

suddenly and effectively ended the cultural climate that had allowed black slavery, as well as other forms of bondage and unfreedom, to exist throughout the colonial period without serious challenge. With the revolutionary movement, black slavery became excruciatingly conspicuous in a way that it had not been in the older monarchical society with its many calibrations and degrees of unfreedom; and Americans in 1775–76 began attacking it with a vehemence that was inconceivable earlier.

For a century or more the colonists had taken slavery more or less for granted as the most base and dependent status in a hierarchy of dependencies and a world of laborers. Rarely had they felt the need either to criticize black slavery or to defend it. Now, however, the republican attack on dependency compelled Americans to see the deviant character of slavery and to confront the institution as they never had to before. It was no accident that Americans in Philadelphia in 1775 formed the first antislavery society in the world. As long as most people had to work merely out of poverty and the need to provide for a living, slavery and other forms of enforced labor did not seem all that different from free labor. But the growing recognition that labor was not simply a common necessity of the poor but was in fact a source of increased wealth and prosperity for ordinary workers made slavery seem more and more anomalous. Americans now recognized that slavery in a republic of workers was an aberration, “a peculiar institution,” and that if any Americans were to retain it, as southern Americans eventually did, they would have to explain and justify it in new racial and anthropological ways that their former monarchical society had never needed. The Revolution in effect set in motion ideological and social forces that doomed the institution of slavery in the North and led inexorably to the Civil War.

With all men now considered to be equally free citizens, the way was prepared as well for a radical change in the conception of state power. Almost at a stroke the Revolution destroyed all the earlier talk of paternal or maternal government, filial allegiance, and mutual contractual obligations between rulers and ruled. The familial image of government now lost all its previous relevance, and the state in America emerged as something very different from what it had been.

The Radical Revolution from the “Bottom Up”

GARY B. NASH

“WHO SHALL WRITE THE HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION? Who can write it? Who will ever be able to write it?” Thus wrote John Adams in 1815 to Thomas Jefferson, his old enemy but by this time his septuagenarian friend. “Nobody,” Jefferson replied from Monticello, “except merely its external facts ... The life and soul of history must be forever unknown.”

Not so. For more than two centuries historians have written about the American Revolution, striving to capture the “life and soul” of which Jefferson

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spoke. We now possess a rich and multistranded tapestry of the Revolution, filled with engaging biographies, local narratives, weighty explorations of America's greatest explosion of political thinking, annals of military tactics and strategies, discussions of religious, economic, and diplomatic aspects of what was then called the "glorious cause," and more. Indeed we now have possession of far more than the "external facts."

Yet the great men—the founding fathers—of the revolutionary era dominate the reigning master narrative. Notwithstanding generations of prodigious scholarship, we have not appreciated the lives and labors, the sacrifices and struggles, the glorious messiness, the hopes and fears of diverse groups that fought in the longest and most disruptive war in our history with visions of launching a new age filling their heads. Little is known, for example, of Thomas Peters, an African-born slave who made his personal declaration of independence in early 1776, fought for the freedom of African Americans, led former slaves to Nova Scotia after the war, and completed a pilgrimage for unalienable rights by shepherding them back to Africa to participate in the founding of Sierra Leone. Why are the history books virtually silent on Dragging Canoe, the Cherokee warrior who made the American Revolution into a two-decade life-sapping fight for his people's life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness? We cannot capture the "life and soul" of the Revolution without paying close attention to the wartime experiences and agendas for change that engrossed backcountry farmers, urban craftsmen, deep-blue mariners, female camp followers and food rioters—those ordinary people who did most of the protesting, most of the fighting, most of the dying, and most of the dreaming about how a victorious America might satisfy the yearnings of all its peoples....

[T]he true radicalism of the American Revolution ... was indispensable to the origins, conduct, character, and outcome of the world-shaking event.

By "radicalism" I mean advocating wholesale change and sharp transformation rooted in a kind of dream life of a better future imagined by those who felt most dissatisfied with the conditions they experienced as the quarrel with Great Britain unfolded. For a reformed America they looked toward a redistribution of political, social, and religious power; the discarding of old institutions and the creation of new ones; the overthrowing of ingrained patterns of conservative, elitist thought; the leveling of society so that top and bottom were not widely separated; the end of the nightmare of slavery and the genocidal intentions of land-crazed frontiersmen; the hope of women of achieving a public voice. This radicalism directed itself at destabilizing a society where the white male elite prized stability because it upheld their close grip on political, economic, religious, sexual, and social power. This radicalism, therefore, was usually connected to a multifaceted campaign to democratize society, to recast the social system, to achieve dreams with deep biblical and historical roots, to put "power in the people," as the first articles of government in Quaker New Jersey expressed it a century before the American Revolution....

Both loyal supporters of English authority and well-established colonial protest leaders underestimated the self-activating capacity of ordinary colonists. By the end of 1765, an extraordinary year in the history of the English colonies,

people in the streets had astounded, dismayed, and frightened their social superiors. Resistance to English policies had emboldened people who previously counted for little in the political arena to find a mind of their own. Colonial leaders, warned the perceptive General Gage, "began to be terrified at the spirit they had raised to perceive that popular fury was not to be guided, and each individual feared he might be the next victim to their rapacity."

While crowds took to the streets up and down the Atlantic seaboard shouting "liberty and no stamps," it entered the minds of many colonists that the constant talk about liberty—and its opposite, slavery—might become highly contagious, and applied to an issue far more fundamental than a modest tax imposed by England. In every colony, white leaders began to wonder about how restive slaves might react to the rhetoric fueling the disturbances related to the Stamp Act. While seeking freedom from parliamentary taxes, while deploring English tyranny and supposed attempts to "enslave" colonists, the Americans unexpectedly faced a profound contradiction as they scrambled to suppress enslaved Africans with their own urges to be free.

George Mason, Virginia planter-politician and neighbor of Thomas Jefferson, was one of the many Virginia leaders worried over the huge increase in Africans brought across the Atlantic after the end of the Seven Years' War. "Perhaps the primary cause of the destruction of the most flourishing government that ever existed was the introduction of great numbers of slaves," he wrote in 1765 in a bill he introduced in the House of Burgesses, just after the Stamp Act riots surged through the seaboard cities. Mason was soon joined by other Virginians who had been edgy about slave unrest since the beginning of the Seven Years' War. Many white militiamen were fighting on the frontier, and this raised fear that slaves, who represented 40 percent of the population, would capitalize on their absence as slave patrollers to stage a bid for freedom. "The villainy of the Negroes on any emergency of government is what I always feared," Governor Robert Dinwiddie told Charles Carter, a tidewater planter with scores of slaves, in 1755. Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763 further increased fears of black rebellion. One militia officer told Governor Dinwiddie that the Indians raiding on Virginia's frontier "are saving and caressing all the Negroes they take," and this might "be productive of an insurrection ... attended with the most serious consequences."

The Indian-African alliance never occurred, but nervousness over the possibility spread as the furor over the Stamp Act filled the air with heated talk about American liberty and British tyranny. In 1766, some of George Mason's slaves joined a plot to mount an insurrection. Other slave rebellions, including ones in Loudoun and Fairfax Counties occurred in 1767, and this convinced the House of Burgesses to double the import duty on slaves in order to limit the number of new Africans entering the colony. In the meantime, white authorities hanged seven slaves, and the heads of four "were cut off and fixed on the chimneys of the courthouse," as a Boston newspaper reported....

Charleston, South Carolina, the slave importation center of North America, suffered even greater fears of slave conspiracy after white protesters bandied about assaults on *their* freedom. Black Charlestonians heard and read the word "liberty" repeatedly in the waning months of 1765, and saw the slogan "Liberty

and no Stamp Act" emblazoned on a placard hanging from the neck of the stamp distributor's effigy, strung up on October 19, 1765. A few days later, the Sons of Liberty, marching on the elegant house of merchant Henry Laurens to seize bundles of stamps they believed had been stored there, shouted "Liberty, Liberty and Stamp'd Paper." When a huge procession celebrated the resignation of Charleston's stamp distributor, they held aloft a British flag that read LIBERTY.

The repeated use of the word "liberty" was not lost on some five thousand slaves in Charleston. In 1765, the city's grand jury was already apprehensive "that slaves in Charles-Town are not under a good regulation, and that they at all times in the night go about streets rioting," undeterred by the city's handful of watchmen. Within weeks, restive slaves were gathering in knots. More ominous, in mid-December the wife of a wealthy merchant overheard two slaves conversing about a colonywide insurrection planned for Christmas Eve. "This place has been in an uproar for twelve days past," wrote one townsman. "Every company in town mount guard day and night, and the severest orders given which has prevented it hitherto."

Put on close guard, white Carolinians got through the Christmas season unscathed. But in mid-January "a peculiar incident, revealing in what dread the citizens lived among the black savages with whom they were surrounding themselves," reported Henry Laurens, "was furnished by some negroes who apparently in thoughtless imitation, began to cry 'Liberty.'" Laurens was surely mistaken that this action was "thoughtless imitations," but he was accurate that "the city was thrown under arms for a week and for 10 or 14 days messengers were sent posting through the province in the most bitterly cold weather in 19 years." Almost simultaneously, 107 slaves fled their plantations outside Charleston and "joined a large number of runaways in Colleton County, which increase[d] to a formidable Body." Concerned about their liberty with regard to stamped paper, South Carolinians were even more concerned about the liberty of Africans. More than seven thousand Africans had stumbled off slave ships in Charleston Harbor in the year 1765—a huge increase from previous years that made the colony more than 60 percent African. Quaking over real and imagined black insurrections, legislators passed a three-year stoppage of slave imports to take effect on January 1, 1766. But the black revolution in South Carolina had already begun....

The years between 1766 and 1774 were ones of intense debate and confrontation at every level of society. Thousands of well-meaning people on both sides of the Atlantic were engaged in the yeasty business of defining sound political principles, finding stable constitutional ground upon which to stand, and hammering out ideological positions that made sense within their communities. Only in a time of crisis does such hard thinking usually occur. Complicating matters, the crucial decade after 1765 produced violent economic fluctuations and difficult circumstances for people of all ranks. These difficulties cannot be sensibly separated from the course of politics and political thinking, for all politics takes place within social and economic contexts.

By 1766, most sectors of the colonies had recovered from the depression that followed the end of the Seven Years' War, but nettlesome problems

remained. The growing domination of colonial wheels of commerce by English decision makers and English capital was of especial concern. The colonial economy had always been the servant of the metropolitan master; that was what it meant to be a colony, to be "underdeveloped," to be a producer and exporter of foodstuffs and raw products and an importer and consumer of finished goods. But as the colonial economies matured, restrictions on local development began to grate. The Currency Act of 1764, which strictly limited the authority of Pennsylvania and New York to issue paper currency, had a constricting effect because locally issued paper money had provided the circulating medium of local trade. When it was disallowed, internal trade shriveled up, hurting merchants and artisans alike and obliging traders to concoct ingenious schemes for issuing fiat money. The years from 1767 to 1769 were especially difficult in this regard. A number of Boston merchants, including John Hancock's younger brother, closed their doors; and Philadelphians were stunned by the collapse of Baynton, Wharton, and Morgan, one of the city's largest merchant houses that specialized in the Indian trade, with liabilities of £94,000—something akin to the collapse of Enron in 2001.

Even more punishing was the credit crisis of 1772. Touched off by the collapse of a major London banking house, it spread like a summer brushfire. English and Scottish merchants had extended credit liberally to American importers in order to spur the consumption of British goods. American merchants willingly increased their orders and passed their indebtedness on to retailers and consumers as book credit. Accepting credit in order to expand had obvious advantages, but it made borrowers far more vulnerable to cyclical swings in the British credit structure. Responding to a major bankruptcy in 1772, English merchants began to demand payment on colonial debts. When colonial merchants could not meet the demands of their overseas creditors, they declared bankruptcy; or, by calling for retailers to pay off their indebtedness, they forced shopkeepers into bankruptcy. The ripple effect was felt up and down the seaboard colonies. "Daily accounts of heavy failures among the shopkeepers" were reported in Philadelphia in late 1773, and this occurred in other seaport towns as well. The scramble for liquidity hit southern planters and small farmers as well as northern merchants and shopkeepers, for tobacco, rice, and indigo growers had deeply indebted themselves to purchase more slaves and open up more land. When English and Scottish creditors called on them to pay their debts, thousands of southern planters suffered court judgment that took away their "land, Negroes, horses, cows, hogs, and feather beds or old pots or pans," as one Fredericksburg trader explained. The early 1770s thus became a time when punishing economic fluctuations made parliamentary legislation all the more intolerable....

John Adams, especially in his public pronouncements, had nervous fits about the leveling spirit breaking out in all the colonies. It was one thing to bring the high and mighty down a rung or two, but quite another to allow those on the bottom rungs to spring upward. Like his cousin Sam, he believed that in a republic the distance between rich and poor should not be too great. But if this leveling of income and wealth shaded into indiscipline or challenges to the authority of the well-born and educated, he saw the beast of anarchy beckoning.

Writing from Philadelphia to Abigail, who was tending the farm and raising their four children in Braintree, Massachusetts, three hundred miles to the north, Adams complained that "our struggle has loosened the bands of government everywhere. That children and apprentices were disobedient—that schools and colleges were grown turbulent—that Indians slighted their guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their masters." This casting off of deference disturbed Adams. Released from the bottle, could the genie ever be recaptured?

That the genie was not always masculine also troubled Adams. His wife Abigail tasked him on just this issue. Her husband's long absences from home and the strain of running their farm by herself just outside British-occupied Boston, along with the death of her mother in the fall of 1775, all seemed to bring her to a new state of consciousness about what the looming revolution might hold for the women who were playing such an important role in the nonimportation and homespun movements. "In the Code of Laws which I suppose it will be necessary for you to make," she wrote John on March 31, 1776, "I desire you would remember the ladies, and be more generous and favourable to them than your ancestors." In this much quoted passage, Abigail went from desire to demand. "Do not put such unlimited power into the hand of the husbands. Remember all men would be tyrants if they could. If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation." A few paragraphs earlier Abigail had wondered about just how real the "passion for liberty" was among those who still kept fellow humans enslaved. Now she pushed the point home about men enslaving women. "That your sex are naturally tyrannical is a truth so thoroughly established as to admit of no dispute, but such of you as wish to be happy willingly give up the harsh title of master for the more tender and endearing one of friend. Why then, not put it out of the power of the vicious and lawless to use us with cruelty and indignity with impunity? Men of sense in all ages abhor those customs which treat us only as the vassals of your sex."

In this letter we see clearly how women of Abigail Adams's intellectual mettle nimbly made the connection between civil and domestic government. The more male leaders railed against England's intentions to "enslave" its colonial "subjects," to rule arbitrarily, to act tyrannically, the more American women began to rethink their own marital situations. The language of protest against England reminded many American women that they too were badly treated "subjects"—the subjects of husbands who often dealt with them cruelly and exercised power over them arbitrarily. Most American women, still bound by the social conventions of the day, were not yet ready to organize in behalf of greater rights. But the protests against England stirred up new thoughts about what seemed arbitrary or despotic in their own society, and many women began to think that what had been endured in the past was no longer acceptable. This paved the way for change. Abigail's reference to the cruelty men used against their wives probably refers to the "rule of thumb" that the law upheld. Deeply imbedded in England's common law, and encoded in Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, the rule of thumb made it permissible for husbands to beat their wives so long as the stick or club did not exceed the thickness of a male

thumb. The reference to using women with indignity probably referred to the emotional and psychological domination of wives by husbands. For all his love of Abigail, John's reply to her letter of March 31, 1776, confirmed the point. "As to your extraordinary code of laws," he wrote, "I cannot but laugh." Then referring to the growing insubordination of children, apprentices, Indians, slaves, and college students, he sniffed that "your letter was the first intimation that another tribe more numerous and powerful than all the rest were grown discontented. This is rather too coarse a compliment but you are so saucy, I won't blot it out."...

Abigail was not amused. She knew that it was not the British ministry that stirred up women and others grating against their subordination. Instead of writing John after receiving his dismissive letter. She unburdened herself to her friend Mercy Otis Warren, the sister of John Otis and wife of James Warren, a Massachusetts legislator. "He is very saucy to me in return for a list of female grievances which I transmitted to him," she wrote Mercy. "I think I will get you to join me in a petition to Congress." Why, she wondered, was her husband so insensitive to what seemed an opportunity to enact a more "generous plan," "some laws in our favor upon just and liberal principles" by which the law would curb "the power of the arbitrary and tyrannic to injure us with impunity?" Under revised law, women could gain court protection against abusive husbands and not lose their property and wages to men once they married. For raising just and liberal principles, she bitterly told Mercy, he scoffed at her and called her saucy. "So I have helped the sex abundantly," she closed, "but I will tell him I have only been making trial of the disinterestedness of his virtue, and when weighed in the balance have found in wanting." Mercy Otis Warren, who had already crossed the boundaries of correct female behavior by writing two patriot plays that pilloried Thomas Hutchinson and other Loyalists, sympathized with Abigail and told other women that the criticism of females who interested themselves in politics should be resisted.

Abigail stewed about John's dismissiveness and waited far longer than was her habit before answering his letter of April 14. "I believe tis near ten days since I wrote you a line," she wrote on May 7. "I have not felt in a humor to entertain you. If I had taken up my pen perhaps some unbecoming invective might have fallen from it." Then she let out the steam building in her on the matter of women's rights. "I can not say that I think you very generous to the ladies, for... you insist upon retaining an absolute power over wives." Again, she was using the same catchwords and phrases so familiar from the years of protesting British arrogance and insensitivity—"absolute power," "tyranny," "unlimited power." "You must remember," she continued, "that arbitrary power is like most other things which are very hard, very liable to be broken—and notwithstanding all your wise laws maxims we have it in our power not only to free ourselves but to subdue our masters, and without violence throw both your natural and legal authority at our feet." In this reference to Lysistrata, who rallied the Grecian women to withhold their sexual favors from husbands who would not listen to their pleas for peace, Abigail played her last card—at least for now. When John received her latest parry on the question of arbitrary and tyrannical men, he

chose to withhold further comment. It was not that he put the matter out of mind. Rather he chose to express his dismay and horror to James Sullivan, superior court judge in Massachusetts and member of the legislature, who had offered his view that propertyless adult men should be allowed the vote. "Depend upon it, Sir," Adams wrote Sullivan: "There will be no end of it" if propertyless men were given the vote. "Women will demand a vote." Young lads would be next. "It tends to confound and destroy all distinctions and prostrate all ranks to one common level."...

Many slaves could not wait for benevolent masters and mistresses to set them free. From northern New England to the Georgia-Florida border, previous strategies to obtain freedom—petitioning legislatures for a general emancipation, bringing individual freedom suits before local courts, and taking flight in the hope of successfully posing as free men and women—now expanded to a fourth highly risky but less complicated option: offering the British their services in exchange for freedom and inducing the British to issue a general proclamation that would provide an opportunity for masses of slaves to burst their shackles.

In Boston, after he had been appointed the military governor of Massachusetts in April 1774, General Thomas Gage was determined to ram the new British policy down the throats of truculent Bostonians. Five months later, he received offers of help in this difficult matter from an unlikely source. Knowing that Governor Gage had dissolved the Massachusetts legislature, thereby foreclosing that avenue of ending slavery, Boston's slaves now offered to take up the sword against their masters. In late September 1774, fourteen months before Virginia's royal governor issued his famous proclamation offering freedom to any slave or indentured servant reaching the British forces, enslaved Bostonians tried to turn rumors of British intentions into concrete policy. "There has been in town a conspiracy of the Negroes," Abigail Adams wrote her husband, now in Philadelphia as a delegate to the First Continental Congress. "At present it is kept pretty private and was discovered by one who endeavored to dissuade them from it; he being threatened with his life, applied ... for protection." Abigail continued that "They conducted in this way ... to draw up a petition to the Governor, telling him they would fight for him provided he would arm them and engage to liberate them if he conquered." For white Bostonians, who prided themselves as a different breed from Virginia and Carolina slave masters, this came as a shock. Benjamin Franklin's judgment nearly twenty years before that "every slave may be reckoned a domestic enemy" was being chillingly confirmed.

In reporting the determination of Boston slaves to seize their freedom, Abigail reiterated her hatred of slavery. "I wish most sincerely there was not a slave in the province. It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me—fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have." All over Massachusetts, slaves agreed. In late March 1775, slaves in Bristol and Worcester counties petitioned the local committees of correspondence for assistance "in obtaining their freedom." In mid-April, just before the "shot heard round the world," slaves in Bristol County, Rhode Island, slipped away to join "Col. Gilbert's banditti," a group of thirty-five Loyalists who had obtained arms from a British man-of-war in Newport.

Then, in the aftermath of the firefight at Lexington and Concord, Worcester County's convention, sitting outside the law, resolved that "we abhor the enslaving of any of the human race, and particularly of the NEGROES, in this country," and promised to do anything possible "toward the emancipating the NEGROES...."

Not far behind Massachusetts slaves were African Americans in the southern colonies. In November 1774, apparently aware that the English might give them their freedom, a group of Virginia slaves met to choose a leader "who was to conduct them when the English troops should arrive," as the young James Madison revealed to Philadelphia's printer William Bradford. Madison recounted how the slaves "foolishly thought ... that by revolting to them [the British] they should be rewarded with their freedom." He soon learned that the slaves were not foolish at all but were anticipating what would soon become policy. Madison begged Bradford not to print anything about his plot in the *Pennsylvania Journal* for fear that the news would inspire other uprisings. Two weeks later, the dreaded insurgency surfaced in coastal Georgia when six male and four female slaves murdered their plantation overseer and his wife and then marched to neighboring plantations, where they killed several whites and wounded others. When a patrol captured the rampaging slaves, they were burned alive at the stake, not only to avenge the deaths of white planters but to terrify other slaves with rebellion on their minds."

Word leaking back from England gave southern slaves further reason to believe that their calculations about evolving British policy were not foolish. In early January 1775, the news reached southerners that a member of Parliament had proposed a general emancipation of slaves as a way of "humbling the high aristocratic spirit of Virginia and the southern colonies." The House of Commons did not pass the measure, which would have rocked overseas English slavery to the roots; but in Massachusetts Governor Gage soon expressed interest in such a policy. In a letter to John Stuart, southern superintendent of Indian affairs, Gage noted that if white South Carolinians continued their reckless opposition to British policies, "it may happen that your rice and indigo will be brought to market by negroes instead of white people."

Slaves in tidewater Virginia did their part to shape English policy on the emancipation issue through a rash of uprisings in early 1775. On April 21, only two days after the minutemen riddled Gage's troops, who were sent to capture the colonial arsenals at Lexington and Concord, determined slaves made their move. John Murray, earl of Dunmore, had already moved from the governor's mansion in Williamsburg, Virginia's capital to the *Fowey*, a British warship anchored in the lower York River. From here he dispatched a detachment to seize barrels of gunpowder in Williamsburg and bring them to the British warships. Edmund Randolph, Jefferson's son-in-law, later claimed that the governor's intention was to disarm the Virginians and "weaken the means of opposing an insurrection of the slaves ... for a protection against whom in part the magazine was at first built." Seeing their chance, a number of slaves in Williamsburg offered to join Dunmore and "take up arms." To cow white patriot Virginians, Dunmore now warned that he "would declare

freedom to the slaves and reduce the City of Williamsburg to ashes" if the hastily raised militia units threatened him.

Ten days later, on May 1, 1775, Dunmore made an earthshaking decision in favor of what one white Virginian called "the most diabolical" scheme to "offer freedom to our slaves and turn them against their masters." Writing to the secretary of state in London, Dunmore set out his plan "to arm all my own Negroes and receive all others that will come to me whom I shall declare free." It was a policy, remembered South Carolina's William Drayton, that "was already known" by slaves, who "entertain ideas that the present contest was for obliging us to give them their liberty." Near panic engulfed the South. "The newspapers were full of publications calculated to excite the fears of the people—massacres and instigated insurrections were the words in the mouth of every child," remembered Indian superintendent John Stuart. Stuart himself was part of the potential insurrection. Charlestonians drove him from the city after he was suspected of plotting to draw Creek Indians into the conflict on the British side. Stuart fled to Saint Augustine, Florida, to await the British occupation of South Carolina....

Native Americans suffered disastrous losses in the war of the American Revolution. Facing a white society that was heavily armed and determined to seize the western lands that the Proclamation Act of 1763 denied white settlers, nations such as the Iroquois, Delaware, Shawnee, Wyandot, Cherokee, and Creek were forced by American commissioners to cede most of their land at gunpoint. While population buildup that had caused straitened economic conditions in seaboard settlements found a safety valve in western lands. Pouring across the Appalachians even before Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Jay affixed their signatures to the peace treaty with England, thousands of settlers ignored treaty boundary lines and thumbed their noses at their elected state governments and the continental Congress. Looking east, Native Americans had to make hard choices while confronting this human torrent.

Joseph Brant, the Mohawk leader ... appeared on the scene once more to play a crucial role in attempts to forge a pan-Indian alliance that could stem the white tide in the Old Northwest. Having cowed the tribes closest to the settlers' frontier—the Iroquois, Delaware, Wyandot, Chippewa, and Ottawa—congressional commissioners in 1786 planned to humble the westernmost tribes, the Shawnee, Miami, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, and others. But meanwhile, Brant worked his own woodland diplomacy, trying to gather many tribal leaders together for a grand parley at Detroit late in 1786. He had just returned from his second voyage to England, where he did not receive what he most hoped for—promises of military support. But England promised Brant a generous compensation for Iroquois losses in the war and gave him enough encouragement to return home determined to rally England's wartime Indian allies for further resistance to the overweening Americans. Brant knew that for his own people, the Mohawks and other Iroquois, the future lay in moving north of Lake Erie and Lake Ontario where the British had granted them land in the Grand River region of Lower Canada. Yet he felt compelled to play out his years on a larger stage, working to rally the Ohio River valley tribes in defense of their homelands.

Trekking into Ohio country in September 1786 with fifty-seven Iroquois delegates to parley with the Shawnee at their main town of Wapakoneta (in today's west central Ohio), Brant narrowly escaped a punitive expedition of two thousand militiamen led by George Rogers Clark and Benjamin Logan that burned seven Shawnee towns, killed many warriors, and captured women and children. In another incident of violating the rules of civilized warfare, the Americans slaughtered Old Melanthy, a friendly Shawnee headman, under a flag of truce. "Melanthy would not fly, but displayed the thirteen stripes and held out the articles of the Miami treaty," Colonel Josiah Harmar wrote, "but all in vain; he was shot down, ... although he was their prisoner." Yet Clark withdrew, still not strong enough to attack the towns farther west of the Wabash River.

Moving on to Detroit, Brant awaited the gathering of headmen from all the western tribes. In December, a moving speech was made, probably by Brant, reviewing the entire course of history since Europeans had invaded North America. "It is certain that before Christian Nations visited this continent we were the sole lords of the soil.... The Great Spirit placed us there! And what is the reason why we are not still in possession of our forefathers' birth rights?" The answer was all too obvious: that intertribal rivalry and ancient animosities had allowed the Europeans to pursue the age-old policy of divide and conquer. "The interests of any one nation should be the interests of us all," the orator counseled; "the welfare of the one should be the welfare of all the others."

The speech carried the day. Ten nations of the Ohio country spoke as one in an address to Congress calling for a reconsideration of the shotgun treaties of Fort Stanwix and Fort McIntosh. They had not been conquered, they insisted, and they had not lost their land except by intimidation and fraud. Until new negotiations took place, the surveyors laying off lands in the ceded parts of Indian country should lay down their instruments. If the United States rejected these requests, the Indian confederacy would fight.

Congress paid little heed to the address. By mid-1787, with the Constitutional Convention drawing up a new plan of government, Congress was near the end of its life. Nor were the western tribes able to maintain a united front, beset as in the past by intertribal and intertribal disputes. Once reorganized after ratification of the Constitution, the United States would do exactly what Pennsylvania's president John Dickinson promised in addressing the western tribes: Unless they quit resistance to the American treaties forced on them "we will instantly turn upon them our armies that have conquered the king of Great Britain ... and extirpate them from the land where they were born and now live." ...

Promoting and prosecuting the Revolution instilled in ordinary and subjected people a new sense of themselves, a certitude that they had been instrumental in one of the most mold-shattering, mass action movements of recorded history, and in a comradeship born of fighting against formidable odds. Such awareness of their political importance and their certainty about the justness of their causes insured that the ideas of ardent radicals would not be driven underground. Very seldom in history do a people imagine a new world, see it within their grasp, and then given it up. Every unfulfilled element

of the Revolution—abolition of slavery; full citizenship for all free people; greater women's rights; the integrity of Native American land and political sovereignty; the entitlements of laboring people on farms and in cities; more equitable taxes; public education; religious toleration—reemerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of these planks in the radical platform, such as strict limits for legislators or gender equality, are still agenda items today....



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