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Republicanism and Early American Historiography

Robert E. Shalhope

WITHIN the last several decades a dramatic reorientation has taken place in interpretation of the Revolutionary and early national periods. This new perspective is the result of scholars' recognition of the vital function of republicanism in early American society. As an increasingly sophisticated comprehension of republicanism continues to transform our understanding of the Revolution and its aftermath, it has the potential to collapse the idealist-materialist dichotomy in the progressive-whig dialogue that has dominated twentieth-century American historiography.

More than any other historian, Bernard Bailyn was the progenitor of this new appreciation of republicanism. His work, along with that of Gordon S. Wood and J.G.A. Pocock, among others, established the initial perception of republicanism that has become so familiar.¹ These authors argue that colonial American spokesmen, drawing deeply on the libertarian thought of the English commonwealthmen, embraced a distinctive set of political and social attitudes and that these attitudes permeated their society.² Believing that history revealed a continual struggle between the spheres of liberty and power, the American Revolutionaries quickly formed a consensus in which the concept of republicanism epitomized the new social and political world they believed they had created. Preserving a republican polity meant protecting liberty from the ceaseless aggression of power. In addition, Americans believed that what made republics great or

Mr. Shalhope is a member of the Department of History at the University of Oklahoma. The author wishes to acknowledge the kind assistance of David W. Levy of the University of Oklahoma whose perceptive reading of the manuscript helped immeasurably in clarifying a number of points of analysis.

¹ Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), and *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1967); Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969); Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, N.J., 1975). Pocock discusses important distinctions in the ways these three authors view republicanism in his "The Machiavellian Moment Revisited: A Study in History and Ideology," *Journal of World History*, LIII (1981), 49-72.

² Essential to understanding this thought is Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).

ultimately destroyed them was not the force of arms but the character and spirit of the people. Public virtue, as the essential prerequisite for good government, was all-important. A people practicing frugality, industry, temperance, and simplicity were sound republican stock, while those who wallowed in luxury were corrupt and would corrupt others. Since furthering the public good—the exclusive purpose of republican government—required the constant sacrifice of individual interests to the greater needs of the whole, the people, conceived of as a homogeneous body (especially when set against their rulers), became the great determinant of whether a republic lived or died. Thus republicanism meant maintaining public and private virtue, internal unity, social solidarity, and vigilance against the corruptions of power. United in this frame of mind, Americans set out to gain their independence and then to establish a new republic.

This perspective has exerted a tremendous influence on the historical profession. Its primary themes pervade recent work on early America.³ Many scholars have elaborated on these basic concepts, and have applied to various aspects of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century America insights found in or inferred from the writings of Bailyn, Wood, and Pocock. These efforts have shed fresh light on old historical problems and opened up inviting new avenues of research.

If historians now commonly recognize that republicanism represented a secular faith for Americans, who found in it identity and meaning for their lives, precisely what that meaning was, and whether it bore the same significance for Americans in all social ranks and in every region, remains open to question. Many scholars have either raised serious questions about the broad view of republicanism sketched above or gone beyond it. The result is an increasingly diverse and at times seemingly inconsistent body of literature that casts republicanism in an enigmatic role. Gone are the clarity and simplicity of the “republican synthesis” of nearly a decade ago.⁴ In its place is a problematic and complex web of interpretations that requires analysis.

I

Bailyn's introduction to *Pamphlets of the American Revolution* quickly established a new paradigm for interpreting the Revolution.⁵ The breach

³ Representative examples include Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York, 1972); Richard Buel, Jr., *Securing the Revolution: Ideology in American Politics, 1789-1815* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1972); Mary Beth Norton, *The British-Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England, 1774-1789* (Boston, 1972); Alan Rogers, *Empire and Liberty: American Resistance to British Authority, 1755-1763* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, Calif., 1974); and Lance Banning, *The Jeffersonian Persuasion: Evolution of a Party Ideology* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1978).

⁴ Robert E. Shalhope, “Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), 49-80.

⁵ Bailyn, ed., *Pamphlets of the American Revolution, 1750-1776* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965).

between the colonies and Britain was henceforth to be explained primarily by understanding the circumstances as the participants perceived them. In this introduction and in subsequent publications Bailyn contended that patriot leaders consistently displayed a world view characterized by libertarian republicanism. They adhered to this ideology because the actions of Britain and the structure of colonial politics gave it peculiar persuasiveness. A volatile political situation arising from "a presumptuous prerogative and an overgreat democracy" led colonial publicists to see in actions taken by the British following the French and Indian War a deliberate design to destroy liberty.⁶ For Bailyn, "the outbreak of the Revolution was not the result of social discontent, or of economic disturbances, or of rising misery, or of those mysterious social strains that seem to beguile the imaginations of historians straining to find peculiar predispositions to upheaval." Rather, "American resistance in the 1760s and 1770s was a response to acts of power deemed arbitrary, degrading, and uncontrollable—a response, in itself objectively reasonable, that was inflamed to the point of explosion by ideological currents generating fears everywhere in America that irresponsible and self-seeking adventurers—what the twentieth century would call political gangsters—had gained the power of the English government and were turning first, for reasons that were variously explained, to that Rhineland of their aggressions, the colonies."⁷

Since 1965 many scholars dealing with the Revolution have worked within Bailyn's paradigm. That is, they have continued to analyze the period in terms of the participants' view of the world. At the same time, Bailyn's interpretation of the patriots' world view has stimulated spirited controversy. Criticism has focused on several themes. It is contended that (a) Bailyn's analysis rests on a misleading view of a homogeneous colonial America that slights internal diversity and conflict; (b) ideologies other than the one outlined by Bailyn governed the way participants in the Revolution saw and responded to their world; (c) there are alternative explanations of the appeal of libertarian republicanism; (d) Bailyn's studies treat ideology abstractly, without sufficient grounding in circumstances, environment, and experience, and thus seem to imply ideational autonomy; and (e) Bailyn's analysis is one-dimensional, causing republican ideology to appear centrally, even exclusively, political and constitutional.⁸

Recent examinations of republican thought have fragmented the intellectual consensus portrayed by Bailyn and others. These inquiries reveal a

⁶ Bailyn, *Origins of American Politics*, 106.

⁷ Bailyn, "The Central Themes of the American Revolution: An Interpretation," in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973), 3-31 (quotation on pp. 12-13).

⁸ There is a tremendous amount of crosscutting and interlocking among these themes in the recent literature. Therefore, this essay makes every attempt to integrate rather than to isolate these ideas.

major weakness of most early studies of republicanism—the failure to deal with the dynamic interrelationships between ideological perceptions and the environment in which they occur. The new studies also take critical note of a tendency to emphasize perceptions held in common by Americans rather than to analyze local circumstances that may have created distinctive variations in thought. Scholars whose approach is essentially socioeconomic believe that Bailyn's emphasis (and that of many others) on the commonwealth ideology as the dominant moving force behind the Revolution has resulted in a simplistic, consensus view of colonial behavior.⁹ These critics do not see colonial Americans as an undifferentiated mass joined by belief in a single ideology. They consider Bailyn and his "neo-Whig" followers "idealists" who view thought as an autonomous construct divorced from specific time and place. In addition, they take issue with Bailyn's contention that the material conditions of life in America were so generally favorable that social and economic factors deserve little consideration in explaining the origins of the Revolution. For their part, these historians find in colonial America diverse and often conflicting political beliefs, personal and group motives, class views, and economic interests. The colonies, in their eyes, experienced political, social, and economic changes that produced serious distress and tension. The Revolution, they conclude, was rooted in this complex substructure, rather than in a narrowly focused political and constitutional ideology. They do not deny the validity of ideological interpretation, but they recognize the possibility of alternatives to commonwealth doctrine and suggest that distinctive situations or local circumstances shaped the predisposition of people to accept certain ideas and to reject others.

Though the substantive research that supports this broad point of view is scattered through a great many books and essays, its central themes are clearly manifested in *The American Revolution*, a collection of essays edited by Alfred F. Young.¹⁰ Basic to many of the contributions is the belief that the economic substructure of eighteenth-century British America—with

⁹ Representative examples include Joseph Albert Ernst, *Money and Politics in America, 1755-1775: A Study in the Currency Act of 1764 and the Political Economy of Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973), and "Ideology and the Political Economy of Revolution," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, IV (1973), 137-148; Jackson Turner Main, *The Sovereign States, 1775-1783* (New York, 1973); Ronald Hoffman, *A Spirit of Dissension: Economics, Politics, and the Revolution in Maryland* (Baltimore, 1973); Stephen E. Patterson, *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Madison, Wis., 1973); James Kirby Martin, *Men in Rebellion: Higher Governmental Leaders and the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1973); Dirk Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1765-1780* (New York, 1977); Gary B. Nash, "Radicalism and the American Revolution," *Reviews in American History*, I (1973), 75-81; Staughton Lynd, "Tories and Neo-Whigs," *ibid.*, 201-208; and Jesse Lemisch, "Bailyn Besieged in His Bunker," *Radical History Review*, VII (1977), 72-83.

¹⁰ Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976).

its tensions and antagonisms—is central to any understanding of the Revolution.¹¹ Joseph Ernst makes this clear in an essay that contends that specific events, issues, and interests must be interpreted in light of the economic transformation of the colonies after 1720.¹² Conditions in this period pitted local elites against politically awakened middle and lower classes. In Ernst's view, rational and self-conscious links existed between the rhetoric of the various groups and their social experience. Only by understanding the relations between specific groups and the ideology each espoused can one understand the complexity of the Revolution. Belief in the motivational power of a single, all-inclusive ideology obscures such understanding.

Marvin L. Michael Kay, Ronald Hoffman, and Edward Countryman focus on another characteristic theme of this perspective: the severe social tension and unrest that, they believe, characterized colonial American society. Kay finds class antagonism at the base of the Regulator movement in North Carolina, where class-conscious farmers attempted to alleviate economic and social distress by democratizing their local governments.¹³ Hoffman contends that the entire South suffered serious social discontent and internal tensions simultaneously with the war against Britain. Unpopular whig elites survived only by channeling popular unrest into the creation of the new republic.¹⁴ Countryman finds the land riots in the northern colonies to be class-based rather than ethnocultural in origin, and he connects them with the domination of land and with the political and social power that accompanied it. The success or failure of the outbreaks varied according to circumstances: rural radicals in New York remained divorced from power, but their counterparts in Vermont wrote a constitution that represented the high point of radical republicanism.¹⁵

The essays by Eric Foner, Dirk Hoerder, and Gary B. Nash (like Ernst's) suggest that more than a single ideology may have been instrumental in bringing about the Revolution. Foner's analysis of Philadelphia

¹¹ The spring 1976 issue of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* includes a number of pertinent essays: Gary B. Nash, "Urban Wealth and Poverty in Pre-Revolutionary America"; G. B. Warden, "Inequality and Instability in Eighteenth-Century Boston: A Reappraisal"; Duane E. Ball, "Dynamics of Population and Wealth in Eighteenth-Century Chester County, Pennsylvania"; Edward Countryman, "Consolidating Power in Revolutionary America: The Case of New York, 1775-1783"; and Robert M. Weir, "Who Shall Rule at Home: The American Revolution as a Crisis of Legitimacy for the Colonial Elite."

¹² Ernst, "Ideology' and an Economic Interpretation of the Revolution," in Young, ed., *American Revolution*, 160-185. This essay expands on an earlier one which Ernst coauthored with Marc Egnal, "An Economic Interpretation of the American Revolution," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), 3-32.

¹³ Kay, "The North Carolina Regulation, 1766-1776: A Class Conflict," in Young, ed., *American Revolution*, 71-123.

¹⁴ Hoffman, "The 'Disaffected' in the Revolutionary South," *ibid.*, 273-316.

¹⁵ Countryman, "'Out of Bounds of the Law': Northern Land Rioters in the Eighteenth Century," *ibid.*, 37-69.

and Tom Paine reveals a politically alert lower class activated by an egalitarian, evangelical strain of thought that espoused traditional values of community and emphasized the existence of a uniform general interest. Opposed to this was the whig ideology of the merchant class centering on the conviction that the competing ambitions of self-interested individuals would produce the greatest public benefit.¹⁶ Hoerder, too, sees a struggle that pitted lower-class radicals captivated by an ideology based on Protestant and common-law traditions against upper-class whigs who employed the rhetoric of the commonwealthmen.¹⁷ Both Hoerder and Foner believe that class-consciousness remained rudimentary, even though lower-class radicals managed to force cautious merchant leaders to become outspoken politicians in opposition to England. In the end, however, the republican ideology of the gentry was able to absorb the radical thrust.

Nash also hints that a popular ideology emerged from the material conditions of port cities, where an inequitable distribution of wealth and economic insecurity created severe distress and tension. Under these circumstances, the upper classes remained wedded to the whig ideology and its defense of property lodged in constitutional rights and political liberties.¹⁸ Such an ideology did not, however, speak to the changing economic and social environment of the cities. New conditions called forth a popular rhetoric that transcended constitutional rights and advocated a more equitable arrangement of wealth and power. The artisan and laboring classes, buttressed by this rhetoric, became highly politicized and assumed a dynamic role in urban politics. Nash, however, does not believe that their ideas ever developed into a fully articulated ideology. Like Hoerder and Foner, he discovers within the lower ranks of society restive elements who, though politically self-conscious, could not fully conceptualize their purpose in such a way as to separate themselves from the ideas and goals of the gentry leadership.

In *The Urban Crucible* Nash skillfully weaves the themes of *The American Revolution*—disparate, tentative, and occasionally strident—into a thoughtful and provocative study essential to a fuller understanding of the Revolution and republicanism.¹⁹ Nash's intensive examination of

¹⁶ Foner, "Tom Paine's Republic: Radical Ideology and Social Change," *ibid.*, 187-232.

¹⁷ Hoerder, "Boston Leaders and Boston Crowds, 1765-1776," *ibid.*, 233-271.

¹⁸ Nash, "Social Change and the Growth of Prerevolutionary Urban Radicalism," *ibid.*, 3-36.

¹⁹ The authors of a number of essays in *American Revolution* made a distinct effort to meet the expectations raised by that volume's subtitle. As a consequence, their desire to find a viable base of American radicalism and, perhaps, to attack Bailyn led them to overstatements regarding popular or radical activity. For example, the broad hints of class-based ideologies appearing in the essays by Hoerder and Nash are much more subtly stated and carefully circumscribed in their books, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts* and *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

eighteenth-century Boston, New York, and Philadelphia reveals the dynamic interdependence of economic shifts, social changes, and political consciousness. He describes how these seaport towns became caught up in the changes affecting the entire Atlantic community. Impersonal market forces disrupted traditional social and economic relationships, led to an increasingly unequal distribution of wealth, and restructured urban society along rigid class lines. As Americans adjusted to these changes, two conceptions of economic life vied for ascendancy. One clung to traditional communal norms. The other encouraged a nascent system of values that emphasized private profit seeking, accepted the demise of traditional controls designed to promote the good of all, and claimed that the free pursuit of individual self-interest would foster the common good. As time passed, more and more successful merchants, shopkeepers, and land speculators came to accept this "modern" economic thought. At the same time, the older corporate ideology of an indivisible public good would not die. The severe economic crisis brought on by the colonial wars prompted the lower orders of society to assert a traditional value system that stressed communal obligations rather than free enterprise. While the lower orders looked to the past for guidance regarding proper economic relationships, they supported a more modern participatory form of politics in order to secure economic justice. In addition, they felt that their social superiors employed the rhetoric of the commonwealth ideology merely to mask their own avarice. Gradually the feeling arose that the rich became richer because the poor became poorer. The Great Awakening exacerbated such feelings, as Old Lights pragmatically accepted the new capitalist ethic while radical Awakeners expressed alarm over the urban elite's acquisitiveness. Thus by the time of the Revolution the dialogue over American constitutional rights took place in urban locales marked by poverty at the bottom, economic uncertainty in the middle, and opulence among the upper ranks. Nash believes that, as a result, American urban areas entered the Revolution facing severe crises in class relations.

Nash's discussion of the political consciousness of various groups provides excellent insight into the competing ideologies of the period and their relationship to republicanism. He identifies two broad ideologies—whig and evangelical—that overlap at a number of points, as well as several groups of ideas that were not yet fully articulated. In his view, whig ideology, with its emphasis on balanced government, a popularly elected legislature, and support of free speech and press, constituted the dominant perception of the age. In America, the whigs split into conservative and liberal groups. The conservatives—wealthy merchants, Anglican clergymen, and placeholders—valued social stability, fostered capitalistic economic relations, and believed in their own political stewardship. They were economic modernizers with a profoundly conservative social philosophy. The liberal whigs—some wealthy traders, ship captains, non-Anglican clergymen, small manufacturers, and craftsmen—also eagerly espoused the new spirit of commercial life, but they embraced more egalitarian social and political ideas, including equality of opportunity.

The other major perception Nash identifies—the evangelical ideology—overlapped with that of the whigs in that its adherents advocated balanced government, electoral institutions, and freedom of speech and press. However, the evangelicals had a different vision for America. They, too, divided into two groups: the radicals and the social reformers. The radicals—drawn from the lower orders—favored the traditional ideas of a moral economy rather than capitalistic enterprise. They were egalitarian and communalistic in spirit. Considering the merchant elite their oppressors, they hoped that the Revolution would establish basic political rights and social justice for all, rather than simply protect the private property and constitutional liberties of the wealthy. The social reformers—clergymen, middle-class doctors, lawyers, tradesmen, and teachers—shared a highly moralistic temperament. These were the people who espoused most clearly the classical republicanism and “civic humanism” that recent scholars have emphasized. They, too, decried the new capitalistic spirit as the cause of decadence in their society.

The whig and evangelical casts of mind clashed at some points while blending at others. The evangelical espousal of basic republican principles—that virtue was incompatible with the pursuit of private interests, that commerce corrupted, and that social inequality led to oligarchy—grated on most urban whigs. The essentially antirational and antibourgeois spirit of the evangelicals conflicted, moreover, with the emerging economic liberalism that would soon be articulated by Adam Smith. For their part, the whigs, while rejecting the evangelical bias against commercial enterprise, accepted the moral strictures of the reformers, who concentrated on defects in the American character rather than on structural inequalities. Virtually all of the Revolutionaries perceived England as corrupt and responded positively to republicanism’s call for regeneration through virtuous conduct. Thus republicanism’s emphasis on virtue and sound character became the ground on which men of differing persuasions could unite against a common enemy.

It becomes clear from Nash’s analysis that different groups approached the Revolution from different perceptions of what America was and should become. These divergent views were rooted in experience and values. Everyone desired some reformation from the Revolution, but, depending on an individual’s position in society, each drew on republican theory selectively. While all saw England as a threat, Americans ranged from radical to conservative in their views about how to confront that threat and in their hopes for the future. Clearly, no single ideology could serve them all.

Research by Foner and Robert Kelley supports Nash’s suggestion that republicanism did not exist as a monolithic entity. Through a study of Tom Paine and his working-class followers in Philadelphia, Foner reveals an urban variant of republicanism that fostered egalitarianism as well as economic enterprise.²⁰ Paine outlined a society in which republican

²⁰ Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976).

government, together with economic progress, would produce social harmony, equality, and abundance. Kelley broadens this focus to include the entire nation, within which he identifies four distinct varieties of republicanism, each tied closely to the social circumstances in which it originated and each offering a vision for America.²¹ Kelley considers New England republicanism moralistic with an emphasis on an organic community bound together by a strong government that promoted a shared way of life. Such a government and society were anathema to southerners, whose republicanism remained basically libertarian. They desired a relatively weak central government that would allow a nation of white men to live as they saw fit. Kelley believes that the Middle Atlantic states offered opposing perceptions of republicanism. One, supported by Scotch-Irish Presbyterians and their working-class allies, fostered egalitarianism and individualism. The other, nationalistic republicanism, was favored by an anglicized and cosmopolitan mercantile elite who advocated a highly centralized government, an active commercial life, and a deferential social order. Kelley concludes that republicanism offered Americans a universe of discourse, not a prescriptive faith. It established a framework for discussion; certain generally accepted ideas and goals existed, and a special language was shared. What those goals meant and how they were to be reached, however, remained quite unsettled.

Joyce Appleby, too, suggests the need to go beyond a narrow definition of republicanism. Drawing on the work of social historians such as Kenneth A. Lockridge, Richard L. Bushman, and Philip J. Greven, Jr., and pursuing her own explorations into seventeenth-century English economic thought, Appleby seeks the origins of the liberalism she believes characterized post-Revolutionary America.²² She contends that colonial America underwent a modernizing process that gave rise to "the aggressive individualism, the optimistic materialism, and the pragmatic interest-group politics that became so salient so early in the life of the new nation."²³ Synthesizing this perception with ideas found in essays by Nash,

²¹ Kelley, "Ideology and Political Culture from Jefferson to Nixon," *American Historical Review*, LXXXII (1977), 531-562, and *The Cultural Pattern in American Politics: The First Century* (New York, 1979).

²² Representative of a great bulk of research by a good many scholars are Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Lockridge, *A New England Town, the First Hundred Years: Dedham, Massachusetts, 1636-1736* (New York, 1970); and Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970). Appleby's work includes *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, N.J., 1978), "Liberalism and the American Revolution," *New England Quarterly*, XLIX (1976), 3-26, "The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology," *Journal of American History*, LXIV (1978), 935-958, "Ideology and Theory: The Tension between Political and Economic Liberalism in Seventeenth-Century England," *AHR*, LXXXI (1976), 499-515, and "The New Republican Synthesis and the Changing Political Ideas of John Adams," *American Quarterly*, XXV (1973), 578-595.

²³ Appleby, "Social Origins," *JAH*, LXIV (1978), 937.

Countryman, and Hoerder, Appleby maintains that restive lower and middle orders in colonial America, imbued with aggressive modern characteristics, drew on a body of seventeenth-century English economic literature quite distinct from classical republicanism in order to advance their opportunities. Thus the upwardly mobile, advocating "liberal republicanism"—an ideology that "elevated their goals to a universal law of self-interest"—turned the resistance movement into a revolution that gave birth to modern liberalism.²⁴ From Appleby's perspective, this historical process has been obfuscated by historians' insistence on the preeminence of classical republicanism as the driving force of the Revolution. She believes that if historians infer a premodern social order from this premodern ideology, they will create a colonial past ill-suited to provide the foundations of nineteenth-century American society. Worse yet, the ideological historians threaten to sink the social historians' careful reconstruction of the past in a "quagmire of explanations which rely more upon theories of social psychology than evidence supporting a connection between presumptive cause and discernible effect."²⁵

Appleby's work reveals a noteworthy characteristic of historical research over the last decade. Historians interested in the ideological impact of republicanism have concentrated on the literate elite, whereas scholars with a socioeconomic perspective have focused on the lower classes and hinted at the presence of a rudimentary popular ideology. These approaches, by and large, remained separate enterprises until the publication of several essays by Rhys Isaac on colonial Virginia that perceptively analyze the relationship between the whig gentry and the evangelical elements of the populace.²⁶

Virginia has been commonly viewed as the classic example of a colony

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 954. Here Appleby draws on Bernard Friedman, "The Shaping of the Radical Consciousness in Provincial New York," *JAH*, LVI (1970), 781-801. She also depends on Nash's essay "The Transformation of Urban Politics, 1700-1765," *ibid.*, LX (1973), 605-632, as well as the one in *American Revolution*. Like a number of authors in *American Revolution*, Appleby assumes that a popular ideology *must* have existed because the socioeconomic conditions were ripe for one. Therefore she grafts her own findings on economic liberal thought to the groups she assumed *must* have or *should* have espoused these ideas. However, Nash and others, drawing heavily on Alfred Young's unpublished manuscript, "The Crowd and the Coming of the Revolution: From Ritual to Rebellion in Boston," have subsequently concluded that the lower and lower-middle class elements espoused the traditional communal ideology rather than the liberal one of Appleby.

²⁵ Appleby, "Liberalism and the American Revolution," *NEQ*, XLIX (1976), 25.

²⁶ Isaac, "Preachers and Patriots: Popular Culture and the Revolution in Virginia," in Young, ed., *American Revolution*, 125-156, "Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in Virginia in the Era of the Great Awakening and the Parsons' Cause," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXX (1973), 3-36, "Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775," *ibid.*, XXXI (1974), 345-368, and "Dramatizing the Ideology of Revolution: Popular Mobilization in Virginia, 1774 to 1776," *ibid.*, XXXIII (1976), 357-385.

united behind its gentry against the British.²⁷ It has seemed a perfect fit for the Bailyn thesis, which minimizes internal disorder and emphasizes ideology as the primary explanation for the timing and focus of revolt. Isaac's research, however, indicates that although there may have been an eventual common front against the British, it was accomplished only after the rapprochement of two violently antagonistic cultural forces: the gentry and their Baptist opponents. The conflict resulted from the confrontation between a courthouse culture reflecting the interests and rivalries of proud gentlemen and a communalistic order in which God-humbled men sought fellowship in the deep emotions of a religious faith that stressed equality. Baptists attempted through preaching and good works to create a new and more popular structure for the maintenance of social order. Their attacks on traditional authority, which led to physical retaliation by the gentry, constituted a revolt indicative of serious strains in Virginia society.

The British actions of the 1760s intruded on this scene of conflict and provoked a more general form of excitement in Virginia: the patriot movement. This movement, which subsumed the internal contest, reveals republicanism as the element that united the gentry and the evangelicals. The message imparted by patriot leaders emphasized republican concepts of liberty, virtue, and frugality. It drew meaning from a nagging source of anxiety for a broad range of Virginians: how could they denounce British corruption if their own virtue was questionable? This uneasiness resonated with the gentry's growing concern over luxury, idleness, indebtedness, and slavery, as well as with the evangelical resistance to the dominant culture. Thus, even though striking contrasts and sharp tensions existed between the evangelicals and the gentry, at a deeper level, where the need for psychic relief from oppressive feelings of guilt and anxiety was rooted, republican ideas struck a single responsive chord.

Isaac contends that the manner in which patriot leaders communicated their message to the people tells us a great deal about the dramaturgical needs of an oral culture. Employing the spoken word and communal rituals—voting, militia musters, and economic associations—the gentry, closely integrated in rural society, responded heartily to preaching and good works whenever these tended to secure their cause rather than condemn their way of life. The Baptists, too, gained the more orderly moral authority they sought. Both sides found relief from anxieties by participating in symbolic communal activities. Such public behavior and communication created a collective conscience that affirmed membership in a virtuous community aroused in common defense of its most cherished rights. Thus republicanism gave force and expression to a movement that concealed a deep split in Virginia culture.

²⁷ The clearest and most recent statement of this position is Jack P. Greene's essay, "Society, Ideology, and Politics: An Analysis of the Political Culture of Mid-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," in Richard M. Jellison, ed., *Society, Freedom, and Conscience: The American Revolution in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York* (New York, 1976), 14-76.

While the work of Isaac, Nash, Kelley, and others reveals the vulnerability of the supposition of an ideological consensus in colonial society, another major weakness of earlier analyses of republicanism has also become apparent; namely, a focus on political and constitutional issues to the detriment of economic analysis. Two authors, J. E. Crowley and Drew R. McCoy, address this problem and offer major contributions to an understanding of the political economy of republicanism.²⁸ In his analysis of the manner in which eighteenth-century Americans conceptualized their economic life, Crowley notes the concern they showed for industry and frugality. These terms helped define one's relationship with society long before the libertarian rhetoric of the Revolution flourished. Crowley's observation is important because it reveals the ways in which these ideas contributed to a pervasive "moral economy" that transcended any divisions among the various ranks of society. In addition, it suggests the possibility that republican thought may have helped synthesize the popular evangelical beliefs noted by Nash, Young, and others with the whig ideas of the gentry. Such a possibility gains credence from the fact that, like Isaac, Crowley recognizes that visible and ritualized behavior, such as the enforcement of nonimportation pacts, was vital in gaining community support for resistance to Britain. Republican ideas may have provided the catalyst for uniting behind the patriot cause the conflicting groups identified by the socioeconomic historians. In addition, Crowley's epilogue, "Republicans as Economic Men," is suggestive in another direction: republicanism accommodated the requirement of the American situation that commerce be embraced, rather than restrained or even eliminated in accordance with classical strictures against it. While some Americans retained anticommercial feelings, the vast majority of those who gave public expression to their thought integrated the ideas of Adam Smith and other economic liberals into their own republicanism.

McCoy's work provides the most cogent analysis of American attempts to reduce the tension between the economic "liberalism" of Smith and "classical" American republicanism.²⁹ McCoy acknowledges the admiration many Americans felt for the precommercial social values of classical

²⁸ Crowley, *"This Sheba, Self": The Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America*, Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science, XCII (Baltimore, 1974); McCoy, "Republicanism and American Foreign Policy: James Madison and the Political Economy of Commercial Discrimination, 1789 to 1794," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXI (1974), 633-646, "Benjamin Franklin's Vision of a Republican Political Economy for America," *ibid.*, XXXV (1978), 605-628, and *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980).

²⁹ Pocock clearly identified these strains in "Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century," *JIH*, III (1972), 119-134. Donald Winch's *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (New York, 1978) indicates that Smith was more influenced by libertarian thought than previously imagined. Smith, too, was affected by the strains created by the commercial changes of the era.

republicanism, but he also notes their commitment to an expansive commercial society. This ambivalence necessitated some kind of synthesis, which Americans accomplished primarily by integrating the ideas of Smith—whose sociological view of English corruption blended nicely with that of the libertarians—into their republican social perspective. Smith's analysis of the aging process of nations assumed great relevance for Americans. They acknowledged that societies aged naturally through the inexorable pressure of population growth but could also be forced into premature decay by the machinations of a corrupt, mercantilist government that sacrificed the public good to special interests. Convinced that republican government and a healthy society depended on the expansion of agriculture and the export trade, Americans saw the opportunity to forestall the evils of Old World decadence. The virility of their nation could be sustained by a republican economy of moderately prosperous, self-reliant producers. America would remain in this ideal middle state of civilization (thus escaping the curses of overpopulation, inequality, and poverty) only if it secured a republican political economy that combined orderly expansion across the continent and a vigorous foreign commerce fostered by free trade. American republicanism was thus not anticommmercial or anticapitalistic. Nor was it a static, premodern libertarian ideology transferred intact from its English context. Instead, McCoy portrays republicanism as an ideology in transition, one that accommodated change in an effort to reconcile classical republican virtues and an expansive commercial economy.

The research of the last ten years, then, makes clear that it is no longer possible to see a single, monolithic political ideology characterizing American thought on the eve of the Revolution. While the new complexity adds depth to our understanding of republicanism, it also raises two important questions. First, what became of republican thought in the half century after the Revolution? Second, in light of the welter of new interpretations, how are historians to make sense of the role and function of republicanism in early American history?

II

The first question directs our attention to current scholarship dealing with the early nineteenth century, where a stark contrast with colonial and Revolutionary research becomes apparent. James M. Banner, Jr., Lance Banning, Gerald Stourzh, and McCoy, among others, offer insights into the relationship between republican thought and the political partisanship of the 1790s and early 1800s, but their work exists in comparative isolation.³⁰ For the half century following the Revolution we lack the

³⁰ Banner, *To the Hartford Convention: The Federalists and the Origins of Party Politics in Massachusetts, 1789-1815* (New York, 1970); Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion*; Stourzh, *Alexander Hamilton and the Idea of Republican Government* (Stanford, Calif., 1970).

careful re-creation of social and economic life typified by the colonial studies of Nash, Greven, Lockridge, Bushman, Jack P. Greene, and Edmund S. Morgan. Without such an understanding of the fabric of life in the early national period, it is difficult to deal fruitfully with republicanism or with concepts like *laissez-faire* and liberalism in the nineteenth century.³¹

Two essays by Rowland Berthoff and John M. Murrin offer a provocative hypothesis that may serve as a starting point.³² By focusing on two of republicanism's central themes, the independent citizen and equality of condition, these scholars suggest some consequences of republican thought for nineteenth-century America. Basic to both essays is the belief that the American colonies were modernizing rapidly during the eighteenth century and, had not the imperial crisis intervened, might well have developed a system of thought that could deal realistically with modernity. Instead, classical republicanism, already anachronistic when the Revolution erupted, captured the minds of a great many Americans with far-reaching effects on post-Revolutionary society.

The republican ideal of the selfless independent citizen as the basis of social harmony was embraced by the Revolutionaries even though that image represented a reaction against, rather than a fulfillment of, dominant tendencies in colonial society. In actuality, late eighteenth-century America already exemplified the aggressive, individualistic, entrepreneurial spirit described by Appleby and others. Murrin and Berthoff's contribution is to show that as the gap widened between classical ideals and social realities in the nineteenth century, Americans grasped more urgently the republican view of themselves that obscured the actual ramifications

³¹ Some scattered beginnings have been made. Ronald P. Formisano's "Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789-1840," *American Political Science Review*, LXVIII (1974), 473-487, provides an outstanding analysis of the relationship between cultural transformations and political change. Howard B. Rock offers insights into the artisan's social and political roles in a marketplace in transition from a preindustrial to an industrial economy (*Artisans of the New Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* [New York, 1979]). Paul A. Gilje's "The Baltimore Riots of 1812 and the Breakdown of the Anglo-American Mob Tradition," *Journal of Social History*, XIII (1980), 547-564, suggests basic societal alterations through a study of changing mob behavior in the nineteenth century. Studies such as Paul E. Johnson's *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York, 1978), and Stuart M. Blumin's *The Urban Threshold: Growth and Change in a Nineteenth-Century American Community* (Chicago, 1976), are excellent examples of the kind of work that needs to be done for the Jeffersonian years.

³² Berthoff, "Independence and Attachment, Virtue and Interest: From Republican Citizen to Free Enterpriser, 1787-1837," in Richard L. Bushman *et al.*, *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin* (Boston, 1979), 97-124; Berthoff and Murrin, "Feudalism, Communalism, and the Yeoman Freeholder: The American Revolution Considered as a Social Accident," in Kurtz and Hutson, eds., *Essays on the Revolution*, 256-288.

of accelerated economic development.³³ As time passed, the republican image of the virtuous citizen became ambiguous. Civic virtue came, ironically, to be measured in terms of personal ambition and devotion to the acquisition of wealth, as the spirit of free enterprise, entirely detached from its eighteenth-century context, emerged as the essence of the republican ethic. "Long before the United States reached its centennial celebrations," Berthoff asserts, "the 'equally free and independent' citizen of 1776 had indeed been corrupted into what in 1876 was just beginning to be recognized as the modern embodiment of both those classical specters: the entrepreneur set free, by the American dream of virtuous independence, to dominate a society grown so narrowly acquisitive that it could only admire his success."³⁴

Republican emphasis on equality of condition—idealized in the figure of the yeoman freeholder—raised an even more complex difficulty. The commitment of nineteenth-century Americans to social equality and political democracy evolved from a Revolutionary ideology that drew on an already anachronistic image of agrarian simplicity. This persistent and misleading perception of the United States as a nation of independent freeholders hamstrung post-Revolutionary reforms and shaped the direction that "egalitarian" change would take.³⁵ Berthoff and Murrin maintain that even though American society became increasingly stratified during the half century after 1775, Americans continued to honor egalitarian social and political rhetoric. This detachment of rhetoric from reality contributed to the banality of Jacksonian thought, which idealized the image of a golden age of republican equality in a society of yeomen freeholders while American society was in fact moving rapidly toward greater complexity and inequality. It is true that Americans in this period assaulted many artificial barriers to equality—suffrage restrictions, legal privileges, monopolistic advantages, and the like. But such reforms did not actually promote equality of material or social condition; rather, they enhanced the free individual's opportunity to compete with and surpass his neighbor. Post-Revolutionary reform rhetoric couched political liberties in egalitarian terms, but when Americans attacked social problems and pursued social opportunities they did so in an essentially libertarian cast of mind. "Partly because of their Revolutionary heritage Americans could not really face the possibility that their liberty—their freedom to com-

³³ Easing the tension resulting from the gap between the real and the ideal in any society is one of the prime functions of an ideology. See Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, 1958), 22; Francis X. Sutton *et al.*, *The American Business Creed* (Cambridge, Mass., 1956); and Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in David E. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (New York, 1964), 47-76.

³⁴ Berthoff, "Independence and Attachment," in Bushman *et al.*, *Uprooted Americans*, 120.

³⁵ Richard Bushman also suggests this in a penetrating essay, "This New Man: Dependence and Independence, 1776," in Bushman *et al.*, *Uprooted Americans*, 77-96.

pete—was undermining their equality.”³⁶ Post-Revolutionary reforms that promised an equality patterned on an agrarian ideal actually freed Americans to become unequal on a scale that escalated with the economic development of the nineteenth century.

The republican view of America as a land of independent freeholders had its greatest impact on the role of government. Because government was largely irrelevant to the image, it was gradually divorced from society. In particular, the general welfare no longer seemed to require regulation of the economy. The emergence of the liberal principle of laissez-faire, which was designed to promote equality in a land of independent entrepreneurs, sanctioned the separation of government from the realm of economy and society. Thus the Jacksonians destroyed the federally chartered Bank of the United States to foster individual equality. In time, however, this action contributed to the formation of un-republican concentrations of wealth and power. Similarly, Murrin and Berthoff observe that “the transportation revolution, after an initial stage of public capitalization and control, and the Industrial Revolution from its inception were allowed to proceed as though an unregulated modern economy would distribute the wealth it produced as satisfactorily as the simple agricultural and mercantile economy of the colonial past had done—or as parts of the contemporary but old-fashioned West were still doing.”³⁷ On the contrary, the second half of the nineteenth century brought extremes of inequality that far exceeded the greatest fears of eighteenth-century republicans. The irony is that as modern Americans faithfully articulated an egalitarian dogma centered on the anachronistic figure of the yeoman freeholder, they were contributing to the demise, rather than the fulfillment, of the republican vision. Such disembodied republican language made it difficult to define, much more to resolve, the tensions between community needs and individual desires. In the opinion of Murrin and Berthoff, therefore, the ultimate effect of republican rhetoric may well have been to separate power from politics and the political world from social reality. The Revolution, with its idealization of classical republicanism, helped to prevent America from developing a social and political system that could recognize and deal realistically with the changes brought about by modernization.

The essays by Berthoff and Murrin draw together nicely several strands of inquiry. They fully incorporate the work of social historians who have explored social change in eighteenth-century America and have shown that opposing interests and social tensions characterized the late colonial and early national periods. Berthoff and Murrin also give full credit to the ideological historians, not for explaining the Revolution, but for elucidating republican thought. Unlike Appleby and others, they do not believe that the ideological historians have obfuscated early American history.

³⁶ Berthoff and Murrin, “Feudalism, Communalism, and the Yeoman Freeholder,” in Kurtz and Hutson, eds., *Essays on the Revolution*, 283.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 285.

Rather, these historians have uncovered the ideology that divorced political rhetoric from social and economic reality. For Berthoff and Murrin, classical republicanism provided the operative principles of nineteenth-century America, its “definitive ideas, as a lasting legacy of the American Revolution.”³⁸

III

The second issue raised by recent research—the role and function of republicanism in early America—leads in interesting new directions. Scholars are providing fresh perspectives that contribute greatly to a deeper understanding of that ideology. Their insights have transformed it from a narrow constitutional and political perspective to a far broader, more powerful force. This literature adds much-needed sophistication to our knowledge of republicanism and provides the substantive basis for a number of observations about its study—observations that may prove helpful in better understanding early America.

The work of McCoy and others, for example, reveals that republicanism was not a static, premodern concept but rather a dynamic one capable of synthesizing classical republican social thought and modern commercial ideas. This discovery, combined with the insights of Pocock, Appleby, Berthoff, Murrin, and Wood, demonstrates that America did not make a neat or smooth march into modernity. Instead, liberal and classical ideas existed in constant tension. They shaped and influenced each other until the end result was a bastardized form of each. Wood characterizes this aptly in his observation that by 1820 American culture was completely republicanized, but hardly in the manner most Revolutionaries had intended. Rather than embodying the best of ancient republics, America had developed into “a sprawling, materialistic, and licentious popular democracy unlike anything that had ever existed before.”³⁹ Prosperity replaced austerity, and the meaning of virtue was subtly transformed. Instead of sacrificing their private desires in the interest of the community, nineteenth-century Americans relentlessly engaged in the individual pursuit of wealth and even justified such activity as the sole legitimate foundation for a free society. Yet, as Berthoff and Murrin convincingly suggest, this society also viewed itself largely in terms of classical republican simplicity and virtue. It seems, then, that post-Revolutionary America was an odd mixture of the archaic and the modern. While liberalism characterized Americans’ economic and social behavior, classical republican rhetoric continued to influence their perceptions of themselves and helped shape the development of nineteenth-century society.

If many studies of republicanism have overlooked its economic content, so, too, have they slighted its religious element. The evangelical tradition, in particular, has appeared in recent work to be far more vibrant and long-

³⁸ Berthoff, “Independence and Attachment,” in Bushman *et al.*, *Uprooted Americans*, 124, n. 96.

³⁹ Wood, ed., *The Rising Glory of America, 1760-1820* (New York, 1971), 8.

lasting than most early studies of republicanism recognized. Research by Morgan, Greven, and Alan Heimert demonstrates that eighteenth-century religious divisions contributed greatly to the political and social consciousness of the Revolutionary and early national periods.⁴⁰ These insights have been further developed by Nathan O. Hatch, James West Davidson, and William G. McLoughlin, who analyze the emergence of what Cushing Strout terms "political religion."⁴¹ They believe that a "republican eschatology," resulting from a convergence of traditional millennial thought and republican political ideas, emerged in the 1760s. Congregational ministers projected the image of Antichrist in one breath and attacked the "Robocracy" in the next. Indeed, McLoughlin presents the Revolution, which implemented the new republican ideology, as the secular fulfillment of the religious ideals of the Great Awakening.

Such findings have influenced the work of Hoerder, Young, Nash, Isaac, and others. These historians see Americans embracing deeply entrenched religious perspectives in an effort to find meaning in an age of confusion. Two authors in particular—Isaac and Crowley—attempt to show how the republican temperament that emerged during the Revolution drew on basic evangelical values (virtue, frugality, temperance) to forge a strong ideological force supportive of the Revolution. Such analyses indicate that republicanism offered a vehicle for synthesizing religious, political, economic, and social beliefs that provided Americans with a sense of identity and direction in their lives.

Republican ideology, therefore, was broad enough to incorporate diverse economic and religious ideas. It must also be recognized, however, that republicanism alone does not constitute a sufficient cause or motive to explain action. The mere presence of republican language cannot explain differences between groups or individuals. For example, men as diverse as John Taylor of Caroline, Elbridge Gerry, and Theodore Sedgwick considered themselves good republicans and employed similar language, yet each clearly believed in a different kind of society and envisioned a different kind of America. Their political actions sprang from distinctive perceptions of reality—perceptions that each chose to articulate in terms of republicanism.⁴²

⁴⁰ Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIV (1967), 3-43; Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York, 1977); Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966).

⁴¹ Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven, Conn., 1977); Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven, Conn., 1977); McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay in Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago, 1978); Strout, *The New Heavens and New Earth: Political Religion in America* (New York, 1974).

⁴² George Athan Billias, *Elbridge Gerry: Founding Father and Republican States-*

The research of Isaac, Hoffman, Richard Alan Ryerson, and others demonstrates that republican language was indeed capable of supporting different groups in different situations. An entrenched gentry in Virginia employed republican rhetoric to further the patriot cause, while the same language mobilized political outsiders in Philadelphia to bring pressure on the established order when the latter resisted the Revolutionary effort.⁴³ Focusing on the fact that the Revolution influenced and was influenced by many local tensions, Edward Countryman observes that “‘to make the revolution’ conjugated differently in Portsmouth, Dedham, Albany, Annapolis and Ninety-Six.”⁴⁴ Though similar language was employed in each of these areas, it certainly did not carry the same meanings for all involved. Clearly, then, the identification of an individual or group as “republican” is insufficient to explain behavior. Here the work of such scholars as Kelley, Foner, and Nash is valuable, precisely because it helps clarify the republican views held in different regions of the nation and even by different groups within those regions. *Why* a person or group chose one version of republicanism rather than another, or even chose to support republicanism at all, however, remains problematic.

Research by historians interested in the dialogue between “Court” and “Country,” as well as Greven’s work on “temperament,” may offer suggestive hypotheses. The concepts Court and Country, long associated with the English Revolution, have also been employed in an effort to understand America’s Revolutionary era.⁴⁵ These ideas are central, for example, to Pocock’s discussion of civic humanism, Banning’s treatment of the division between Hamiltonians and Jeffersonians, and Murrin’s analysis of late eighteenth-century American society.⁴⁶ These authors perceive Americans arranged along an ideological spectrum. The Country position on the left, made up of “virtuous farmers strugg[ling] desperately to protect their land and hence their independence against a darkly

man (New York, 1976); Banner, *To the Hartford Convention*; Robert E. Shalhope, *John Taylor of Caroline: Pastoral Republican* (Columbia, S.C., 1980).

⁴³ Ryerson, “Political Mobilization and the American Revolution: The Resistance Movement in Philadelphia, 1765 to 1776,” *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXI (1974), 564-588, and *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765-1776* (Philadelphia, 1978).

⁴⁴ Edward Countryman, “A Review Article: The Problem of the Early American Crowd,” *Journal of American Studies*, VII (1973), 77-90 (quotation on p. 89).

⁴⁵ Perez Zagorin’s *The Court and the Country: The Beginning of the English Revolution* (London, 1969), is essential for understanding the background and meaning of these terms.

⁴⁶ Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*; Banning, *Jeffersonian Persuasion*; Murrin, “The Great Inversion, or Court versus Country: A Comparison of the Revolution Settlements in England (1688-1721) and America (1776-1816),” in Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, N.J., 1980), 368-453. James H. Hutson interprets the Antifederalists from a Country perspective in “Country, Court, and Constitution: Antifederalism and the Historians,” *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXVIII (1981), 337-368.

corrupt, grasping, anonymous, pervasive, and mysterious money power, which did indeed threaten their autonomy," contrasted with the Court stance on the right, where "the disciples of public order were merely rallying to defend property and protect the 'worthy' against the 'licentious.'"⁴⁷ Advocates of the Country position, usually rural, employed republican language to express their suspicion of governmental corruption and sinister conspiracies against liberty, while Court advocates, most often urban dwellers with commercial interests, emphasized republican aversion to disorder and anarchy.

This analytic framework of Court and Country is capable of incorporating insights from a broad range of research. For instance, Jackson Turner Main's identification of the division between "cosmopolitans" (wealthy, educated individuals who had extensive experience beyond their own cities and states) and "localists" (individuals lacking these characteristics who remained closely identified with their home communities) provides excellent insight into why a group or individual would accept Court or Country ideas.⁴⁸ David Szatmary's analysis of Shays's Rebellion as a clash between a traditional way of life and an ever-encroaching commercial society provides another thoughtful treatment of cultural differences and their potential for generating diverse perspectives.⁴⁹ Such work, combined with that of Pocock, Banning, Murrin, and others who emphasize the Court-Country dialogue, indicates that cultural forces—rooted in the region and type of community involved—heavily influenced an individual's or group's gravitation toward the Court or Country strains of republicanism.

The question remains: why did individuals within similar environments choose differently? Here Greven's analysis of temperaments provides a challenging starting point.⁵⁰ In an effort to link the inner lives of Americans, their feelings and pieties, with their outer behavior, Greven suggests that child-rearing practices produced in colonial America three distinctive temperaments—evangelical, moderate, and genteel—that shaped perceptions of the self and world in vastly different ways, with significant ideological consequences. Greven identifies at least three patterns of ideology—moderate, evangelical, and "non-Whig"—which correspond with the temperaments he discusses. He makes clear that different groups defined liberty and authority in different ways and that these definitions were linked to intimate familial experiences. Such research contributes greatly to an understanding of the importance of experience and values as determinants of ideological stances.

Equally important is the need to learn how ideology was employed to motivate public action. Here the work of Isaac is exemplary. He shows

⁴⁷ Murrin, "Great Inversion," in Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions*, 401.

⁴⁸ Main, *Political Parties before the Constitution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973).

⁴⁹ Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, Mass., 1980).

⁵⁰ Greven, *Protestant Temperament*.

how the ideological language of the Virginia gentry was communicated to the lower orders. In addition, he has begun the process of analyzing how ideological commitment could support a popular movement. His skillful treatment of Virginia demonstrates that analyses of regional subcultures are needed to understand fully responses to the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 1770s.⁵¹

Isaac's observation that scholars must avoid the false assumption of a simple, single American society is of substantial importance. The American Revolution created a single political nation but certainly did not fashion a cohesive national community. Rather, during the Revolution and for some time thereafter, America was composed of regional subcultures. This perception is vital to any attempt to assess the role of republicanism in early America. It may well be that republicanism, in its local variant forms, constituted a hegemonic consensus within particular regions.⁵² That is, the diffusion of republican ideas was so complete within each subculture as to form a hegemony or consensus that shaped social relations and political principles as well as morality and customs. This helps to explain the phenomenon that appears in the work of Ryerson, Nash, Hoerder, and others: they have discovered, for a number of different regions, active groups among the lower ranks who, although politically united, could not articulate their purpose in a manner distinct from the dominant republican language of their superiors. In the end, class or popular ideologies remained stillborn. This does not mean that the various egalitarian or radical strains identified by Countryman and Nash did not exist or were unimportant. Rather, they may prove to be limiting cases that tested the boundaries of the local consensus, thus allowing the historian to investigate the mechanism whereby men in authority secured their ideological hegemony.⁵³ In any event, it is clear from recent research that republican ideas, broadly defined, predominated in the local areas that have been carefully investigated.

IV

The extraordinary promise of recent research on republicanism for furthering our understanding of early America has not been fully realized. By exaggerating differences and obscuring potentially common ground, constant bickering between "ideological" historians and "social" historians

⁵¹ Robert A. Gross does just this in his excellent *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976), which reveals how republican ideas healed a serious division among the inhabitants of Concord and united them against the British. See esp. chap. 3, "A Well-ordered Revolution."

⁵² For a discussion of hegemonic consensus see Eugene D. Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explanations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York, 1971), 136-153.

⁵³ Aileen S. Kraditor offers a provocative discussion of the "limiting case" in "American Radical Historians on Their Heritage," *Past and Present*, No. 56 (1972), 136-153.

has proved counterproductive. In its present form, the discussion finds intellectual historians contending for the causative power of ideas, while the "new" social historians and others by and large consider ideas to be epiphenomenal or merely rationalizations of social and economic needs. Constant sniping between the two camps has prevented useful questions regarding republicanism's role in early American society from being asked, much less being answered.⁵⁴

The suggestions of a number of social scientists offer historians a potential escape from the conundrum. The research of Clifford Geertz, Kenneth Burke, Erik Erikson, and others attempts to understand ideologies as cultural systems as well as to analyze the meaning of their language. These scholars suggest that the sociopsychological dimension of ideology—perhaps best defined as the "unconscious tendency underlying religious and scientific as well as political thought: the tendency at a given time to make facts amenable to ideas, and ideas to facts, in order to create a world image convincing enough to support the collective and the individual sense of identity"—arises from individual or group efforts to escape strain rather than to pursue interests.⁵⁵ In addition, these scholars demonstrate that ideologies operate as cognitive and expressive symbol systems that provide a pattern or guide for organizing social and psychological processes. Being extrinsic sources of information, cultural symbol systems become crucial in situations "where institutionalized guides for behavior, thought, or feeling are weak or absent." Just as one needs a map when traveling through strange territory, so, too, one requires a sociopsychological guide at times. Ideology functions in such a way as to make possible a clearly defined political movement by providing "the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped." When a society's general cultural orientation and its pragmatic answers prove inadequate, ideologies become crucial in giving meaning to life. "It is a confluence of sociopsychological strain and an absence of cultural resources by means of which to make (political, moral, or economic) sense of that strain, each exacerbating the other, that sets the stage for the rise of systematic (political, moral, or economic) ideologies." Thus, in the final analysis, ideologies constitute "maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience."⁵⁶

Similarly, the language of ideologies, often considered excessive or

⁵⁴ Throughout this essay a conscious effort has been made to avoid classifying individual scholars or points of view as representative of a "school" of thought in order to be able to deal effectively with ideas common to differing approaches.

⁵⁵ The quotation is from Erikson, *Young Man Luther*, 22. The fullest discussion of the sociopsychological determinants of ideology are found in Sutton *et al.*, *American Business Creed*, and Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent*.

⁵⁶ The foregoing discussion of ideologies is drawn from Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent* (quotations on pp. 62-64).

simplistic, is best interpreted in light of the research of Burke. For him, words hold the key to understanding the dramatic encounter between the internal world of images and meaning and the external one of circumstances and experience. Ideas are the result of mind's encounter with the world, and language represents our attempt to order that encounter. Consequently, language becomes action. More precisely, it becomes "symbolic action." It represents the individual's strategic response to the selectively perceived situation in which he finds himself. Burke is primarily concerned with what an idea or word suggests, and he reaches outward from the word not to find what "causes" it but rather to discover what it is in the world to which the idea responds. He wishes, above all, to discern the dialogic encounter between "subjective mind" and "objective world." Burke's important insight here is the recognition that words hold a key to understanding the encounter between mind and environment.⁵⁷

Historical research attuned to the ideas of scholars such as Burke and Geertz might, in fact, dissolve the familiar idealist-materialist dichotomy between thought and action. Such a perspective would consider ideas or beliefs to be neither causes nor effects of social forces; instead, they become functional and instrumental. Recognizing this, Wood contends that "ideas thus influence behavior, not by being motives for action, but by giving meanings to action and thus publicly prescribing and circumscribing what behavior is legitimate and permissible, indeed, possible."⁵⁸

An understanding of republicanism that comprehends the origins, functions, and language of ideology offers immense potential for the study of early America. Once it is recognized that the presence of an ideology with the depth and strength of republicanism is indicative of serious strains in American society, an analytic framework emerges that permits the drawing together of disparate or even contradictory strands of historical inquiry. Nash's urban tensions, Isaac's cultural clash between gentry and evangelicals, and Appleby's belief that qualitative changes taking place in pre-Revolutionary America placed great strain on the free individual all become integral elements of (in Geertz's phrase) a "problematic social reality" defined in republican terms. As a consequence, scholars should not be content with merely discovering and analyzing the content of republican language; they must consider it as a clue or symptom. They must follow Burke's lead, in short, and probe the dynamic interaction between life and language.

For historians willing to transcend the rather narrow focus of the various "schools" of thought or thematic subgroupings in their discipline, the recent literature of the colonial and Revolutionary era has a great deal to offer. And republicanism, considered as a cultural system, may well provide the most stimulating means of integrating the many insights of separate approaches into a useful reappraisal of early American society.

⁵⁷ Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge, La., 1941), 1-137 *passim*.

⁵⁸ Gordon S. Wood, "Intellectual History and the Social Sciences," in John Higham and Paul Conkin, eds., *New Directions in American Intellectual History* (Baltimore, 1979), 27-41 (quotation on p. 36).

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⁴ **Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography**

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⁹ **Review: Radicalism and the American Revolution**

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From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776. by Pauline Maier

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²² **Liberalism and the American Revolution**

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²² **The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology**

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²² **Ideology and Theory: The Tension Between Political and Economic Liberalism in Seventeenth-Century England**

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²³ **The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology**

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²⁴ **The Shaping of the Radical Consciousness in Provincial New York**

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²⁴ **The Transformation of Urban Politics 1700-1765**

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²⁵ **Liberalism and the American Revolution**

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³¹ **Deferential-Participant Politics: The Early Republic's Political Culture, 1789-1840**

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³¹ **The Baltimore Riots of 1812 and the Breakdown of the Anglo-American Mob Tradition**

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⁵³ **American Radical Historians on Their Heritage**

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