



The American Revolution as a PEOPLE'S WAR

WILLIAM MARINA

Just what is it we are celebrating with the Bicentennial? With a few notable exceptions, much of the reality and significance of the American Revolution seems to have escaped the American people and

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a large segment of the historical profession, judging from what has been published during the Bicentennial.

Was the American Revolution, for example, a people's war? Last year in an article in *REASON* (June 1975), I pointed out that the widespread idea that it was a minority movement is based on a misreading of a letter from John Adams to James Lloyd, dated January 1831, located in volume 10 of *Adam's Works*. A close reading makes it clear that Adams was discussing American opinion about the French Revolution in the 1790's when he wrote of a third being for the Revolution, a third against it, and a third "lukewarm."

I do not claim credit for the *éxposé* of that

misreading, which is found in numerous books dating back at least to 1902. The error was first pointed out in 1954 in *The American Revolution* by John R. Alden, who was cited by R. R. Palmer five years later in his *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, and the error was discussed in detail by Herbert Aptheker in *The American Revolution* a year after Palmer's book.

Yet in the 1970's, at the approach of and into the celebration of the Bicentennial, the repetition and perpetuation of the minority myth, based upon the misreading of Adam's letter, continues unabated. To cite just a few sources: the colonial historian Darrett B. Rutman mentioned it in a book in 1971, as did the historian Oscar Handlin in an article in *The American Scholar* the same year; the next year it was noted by Daniel Ellsberg in his book, by Alistair Cooke in his television program "America" and the book of the same name, and by the conservative social critic Irving Kristol in a presentation; it was reiterated in 1974 by Thomas H. Greene in a book on comparative revolutions, in 1975 by Sydney B. Harris in several columns; and just recently by the historian Page Smith, whose magnificent two-volume work *A New Age Now Begins* is otherwise dedicated to demonstrating the American Revolution as a majority movement (Smith avoids an apparent contradiction by suggesting Adams' estimate referred to the beginning of the Revolution).

I hope that lengthy list, just for the 1970's, has not bored the reader, but I thought it necessary to establish the pervasiveness of the misreading of the letter. A very large number of intellectuals apparently find something very appealing in the notion that social change is caused by a minority. A variation of the minority theme, found in the work of British historians such as W. E. H. Lecky and Eric Robson, admits an American majority but sees it as very much manipulated by a clever group of leaders.

We will skip over the questionable methodology of all those who have cited the Adams letter. Common sense ought to lead one to ask what kind of Gallup Poll Adams had upon which to base such an estimate, why it was better than the estimates of other participants, and how that estimate could be reconciled with others by Adams indicating a clear American majority.

A DANGEROUS MYTH

With the misreading of the Adams letter out of the way, the question still remains whether the American Revolution was a majority movement, and it is a very important one. If, for example, the Founding Fathers had thought they were only a minority it would be difficult to avoid viewing them as rather hypocritical, for they constantly spoke of the will of the majority as second only to natural law.

The fascination of the minority interpretation is closely linked with what must be regarded as the other significant, and much debated, question about the Revolution—Was it a true social revolution or

merely a colonial rebellion? For a long time now an anti-revolutionary outlook has been growing in America, reflected in the historiography of the American Revolution. At the heart of that outlook is the arrogance of power that some of the Founding Fathers such as John Adams criticized as the essence of empire. Since late in the 19th century there has been ample evidence in the American experience to demonstrate the growth of that attitude. A number of the antistatists of the Old Right spoke out against this trend, and I have written at length about it, most recently in *REASON* (Feb. 1976). Suffice it to say here that the notion of a minority having effected the American Revolution meshes nicely with the idea that the Imperial Republic ought to be run by a group of policymakers who, in their wisdom about "world order," have a better sense about what is good for the American people than the people themselves.

Given that antirevolutionary, elitist attitude, in a century filled with violent and radical revolutionary upheaval, it is perhaps natural that some should seek to find in the American Revolution an exception to these recent struggles. Hence the interpretation of the American Revolution as only a colonial rebellion to protect existing American rights from the encroachment of British power.

There is much wisdom in the observation that, like all historical occurrences, the American Revolution was a unique event. That insight, however, can become quite divorced from reality if it obscures the ways in which the Revolution was similar to a number of such upheavals. The American patriot David Ramsay was talking about a "people's war" long before Mao Tse-tung. American revolutionary Committees of Safety were extracting "recantations" and "confessions" after lengthy sessions with individuals who expressed doubts about the struggle decades before "brainwashing" and "coercive persuasion" were carried to their logical conclusions by Communist revolutionists and psychologists. And George Washington was writing about an American strategy to "protract" the conflict many years before Communist tacticians worked out a plan for "protracted conflict."

In short, one need not go to the writings of Lenin, Trotsky, Mao, Ché Guevara, or Vo Nguyen Giap nor study the revolutions with which they were associated to learn about the principles of revolutionary warfare. The events of the American Revolution are filled with examples of the discovery and working out of the essentials of those principles. Note, for example, this assessment by Washington's young aide, Alexander Hamilton, hardly a radical: "To avoid a general engagement" it was sometimes necessary to "give up objects of the first importance." To the question, "What is to hinder the enemy from carrying every important point and ruining us?" he replied: "Our hopes are not placed in any particular city, or spot of ground, but preserving a good army, furnished with proper necessities, to take advantage of favor-

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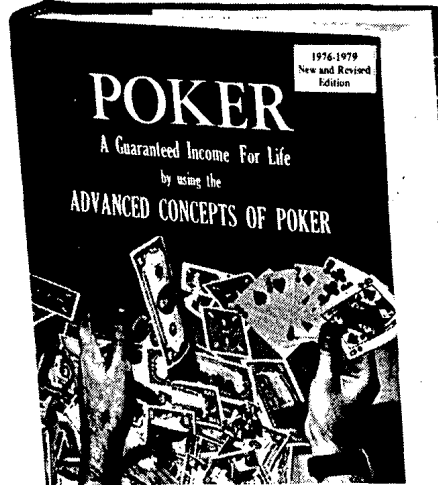
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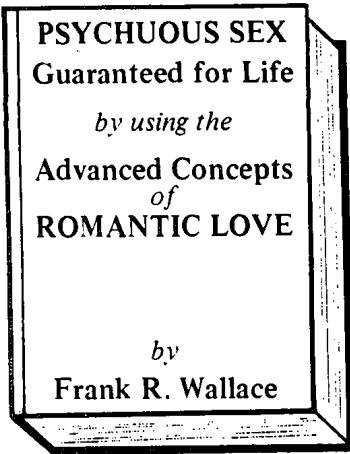
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able opportunities, and to waste and defeat the enemy by piecemeal." Could any of our 20th-century writers on "guerrilla" or "counterinsurgency" warfare have stated the strategy more clearly?

WHAT MAKES A PEOPLE'S WAR?

The sociology of revolution, of late, has received considerable attention. In the light of recent experiences, unlike earlier studies such as Crane Brinton's classic *The Anatomy of Revolution*, several newer books on revolution link its success to guerrilla war and to the participation of the mass of the people.

Insufficient attention has been given, however, to what might be called the basis of legitimacy of a society. Individuals conceptualize through a worldview, a definition of reality at the center of which are some assumptions about human nature and about the basis of values that give the social order a degree of cohesion or legitimacy. A paradigm (the current "in" word) is really a subset within this larger worldview. Thus a shift from a Ptolemaic to a Copernican theory in astronomy is a paradigm shift that need not disturb another paradigm concerning molecules. On the other hand, one can have only one worldview, and, as I have suggested in *Egalitarianism and Empire*, though

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they can be combined in a hierarchy, there are only three sources of value—supernatural, natural, and positive law—from which one can choose to construct the core of a worldview.

In considering whether a given upheaval is only a rebellion or a true social revolution, little effort has been made to define exactly what is meant by the latter. While the degree of social and economic change, the turnover of the elite, and the extent of violence are all important aspects, I would suggest that the most fundamental criterion is whether there is a shift in the basis of legitimacy between the old regime and the new.

What really characterizes a people's war is that the ideology of legitimacy is the matrix within which the military struggle is waged. The most critical period in any revolution, therefore, is the point at which the great mass of the people shifts its legitimacy from the value base of the old regime. People's war, whether through popular support of a regular army, partisan units, or guerrilla bands, is simply the military effort to establish the institutions embodying the new legitimacy.

THE HEART OF REVOLUTION

That subtle shift in legitimacy is the key aspect of

the sociology of revolution. Unless it can reestablish its legitimacy, no amount of territory captured or number of battles won can ever result in a victorious return of the old regime.

Modern counterinsurgency warfare has too often concentrated upon the military aspect of the struggle, but that is not the way of successful revolutionists. The insurgents' regular army forces can be broken into partisan units, defeated until there are only guerrilla groups left, and many of those groups isolated and destroyed, but the insurgency will not be defeated unless the legitimacy it has for the mass of the people is displaced. That, and nothing else, is what is meant by victory. The dynamics of that shift, before any real overthrow of the old regime is accomplished, is crucial to social revolution.

Revolutions are an example of social change at its maximum. The great question that has occupied students of both social change and revolution is, Why, and under what circumstances, does a questioning of the old regime take place? In *Egalitarianism and Empire* I sought to develop a theory of social change, which applies not only to revolution, but also to the American history, where, as Alexis de Tocqueville was the first to point out in detail, equality was a significant factor. I suggested that civilizations tend to pass through a cycle from equality, which generates envy, to egalitarianism, and finally to empire. Without being deliberately alliterative, I would now add several additional "E's," so that the whole syndrome might be described: expansion, equality, envy, egalitarianism, empire, entropy, and extinction.

From the standpoint of social revolution, what is significant is that in any society there is a constant tension—which can be thought of as a triangle—between the beneficiaries of the inequalities of the old order, those who are striving to increase equality of opportunity and before the law, and those who desire egalitarian leveling of status and wealth. Expansion, whether of the market or of territory, softens the sense of inequality, offers greater opportunity, and tends to assuage demands for egalitarianism.

If, however, expansion breeds a certain psychology, so too does contraction of the system. People become more cognizant of inequalities, and those who are dissatisfied gravitate toward either equality or egalitarianism, with a demand for the former often masking a real desire for the latter. Thus it was that Tocqueville saw envy as the driving force in the rampant egalitarianism that characterized the French Revolution. With these brief comments about social change, revolution, and people's war in mind, let us examine the American Revolution.

SEARCHING FOR NEW LEGITIMACY

The American Revolution cannot be correctly understood outside of the context of a lingering debate that had surfaced in the English Revolution and continued during that almost century and a quarter that comprised much of the colonial period

of American history. At issue was what constitutes a good society. It was an age in which religion, and this was true of the American Revolution as well, played an important role.

As the rise of national states challenged the supremacy of a Christian religious community, monarchs such as Henry VIII attempted to work out a synthesis between the various sources of law or value. In supplanting Thomas More's belief in supernatural as superior to positive, statist law, Henry did not seek to eliminate other sources of value but to develop a hierarchy in which it was "natural" that the king, as head of the state, was by divine ordination God's choice to rule. This effort to make nation and church coincide could hardly satisfy those who, seeing sin and corruption among those comprising the state, wished either to purify the church (Puritans) or separate church from state (Separatist).

Without going into the social, economic, and political intricacies of the English Revolution, we can see that the debate involved equality and egalitarianism. That debate about the nature of a Christian commonwealth took place around the campfires of the New Model Army. The more conservative members, the leaders, of the revolutionary coalition were not so much concerned with equality as a general principle as they were anxious to gain access to that organized system of coercive inequality known as the State. The equalitarian position was argued by leaders, such as John Lilburne, of that group known as Levellers, to the everlasting confusion of future historians, for their program was essentially libertarian. The Diggers, a much smaller group led by Gerard Winstanley, took an egalitarian, socialist position. Even before the restoration of the King, it was clear the Revolution had faltered far short of the equality of opportunity and before the law desired by the libertarian Levellers.

During the next century, including the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89, there was a continuing debate about the nature of the English Constitution and the relationship between the King and the Parliament. The Whigs, especially that group represented by pamphleteers such as Thomas Gordon and John Trenchard, were in many ways the heirs to the equalitarian ideas of the Levellers.

As might be expected, that debate and aspects of the alternatives were carried to the New World and were reflected in the English efforts at colonization. What linked, for example, some of the Puritan leaders in early Massachusetts with proprietors in the Carolinas was a belief in a rather rigid hierarchical system of inequality. Even less successful in the New World were those who envisaged the ideal commonwealth as a society of leveling communism. After several years of futility that "noble experiment" was dropped both at Plymouth and at Jamestown.

Perhaps the most fruitful way to view the whole American colonial experience is to see it as a number of continuing struggles, progressing at a different pace

depending on the colony, between those who wished to establish some version of a feudal, hierarchical system of inequality and those favoring equality of opportunity and before the law. The former argued for a strong, positive government, while the latter wanted the State either limited or eliminated. (Recent research by Rowland Berthoff and John M. Murrin suggesting a feudal revival in the 18th century raises some question about the strength of the equalitarians. It is probably safe to conclude, however, that political participation was on the whole extended and that some additional mobility existed in that some able persons were coopted into the existing system.)

The continuing struggles surfaced most obviously in the rebellions that shook many of the colonies before and during the Glorious Revolution. Though he does not put it in the context sketched above, Bernard Bailyn's *The Origins of American Politics* offers a great deal of evidence to support such an interpretive framework.

Finally, there is the relationship between the colonies and the Mother Country. At this level also, the debate would in the end focus around inequality versus equality. As early as the 1670's some British

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policymakers conceived that the colonies, especially New England might someday offer an economic and political challenge to England. The policy of "salutary neglect" operated for a good part of the 18th century, postponing a confrontation with that problem, but it began to change when, after the Great War for Empire in the mid-1700's, British mercantilist policymakers sought to fully implement the potential of the system.

THE STAMP ACT CRISIS

The British effort in 1765 to collect a revenue from the colonies through the sale of stamps, to be required for numerous items and transactions, coming as it did on the heels of several other problems, threw the whole system into disarray. Even that obnoxious piece of legislation was an effort to curtail the thrust toward greater equality of opportunity. The tax to enter college or the bar was to be much higher than in England. Thomas Whately, who drew up the bill, acknowledged "they were raised . . . considerably in order to keep mean persons out of those situations in life which they disgrace."

The massive protest in America made some strange bedfellows, ranging from Samuel Adams, through more conservative elements, to members of

the British system such as Thomas Hutchinson. That dilemma, or "ordeal" as Bailyn calls it, of Tory-Loyalists such as Hutchinson is familiar to anyone who has studied colonial rebellions. Marxists use the term "comprador" to describe those natives who link their fortunes to that of the imperial power. William H. Nelson's little book *The American Tory* is particularly good in exploring the quandary of such men when the tensions inherent in the inequalities of the colonial system come to the fore. They are truly the men in the middle.

"Organized mobs" and riots, Sons of Liberty, and a colonial Stamp Act Congress were all a part of negating the act, but the actual nullification came in the unanimous refusal to buy or use the stamps. As England backed down, some conservatives were frightened by the destruction of some of the riots and protests, such as those by tenants in New York opposing abuses of the quasi-feudal system. William Prendergast, the leader of these Levellers (note the name harking back to the libertarians of the previous century), warned that the same arguments used against stamps certainly must have validity elsewhere as well.

The Stamp Act initiated over a decade of debate

British policymakers never understood that the Americans had almost unanimously united behind the idea that they would not submit to taxation without representation.

among Americans about the British Constitution and the place of the colonies within it. In essence it was a discussion of the basic legitimacy of the system, and it certainly was not clarified by the fact that a debate over the Constitution had been going on in England itself. What British policymakers after the Stamp Act protest never understood was that the Americans had almost unanimously united behind the idea that they would not submit to taxation without representation. In the several confrontations that were to follow, the Americans never wavered from that view, which is at root an aspect of equality before the law. In the debate the Americans were clarifying in their own minds the basic legitimacy of their beliefs—a very arduous and often slow process—and heatedly discussing the proper response to British actions as new groups were drawn into the protest coalition.

REVOLUTION: BEGINNINGS

A second round in the struggle began in 1767 with the British decision to pursue the Townshend duties on items such as paper, glass, lead, painters' colors, and tea. The American argument against this so-called external tax was best summed up in John Dickinson's "Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies," which appeared

serially in newspapers and then was widely published as a pamphlet. This time the American response took the form of nonimportation agreements. While they began with merchants in the leading port cities, they would not have been effective had not a large segment of the population participated. In fact, before the British capitulation in 1770, it is clear that the initiative in enforcing such agreements was increasingly taken by organizations of artisans and mechanics which formed the backbone of the popular protests, led by leaders such as Samuel Adams, Alexander MacDougall, Charles Thomson, and Christopher Gadsden.

In a very real sense, however, the Americans were already beginning to fashion a new paradigm. Samuel Adams later admitted that it was about 1768 when the possibility of independence first began to take shape in his thinking. But as Merrill Jensen has noted, some of the leaders used terms such as "citizen," "commonwealth," and "independence" only after they had long been found in anonymous articles and letters in American newspapers. Certainly the colonies were far from united on any alternative and were relieved at the lull after 1770. Many had disliked the infringement on the market and on property rights that had been a part of public pressure brought to bear in the economic boycotts.

But things were not completely quiet during 1770 and after. There were the Boston "Massacre," continuing tensions between American smugglers and the British navy and customs commissioners, and efforts by the British to take away from the Americans the power of purse to pay various governmental salaries, as well as much of the court system, as American juries refused to convict on cases involving smuggling. A major result of these continuing problems was that the Americans extended formal Committees of Correspondence to facilitate communication between the various colonies with respect to the latest British actions and how best to respond to them.

It is significant that the action that initiated the final crisis—the Tea Act—was intimately connected with the struggle between inequality and equality of opportunity and before the law. The ultimate form of economic inequality is monopoly, which, as the most consistent of the Austrian School of economists, Murray Rothbard, has argued, can only be maintained by State intervention. The Tea Act was a mercantilist effort to aid that gross example of inefficiency and monopoly mercantilism, the East India Company.

Boston's Tea Party was the extreme form of protest that shook all four of the major port cities. The public sentiment behind the Tea Party was evident in the inability of the British to find out the identity of the "Indians" who had carried out the raid. (The Indians were careful, by the way, to replace some property that was damaged by mistake, housed as it was in a chest resembling those holding the tea.)

When the British responded with what the Ameri-

cans came to call the "Intolerable Acts," the Americans reacted in two ways. Most directly, there was a massive outpouring of aid to Massachusetts, sent in through Salem and elsewhere, since Boston's port had been closed. British attempts to reduce Massachusetts to a conquered province made it clear to every colony that the government could at any time inflict such punishment on them as well. The second reaction, ironically at the pressure of some of the conservatives, who feared some more precipitous action, was the calling of a Continental Congress.

RADICALS GAIN STRENGTH

The proceedings of the Congress demonstrated the growing strength of those Americans who refused to back down in the face of British coercion. The conservative Joseph Galloway's plan for reconciliation failed to pass, while the Congress initiated an Association to enforce a boycott of British goods.

In any successful revolution, however, the key factor is the shift in values that takes place long before any fighting, and it was that process to which John Adams referred when he said that "the revolution was in the mind and hearts of the people and in the union of the colonies, both of which were accomplished before hostilities commenced." As Richard Henry Lee, among others, pointed out in the Congress, while custom, colonial charters, and the British Constitution all were a part of the American argument, in the final analysis it rested upon the idea of natural law.

At the same time, the Americans were coming to reject any notion of the divine right of kings. Jokes about the King became commonplace among the people, a sure sign of the loss of legitimacy. Over a year later Thomas Paine, in his bestselling pamphlet *Common Sense*, was to capture the essence of American thinking: "A French bastard landing with an armed banditti and establishing himself king of England against the consent of the natives, is in plain terms a very paltry rascally original. It certainly hath no divinity in it."

It was not, of course, until July 1776 that enough of the more conservative delegates in the Congress, under growing popular pressures, would consent to a Declaration of Independence as the logical culmination of a protest movement that had not impressed upon the British government the slightest recognition that the Americans had any rights whatsoever. Thomas Jefferson's comment about the Declaration, that great natural law statement, made years later, is worth citing:

When forced, therefore, to resort to arms for redress, an appeal to the tribunal of the world was deemed proper for our justification. This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before;

but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we [were] compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and the spirit called for by the occasion.

But the actions of the Americans in late 1774 and early 1775, even before the fighting that broke out at Lexington and Concord on April 19, is the best evidence that the British government had lost its legitimacy in the eyes of Americans long before it was officially recognized. Operating through local and state committees right up to the Congress, the Association moved to set up what the French in Vietnam would later call "parallel hierarchies," that is, an alternate governmental system reflecting the will of the great majority of the people. Almost intuitively the Americans understood that they could never be beaten if the revolutionary committees continued to function as the legitimate representa-

The protest movement had not impressed upon the British the slightest recognition that the Americans had any rights whatsoever.

tives of the people and in concert with a militia whose primary task it was to keep order in their locale.

Though British commanders such as General Thomas Gage later came to realize that they faced an entire, aroused country, Gage at first took the lack of American protest against the Intolerable Acts as a sign that they would be accepted. This was a complete misreading of the situation. People no longer bother to protest against institutions that they have rejected as illegitimate. The Americans were too busy setting up a militia, a government, and the apparatus to feed Massachusetts to bother much with further protests. Authority, without legitimacy, is reduced to the use of naked force. And that was all the British had left by 1775. The American response to British actions was a magnificent example of what I have referred to as "intersticism" (REASON, June 1975).

PEOPLE'S WAR

The essence of people's war is ideological. If a true social revolution were anything less than the overwhelming mass of a society shifting the basis of legitimacy, the society would simply fragment. The essence of leadership is found in the two-way

relationship and dialogue between the leaders and the larger mass of the people as the former articulate that shift in thinking. Once that shift has occurred, there is an opportunity for the leadership, operating within the broad parameters of that new legitimacy, which is necessarily abstract, to direct policy on some specific issues in ways that may not reflect the thinking of the majority of the people. If they transgress those parameters, as happened in Russia after 1917, they may, in fact, literally "gut" the revolution and bring it to a grinding halt.

In emphasizing, however, that mass of Americans which shifted the basis of its view of legitimacy, joined in protest and economic boycott against the British, fought to defend its rights and property, and eventually proclaimed its independence, I do not wish to obscure some of the differences within that revolutionary coalition. One cleavage, as noted earlier, focused around equality, as I have defined it, as opposed to egalitarianism. Some wanted a national power, while others hoped to see government, to the extent it existed, essentially at the state or local level. Finally, to oversimplify for the sake of brevity, an important division existed between those who desired a republic and those who wanted an empire. Given

Expansionist dreams of empire often took precedence over the idea of a people's war of self-defense.

those variables, all kinds of combinations were possible. The American Revolution might be termed "an anticolonial, civil, expansionist, people's war." The "hooker," in that it contradicted the other three factors and therefore prevented their speedier realization, was the "expansionist" aspect of the war.

John Adams was one American who worried about empire, characterized by arbitrary, centralized government, as a recurring phenomenon in history. On the other hand, Americans such as Benjamin Franklin gloried in the idea of "this rising American Empire." Adams was understandably upset about the consistency and aims of a war effort that, with the British trapped in Boston late in 1775, did not organize to push them into the sea but wasted its manpower on what proved to be a disastrous expansionist adventure in Canada. To be sure, there was a British and Indian threat along the frontier, but the American response in the case of expeditions, such as that of George Rogers Clark, would seem to indicate that expansionist dreams of empire took precedence over the idea of a people's war of self-defense. Those Americans who believe that the debate over whether this nation should be a republic or an empire—and it cannot be both in the long run—erupted in the 1960's, or even the 1890's, are simply mistaken. That fatal contradic-

tion was there from the beginning.

One of the most important indications of the enormous popular support for the war can be seen in the Americans' ability to control the countryside through committees and militia, to fight the British, Hessians and Tories in a traditional and guerrilla war, to battle the English Navy at sea, and even to engage in some expansionist adventures in Canada and the West. It took some time for American leaders to grasp the essentials of guerrilla war, and Washington, despite his magnificent qualities as a leader, never quite adapted to that idea. But Nathaniel Greene, and especially Daniel Morgan, Francis Marion, and Andrew Pickens, was the equal of any of the great guerrilla or partisan warfare leaders in military history. The war also had a way of weeding out commanders who owed their positions to status-inequality or had been elected for their popularity by fellow members of the militia. It took time, and some defeats, but the leaders who finally emerged were those who, given the opportunity, had been able to produce victories.

Leaders such as Washington were constantly downgrading the militia, but the truth is, when used properly and with imagination, the militia fought well. They were intelligent enough to see little sense to the "stand up and fire at the other guy" tactic that characterized warfare then, and like any other troops they would scatter under an enormous artillery barrage, but in the end they made the difference. Like guerrilla fighters through the ages, the Americans often went back to their farms, but they always returned to fight again, or as General Greene put it, "We fight, get beat, and rise to fight again." And, as the military historian John Shy has observed: "The militia never failed in a real emergency. . . . From the British viewpoint, the militia was the virtually inexhaustible reservoir of rebel military manpower, and it was also the sand in the gears of the pacification machine."

IN BRITISH EYES

The British never understood that the Tory-Loyalists were only about one-sixth of the population, and that number shrank in the face of British atrocities and depredations as the war dragged on. Thus the American leader Andrew Pickens originally signed a loyalty oath but joined the conflict after the British destroyed his property. The Americans also practiced terror on the Tories, if "coercive persuasion" failed to carry the day, but it was strategic and selective, never threatening American legitimacy, whereas British reprisals against the population, the worst usually by Tories, were random and without real purpose.

The youth of the American troops was an indication of the widespread participation of a male population that only averaged sixteen years of age. Washington, the commander in chief, was only 43, his aide, Hamilton, a mere 20, but these were old men compared to many in the army. Andrew Jackson was

only 14 when wounded; the first atrocity of the war was probably committed by a 12-year-old as the wounded British tried to retreat from Concord; and even Americans at first made fun of the youth of "Swamp Fox" Marion's band of fighters. British political generals might initially make fun of the Americans and talk of quickly ending the war to return home soon, but the British who had to face the young Americans in the field found little to make fun of.

In America, the British soon learned that they faced a nation in arms against them. They knew this was true in New England and never dared a land campaign there after Lexington, Concord, or Breed's Hill, and soon even abandoned their enclave in Boston. It was in the middle colonies that British sympathy was supposedly strongest, and until late in the war some British commanders continued to hold to the myth of a vast Tory uprising should the army venture out to help them. In the face of that pipe dream was the reality of the American militia swarming around General Burgoyne's forces at Saratoga, and the fact that even in Pennsylvania it took over 3,000 British troops to guard the 15 miles of road over which supply wagons traveled from Chester to Philadelphia, and even then many fell victim to America militia. Late in the war, when the Hessians ventured out from New York to link up with these nonexistent Tory legions, they found themselves under constant harassment by the militia in New Jersey and quickly retreated to their enclave. Finally, we know what happened to General Cornwallis's forces at the conclusion of his costly campaign in the South.

GUERRILLA WAR

The British won many of the major battles—they could never win the war. The real story of the war was the continual harassment the Americans inflicted, much of which did not, and never will, make the history books. The great British problem was morale, as the English military historian Eric Robson suggested several decades ago. In typical guerrilla fashion the Americans would quickly attack and then retreat. The British seldom ventured out after dark in less than battalion strength, and the Americans knew their movements. As early as February 1777, Captain James Murray described "a pretty amusement known by the name of foraging or fighting for our daily bread. As the rascals are skulking about the whole country, it is impossible to move with any degree of safety without a pretty large escort." And, as Robson concluded, "continual harassment is worse than occasional large-scale actions to men whose morale is deteriorating."

It was not only that the British found themselves in a country that was hostile to them outside their enclave in New York City. There was a strong antiwar movement back in England, which, in the long run, was also important. Some of the best men in the

army and navy refused to serve against the Americans, and that was one factor in the disastrous decision to hire Hessians to fight in America.

Once there had been a shift in legitimacy, the American rejection of the British peace offerings of 1778, which might have made some sense if offered many years before, was predictable. In fact, it was foreseen by a Scottish philosopher, Adam Smith, who was one of the intellectuals belatedly consulted by the government that year, and whose memorandum on the options, from his libertarian perspective, was probably not much heeded or appreciated.

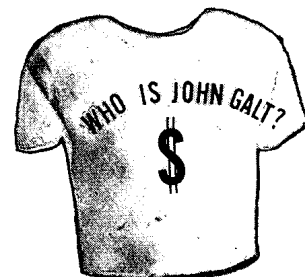
In the end, there was only one debate possible within the high councils of the British military: whether to initiate a really bloody war of attrition and reprisal against the hostile Americans on the assumption that this was the way to halt a "domino effect," lest any of the other 17 British colonies in the New World become infected with the republican virus that had affected 13 of them. After all, a counterinsurgency policy that killed enough Americans could convince other colonists it was better to be alive than free. It is a lasting credit to the British that they rejected that formula, fit only for fanatics who had completely lost sight of the goal for which they once strove, which was, after all, to win back the hearts and minds of the American people.

That rejection was well described by a young officer, Colonel Charles Stuart, who doubted the capacity of the British to wage such a war of violent

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attrition and worried what its effects might be upon the men who were asked to carry out "a war of ravage and destruction" when it was clear that no "acts of severity will cause these people to submit," though the army had already inflicted "every species of barbarity" with no other result than to plant "an irrecoverable hatred" in the mind of every American.

ABOUT THE REVOLUTION

It is very difficult to break off this narrative and analysis, which I also found hard to confine to a small book. There are, however, several interrelated points that I should like to make about the revolution and the war.

The first is that, despite the fact that the *means* by which the American Revolution progressed were not so very different from revolutionary struggles of the past and of this century as some Americans have at times imagined, it was a very different and radical revolution in its *ends*. That legitimacy shift toward natural law, republicanism, and sovereignty of the people was something very new, and the Americans of that era realized it and were justly proud of the fact.

Secondly, it was the one great revolution in history

It was the one great revolution in history in which the idea of equality triumphed.

in which the idea of equality triumphed over either an accommodation with the inequalities of the old order, or radical egalitarianism. There is ample evidence that egalitarianism lurked just beneath the surface, ready to explode. Though there is not space to explore this complex issue here, a realization of the fact was perhaps the central motive of those, who were essentially equalitarians, who finally pushed for the adoption of the Constitution. The key to understanding that is to look neither at the nationalists of 1776, who remained so in 1787, nor at the confederatationists, who were consistently so over those 11 years, but at those leaders in the middle, who shifted to a position advocating a national government.

They did so reluctantly, not so much to protect their property in the narrow sense, but because they saw a "newer" type of popular, egalitarian political leader coming to power at the local and state levels who found in government the key to his fortune. They saw in a national government a means of checking that kind of egalitarianism. What they accomplished was to postpone its reemergence as a force to be reckoned with for almost 40 years. But it did return, for the Jacksonian movement was composed of an incredibly unstable coalition of equalitarians, egalitarians, and even slaveholders, who

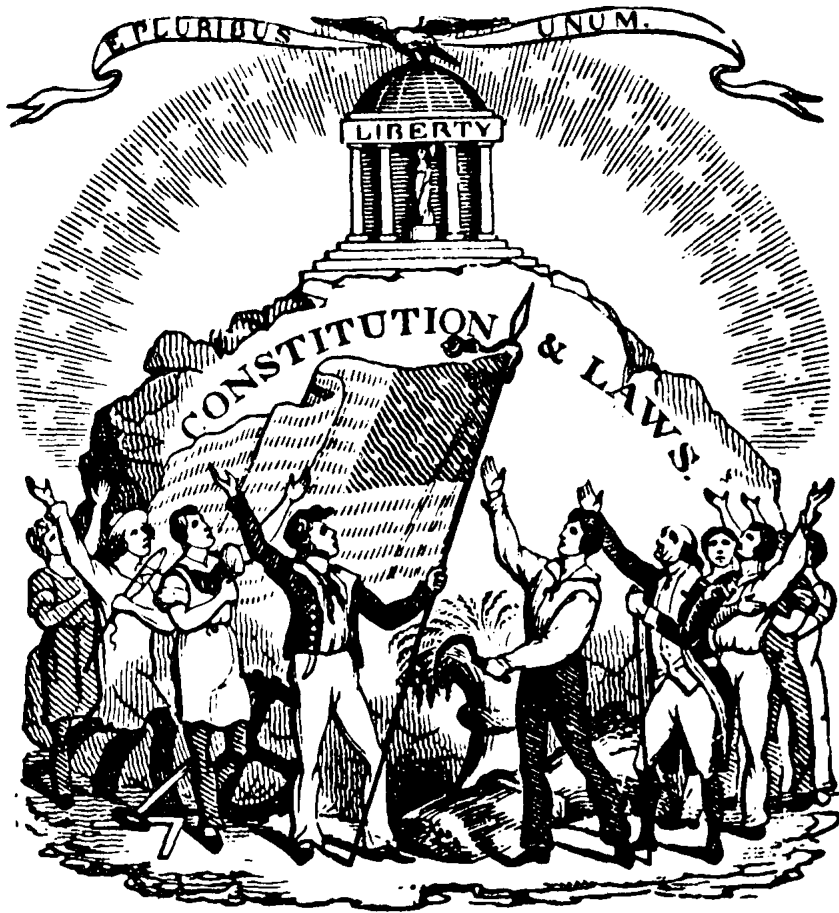
wanted inequality. A good clue to the equality versus egalitarian nature of the conflict in 1787-89 is that the Federalist meetings invariably selected their best men to represent them in conventions, while the egalitarian-envy destructiveness of the Anti-Federalists often led them to choose their less able representatives.

Thirdly, the chance for a unique American equality owes an enormous debt to the British, who chose *not* to pursue a long, drawn-out war of counterinsurgency attrition, unlike the total warriors of the 20th century. R. R. Palmer is the only one, to my knowledge, to speculate, even though briefly, on what America might be like had the British attempted to pursue that alternative. The Americans would have won that much longer, bloody encounter also, and, as Page Smith notes, the French alliance was more an obstacle, despite Yorktown, than an advantage. But as Palmer suggests, the American society that emerged from such a conflict would have been much different. I believe it would have been more statist, egalitarian, and intolerantly nationalistic, much like many of the societies of the 20th century that have been pushed in that direction, even more than might otherwise have been the case, by continued Western, often American, intervention. Imagine the degree of militarism that would have characterized American society, one in which the young boys would have spent much of their lives in a war of atrocity against the British. They most certainly would not have put much of a premium on human life, and, how would they have felt about liberty?

Finally, the debate over a republic versus an empire is not new, but goes back to the birth of the nation. Our present antirevolutionary posture is but one indication of the progress of the imperial half of that unstable equation.

What then, can this generation of Americans learn from that people's war of two hundred years ago? First, we must kindle the desire for equality of opportunity and before the law in our own society to counter the present push toward either inequality or egalitarianism, which, ironically, with its socialist elite, ends up being a new kind of inequality. Secondly, equality is best fostered by severely limiting the power of government and by the free market, not by a schooling system with pieces of paper (degrees) so dear to American mandarin intellectuals since Jefferson, who was himself something of a Confucian. Thirdly, we must eliminate, once and for all, that imperial quest for power that has repeatedly contradicted the desire for a republic based on liberty and law. Finally, intervening in other revolutions, whether because of that imperial thrust or with the best of intentions, where the push for equality is very weak at best in the fight against feudal inequality, can only result in a more rapid victory for egalitarianism.

Let us strive not for the power of the Great Society, but for the creativity of the Good Society. □



America's Libertarian Revolution

MURRAY N. ROTHBARD

With the beginning of the American Revolutionary War at the outbreak of Lexington and Concord, two truths about the Revolution already stand out clearly. One is that the Revolution was genuinely and enthusiastically supported by the great majority of the American population. It was a true people's war against British rule. The American rebels could certainly not have concluded the first successful war of national liberation in history, a war against the world's greatest naval and military power, unless they had commanded the support of the American people. As David Ramsay, the first great historian of the American Revolution, put it in 1789: "The War was the people's war . . . the exertions of the army would have been insufficient to effect the revolution, unless the great body of the people had been prepared for it, and also kept in a constant disposition to oppose Great Britain." "[For a discussion of the Revolution as

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a majority movement, see the article in this issue by William Marina - Ed.]

A second truth that emerges is the egregious fallacy of the view endemic among historians of all ideological persuasions that there is a large and necessary dichotomy between political or moral principle and economic self-interest. Historians friendly to the Revolution have insisted that the Americans fought for political freedom, for independence, for constitutional rights, or for democracy; critical historians maintain that the fight was *merely* for economic reasons, for defense of property and trade against British interference. But why must the two be sundered? Why may not a defense of American liberty *and* property, of political *and* economic rights be conjoined? The merchants rebelling against the stamp tax, or sugar or tea taxes, or restrictions of the Navigation Laws, were battling for their *rights* of property and trade free from interference. In doing so, they were battling for their own property and for the rights of liberty at the same time. The American masses, similarly, were battling for all property rights, for their own as well as those of the merchants, and acting also in their capacity as consumers fighting against British taxes and restrictions.

In reality there need be no dichotomy between