

Twenty-Five Years of Turmoil, Sacrifice, and Glory: A Condensed History of America's  
Original Grand Social Revolution from 1763 to 1789

By Matthew Halberg

April 27, 2019

The American Revolution was much more than a simple war between cousins separated by a vast ocean; it was a battle for the hearts and minds of America's colonial population. While the eight years between 1775 to 1783 were marked by the American Revolutionary War, it can and has been argued that the revolution really began as far back as 1763, when King George III issued a royal proclamation that restricted American colonists' freedom of settlement beyond an arbitrary line that closely followed the Appalachian Mountains. The Proclamation of 1763 signaled an end to the era of salutary neglect; it also marked the genesis of a prolonged era of political and social turmoil that climaxed with the formal break between the American colonies and the British government via the Declaration of Independence. It would take years of vicious warfare to cement that political break into law with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783.

What often gets lost in the shuffle when discussing these grand developments is the fact that during the fateful years between 1763 and 1789, America's colonial lower class waged their own revolution for social and economic equality within the society that would eventually emerge from the long-running conflict against the British government. This lesser-known revolution was multiethnic in nature, it included citizens from all different occupations and walks of life, and it included both women and men. It lacked a formal leadership structure, but many distinguished and capable leaders emerged to fight for expanded rights and opportunities for their people to enjoy in post-revolution America. This period of cultural upheaval was perhaps America's first grand social revolution, and like most other revolutions it did not go unopposed. A class of elite, white, male colonial revolutionaries at first encouraged the many disparate wings of the movement to oppose British authority in the colonies, and subsequently made efforts to stifle the movement's diverse but undeniably progressive goals once victory against the British was at hand.

Due to the breadth and variety of the relevant topics discussed, the history of this social revolution will be addressed in three sections. The first section will detail the political awakening and mobilization of the American colonial lower class, and the evolution of their tactics in protesting against the tyranny of the British Crown and government, before the final political break between the British government and the American colonies in 1776. The initial attempts by the colonial upper crust to stifle the grand social revolution will also be highlighted in section one. The second section will detail the experiences of America's lower class during the Revolutionary War from 1775 to 1783, and will highlight the immense suffering endured by everyday Americans during those years. The third section will detail the shared motivations and common experiences of several sub-groups encapsulated within the scope of the grand social revolution, and will include a discussion on how the different wings fared in the twilight years of the Revolutionary Era.

### **From Rabble to Rebels: The Political and Social Awakening of the Colonial Lower Class**

Beginning in the 1760s and continuing to the fateful year of 1776, the smallfolk living in the British North American colonies, especially in the northeast, played a vital role in driving the course of events toward open rebellion against British hegemony. This years-long process began as mostly disorganized opposition among the colonial lower class to British violations of their human rights, such as the ongoing practices of slavery and naval impressment in the colonies, but eventually grew in scope to include those protesting against economic and social grievances as well. The movement began as a spontaneous coalition with shared grievances, a 'motley crew' of lower-class laborers, sailors, servants, slaves, dock workers, and urban dwellers that reacted

against various injustices they encountered in their everyday lives.<sup>1</sup> This general antipathy soon congealed into outright mass rejection of unpopular British laws, British colonial government officials, and ultimately of British authority over the American colonies. The process was gradual, and as anti-British sentiment in the colonies evolved and intensified, so did the role of the colonial lower class. In fact, America's lower class became more organized, more effectively led, and wielded much greater influence over the course of events as they transpired in the colonies. Many colonial upper-class elites grew so concerned about the radicalization of the lower class that they promptly took major steps to manage the grassroots movement and direct its anger to fit their political needs. Many leaders inside the grassroots movement resisted this unwelcome development, and began to push for greater social equality and economic opportunities for their people in colonial society, while also still clamoring for independence from Great Britain.

Lower-class colonial American resistance to British authority can be traced back many years before the formal political break between the colonies and the British Crown in July 1776. Some of the earliest traces of open resistance came from lower-class colonial residents and slaves when they were threatened with impressment by the British Navy. There were major riots in Boston in 1741, 1742, 1745, and 1747 that included hundreds of armed protesters assaulting British naval officers and sheriffs, in addition to destroying British naval property, all in the name of staving off the press-gangs.<sup>2</sup> These early violent clashes saw colonial residents reacting as a group against the specific impending threat of forfeiting their liberty and possibly their lives at sea. The immediate danger of being swiped away from their families, friends, and daily

---

<sup>1</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 212-213.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 214-215.

routines at home motivated citizens to band together and collectively resist a loathed common foe: the press-gangs. Once the immediate threat subsided, however, the collective defense ceased and the mobs disbanded.<sup>3</sup> After their primary motivation of driving away the press-gangs had been achieved, the mobs found no common concerns or reasons to continue their protests.

The violent backlash against the looming imposition of the Stamp Act in the colonies during 1765 signaled a marked evolution in colonial mob tactics. In this instance, a mob of lower-class Bostonians built and destroyed effigies of Crown agents before ransacking the home and office of stamp commissioner Andrew Oliver on August 14, 1765.<sup>4</sup> A local shoemaker named Ebenezer Mackintosh led the mob.<sup>5</sup> Mackintosh later led a similar mob on August 26 that destroyed the house of Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson, another supporter of the Stamp Act.<sup>6</sup> These demonstrations featured a marked elevation in the complexity of the tactics utilized by the colonial lower class in Boston. The building of effigies, the specific targeting of government officials supportive of the Stamp Act, and the presence of a recognizable leader directing the violence were all evidence of this elevation. Furthermore, the rapidity of the colonial population's actions and the heightened level of organization seems to have caught the royal authorities in Boston entirely off guard. Governor of Massachusetts Francis Bernard later wrote about the bewildered governmental reaction to the Stamp Act riots:

“Others said, that it was a serious Affair already; that it was a preconcerted Business, in which the greatest Part of the Town was engaged; that we had no force to oppose to it, and making an Opposition to it, without a power to support the Opposition, would only

---

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 218-219.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred F. Young, “Ebenezer Mackintosh: Boston’s Captain General of the Liberty Tree,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 17.

inflame the People; and be a means of extending the mischief to persons not present to Objects of it.”<sup>7</sup>

Violent opposition to the Stamp Act occurred not only in Boston, but also in New York City, where Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden’s estate was attacked by a mob on November 1, 1765.<sup>8</sup> Similar to the Boston demonstrations, the New York City attack was also presaged by an organized crowd destroying effigies that symbolized government officials supportive of the Stamp Act.<sup>9</sup> The specific targeting of wealth and its various symbols by lower-class mobs is another thread that connected several major events in the leadup to the Revolutionary War. A major symbol of wealth was stolen from Colden’s estate, namely his carriage.<sup>10</sup> Back in Boston, similar items stored inside Hutchinson’s house had also been targeted: namely his clothes, furniture, and dinnerware.<sup>11</sup> The targeting of wealth symbols by the mobs in Boston and New York City speak to a much larger theme: class conflict in the American colonies during the prelude to the Revolutionary War. The lower-class mobs may have targeted wealth because it symbolized everything that separated them from their societal betters. The specific targeting of these symbols may also indicate that there was at least some desire for a social revolution in the colonies among members of the lower class to go along with the political revolution that was quickly gaining steam during the latter half of the 1760s.

The murder of five colonists by British redcoats stationed in Boston on March 5, 1770 came on the heels of several previous violent, but isolated, clashes between lower-class

---

<sup>7</sup> Governor Francis Bernard to Lord Halifax, August 15, 1765, in *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760-1791*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Richard D. Brown (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 101.

<sup>8</sup> Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden to London, in *Revolutionary America: 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, ed. Cynthia A. Kierner (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), 74-75.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson to a Friend, in *Revolutionary America: 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, ed. Cynthia A. Kierner (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), 70-71.

Bostonians and agents of the British Crown, including customs officials and soldiers.<sup>12</sup> The climactic confrontation between a mob of incensed Bostonians wielding improvised weapons and a garrison of British redcoats was only the final chapter in a long-simmering situation that finally boiled over on the night of March 5. The crowd of colonial protesters that clashed with British redcoats on King Street was violent and antagonistic, even daring the soldiers to fire at them.<sup>13</sup> The primary evolution of mob tactics in the case of the Boston Massacre was the simple fact that colonial mobs were no longer only reacting to immediate outside stimuli; they were now organizing *en masse* to address underlying grievances, namely the ongoing British redcoat brutality against Boston residents. The high ratio of soldiers to Boston citizens – four thousand redcoats compared to sixteen thousand Bostonians – had set the city on edge, and a run of violent incidents from February 23 leading up to March 5 provided the spark that finally set off the proverbial powder keg.<sup>14</sup> Colonial residents were apparently no longer content to sit back and wait for personal injury, be it physical or economic, to befall them before they lashed out in anger. They were seizing the initiative and pressing their outstanding grievances against British agents, and perhaps even the Crown’s very authority in the colonies.

By the time of the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773, the colonial lower class was rapidly mobilizing, politically and socially, against British influence and authority in the colonies. The Boston Tea Party was most likely organized by the Sons of Liberty, but it was primarily executed on the ground by lower-class Boston residents: “apprentices and journeymen”

---

<sup>12</sup> Alfred F. Young, “George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Oct. 1981): 586-587, doi:10.2307/1918907 (accessed April 27, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> “What Really Happened at the Boston Massacre? The Trial of Captain Thomas Preston,” in *Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, eds. William Bruce Wheeler and Susan D. Becker (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998), 77-84.

<sup>14</sup> Young, “George Robert Twelves Hewes,” 585.

who could not be easily identified and later prosecuted for their crimes.<sup>15</sup> George Robert Twelves Hewes and Joshua Wyeth, two Bostonian tradesmen who participated in the Tea Party, used eerily similar language to describe their experience, including being grouped into ‘divisions’ to conduct the ‘operation,’ and mentioned being under the supervision of a ‘commander’ or ‘captain’ that gave ‘orders.’<sup>16</sup> This specific use of language suggests that these men believed they were conducting a sort of pseudo-military operation where they were grouped into an acknowledged command structure, and were beholden to direct superiors in that chain of command.

To expand on this theme, it is important to emphasize the fact that the Boston Tea Party came about not through spontaneous mob violence, but meticulous planning and a code of secrecy that made it so some participants, such as Wyeth, did not even know exactly what was planned until a few hours beforehand.<sup>17</sup> The boarding parties that dumped the tea into Boston Harbor disguised themselves, either to draw attention to their actions or to simply make it more difficult to identify them afterward. This was a sophisticated tactic not yet seen before at the other major anti-British protests up to that point.<sup>18</sup> This level of planning and organization came not as an organic evolution of the lower-class mob, but from the influence of the Sons of Liberty.<sup>19</sup> At this juncture the mob was no longer directing its own destiny; rather, it was being wielded as a blunt force instrument by the colonial patriot upper crust: namely by John Hancock, Samuel Adams, and their ilk.<sup>20</sup> The Sons of Liberty, and their precursor organization, the Loyal

---

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 591.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 591-592.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 590.

<sup>20</sup> Gouverneur Morris to Thomas Penn, 1774, “A Gentleman Fears the Power of the People,” in *Revolutionary America: 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, ed. Cynthia H. Kierner (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), 102-103.

Nine, had dabbled before in shaping and directing the actions of lower-class mobs, such as when they previously employed Mackintosh, the nominal leader of the Stamp Act rioters in Boston.<sup>21</sup> This one-step-removed management structure utilized by the Sons created a degree of separation between the mobs and the colonial upper crust, and further served as a means of plausible deniability for the responsibility of future attacks on British soldiers and agents of the Crown. The Sons of Liberty leadership, including many who were members of the upper class, had no qualm with instigating a popular political revolution against British authority in the colonies.

However, they were not aiming to allow that political revolution to spiral out into a wider social revolution. In a private letter to a friend, wealthy colonial revolutionary Gouverneur Morris wrote: “These [mobs], simple as they are, cannot be gulled as heretofore. In short, there is no ruling them, and now...the heads of the mobility grow dangerous to the gentry, and how to keep them down is the question.”<sup>22</sup> The lower-class mob was, certainly by 1773, no longer a directionless beast chasing whatever caught its eye in the moment. The Sons of Liberty had, so to speak, slipped a collar around the neck of a barking dog. Despite this notable shift in dynamics, the lower-class mobs could and would still occasionally direct their fury in a spontaneous manner. Two separate incidents of tarring and feathering against Bostonian loyalist John Malcolm in November 1773 and January 1774 showed that the lower-class mob was still capable of conducting attacks on their own colonial neighbors if those neighbors insisted on displaying outward sympathies for mother Britain.<sup>23</sup>

Outside the coastal port cities of Boston and New York City, rural colonial settlements threw off the chains of British Crown authority with increasing urgency and brazenness after

---

<sup>21</sup> Young, “Ebenezer Mackintosh,” 23.

<sup>22</sup> Morris to Penn, “A Gentleman Fears the Power of the People,” 102-103.

<sup>23</sup> Ann Hulton to Mrs. Lightbody, January 31, 1774, in *The American Record: Images of the Nation’s Past*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, eds. William Grabner and Leonard Richards (New York: McGraw Hill, 2001), 132-133.

December 1773. In late 1774 a caucus of rural and radical Pennsylvania politicians that included Thomas Paine, James Cannon, and Christopher Marshall banded together to give a political voice to the democratic sentiments that had been bubbling near the surface of colonial society over the preceding years.<sup>24</sup> The radical but informal caucus was composed of several talented writers, including Paine of course, who used their literary talents to begin openly advocating a clean political break with Great Britain at a time when most prominent colonial politicians had yet to publicly endorse a drive for independence.<sup>25</sup> Along with advocating independence, the Philadelphia radicals pushed for internal colonial reforms to decrease social stratification among the classes in terms of the laws that governed them.<sup>26</sup> This same group of radicals would later go on to help craft one of the most liberal-minded and socially conscious state constitutions on the continent after the colonies formally declared their independence from Great Britain in 1776.<sup>27</sup>

Radical pro-independence legislators seized control of other local and state legislatures after 1773. When the British Parliament revoked the Massachusetts Charter of 1691, thereby dissolving the colony's government and placing the entire territory under the arbitrary whim of the British government, the mood in the countryside moved rapidly toward independence.<sup>28</sup> A radical pro-independence caucus called the American Political Society gained control of the Worcester County, Massachusetts legislature, converted or marginalized their Tory enemies, and began advocating self-government.<sup>29</sup> The APS organized demonstrations and utilized street

---

<sup>24</sup> Gary B. Nash, "Philadelphia's Radical Caucus That Propelled Pennsylvania to Independence and Democracy," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 68-69.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-73.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 82-84.

<sup>28</sup> Ray Raphael, "Blacksmith Timothy Bigelow and the Massachusetts Revolution of 1774," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 39.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

theater to promote their political goals, for example when they helped to organize the public resignations of many loyalist state officials, and when they helped to shut down the local courts to prevent them from operating under the authority of the despised Massachusetts Government Act.<sup>30</sup> Citizens in and around Worcester began stockpiling weapons and named a new captain of the town militia, Timothy Bigelow, who quickly stepped up the training schedule and offered his own home and smithy for the storage and production of weapons.<sup>31</sup> These demonstrations and the military buildup represented the first whiff of outright armed rebellion by an organized seat of American colonial government against the British Crown.

The participation of the rural lower class in organized colonial militias, which might be called at any time to face British regulars should the redcoats march on Worcester to restore Crown authority there, represented a significant escalation in tensions. It must also be noted that the actions of Timothy Bigelow and the APS in Worcester county again spooked revolutionary moderates like John and Samuel Adams in Boston, who wished to slow down the rapid escalation of open hostility and public endorsements of 'independency' from the mother country, in order to retain broad moderate support across the colonies for the steadily growing rebellion.<sup>32</sup> In the end the Adams cousins' strategy of a more gradual revolution won the day, as Massachusetts did not declare its formal independence from Great Britain in 1774, and instead waited until the other colonies were ready to stand beside it later in 1776.<sup>33</sup>

Joining a militia to fight for independence from British domination must have been somewhat of a liberating experience for the average lower-class minuteman. The act of picking up a rifle and marching to war alongside neighbors to fight against a major world power for

---

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 41-44.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 49-51.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

one's natural rights was not an act to be taken lightly. Thousands of lower-class colonials were willing to lay down their lives in order to secure independence for themselves and their communities. Although it was not the case in Worcester county, there was actual fighting in other rural colonial areas. In Maine, also in 1774, a minor local official named Samuel Thompson reinvented himself as a pro-independence religious zealot and freedom fighter.<sup>34</sup> He recruited a large band of likeminded followers from the town of Gorham and the surrounding area, and soon began terrorizing all perceived enemies of colonial independence throughout the region.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in both Worcester county and rural Maine, lower-class rural colonists took the initiative, organized into armed militias and soon found that they and many of their neighbors were prepared to risk open battle with British regulars. By the year 1775 these militias were eventually integrated into the much larger Continental Army, the highest and most rigidly structured organization that lower-class colonials could take part in at that time. This represented the final and most crucial step in the lower class's evolution from a disorganized and aimless rabble into something much more significant: a politically awakened, liberty-conscious citizenry that was willing to stand and fight for their natural rights on the field of battle.

The road from 1765 to 1775 was a long and winding track, but the lower class that emerged on the eve of the American Revolutionary War was mobilized and committed to the cause of liberty and freedom from British tyranny. However, freedom from the British was not necessarily all they wanted out of the long-running conflict anymore. Ten years of engaging in organized street theater, combating pro-British politicians in their local and state legislatures, and protesting against various legal injustices brought down on them against their will had opened

---

<sup>34</sup> T.H. Breen, "Samuel Thompson's War: The Career of an American Insurgent," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 60-61.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

their minds to all the possibilities of the upcoming Revolutionary War, including whether it would remain a strictly political revolution instead of a social one as well. The fact remains that this shift in socio-political attitudes was gradual, while the more radical elements of the movement were eventually reined in and harnessed by an elite colonial upper crust that wished to contain the movement's scope and political force in order to retain their place at the apex of the social strata inside the rebellious colonies.

### **“Little Men Get Nothing”: How the Colonial Lower Class Was Used by Their Leaders and Then Discarded by Their Lawmakers During and After the Revolutionary War**

The common enlisted soldier that fought in the Revolutionary War for the goal of securing American independence was subjected to many horrors during their term of service. Men enlisted in the Continental Army and local militias were regularly expected to brave the musket and cannon fire of their better trained, better supplied, and better equipped British counterparts. That task alone was a tough ask for a ragtag army that was cobbled together mostly from farmers, semi-skilled tradesmen, and unskilled laborers that served on a typical infantry line. However, bullets and bombs were not the only threats that enlisted men had to contend with. A chronic lack of basic supplies ensured that many enlisted soldiers often straddled the line between malnutrition and starvation.<sup>36</sup> Several virulent diseases, such as yellow fever, dysentery, and smallpox harassed Continental forces as surely as the British did.<sup>37</sup> Unfair conscription and

---

<sup>36</sup> Philip Mead, “‘Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings’: The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin, Continental Soldier,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 124.

<sup>37</sup> Joseph Plumb Martin, *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. James Kirby Martin (West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 43-45.

taxation laws in several states unfairly burdened the lower classes to the benefit of social elites, hampering popular enthusiasm for the war and likely prolonging the conflict.<sup>38</sup> These tribulations were exacerbated by the fact that most Continental Army soldiers' monthly wages soon fell into arrears during the war, dampening morale and escalating the chances of mutiny among the ranks.<sup>39</sup> This widespread failure of leadership by upper-class colonial lawmakers and military leaders led to much unnecessary suffering among the ranks of the Continental armed forces. After the war concluded, most lower-class soldiers were never adequately compensated for their suffering and immense contributions to the war effort.

In order to thoroughly examine this topic, it is first necessary to discuss the class division that persisted inside the Continental Army during this time. Generally, commissioned officers were drawn from the upper-class social elite living in the American colonies. George Washington himself was a wealthy plantation owner from Virginia, and many of his subordinate generals enjoyed upper-middle to upper-class lives before pledging themselves to the revolutionary cause. On the other hand, lower-class men were relegated to the enlisted ranks, where the highest post they could usually hope to achieve was that of a non-commissioned officer.<sup>40</sup> One major motivation for lower-class colonial men to join the Continental Army was the financial incentive, as both workable land and hard currency were becoming increasingly scarce in the colonies.<sup>41</sup> The Continental Army's promise of a steady monthly wage, and in some

---

<sup>38</sup> Michael A. McDonnell, "The Spirit of Levelling': James Cleveland, Edward Wright, and the Militiamen's Struggle for Equality in Revolutionary Virginia," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 135-136.

<sup>39</sup> Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 176-177.

<sup>40</sup> Mead, "The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin," 119.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

cases a land grant to be claimed after the war's conclusion, provided a fine incentive for those men whose financial future seemed not so bright.<sup>42</sup>

Joseph Plumb Martin was one such man. Born in 1760 in Massachusetts, Martin was raised by his grandparents in Connecticut.<sup>43</sup> Facing bleak financial prospects on the verge of manhood and motivated by peer pressure, a patriotic streak, and perhaps a youthful desire for adventure, Martin volunteered for the Connecticut militia in 1776.<sup>44</sup> Meanwhile, many young men across the continent joined their local militias or volunteered for the Continental Army for exactly the same reasons. During his seven years of service in the militia and the Continental Army, Martin faced nearly constant hardship. He and his fellow soldiers faced endemic food shortages, regular exposure to both disease and the elements, and were paid for their troubles in essentially worthless IOUs from the Continental Congress.<sup>45</sup> Sadly, the conditions that Martin was expected to brave as an enlisted soldier in the Continental Army were not extraordinary; on the contrary, they were quite common among the enlisted ranks during the Revolutionary War.

The endemic supply shortages prevalent in the Continental Army was a topic frequently mentioned in Martin's memoirs, indicating that this scarcity of provisions persisted for most of his service from 1776 to 1783. When food was in short supply, Martin and his comrades were forced to either forage, steal what they needed, or simply go hungry.<sup>46</sup> According to Martin, the first method "was nothing more nor less than to procure provisions from the inhabitants for the men in the army and forage for the poor perishing cattle belonging to it, at the point of a bayonet."<sup>47</sup> When the army did distribute food to enlisted men, even for special occasions, the

---

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 4.

<sup>44</sup> Mead, "The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin," 122.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 118-119.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>47</sup> Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 68.

quality and portions were often meager. Martin recalled that on Thanksgiving Day, 1777, he was given only half a gill of rice and a tablespoon of vinegar to feast upon.<sup>48</sup> Martin consumed everything from a cow's spleen to tree bark in order to stave off starvation while on campaign, and also recalled hearing of a group of officers that killed and ate a beloved dog to keep from starving during the winter of 1780.<sup>49</sup> Enlisted continental soldiers regularly consumed hard liquor in lieu of actual food in order to distract their minds from the constant desire for calories.<sup>50</sup>

Said Martin, "If this was not 'suffering,' I request to be informed what could pass under that name."<sup>51</sup> The blame for this widespread suffering falls squarely on the leadership of the Continental Army. It is inexcusable that an army operating entirely in its own territory for the duration of the war could be so miserably provisioned for so many years in a row. This failure was compounded by the fact that, since soldiers were mostly paid in promissory notes instead of hard currency, they were often unable to pay for their own food when offered provisions at a fair market price. Even when Martin or another soldier came across something edible, they were sometimes forced to abandon their catch midway through cooking for another round of forced marching through the countryside.

Exposure to disease and the elements posed yet another hardship for the common soldier. While inoculation against some diseases like smallpox was a somewhat effective method of prevention, it was far from perfect. Whole groups of soldiers, Martin included, were rounded up, ordered inoculated by their officers, and were then housed together in makeshift barracks to ride out the illness.<sup>52</sup> During the fighting months soldiers were forced to march for hours, a task made

---

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 50, 113.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 45.

even more grueling by the persistent shortage of food. When they finally arrived at their destination, enlisted men were lucky if they found a barracks already constructed. If not, they were forced to build their own temporary shelters or, as was often the case, sleep outside.<sup>53</sup> This particular hardship was made even more unpalatable by the fact that upper-class commissioned officers often quartered themselves in whatever houses a small country village could provide.<sup>54</sup> There, they enjoyed access to more and higher quality food than any enlisted man could hope to find on short notice.<sup>55</sup> Regular enlisted soldiers, Martin included, developed a considerable antipathy toward the commissioned officers that commanded them, in part due to the better conditions they enjoyed in comparison to enlisted soldiers.<sup>56</sup> These unequal privileges contributed to the class-based rift that existed between the enlisted ranks and their superiors, the upper-class commissioned officers. While these were obviously horrible conditions to live and work under, the shared experience of hardship during the war instilled a sense of camaraderie between the enlisted men, most of whom belonged to the lower class. While they may have come from different regions, spoke with different accents, held different peacetime occupations, and so on, these men were bound together by the crucible of war they all experienced. This fact would prove critical to the furtherance of the grand social revolution that continued to rage both during and after the Revolutionary War.

The divide between the classes during the war ran much deeper than within the ranks of the Continental Army. When the war broke out in 1775, lower-class militiamen soon became disgruntled over unfair treatment with respect to mandatory participation in the state militias. Upper-class citizens throughout the colonies were exempted from militia service due to poor

---

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Mead, "The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin," 126.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

health, advanced age, or plantation duties at a much higher rate than their lower-class counterparts.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, many lower-class tenant farmers were expected to shoulder their regular responsibilities at home while also making time to muster with their local militia unit whenever British regulars threatened their area.<sup>58</sup> Thus, at least at the outset of the war, local and state governments across the colonies often failed to uphold one of the core principles that they claimed to be fighting for in their war against British domination, namely that of equality under the law.

This class-based rift inside the state militias resulted in at least one major popular protest, led by a man named James Cleveland in Loudon County, Virginia. In Virginia, many poor tenant farmers were straining under the weight of their obligations to both their families and their fledgling nation while they watched their upper-class neighbors escape the same responsibilities by pleading exemption from militia service.<sup>59</sup> As the war dragged on, George Washington himself called for an army of primarily lower-class conscripts, who in his mind were more deferential to authority, more accepting of corporal punishment, and more malleable to other disciplinary protocols.<sup>60</sup> The Loudon demonstrations led by Cleveland in 1775, and later in 1777 in response to new conscription laws, eventually led to many recruitment reforms in the Virginia state militia.<sup>61</sup> However, these reforms came years too late, and the widespread resistance campaign waged against the discriminatory laws had in the meantime stunted recruitment, slowed mobilization, and forced General Washington to wage a mostly defensive military campaign that likely prolonged the conflict.<sup>62</sup> Thus, it can surely be argued that the

---

<sup>57</sup> McDonnell, "The Spirit of Levelling," 139, 146-147.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-136.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 144-145.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.

discriminatory militia laws that persisted for years in Virginia and other states, upheld and advocated for by influential state legislators and top military commanders alike, needlessly extended the war and caused undue hardship and suffering to many thousands of enlisted Continental soldiers.

By the year 1779, all these factors had exerted such an extreme toll on the Continental Army that several regiments began to voice their protests by disobeying basic orders and threatening to march away.<sup>63</sup> In May 1780 the supply situation had yet to improve, so several regiments of the Connecticut Line Infantry, including Joseph Plumb Martin's, went on parade and refused to disperse until they received food and other basic supplies.<sup>64</sup> According to Martin, "We therefore still kept upon the parade in groups, venting our spleen at our country and government, then at our officers, and then at ourselves for our imbecility in staying there and starving in detail for an ungrateful people who did not care what became of us, so they could enjoy themselves while we were keeping a cruel enemy from them."<sup>65</sup> Thus, the social revolution that had taken shape before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War finally bore fruit inside the Continental Army, when lower-class enlisted men finally cast aside their deferential attitude toward their societal betters and superior officers to demand humane treatment in exchange for their daily sacrifices. After their public airing of grievances, Martin noted that the infantrymen had access to decent provisions for several days running.<sup>66</sup>

For all the suffering that common enlisted soldiers endured during the American Revolutionary War, in the end most of them received a pitiable reward compared to what they were promised at the war's outset. The paper IOUs that most Continental soldiers were paid in

---

<sup>63</sup> Mead, "The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin," 126.

<sup>64</sup> Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 118-122.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

were bartered away for a fraction of their face value long before the war ended, only to find their way into the hands of currency speculators who could afford to hold onto them until the government chose to honor their obligation. The land grants promised to some Continental volunteers represented another renege promise by the government, as most Revolutionary War veterans either died, settled elsewhere, or sold off their land grants long before Congress made any meaningful effort to fulfill them.<sup>67</sup> Like many of his compatriots, Martin became embroiled in a land dispute after the war, as he chose to settle on previously unclaimed land in rural Maine that eventually fell into the possession of former Continental Army major general Henry Knox.<sup>68</sup> After a lengthy legal battle, Martin was forced off his land and soon fell into poverty.<sup>69</sup> After the Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818 was finally signed into law, Martin claimed benefits for the remainder of his life, finally reaping the wages he was owed for all his years of suffering during the Revolutionary War.<sup>70</sup> The relief came years too late for many other lower-class war veterans who either died in poverty, or else suffered needlessly in squalor during the intervening years. The excessive delay in passing the Pension Act represented yet another major failure by Congress to sufficiently provide for common enlisted men, even after the fighting was over.

Curiously, Martin himself did not place the blame for his and other war veterans' suffering squarely on the shoulders of the Continental Army and Congress. He instead lamented that ordinary citizens also placed undo hardship on continental soldiers by often refusing to offer boarding and provisions to half-starved soldiers during the war.<sup>71</sup> He pointed out plainly that the mistreatment continued long after the war, as many taxpayers seemed reluctant to fund the

---

<sup>67</sup> Mead, "The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin," 129-132.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 177-180.

pensions of those who had sacrificed their youthful years, their health, and endured so much misery to secure the nation's freedom.<sup>72</sup> In the opinion of Joseph Plumb Martin, a majority of the country was guilty of being ungrateful and forgetful of a generation of sacrifice by ordinary men who accomplished extraordinary deeds.

Martin and many other men's crusade for backpay, promised land, and ultimately the respect they felt they deserved as defenders of an infant nation is best summed up by one of Martin's own phrases. He wrote, "Great men get great praise, little men nothing."<sup>73</sup> The failure of the Continental Congress, the Continental Army, and later even the United States Congress to promptly provide sufficient material support to its lower-class enlisted men, both during and after the war, represents a shameful example of failed leadership and reneged promises over not just a few years, but the first several decades of the nation's early history. This injustice was mainly perpetrated by upper-class lawmakers and army officers who cared little for the physical or economic wellbeing of the lower-class soldiers they lorded over. It was also, in part, a reflection of their prejudices against the class of underprivileged people who continued to advocate against the upper class's monopolization of wealth, power, and social superiority during the war and after its conclusion.

### **Life, Liberty, and Property: The Common Motivations of Women, African Americans, Native Americans, and Loyalists During the Social Revolution**

The preceding two sections primarily detailed the motivations and actions of lower-class white men during the grand social revolution. With so much to discuss, it is easy to forget the

---

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 63.

experiences and trials faced by the even more marginalized and disenfranchised sectors of continental society during this time period. Women, Native Americans, African Americans, and loyalists often get pushed aside to the margins of the narrative to make way for men like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, whose faces are well-known and whose deeds during the Revolutionary Era are easy to recall. However, at the same time the Continental Army was fighting the British redcoats, all the aforementioned groups were fighting their own battles. African Americans like Phillis Wheatley and Prince Hall advocated for the abolition of slavery and, more radically for the era, equality under the law and in polite society. Women fought to keep their families and communities together while also advocating for property and inheritance rights on par with their husbands and brothers. Loyalists also fought to protect their communities and their property, all while being threatened and harassed by colonial authorities for their political views. Finally, Native Americans fought to preserve their traditions, retain their sovereignty, and stem the tide of invaders encroaching upon their ancestral homelands. These four groups shared many of the same goals during the grand social revolution, and yet attempted to realize those goals in drastically different ways. Taken as a whole, these groups' primary common concerns were the expansion of personal rights, the retention of whatever property they held, and the desire to see their families and communities unharmed by the war.

The expansion of personal rights was a motivation shared primarily by women and African Americans. At the outbreak of the war, a person belonging to either of these groups was not technically a person under the law. Heeding Abigail Adams's famous plea to her husband John, we shall first "remember the ladies."<sup>74</sup> Women in the late eighteenth century were denied two fundamental rights that set them apart from their male counterparts: the right to vote, and the

---

<sup>74</sup> "Abigail Adams to John Adams," March 31, 1776, in *Major Problems in the Era of American Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Richard Brown (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), 290.

right for married women to possess personal property independently of their husband. Abigail Adams was a true pioneer in the latter sense; she flouted the patriarchal custom of coverture by running an import/export business, enlisting her husband's help to import goods from Europe to be sold in America.<sup>75</sup> Adams was forced to conceal her activities by conducting her business through male proxies like her husband, her uncle, and even her son; she also used trusted male intermediaries to conduct other business abroad.<sup>76</sup> The coverture system was loathed by women, as it made them financially beholden to their husbands in addition to reinforcing the sexist notion that females were mentally incapable of conducting their own financial affairs. Adams continued to thumb her nose at the coverture system even after she was dead; she willed away most of her personal wealth to her nieces and granddaughters, even though her husband John was still alive at the time of her death in 1818.<sup>77</sup> Adams's male relatives, including her husband John, endorsed her wishes by executing the will faithfully, thereby cementing it as a legally valid document in spite of the coverture laws.<sup>78</sup> Despite these events, the coverture system remained in place for several decades after Adams's death.

African Americans also lacked several key rights both before and after the American Revolution. Like women, they were only granted the franchise many decades after the war's conclusion. Moreover, when it came to property rights most African Americans did not even own themselves. Many enslaved African American men aimed to gain their freedom by running away to join the British Army, which by the proclamation of Lord Dunmore guaranteed their

---

<sup>75</sup> Woody Holton, "The Battle Against Patriarchy That Abigail Adams Won," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 274-275.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 285-286.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

freedom in exchange for fighting against the colonial rebels.<sup>79</sup> Just one month after Lord Dunmore issued his famous proclamation, he reported to London that nearly three hundred slaves had already arrived to take the offer.<sup>80</sup> The famous slave-poet Phillis Wheatley challenged racial and gender norms before and during the Revolution by drawing connections between liberty for the American colonies and personal freedom for African Americans.<sup>81</sup> Developments after the Revolutionary War included a plan for the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which was set in stone with the ratification of the new constitution in 1789. In that same vein, many northern states either outlawed slavery or began the process of gradually freeing whatever slaves resided within their borders by grandfathering the institution out of existence.<sup>82</sup>

Many African Americans were not content to simply have their freedom, however. Beyond freedom from bondage, African Americans thirsted for legal and social equality as well. Notable black founders like Prince Hall, Richard Allen, and Daniel Coker founded religious and social organizations that promoted the advancement of African Americans not just in the north, but in all the states.<sup>83</sup> Hall wrote petitions and essays advocating public education for black children, praising black soldiers who fought in the recent Revolutionary War, and lamenting the climate of incivility that their white neighbors thrust upon the free black population.<sup>84</sup> Allen helped build a critical infrastructure network for blacks centered around the church, specifically

---

<sup>79</sup> “Lord Dunmore’s Appeal to the Slaves of Virginia,” November 1775, in *Revolutionary America, 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, ed. Cynthia A. Kierner (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 2003), 126-127.

<sup>80</sup> Cassandra Pybus, “Mary Perth, Harry Washington, and Moses Wilkinson: Black Methodists Who Escaped from Slavery and Founded a Nation,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 157-158.

<sup>81</sup> David Waldstreicher, “Phillis Wheatley: The Poet Who Challenged the American Revolutionaries,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 104-105.

<sup>82</sup> Richard S. Newman, “Prince Hall, Richard Allen, and Daniel Coker: Revolutionary Black Founders, Revolutionary Black Communities,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 313-316.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 305-306.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 309-310.

by founding the African Methodist Episcopal denomination in 1816. The AME “emphasized racial pride, piety, and educational uplift,” and became the largest black church in America by the time of the Civil War.<sup>85</sup> Coker set his sights primarily on helping to abolish slavery in the south, appealing to white consciences using Scripture, Lockean natural rights philosophy, and plain common sense.<sup>86</sup> Although the final victory against slavery was not won until 1865, and the prospect for true social equality among all races and ethnicities remains elusive even at the present day, the black founders of the United States of America laid the groundwork for monumental advancement in the areas of civil rights and social equality for their people.

The retention of personal property, especially land and houses, remained a constant concern for Native Americans, women, and loyalists before, during, and after the Revolution. White settlers had infringed upon Natives’ territory ever since the dawn of the sixteenth century, but by the 1770s the situation had reached a crisis point. Native American tribes ceded land to colonial settlers at an alarming rate; the Cherokee and Iroquois nations ceded thirteen million acres to colonial settlers between 1768 and 1775 alone.<sup>87</sup> Hoping to reverse this unsustainable trend, Native American leaders like Dragging Canoe and Han Yerry took drastically different paths. Dragging Canoe chose to fight against the rebel colonists while they tussled with the British Army, while Yerry and his wife Tyonajanegen aimed to placate their rebel colonial neighbors by acting as their scouts while continuing to trade and fraternize with them.<sup>88</sup> In the end, the paths of Dragging Canoe and Yerry arrived at roughly the same destination. Brutal tribal

---

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 314.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 317-318.

<sup>87</sup> Colin G. Calloway, “Declaring Independence and Rebuilding a Nation: Dragging Canoe and the Chickamauga Revolution,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 187-188.

<sup>88</sup> James Kirby Martin, “Forgotten Heroes of the Revolution: Han Yerry and Tyona Doxtader of the Oneida Indian Nation,” in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 200-203.

infighting ensued, Native territorial concerns were not addressed in the Treaty of Paris that ended the Revolutionary War, and armed white settlers continued to encroach on Native American lands with increasingly brazen violations of Native territorial sovereignty.<sup>89</sup>

With so many of their male relatives off fighting in the war, both rebel and loyalist women fought tooth and nail to protect their family property. Many women chose to stay alone or with their children on their homesteads to protect their property from plundering armies, both rebel and British-aligned. Mary Willing, widow of prominent British sympathizer William Byrd III, used her family's social connections to shield her plantation from harm when British forces repeatedly raided her family's lands.<sup>90</sup> Despite the nearly total destruction of the port city of Norfolk, Virginia during the winter of 1775-1776, many women took great risks by remaining in the city amid the heavy fighting and firestorms. Norfolk women like Mary Webley, Sarah Smith, Mary Ross, and Joyce Edwards, among others, remained in the city throughout the fighting, burning, and looting to help preserve their homes despite the obvious hazards.<sup>91</sup>

Among the notable subgroups affected by the American Revolution, loyalists living in the colonies occupied perhaps the most precarious position. As depicted in the 1994 film *Mary Silliman's War*, known loyalists were often singled out as traitors to the revolutionary cause, and were subject to death or property confiscation if they did not renounce their oaths to King George III and pledge their support for the revolution.<sup>92</sup> Even before the outbreak of the war, curious observers of the Revolution like James Parker became disillusioned by its more radical

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 210-211.

<sup>90</sup> Joan R. Gundersen, "We Bear The Yoke With a Reluctant Impatience': The War for Independence and Virginia's Displaced Women," in *War and Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Front*, eds. John Resch and Walter Sargent (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 265-266.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 270-272.

<sup>92</sup> *Mary Silliman's War* (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Heritage Films, 2003), DVD.

elements when his personal property was threatened and pilfered by a hostile mob in 1769.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, many loyalists, especially upper-middle class merchants like Parker, only expressed open hostility toward the Revolution once they felt it had progressed beyond its relatively humble initial goals. Parker began to perceive the Revolution as embracing radical tactics that often included property destruction, forgiving debts owed to British-aligned merchants, and anti-immigrant biases.<sup>94</sup> These concerns eventually won out and trumped whatever initial sympathy Parker may have harbored for the plight of the colonies against British economic and political domination. Other prominent loyalists like Thomas Hutchinson and Peter Oliver eventually followed in Parker's footsteps to reach many of the same conclusions that informed their loyalism.<sup>95</sup>

The final primary motivation that guided the actions of these subgroups was also the most universal: the desire to see their families and communities largely unharmed by the ravages of war. As previously mentioned, Native Americans like Dragging Canoe and Yerry pursued radically different strategies toward rebel colonists, one of hostility and another of placation. Both these strategies were designed to preserve Native communities by halting white encroachment on their ancestral homelands, at the very least for a few years.<sup>96</sup> For their part, many in the Continental Congress wished to see the Native American tribes stay neutral during the war, and sent out messages to the Iroquois Confederacy and other Native tribes conveying

---

<sup>93</sup> Keith Mason, "A Loyalist's Journey: James Parker's Response to the Revolutionary Crisis," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no. 2 (1994): 139-140, <http://www.jstor.org.lib-proxy.radford.edu/stable/4249428> (accessed April 14, 2019).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-148.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-153.

<sup>96</sup> Calloway, "Dragging Canoe and the Chickamauga Revolution," 186-187.

that sentiment.<sup>97</sup> In the end both the Cherokee Nation and Iroquois Confederacy became politically divided beyond repair, mostly due to internal tensions centered on how to respond to the Revolutionary War.<sup>98</sup> In the case of the Native Americans, the well-intentioned actions of their leaders opened an inter-tribal rift that persisted for generations after the war's conclusion in 1783, and did little to stem the tide of white settlers moving west.

Undeterred by the dangers of war, many women chose to uproot their lives and follow their loved ones on campaign by becoming camp followers of the Continental Army.<sup>99</sup> In a way, these women helped form a surrogate community that temporarily replaced the one they had left behind; they earned their place in the army by performing labor such as cooking, laundry, sewing, and other services for the soldiers.<sup>100</sup> During the previously mentioned chaos inside Norfolk during the winter of 1775-76, women belonging to both the rebel and loyalist factions took in displaced neighbors and family members who would have otherwise become refugees.<sup>101</sup> In the film *Mary Silliman's War*, Silliman attempted to persuade her husband, a judge, to pass a lighter sentence on their convicted loyalist neighbors, instead of the death by hanging they initially received, in part because she was concerned that the very fabric of their community would come undone in the aftermath.<sup>102</sup> These are just a few examples of how women attempted to preserve a sense of community and familial bond throughout the war, even as the world fell apart all around them.

---

<sup>97</sup> "Congress Explains Patriot Reasoning and Calls for Native American Neutrality, 1775," in *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, ed. Richard D. Brown (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 261-264.

<sup>98</sup> Calloway, "Dragging Canoe and the Chickamauga Revolution," 191-194.

<sup>99</sup> Holly A. Mayer, "Wives, Concubines, and Community: Following the Army," in *War and Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Front*, eds. John Resch and Walter Sargent (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), 236-238.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 238-241.

<sup>101</sup> Gundersen, "The War for Independence and Virginia's Displaced Women," 270-271.

<sup>102</sup> *Mary Silliman's War*, 2003, DVD.

Loyalists also fought to protect their families and communities from the horrors of the war. As noted by Albert H. Tillson, Jr., political allegiances in rural colonial communities tended to be based on a primary attachment to local neighborhoods, not the cosmopolitan social and political elites that dominated the eastern seaboard of the continent.<sup>103</sup> Local economic and community concerns were the primary political issues in the backcountry, where charismatic leaders often swayed their neighbors to either endorse the Revolution or remain loyal to the mother country. The inverse was also true: peer pressure within the community was often powerful enough to persuade leaders to follow the majority of their neighbors.<sup>104</sup> Loyalism was more prevalent among recent Welsh and German immigrants to the backcountry, as these ethnic groups felt little genuine connection with Revolutionary leaders, and instead looked to their neighbors and families as the primary compass for their allegiance.<sup>105</sup> Undoubtedly, family and community were the main drivers that informed the actions of loyalists during the war.

Slave families were often put at the mercy of their master's political affiliations and movements during the war.<sup>106</sup> Since slave labor was a valuable commodity that both sides of the conflict attempted to control, slaves were sometimes subjected to forced transportation and separation from their families and friends.<sup>107</sup> After the Dunmore Proclamation, many slave families fled together to the relative safety of British lines.<sup>108</sup> The British, for their part, recognized that black men would only bear arms against the rebels if they knew their families would receive protection as well, so the offer of sanctuary was also extended to black non-

---

<sup>103</sup> Albert H. Tillson, Jr., "The Localist Roots of Backcountry Loyalism: An Examination of Popular Political Culture in Virginia's New River Valley," *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 3 (Aug., 1988): 387-389, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2208995> (accessed April 15, 2019).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 388.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 395-396.

<sup>106</sup> Gundersen, "The War for Independence and Virginia's Displaced Women," 274-275.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 275-276.

combatants.<sup>109</sup> In total about 1,100 slaves took advantage of Lord Dunmore's offer of freedom in exchange for military service, and many brought their families to safety with them when they fled their rebel masters.<sup>110</sup>

The American Revolution represented a turning point for the entire continent. Over the period of just a few years, the levers of ultimate power in the former colonies were transferred from the hands of a foreign ruling class elite to those who resided in the newly formed United States. However, it must be noted that this political revolution did little to immediately improve the lives of the four groups discussed above. Despite Abigail Adams's entreaty to her husband John, women were mostly ignored in the new American constitution and only obtained the franchise roughly 135 years later. Similarly, Native Americans who fought on both sides of the war were abandoned by their American and the British 'allies', as neither side bothered to ensure tribal lands were protected in the Treaty of Paris.<sup>111</sup> United States policy over the next century called for repeated violations of Native American sovereignty, and even open warfare.<sup>112</sup> Both the Cherokee and the Iroquois peoples were eventually relegated to small reservations that represented a fraction of the lands they once occupied.

As for African Americans, their future after the American Revolution was a mixed bag. Northern states phased out slavery after the war, although the south clung stubbornly to the 'peculiar institution' until another war was fought eighty years later to end the practice for good. Although most northern blacks gained their freedom a few years after the Revolution, real equality remained elusive. Full legal equality was not achieved until the middle of the twentieth century, and social equality remains an open question even at the present day. Loyalists were

---

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 276-277.

<sup>111</sup> Martin, "Forgotten Heroes of the Revolution," 210-211.

<sup>112</sup> Calloway, "Dragging Canoe and the Chickamauga Revolution," 196-197.

also served a mixed bag of outcomes after the Revolution. Many, like Thomas Hutchinson and Peter Oliver, fled the colonies as political refugees and lived the rest of their lives in exile abroad. Some loyalist refugees, like James Parker, remained staunch conservatives opposed to constitutional democracy even into old age, and continued their verbal attacks from across the Atlantic Ocean or from Canada years after the war concluded.<sup>113</sup> Other loyalists chose to remain in the newly formed United States, and successfully reintegrated back into their local communities after the war. Their individual fates differed wildly from one case to another.

No matter the individual motivations that drove the various marginalized factions inside the grand social revolution to take the actions they did during the American Revolution, they all suffered to some degree. Their stories are worth telling because their experiences during the Revolution helped shape the character of our nation.

### **Conclusion: The Ties That Bind Us**

The American Revolution was an experience of collective struggle shared not just by upper-class white men blessed with control over the levers of power, but by all people who would eventually call themselves Americans. While the effort to stifle the grand social revolution that raged from the years 1763 to 1789 was partially successful, the movement still scored some major victories, such as the abolition of slavery in the north. The social revolution also helped to produce several radical state constitutions that instituted a wider franchise and more equitable representation inside state governments after the war's conclusion, both of which benefitted several factions inside the movement in the long run.<sup>114</sup> American social revolutionary Robert

---

<sup>113</sup> Mason, "A Loyalist's Journey," 165-166.

<sup>114</sup> Nash, "Philadelphia's Radical Caucus," 82-84.

Coram advocated all his life, right up to his death in 1794, for the right of all people to have access to public education funded by their state, and his activism helped pave the way for later reformers to develop the public school system that is today responsible for the education of most American youths.<sup>115</sup> Founding Fathers and Mothers like Prince Hall, Abigail Adams, James Cleveland, Phillis Wheatley, Timothy Bigelow and the American Political Society, Thomas Paine and the radical Philadelphia Caucus, and so many others helped to shepherd the movement from the days of destroying effigies and government offices during the Stamp Act riots to sending their representatives to the most prestigious halls of political power in post-revolution America. Each wing of the social revolution had its own preferred methods for obtaining the reforms they desired; these methods ranged from political activism through writings, violent and nonviolent street theater, to even armed insurrection against British and colonial governmental bodies. No government was ever totally immune from criticism by the many, variously opinionated leaders of the grand social revolution during this crucial period of American history.

The immediate victories of the grand social revolution after the war were modest, but perhaps the movement's greatest achievement was to set the table for future legal reforms and social levelling in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Everything from the final abolition of slavery, the expansion of the franchise to all legal adults, the right for women to own their own property and conduct their own financial affairs, to the equal application of the law unto all citizens regardless of gender, race, creed, or any other distinction – these were just a few of the radical goals the social revolutionaries advocated for during their lifetimes. It would take many decades after the conclusion of the Revolutionary Era to convert the social revolutionaries'

---

<sup>115</sup> Seth Cotlar, "Every Man Should Have Property": Robert Coram and the American Revolution's Legacy of Economic Populism," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, eds. Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael (New York: Random House, 2012), 348-350.

dreams into reality; practically all of them were dead before their most radical goals were achieved. Their ideas, however, remain very much alive and well in the modern United States of America. The spirit of the grand social revolution lives on to the present day as activists continue to strive for the ever-elusive goal of true social equality in America. As it turns out, they are simply picking up where the Founding Fathers and Mothers of the grand social revolution left off more than two hundred years ago.

## Bibliography

## Primary Sources

- “Abigail Adams to John Adams.” March 31, 1776. In *Major Problems in the Era of American Revolution*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by Richard Brown, 290. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.
- “Ann Hulton to Mrs. Lightbody.” January 31, 1774. In *The American Record: Images of the Nation’s Past*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by William Grabner and Leonard Richards, 132-133. New York: McGraw Hill, 2001.
- “Congress Explains Patriot Reasoning and Calls for Native American Neutrality.” 1775. In *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, edited by Richard D. Brown, 261-264. Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992.
- “Governor Francis Bernard to Lord Halifax.” August 15, 1765. In *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760-1791*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, edited by Richard D. Brown, 101. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000.
- Gouverneur Morris to Thomas Penn. 1774. “A Gentleman Fears the Power of the People.” In *Revolutionary America: 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, edited by Cynthia H. Kierner, 102-103. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003.
- “Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden to London.” In *Revolutionary America: 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, edited by Cynthia A. Kierner, 74-75. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003.
- “Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson to a Friend.” In *Revolutionary America: 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, edited by Cynthia A. Kierner, 70-71. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003.
- “Lord Dunmore’s Appeal to the Slaves of Virginia.” November 1775. In *Revolutionary America, 1750-1815, Sources and Interpretation*, edited by Cynthia A. Kierner, 126-127. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003.
- Martin, Joseph P. *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, edited by James Kirby Martin. West Sussex, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

## Secondary Sources

- Breen, T.H. “Samuel Thompson’s War: The Career of an American Insurgent.” In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 53-66. New York: Random House, 2012.

- Calloway, Colin G. "Declaring Independence and Rebuilding a Nation: Dragging Canoe and the Chickamauga Revolution." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 185-198. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Cotlar, Seth. "Every Man Should Have Property': Robert Coram and the American Revolution's Legacy of Economic Populism." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 337-353. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Gundersen, Joan R. "We Bear The Yoke With a Reluctant Impatience': The War for Independence and Virginia's Displaced Women." In *War and Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Front*, edited by John Resch and Walter Sargent, 263-288. Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007.
- Holton, Woody. "The Battle Against Patriarchy That Abigail Adams Won." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 273-287. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Linebaugh, Peter and Marcus Rediker. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2000.
- Martin, James K. "Forgotten Heroes of the Revolution: Han Yerry and Tyona Doxtader of the Oneida Indian Nation." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 199-211. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Mary Silliman's War*. DVD. Directed by Stephen Surjik. Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Heritage Films, 2003.
- Mason, Keith. "A Loyalist's Journey: James Parker's Response to the Revolutionary Crisis." *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no. 2 (April 1994): 139-166. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4249428> (accessed April 27, 2019).
- Mayer, Holly A. "Wives, Concubines, and Community: Following the Army." In *War and Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Front*, edited by John Resch and Walter Sargent, 235-261. Dekalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2007.
- McDonnell, Michael A. "The Spirit of Levelling': James Cleveland, Edward Wright, and the Militiamen's Struggle for Equality in Revolutionary Virginia." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 135-154. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Mead, Philip. "Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings': The Betrayals of Private Joseph Plumb Martin, Continental Soldier." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and*

- Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 117-134. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Nash, Gary B. "Philadelphia's Radical Caucus That Propelled Pennsylvania to Independence and Democracy." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 67-85. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Newman, Richard S. "Prince Hall, Richard Allen, and Daniel Coker: Revolutionary Black Founders, Revolutionary Black Communities." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 305-321. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Pybus, Cassandra. "Mary Perth, Harry Washington, and Moses Wilkinson: Black Methodists Who Escaped from Slavery and Founded a Nation." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 155-168. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Raphael, Ray. "Blacksmith Timothy Bigelow and the Massachusetts Revolution of 1774." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 35-52. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Tillson, Albert H. "The Localist Roots of Backcountry Loyalism: An Examination of Popular Political Culture in Virginia's New River Valley." *The Journal of Southern History* 54, no. 3 (August 1988): 387-404. doi:10.2307/2208995 (accessed April 27, 2019).
- Waldstreicher, David. "Phillis Wheatley: The Poet Who Challenged the American Revolutionaries." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 97-113. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Wheeler, William B. and Susan D. Becker. "What Really Happened at the Boston Massacre? The Trial of Captain Thomas Preston." In *Discovering the American Past: A Look at the Evidence*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, 77-84. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1998.
- Young, Alfred F. "Ebenezer Mackintosh: Boston's Captain General of the Liberty Tree." In *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, edited by Alfred F. Young, Gary B. Nash, and Ray Raphael, 15-33. New York: Random House, 2012.
- Young, Alfred F. "George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (October 1981): 561-623. doi:10.2307/1918907 (accessed April 27, 2019).