distance from England and the slowness of communications helped keep the ties, those "political bands" Thomas Jefferson was to mention in the Declaration of Independence, slack. So also did the robust political institutions found in the mainland colonies—the provincial assemblies or legislatures and the county, town, and parish governments which gave order to their lives. Before 1776, the Americans had become almost completely self-governing.

And yet the crisis that came upon the English colonies in the American Revolution was constitutional. It raised the question of how men should be governed, or as the Americans came to say, whether they as free men could govern themselves. There had been conflict between individual colonies and the home government before; in fact there had been rebellions within several colonies against constituted authority; and there may have been a long-standing though submerged resentment within the colonies against external control. All the earlier upheavals, however, differed from the Revolution. For one thing, they lacked the scale and the convulsive quality of the Revolution. But more than that, they had not engaged the moral sensibilities of ordinary people in a profound way. In contrast the conflict that tore the British empire apart between 1764 and

1783 drew upon the deepest moral passions of Americans of virtually every sort and status.<sup>1</sup>

Why these Americans engaged in revolution had much to do with the sort of people they were. First of all, the Americans were a divided people, cut up among thirteen colonies on the mainland. They had no common political center, and London was really too far away to serve as such. When problems of governance arose the colonists naturally looked to their provincial capitals; many perhaps never gazed beyond town, parish, or county lines. They often looked farther afield in business, but their economies scarcely drew them together. If an American raised tobacco or rice he shipped it overseas; if he raised grain or milled flour or baked bread he often dealt in local markets, although a significant proportion of these commodities also found its way to the West Indies. If he had money and wore fine clothing, furnished his house with elegant furniture, drank good wine, rode in a handsome carriage, read extensively, the chances were that he used English and European products. If he needed heavy equipment, he also looked to England. He and his fellows consumed a variety of English manufactures—cotton goods, guns, and hardware of various sorts. And if he preferred local manufactures, he usually depended upon the production of his colony. There was relatively little intercolonial trade of great value.<sup>2</sup>

The divided character of the colonies can be overstated, for there were forces pulling them together. In the eighteenth century their economies, for example, gradually began to merge. Merchants in the leading cities dealt with one another on increasingly frequent occasions, though of course their most important ties remained with others overseas. Farmers whose produce went to foreign markets sometimes sold it—usually grain—to traders in nearby colonies. Still, most of a colony's production went to local markets or found its way to foreign merchants.

With each colony virtually independent of every other colony, political cooperation did not flourish, and most of the time no one tried to pull the colonies together. When the attempt was made, usually to meet a problem of common concern such as Indian relations or war, it was not suc-

1. A model study of an important earlier upheaval is David S. Lovejoy, *The Glorious Revolution in America* (New York, 1972).
2. Stuart Bruchey, *The Roots of American Economic Growth, 1607-1861* (New York, 1965), 1-73; Richard Pares, *Yankees and Creoles: The Trade Between North America and the West Indies Before the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956); James B. Hedges, *The Browns of Providence Plantations: Colonial Years* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

cessful. The Albany Congress of 1754, held on the eve of the French and Indian War, as the Seven Years War was called in America, attracted delegates from six colonies. These men deliberated at length over grand plans for a union of colonies submitted by Thomas Hutchinson of Massachusetts and by no less than Benjamin Franklin of Pennsylvania and produced one of their own. Carried back to the legislatures this plan went the way of other similar proposals—into oblivion.<sup>3</sup>

The colonies at midcentury apparently could not attain even rudimentary unity, or at least showed no desire to attain it. Sunk in localism each clutched at its own institutions or looked across the Atlantic to Britain. All in all there seemingly could be no crisis great enough to bring them together.

## II

There was, however, a standard culture throughout the colonies, not strictly American, but one heavily indebted to England. For the most part the institutions of politics and government on all levels followed English models; the "official" language, that is, the language used by the governing bodies and colonial leadership, was English; the established churches were English; prevailing social values were also English. Yet the culture was only imperfectly homogeneous. Population growth and physical expansion had weakened English dominance; the standard culture retained its English cast but the presence of large bodies of non-English populations eroded its English texture.

The largest non-English group was the blacks, slaves brought by force from Africa and the West Indies. Altogether, there were around 400,000 in the mainland colonies in 1775, approximately 17 percent of the population. To most of their white masters they seemed all cut from the same cloth, in their oppressive blackness, curly hair, and indistinguishable features. In fact, of course, they were men and women torn from cultures which had achieved their own kind of distinction several centuries earlier. The African societies had been unknown to Europe before the sixteenth century, and even after that they were slow to receive European science and technology. West African kings, however, quickly grasped the importance of firearms and also proved remarkably adept in accommodating European demands for captive labor with their own control of the long flourishing internal trade in slaves.<sup>4</sup>

3. See *BF Papers*, V, 337–416, and the references cited in the footnotes.

4. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970* (Bicentennial ed., Washington, D.C., 1975), 1168. (The figure given for 1770 is 459,822.)

Next to the Africans, the largest non-English group of immigrants was the Scotch-Irish, the Ulstermen from Northern Ireland. These people were the children of another earlier migration, the thousands of Scots and English who had moved to Ulster in Ireland in the seventeenth century when Anglican kings and later the Independent Lord Protector, Oliver Cromwell, drove Irish Catholics from their lands, replacing them with good trustworthy Protestants.<sup>5</sup>

These beneficiaries of religious persecution soon became its victims. In the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution the English Parliament, carefully protective of Anglicans, led its Irish counterpart to bar Presbyterians from all civil and military offices under the Crown, and to remove those holding posts as judges and postmasters. More galling perhaps were the taxes the Presbyterians were forced to pay to the Church of England. These indignities might have been borne by most, but English policy soon cut down opportunities to make a living by discriminating against wool, cattle, and linen from Ireland. This blow was too much, and the poor, the desperate, and the adventurous among the Irish began to leave for the New World.

The first stop for arrivals in the early eighteenth century was New England. The Congregationalists there recognized the Scotch-Irish as part of the Protestant brotherhood and, not incidentally, as useful buffers along the frontier recently ravaged by Indians. The Scotch-Irish were a tough resourceful people—dogmatic and inflexible in their faith, and most important, given the present state of the country, ferocious in combat. They after all had endured years of persecution and bloodletting by English monarchs. Hence the Scotch-Irish were welcomed, for example, in Worcester, a frontier community in 1713 when they began to arrive. In the next few years others settled on the west bank of the Connecticut River, in southern New Hampshire, on Casco Bay in Maine, all remote and defenseless areas.

These immigrants did not come to America overburdened with money and possessions. Some had a hard time getting a start: to the west there was good land, but bringing it under cultivation, building houses, buying tools and stock required more money than they had. Not surprisingly, a number who arrived in poverty remained poor. Several New Englanders pitied them, Cotton Mather for one, but more seem to have wished that the Scotch-Irish would go elsewhere, for poor relief was

5. James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1962), 157–325.

expensive. In the next twenty years, some arrivals were warned to leave, others were denied the right to land in Boston. In 1729, for example, a mob in Boston forcibly resisted the debarkation of Irish. The Scotch-Irish already in New England absorbed their share of abuse too. Those in Worcester attempted to build a church in 1738 only to have their Protestant neighbors tear it down. Within a few more years most of the Scotch-Irish there and elsewhere in New England gave up and looked for friendlier places to settle.

Whether they came from New England or directly from Ulster, the newcomers found hospitality in the middle colonies and after 1740 began pouring through New York City and Philadelphia to the west where they settled along the Delaware and the Susquehanna. Still others pushed to the Ohio and to what is now Pittsburgh. As these areas filled, the Scotch-Irish moved southward into western Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. Some followed a more direct route to the southern backcountry through Charleston, the one major port in the southern colonies. In all these areas, the Ulsterites turned to farming, growing grains, and raising stock, and in the process established themselves between the Indians and the East.

While the Scotch-Irish flowed in and made their way to the backcountry, another sort of immigrant arrived, lacking the toughness and, perhaps, the religious zeal of the Scotch-Irish but bringing skills of their own unrivaled anywhere in America. This group was from Germany and included large numbers of Lutherans, Reformed, Moravians, and smaller numbers of Mennonites. They had been preceded by small numbers from Germany in the seventeenth century; for example, the settlement that came to be called Germantown in Pennsylvania was made in 1683. William Penn, the founder of the colony, was largely responsible for stimulating this early migration. Penn wanted to draw the persecuted from Europe; the Germans were especially attractive in their quiet devotion to religion and farming. They were undoubtedly the best farmers in the colonies.<sup>6</sup>

Penn brought one group who organized themselves as the Frankfurt Company, an agency that collected men and money. A second body soon followed led by Johann Kelpius, a millenarian saint who yearned for the end of this evil world and the beginning of a better. One of his followers similarly hopeful and claiming inspiration predicted the beginning of the millennium in 1694. Though it did not come, the faith remained solid, and these Germans lost none of their zeal for God and the land.

6. Andrews, *Colonial Period*, III, 302-3.

In the eighteenth century before the Revolution, at least 100,000 Germans poured into America, settling like the Scotch-Irish in the west and drifting steadily down the Shenandoah Valley. Pennsylvania absorbed the greatest number, and by 1775 Germans made up about one-third of its population. There were also sizable companies extending as far south as Georgia by midcentury.

These peoples resembled one another more than they did anyone else, but there were differences among them—the Swiss Mennonites kept to themselves, as did the Dunkers, and the Schwenkfelders, sectarians from Silesia. Two large groups, the Lutherans and the Reformed, held conventional Christian attitudes toward war; in contrast, the Moravians and the Mennonites did not and remained quietist, passive, and uninterested in politics.

These groups contained the largest numbers of white immigrants in the eighteenth century. There were others, some of whom had come in the seventeenth century and who in various ways left their mark: the Dutch, Swedes, Finns in the middle colonies; the sprinkling of Jews in the cities; and the scattered Welsh, Irish, and French, no more than a few thousand at the most. Among the late arrivals were the Scots, of whom perhaps 25,000 came in the generation before the Revolution. The Highland Scots came last of all in the 1760s, pushed out by poverty. They settled in pockets in the middle colonies and in the Carolinas.<sup>7</sup>

All these peoples, Scotch-Irish, Germans, Dutch, Scots, and the rest, had one characteristic in common. They had been selected by desperate conditions at home and, surely as important, by something within themselves. Millions of their compatriots had remained in Europe, enduring religious persecution and suffering poverty, straining to get a living from thin soil and fat landlords. Those who came may or may not have been stronger than those who stayed, but whatever the case they were peoples who could not stand further oppression whether in poverty or persecution. They were those who resisted or fled; they were eccentric in this sense at least—deviants who cut themselves off from the comfortable and the successful. In class they were, in the language of the eighteenth century, “the middling and the poorer sort.”

### III

Besides subtly diluting the English cast of society, immigration contributed to the growth of the American population. The natural increase of a fertile

7. Ian Charles Cargill Graham, *Colonists from Scotland: Emigration to North America, 1707-1783* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1956), 185-89.

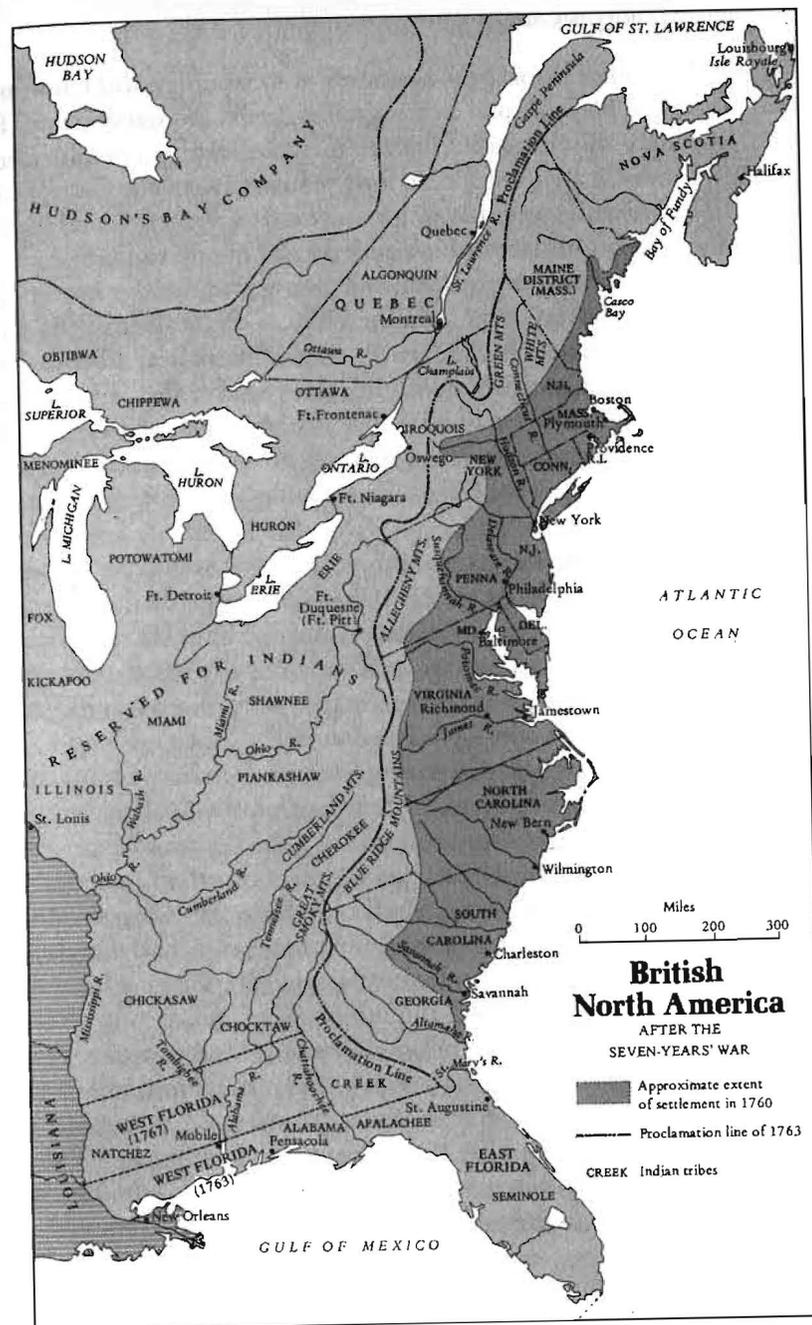
people played an even more important part throughout the eighteenth century. A comparison of population statistics will provide some notion of just how explosive population growth was. In 1700 the thirteen colonies numbered around 250,000 people; at the time of independence their population had reached 2,500,000—at least ten times what it had been. The growth was not evenly spread throughout the colonies, and it did not proceed at the same rate every year—or every decade. The most reliable estimates hold that it doubled every twenty or twenty-five years, a staggering change.<sup>8</sup>

Most of the growth occurred in the countryside, on farms and in villages, where more than 90 percent of all Americans lived. The cities also added people to themselves. In the thirty years before 1775, Philadelphia swelled from 13,000 to 40,000; New York from 11,000 to 25,000; Charleston from 6,800 to 12,000; Newport from 6,200 to 11,000. Only Boston's population remained stable in this thirty-year period at around 16,000. All of these cities were seaports, and commerce supported their existence. Each served inland areas, which sent agricultural surpluses to them and absorbed the manufactures imported from overseas or in some cases fashioned in their small shops.<sup>9</sup>

The increase in numbers of people in America helped produce a slow but uneven expansion in the colonies' economies. This expansion was a part of a sustained increase of population, urban and westward movements, and increases in agricultural production, shipping, and overseas trade. The southern colonies grew more rapidly than those to the north, largely as a result of the increase in the numbers of slaves in the eighteenth century.

Trade of almost all sorts expanded. In 1688 the colonies sent 28 million pounds of tobacco to Britain; in 1771, 105 million. Charleston, South Carolina, shipped eight times as much rice in 1774 as it did in 1725. Altogether the value of colonial exports to Britain in 1775 exceeded by sevenfold the value of those at the beginning of the century. Exports of bread, meat, grains, fish, plus a variety of other commodities, showed large increases in the century. Imports of goods from Britain, the West Indies, and Europe also increased—in some cases in great volume.<sup>10</sup>

Whether this expansion represented actual economic growth probably cannot be known with certainty—cannot, that is, if economic growth is taken to mean an increase in production or income per capita. Economic historians tell us that in the eighteenth century there was an increase in



8. *Historical Statistics*, 1168.

9. Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 5, 216.

10. *Historical Statistics*, 1189–91 (tobacco exports), 1192–93 (rice).

the output per unit of labor. Improvements in technology, though minor by later standards, played a part in this growth, as did foreign demands for colonial products which made a more efficient use of resources necessary. But the most important forces for expansion were the increase in land available per man—a result of the westward movement—and the increase in the number of slaves which added to labor and capital.<sup>11</sup>

The expansion of the population and the economy, the movement westward and, to a lesser extent, into the cities made for flux in the societies of the English colonies. The wars with the French and Spanish in the eighteenth century accentuated tendencies toward boom and recession, contributing to what has been called “variable instability.”<sup>12</sup> Undergoing so many changes, the societies themselves are difficult to describe. Although much is known about them, less is understood about their structure and internal workings.

Besides flux they were characterized by a tendency toward the stratification of classes. At one end of society, upper classes gradually separated themselves in wealth and styles of life from everyone else. At the other end, lower classes, small in numbers but genuinely impoverished, made their appearance in the cities. The largest single group of colonials belonged to a middle group of farmers who owned and cultivated their own land.

In the countryside large landowners, a few with hundreds of thousands of acres, set themselves off; these landed magnates with their immense holdings were largely nonresident proprietors. The Penns, with over forty million acres, were the largest, but the Carterets in the Carolinas, the Calverts in Maryland, and Lord Fairfax in Virginia (who eventually moved there) all made claims to several million acres. A few years before the Revolution began these grandees were receiving returns from their lands rivaling the incomes of great English landed families.<sup>13</sup>

The cities also contained men of large fortunes. Most were merchants, though some combined commerce and law, and others branched out into manufacturing. The Browns of Providence, for example, put up an iron forge and, like several others in New England, manufactured candles from spermaceti oil, the head-matter of sperm whales. Ironmakers were more common in Pennsylvania and not all engaged in a general trade

11. Bruchey, *Roots of American Economic Growth*, 22–23.

12. G. B. Warden, “Inequality and Instability in Eighteenth-Century Boston: A Reappraisal,” *JH*, 6 (1976), 593.

13. Rowland Berthoff and John M. Murrin, “Feudalism, Communalism and the Yeoman Freeholder,” in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., and New York, 1973), 267n, fn. 27.

overseas. Many did, however; for them the production of pig iron was one of several money-making businesses.<sup>14</sup>

Commerce generated most of the great fortunes in the cities. By the middle of the eighteenth century a number of merchants in the principal cities, through their connections with the larger Atlantic world inside and outside the British empire, had made their names as well as their wealth well known—at least locally. An increasing number intermarried, and a few joined their families across colonial boundaries. Thus the Redwoods of Newport, Ervings of Boston, Allens, Shippens, and Francisces of Philadelphia, DeLanceys of New York, and Izards of Charleston established familial connections in other colonies.<sup>15</sup>

The great landowners along the Hudson Valley in New York and the big planters in Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina may have possessed even greater wealth. A number of these planters owned thousands of acres, cultivated a relatively small portion themselves, and leased the remainder. These landed magnates made up a rural aristocracy, and some consciously imitated English models.

Several of the great landlords owed their start to seventeenth-century charters and land patents. The charters were worthless for more than a hundred years after they were first issued even though they provided that feudal dues—rents, fees, and quit rents—should be paid their holders. The holders, however, could not collect what the charters said was owed them since the population to give these obligations reality did not exist in the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, when colonial population virtually exploded, the holders of the original grants—the Penns and the Calverts, for example—made the old charters pay off.

A few “feudal lords,” a large number of great merchants, planters, and wealthy lawyers made their way to the top. There is some evidence that the long-run “trend” in the seventy-five years before the American Revolution entailed an increasing concentration of wealth in such groups. One historian holds that the richest 5 percent in Boston increased its share of taxable wealth between 1687 and 1774 from 30 to 49 percent. In Philadelphia a comparable group built up its holdings from 33 percent to 55 percent. The difficulty with these figures lies in the fact that in 1774 taxable wealth was assessed differently from 1687.<sup>16</sup>

14. The standard study of iron production in Pennsylvania is Arthur G. Bining, *Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture in the Eighteenth Century* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1938).

15. Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 346.

16. Gary B. Nash, “Urban Wealth and Poverty in Pre-Revolutionary America,” *JH*, 6 (1976), 545–84.

Several historians have recently compiled a good many other statistics, most of which show that social stratification occurred in the eighteenth century. In Boston and Philadelphia, to cite a different sort of example, the lower half of society held 5 percent of the taxable wealth. Using another sort of measurement, a historian has established that between 1720 and 1770 in Philadelphia the percentage paying no taxes rose from 2.5 percent to 10.6 percent. He estimates that by 1772 one of four adult men in Philadelphia was poor by the standards of the day; of this poor group half either received some sort of public aid or spent part of the year in the workhouse, the almshouse, or the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Sick Poor; the other half owned so little real property that they paid no taxes.<sup>17</sup>

The abstractness of the statistics conceals the bleakness of the lives of these urban poor. There is little doubt that some went hungry; some lived in dreadfully cramped and unsanitary housing; some did not receive medical treatment when sick. From at least the 1750s on, these poor included new sorts of people—veterans of the midcentury wars and perhaps a larger number of victims of the instabilities produced by the wars and the increasing population growth. Not surprisingly they protested when they found the strength, rioting in the streets for bread and presumably for some public recognition of their problems.

Bread riots in the cities brought very little bread or anything else. None of these riots was large in the eighteenth century; none really threatened the control of public authority. The cities themselves, though major institutions of the colonial economy, contained relatively few people. At least 90 percent of the colonial population lived in towns and villages of no more than 8000 people. And the majority of the 90 percent lived on farms or in hamlets. The impoverished classes of the cities included a very small proportion of native-born Americans. More of the poor lived on farms and plantations than in cities. Even here they were not numerous.<sup>18</sup>

Although the majority of Americans who worked the soil owned their land, landless laborers lived in all colonies. Many leased land which they cultivated with an independence approaching that of freeholders, a group they hoped to join. Three colonies—New York, Virginia, and Maryland—held the largest numbers of tenants. At first sight, a New World feudalism seemed to have existed in parts of these colonies.

17. Ibid.

18. These generalizations are drawn from social histories of the colonial period and from *Historical Statistics*.

On the surface no area of English America looked more feudal than the Hudson Valley in New York. Large “manors” had been carved out there, with six of the most impressive located on the east side of the river. Their holders, the landlords, may have at times fancied themselves to be Old World feudal “barons,” and they did enjoy some of the privileges and exemptions of the breed. For example, some held patents which authorized them to hold courts leet and baron, exercising criminal and civil jurisdiction; several by the terms of their patents controlled hunting and fishing, the cutting of timber, and the milling of grain. A few could even appoint a clergyman for their manors. Most claimed the right of escheat, and practically all could repossess their property if tenants failed to pay the rent. Landlords could also require their tenants to work a few days a year on fences and roads.<sup>19</sup>

Practice often diverged from the claims to these rights. For the application of these rights proved uneven and in some cases nonexistent. Courts leet and baron rarely appeared despite the authorization of charters and patents. County courts filled their places and provided judicial services. As for most of the other rights, they remained unexercised or of minor importance when they were enforced.

Tenancy was not a desirable condition though many desired it. Tenants worked the lands of the great Hudson Valley manors and paid their rents along with a certain deference to the great men who ran things. Yet the tenants’ lot was not so bad as these statements may imply, for they did not make up a European peasantry permanently tied down by their obligations to others. The Hudson Valley lords had more land than they could use, and in the eighteenth century they were under pressure from the English government—which wanted the fees that leases of land produced—to get it into production. The presence of squatters and settlers from Connecticut and Massachusetts also helped persuade the landholders to put their lands into production. As a result, landlords began to attempt to lure squatters, who paid nothing, into becoming tenants, who might be made to pay something. The landlords offered leases that required no payments of rent for the first few years, and they also lent tenants tools and livestock.<sup>20</sup>

These techniques worked, or at least they attracted tenants. But tenants usually aspired to become freeholders, and they signed leases only in order

19. Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664-1775* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 87-128.

20. Patricia Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York, 1971), 196-97.

to get a start—not to perpetuate their own dependency. They farmed as tenants, accumulated income, and then bought their own places. By the time of the Revolution the Hudson Valley lords were getting used to a remarkable turnover among their tenants.

Tenants in Maryland, especially those of proprietary manors, led lives rather different from those of tenants in New York. For them tenancy offered little promise of moving up into the freeholder class. Rather they led stable lives, or lived for decades in the same places, usually in poverty, cultivating the same ground. They leased this land for decades, and some inherited their leases from parents who had lived and died on proprietary manors. Still others leased lands near the land leased by their fathers. Only a few owned any land, and probably fewer still owned a slave or two. Those on the eastern shore, where wheat was grown, were better off than those who cultivated tobacco. But for both sorts life went on in miserable circumstances—large families crowded into small houses, farming with primitive techniques, few livestock and barns, and indebtedness the common conditions.<sup>21</sup>

#### IV

No political system ever perfectly expresses the needs of its society. No society in the English colonies constructed political arrangements completely faithful to itself. Their governments arose from English sources such as charters, patents, and the instructions of the Crown, and their leaders counted among themselves a number who had been appointed in England by the Crown, or, in the eighteenth century, in Pennsylvania and Maryland, by proprietors.

There were other circumstances distinguishing American politics, and several more important than the English connection in giving them form and substance. Representative government prevailed in all thirteen colonies, and representation was virtually always tied to land. Since even by the middle of the eighteenth century land was still fairly easy to acquire, a majority of white adult males could exercise the vote in provincial elections. Outright ownership—fee simple—was not always among the qualifications required of a voter. A leasehold brought the right to vote in New York, where thousands of tenants trooped to the polls on election day.<sup>22</sup>

21. Gregory A. Stiverson, *Poverty in a Land of Plenty: Tenancy in Eighteenth-Century Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 137–42.

22. Chilton Williamson, *American Suffrage from Property to Democracy, 1760–1860* (Princeton, N.J., 1960), 13, 17–28.

Like the English government, the American divided up the spoils of office, kept the peace, and most of the time at least kept order. But they did more. Colonial assemblies had their versions of Lord Boodle, though the Boodles of America were never lords. These worthies usually held forth in the lower houses, where the real power lay by 1750. The American Boodles worried over much more than the division of political offices. The political loaves and fishes did not amount to much in the colonies, and what there was fell to some dim secretary of state in England or occasionally the royal governor, to distribute. Boodles in America chased bigger game—land which might be held for speculation or seated in plantations. They also had contracts to award, contracts for the supplies and equipment needed in the frequent wars of the century, contracts for roads, bridges, wharves, and other facilities essential to a developing economy.

These activities suggest that colonial governments had much to do compared with their English counterpart, and thirteen little Parliaments, as the assemblies liked to style themselves, offered lively arenas for their energies. With so much at stake the assemblies often found themselves the scene of considerable conflict. And indeed a factionalism sometimes described as noisy and turbulent marked most of their proceedings in the years before the Revolution. But not every colony found itself divided or disturbed by factions. Virginia, one of the greatest of all the colonies, sometimes enjoyed lively elections, but its politics were usually tranquil. A landed elite ran things, most often in the interest of a broad public and only occasionally in its own. Political life flowed a course equally calm in New Hampshire in the twenty-five years before the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765 because Benning Wentworth and an elite were in charge. Wentworth and an aristocracy composed of relatives and friends dominated political life in New Hampshire between 1741 and 1767 as no other group did elsewhere. Liberal in dispensing political patronage and grants of land, Wentworth relied on a satisfied Council and judiciary to help him run the government. The lower house also learned to admire him as its members received land—once an entire township—and flattering attention. Wentworth did not just bribe his way into the affections of his constituents, he protected their interests, especially their interests in the trade in masts, lumber, and ships. The mast trade and lumber business so consumed labor in New Hampshire that grain sometimes had to be imported. Protecting this trade often meant that Wentworth had to violate his instructions which called on him to protect the king's right to the

woods. Wentworth never seemed to mind; nor apparently did anyone else in New Hampshire, where safe and stable government prevailed.<sup>23</sup>

The tranquility that distinguished the politics of Virginia and New Hampshire, and one or two others, set them apart from most colonies. Next door to New Hampshire, politics in Massachusetts followed a course common to most of the colonies with factions struggling for control. In Massachusetts, as elsewhere, much of the strife twisted around the governor, who normally led a miserable life. One of those of the early part of the century, Joseph Dudley, deserved his fate; although his successors, Samuel Shute, William Burnet, and Jonathan Belcher, did not, they endured even more savage struggles with local factions. William Shirley, who served as governor between 1741 and 1757, enjoyed political peace because he had wars with France to fight. Those wars armed him with patronage and contracts to distribute, means he used to disarm his opposition.<sup>24</sup>

Not even war could keep Pennsylvania's factions from tearing at one another during much of the eighteenth century. As in Massachusetts, the governor customarily absorbed many blows. But the governor of Pennsylvania had his own peculiar problems—he was the representative of an absentee proprietor, one of the heirs of William Penn, who refused to allow his large holdings of land to be taxed. On the eve of the agitation of the 1760s, disenchantment with Thomas Penn, who had acceded to the proprietorship in 1746, had reached an intensity that led Benjamin Franklin and others to attempt to persuade the Crown to take over the colony's government.<sup>25</sup> Franklin failed, but his effort hardly contributed to a politics of calm.

New Yorkers found other reasons for dividing into factions which contested with one another as vigorously as they did with the royal governor. Rhode Island elected its governor and scarcely even saw a royal official other than those in the Customs service. But factions appeared nonetheless and added to the colony's reputation of crankiness. Maryland and

23. Charles S. Syndor, *Gentlemen Freeholders: Political Practices in Washington's Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1952), passim; Jere Daniell, "Politics in New Hampshire under Governor Benning Wentworth, 1741-1767," *WMQ*, 3rd Ser., 23 (1966), 76-105.

24. John A. Schutz, *William Shirley* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961).

25. James H. Hutson, *Pennsylvania Politics, 1746-1770: The Movement for Royal Government and Its Consequences* (Princeton, N.J., 1972). For an earlier period of Pennsylvania's politics, see Alan Tully, *William Penn's Legacy: Politics and Social Structure in Provincial Pennsylvania, 1726-1755* (Baltimore, 1977). Tully discounts conflict in Pennsylvania politics in an interesting and valuable book.

North Carolina differed from Rhode Island in many ways, and from one another, but periodically they too tied themselves and their governor in factional knots.<sup>26</sup>

Factions nourished themselves from offices and from the resources in the hands of the powerful. They also drew sustenance from conflict, but they did not tear the political society apart. They recognized that limits existed and that exceeding them might bring the political system to collapse. For there were rules by which the factional game was played. The rules barred the use of violence against the opposition. The colonial Booble knew enough history to recognize the dangers of force. In the seventeenth century most of the major colonies had endured rebellion. Such upheaval dismayed men of the next century who also knew of the English Civil War. They recognized that there was much at stake—political offices, an undeveloped continent, and social order itself. The opportunities for able men to grab and then to grab more enticed many into unprincipled action and made for political struggle. But these opportunities also helped keep them in bounds, made them reluctant to go too far, and made them wary of conflict over principles from which there would be no turning back.

Factionalism thus took form in the enveloping stability of the century. The forces that made for conflict, paradoxically, contributed to political order as well. In the colonial constituencies, for example, most white men could vote. A large electorate could induce strenuous electioneering, but it gave men a sense that they had been included within the political system. Governments with considerable powers may have tempted men to strive to control them, but they also induced restraint, an accommodation to the reality of the relationships among the institutions of society.

The sense of these relationships in the eighteenth century was weaker than it had been when the colonies were founded, but it retained importance nonetheless. At its heart lay the belief that the agencies of the state were connected to all other institutions—families, churches, even schools and colleges. The precise nature of the connections appeared indistinct,

26. Among many excellent books on New York, Stanley N. Katz, *Newcastle's New York: Anglo-American Politics, 1732-1753* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968) stands out. For Rhode Island, see Lovejoy, *Rhode Island Politics*; for Maryland, Charles Barker, *The Background of the Revolution in Maryland* (New Haven, Conn., 1940) and Donnell M. Owings, *His Lordship's Patronage: Offices of Profit in Colonial Maryland* (Baltimore, 1953); for North Carolina, Jack P. Greene, *The Quest for Power: The Lower Houses of Assembly in the Southern Royal Colonies, 1689-1776* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1953). The best general account is Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968).

yet the connections were there. Men of affairs undoubtedly took reassurance from the persistence of patrician leadership, for in virtually every colonial institution the “better sort” led the way. This leadership, drawn from the comfortable classes generation after generation, gave evidence to lesser men of the permanence of society and political institutions.

Thus colonial politics and society contained some contradictions and some surprising agreements and unities. Though dominated by property owners and entrepreneurs, the economy remained colonial—subject to regulation from abroad which aimed among other things to restrict its growth. Yet it grew nonetheless. Society on the eve of the Revolution was heavily English in composition; yet it had absorbed large numbers of migrants from the European continent. The political order, modeled in rough on the representative institutions of England, was presided over by governors who, except in Connecticut and Rhode Island, were appointed in the home country. Yet local interest managed to get their way in most matters despite instructions to the contrary that these governors carried with them. And though eagerness to govern themselves often led the American colonials to fall into factions, they observed rules that made politics tolerable.

## V

Religion, especially after 1740, displayed similar contradictions. In nine colonies an established church—one that received public taxes—held forth. But the most fervent believers remained outside its doors with no intention of applying for admission. They followed the call of the Spirit and despised the formality and the rationalism—they called it sin—in the established bodies. Even these enthusiasts differed among themselves on many matters. The sacraments aroused disagreements, as did the qualifications of their clergy, the education of their children, and the order of worship.<sup>27</sup>

Congregationalists with a desire for purity had settled New England in the seventeenth century, and they continued to insist on their version of it for themselves, though not for others, in the eighteenth. After the turn of the century they had to contend with increasingly powerful groups of Anglicans, Quakers, and Baptists who fought for exemptions from paying taxes to the Congregational establishment and thereby demonstrated an aversion in common. But these groups agreed on little else. Nor did

27. For the background of religion in early America, see Sidney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, Conn., 1972).

harmony prevail within the individual groups. Bitter disputes threatened unity, especially after the Great Awakening, the religious revival of the 1740s that shattered so much that was conventional in Protestantism. The Baptists, for example, divided into “separate” and “regular” branches, and struggles between “New Lights” and “Old Lights” rent the established order. Still, the Congregationalists proved their staying power, especially in Massachusetts and Connecticut, where they received public support well into the nineteenth century.<sup>28</sup>

The New England churches look tame compared with those of the middle colonies. There a genuine religious pluralism prevailed by the mid-eighteenth century. Pluralism helped create religious freedom eventually, but for much of the century a spirit of toleration barely breathed. Even the Quakers, who had taken the lead in founding Pennsylvania late in the seventeenth century and who had clung together under persecution in England, often disputed among themselves in America. In any case, the eighteenth century was only about twenty years old when other sects and churches in the colony could count more members. But although they were outnumbered, the Quakers continued to dominate the government until midcentury wars and the Presbyterians eased them out of power.

The Presbyterians drew their members from New England and from northern Ireland. The New English and the Scotch-Irish proved no more able to get along with one another in America than they had in England. There were sizable numbers of Presbyterians in New York, New Jersey, and Delaware, as well as in Pennsylvania; and everywhere they found more than nationality to struggle over. The qualifications of ministers, subscription to creeds, and governance all ignited fiery spirits. In 1741, the conflagration that was the Great Awakening burned them apart, as the “New Side Presbyterians” set up their own synod in New York and the “Old Side” gathered under the Synod of Philadelphia. The New Side, which favored the new measures of the revival, made itself felt from the Hudson Valley south into North Carolina; and when the schism of 1741 gave way to the reunion of 1758, the Presbyterian Church included more members than any other in the middle colonies.

Had the Old Side not proved so sluggish, the Presbyterians might have gained even more converts. The Philadelphia Synod, staggered by the schism of 1741, never really regained its balance. The most difficult problem was to reconstruct its fragmented ministry, a challenge it might have met

28. C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (New Haven, Conn., 1962).

had it established a seminary for the training of clergy. For a time after 1741 the Old Side seemed to have an opportunity of merging with the German Reformed Church in Pennsylvania. Whether this possibility was ever more than a hope is impossible to say, and had a merger occurred, the problems of the Presbyterians might have doubled. Yet it might also have encouraged efforts to convert the Scotch-Irish immigrants who were making their way to western Pennsylvania and, in many instances, moving from there down the Shenandoah Valley into Virginia and the Carolinas.<sup>29</sup>

The Germans in Pennsylvania could not have reached the Scotch-Irish had they tried. Cut off from much in mid-eighteenth-century life by their language and culture, the Germans remained largely isolated from those surrounding them. The German Reformed and the Lutherans faced severe problems in forming their churches. Those who emigrated to America do not seem to have had strong religious convictions, and since they came as individuals, often as bonded servants, they initially had no churches to join. German laymen had not usually offered much leadership in the Old World churches, and in America they found few ministers to pull them together. Other German churches—Mennonites, Dunkers, and Moravians were the most numerous—were better organized and held themselves together in Pennsylvania.<sup>30</sup>

The colony also harbored a variety of other reformed sects of several nationalities—other Germans, Dutch, Swedes, a handful of French and Jews. None of these groups could rival the Quakers and Presbyterians in numbers or power. The one large group which could—and did—was English, and it was in the Anglican Church. The Church of England in Pennsylvania as elsewhere remained largely unaffected by the revival. Yet even in Pennsylvania there were small rumblings within a fringe, a fringe of piety that would eventually discover itself to be Methodist.

Although New York housed many of the religious groups found in Pennsylvania, a rather different religious road was followed. The Presbyterians there pushed their faith outward to New Jersey and southward, but most other churches and sects did not. If pluralism in New York did not lead to indifference, neither did it produce much piety. The Great Awakening largely left New York cold. There were small revivals in Manhattan and Staten Island, but elsewhere revival failed. Henry Muhlenberg on a

29. This discussion of colonial Presbyterianism is based on Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Philadelphia, 1949).

30. Ahlstrom, *Religious History*, 230–59; Joseph E. Illick, *Colonial Pennsylvania: A History* (New York, 1976), 243–45.

visit in 1750 to a Lutheran church in New York City remarked that “it is easier to be a cowherd or a shepherd in many places in Germany than to be a preacher here. . . .”<sup>31</sup>

Preachers in the Dutch Reformed Church would have agreed with this assessment. And perhaps they would have preferred indifference to the bitterness that marked the struggles within their congregations. No great doctrinal principles incited the combatants, who fought instead for power. The two sides pitted America against the Netherlands—the English language against the Dutch in the affairs of the church and the authority of the local congregation against the Classis in Amsterdam. The split occurred in 1754 and was not healed until just before the Revolution. Something of the same conflict was enacted at about the same time in New Jersey.<sup>32</sup>

In the southern colonies the Anglican Church had most things relating to religion under its thumb, including the tax support of the public, but in the years after 1740, it learned that religious enthusiasts were not averse to challenging its dominance. The Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who moved down the Valley into the backcountry did not admire the style of the great planters and did not intend always to pay taxes for the support of a faith they did not share. The Baptists, poorer and much less aware politically, constituted silent communities of simple men and women determined to worship in their own way and to avoid the sins of excess they detected in the high-living Anglicans. Even within the established church itself an increasing number, awakened by the revival, found the old pieties and the traditional preaching unsatisfactory. Without quite knowing it, in their search for holy experience they moved toward Methodism.<sup>33</sup>

## VI

Although Americans entered the revolt against Britain in several ways, their religion proved important in all of them, important even to the lukewarm and the indifferent. It did because, more than anything else in America, religion shaped culture. And as different as the colonies were, they possessed

31. Quoted in Michael Kammen, *Colonial New York: A History* (New York, 1975), 231.

32. *Ibid.*, 235–37. I have learned much about the religion of the middle colonies from Martin E. Lodge, “The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies” (unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1964); and Lodge, “The Crisis of the Churches in the Middle Colonies, 1720–1775,” *PMHB*, 95 (1971), 195–220.

33. G. M. Brydon, *Virginia's Mother Church* (2 vols., Richmond, Va., 1947), for Anglicanism; and Rhys Isaac, “Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765–1775,” *WMQ*, 3rd Ser., 31 (1974), 345–68, for the Baptists.

a common culture—values, ideals, a way of looking at and responding to the world—which held them together in the crisis of upheaval and war. To be sure the churches in the colonies differed from one another. But beneath the surface their similarities were even more striking—a governance so dominated by laymen as to constitute a congregational democracy, a clergy much weaker than its European analogue, and a religious life marked by attenuated liturgies and an emphasis on individual experience. This last characteristic was not prominent in the Anglican Church, but worship even in Anglican establishments partook considerably of low-church practice.

Laymen assumed authority in churches of all sorts, had to assume it or else the churches might not have existed. There were no ready-made parishes in America, no rich endowments, few qualified clergymen, and few opportunities for recruiting or training them. Laymen took the lead from the beginning of the colonies in creating churches and, though clergymen joined the migration across the sea and trained those who came from Europe, never gave it up. Through lay direction, and in other ways, society left its imprint on religion. Even in New England, where the Congregational churches possessed an autonomy not found in the middle and southern colonies, the surrounding society made its claims felt. Fairly early in the eighteenth century, towns began to insist on their right, if not to appoint ministers, at least to approve the choice of the churches. Cotton Mather's account of this development betrays an unease at what it implied for the faithful of the church: "Many people [inhabitants of the town but not communicants of the Church] would not allow the Church any Priviledge to go before them, in the Choice of a *Pastor*. The Clamor is, *We Must maintain him!*"<sup>34</sup>

Mather wrote before the Great Awakening occurred, and he described only the most obvious way that laymen reduced the authority of ministers and the faithful. How economic growth and population increases affected religious life is less clear, but they must have produced results unfavorable to established churches. For the swelling economy and the expanding population broke down institutional lines of authority, or made drawing them difficult. What after all could the traditional parish do about the unchurched beyond its borders, and what could it do about men on the move as well as on the make, unattached to established institutions and apparently indifferent to their standards?

If the older churches often found themselves unable to cope with growth and mobility, the newer sects—especially the Separates and the Baptists—did not. Nor did churches swept by the revival and its message

34. Cotton Mather, *Ratio Disciplinae Fratrum Nov-Anglorum* (Boston, 1726), 16.

that the experience of the Spirit, the New Birth, constituted true religion. For the Awakening recalled a generation to the standards of reformed Protestantism, which had prevailed at the time of the founding of America. It revived values summed up best by its greater emphasis on individual experience and its lessened concern for traditional church organization. At the same time it produced a concentration on morality and right behavior, a social ethic supple enough to insist on the rights of the community while it supported the claims of individualism. The covenanted church and Christian Union, the league of believers everywhere, were two outstanding expressions of this ethic.

The Awakening, like mobility and economic and demographic growth, fed congregational democracy. Ministers eager to further the revival of religion discovered themselves begging men to convert. Their success as ministers, they found, was measured by the number of converts they gained—thus their role as suppliants, a role that inevitably diminished their authority in the community as it made them dependent upon the actions of others.

The political ideas of Americans in 1760 did not take their origins from congregational democracy or from revivalistic religion. Most American ideas were a part of the great tradition of the eighteenth-century commonwealthmen, the radical Whig ideology that arose from a series of upheavals in seventeenth-century England—the Civil War, the exclusion crisis of 1679–81, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Broadly speaking, this Whig theory described two sorts of threats to political freedom: a general moral decay of the people which would invite the intrusion of evil and despotic rulers, and the encroachment of executive authority upon the legislature, the attempt that power always made to subdue the liberty protected by mixed government.

The American Revolution revealed that this radical Whig understanding of politics had embedded itself deeply in American minds. In Britain only the dissenting fringe accepted the Whig analysis. Its broad acceptance in America has been explained as one of the consequences of an imbalance in political structure which saw executive authority legally commissioned with great powers but actually weak in authority. "Swollen claims and shrunken powers," as one historian has described this institutional situation, yielded a bitter factionalism to be explained apparently only by those formulas of radical Whiggery which linked liberty to balanced government, and despotism to the over-mighty executive and to moral corruption.<sup>35</sup>

35. Bailyn, *Origins of American Politics*, 96

This interpretation is surely true in part and just as surely too simple in its concentration on the facts of institutional relationships. Radical Whig perceptions of politics attracted widespread support in America because they revived the traditional concerns of a Protestant culture that had always verged on Puritanism. That moral decay threatened free government could not come as a surprise to a people whose fathers had fled England to escape sin. The importance of virtue, frugality, industry, and calling was at the heart of their moral code. An overbearing executive and the threat of corruption through idle, useless officials, or placemen, had figured prominently in their explanations of their exile in America. For the values of the eighteenth-century commonwealthmen had earlier inspired those of the seventeenth century. They had formed an American mentality prone to conceive of politics in their terms. Thus radical Whiggery of the eighteenth century convinced Americans because it had been pervasive in their culture since the seventeenth.

The generation that made the Revolution were the children of the twice-born, the heirs of this seventeenth-century religious tradition. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and many who followed them into revolution may not have been men moved by religious passions. But all had been marked by the moral dispositions of a passionate Protestantism. They could not escape this culture; nor did they try. They were imbued with an American moralism that colored all their perceptions of politics. After 1760 they faced a political crisis that put these perceptions to an agonizing test. Their responses—the actions of men who felt that Providence had set them apart for great purposes—gave the revolution much of its intensity and much of its idealism.