

turned their attention to non-elite groups often emphasized that the Revolution did not bring equality or liberty to all. More recently, some historians have taken a closer look at the actions of common people during the Revolution. Sometimes called neoprogressives, they have highlighted Revolutionary-era class conflict and efforts by ordinary people to create a more egalitarian society. In doing so, these historians have enhanced our understanding of the social and economic influences on Revolutionary leaders. Their work also provides a timely reminder that those who try to understand the fight for independence without also considering struggles over “rule at home” will not fully understand the American Revolution.

INVESTIGATION

Unlike the previous chapters, this one contains a historian’s essay—a *secondary source*—as well as a set of primary documents. The secondary source discusses the relationship between the struggle for independence and Americans’ “multiple agendas” for radically transforming their society. The primary sources shed light on the essay’s argument about the need to broaden our conception of the Revolution beyond the Founding Fathers who led the struggle against Britain. Your challenge is to use these sources to evaluate the essay’s conclusions regarding varied efforts of other people to mold their society along more egalitarian and democratic lines. Together, the secondary and primary sources will allow you to determine the various ways that Americans challenged traditional authority and ideas. In the end, you should be able to decide whether and how the American Revolution was a “people’s revolution” and what differences that made. Your evaluation should address the following questions:

1. **According to Source 1, how does broadening the story to include non-elite people change our understanding of the American Revolution?** In what ways, according to this source, did these people seek to transform American society? How did their actions shape the crisis with Britain?
2. **What do the primary sources reveal about the desires of common people or outsiders to challenge the status quo—the prevailing ideas or existing state of affairs in American society?** Did their protests share any common themes or ideas?
3. **In what ways, if at all, did the protests of non-elite people make the Revolution radical?** What were the most important consequences of their protests?

To complete this assignment, first read Source 1 and determine its argument about the “true radicalism” of the Revolution. Then turn to the primary sources to see what additional evidence they provide about the efforts of outsiders and

non-elite Americans to change their society. When you are finished, you should be able to come to some conclusions about the extent to which the Revolution involved a struggle to remake American society along more democratic and egalitarian lines and was thus more than a struggle for independence from Britain.

SECONDARY SOURCE

1 In this source, historian Gary Nash argues that we must see beyond the “mythic” view of the Revolution that usually revolves around the leaders of the American colonies’ rebellion against Great Britain. Doing so, Nash maintains, reveals its “radicalism.” In this selection, Nash points to the protests of various groups or individuals during the Revolutionary era. Their actions and ideas, he suggests, challenged in various ways traditional power arrangements and illustrate the way many Americans wanted to democratize their society in these years. As you read Nash’s account, note the way he links protests against British policies to an increasing willingness to challenge authority in general. In what ways did that attitude manifest itself in the Revolutionary era, according to Nash?

The Unknown American Revolution (2005)

GARY B. NASH

In this [study] the reader will find, I hope, an antidote for historical amnesia. To this day, the public remembers the Revolution mostly in its enshrined, mythic form. This is peculiar in a democratic society because the sacralized story of the founding fathers, the men of marble, mostly concerns the uppermost slice of American revolutionary society. That is what has lodged in our minds, and this is the fable that millions of people in other countries know about the American Revolution.

I ask readers to expand their conception of revolutionary American society and to consider the multiple agendas—the stuff of ideas, dreams, and aspirations—that sprang from its highly diverse and fragmented character. It is not hard today to understand that American people in all their diversity entertain a variety of ideas about what they want their nation to be and what sort of America they want for their children. Much the same was true

Source: Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York: Viking, 2005), pp. xvi–xvii, 44–45, 46–49, 59, 151, 157–158, 159–160, 171–175, 202–204, 205, 206.

two centuries ago. But from a distance of more than two centuries we don't think about our nation's birth that way. It is more comforting to think about united colonists rising up as a unified body to get the British lion's paw off the backs of their necks. That is a noble and inspiring David and Goliath story, but it is not what actually happened. It is assuredly not the story of radical democracy's work during the Revolution.

This [study] presents a people's revolution, an upheaval among the most heterogeneous people to be found anywhere along the Atlantic littoral in the eighteenth century. The [study's] thrust is to complicate the well-established core narrative by putting before the reader bold figures, ideas, and movements, highlighting the true radicalism of the American Revolution that 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. . . .

The pages that follow mostly view the American Revolution through the eyes of those not in positions of power and privilege, though the iconic founding fathers are assuredly part of the story. In reality, those in the nether strata of colonial society and those outside "respectable" society were most of the people of revolutionary America. Without their ideas, dreams, and blood sacrifices, the American Revolution would never have occurred, would never have reverberated around the world among oppressed people down to the present day. Disinterring these long-forgotten figures from history's cemetery, along with their aspirations and demands, along with the events and dramatic moments in which they figured so importantly, is offered as an antidote to the art of forgetting. . . .

[I]t is not surprising that imperial decisions made in England as the Seven Years' War drew to a close sparked anger and upheaval in North America. A key element in this destabilization was the remarkable center-stage appearance of lower-class and enslaved people, whom colonial leaders had always hoped to keep in the wings, if not offstage altogether. In some sectors

of colonial society, radical insurgency arose quite apart from England's attempts to rule its overseas colonies with a stronger hand. In other cases, external and internal stimuli of radical behavior overlapped and interacted. Whether stimulated externally or ignited internally, ferment during the years from 1761 to 1766 changed the dynamics of social and political relations in the colonies and set in motion currents of reformist sentiment with the force of a mountain wind. Critical to this half decade was the colonial response to England's Stamp Act, more the reaction of common colonists than that of their presumed leaders.

When dawn broke on August 14, 1765, Bostonians tramping to work found an effigy of Andrew Oliver, who was as respectable and well heeled a man as anyone in the city, clad in rags and dangling from a giant elm tree at the crossing of Essex and Orange Streets in the city's South End. This is where a narrow neck of land led from Boston to the farm villages west of the town. Attached to the effigy was the verse. "A goodlier sight who e'er did see? A Stamp-Man hanging on a tree!" Strung up alongside Oliver's effigy was a worn "Jack-Boot with a Head and horns peeping out of the top." The boot was painted green on the bottom—"a Green-ville sole," said the sign. The boot was a clever pun on the unpopular earl of Bute, King George's trusted adviser, and George Grenville, first lord of the Treasury and chancellor of the Exchequer. Colonial Americans regarded these two men as the architects of detested new imperial policies, especially the hated Stamp Act passed by Parliament on March 22, 1765, and scheduled to take effect on November 1. Oliver had been appointed as the distributor of the stamps for Boston and the entire colony of Massachusetts.

Before the day was over, laboring Bostonians, joined by middling townsmen, turned the city upside down. The "Stamp Act crisis," as historians have called it, had begun. In the cascading reactions to the Stamp Act, we can see how discontent over England's tightening of the screws on its American colonies merged with resentment born out of the play of events indigenous to colonial life. A perceptive witness of the mass disorder occurring from one end of the colonies to the other over the Stamp Act would have seen that several revolutions were about to erupt simultaneously. . . .

Bostonians knew vaguely about the tricky constitutional question raised by the Stamp Act: whether Parliament had the right to pass a tax simply to raise revenue—an internal tax—when the colonies had no representation in Parliament. American colonists, with rare exceptions, agreed that Parliament was entitled to pass external taxes meant to control the flow of trade. But ordinary Bostonians knew something beyond a quibble: that Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson had arranged the appointment of his brother-in-law Andrew Oliver to be the distributor of the hated stamps. Common folk also knew that both men were leaders of the prerogative circle gathered around the royal governor, an imperious group that had recently tried to dismantle Boston's town meeting and showed contempt for ordinary people

who dared to think of themselves as entitled to a role in political affairs. All of Boston also knew that their provincial legislature had elected three men to gather with delegates from other colonies to meet in New York in October 1765 to hammer out an intercolonial protest to Parliament about the Stamp Act. The crowd, however, had no intention to wait for the Stamp Act Congress to meet.

At midmorning on August 14, Hutchinson ordered Sheriff Stephen Greenleaf to cut down the effigies, and at that moment the question of rightful authority moved from the chambers of constituted authority to the streets. Quickly, a crowd assembled to stop the sheriff. All day, common Bostonians detained farmers bringing produce into town along Orange Street until they had their goods "stamped" under the great elm standing at the neck of land. At the end of working hours, a mass of laboring men began forming for a mock funeral. Their leader was Ebenezer MacIntosh, a poor shoemaker and veteran of the Seven Years' War. . . . With MacIntosh acting as "the principal leader of the mob," as Governor Francis Bernard described the action, the crowd cut down Oliver's effigy as dark came on and carried it through the streets toward the Town House, the center of government where the legislature met. Then the crowd headed for the South End wharves, where Oliver had built a brick office for distributing the detested stamps. In less than thirty minutes they leveled the building. Saving the timbers, they "stamped" them in derision of the Stamp Act, and hauled them to Oliver's luxurious house at the foot of Fort Hill. At nightfall, they added the timbers to a bonfire atop the hill. By the light of the bonfire, they beheaded Oliver's effigy and then destroyed Oliver's stable house and his horse-drawn coach and chaise—prime emblems of upper-class affluence. Later in the evening, when Lieutenant Governor Hutchinson and Sheriff Greenleaf tried to stop the destruction, the crowd drove them off in a hailstorm of stones after someone cried out: "The Governor and the Sheriff! To your arms, my boys." For another four hours, deep into the night, the crowd tore through Oliver's house, breaking windows and a looking glass said to be the largest in the colonies, demolishing the elegant furniture, emptying the contents of the well-stocked wine cellar, and tearing up the gardens. The next day the shocked Oliver asked to be relieved of his commission as stamp distributor.

Twelve days later it was Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson's turn. After attacking the handsome houses of the deputy register of the vice admiralty court and the comptroller of Customs, a crowd of men in workaday garb descended on Hutchinson's mansion. Catching the lieutenant governor at dinner with his family, the crowd smashed in the doors with axes and sent the Hutchinsons packing. Working with almost military precision, they reduced the furniture to splinters, stripped the walls bare, chopped through inner partitions until the house was a hollow shell, destroyed the formal gardens, drank the wine cellar dry, stole nine hundred pounds sterling in coin

(today this would be about \$90,000), scattered books and papers in the street, and carried off every movable object of value. Led again by MacIntosh, the crowd worked into the night, spending almost three hours alone "at the cupola before they could get it down" and then finishing off the building as dawn broke. "Gentlemen of the army, who have seen towns sacked by the enemy," wrote one of the first historians of the Revolution, Boston's William Gordon, "declare they have never before saw an instance of such fury. . . ."

Hutchinson knew why his townsmen hated the tightening of trade regulations and the imposition of a new tax. But only by considering the wrath he had incurred among ordinary people over many years could he have understood their determination to bring his house level with the street. He never admitted such understanding in his correspondence or private conversations that have survived in the documentary record. But it is clear that the crowd was giving vent to years of resentment at the accumulation of wealth and power by the haughty prerogative faction led by Hutchinson. Behind every swing of the ax and every hurled stone, behind every shattered crystal goblet and splintered mahogany chair, lay the fury of a plain Bostonian who had read or heard the repeated references to impoverished people as "rabble" and to Boston's popular caucus, led by Samuel Adams, as a "herd of fools, tools, and sycophants." The mobbish attackers were those who had suffered economic hardship while others fattened their purses just the year before, they had listened to their popular leaders condemn those "who grind the faces of the poor without remorse, eat the bread of oppression without fear, and wax fat upon the spoils of the people." They had heard it said over and over that "luxury and extravagance are. . . destructive of those virtues which are necessary for the preservation of liberty and the happiness of the people." They had burned inwardly at hearing some of the wealthy proclaim from their mansions that poverty was the best inducement for industry and frugality and that "the common people of this town and country live too well." And they had cheered James Otis when he replied that "I am of a quite different opinion, I do not think they live half well enough. . . ."

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 deploping 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. . . .

Nobody in England's North American colonies wanted a more radical change than those who abhorred the practice of enslaving and brutalizing

fellow human beings. A crescendo of objections to the continuance of slavery, mounting in the two years before the Declaration of Independence, gave hope that an ancient blotch on humaneness and morality might come to an end in a part of the world where people prided themselves on being part of a redeemer society destined to teach the world at large. The abolitionists' pamphlets that rolled off the presses, mostly in the northern cities, were longer, shriller, and more numerous and trenchant than those of the previous decade. The old argument of the Enlightenment philosophers that slavery was the central impediment to the march of progress continued. So did the insistence that American patriots be consistent about their proclamations of liberty and unalienable rights. But now, with war imminent, the new militancy of slaves and an astounding royal proclamation made the issue of abolition all the more urgent. . . .

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. . . .

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 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. . . .

The roll call of Virginia revolutionary leaders was also the roll call of Virginia speculators in western land whose rights, they believed, had been obliterated by a series of policy decisions, legal judgments, and Parliamentary acts in 1774, including the Quebec Act. The man who was the principal author of Virginia's Declaration of Rights and Virginia's new state constitution, George Mason, "had watched the Proclamation of 1763 destroy first his beloved Ohio Company and then his hopes of obtaining fifty thousand acres of Kentucky land. . . ." The man who would introduce the Declaration of Independence to the Continental Congress in July 1776, Richard Henry Lee, had been appalled by how the 1763 Proclamation Act and the Quebec Act dashed his Mississippi Land Company's hopes to lay hands on 2.5 million acres. The man who would lead the Continental army, George Washington, had thousands of acres of bounty lands that he purchased cheaply

from veterans' claims slip from his hands as a result of the English attempt to stop Virginia land speculation. The man who drafted the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, had invested in three land companies that would have given him title to 17,000 acres if the ministry in London had not cracked down. And the man whose fiery speeches helped push the colonies to the brink of revolution, Patrick Henry, saw five of his land ventures disappear like smoke. All these disappointments could be undone through a war that would remove the roadblocks—that is, a double war: against England, and against the ancient inhabitants of the fertile region watered by the Ohio River and its tributaries.

The Quebec Act was obnoxious not only to Virginians but to many colonists speculating in lands north of the Ohio River. The act also fiercely offended Protestant New Englanders because it guaranteed Catholic Canadians the right to worship freely. Hence, they folded the Quebec Act into the other Coercive Acts of 1774 and branded them all as "intolerable." But for the Six Iroquois Nations the Quebec Act promised relief from the frantic speculation and squatting in the lands reserved for the Iroquois and other northern tribes. . . .

As the Iroquois pondered their position, the matter became more urgent when several companies of New Englanders and New Hampshire backwoodsmen, completely unauthorized by the Continental Congress, attacked and captured Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point on Lake Champlain on May 10–11, 1775. Under the joint command of Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen (who wrestled dangerously for command of this private expeditionary army), the attack at dawn succeeded without a shot being fired. Surrounding the fort, Allen called out to the British officer, who commanded only about forty men: "Come out of there, you damned old rat." When asked in whose name the Americans were fighting, the ever bull headed Allen replied, "In the name of the Great Jehovah and the Continental Congress." Neither had authorized the attack. But this victory made the Iroquois' problem no less severe. . . .

Another Grand Iroquois council met at the end of July 1775 in Montreal to listen to [Quebec] Governor [Guy] Carleton's plea for Iroquois support. Joseph Brant participated in a mock feast to devour "a Bostonian and drink his blood—an ox having been roasted for the purpose, and a pipe of wine given to drink." Along with some 1,700 Indians, Brant listened intently as Guy Carleton promised the Mohawks that if they took up the hatchet "to defend our country," they would recover all their stolen property after the British put the Americans in their place and forced their obedience to royal authority. . . .

[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 it 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. . . .

Adams tried to end the argument on a high note by complimenting Abigail as a "Stateswoman" as well as "a Farmeress." But for Abigail, the matter was not closed. Years later she insisted that "I will never consent to have our sex considered in an inferior point of light. Let each planet shine in their own orbit. God and nature designed it so—if man is Lord, woman is

Lordess—that is what I contend for." Like a stone cast into a pond, ripples radiated outward from this private family argument auguring currents of change far beyond the Adams family.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The primary sources in this section reflect the concerns and experiences of various people during the struggle for independence. As you evaluate these sources, consider what they reveal about the desire to achieve greater equality and to what extent they support the argument that the American fight for independence from Britain unleashed a struggle to achieve greater equality and rights at home.

2

When the Stamp Act went into effect on November 1, 1765, a crowd of angry men in New York targeted Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden, a defender of British policy in the colonies. The crowd was led by a group of men from the middle rank of New York society that came to be known as the Sons of Liberty. Several days later, Colden recounted the incident in a report to officials in Britain. Note the type of property the mob attacked. Why do you think many of New York's "gentlemen" may have come out to "observe"?

An Account of a Stamp Act Riot (1765)

Sir,

In a day or two after the date of my letter of the 26th of last month. . . the packages of stamped papers were landed from His Majesty's ship *Garland* at noonday without a guard or the least appearance of discontent among the people. . . . But on the evening of the first day of this month the mob began to collect together, and after it became dark they came up to the Fort Gate with a great number of torches, and a scaffold on which two images were placed, one to represent the governor in his grey hairs, & the other the devil by his side. This scaffold with the images was brought up within 8 or 10 feet of the gate with the grossest ribaldry from the mob. As they went from the gate they broke open my coach house, took my chariot out of it & carried it

Source: Cynthia A. Kierner, *Revolutionary America 1750–1815: Sources and Interpretations* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 2003), pp. 74–75; originally from Cadwallader Colden to Secretary Conway, November 5, 1765, in E. B. O'Callaghan and Berthold Fernow, eds., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, 15 vols. (Albany, N.Y., 1853–1887), VII: p. 771.