

8. See the argument in Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy: An Inquiry into Human Satisfaction and Consumer Dissatisfaction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

9. These two orientations involve contrasting strategies. In the first, the basic concern is with increasing the number of times one is able to enjoy life's "pleasures"; thus the traditional hedonist tries to spend more and more time eating, drinking, having sex, and dancing. The hedonistic index here is the incidence of pleasure per unit of life. In the second, the primary object is to squeeze as much of the quality of pleasure as one can out of all the sensations one actually experiences during one's life. All acts are, from this perspective, potential pleasures, if only they can be approached or undertaken in the right manner; the hedonistic index here is the extent to which one is actually able to extract the fundamental pleasure that "exists" in life itself.

10. See J. L. Singer, *Daydreaming* (New York: Random House, 1966).

11. Products need not actually be new; they merely have to be presented or packaged in such a way that it is possible for consumers to believe they are new.

12. That there is a close relationship between people's daydreams and their selection, purchase, use, and disposal of goods and services is revealed, for example, by the nature of advertisements. But one should not assume from this that advertising *creates* daydreaming, as the latter appears to be an intrinsic feature of the mental life of modern humans and does not depend on external agencies to prompt or support it.

13. See Veblen and Riesman.

14. To suggest that consumerism is driven by pleasure-seeking is to raise the possibility that ecological and anticonsumerist movements might have something in common with earlier Puritanical movements. Perhaps an important underlying (if not openly admitted) impulse behind such movements might indeed be a hostility to pleasure. Could such movements represent a new Puritanism in their calls for us to sacrifice our energy-expensive and "wasteful" way of life?

15. See, for the Romantic nature of this movement, Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Frank Musgrove, *Ecstasy and Holiness: Counter-Culture and the Open Society* (London: Methuen, 1974); and Bernice Martin, *A Sociology of Contemporary Cultural Change* (London: Blackwell, 1981).

16. The question has of course been posed before, and the answer much debated. See Jacqueline Sarsby, *Romantic Love and Society* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983); Ethel Spector Person, *Love and Fateful Encounters: The Power of Romantic Passion* (London: Bloomsbury, 1989); and Stanton Peele, *Love and Addiction* (New York: Taplinger, 1975).

CHAPTER 3

Consumer Society

Jean Baudrillard

Today, we are everywhere surrounded by the remarkable conspicuousness of consumption and affluence, established by the multiplication of objects, services, and material goods. This now constitutes a fundamental mutation in the ecology of the human species. Strictly speaking, men of wealth are no longer surrounded by other human beings, as they have been in the past, but by *objects*. Their daily exchange is no longer with their fellows, but rather, statistically as a function of some ascending curve, with the acquisition and manipulation of goods and messages: from the rather complex domestic organization with its dozens of technical slaves to the "urban estate" with all the material machinery of communication and professional activity, and the permanent festive celebration of objects in advertising with the hundreds of daily mass media messages; from the proliferation of somewhat obsessional objects to the symbolic psychodrama which fuels the nocturnal objects that come to haunt us even in our dreams. The concepts of "environment" and "ambiance" have undoubtedly become fashionable only since we have come to live in less proximity to other human beings, in their presence and discourse, and more under the silent gaze of deceptive and obedient objects which continuously repeat the same discourse, that of our stupefied (*medusée*) power, of our potential affluence and of our absence from one another.

As the wolf-child becomes wolf by living among them, so are we becoming functional. We are living the period of the objects: that is, we live by their rhythm, according to their incessant cycles. Today, it is we who are observing their birth, fulfillment, and death; whereas in all previous civilizations, it was the object, instrument, and perennial monument that survived the generations of men.

While objects are neither flora nor fauna, they give the impression of being a proliferating vegetation; a jungle where the new savage of modern times has

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The First Consumer Revolution

James Axtell

We Have Celebrated Two Important Revolutions in recent years, the American and the French, and we are in the midst of observing another event of revolutionary proportions, the Columbus Quincentenary. Each of these revolutions has a publicly accepted inaugural date—July 4, 1776, July 14, 1789, October 12, 1492—which enables us to fill our calendars with commemorative events. But the latest addition to the revolutionary pantheon comes without a birth certificate or scholarly consensus about its credentials and pedigree. I refer to the English “consumer revolution,” which claims no kinship to the more famous English revolutions of Tudor government, civil war, or 1688.

It's small wonder that scholars cannot agree about the causes, timing, effects, and long-range importance of this latest revolution because they discovered it only within the last ten years or so. Another reason for the lack of consensus owes to its nature: this is one of the first “revolutions” to be discovered by the Early Modern practitioners of the “new” social history, rather than by political historians of a conventional stripe. Given the scope of their questions and the quicksilver quality of their evidence, social historians seldom agree about anything, and the consumer revolution is no exception. Yet the outlines of the phenomenon are becoming clearer with each passing article.

It seems that sometime between 1690 and 1740, first in England and Scotland and soon in England's mainland American colonies, consumers of the gentle and particularly “middling” classes began to purchase an unprecedented number and variety of manufactured goods and to use many of them in conspicuous displays of leisure, social ritual, and status affirmation (or arrogation). Thanks to a pronounced increase in per capita wealth and disposable income, consumers not only upgraded their necessities, such as bedding, eating utensils, and clothing, but chose from a veritable Sears catalogue of competitively priced luxury goods and amenities, which reached the remotest

corners of the land in peddlers' packs and the inventories of myriad country stores. Often patterned after the latest of the ever-changing fashions of Paris and London and vigorously promoted by window displays, newspaper advertisements, and word-of-mouth, these goods quickly spread from responsive English manufactories across regions and classes in a wide but standardized repertoire. This had the effect of forging strong material bonds between mother country and colonies, even as political fissures were beginning to appear in their union, some the result of mounting debts incurred by colonial shoppers anxious to keep up with the Carters and the Schuylers.¹

One might legitimately ask, Why is the purchase—even the widespread, cross-class purchase—of satin waistcoats, looking glasses, japanned dressing tables, Wedgwood china, forks, and matching tea services considered “revolutionary”? The experts offer a number of answers. The first is that, unlike the later Industrial Revolution, the consumer revolution was made, less by increased, more efficient, and more competitive productivity on the supply side, than by unprecedented and particular consumer demand, which called forth the supply and inspired many of the technological and organizational advances of the Industrial Revolution. This demand, in turn, was moulded by new techniques of mass marketing and the conscious creation of “imaginary necessities.” “As wealth and population increased,” explained an English visitor to colonial Baltimore, “wants were created, and many considerable demands, in consequence, took place for the various elegancies as well as the necessities of life.”²

Enjoying for the first time so many economic choices, consumers, especially women, were empowered by a heady sense of personal independence and the ability to fashion themselves with the material trappings of “gentility.” In the American colonies, however, this heavy dependence on the credit extended by English merchants and manufacturers led to fears of economic enslavement. These fears, in turn, exacerbated fears of political tyranny from the Stamp Act on and gave rise to such consumer boycotts as the Association to halt importation of the “effeminating” and enervating “Baubles of Britain.” In other words, when the British government injected coercion into its relations with the colonies, the ties of loyalty that bound the colonists to an empire of free-flowing goods quickly came undone. “A constitutional crisis transformed private consumer acts into public political statements” and many Americans “discovered political ideology through a discussion of the meaning of goods.”³

In sketching the outlines of this eighteenth-century British revolution, I have a strong sense of *déjà vu*. Where have I seen this before? The answer, as might be expected from an ethnohistorian of colonial North America, is in the Indian communities of seventeenth-century North America. Such an answer will undoubtedly be greeted with a certain amount of reasonable skepticism. After all, don't we all know that the American Indians were poor and spiritual people who lived from hand-to-mouth in a precarious environment and put their faith in strange gods and spirits rather than earthly things? Don't we know that

their “nomadic” lifestyle and their communal ethic of sharing militated against the senseless acquisition of material comforts? Perhaps unlikelier candidates for a *consumer* revolution could not be found, certainly not fifty or seventy-five years before their “civilized” and admittedly materialistic English counterparts experienced one.

Such skepticism is unwarranted. The Indians of the Eastern Woodlands experienced a consumer revolution every bit as revolutionary as that experienced by their European suppliers, though not identical in every respect, and they did so many years earlier, usually as soon as the commercial colonists founded trading posts, *comptoirs*, and nascent settlements. How, if the natives lived in penury, was this possible? Without gold or silver mines like those in Mexico and Peru, how did native North Americans across the social spectrum (which was not wide in any case) find the purchase price of any European goods, much less goods in sufficient quantity and variety to warrant a “revolutionary” denomination?

The per capita wealth of Indian America, though it cannot be measured in native currencies, increased dramatically from the earliest stages of contact because European traders were willing and eager to pay top pound, franc, and florin for American animal pelts and skins, which the Indians were adept in curing and procuring for their own domestic uses. Three kinds of pelts were the most lucrative for the Indians. Beaver, for which the natives had little use before the trade, became the best seller because its soft, microscopically barbed underfur was in great demand for the manufacture of broad-brimmed felt hats for Europe's gentlemen. A ready market also existed for rare and luxurious “small furs,” such as marten, otter, and black fox, which were used to trim the rich gowns of the high-born. And beginning in the last quarter of the seventeenth century, the Indians of the Southeast could sell any number of humbler but larger deerskins, which provided scarce leather for Continental breeches, saddlebags, bookbindings, and workingmen's aprons. The European demand for skins the natives regarded as commonplace was seemingly insatiable and enabled all male hunters of a tribe to participate in the search for income-producing pelts if they wished.

To judge by the traders' export figures, a substantial majority of native hunters did quite well in the new European market. The Mahicans and eastern Iroquois brought about 8,000 beaver and otter skins to the Dutch posts at Fort Orange and New Amsterdam in 1626. Nine years later they had doubled their take. By the late 1650s, 46,000 pelts were pouring into Fort Orange alone.⁴ The French in Canada were even better supplied by their native partners.

In 1614, only six years after the founding of Quebec, 25,000 skins, mostly beaver, were shipped to France's hatters. By the 1620s the Montagnais on the north shore of the St. Lawrence were trading 12–15,000 pelts at Tadoussac every year. In flotillas of 60–70 canoes, some 200 Huron traders from southern Ontario brought 10,000 skins a year to Quebec. Twenty years later, even as their population was cut in half by disease and intertribal warfare, the Hurons pro-

duced 30,000 beaver pelts annually.⁵ In New England, the Plymouth colony was able to pay off its English creditors only because Abenaki hunters on the Kennebec River in Maine kept them supplied with animal skins: about 8,000 beavers and 1,156 otters between 1631 and 1636 alone. Even then the lion's share of Abenaki pelts went to French traders from Acadia.⁶

To the south, the natives of the interior supplied outgoing ships with 54,000 deerskins a year between 1700 and 1715. Between 1740 and 1762 the take was up to 152,000 skins a year. The best hunters were the Muskogeans or Creeks of Alabama and Georgia. In 1720 they traded more than 80,000 skins to South Carolina and French Mobile. Forty years later, with a new market in Savannah, they were killing 140,000 deer every season.⁷ In the 1750s and Cherokees took 25,000 skins annually from the mountains of North Carolina, Georgia, and Tennessee, an average of 12 deer for each of 2,000 warriors. In the twenty years between 1739 and 1759, Cherokee hunters alone reduced the southeastern deer population by 1.25 million.⁸

Clearly, the natives of eastern America controlled resources that were in great demand in Europe. But did they realize their profit potential? Or did they kill all those animals for a few cheap trinkets and a swot or two of rot-gut rum, leaving themselves no better off than they were before the advent of the white man? British traders in particular knew that the natives, whose simple lives required few necessities, had to be given a sense of personal "Property" if their American business was ever to thrive. For a notion of material accumulation, "though it would not increase their real Necessities, yet it would furnish them with imaginary Wants." By 1679, Indians from Hudson Bay to the Carolinas had discovered that "many Things which they wanted not before because they never had them are by . . . means [of the trade] become necessary both for their use & ornament."¹⁰ They had been, in a stay-at-home European's words, "cosoned by a desire of new-fangled novelties."¹¹

But had they? To hear both native hunters and knowledgeable Europeans tell it, the Indian was nobody's fool and certainly felt that he made out like a bandit in his dealings with the rubes from the Old World. For ordinary skins "which cost them almost nothing," the Indians received novel trade goods superior to their own artifacts of skin, bone, stone, and wood.¹² A Montagnais hunter once exclaimed that "The Beaver does everything perfectly well, it makes kettles, hatchets, swords, knives, bread, in short it makes everything." He was making sport of us Europeans," explained his Jesuit guest, "who have such a fondness for the skin of this animal and who fight to see who will give the most to these Barbarians, to get it." Some while later, the same Indian said to the Frenchman, holding out a very beautiful knife, "The English have no sense; they give us twenty knives like this for one Beaver skin."¹³

While the natives didn't easily understand price fluctuations obedient to Western laws of supply and demand, they were shrewd enough to advance their own bargaining position by playing European competitors against each other, by avoiding superfluities that had no place in their own culture, and by

being extremely finicky about the quality and style of goods they would accept. In 1642 Roger Williams noted how the Narragansetts of Rhode Island "will beate all markets and try all places, and runne twenty, thirty, yea, forty mile[s] and more, and lodge in the Woods, to save six pence."¹⁴ Likewise, testified a Recollect priest who knew them well, the Iroquois and natives of the Great Lakes "are rather shrewd and let no one outwit them easily. They examine everything carefully and train themselves to know goods."¹⁵ A Virginia trader in Chesapeake Bay in 1630 complained, to no avail, that his Indian customers were "very long and teadeous" in viewing his array of trade goods and did "tumble it and tosse it and mingle it a hundred times over."¹⁶ Four years later, a trade on the coast of Maine groused to his English boss that "The Indians are[e] now so well seen Into our trading Commodities, that heare is litle to be got by yt." Not only did the competing French and English traders undersell one another in a frenzy to acquire furs, but the Indians refused to buy short English coats, coverlets that were not "soft & warme," or unlined hats without bands.¹⁷ A half-century later, in the mountains of Virginia and North Carolina, William Byrd's Indian customers would have no truck with large white beads (instead of small ones), porous kettles, light (instead of dark) blue blankets, guns with weak locks, or small (instead of large) hoes.¹⁸ "They are not delighted in baubles," Thomas Morton had observed as early as 1632, "but in usefull things."¹⁹ As European trader after trader quickly learned, in native America the customer was always right.

The customer was not only right, he held the upper hand in the struggle over payment. Because his necessities and even his acquired tastes were so few and relatively inelastic, in the establishment of trade the Indians needed the European trader less than he needed them. The sharp competition between company traders, *coureurs de bois*, and government factors for most Indian customers, even those in the *pays d'en haut*, only increased the natives' leverage. So they quickly demanded and received credit from the traders.

In late summer or early fall, the trader advanced the Indians on account the goods, arms, ammunition, and food they needed for the winter hunt. When the hunters returned in the late spring or early summer with their catch, the trader cancelled their debts and, if they had a surplus, furnished them with supplies and luxuries. If the hunters had a poor season, they often escaped the consequences of their growing debts by simply moving to new hunting grounds and striking up business with a new trader, who was only too happy to purchase their pelts and to extend them a line of credit. As a Swedish governor complained of his native trading partners in 1655, "If they buy anything here, they wish to get half on credit, and then pay with difficulty."²⁰ Traders in Hudson Bay, New France, New England, New Amsterdam, and the Carolinas felt the same crunch early in their relations with the fur-toting natives.

If we are going to declare these new Indian purchases a "consumer revolution," similar to the later English one, we should also analyze in some detail the kind and quantity of trade goods the Indians preferred. We have two

major ways to learn about native preferences. One is from the work of archaeologists, whose excavations of Indian villages and burials turn up the broken and discarded material of native life as well as the most treasured possessions buried with the dead. The second way is from the hand of traders' clerks and government officials, who made detailed lists of trade items and diplomatic gifts to be shipped to Indian villages by canoe or packtrain. These two sources can be supplemented to some extent by the findings of underwater archaeologists at the feet of cold northern river rapids, where French canoes overturned with all their bright new cargoes headed for Indian country.²¹ These beautifully preserved objects can tell us what in the peddlers' packs may have attracted the Indians, but they do not necessarily tell us whether the natives purchased them or used them in ways that Europeans would expect.

According to all our sources, the *nouveaux-riches* natives bought five kinds of European goods: tools, clothing, decorations, novelties, and occasionally food. Even before they had direct and regular access to European traders, the Indians acquired a variety of utilitarian and decorative items from sea-going traders, abandoned colonial facilities, shipwrecks, or natives who had access to these sources. Many native communities met their first European objects in the sixteenth century, long before the English or the French established lasting colonies in North America. When Gaspar Corte-Real sailed to Newfoundland or a nearby coast in 1501, for example, he met one Indian man clutching a piece of an Italian gilt sword and another sporting a pair of Venetian silver earrings.²²

The earliest items favored by both native men and women were metal tools to make their work go easier and faster. Since the natives were already fully equipped with the requisite tools to manage their environment, they purchased the same kinds of European implements made of superior materials. Processed metal was brighter, more durable, and held an edge longer than annealed native copper, bone, fired clay, stone, or wood. So the natives sensibly spent their first fur paychecks on iron axes (to save the time involved in burning large trees down), hatchets (to gather firewood and crack enemy skulls), awls (to punch leather and drill shell beads), ice chisels (to break-open beaver lodges), butcher knives (to replace more breakable and costly flint knives), swords (to point spears and arrows with pieces of broken blade), fish-hooks (to replace unbarbed bone hooks), wide hoes (to replace deer scapula or short digging sticks), and brass or copper kettles (to replace heavier, thicker, and more fragile clay pots).

We know a good deal about the metal goods the Indians purchased because they survive well in the ground and frequently end up in caring museums. But their numbers are somewhat deceiving, for the best-selling item in native (as in English and colonial) markets from the seventeenth century on was cloth of all kinds.²³ Unfortunately, cloth does not fare well in the ground over centuries unless it happens to be parked next to some copper or brass, whose salts during oxidation preserve vegetable matter. We do have a few archaeological

cloth remnants, but most of our knowledge of the Indian appetite and stylistic preferences for cloth comes from lead seals used to certify cloth at its source (which turn up in archaeological contexts) and from the letterbooks and inventories of traders. They make it clear why most of the early Indian names for Europeans meant "Cloth makers" or "Coat-men" when they were not called "Iron-Workers" or "Swordmen."²⁴

Why would the natives spend their fur proceeds on European cloth when they already had perfectly adaptable fur and skin clothing? Woolen blanketing or duffels was the single biggest seller for several reasons: it was lighter than and as warm as a fur mantle or *matchcoat*, it dried faster and remained softer and suppler than wet skins and was even warm when wet, it came in bright colors which natural berry and root dyes could not duplicate (though most Indians preferred "sad" hues of red and blue), and, with metal knives and scissors, it could quickly be fashioned into leggings, breechclouts, tie-on sleeves, or mantles by women who no longer had to laboriously cure and dress several skins. Another potential advantage was seldom realized because the Indians almost never washed their clothes and literally wore them off their backs.²⁵ Soap was not in the trader's kit until the more fastidious nineteenth century, and since the dead were always buried in their best clothes, cloth heirlooms and hand-me-downs were rare. With the "bargains" offered by the European traders, the natives found it easier to buy new threads than to slave over a soapy stream.

While cloth was in great demand in Indian country, a few items were unpopular. There was almost no market for tight or fitted clothing, for example. Until the genteel eighteenth century, no native man would have been caught dead in a pair of European breeches: they impeded running and other natural functions (southern men, at least, squatted to urinate).²⁶ Elaborate military-style coats with braid, buttons, and capacious cuffs were worn only by a handful of favored chiefs and head warriors on ceremonial occasions. The only fitted pieces of clothing that sold relatively well were brightly patterned calico shirts, which the men wore open at the neck and flapping in the breeze.

We can be very brief about the food trade because it was rare. In the seventeenth century the native hunters of eastern Canada occasionally bartered a beaver for some durable ship's biscuit or bread when they couldn't find Indian corn among their agricultural neighbors. But prunes and raisins never caught on except as gifts, and sugar, flour, and tea made their way very slowly into native larders, and then only if colonial settlements were close by.²⁷

From the earliest indirect contact with Europeans, the Indians sought to enhance their beauty and status with decorations of foreign material or manufacture. Chinese vermilion, sold in tea-bag-sized paper packets, gradually supplanted native red ochre, and verdigris added a brand new color to harlequin faces. As the Portuguese explorer Corte-Real discovered, silver earrings found a male as well as female market. Copper and brass bracelets, tin finger rings (particularly engraved Jesuit rings with religious motifs, initials, and hearts),

bangles or jingling cones made from sheet brass, necklaces of Venetian glass beads in both solid colors and stripes, mostly red, white, and blue, corkscrew wire ear dangles, and, in the eighteenth century, German silver brooches, pins, and gorgets custom-made for the Indian trade were among the most popular European jewelry. While several of these items were new in form and function, the natives made more familiar jewelry from thimbles (by attaching a leather thong through a hole cut in the bottom to make jinglers), scraps of kettle or sheet copper (cut into pendants, gorgets, and even sweat scrapers in the Deep South), and gold and silver coins (perforated and worn around the neck as pendants).²⁸ With jewelry as with most things, the Indians used, adapted, and interpreted Europe's introductions in traditional ways.

This is less but still true of the final category of Indian trade goods, what we must call novelties because they had no native counterparts. Part of the revolutionary character of native consumerism is attributable to the effects some of these material innovations had on native life. Mouth harps, bells, and clothing fasteners (buttons, buckles, and lace points) played only bit parts in transforming Indian culture in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. But guns, alcohol, and even mirrors were center stage.

An arquebus or flintlock was, in one sense, only a noisy bow and arrow. It was also heavier, harder to make and repair, more expensive, less reliable in wet weather, much slower, and incapable of surprise after the first round. Despite the many deficiencies of firearms, however, the Indians rushed to acquire them as soon as they had seen them in action. For guns drove fear into enemy breasts as often as balls, smashed bones and did more internal damage than razor-sharp arrowheads, and heralded the status of their owners in ways that traditional weapons never could. Against traditional wooden slat armor and old-time massed armies, the gun won hands down.²⁹ One major effect of the advent of firearms, therefore, was the natives' sole reliance on dispersed guerilla tactics executed behind trees or from ambush. Sir William Johnson, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the British northern department, was of the opinion that the authority of chiefs had also declined since the introduction of firearms because, he said, "They no longer fight in close bodies but every Man is his own General."³⁰

The effects of alcohol upon Indian society were nearly as destructive. Cadwallader Colden, an expert on the Iroquois, thought that drunkenness among the American tribes "has destroyed greater Numbers, than all their Wars and Diseases put together."³¹ He was wrong about the magnitude but right about the seriousness of the problem which the advent of brandy kegs, rundlets of rum, and case bottles of wine posed for native communities. Although—or perhaps because—the Woodland Indians had no previous experience with intoxicating beverages or hallucinogens, they took to liquid spirits with frightening abandon. And they drank only to become fully inebriated, in which state they felt invincible, capable of making anti-social mayhem with a perfect excuse, and perhaps (though the evidence is weak) more susceptible to

the dreams in which "guardian spirits" conveyed their sacred secrets for success.³² When the "water-that-burns" arrived in sufficient quantity in a village, the place was soon turned into the very "image of hell." Drunken "frolics" lasting several days often produced several victims of shootings, stabbings, brawls, burning, biting, and bawdry. Neither resident missionaries nor native leaders were very successful in persuading the traders to halt the profitable flow, although they used two compelling arguments: the Indians were dying in excessive numbers from drink-related murders (and, we know also, from exposure and increased susceptibility to colds, pneumonia, and other diseases), and the temperance issue "produce[d] all Evil and Contention between man and wife, between the Young Indians and the Sachims."³³ Alcohol was clearly one trade good the natives could well have done without.

By contrast, mirrors seem terribly tame as novelties go. But the first "looking-glasses" and mirror boxes, which reached the remote Senecas of western New York by the 1620s, may have promoted a preoccupation with personal fashion as much as full-length hanging mirrors did among the genteel colonists. Among the Indians, however, "the men, upon the whole, [were] more fond of dressing than the women" and carried their mirrors with them on all their journeys, which the women did not.³⁴ As a vehicle of vainglory, the mirror was a necessity, especially for young warriors who now had more income to spend on imported face paints, jewelry, and other finery. Before the advent of mirrors, a native coxcomb had to have his face painted "by some woman or girl," which curtailed his independence and let some of the air out of his vanity.³⁵ With his own mirror, which he wore constantly around his wrist or over his shoulder, he could arrange his hair, refurbish his scalp-lock, and paint his face to his heart's content in the privacy of his own toilette. One unfoppish Frenchman who knew the Great Lakes tribes well believed that "if they had a mirror before their eyes they would change their appearance every quarter of an hour."³⁶ But the tell-tale object, like all spiritual power, was capable of bringing bad news as well. During the great smallpox epidemic of 1738, which killed half of the Cherokee population, "a great many" Indians "killed themselves" by shooting, cutting their throats, stabbing, and throwing themselves into fires because they had seen themselves disfigured by the pox in their ubiquitous mirrors and, "being naturally proud," could not stand the literal loss of face.³⁷

We can now appreciate the amazing variety of European goods that reached Indian customers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. To constitute a revolution comparable to the later English one, however, these material products had to arrive in native villages in such quantities that tribesmen and women up and down the social scale had their lives altered by the pursuit, purchase, and use of them. There are basically two ways to establish these quantities. The indirect way is to look at the substantial leap in exports from England to the American colonies in the seventeenth century. It is surely no coincidence that exports of woolens and metalwares doubled between the 1660s and 1700, and miscellaneous manufactures, including tableware and

sewing accoutrements, increased threefold.³⁸ Most of those items were the mainstays of the Indian trade, which we know was burgeoning, even as the native population was declining from disease, wars, and dislocation.

The more direct way is to register the changes in Indian villages, either above or below ground, at the time or later. Obviously, we don't have comparable evidence for every tribe in every region. But what we do have is strongly suggestive. For example, on both Seneca and Onondaga Iroquois sites from 1600 to 1620, only 10–15 percent of the artifacts found by archaeologists are European in origin. From sites dated 1650–55, fully 75 percent of the assemblages are European (and this, remember, grossly underestimates the amount of cloth used).³⁹ Small wonder, then, that in 1768 Eleazar Wheelock, the master of an Indian school in Connecticut, conducted a frustrated search among the eastern Iroquois nations for a native artifact that was “perfectly Simple, and without the least Mixture of any foreign Merchandise” to send as a gift to the Earl of Dartmouth, the benefactor of his future college. A “small specimen” was all he could find because, he apologized, “our Traders have penetrated so far into their Country.” Only “some articles which were defaced by Use” were crafted from the traditional materials he sought. Perhaps he shouldn't have been so surprised, for two years earlier one of his English missionary-teachers had written that the Iroquois were “in some measure like those in New England much degenerated, both as to their Customs, their Dress and their Impliments.”⁴⁰

“Degeneration” is the wrong term to describe any cultural change, unless, of course, we believe that the only bona fide Indian looks and acts like his pre-Columbian ancestors. But New England's native population, largely converted to Christianity and settled in “praying towns,” had indeed felt the forces of acculturation in the century since the Reverend John Eliot began to proselytize them. Many lived in English frame houses complete with standard colonial furniture, plowed their fields with horses or oxen, kept cattle, dressed in English garb, cooked in iron kettles and skillets, and ate off glazed earthenware with spoons and forks. Even those who still lived in wigwams, such as Phebe and Elizabeth Mohege of Niantic, Connecticut, cooked in an iron pot suspended from a trammel, drank at a tea table, ate at another table in a chair (presumably not at the same time), stored their cups and plates in a wall cupboard and their prized possessions in two wooden chests.⁴¹

Another symbol of the revolutionary changes in the lives of virtually all eastern American natives lived just down the road from the Moheges, across the Rhode Island line. There in a house or “palace” lived “King George Ninigret,” the chief of the once-mighty Narragansetts. When Dr. Alexander Hamilton of Annapolis rode by in 1744, King George owned 20–30,000 acres of “very fine level land” upon which he had “many tenants” and “a good stock of horses and other cattle.” “This King,” Hamilton noted with evident approval, “lives after the English mode. His subjects have lost their own government [*sic*] policy and laws and are servants or vassals to the English here.

His queen goes in a high modish dress in her silks, hoops, stays, and dresses like an English woman. He educates his children to the belles lettres and is himself a very complaisant mannerly man. We pay'd him a visit, and he treated us with a glass of good wine.”⁴²

King George, of course, was atypical of his American brethren in the degree of his apparent success. He was, after all, a chief. But he was a new kind of chief, one who sold his tribal lands to white men and pocketed most of the proceeds, rather than consulting the will of his people and distributing the revenues among them. Nor did he share his personal property as a traditional chief would have a century earlier. This Indian looked out for Number One in good capitalist fashion: he gave many thoughts to his own family's future but far fewer to that of his “subjects” who labored menially for his English models and neighbors.⁴³

But most Indians in colonial America were unable to ride the crest of change like King George and were caught instead in the undertow and dragged into dependence and debt. In their initial rush to acquire the material marvels of Europe, they gave no thought to the future and hunted out the game that gave them access to foreign markets. When the beaver and whitetail deer disappeared, the natives were left with nothing to sell but their land, their labor, or their military services, which the proliferating colonists were only too glad to buy at bargain rates. Those prices, paid always in desirable trade goods, were low because, with the game diminished, the Indians had little leverage left and had become dangerously dependent on their European suppliers for an ever-growing list of “necessities.” In 1705 Robert Beverley noticed that “The *English* have taken away great part of their Country, and consequently made everything less plenty amongst them. They have introduc'd Drunkenness and Luxury amongst them, which have multiply'd their Wants and put them upon desiring a thousand things they never dreamt of before.”⁴⁴ These “artificial Wants,” as Ben Franklin called them, were so numerous that even the Indians admitted, particularly in the early eighteenth century, that “they could not live without the English” and that they would “always be ruled by them.”⁴⁵

Yet, like their colonial neighbors who later formed the Association to rid themselves of foreign debt and debilitating “luxury,” many tribesmen in the eighteenth century sought to recapture their autonomous aboriginal past by participating in what anthropologists call “revitalization movements.”⁴⁶ In 1715 the Yamasees and several Muskogee groups resorted to all-out, purifying war with the South Carolinians because they had accumulated tribal debts of 100,000 deerskins, which, in the face of greatly diminished herds in the increasingly settled coastal region, they had little hope of ever paying off.⁴⁷

But the most famous revitalization took place among the Delawares of western Pennsylvania and the Ohio Valley, where in the early 1760s they were called to action by several messianic prophets. Their message was much the same: if the Indians wished to get to their own heaven and to make life on

earth bearable in the meantime, they had to revive their "old" ceremonies and to make several sacrifices. The most onerous but the most purifying was to "learn to live without any trade or connections with the white people, clothing and supporting themselves as their forefathers did."⁴⁸

Such a message was particularly welcome in the camps of the Great Lakes Indians who followed Pontiac into major "rebellion" against the British in 1763. The major cause of their discontent was material: once the French competitors of the British were driven from North America, the British felt free to raise the prices of their trade goods, drastically cut the number of goods (including ammunition) distributed as gifts in the long-standing protocol of diplomacy, and prohibited the sale of liquor, all in a spirit of unmasked contempt for native life and values. No longer able to live without the "Baubles of Britain," Pontiac's warriors decided on a course of action every bit as revolutionary as that followed by the colonists themselves thirteen years later.⁴⁹

Notes

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CHAPTER 7

Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution

T. H. Breen

On the eve of Independence, Americans interpreted imperial politics in highly unusual ways. Indeed, historians of the Revolution report that colonists—even educated leaders of church and state—enthusiastically endorsed conspiratorial forms of thought.¹ The popular appeal of such forms of explanation is not surprising. After all, mid-eighteenth-century Americans had to make sense of rapidly changing economic and political conditions for which there was no precedent in their experience. Parliament aggressively asserted its sovereignty by taxing the colonists at about the same time that a flood of British manufactured items transformed the American marketplace. When Stephen Hopkins, Rhode Island's governor, surveyed the relation of the colonies to an expanding empire in 1765, he concluded, as did many contemporaries, that "the scene seems to be unhappily changing."²

Uneasy perceptions of this sort provoked a creative cultural response. Americans such as Hopkins interpreted for themselves and for their neighbors as best they could the mysterious engines of political and economic transformation. Drawing on the language and beliefs of ordinary people, they told stories that helped situate Americans within an unstable world that had rendered problematic much that they took for granted about provincial society. Some of the tales invented during this period serve as apposite illustrations of a dependent culture struggling to control change by giving it plausible local meaning. These hermeneutic efforts generated what can be termed new narratives of everyday life.

By reconstructing the mental framework that informed one of the central narratives of the mid-eighteenth century—in this case, an elaborate story of misunderstood American consumers—we shall better understand how the

colonists came to imagine themselves within an expanding empire of trade, how at a moment of extreme political crisis a bundle of popular ideas and assumptions about commerce suggested specific styles of resistance, and finally, how a boycott movement organized to counter British policy allowed scattered colonists to reach out to each other and to reimagine themselves within an independent commercial empire.

In 1763, no one could have foreseen that the translation of a "Genius of Commerce" into political protest would produce radical new forms of liberal community in America.³ It was the unintended consequences of commercial ideas that made the Revolution genuinely revolutionary.⁴ We shall look initially at the evolution of a popular narrative of commercial life and then explore the broad experiential and ideological context in which this bizarre account briefly but powerfully flourished.

Although the origins of folk explanations are difficult to isolate, we can with reasonable confidence begin the investigation of the new commercial narrative in the early 1760s. It was during this period that Americans first focused their attention on why British authorities had redefined the rules that had governed the empire for as long as anyone could remember. In this context, the Sugar Act of 1764 seemed so precipitate, so destructive to the normal flow of trade, so ill conceived that it defied easy explanation. But Americans accepted the interpretive challenge, probing connections between parliamentary oppression and the consumption of British goods.

The first troubled response appeared in Boston. Although the author of an anonymous pamphlet of 1764 entitled *Considerations Upon the Act of Parliament* did not proclaim a full-blown conspiracy, he suggested that Americans themselves bore responsibility for deteriorating relations with England. During the Seven Years' War, the colonists not only had lived too well but had done so too publicly. Their opulent consumption of British manufacturers strongly impressed "the gentlemen of the army and others at present and lately residing in the maritime towns." These outsiders learned that the Americans "spend full as much [on] the luxurious British imports as prudence will countenance, and often much more."⁵

The next year, the commercial interpretation of parliamentary taxation acquired fuller definition. John Dickinson, a respected Pennsylvania lawyer, traced the imperial crisis in part to a stunning misinterpretation in Great Britain of American consumer habits. "We are informed," Dickinson noted in *The Late Regulations*, "that an opinion has been industriously propagated in Great-Britain that the colonies are wallowing in wealth and luxury." That conclusion, he insisted, represented a pernicious misreading of colonial culture. The streets of America were not paved with gold, and in any case, impoverished colonists could not possibly pay new taxes. During the Seven Years' War, European visitors had witnessed an abnormal economy, artificially fueled by large military expenditures. Americans, Dickinson claimed, were ordinarily and mostly quite poor. British observers had been misled because the

¹"Narrative of Commercial Life: Consumption, Ideology, and Community on the Eve of the American Revolution" by T. H. Breen reprinted from *William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Series, Vol. L. (July 1993). Used by permission of the *William and Mary Quarterly*.

colonists, "having a number of strangers among us," were too generous and hospitable for their own good. The Americans had "indulged themselves in many uncommon expenses." This "imprudent excess of kindness" was simply an ill-conceived attempt to impress British visitors.⁶

Other writers took up the narrative of commercial life, adding innovative elements of their own. In 1768, for example, an anonymous New York pamphleteer situated Anglo-American consumption within a larger historical framework. Readers of *The Power and Grandeur of Great-Britain*—one of the more impressive political discussions of this period—learned that the original New World settlers had overcome "a thousand discouragements" and only recently had managed to establish themselves as "a numerous people." Whatever hardships they endured, the struggling colonists had contributed generously to English prosperity. As loyal consumers on a distant shore, they purchased "merchandise of an almost infinite variety, numberless useful and useless articles [that] are now yearly furnished to three millions of people." The profits of this trade flooded back to England. Even during the mid-century wars against France, commercial revenues increased. For the privilege of obtaining these goods uncomplaining colonists ransacked "the seas and the wilds of America . . . to make payment for them, and the improved lands are cultivated chiefly for the same purpose." Like other colonial authors, the New Yorker described the Seven Years' War as the crucial moment in the development of an empire of goods. In its aftermath, Britain turned the ingenuity of American consumers into a justification for parliamentary taxation, based on the reports of visitors "who saw a great display of luxury, arising from the wealth, which many had suddenly acquired during the wars."⁷

At this point, the author added a sociological dimension to an evolving commercial explanation of political crisis. It was not so much that the reports of extravagant American market behavior had been erroneous. Rather, the colonists were parvenu consumers who had failed to master the etiquette of a polite society. "It is an old observation," the pamphleteer confessed, "that those who suddenly plunge into unexpected riches, in ostentation greatly exceed those who either derive them from their ancestors, or have gradually acquired them by the ordinary course of business." Contemporary imperial policy, therefore, was the product of shoddy anthropology. The British refused to appreciate that, despite their superficial glamour, eighteenth-century Americans remained provincial bumpkins, too poor to pay parliamentary taxes and too untutored to display their wealth tastefully.⁸

In 1768, William Hicks of Philadelphia heightened the conspiratorial element in this broad folk discourse. It was no accident, he announced, that ordinary English people accepted inflated estimates of colonial prosperity as truth, for unnamed sources had systematically distorted reports of economic conditions in America. Hicks protested that "the estimates of our wealth which have been received from ignorant or prejudiced persons, are, in every calculation, grossly erroneous. These misrepresentations, which have been so indus-

triously propagated, are very possibly the offspring of political invention, as they form the best apology for imposing upon us burthens to which we are altogether unequal." This interpretive framework—what was becoming for Hicks a conspiracy of commerce—carried extremely sinister implications for the colonists' happiness within a commercial empire. Boldly linking consumption and politics, Hicks asked Americans to remember exactly how Parliament had first reacted to the false reports of wealth. Had that body not immediately imposed new taxes? Were not these revenue acts an ominous hint of future assaults? Without money, what would the colonists be able to afford? The plot was obvious. The British wanted to keep the Americans poor, marginal consumers just able to pay the rising taxes but never "suffered to riot in a superfluity of wealth." Industrious colonists could surrender their dreams of luxury, their expectations of sharing the material culture of Britain. "Whatever advantages may hereafter present themselves, from an increased population, or a more extended trade," lamented Hicks, "we shall never be able to cultivate them to any valuable purpose; for, how much soever we may possess the ability of acquiring wealth and independence, the partial views of our selfish brethren, supported by the sovereignty of Parliament, will most effectually prevent our enjoying such invaluable acquisitions."⁹

Narratives of commercial life—a fluid assemblage of popular notions about consumption and politics—echoed through the colonial newspapers, indicating that the tale of hospitable American consumers and bemused British visitors, of luxury and poverty in a changing economy, had become a staple of popular culture on the eve of Independence. Writing in the *New-London Gazette*, "Incultus Americanus" reminded readers that the Seven Years' War had been responsible for "an insatiable itch for merchandizing; and the folly and extravagance of the people in imitating the customs and dress of foreigners." Self-indulgence had been the colonists' undoing. "Our extravagant dress and luxury had this fatal effect . . . , that Europeans concluded we were a people abounding with wealth, and well able to furnish largely for defraying the national debt."¹⁰ The *Boston Evening-Post* noted that the British belief in "our being in affluent and flourishing circumstances, was grounded upon a mistake or the misrepresentation of travellers or others."¹¹ By 1771, the argument for disjuncture between appearance and reality had become standard fare. "A Friend of the Colony of Connecticut" explained in the *New-Haven Post-Boy* that "a large consumption of unnecessary foreign articles . . . has given us the false and deceitful appearance of riches, in buildings, at our tables, and on our bodies. Which has attracted the attention if not raised the envy of our neighbors, and perhaps had its influence in making the late grievous unconstitutional revenue acts."¹²

Even as the contest with Great Britain intensified and the possibility of armed conflict loomed, Americans maintained that the political crisis was somehow related to their own participation in a new Anglo-American marketplace. One example appeared in 1774. The Reverend Ebenezer Baldwin of

Danbury, Connecticut, published a short sermon explicitly directed to ordinary farmers living in isolated communities who were "not under the best advantages for information from the news papers and other pieces wrote upon the controversy." How had it come to pass, Baldwin asked these rural people, that Americans were contemplating armed resistance against the British empire? For answers one needed to look no further back in time than the Seven Years' War. "As America was much the seat of the last war," Baldwin recounted, "the troops sent here from the mother country, opened a much freer communication between Great Britain and the Colonies, [and] the state of the colonies was much more attended to in England, than it had been in times past."

Such familiarity generated only superficial understanding. British visitors failed to appreciate just how much the social dynamics of America differed from those of England. "In a country like this," Baldwin reminded the farmers, "where property is so equally divided, every one will be disposed to rival his neighbor in goodness of dress, sumptuousness of furniture, &c. All our little earnings therefore went to Britain to purchase mainly the superfluities of life." Economic leveling in the colonies stimulated status competition; consumer goods were the primary means by which men and women sorted themselves out in society. "Hence the common people here make a show, much above what they do in England," Baldwin asserted. Here was the source of a profound cultural misunderstanding. "The luxury and superfluities in which even the lower ranks of people here indulge themselves," the Connecticut minister observed, "being reported in England by the officers and soldiers upon their return, excited in the people there a very exalted idea of the riches of this country, and the abilities of the inhabitants to bear taxes."¹³ Whatever their former excesses as consumers may have been, Baldwin thought that Americans could still save the political situation. All they had to do was reform their buying habits, putting aside the imported goods that had made them seem richer than they actually were. The moment had arrived for the "lower ranks" of society to appreciate that their private decisions in the marketplace had helped to precipitate and could influence the greatest political event of their lives.

Versions of the commercial narrative had strong popular appeal. In 1774, for example, "A Citizen of Philadelphia" submitted a story of naïve American consumers to several urban newspapers. This form of the evolving story was more elaborate and less sophisticated. To be sure, the Seven Years' War brought British troops to America. These had not been average soldiers, however, for as A Citizen explained, the officers were upper-class figures, "many of them sons of the best families." Other eminent Englishmen accompanied the military to the New World. "Gentlemen on their travels extended their route to America," the writer explained, "and even Peers of the realm landed on our shores." Sudden attention from such distinguished personages flattered the colonists, who worked hard to make a favorable impression on their elite guests. A Citizen recaptured their effusive hospitality: "we lavished the fruits

of our industry, in social banquets,—We displayed a parade of *wealth*, beyond the bounds of moderation and prudence; and suffered our guests to depart, with *high ideas of our riches*." As the prodigal Americans soon learned, these socially prominent officers and gentlemen lost no time informing well-connected friends in England about the affluent consumers they had encountered in the New World. Perhaps these reporters meant no harm; perhaps they did not consciously engage in conspiracy. There was no disputing, however, that as England "was oppressed with a heavy load of debt, . . . how natural then, was it for Parliament, to hunt out fresh resources?"¹⁴

The narrative of commercial life gained what may have been a final reformulation in David Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution*. Published in 1789, this sedulously researched account of the War for Independence strove to avoid the shrill partisan tone that marred many early patriot histories. Like others who reviewed the conflict, the South Carolina physician and army veteran found it difficult to understand why Parliament decided to tax the Americans in the first place. He located the answer in Britain's willingness to accept "exaggerated accounts" of Americans' wealth. "It was said," Ramsay explained, "that the American planters lived in affluence, and with inconsiderable taxes, while the inhabitants of Great-Britain were borne down." The culprits again seem to have been British soldiers serving in America. "Their observations were founded on what they had seen in cities, and at a time, when large sums were spent by government, in support of fleets and armies, and when American commodities were in great demand." Kind Americans spared no expense in feting their British allies in the great struggle against France. "To treat with attention those, who came to fight for them," Ramsay asserted, "and also to gratify their own pride, the colonists had made a parade of their riches, by frequently and sumptuously entertaining the gentlemen of the British army." The visitors mistakenly concluded that the colonists lived very well. It was a natural error. These officers "judging from what they saw, without considering the general state of the country, concurred in representing the colonists, as very able to contribute, largely, towards defraying the common expenses of empire."¹⁵

These various versions of the commercial narrative joined other discourses that Americans invented to explain to themselves why relations with England had soured so suddenly. Although other tales circulated widely throughout the colonies during this period—for example, stories of massive political corruption in Great Britain—this largely overlooked account of eager, misunderstood colonial consumers possesses unusual interest. It represents an imaginative, often entirely plausible response to two distinct crises in the Anglo-American world of the mid-eighteenth century. The colonists had to accommodate not only the demands of a new consumer marketplace that inundated the homes of free men and women with alluring goods but also the aggressive Parliament that threatened to destroy a delicate commercial system that made it possible to pay for these goods.

The commercial narrative that enjoyed popularity for over two decades effectively linked these separate challenges. For one thing, it established a shared chronology. Change accelerated during the Seven Years' War, setting the stage for a cultural misinterpretation so profound that the Americans could never again persuade Parliament that they were in fact poor. The interpretation turned on the consumption of English manufactures by Americans who were overly hospitable, remarkably self-indulgent, and socially insecure. Versions of the story came from all regions of the continent, from different classes and backgrounds, from people who seemed in retrospect to have felt a little guilty that their own excesses had given off such confusing signals. The narrative of commercial life explained that it was not the goods that had hurt the Americans but, rather, their misuse; not the purchase, but the vulgarity.

Historians have failed to give the commercial perspective proper interpretive standing. Another body of thought has long dominated the search for the ideological origins of the American Revolution. According to Bernard Bailyn, who more than any other has set the terms of this debate, eighteenth-century colonists subscribed to a controlling set of "assumptions, beliefs, and ideas—the articulated world view—that lay behind the manifest events of the time."¹⁶ This complex mental framework, often labeled "republican," marginalized the language and experience of commercial capitalism.¹⁷ In this interpretive perspective, colonial Americans were not trying to accommodate to a rapidly changing world economic system; instead, they resisted it. They condemned the modern commercial mentality. They were backward looking, suspicious of trade and banking, fearful of spreading political corruption produced by financial revolution in Great Britain. Americans of republican persuasion spent their days exposing plots consciously designed to pervert Britain's ancient constitution, schemes to establish a standing army, efforts to silence the press—in short, conspiracies to crush liberty. These shrill anxieties helped Americans to see the evil hand behind British policy, and by 1776 colonial readers of John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon had transformed themselves into armed rebels against the empire. So runs the "republican synthesis."¹⁸

Historians critical of this dominant interpretation have argued that the colonists' political ideology before the Revolution was more liberal and Lockean than we had been led to believe. Others have tried to restore elements of traditional Protestant theology to the ideological mix, but with the notable exceptions of Joyce Appleby and Isaac Kramnick, few seem comfortable with a political discourse that owed much to the experiences of ordinary men and women in a new consumer marketplace.¹⁹ To construct a persuasive explanation of the dialectic between experience and ideology on the eve of Independence, one would need to address two separate interpretive problems about which current historiography has little to say.

First, we should focus on the elusive relation between the events of everyday life and the stories that contemporaries invented to make sense of those events.

This is not an exercise that necessarily gives interpretive privilege to the writings of highly educated colonial leaders—for example, to the pamphlets produced by great planters, successful lawyers, and prominent ministers. These familiar sources have obvious utility, but we should cast the net more broadly to include elements of popular thought—inchoate, sometimes contradictory ideas and assumptions that persons of very different economic and regional backgrounds came to share by mid-century.²⁰

Second, we should consider how artisans and farmers—the sort of folk who may have heard the Reverend Baldwin—confronted a mid-eighteenth-century world that impinged ever more insistently on their sense of self. The great value of the local studies produced by American historians over recent decades is that they powerfully draw attention to ordinary men and women making decisions about the conduct of their lives. The drama of the past reveals itself most poignantly within small units, within communities trying to explain environmental change, within families experiencing the joys and disappointments connected to cycles of life and death, within the minds of individual men and women attempting to work out their sexual, racial, and ethnic identities.

Local analysis, however, cannot be its own reward. Throughout recorded history, ordinary people have found that they must express agency within larger frameworks, such as capitalism and nationalism—forces that puzzled and frightened, that demanded personal response, and that presented an unprecedented range of choice.²¹ In mid-eighteenth-century America, the outside world often spoke most seductively through imported consumer goods, and because they imagined themselves within an empire of commerce, colonists who had previously not had much to do with each other came to see it a matter of common sense to respond to the disruption of their economic and political lives through specific commercial strategies such as an ever-wider boycott movement. Political actions grew out of a popular ideology. What no one anticipated was that mass political mobilization within a consumer marketplace would radically transform how Americans construed community so that by the 1770s their experience provoked them to imagine a powerful commercial empire of their own.

Americans brought to the final political crisis a complex bundle of ideas about the British empire that were products of long commercial experience. This set of popular assumptions provided an interpretive lens through which the colonists viewed parliamentary claims to absolute sovereignty. Jonathan Mayhew, a leading Boston clergyman, understood these patterns of thought as well as any colonist, and he was therefore an appropriate person to celebrate in 1766 the repeal of the Stamp Act with a sermon entitled *The Snare Broken*. Mayhew used the occasion to reexamine what membership in the British empire meant to colonial Americans. He concentrated on shared assumptions—what he termed "commonly-received opinions" and notions generally "taken for granted"—that he believed had shaped popular political identity.²² At that

happy moment, Mayhew must have sensed that scholarly arguments would not spark the desired emotional response. To be sure, Americans cared deeply about the empire to which they swore allegiance. It was just that their thoughts about this subject were a bit fuzzy—a loose amalgam of beliefs about the balanced constitution, the common law tradition, and the sanctity of the Protestant succession. These disparate elements had somehow contributed to their own freedom and prosperity.²³ Certainly, there was no denying success. According to one American writing in 1768, “Britain seems now to have attained to a degree of wealth, power, and eminence, which half a century ago, the most sanguine of her patriots could hardly have made the object of their warmest wishes.”²⁴

On one point Americans expressed near universal agreement. They believed that the empire owed its ascendancy almost entirely to international commerce, that trade was the indispensable source of national wealth and military power, and that trade even sustained political liberty.²⁵ World history, they claimed, demonstrated that commercial societies were freer and happier than those that had not experienced its marvelously transforming effects. Thus writer “X” in the *Connecticut Journal* insisted that “the experience of every age, and nation from the remotest knowledge, down to the present-day, join in asserting this fact; that no nation, ever became rich or poor, but in proportion to the increase, or decrease of their trade.” For “X,” the British empire brought Americans more than economic prosperity: commerce went “hand in hand with liberty; rose, flourish’d and declin’d together.”²⁶

Colonial newspapers regularly reaffirmed the lesson. Commerce distinguished the British empire from other empires, from despotic systems that could never deliver the peace, security, and coherence that eighteenth-century Americans now took for granted. “Commerce is the most solid foundation of civil society,” the *Boston Evening-Post* announced in 1764. “By this our necessities, conveniences, and pleasures are supplied from distant shores; every region is amazed to find itself abounding in foreign productions, and enriched with a thousand commodities unknown to itself, and promoting its welfare and serving to make life more agreeable.”²⁷ Mid-century Americans imagined themselves within a great circulation of money and goods, a practically Newtonian marketing system connecting them in mutually beneficial ways to strangers throughout the empire.

For Americans, trade implied reciprocity. All groups within the empire stood to gain something by exchanging goods. Commercial relations between peoples and societies were analogous to private contracts, all parties negotiating and each party compromising a little in an effort to reach agreement. To take advantage of a partner’s weakness, to take more from a relationship than one returned, was condemned as shortsighted as well as avaricious. A young man chosen in 1766 to deliver a prize-winning dissertation on “The Reciprocal Advantages of a Perpetual Union Between Great-Britain and Her American Colonies” voiced the common wisdom: “I hope . . . to make it appear,” he de-

clared, “that a reciprocal emolument will arise from a perpetual union between *Britain* and her *American* Colonies; as she may by their means greatly enlarge her trade and commerce . . . , as they will reap the advantage of her riches and power, by being protected from their enemies, and supplied with the conveniences of life at a cheaper rate, and of a better quality than if manufactured by themselves.”²⁸ From this perspective the empire was a bargain. Members of an Annapolis trade inspection committee expressed the point less effusively in 1770, but they too assumed reciprocity. “The Province of Maryland,” they explained, “and the whole Continent of *British America*, had for more than an Hundred Years, carried on a very extensive Commerce with Great-Britain, which gave a quick Progress to the Population of America, and advanced greatly the Strength, Wealth and Grandeur of *Great-Britain*.”²⁹

While the commercial model assumed balance and fairness within the empire, the colonists—even before the crisis over parliamentary taxation—routinely betrayed a sense of their own vulnerability. American rhetoric often sounded more anxious than descriptive. Writers seemed overly eager to persuade the British—perhaps their fellow colonists also—that trade did in fact benefit the metropolitan core as well as the distant peripheries. The key to any positive assessment of imperial trade was the Americans’ rising consumption of manufactured goods. In 1764, for example, Governor Thomas Fitch lectured the people of Connecticut that “the Colonies and Plantations in *America* are, indeed, of great Importance to their Mother Country and an Interest worthy of her most tender Regard.” The provinces were partners, not competitors. “The more they prosper and increase in Number, Riches and Commerce,” Fitch noted defensively, “the greater will be the Advantage not only to them but also to the Nation at Home.” The colonies provided an ever-expanding market for “almost all Sorts of *British* Manufactures, and of many and various Kinds of Goods of the Produce of other Countries, first imported into *Britain*.”³⁰ In Massachusetts, Oxenbridge Thacher asserted that it was common knowledge “that the greatest part of the trade of Great-Britain, is with her colonies.” As the Americans prospered, so too would the British. Thacher observed that “doubtless even the luxury of the colonists is the gain of G. Britain.”³¹

Colonial observers understood something fundamental about the imperial connection that modern historians have generally ignored: mid-century Americans confronted a situation that was genuinely new. Before the 1740s, few would have described their relation with Great Britain within the framework of a rapidly expanding consumer marketplace. After that date, the commercial connection became much more invasive, more manifest—a development demanding adjustment and accommodation and one that touched the lives of people living in all parts of America.

Contemporaries were fully aware of the changes that had dramatically transformed the face of a provincial material culture. A quotidian world had taken on a different appearance. People dressed more opulently and more colorfully. They purchased more manufactured items that made them feel hap-

pier, warmer, or better looking.³² As William Smith observed in his *History of the Late Province of New-York*, "In the city of New-York, through our intercourse with the Europeans, we follow the London fashions. . . . Our affluence, during the late war [Seven Years' War], introduced a degree of luxury in tables, dress, and furniture, with which we were before unacquainted."³³ Other Americans testified to the suddenness of the change. "I am now forty-four years old," a "Countryman" told the readers of the *Boston Gazette* in 1769, "and to see the difference in the times really astonishes me. I never had, Mr. Printers, believe me, nothing better to go to meeting in, than a pair of sheepskin breeches, a felt hatt, and homespun-made coat with horn buttons." According to the Countryman, his neighbors now demanded "English-made cloth that cost . . . a guinea a yard."³⁴

Statistical evidence abundantly supports contemporary impressions. Trade figures compiled for the eighteenth century reveal that England's exports to the mainland colonies increased over 50 percent between 1720 and 1770. The sharpest rise occurred between 1750 and 1770, and the per capita expenditures on British manufactures equaled, perhaps even exceeded, the phenomenal rate of growth of the American population. Cloth of various types was the major item for sale, but judging from analyses of colonial probate records, men and women also rushed to purchase household amenities such as clocks and china that were just then becoming available at prices that most middle-class families could afford.³⁵

Increasing opportunities to consume triggered intense print controversies about the character and limits of luxury, the moral implications of credit, the role of personal choice in a liberal society, and the relevance of traditional status hierarchies in a commercial world that encouraged people to fashion protean public identities.³⁶ Heated debates on these issues represented an initial effort by large numbers of Americans throughout the colonies to gain intellectual control over the marketplace, to make sense of their new experiences, and to bring ideology into line with a commercial system that they found inviting as well as intimidating. These controversies were facets of a more general struggle to reach accommodation with a particular form of preindustrial capitalism. Similar debates occurred in eighteenth-century Scotland, Ireland, and France, for in those nations a flood of manufactured goods also forced ordinary people to rethink the meaning of traditional cultures. The market compelled a response, and even without political revolution, Americans would inevitably have had to adjust to its demands.³⁷

This developing commercial mentality was neither premodern nor anticapitalist. Americans welcomed improved living standards, and they would have regarded calls to restore an earlier, largely subsistence economy as sheer lunacy.³⁸ By the mid-eighteenth century the simple life had come to be associated with a dull, savage existence. James Otis, the Massachusetts lawyer, who may have been the most radical democrat in America before Thomas Paine, dismissed market asceticism out of hand. Writing in the *Boston Gazette* in 1761,

Otis observed that "luxury is a very vague & loose term, [and] if by it is meant the importation of many foreign commodities, the more we have the better. . . . I know it is the maxim of some, that the common people in this town and country live too well; however I am of a quite different opinion, I do not think they live half well enough."³⁹

During the 1760s, Parliament revised the rules of empire in an effort to reduce a huge national debt. For Americans, the revenue acts came as a shock. They could see no compelling reason to tinker with a commercial system that seemed to be working well enough. To be sure, both sides grumbled from time to time about specific trade problems—smuggling, breaches of the Navigation Acts, inadequate supplies of currency, and the like—but new parliamentary taxes were certainly not the proper solution. As "A Friend to this Country" explained in the *Boston Evening-Post*, "it is an argument in the mouth of almost everyone, 'that the whole profit of our lives center in Britain, & that 'tis folly for them to tax us to gain in themselves what they already secured by a trade, the balance of which is wholly in their favor.'"⁴⁰

The escalating dispute raised fundamental constitutional issues, and while Americans passionately defended their positions on rights and representation, they also worried about their continued participation in the consumer marketplace. In their attempts to comprehend the sudden shift in British policy, they drew as much on their own recent commercial experience as they did on abstract theories of republican governance. The stories they told themselves about prodigal American consumers entertaining British soldiers were a part of this general response. So, too, were decisions about specific forms of political mobilization. The colonists evolved instruments of protest within a mental framework that was largely a product of living in a commercial empire.⁴¹

The most striking aspect of the Revolutionary boycotts is their utter novelty. No previous popular rebellion had organized itself so centrally around the consumer. That the Americans did so is an additional indication of their modernity. Yet historians have not viewed the boycott movement as problematic: it just happened; it was a reflexive response to taxation without representation.⁴² And so it must have seemed to most colonial Americans. While they defended their constitutional goals, fiercely affirming their rights, they seldom bothered to consider the rationale of nonimportation. Shared consumer assumptions and experiences flowed smoothly into the taken-for-granted of resistance. As a Philadelphia broadside declared, "the Stopping the Importation of Goods is the only probable Means of preserving to us and our Posterity . . . Liberty and Security."⁴³

The first boycotts of 1765–1766, contested the Stamp Act. Similar protests occurred in 1768–1770 and 1774–1776. Over time, the nonimportation movement grew larger, more successful, and more democratic. Groups of local merchants usually planned and executed the initial efforts, but the driving force behind the various committees and associations gradually passed to the people. Throughout the colonies, extralegal bodies seized control of the boy-

cott movement; as they did so, their members increasingly spoke in the name of a newly constituted American public.

While the boycott was rapidly becoming the distinctive signature of American political protest, colonists began to resituate themselves in an evolving commercial discourse. Their focus shifted away from reciprocity, away from a mutually beneficial exchange with Great Britain, to outright claims of American preeminence. "I think it may justly be said," boldly declared a Philadelphia writer, "that THE FOUNDATION OF THE POWER AND GLORY OF GREAT BRITAIN ARE LAID IN AMERICA."⁴⁴

Although this booster may not have believed that the American tail really wagged the British dog, he and others made a strong case for Britain's economic dependence on American consumers. Thacher, for example, likened commerce within the British empire to "a grand chain" and concluded that Parliament could not remove the American links "without greatly endangering the whole."⁴⁵ In 1769, the *South-Carolina Gazette* suggested that consumption of imported goods was really a source of political empowerment. Americans, the editor argued, "know themselves to be the best customers Great-Britain has, for her wares." They did not have to pay the oppressive taxes. Britain's rulers should learn that "every American has an indisputable right to lay his money out [on goods] as sparingly as he pleases." If Americans supported the boycott, then no one could predict what might happen. British merchants might suffer large losses; British workers might find themselves out of work. "Must not such a number of idle hands, in the heart of the country, be extremely alarming?" inquired the South Carolinian.⁴⁶

If riots in the Midlands of England failed to win parliamentary concessions, Americans had another card to play: they could go into manufacturing themselves. This had not been a topic of broad colonial interest before the passage of the Stamp Act, but once it became part of a general commercial conversation, it opened up new creative possibilities. Insistence that Americans were capable of satisfying their own consumer demand—something that they would not achieve for many decades—made it easier for people to imagine genuine economic independence. In any case, there is not much evidence that Revolutionary Americans wanted to roll back the commercial progress of the eighteenth century. If a recalcitrant Parliament forced their hand, explained a letter in the *Boston Chronicle*, "the people of America, must from necessity, if not from motives of interest, set up manufacturers of their own: which must gradually diminish, and in consequence put an end to that mutual beneficial commerce, that has hitherto subsisted between us."⁴⁷

Such plausible, though exaggerated, economic claims fed the boycott movement, continuously strengthening the political resolve of individual consumers. Local associations organized to promote nonimportation and manufacturing represented initial, often tentative steps toward a radical reconstitution of civil society.⁴⁸ For in point of fact, Americans of the time were experimenting with new forms of community, founded not on traditional religious affiliations but

on shared commercial interests. Only those who insist that preindustrial capitalism inevitably sparked destructive individualism will be surprised by popular attempts to construct interpretive communities around a temporary withdrawal from an Atlantic marketplace.

The truth of the matter is that a liberal market ideology proved capable of sustaining interpretive communities—indeed, of mobilizing ordinary men and women into associations unequivocally dedicated to the common good. As a "Tradesman" writing for the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* in 1770 well understood, civil society in America could develop from sources other than republicanism. He explained that "as we form a considerable, independent, and respectable Body of the People, we certainly have an *equal Right* to enter into Agreements and Resolutions *with others* for the public Good, in a sober, orderly Manner, becoming Freemen and loyal Subjects. . . . [L]et us determine, *for the Good of the Whole*, to strengthen the Hands of the Patriotic Majority, by agreeing not to purchase *British Goods*."⁴⁹

The link between commerce and community energized a pamphlet published in Boston in 1762. The anonymous author of *Debtor and Creditor* launched his argument with an observation to which few American readers would have objected. God's blessing, he observed, is the "Foundation of Happiness to any Community." He moved quickly to less familiar intellectual ground; other factors merited consideration. "The Number, Riches, and Unanimity of the People are the secondary Constituents of this Happiness," and these elements were in turn a function of "Commerce and Government." "Extensive Commerce and an happy Government will soon introduce a flourishing Nation," he noted in the expansive language of the Scottish Enlightenment. The "Commerce" that the writer had in mind strengthened community, stimulated cooperation, and in these respects, "is like our spiritual Race. In the Spiritual Race we labour for Happiness hereafter, and should not only press towards Heaven ourselves, but, likewise, give all possible Assistance to others in their Labours therein." The analogy with commerce was obvious. In this sphere, too, the individual would work for the common good. "In the Race of Commerce," the writer explained, "not only our own private Advantage, but also that of the Body of which we are Members, should be in View." He imagined a powerful self-regulating community in which "it is our Duty to look on every Addition to our Fortune as an additional Obligation on us to assist and forward the Designs of those who, perhaps, are more indigent, tho' equally industrious."⁵⁰

The nonimportation movement—in effect, a communal experiment in applied ideology—exposed a radical egalitarian strand within the commercial discourse. To appreciate this development one must remember that the consumer market of the mid-eighteenth century was open to almost any white person able to pay the price. Generous credit, paper currency, and newspaper advertisements encouraged broad participation.⁵¹ Usually, free producers were also consumers. And on the eve of Revolution, the success of the colonial boy-

cotts depended on all these consumers temporarily deciding to become non-consumers. The argument for the liberating possibilities of agency in the new Anglo-American marketplace is not intended to mitigate the exploitative and oppressive effects of eighteenth-century capitalism. The development of an Atlantic economy meant that African-American slaves and indentured servants—indeed, unfree people of all sorts—worked very hard, often under extremely harsh conditions. New forms of self-fashioning were built on the suffering of laborers in England and America who made mass consumption possible.

Since in the politicization of private economic choice every free voice counted, it is not surprising that the promoters of the boycott movement tried to legitimate their activities through appeals to the popular will. They presumed to speak for the majority, however defined. Exclusiveness ran counter to the spirit of this powerful mobilizing discourse, and it was a happy moment when a town could report—as did Norwich, Connecticut, in September 1770—that “there was as full a Town Meeting as [was] ever known when the Town voted, almost unanimously, to adhere to their . . . Non-Importation Agreement.”⁵²

The so-called subscription lists also testify to the egalitarian thrust of eighteenth-century commercial thought. These instruments extended the boycott movement to large numbers of people who normally would not have had a voice in public affairs. The lists presented individual consumers with a formal declaration of purpose, followed by an oath or pledge. The goal of subscription was in part indoctrination. The forms reviewed a growing catalogue of grievances and announced that in the short term only nonimportation could preserve liberty and property. More significant, the ritual of signing gave birth to new collectivities. The ordinary consumer who accepted the logic of the argument and signed the paper thereby volunteered to support a community protest.

Surviving subscriptions resonate with religious as well as contractual language. A Boston agreement drafted in 1767 announced that all signers: “DO promise and engage, to and with each other, that we will encourage the Use and Consumption of all Articles manufactured in any of the British American Colonies, and more especially in this Province; and that we will not . . . purchase . . . Articles from abroad.”⁵³ A 1773 South Carolina subscription sounded remarkably similar to that of Boston. After reviewing a decade of oppressive parliamentary acts, persons collectively known as “We the undersigned” declared that they “DO hereby solemnly promise and agree, each for him or herself, that we will not, either directly or indirectly import, buy or sell, or any way encourage or countenance the importation, buying or selling, any teas. . . . And this we do, because we conceive, that the payment of . . . duties, will be acknowledging a power which the British Parliament hath assumed, and which we deny them to have under our excellent constitution.”⁵⁴

The subscription campaign caught the public interest. Numbers provide an index of political success. In 1767, the *Boston Evening-Post* reported that “the Subscription Rolls are daily filling up at the Town Clerk’s Office.”

Charlestown, Dedham, and Providence had launched efforts of their own, and there, too, the forms were “filling up fast.”⁵⁵ The publisher of the *South-Carolina Gazette* established a central register where the separate subscriptions could be tabulated, and he urged “Gentlemen in the country possessed of these Forms . . . to transmit the names subscribed thereto, as frequently as possible.”⁵⁶ The *Maryland Gazette* informed its readers that 840 people had already signed the local lists; many more were expected.⁵⁷

One person’s signature seems to have been as desirable as another’s. In 1767, Boston town officials specifically urged “Persons of all Ranks” to come forward, and in Annapolis, Maryland, people circulating “our Association-Paper” predicted that colonists of “every Degree” would sign it.⁵⁸ The *South-Carolina Gazette* even reported that in New York, “The Sense of the People was taken by Subscription, and near 800 Names got, about 300 of the People without a single Shilling Property.”⁵⁹

Even more significant, the subscription movement actively involved women. It was as consumers participating in new interpretive communities that American women first gained a political voice. Although men may have pushed women to the margins of formal protest, so that they had to organize their own subscriptions, women made the most of this opportunity. In 1770, for example, a group of Boston women drew up an agreement “against drinking foreign TEA.” One hundred twenty-six “young Ladies” announced: “We the Daughters of those Patriots who have and now do appear for the public Interest . . . do with Pleasure engage with them in denying ourselves the drinking of Foreign Tea, in hopes to frustrate a Plan that tends to deprive the whole Community of their all that is valuable in Life.”⁶⁰ Another Boston subscription gained the signatures of 300 “Mistresses of their respective families.” The next week, 110 more names appeared.⁶¹ In 1774, the women of Charleston, South Carolina, formed an association and, according to the local newspaper, “are subscribing to it very fast.”⁶²

These innovative efforts to bring people into the boycott remind us that consumer-based actions were inherently more open than were the traditional political ones accessible only to white males with property. Peter Oliver, the Boston loyalist who later penned a caustic history of the Revolution, immediately spotted the radical thrust of the market protest. Recounting what he had witnessed during the late 1760s, Oliver claimed that agitators had circulated “A Subscription Paper . . . Enumerating a great Variety of Articles not to be imported from *England*, which they supposed would muster the Manufacturers in *England* into a national Mob to support their Interests. Among the various prohibited Articles, were *Silks, Velvets, Clocks, Watches, Coaches & Chariots*; & it was highly diverting, to see the names & marks, to the Subscription, of Porters & Washing Women.”⁶³ Oliver ridiculed such activities. How could persons outside politics ever hope to have their opinions on important issues taken seriously? But the poor laborers of Boston—women as well as men—knew what they were doing. Their “names & marks” testify to

their membership in a new volitional community that people of Oliver's status could never comprehend.

Subscription should be seen, therefore, as an instrument through which the colonists explored the limits of democratic participation. Appearing on the margins of mainstream political discourse, the popular lists raised the issue of political exclusivity.⁶⁴ Did the men and women who signed the papers, for example, necessarily represent the people? If they did not, then for whom did they speak?

These were the sorts of questions that "Cato" addressed in the *Pennsylvania Chronicle* in 1770. For him, the colonial political crisis was too important to be left in the hands of a minority pretending to speak for a majority. "This is a point," he wrote, "in which every freeholder of this province is highly interested, and in which every one of them has a right to a voice." He was irritated by inflated claims to political authority advanced by a select group of local "subscribers to the non-importation." These people assumed "an exclusive right to determine this matter." If they did possess such a privilege, Cato warned, "it follows that the subscribers to the non-importation have the sole right to determine a question of liberty, that most nearly concerns every freeman of this province. For if it is the only mode of opposition of any force, and those two or three hundred subscribers have a right to make the agreement void whenever they please, it is a plain inference that they have a right to decide on a point which affects the liberties of the people of this province." Cato wanted to open up the process. Votes, not signatures, reflected the popular will, and he trusted that "every freeman, whether he be farmer, merchant, or mechanic, will insist upon his right to a vote in so important an affair."⁶⁵

The question of political inclusion flared dramatically in New York on the eve of Independence, when a small group of wealthy merchants seized control of the local boycott. These men did not want to consult about politics or trade with people whom they regarded as social inferiors. Their expressions of public arrogance mocked new popular notions of an open, egalitarian commercial community. In a 1774 broadside, *To the Free and Loyal Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New-York*, "Brutus" spoke out for the political rights of ordinary men and women. "Nothing can be more flagrantly wrong," Brutus declared, "than the Assertion of some of our mercantile Dons, that the Mechanics have no Right to give their Sentiments about the Importation of *British Commodities*." The great merchants of New York failed to appreciate that ordinary colonists interpreted political events within ideological frameworks every bit as complex and compelling as those of their more privileged contemporaries. "For who," asked Brutus in the distinct language of eighteenth-century commercial capitalism, "is the Member of Community, that is absolutely independent of the rest? Or what particular Class among us, has an exclusive Right to decide a Question of general Concern?"⁶⁶

The key element of the developing argument was the rejection of *exclusiveness*. From Brutus's perspective, the common good was a public responsibility.

There was no celebration here—as one finds in the republican literature of that time—of the man of wealth and leisure, the independent property holder who rises above grubby commercial interests and contemplates with marvelous objectivity the general welfare. Legal standing did not define citizenship. After all, Brutus insisted, "We are all equally free." With equal freedom went equal responsibility. During the boycott movement, "Every Man saw, that between an Importation of Goods . . . and the Sacrifice of our inestimable Rights as Englishmen, there was no Medium." Political resistance within the consumer marketplace had to be open to people of all "Ranks." Otherwise it was an empty promise. Ignore those merchants, urged Brutus, "who dare to affirm . . . that the Mechanics, or in other Words, the Majority of the Community, are not to be consulted on a Point of universal, of dreadful Concern."⁶⁷

During the summer of 1770, the New York boycott movement hotly debated the issue of democratic participation. After Parliament repealed the Townshend duties, thus dropping all taxes except that on tea, the major import merchants of the city agitated to renew trade as soon as possible. Delays in reestablishing English contacts might give competitors in Philadelphia or Boston a huge advantage. But however much the New York merchants wanted to turn a profit, they could not bring themselves unilaterally to break the local nonimportation agreement. What they needed at this decisive moment was authorization from the people, and this they determined to obtain through a public opinion poll of consumers—perhaps the first such effort conducted in America. If they could demonstrate with quantitative evidence that the public wanted to rescind the boycott, the merchants knew they would be safe. The tactic worked. Polling papers carried through the city wards revealed that a majority of the people of New York supported a greatly modified boycott that allowed the merchants to import virtually everything except British tea.

The radical leaders of New York found themselves confronted with a quandary that has haunted democratic theorists since ancient Greece. How does a minority respond when it is certain that the majority has made a mistake? The obvious ploy was to declare the poll a fraud, and over several months the supporters of a continued total boycott did just that. They hammered away at the merchants' sham democracy. The author of "A Protest" in the *New-York Mercury* argued that the reported numbers were not credible. "It appears from the Ward-Lists," the writer charged, "that only 794 Persons in this populous City, including all Ranks, and both Sexes; declared for the Affirmative of the Questions."⁶⁸ It is particularly significant for my argument that this writer assumed that a true canvass of colonial consumers—even one involving complex political issues—required inclusiveness, full participation by women as well as men, the poor as well as the rich.

"A Son of Liberty" also challenged the merchants' democratic claims. In the *New-York Advertiser* he ridiculed the assertion that "a majority appeared for importation." The merchants had not even approached most of the men and women who composed the consumer public. A Son of Liberty observed that

"there were not quite twelve hundred persons who signed for importing (notwithstanding the diligence and indefatigable industry of those who went about for the purpose), and I am well assured that they do not amount to above one third of the inhabitants of this city (not to mention the counties, who have an undoubted right to give their voices upon this very interesting and important subject)."⁶⁹

During this contest, "A Citizen" produced a pointed defense of open, egalitarian procedures in a politicized consumer marketplace. To appreciate fully his contribution to the liberal discourse, we must remember that A Citizen was discussing civic responsibility within a commercial public sphere of quite recent invention—in other words, within a popular political arena that was just beginning to express itself apart from traditional institutions of governance. The merchant canvass of New York brought theory into contact with events, helping ordinary men and women better to appreciate the interdependence of liberty and commerce. "Will it excuse this City to the rest of the World," A Citizen asked, "if it should appear that a Majority of the Inhabitants concurred in desiring to break thro' the [nonimportation] Agreement?" He argued through interrogation, with hard questions leading to harder ones until the logic of the performance seemed irrefutable. "Supposing there is a Majority, (which is not admitted)," he inquired of the merchants,

was it fairly and properly obtained? Was that Opinion given and subscribed with due Deliberation, Knowledge and Freedom? Or were not a very considerable Number of the Subscribers, influenced and determined, by your Persuasions and Representations, or by submitting their Opinions to be guided by your Advice and superior Judgment? Can opinions so given and obtained, properly be called the Voice of the People, or given a Sanction to the Dissolution of an Agreement of such immense Weight and Importance?⁷⁰

The breaking of the New York boycott in 1770 came to a curious conclusion that prefigured America's eventual separation from Great Britain. As in the larger imperial contest, the failure of local authorities to expand representation, to listen to a newly empowered "Voice of the People," ended in violence. When "Gentlemen" sought to rationalize the resumption of trade, they were confronted by a group of forty or fifty people who gathered at the "house of Mr. Jasper Drake, inn-keeper." The *New-York Mercury* reported that "they erected a flag, as a signal of the place appointed for their rendezvous, and after carousing and drinking very plentifully . . . they sallied out in the evening, . . . carrying with them music, colours and staffs, upon which were labels fixed with the inscription of, *Liberty and Non-importation*." The mob marched through the streets "crying out, *No Importation*." The leading merchants and their allies could not endure the provocation. The popular protest ended when "a Number of principal People . . . applied to an Alderman to go and stop those People, and take the Flag from them, upon which the Alderman headed

a considerable Number with Canes and Clubs, and attempted to take their Colours, upon which a Scuffle ensued, and a few got hurt."⁷¹

Americans of different backgrounds and regions regularly insisted that without "virtue" their cause had no chance whatsoever. Virtue was the social glue that kept the newly formed liberal communities from fragmenting. Colonists who signed the subscriptions, supported the boycotts of British goods and marched the streets carrying banners proclaiming "Liberty and Non-Importation" assumed that their protests mobilized virtuous people.

Eighteenth-century virtue claims two distinguished genealogies. J. G. A. Pocock traces it back to the Florentine world of Niccolò Machiavelli, arguing that the virtuous citizen was a man whose landed wealth enabled him to rise above the corrupting influences of commerce and thereby preserve the purity of republican government.⁷² Such historians as Edmund S. Morgan associate eighteenth-century virtue with the so-called Protestant Ethic.⁷³ While both positions possess merit—indeed, political discourse on the eve of the Revolution seems to have drawn on both traditions—the virtue that resonated through the entire boycott movement was closer to what T. A. Horne provocatively labels "bourgeois virtue."⁷⁴

When advocates of nonimportation spoke of virtue, they referred primarily to a personal attribute. A virtuous man or woman was one who voluntarily exercised self-restraint in the consumer marketplace. Such behavior represented a sacrifice. No one denied the desirability of the new manufactured items. But however appealing the British imports were, the virtuous person exercised self-control for the common good. It was in this spirit that the delegates to a New Haven boycott meeting in 1770 declared that "the non-importation agreement come into by the colonies in general, and by this in particular . . . were founded on free, virtuous, peaceable, manly and patriotic principles."⁷⁵ In *A Sermon on Tea*, published in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, an anonymous author argued that "if we have virtue enough to disuse every commodity on which they lay a tax," Parliament will soon tire "of cultivating the barren tree that produces no fruit."⁷⁶ And "Juris Prudens," writing in the *New-York Mercury*, urged all Americans: "let us import no Goods whatsoever from Great-Britain, and we shall be crowned Virtuous; we shall be free forever."⁷⁷

This rather straightforward sense of market virtue that developed throughout the colonies before Independence had important implications for political mobilization. Anyone who regularly purchased manufactured goods from Great Britain could become virtuous simply by controlling consumption. The concept thus linked everyday experience and behavior with a broadly shared sense of the common good. What one did with one's money mattered very much to the entire community, for in this highly charged atmosphere, economic self-indulgence became a glaring public vice. Unlike Cincinnatus, the bourgeois patriot did not reach immediately for the sword. He first examined the household budget. "I laugh at a man that talks of facing cannon and red coats," explained a Boston writer in 1767, "who cannot conquer his foppish

empty notions of grandeur. What is true grandeur, but a noble patriotic resolution of sacrificing every other consideration to the Love of our Country! And can he be a true lover of his country . . . who would sooner be seen strutting about the streets, clad in foreign fripperies, than to be nobly independent in russet grey!"⁷⁸ The *Boston Gazette* translated market virtue into a direct call to action: "Save your Money and you save your Country."⁷⁹ Wherever they lived, bourgeois Americans would instruct their "children . . . to practise verture and industry with good economy, which will naturally supply the individuals . . . with abundance, and enable them to improve in all kinds of learning and science and render them useful, respectable and independent."⁸⁰

For all their insistence on voluntarism, the proponents of nonimportation developed a potentially coercive understanding of political obligation. To be sure, the individual consumer could exercise his or her free will and ignore appeals from those who supported the boycotts. But one thereby surrendered one's right to blame others for the destruction of political liberty. Membership in a commercial society implied responsibilities to the larger collectivity. As "Pro Aris Et Focis" wrote in 1769, "Our merchants have done worthily; but it is the body of the people, who must under GOD, finally save us. For while there are debauched consumers of foreign luxuries, there always will be, in this depraved state, mercenary creatures enough to import the *bane of their country*." The writer refused to let the vicious consumer sit complacently. Victory over Parliament required "the virtue of the people," all of them. "Nay, my fellowmen," warned Pro Aris, painting a vivid commercial portrait:

the servile emissaries and wicked minions of your inveterate foes have insultingly prophesied and blazed it abroad . . . that the mercantile endeavours would prove utterly abortive;—that no dependence was to be had upon the virtuous stability of the generality among us;—that the common people, or, as they distainfully term it, the herd, were sunk in luxury, intemperate and degrading vice;—and that hence, any *commercial plan* of political salvation would prove, only, an amusing dream—a transitory phantom.⁸¹

Within the framework of bourgeois virtue, organizers of local boycotts and subscription drives created a new political abstraction that would be of great significance in the coming of the American Revolution. The nonimportation movement constructed a "public," an imagined body of people who demonstrated virtue by renouncing British goods and thus earned the right to judge the behavior of the less virtuous. In the American colonies this may have been as close as people came to creating what Jürgen Habermas calls the "public sphere." For him, this imagined space was an arena in which intellectuals—writers who published largely in the pages of the newly founded urban journals of the eighteenth century—criticized the absolutist state. These independent critics addressed a growing audience of literate men and women in the name of the public. The public—an abstract body that never actually assem-

bled—was composed of reasonable persons, individuals open to liberal argument and hostile to the arbitrary exercise of power.⁸²

Despite charges of political oppression, Americans never really confronted absolutist authority—at any rate, nothing on the order of the ancien régime in France and Germany. British colonial government was notoriously weak. In this social and political setting American authors defined what was essentially a commercial public sphere. In newspapers and pamphlets, popular writers assumed separate, though entirely complementary voices. They spoke *for* as well as *to* a reasoning and virtuous public. The bourgeois audience invented by the commercial press was especially skilled at spotting fraudulent patriots. As a South Carolinian explained in 1770, "the non-Importers had long been endeavouring to discover who were true, and who Traitors to the Cause of American liberty, which nothing could so effectually discover as the present Measure: But, since the Sons of Liberty have got all their Names, and every Man who before wore a Mask, now appears with an uncovered Face, they begin to be not a little uneasy."⁸³

When vicious consumers were caught with British manufactured goods, it was bourgeois virtue that held them accountable, often demanding full confession and restitution. A New York City merchant, Alexander Robertson, who violated the boycott, had to publish a broadside addressed specifically "To the PUBLICK." A chastened Robertson stated, "As I have justly incurred the Resentment of my Fellow Citizens, from my Behaviour, as set forth in an Advertisement, of *great Importance to the Publick*, assuring them that I am truly sorry for the Part I have acted; declared and promise that I never will again attempt an Act contrary to the true Interest and Resolutions of the People zealous in the Cause of *Virtue and Liberty*." He closed with a pathetic appeal to "the Publick in general to believe me."⁸⁴

Such local conversations—however painful for the likes of Robertson—encouraged virtuous consumers to imagine even larger collectivities. The process was slow, halting, punctuated by self-doubt and mutual recrimination, but during the run-up to Independence, Americans living in scattered communities managed to reach out convincingly to distant strangers, to persons not directly known but assumed to share in the development of a new consumer marketplace. The initial boycott experiments of the 1760s persuaded the colonists of the need for broader, more effective alliances. They learned about each other through the weekly newspapers that were themselves both a product and a voice of expanding commerce.⁸⁵

Often the imaginative spark arrived in the form of an invitation. The committees and associations—the local groups that presumed to speak for the public—received requests from other committees appealing for support. The "Gentlemen, Friends, and Fellow Citizens" of Philadelphia were called together in 1768 "to give your Advice and Opinion, what answer shall be returned to our Brethren of *Boston & N. York*, who desire to know whether we will unite with them, in stopping the Importation of Goods from *Great*

Britain."⁸⁶ By voting in the affirmative, the nonimporters of Philadelphia expressed their trust in those about whom they knew very little. Soon after the New Englanders learned that Philadelphians and southerners had joined the boycott, the *Boston Gazette* announced excitedly, "We become one DETERMINED PEOPLE: to pursue Industry and Oeconomy, and encourage our own Manufactures."⁸⁷

Even as they condemned the perfidy of fallen boycotters living in other parts of America, colonists measured their own performance against that of distant strangers. In other words, bitter complaints and charges of betrayal were aspects of an imaginative process that was slowly forcing the colonists to think of themselves as Americans. The broader comparative perspective was apparent when the nonimporters of Philadelphia announced that almost no one else in America could equal their own exemplary virtue in the consumer marketplace. A 1770 broadside published in the City of Brotherly Love seemed intent on demonstrating the existence of a kind of negative union:

Do not the Importers in that province [Maryland] expect the same quantities this Fall? Have not the Eastern-Governments most shamefully imported, notwithstanding their solemn declarations and resolves? Does not the conduct of the Bostonians sufficiently prove their perfidy, by re-shipping trunks and cases filled with rubbish, after gutting them of their British contents? In what manner have New-York and Rhode-Island behaved? Has Virginia ever entered into any agreement? Are not all the ports to the southward of South-Carolina open?⁸⁸

Although defections angered the champions of liberty and nonimportation, we can appreciate that even in moments of extreme disappointment strangers scattered throughout the provinces had begun to situate themselves within a larger commercial and political union. To describe this mental process as incipient nationalism would suggest that we are anticipating independence long before the colonists did. The claim is rather that even when Americans most feared political fragmentation, they imagined themselves within a commercial and liberal discourse capable of sustaining self-conscious nationalism.⁸⁹

New York's desertion in 1770 was such a moment. Residents of other colonies took the stunning decision to resume trade with Britain as a gratuitous insult to the "cause of American Liberty." A powerful continental association of virtuous consumers had been within reach, but at the instant of patriotic triumph the New York traders compromised "the union of the colonies."⁹⁰ Betrayal required explanation. "Why should [New Yorkers]," a South Carolinian asked, "endeavour to weaken that Phalanx which they were so eager to form?" Had they forgotten that patriotism involved acting "in mutual concert, for the good of the whole?" The New Yorkers had shown themselves lacking the necessary bourgeois virtue. According to one colonial newspaper, "The Common Cause of America [has] been most basely and traitorously deserted by a Number of Merchants, Traders, and others, of the City of New-

York . . . at a Time, when the Eyes of all the Colonies were more particularly fixed upon them: when their Virtue, to resist every Temptation, and to defeat every attempt of a prevailing Faction, was, relied on." The New Yorkers had certainly demonstrated themselves unworthy of alliance with "the virtuous people of PENNSYLVANIA [who had] received a cordial invitation to import, and . . . treated it just as it deserved."⁹¹

The collapse of nonimportation in 1770 left Americans in a sour mood. As they assessed the failure to wean themselves from British goods, they momentarily doubted their moral ability to create a truly virtuous state. Their self-deprecatory statements during this period seem to echo the anticommmercial rhetoric of republican discourse, persuading some modern historians, at least, that preindustrial capitalism and the public good were in fact incompatible. What, inquired one newspaper essay, can the colonists learn from recent defection from the boycott?

That self-interest is irresistible.

That liberty and public good can stand no chance among men when self-interest is its rival.

That self-interest recommends the most underhanded schemes to every man's good conscience.⁹²

"Cato" of New York agreed. "The late Conduct of the Merchants of New-York, Philadelphia, &c.," he explained, "sufficiently proves, that no Dependence is to be had upon any Combination or Agreement that can be entered into for the public Good, however well calculated to answer that End—if it interferes with the private immediate Interest of Individuals."⁹³

Such statements—and they were common—should not be interpreted as evidence that Americans rejected either preindustrial capitalism or the consumer marketplace. The renunciation of excess in the market made sense only in a society that took consumption for granted. The challenge for Revolutionary Americans was to negotiate between extreme self-indulgence and primitive simplicity. It involved mediation, not repudiation. As Max Weber explained in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, capitalism is not synonymous with greed. In fact, "capitalism may even be identical with the restraint, or at least a rational tempering, of this irrational impulse."⁹⁴

In any case, the cries of the pessimists were unfounded. They misread the commercial changes sweeping American society and therefore underestimated the capacity of men and women to translate individual market behavior into mass political protest. The delegates to the First Continental Congress did not make that mistake. They appreciated the centrality of consumption in mobilizing persons of different regions and social backgrounds. On October 20, 1774, Congress authorized the Association, a broad network of local elected committees entrusted with the total enforcement of nonimportation. These bodies became in effect, "committees of public safety." At the moment of decision about ultimate political loyalties, the colonists' friends and neighbors were busy monitoring commercial behavior and enforcing bourgeois virtue in the

name of the common good.⁵⁵ "We need only fight our Own selves," announced "A Carolinian" in 1774, "suppress for a while our Luxury and Corruption, and wield the Arms of Self Denial in our own Houses, to obtain the Victory. . . . And the Man who would not refuse himself a fine Coat, to save his Country, deserves to be hanged."⁵⁶

We have traced a complex flow of ideas into actions, of shared assumptions about a commercial empire into forms of political resistance. This was most certainly not the only route from experience and ideology to revolution. Other, more celebrated political discourses helped Americans make sense out of rapidly changing social and economic conditions within the British empire. In this particular exploration, however, we have reconstituted a frame of reference that defined itself around participation in a newly established consumer marketplace. This focus powerfully illuminates how the great shaping forces of history—commercial capitalism, for example—impinged on the lives of ordinary men and women, compelling them to reimagine themselves within a larger polity. For consuming Americans, the mental process had unintended results: the creation of political instruments open to persons of "all ranks," the development of a concept of virtue that included any man or woman capable of economic self-restraint, and the formation of new interpretive communities based on shared, secular interests.

Notes

1. Gordon S. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 401–441; Bernard Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750–1776*, 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 20–90; James H. Hutson, "The Origins of The Paranoid Style in American Politics: Public Jealousy from the Age of Walpole to the Age of Jackson," in David D. Hall, John M. Murrin, and Thad W. Tate, eds., *Saints and Revolutionaries: Essays on Early American History* (New York, 1984), 332–372.

2. Hopkins, *The Rights of Colonies Examined* (Providence, R. I., 1765), in Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets*, 512.

3. *Boston News-Letter*, Sept. 2, 1762.

4. This essay renders problematic accepted chronologies of the American Revolution, especially the temporal relation between causes and effects. I argue that colonists were exploring the radical political dimensions of a commercial discourse before they achieved Independence from Great Britain. Implicit in that interpretative move is the suggestion that the Revolution in itself cannot fully explain late 18th-century radical thought. For a masterly, although quite different, account of these materials see Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992).

5. *Considerations Upon the Act of Parliament . . .* (Boston, 1764), 22. In his *The History of the Late Province of New-York*, 2 vols. (New York, 1829), I, 277, originally drafted in 1762, William Smith confirmed what British military officers had suspected: "Every man of industry and integrity has it in his power to live well, and many are the instances of persons who came here distressed by their poverty, who now enjoy easy and plentiful fortunes."

6. [Dickinson], *The Late Regulations, Respecting the British Colonies on the Continent*

of *America Considered* (Philadelphia, 1765), 23–24. The scholarly Dickinson footnoted his version of the narrative of commerce, citing Malachy Postlethwayt, *Universal Dictionary of Trade and Commerce* (London, 1766), who claimed that since Sir Walter Raleigh's time, English writers "have found an interest in *misrepresenting* or lessening the value" of the American colonies. During the 18th century, however, hostile commentators began alleging the Americans "were not *useful enough* to their mother country; that while we were loaded with taxes, they were absolutely free; that the *planters* lived like *princes*, while the inhabitants of England labored hard for a tolerable subsistence" ([Dickinson], *Late Regulations*, 23). To this, he added that especially heavy duties on Chesapeake tobacco in Great Britain were part of a "design to bring down the pride of these *PRINCELY PLANTERS*" (ibid., 23–24).

7. *The Power and Grandeur of Great-Britain, Founded on the Liberty of the Colonies, and the Mischiefs Attending the Taxing of Them* (New York, 1768), 5.

8. Ibid., 7–8.

9. [William Hicks], *The Nature and Extent of Parliamentary Power Considered . . .* (Philadelphia, 1768), 18–20.

10. *New-London Gazette*, Jan. 20, 1769.

11. *Boston Evening-Post*, Jan. 2, 1769.

12. *Connecticut Journal, and New-Haven Post-Boy*, Oct. 11, 1771.

13. Ebenezer Baldwin, "An Appendix, Stating the Heavy Grievances the Colonies Labour Under . . .," in Samuel Sherwood, *A Sermon, Containing Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers* (New Haven, Conn., 1774), 50–51.

14. *New-York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, July 4, 1774, repr. from *Pennsylvania Packet*, June 27, 1774.

15. David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis, Ind., 1990; orig. pub. Philadelphia, 1789), I, 51.

16. Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), vi.

17. J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975), and "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, III (1972–1973), 119–134; Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969). For a useful review of the historiographic debate see "The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787: A Symposium of Views and Reviews," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XLIV (1987), 549–640.

18. *Cato's Letters: or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and religious . . .*, 4 vols. (London, 1720), a collection of essays by the English writers Trenchard and Gordon, has become a virtual proof text for interpretations of early 18th-century American political ideology. Recent claims about the authors' anticommercial bias and their high republicanism cannot survive a close reading of their work. Trenchard and Gordon owed much to the insights of John Locke and, like many other political commentators of this period, were troubled by the excesses of commercial capitalism, not by capitalism itself. For an excellent discussion of a problematic republican canon see Ronald Hamowy, "Cato's Letters, John Locke, and the Republican Paradigm," *History of Political Thought*, XI (1990), 273–294. For the enthusiastic reception of "Cato's Letters" in America see Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968), 3–58.

19. Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984), and *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1990). The most thoughtful review of pre-Revolutionary political thought remains James T. Kloppenberg, "The Virtues of Liberalism: Christianity, Republicanism, and Ethics in Early American Political Discourse," *Journal of American History*, LXXIV (1987), 9–33. Also useful are Pauline Maier, "The Transforming Impact of Independence, Reaffirmed: 1776 and the Defi-

nition of American Social Structure," in James A. Henretta et al., eds., *The Transformation of Early American History: Society, Authority, and Ideology* (New York, 1991), 194–217, and James Oakes, "From Republicanism to Liberalism: Ideological Change and the Crisis of the Old South," *American Quarterly*, XXXVII (1985), 568–569. For a splendid statement that may serve to end the increasingly arid debate over republicanism in American thought see Daniel T. Rodgers, "Republicanism: The Career of a Concept," *JAH*, LXXIX (1992), 11–38.

20. In an effort to reconstruct a popular political ideology on the eve of the Revolution, I have examined all the major colonial newspapers of this period as well as the familiar pamphlet and sermon literature. I do not suggest that what lawyers, clergymen, and planters had to say about theories of governance was not important. Obviously, such figures played central roles in defining the continuing public debate. The weekly newspapers, however, reached a wider audience, and if they failed to entertain and enlighten their readers, they went out of business. The speed with which ideas were taken up, discussed, and frequently rejected in these journals was much faster than that of the pamphlets.

21. On the profound, although generally overlooked, philosophic implications of such interpretive fragmentation see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (London, 1989), 113–118, and "Class Relations, Social Justice, and the Politics of Difference," paper delivered to Wissenschaftliche Jahrestagung der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien, Berlin, Germany, June 12, 1992.

22. Mayhew, *The Snare Broken. A Thanksgiving-Discourse . . .* (Boston, 1766), in Ellis Sandoz, ed., *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era, 1730–1805* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1991), 233–264, quotations on 239.

23. See Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Background of the American Revolution: Four Essays in American Colonial History* (New Haven, Conn., 1924), Jack P. Greene, *Peripheries and Center: Constitutional Development in the Extended Politics of the British Empire and the United States, 1607–1788* (Athens, Ga., 1986), and Richard L. Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1985).

24. *Power and Grandeur of Great-Britain*, 3–4.

25. P. J. Marshall, "The British Empire in the Age of the American Revolution: Problems of Interpretation," in William M. Fowler, Jr., and Wallace Coyle, eds., *The American Revolution: Changing Perspectives* (Boston, 1979), 195–198.

26. *Conn. Journal*, Feb. 2, 1770. See also *Considerations upon the Act of Parliament . . .* (Boston, 1764).

27. *Boston Evening-Post*, Jan. 2, 1764. On this theme see *New-London Gaz.*, Dec. 16, 1763, *Boston News-Letter*, Sept. 2, 1762, and *Observations on Several Acts of Parliament* (Boston, 1769).

28. *Four Dissertations, on the Reciprocal Advantages of a Perpetual Union Between Great-Britain and Her American Colonies. Written for Mr. Sargent's Prize-Metal* (Philadelphia, 1766), 55–71.

29. *The Proceedings of the [Non-Importation Association] Committee Appointed to Examine into the Importation of Goods . . . from London* (Annapolis, Md., 1770), i–iii.

30. [Thomas Fitch], *Reasons Why The British Colonies in America, Should Not be Charged with Internal Taxes . . .* (New Haven, Conn., 1764), 21.

31. [Oxenbridge Thacher], *The Sentiments of a British American* (Boston, 1764), 13.

32. The most valuable summary of these mid-century economic developments is Neil McKendrick et al., *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, Ind., 1985). See also Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1982), 201–268, Paul Langford, *A Police and Commercial People: England, 1727–1783* (Oxford, 1989), 59–122, 461–518, and Carole Shammas, "How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?" *J. Interdis. Hist.*, XIII (1982–1983), 247–272. I have discussed these topics in greater detail in "An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690–1776," *Journal of British Studies*, XXV (1986), 467–499, and in

"The Meaning of 'Likeness': Portrait Painting in an Eighteenth-Century Consumer Society," *Word and Image*, VI (1990), 325–350.

33. Smith, *History of . . . New-York*, 277. See also "Autobiography of John Barnard," *Massachusetts Historical Society*, III, *Collections*, V (1986), 239–240, *Boston Evening-Post*, June 11, 1753, and *Power and Grandeur*, 5–6.

34. *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, Aug. 28, 1769.

35. Shammas, *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America* (Oxford, 1990); Lorena S. Walsh et al., "Toward a History of the Standard of Living in British North America," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XLV (1988), 116–170; Jacob M. Price, "What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660–1790," *Journal of Economic History*, XLIX (1989), 267–284; Ralph Davis, "English Foreign Trade, 1700–1774," *Economic History Review*, 2d Ser., XV (1962), 285–303; and John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1985), 277–294.

36. T. H. Breen, "The Meaning of Things: Consumption and Ideology in the Eighteenth Century," in John Brewer and Roy Porter, eds., *Consumption, Culture, and Society* (London, 1993), 249–259.

37. For the comparative dimensions of 18th-century commercial capitalism see the many excellent essays in Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff, eds., *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983). See also R. F. Foster, *Modern Ireland, 1600–1972* (London, 1988), 167–225; Declan O'Donovan, "The Money Bill Dispute of 1753," in Thomas Bartlett and D. W. Hayton, eds., *Penal Era and Golden Age: Essays in Irish History, 1690–1800* (Belfast, 1979), 55–87; Colin Jones, "Bourgeois Revolution Revivified: 1789 and Social Change," in Colin Lucas, ed., *Rewriting the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1991), 78–96; and Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (New York, 1987).

38. Shammas, "How Self-Sufficient Was Early America?" 247–272; McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 277–294; James T. Lemon, "Spatial Order: Households in Local Communities and Regions," in Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, eds., *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era* (Baltimore, 1984), 86–122.

39. *Boston Gaz.*, Dec. 28, 1761. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Otis signed his newspaper essays. The best biography of Otis is John J. Waters, Jr., *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1968). There is a great need for a careful reexamination of Otis's political thought.

40. *Boston Evening-Post*, Dec. 7, 1767. See also *ibid.*, Dec. 28, 1767.

41. Breen, "Baubles of Britain," 73–104.

42. Arthur Meier Schlesinger, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763–1776*, Columbia University Studies in History, Economics, and Public Law, LXXVII, No. 182 (New York, 1918); Andrews, "The Boston Merchants and the Non-Importation Movement," *Transactions of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, XIX (1916–1917), 182–191; Edmund S. Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIV (1967), 3–43; J. E. Crowley, *This Sheba, Self: The Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1974), 125–146; Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), 321–378.

43. *The Following Address Was Read At A Meeting of the Merchants . . .*, 25th of April, 1768 (Philadelphia, 1768).

44. [Dickinson], *Late Regulations*, 31.

45. [Thacher], *Sentiments of a British American*, 15.

46. *South-Carolina Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1769.

47. *Boston Chronicle*, Feb. 13, 1769.

48. See Judith N. Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991).

49. *Pennsylvania Chronicle, and Universal Advertiser*, May 14, 1770.

50. *Debtor and Creditor, or A Discourse on the Following Words, Have Patience With Me, and I Will Pay Thee All* (Boston, 1762).
51. Breen, "An Empire of Goods," 467-499.
52. *New-York Mercury*; Sept. 10, 1770.
53. *Boston Evening-Post*; Nov. 2, 1767.
54. *S.-C. Gaz.*, Dec. 6, 1773.
55. *Boston Evening-Post*, Nov. 9, 23, Dec. 7, 1767.
56. *S.-C. Gaz.*, June 29, 1769.
57. *Maryland Gazette*, May 11, 1769. See Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976), 49-52.
58. *Boston Gaz.*, Nov. 30, 1767; [Broadside], *Annapolis*, May 23, 1769 (Annapolis, Md., 1769).
59. *S.-C. Gaz.*, [Supplement], Aug. 20, 1770.
60. *Boston Gaz.*, Feb. 5, 12, 19, 26, 26 [Supplement], 1770.
61. *Ibid.*, Feb. 12, 1770.
62. *S.-C. Gaz.*, Sept. 19, 1774. For a misogynist critique of these organizing efforts see *Boston Evening-Post*, Feb. 7, 1774. See also Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1980), 37-41; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Daughters of Liberty: Religious Women in Revolutionary New England," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution* (Charlottesville, Va., 1989), 211-243; Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N. Y., 1988); and Breen, "Liberalism and Luxury: Eighteenth-Century American Women in a Revolutionary Political Discourse," Society of the Cincinnati Annual Lecture, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Apr. 20, 1992.
63. *Peter Oliver's Origin and Progress of the American Revolution: A Tory View*, ed. Douglass Adair and John A. Schutz (Stanford, Calif., 1961), 61.
64. On the "contagion of liberty" see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 230-319.
65. *Pa. Chronicle*, June 4, 1770.
66. [Broadside], *To the Free and Loyal Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New-York . . .* (New York, 1774).
67. *Ibid.*
68. *N.-Y. Mercury*, Aug. 6, 1770. See also *New York or General Journal; The Advertiser*, Aug. 2, 1770.
69. *N. Y. or General Journal*, June 21, 1770.
70. *Ibid.*
71. *Ibid.*, Sept. 27, 1770; *N.-Y. Mercury*, July 23, 1770; *New-London Gaz.*, July 20, 1770.
72. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 462-552.
73. Morgan, "Puritan Ethic," 3-43.
74. T. A. Horne, "Bourgeois Virtue, Property, and Moral Philosophy in America, 1750-1800," *Hist. Pol. Thought*, IV (1983), 317-340. See also Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Republicanism Vs. Liberalism? A Reconsideration," *ibid.*, XI (1988), 349-377, and Kramnick, *Republicanism*, 260-288.
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76. (Lancaster, Pa., 1774).
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78. *Boston Evening-Post*, Dec. 7, 1767.
79. *Boston Gaz.*, Nov. 9, 1767.
80. *Conn. Journal*, Oct. 11, 1771.
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- also Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990).
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