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The American Revolution and the Pursuit of Economic Equality

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We have grown so accustomed to the phrase "American Revolution" that it is difficult to imagine an alternative label for the events that ultimately resulted in the permanent separation of 13 American colonies from Great Britain. Participants and observers had used the terms "conflict," "struggle," "resistance," "crisis," "war," and even "rebellion" to frame these events, but they were slow to adopt the term "revolution." The opposing sides had been engaged in actual combat for several years before Americans and their allies consistently began to describe what was happening as revolution.[1] Therefore, it is important to consider what Americans at the time meant—or aspired to—in calling their undertaking a revolution.

As assiduous students of political history, Americans in that period would have understood that revolutions are radical affairs.[2] The transformation of the political order from colonial dependence on an imperial monarchy an ocean away to a self-governing country resting at least nominally on the people's sovereignty was certainly a radical change. But if a change in their relationship to Great Britain was all Americans had in mind, the word "independence" would have sufficed. In adopting the word "revolution," they signaled that they were also participating in a radical transformation of the social and economic order. In other words, the American Revolution was both a political and a social revolution.

The social revolution was not a sudden development but rather, like the political events that ultimately culminated in a declaration of

independence, the result of a protracted process decades in the making. Americans at the time generally understood that the political and social dimensions of the American Revolution both revolved around the idea of equality. Taking up Thomas Paine's challenge in *Common Sense* to "begin the world over again,"[3] Americans did not just seek to make themselves independent—they also set out to remake their societies.

My central claim in this chapter is that the American Revolution developed, accelerated, and expanded trends toward greater equality that had been underway for decades and inaugurated new ones that would unfold over the coming centuries, if only fitfully and still incompletely. Despite significant variations in economic and social structures among the British colonies—from the Eastern Seaboard to islands in the Caribbean and the mid-Atlantic—social relations between women and men, blacks and whites, servile and free, poor and rich, and (at least in New England) lay and clergy at the start of the century were organized hierarchically, and deeply rooted norms and habits of deference shaped relations between political leaders and their constituents.[4] Occasional and highly localized bursts of dissent did little to alter relations of subordination in vertically structured societies where the few often felt entitled to rule by virtue of their status.[5]

Even if colonists had moved away from the belief of early 17th-century Massachusetts Gov. John Winthrop that some were born "high and eminent in power and dignity, others mean and in subjection,"[6] Americans through the first half of the 18th century still generally believed that each individual belonged to an assigned place in society. By all indications, everyone seemed content to be the subject of a king even several years into the conflict with Britain. But by the time Americans settled on the label "American Revolution," they had not only renounced domination by elites in Great Britain but also begun to question the legitimacy of domination by elites at home.

The Market Revolution and Opportunities for Participation

The half century preceding independence was a period of profound social, economic, and cultural changes that altered the behaviors, relationships, attitudes, and values of individuals throughout the colonies. During this time, the colonies experienced significant upheavals that chipped away at established notions of rank and status. These changes began with the burst of religious revivalism that began in the 1730s during the Great Awakening[7] and the explosive population growth that saw the number of inhabitants increase eightfold between the start of the century and the first stirrings of colonial unrest.[8] Then an expanding capitalist economy created new opportunities for the accumulation of wealth, and consumer tastes and norms transformed, ushered in by the market revolution.[9] As reflected in bestselling literature, family portraits, and popular educational works, even relations between parents and their children were affected by these currents, as rigid notions of patriarchal authority gave way to new ideals that stressed more affectionate and egalitarian attitudes toward child-rearing.[10]

These and related developments unsettled traditional norms and roles, even if they did not necessarily undermine acceptance of hierarchy across the board. Inequalities between classes, sexes, and races would remain, but the political transformation Americans experienced forced them to reconsider the legitimacy of established ranks and traditional entitlements to rule. Although stark racial and sexual hierarchies would persist and even strengthen over the coming decades, the Revolution provoked discomfiting questions about the justifiability and terms of these relations that continue to reverberate. Likewise, the gap between the haves and the have-nots would expand after the Constitution's ratification, but the Revolution prompted Americans across class backgrounds to question the compatibility of economic inequality with republican ideals. Not only did Americans challenge long-standing assumptions that had connected status, wealth, and power, but they also pushed for and secured legal and political changes designed to ensure that the lower classes would enjoy opportunities in the economy and a voice in politics.

Scholars have been deeply divided on the relationship between class and the Revolution ever since Progressive Era historians highlighted self-serving role of propertied elites during the founding.[11] Although historians such as J. Franklin Jameson and Merrill Jensen viewed the American Revolution in more radical terms, arguing that the struggle for independence was also a "social movement" and a "war against the colonial aristocracy,"[12] political theorist Hannah Arendt praised the American Patriots for largely avoiding the "social question" that would cause other revolutions to pursue economic equality at the expense of political freedom.[13] Surveying decades of postwar scholarship on the socioeconomic context of the Revolution, Jack P. Greene found a consensus that

> far from being similar to the French Revolution, the American Revolution was a peculiarly American event in which there had been remarkably little social discontent expressed, no real social upheaval, and relatively few changes in the existing American social structure.[14]

In the past few decades, there has been an explosion of scholarship demonstrating that life on the eve of independence had been significantly transformed as a result of social and economic developments, though historians disagree on whether and how these changes might have affected attitudes toward economic equality.[15] Since the 1960s, republican revisionists, who have traced the founding's intellectual origins back to a tradition that extends from ancient Rome through the Renaissance up to the 17th- and 18th-century English commonwealth's-men, have identified egalitarian ideals animating the Revolution. For instance, Gordon S. Wood stated that "equality was in fact the most radical and most powerful ideological force let loose in the Revolution."[16]

Following the work of scholars who have examined the transformations in material culture that preceded independence, particularly the role of the so-called market revolution that modified colonists' relationships and attitudes toward commodities and each other, I argue that

changes in the way colonists participated in the evolving 18th-century capitalist economy contributed to the diffusion of more egalitarian political ideals throughout the Revolution. Political events touched off by the passage of the Stamp Act in 1763 interacted with ongoing economic changes that had been underway for decades to incite a reexamination of conventional ideas and attitudes toward established forms of hierarchy. Changes in everyday economic life for ordinary colonists, from how they worked to how they consumed, had already demonstrated that social structures were fluid and adaptable. Additionally, the conscription of women, laborers, and others who had formerly been excluded from formal politics into the various boycotts stemming from nonimportation and nonconsumption movements revealed that their participation mattered.

To suggest that capitalism could contribute to egalitarian politics, even indirectly, flies in the face of both scholarly and conventional thinking. After all, the overwhelming weight of empirical evidence suggests that the long-term trend in capitalist societies is toward greater and more entrenched forms of economic inequality.[17]

However, as even its fiercest critics have pointed out, capitalism has always been a dynamic economic system capable of producing uneven and surprising effects. What Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels described as its impulse to revolutionize production and, thereby, disturb "all social conditions" is precisely what "distinguish[es] the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones."[18] For instance, the integration of free individuals into an ever-expanding and increasingly complex international capitalist economy that created new opportunities for employment and introduced new and exciting consumer goods reshaped social relationships, engendered new cultural habits, incited fresh material desires, and lifted economic expectations.

This is by no means to suggest that individuals did not experience frustrations and disappointments or that the dynamics at work did not also pull in opposing directions. Much like industrialized forms of capitalism in the 19th century and the neoliberal variants that emerged in the closing

decades of the 20th, the capitalism of the 18th-century British imperial world made it possible for a few to amass enormous fortunes off the backs of exploited laborers, whether free, indentured, or slave. Even an enthusiast for entrepreneurial pursuits such as Benjamin Franklin lamented that one of the by-products of this economic system was that "the chief Exports of Ireland seem to be pinch'd off the Backs and out of the Bellies of the miserable Inhabitants."[19] And despite the market's promise of freedom, the proliferation of what Jean-Jacques Rousseau would call "artificial needs" instigated new forms of dependence, including rising consumer debt.

However, as T. H. Breen demonstrates in his magisterial study of the market revolution, the range of increasingly affordable consumer goods, which used to be available to only those in the upper class but were now being advertised and sold to individuals of all classes, instilled a sense of "consumer choice" that made it possible for growing numbers of colonists to imagine the possibility of freedom and equality.[20]

The sense of empowerment that emerged out of this experience of a new, if narrow, form of equality in the mid-century market economy stands in stark contrast to the political powerlessness that most colonists experienced before the protests against Parliament's policies. Colonial assemblies were little more than consultative bodies tolerated by the Crown to facilitate the interests of the aristocratic elite that governed the empire as a whole.

Nevertheless, the men who served in these assemblies saw themselves perched atop a political hierarchy sanctioned by every existing source of moral authority. Scripture, tradition, and law, both natural and man-made, taught the lower orders that politics was the business of their betters. The hierarchical structure of colonial life was manifested and reinforced in virtually all social settings, from religious meetings where families were seated according to social rank to recreational pursuits that were restricted to the upper ranks.[21] Styles of dress, modes of transportation, and choices of food and drink also differed in ways that reinforced distinctions between classes. Up through the first few decades of the century

at least, the sartorial choices of colonial elites set them apart in highly visible ways from their social inferiors.

But as the conflict with Great Britain unfolded, new political spaces began to open. Men in the so-called middling classes were formally permitted to participate in local elections in many colonies, but actual rates of political participation were quite low before the Stamp Act crisis. Even though it was the most prominent men in local communities who led the way in mounting the resistance to intolerable British policies, they helped mobilize and activate the participation of those who had never before gotten involved in politics or did so in only limited ways. The wealthy merchants, landowners, and professionals who represented their communities realized that boycotts organized around nonimportation and nonconsumption would not succeed without the support and participation of every consumer—including women and poorer men.

By urging ordinary men and women to give up tea, substitute homespun clothing for imported fabrics, and sacrifice other goods they had come to view as virtual necessities during the first half of the 18th century, leading Patriots initiated what Linda Kerber describes as the "politicization of the household economy."[22] Christopher Gadsden, a leading South Carolina politician and successful businessman, represented the thinking of many in urging fellow Patriots to "persuade our wives to give us their assistance, without which 'tis impossible to succeed."[23] As a result, the domestic economy became an arena for political activity, inviting the participation of those who had been largely excluded from political life.

In calling on fellow inhabitants to make resistance effective, Patriots contributed to the transformation of subjects into citizens. The new associations and assemblies that sprang up throughout the colonies, most notably the Sons of Liberty, created new political spaces for individuals who been left out of the formal channels of politics in the empire. In addition, the forms of politics that emerged made it possible for farmers, artisans, mechanics, and other laborers—including women—to participate in ways that leading political figures could not necessarily control or direct.

Despite occasional grousing by established elites, men and women, rich and poor, and professionals and laborers alike found opportunities to engage in politics by signing petitions, affixing their names to resolutions, subscribing to covenants, publishing pamphlets, raising funds and supplies for the military, and establishing organizations. And, as Breen notes, when the First Continental Congress called for the creation of the Continental Association allowing the formation of local committees to enforce nonimportation, "it has been estimated that local elections for the committees brought seven thousand men into the political process who had never before served in public office."[24] Even though women were not elected to leadership positions in the committees of safety that developed in local communities, they were called to oversee compliance with nonimportation agreements and testify against Loyalists.[25] Once these groups got involved in these ways, they would seek additional forms of participation and pressure their representatives to pursue their interests.

Certain features of the consumer economy specific to the 13 colonies made these more inclusive and participatory forms of protest possible. If existing legal and institutional rules restricted politics to provincial elites, the far more fluid and rapidly changing developments of the consumer market invited participation by virtually everyone. The breadth of that economic participation in turn made broader political participation necessary if resistance were to succeed.

Purchasing power was never even close to equal, but the possibility of participating in the consumer market as long as one had currency or goods to exchange for British imports worked to unsettle norms and patterns of conduct that had buttressed a hierarchical social order. Even if consumers differed according to their levels of disposable income (or in their ability to pay in all-too-scarce specie as opposed to bartered goods), shopkeepers interested in keeping their customers happy had to treat them with a minimum of respect.

Some retailers even highlighted the market's egalitarianism to entice would-be shoppers. In an advertisement in the *South Carolina Gazette*, one jeweler promised that all prospective consumers would be "treated in the

most just and upright manner, the lowest price being fixed on each article, and those that are not judges will be served equally as if they were."[26]

The absence of legal restrictions on buying finely woven clothing and accessories, elegantly crafted porcelain tea sets, and other consumer goods that only the gentry could afford at the start of the century transformed many luxury goods into must-have items sought by the lower classes. Some manufactured British goods, such as coaches, would always be out of the reach of all but the wealthiest Americans. But as the price of certain imported goods dropped—and as more consumers became willing to purchase them on credit—the threads that had traditionally connected status and class began to unravel.

Not everyone welcomed these developments. The prospect of those in the lower ranks being able to pass themselves off as members of the upper classes elicited disapproval and condemnation. For instance, an anonymous New Englander asked readers to contemplate the horrors

> if a promiscuous use of fine cloaths be countenanced, who, that is really deserving of our respect and reverence, can be distinguished from the profligate and base born miscreant, that lies in wait to deceive under the disguise of noble garb?[27]

Similar complaints would be echoed during the Revolution by conservatives resentful of the way participation in the political realm destabilized the existing social order. Gouverneur Morris grumbled,

> These sheep, simple as they are, cannot be gulled as heretofore. In short, there is no ruling them, and now, to leave the metaphor, the heads of the mobility grow dangerous to the gentry, and how to keep them down is the question.[28]

Despite the fears of censorious elites, consumer behavior could do only so much to foster a sense of equality or empower citizens politically. Even as the market revolution worked to undermine some of the traditional

cultural supports for inequality, it also created the conditions for the augmentation of material inequality. After all, the rapidly expanding trade in manufactured goods was creating new forms of wealth and privilege for shopkeepers, factors, wholesalers, and others who were savvy enough to anticipate and satisfy American consumers' ever-evolving and increasingly discerning preferences.

These developments ended up making shrewd merchants in coastal cities among the wealthiest residents in their colonies. But even as some of these large merchants and smaller retailers increased their wealth, the emerging egalitarian ethos combined with a complicated mix of religious sensibilities and republican ideals to restrain conspicuous displays of their prosperity. For instance, merchants were often encouraged to dress at the same level as their neighbors to avoid exacerbating social differences.[29]

A Society of Owners?

Consumption patterns were not the only economic factors contributing to an appreciation for equality in the years preceding the Revolution. The distribution of landownership throughout the colonies going back to the 17th century established a rough form of equality that would have profound political implications.[30] The size and productivity of landed holdings varied greatly, from small plots that barely enabled owners to eke out a living to enormous estates that allowed owners to earn fortunes from the production of rice, tobacco, and other agricultural products exported to the rest of the British world. But the differences between these extremes were overshadowed by the relatively broad distribution of ownership. Even in the lower South, where economic disparities were most extreme, substantial numbers—even outright majorities—of whites owned at least some land. In the mid-Atlantic colonies, family farms of middling size dominated the landscape.

The availability of landownership at relatively affordable rates and the prospects of achieving economic independence in the mid-Atlantic

and New England colonies, at least, mitigated the development of more extreme forms of inequality and contributed to upward mobility.[31] Those who did not own land felt confident they could, and most, in fact, eventually would. That, as much as anything, tended to offset any belief in the permanence of class or status.

Contemporary scholarship generally bears out the impressions of Americans, who frequently boasted that the relative equality of landholdings set the American colonies apart from—and therefore made life there better than in—the British Isles. Franklin summed up the prevailing view among Americans:

> Land being thus plenty in America, and so cheap as that a labouring Man, that understands Husbandry, can in a short Time save Money enough to purchase a Piece of new Land sufficient for a Plantation, whereon he may subsist a Family.[32]

With land so "easily and cheaply obtained," South Carolina physician and eventual historian of the American Revolution David Ramsay asked, "who would remain in Europe, a dependent on the will of an imperious landlord, when a few years['] industry can make an independent American freeholder?"[33]

Opportunity was never perfectly equal, but it was far more equal in the American colonies than in the rest of the British colonial world—or anywhere else in Europe for that matter. For starters, legal rules concerning the sale and purchase of land in the American colonies were less restrictive than they were in Europe. Not only was land more plentiful and cheaper, but colonists did not have to contend with the same feudal laws of entail and primogeniture that propped up aristocratic elites.

Thanks to such legal rules, actual rates of landownership before independence were much higher in the American colonies than they were anywhere in Europe. Rates of landownership rarely exceeded 30 percent anywhere in Europe, but roughly 50 percent of white men in America owned real estate.[34] In some places, the numbers were much higher. In

eastern New Jersey, for instance, rates of landownership among white men approached 67 percent.[35]

Many commentators at the time suggested that the wide distribution of landownership contributed significantly to the relatively high standards of living Americans enjoyed.[36] Those who traveled to or had recently moved from Europe were often struck by the stark differences in housing, attire, and food between the lower classes in the Old World compared to the New. Indeed, these differences sometimes led enthusiastic Americans to suggest (hyperbolically) a near absence of class distinctions altogether.[37]

Even if the colonies were far more stratified than many acknowledged, boastful Americans were right about one thing: America was remarkably egalitarian compared with European societies at the time.[38] Honest observers admitted that there were poor individuals and families on both sides of the Atlantic, but the availability and terms of landownership made life much more comfortable and secure in the American colonies. Indeed, the widespread ownership of property contributed to labor shortages in the mid-Atlantic and New England colonies that actually created more favorable terms of employment, leading to higher median incomes than anywhere else in the British world.[39]

To be sure, there were extraordinarily wealthy individuals in the American colonies, particularly in more established cities along the coast and in and among the slave-dependent economies of the lower South. But even the opulence of the most successful merchants and planters paled in comparison with the lifestyles of the wealthiest Europeans. Franklin's impressions are, once again, typical of Americans at the time:

> Whoever has travelled thro' the various Parts of Europe, and observed how small is the Proportion of People in Affluence or easy Circumstances there, compar'd with those in Poverty and Misery; the few rich and haughty Landlords, the multitude of poor, abject and rack'd Tenants, and the half-paid and half starv'd ragged Labourers; and views here the happy Mediocrity that so generally prevails throughout these States, where

> the Cultivator works for himself, and supports his Family in decent Plenty, will, methinks, see abundant Reason to bless divine Providence for the evident and great Difference in our Favour, and be convinc'd that no Nation that is known to us enjoys a greater Share of human Felicity.[40]

Whether describing their travels through England, France, Ireland, or Spain, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson issued similar reports about the extremes of opulence and destitution that America thankfully avoided.[41]

Of course, it was one thing to celebrate what Franklin characterized as the "general happy Mediocrity that prevails"[42] in America and another to conserve it. The pursuit of equality would compete with many other interests and ideals for the attention and energy of political actors concerned first and foremost with securing political independence—not to mention avoiding the hangman's noose for treason. However, as many revolutionaries came to understand, securing the freedom, popular sovereignty, and so much else they were struggling to win would depend on securing a sufficient level of economic equality.

Republicanism and the Egalitarian Ethos

Americans knew from the republican political tradition that informed so much of their thinking that economic independence is indispensable to the free exercise of political freedom. And many viewed unchecked economic disparities as a threat to political stability. As the 17th-century English political theorist James Harrington noted, "Where there is inequality of estates, there must be inequality of power, and where there is inequality of power, there can be no commonwealth."[43]

Republicans generally agreed that economic disparities affect the capacity for political independence, but they differed over appropriate responses. They responded in one of two basic ways to the dangers of excessive economic inequality. The more aristocratic tradition, which

included thinkers such as the patrician Roman orator Cicero, the Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini, and the aforementioned Harrington, generally sought to reserve political participation for men (and it was always and only men) who possess the moral virtue and economic resources to exercise political power responsibly and resist corruption. The more democratic or populist tradition, represented by the early Roman Republican Gracchi brothers, Niccolò Machiavelli, and the English Leveler John Lilburne, not only favored the political participation of ordinary "people," understood to mean the lower classes, but proactively searched for measures designed to promote their political empowerment.[44] These include policies calculated to lift the economic fortunes of those at the bottom, strengthen those in the middle, and prevent those at the top from increasing their wealth or using it against the public interest.

Even though avowed republicans such as Adams preferred the more aristocratic alternative, the popular forms of political participation they themselves had encouraged and the growing sense of political entitlement among those who had been mobilized meant it was no longer a realistic option. As the counter-democratic backlash that ultimately led to the creation of the Constitution suggests, many elites never gave up entirely on the more aristocratic vision of republicanism.[45] But enough Americans came to embrace the second, more democratic vision of republicanism that what began as a political revolution became a social revolution.

The notion that equality was not just a general (if imprecise) condition of existing society but an aspiration that should guide policymaking for the future would be voiced from pulpits, in pamphlets, in private correspondence, at meetings, and in political orations. To varying degrees, revolutionary figures such as Jefferson, Thomas Paine, New Jersey signer of the Declaration of Independence Abraham Clark, lexicographer Noah Webster, and many others would express the conviction that economic equality was indispensable to the health of a republic. Connecticut Congregational minister and historian Benjamin Trumbull cautioned, "It will be highly politic in every free state, to keep property as equally divided among the inhabitants as possible, and not to suffer a few persons to

amass all the riches and wealth of a country."[46] The only way to prevent oligarchy from gaining a foothold in the new country would be to prevent extremes of economic inequality.[47]

The pursuit of egalitarian aims in the economic sphere went hand in hand with the pursuit of equality in the political sphere. Once ordinary Americans, including poor laborers and farmers, were mobilized to engage in unconventional forms of politics, it was only natural that there would be calls to enlist them in more traditional forms of political participation. What many Americans actually did with their newfound power was to seek more of it. They started demanding greater shares of power where they had begun to acquire it and pieces of it where it was still out of reach. As Colin Bonwick notes, "Elites were forced to share their power."[48] And by changing the balance of power between Patriot elites and everyone else, the Revolution made it far more difficult for economic elites to use the reins of power to protect their wealth or prevent poorer Americans from raising their economic prospects.

Thanks to a mix of pressure from those at the bottom, a newfound commitment to the consistent application of republican ideals, and reluctant concessions from conservatives hoping to avoid further social unrest, states lowered or even eliminated property qualifications for voting and holding office. Indeed, the egalitarian impulse contributed to a variety of other changes in suffrage rules that eliminated or mitigated barriers to participation. Among other things, some states eliminated religious tests for political office, extended voting rights to anyone who served in the military, permitted free blacks to vote, and, in New Jersey, allowed wealthy women to vote.

The egalitarian spirit moved Americans to reconsider the status of individuals in other areas of life, albeit in incomplete and limited ways. The embarrassment of holding blacks in bondage throughout all 13 states as whites waged war in the name of freedom led to calls for the abolition of slavery and the end of the slave trade, even if racial prejudices among the overwhelming majority of white Americans remained largely unmoved.

Military imperatives reinforced egalitarian aims too. The gentry's inability to fill the ranks of the officer corps created opportunities for members of the lower classes to serve in positions of leadership. Alexander Hamilton, along with his friend John Laurens, went further than most in suggesting that South Carolina create three or four battalions of black soldiers, which would not only address a dire personnel shortfall but also provide black soldiers the opportunity to demonstrate their equal abilities and thereby "open a door to their emancipation."[49]

Although men of all classes generally ignored the role of women in politics—when they were not mocking the idea—women such as the author Judith Sargent Murray took it upon themselves to assert their equality and demand equal treatment in education between the sexes.[50] Married women were still subject to severe legal restrictions on the use of their property long after independence was won, but the Revolution prompted "more nearly egalitarian marital relationships" that improved the conditions of wives throughout the United States.[51]

If efforts to promote racial and sexual equality seldom resulted in meaningful legal or institutional reforms, attempts to address economic equality fared much better. In fact, the economic policies revolutionaries adopted in the first few years of the war, when republican and egalitarian energies were at their strongest, reveal a willingness to intervene in the economy and regulate the market to achieve important political objectives. Despite broad support for property rights—and concerns that overly aggressive redistributive policies could backfire if they lost the war—Americans took decisive steps to promote economic equality. From restrictions on indentured servitude to the adoption of more progressive tax codes (e.g., by eliminating poll taxes, exempting paupers from paying taxes at all, and taxing land based on its assessed value rather than its acreage), from bankruptcy reforms to the establishment of land banks that increased access to credit, legislative assemblies that now included unprecedented numbers from the middle and lower classes created policies that sought to minimize or reverse tendencies toward inequality in economic life.[52]

One of the most immediate and direct consequences for economic inequality stemmed from the confiscation of Loyalist property. The policies adopted by Patriots throughout the newly independent states provide the clearest examples of a social revolution coinciding with the political revolution. That is certainly how Loyalists themselves understood things.[53] Not only did the confiscation and sale of Loyalist property provide a much-needed source of revenue for cash-strapped governments, but it reversed the trend toward increasing economic inequality that had been developing over the preceding decades.

Because the wealthiest in many communities were Loyalists, the confiscation of their property—which in some cases got underway even before states adopted new constitutions—had the effect of removing those who skewed the distribution of wealth in ways that alarmed egalitarian republicans. Many of those who supported these confiscatory policies explicitly connected these plutocratic concentrations of wealth to the political domination they were seeking to dismantle. Although many defended these measures in frankly retributive terms or explained them in terms of military necessity, some Patriots justified these measures on openly redistributive grounds.

Both the law and actual implementation varied from one state to the next. Confiscations in most states did not do much to improve conditions for those near the bottom, but they did generally reduce concentrations of wealth at the top. In New England, Thomas Ingersoll notes, a growing anti-aristocratic ethos fueled the drive to dispossess and liquidate Loyalist property. Although the rhetoric of more radical Patriots could get overheated, threatening retribution against anyone who failed to support the Revolution, lawmakers in New England ended up limiting forfeitures to only the richest Loyalists.[54]

Even though the total number of Loyalists there who lost their property—and their homes as a result of banishment—was low (likely no more than 570 in all of New England), the amount of property that was redistributed was substantial. In Connecticut, the confiscation from just three Loyalists netted 116,000 acres.[55] Based on claims for compensation

made after the Revolution, Loyalist merchants in New York representing 0.00055 percent of the population may have accounted for as much as 0.39 percent of wealth in 1774.[56] Despite its small size—and the fact that it got a late start to confiscation—Maryland eventually seized and put up for auction over 200,000 acres of land.[57] Farther south, in North Carolina, where tensions between supporters and opponents of independence were exceptionally bitter, Loyalists were subject to particularly punitive confiscations that forced many of them to leave the state for good.[58] In Georgia, just eight sales from confiscated Loyalist property captured £344,980 in the year the law went into effect.[59]

Whatever the motivations behind these policies, the results were mixed. Large holdings were divided, creating opportunities for upwardly mobile Americans to purchase land and achieve a greater measure of economic independence, but, as some had feared, the well-to-do often ended up augmenting their own wealth in a speculative frenzy that threatened to undo any egalitarian effects in the long run. In New York, "Commissioners of Sequestration" used the proceeds from seized property to assist those experiencing the privations brought on by war, such as those displaced by the British occupation of New York City.[60] In Georgia, by contrast, a legislative investigation conducted after the war found that "some Loyalist estates had been withheld from auction by the commissioners [responsible for administering the program] because prominent Whigs had already occupied them."[61] Such instances of self-dealing by those who were already wealthy and well-connected added fuel to egalitarian fires that were starting to affect fellow Patriots.

Other policies concerning private property that were intended to alleviate economic disparities fared better. There was perhaps no better example of the aristocratic system most revolutionaries sought to destroy than the feudalistic laws of entail and primogeniture that restricted the free alienation and transfer of property. As with so much else, there were variations from one colony to another. Although the law of entail generally followed antiquated English practice throughout the American colonies,[62] primogeniture laws differed significantly from one section to

another, with every New England colony but Rhode Island eliminating it before the 18th century and all Southern colonies still upholding it to some degree when the Revolution began.[63]

These inheritance laws were so fundamentally incompatible with the principles of republicanism that Jefferson moved to eliminate this holdover from feudalism in Virginia only three months after the Declaration of Independence was signed. By the time Virginia finally enacted Jefferson's proposal into law in 1785, several other states throughout the country had already revised the law.[64] Looking back on this legislative accomplishment years later, Jefferson acknowledged the egalitarian motivations behind the abolition of these outdated practices in his home state:

> The repeal of the laws of entail would prevent the accumulation and perpetuation of wealth in select families. . . . The abolition of primogeniture, and equal partition of inheritances removed the feudal and unnatural distinctions which made one member of every family rich, and all the rest poor, substituting equal partition, the best of all Agrarian laws.[65]

Similar rationales were cited by proponents of repealing entail and primogeniture in other states. When the North Carolina legislature moved in 1784 to eliminate entails to simplify inheritance, it explicitly linked the measure to an interest in promoting "that equality of property which is of the spirit and principle of a genuine republic."[66]

For Jefferson, it was not enough to dismantle an aristocratic system of property. He sought to establish a republicanized system based on a broad distribution of property. Concerned about the dangers of the rich preying on the poor—at least among white men—Jefferson favored policies throughout his career in public service that would minimize the possibility of economic, and by extension political, domination. For instance, he included a radical proposal in his draft constitution for Virginia to distribute 50 acres of unused land to every free married man who had resided in Virginia for at least one year, explaining that the purpose was

"the more equal Distribution of Lands, and to encourage Marriage and population."In light of the suffrage requirements he spelled out in an earlier section of that draft, the proposal would have instantly enfranchised "all male persons of full age."[67]

Another significant economic policy with redistributive effects was the issuance of paper money, which allowed citizens to make payments in the new—and rapidly depreciating—currency. Pressure to enact paper-money legislation throughout the newly independent states came most intensely from debtors, who often lacked the hard currency required to purchase consumer goods, discharge their debts, or pay their tax bills. Not all debtors were poor, and many debtors were also creditors in the complex market economy of the late 18th century. However, merchants and bankers, especially those engaged in international commerce, were vehemently opposed to paper money. Easing the financial difficulties of those struggling to pay their debts and taxes was the top priority for proponents of paper money, but equalizing the balance of economic and political power was always an important consideration too. The same was true of disputes over bankruptcy legislation, the establishment of land banks, and price controls, all of which raised the specter of class warfare.

These and related financial matters would contribute to the conservative backlash that paved the way for the creation of the Constitution. However, even many of those who would be most closely identified with this counterrevolutionary movement and spearheaded the policies that would raise alarms about an incipient oligarchy in the new republic actually supported tax policies that would minimize economic inequality.

During the 1780s, no one better represented the dangers of a new aristocracy in the United States than the wealthy Pennsylvania merchant Robert Morris, who oversaw the young nation's struggling finances as superintendent of finance starting in 1781. His establishment of the Bank of North America, which adopted deposit and loan policies that overwhelmingly advantaged prosperous merchants at the expense of land banks that generally benefited less wealthy farmers and small shopkeepers, became

a symbol of the threats to republican ideals that came from fellow Americans. However, the tax policies that Morris proposed were, he argued, designed to be progressive.

Principally designed with an eye toward generating desperately needed revenue, Morris's land tax proposal was defended in republican terms as stimulating a more equal distribution of property. Noting that the burdens of a land tax would fall hardest on owners of large estates, Morris argued that the tax would incentivize these property owners to sell uncultivated land, creating new opportunities for Americans in the lower classes to provide for themselves and produce goods for sale in the marketplace. As Morris explained,

> A Land tax . . . would have the salutary operation of an Agrarian Law, without the Iniquity [of forced redistribution]. It would relieve the Indigent, and aggrandize the State, by bringing Property into the Hands of those who would use it for the Benefit of Society.[68]

Morris even justified his proposal for a poll tax as a progressive measure because the actual amount would be easy enough for the "middling Ranks" to meet and the poor were exempted from paying it altogether.[69]

Morris's protégé Hamilton similarly took a progressive approach to taxation. Not only did he condemn regressive tax policies that burdened the "common people," but he also proposed policies that exempted the poor. In a series of essays published between 1781 and 1782 recommending reforms to the fledging government, especially the need for reliable sources of revenue, the future Treasury secretary recommended a poll tax that would avoid the regressive tendencies normally associated with it. Like Morris, Hamilton argued that "the poor, properly speaking, are not comprehended" under his plan. But he went even further in promoting a luxury tax that would render the overall plan more progressive, arguing, "The rich must be made to pay for their luxuries, which is the only proper way of taxing their superior wealth."[70]

Even though there is little evidence that either Hamilton or Morris was motivated by the same republican considerations that informed the views of their more egalitarian contemporaries, their insistence that the tax policies they promoted had progressive tendencies provides additional evidence of the extent to which egalitarian ideals shaped the political culture of the Revolution.

A Durable Social Revolution

Within a few years, many political elites, alarmed by the supposed "excesses of democracy" exemplified by the egalitarian economic policies discussed above, would rally behind plans for a new constitutional system that would shift the balance of power away from states they viewed as too responsive to the demands of the lower orders toward a more powerful and centralized national government far more likely to cater to their own interests. But the constitutional counterrevolution went only so far, making important concessions to a laboring class that had grown accustomed to exercising real political power. Even though the Constitution guaranteed contracts, prohibited states from printing paper money, and implicitly codified enslaved blacks as property, it erected no property qualifications for voting or holding office, prohibited religious tests for office, allowed for the establishment of a "progressive revenue base," and included other features that upheld the Revolution's ideals of equality.[71]

Crucial to the pursuit of equality, of course, was the growing sense of being entitled to it. The notion that one deserves to be treated as an equal, under the law and in one's social relations, was a necessary precondition for the actual pursuit or achievement of equality. The demand for equality, which was first expressed politically in the cry "no taxation without representation" as a demand for equal political treatment between subjects in the American colonies and subjects in the British Isles, was made possible in part by the feeling that Americans were, in fact, in some measure, equal.

This sentiment reflected material conditions in the American colonies that differed markedly from those in Europe. The relatively broad distribution and affordability of land that went back to conditions set in the 17th century coincided with developments in the consumer marketplace of the mid-18th century to convey a sense of possibility that worked to erode some of the cultural and economic distinctions traditionally used to maintain relations of hierarchy. Though other distinctions—especially those based on artificial differences in race—would remain and harden over time, the ones that had traditionally been cited to justify class domination would be forcefully challenged once the battle for independence began. In that sense, the American Revolution was not just a repudiation of rule by hereditary elites an ocean away but also a refusal to allow aristocracy to take hold at home.

Notes

1. The word "revolution" was seldom used, except in passing, by Americans before the publication of Gouverneur Morris, *Observations on the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: Styner and Cist, 1779). The term came into widespread use after a pamphlet debate between Abbé Raynal and Thomas Paine. Although Raynal used the title *The Revolution of America* for his work denouncing the "upheavals" taking place as unjustified by any injustice Americans experienced, Paine happily adopted the term in his *Letter Addressed to the Abbé Raynal on the Affairs of North-America,* rebutting the French writer's misguided and misinformed account of the struggle for independence. See Ilan Rachum, "From 'American Independence' to 'American Revolution,'" *Journal of American Studies* 27, no. 1 (April 1993): 73–81, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40464078.

2. As the etymology of the word "radical" suggests, revolutions are extreme or thoroughgoing events that go to the very roots.

3. Thomas Paine, "Common Sense," in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Citadel Press, 1945), 1:45.

4. On the varieties of stratification structuring British colonies in the 18th century, see Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988). On the "politics of deference" before independence, see J. G. A. Pocock, "The Classical Theory of Deference," *American Historical Review* 81, no. 3 (June 1976): 516–23, https://academic.oup.com/ahr/article-abstract/81/3/516/70853; and J. R. Pole, *Political Representation in England and the Origins of the American Republic*

(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1966). For an overview and critique of the historiography on deference, see Richard R. Beeman, "The Varieties of Deference in Eighteenth-Century America," *Early American Studies* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2005): 311–40, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23546525.

5. On incidents of urban protest against political elites before the Revolution, see Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 47–48, 132–33. For an example of rural protest against economic and political elites before the Revolution, see Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

6. John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," in *The Puritans in America: A Narrative Anthology*, ed. Alan Heimert and Andrew Delbanco (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 82.

7. Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009).

8. The conditions contributing to this rapid increase in population were explored in Benjamin Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.," in *Benjamin Franklin: Writings*, ed. J. A. Leo Lemay (New York: Library of America, 1987), 367–74.

9. The market revolution continued to evolve after independence was won and was both an effect of and contributor to the political upheaval it helped shape. See John Lauritz Larson, *The Market Revolution in America: Liberty, Ambition, and the Eclipse of the Common Good* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

10. See Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

11. See, for example, Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: Free Press, 1986); and Carl Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1775* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1909). For critiques, see Forrest McDonald, *We the People: The Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991); and Robert E. Brown, *Charles Beard and the Constitution: A Critical Analysis of "An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution,"* rev. ed. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1979).

12. J. Franklin Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1926); and Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774–1781* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1940), 11.

13. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1965). One of the first works to deny that the American Revolution engaged in the social "experimentation" that led to the violent "excesses" of the French Revolution was Friedrich von Gentz, *The Origins and Principles of the American Revolution Compared with the Origins and Principles of the French Revolution*, trans. John Quincy Adams (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2010).

14. Jack P. Greene, "The Social Origins of the American Revolution: An Evaluation and an Interpretation," *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 1 (March 1973): 4, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2148646.

15. See, for example, Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965); Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*; and T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004).

16. Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993). See also James L. Huston, *Securing the Fruits of Labor: The American Concept of Wealth Distribution, 1765–1900* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1998); and J. R. Pole, *The Pursuit of Equality in American History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 28, 35–36.

17. See, for example, Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2017).

18. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 476.

19. Benjamin Franklin, letter to Thomas Cushing, January 13, 1772, Founders Online, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-19-02-0007.

20. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*.

21. See, for example, T. H. Breen, "Horses and Gentlemen: The Cultural Significance of Gambling Among the Gentry of Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 2 (April 1977): 239–57, https://blogs.dickinson.edu/hist-117pinsker/files/2011/01/Breen-article.pdf; and Linda L. Sturtz, "The Ladies and the Lottery: Elite Women's Gambling in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 104, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 165–84, https://www.proquest.com/docview/195917692.

22. Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1980), 41. See also Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*; and Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 155–63.

23. Christopher Gadsden, "To the Planters, Mechanics, and Freeholders of the Province of South Carolina, No Ways Concerned in the Importation of British Manufacturers," in *The Writings of Christopher Gadsden*, ed. Richard Walsh (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1966), 83.

24. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 327.

25. Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 53–54.

26. Quoted in Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 135.

27. Quoted in Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 159.

28. Gouverneur Morris to John Penn, May 20, 1774, in Jared Sparks, *The Life of Gouverneur Morris, with Selections from Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers* (Boston, MA: Gray and Bowen, 1832), 1:24.

29. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 137–39.

30. On the democratic effects of broad landownership in the American colonies, see the famous account in Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. and trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 27–55.

31. On general differences among the different sections of the North American colonies, see Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*.

32. Franklin, "Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, etc.," 368.

33. David Ramsay, "Oration on the Advantages of American Independence" (speech, Charleston, SC, July 4, 1778), https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N28767.0001.001.

34. These figures are based on assessments later in the century, when economic inequality in the United States had started to creep back up. See Lee Soltow, *Distribution of Wealth and Income in the United States in 1798* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989), 126.

35. Dennis P. Ryan, "Landholding, Opportunity, and Mobility in Revolutionary New Jersey," *William and Mary Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (October 1979): 571–92, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1925184.

36. Contemporary scholarship confirms this impression. See, for example, Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 298, 340–41; and Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 72–73, 91–92, 137.

37. The French American author and farmer Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecœur pointed to the legal rules around property to explain why "the rich and poor are not so far removed from each other as they are in Europe." Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecœur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Albert Stone (New York: Penguin, 1981), 67.

38. Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Unequal Gains: American Growth and Inequality Since 1700* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); and Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "American Incomes Before and After the Revolution," *Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 3 (September 2013): 725–65, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-economic-history/article/abs/american-incomes-before-and-after-the-revolution/F945C1180EE9D07910EEC886327CF471.

39. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*; and Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation to Be*.

40. Benjamin Franklin, "On the Internal State of America," Franklin Papers, https://franklinpapers.org/framedVolumes.jsp?vol=43&page=781.

41. John Adams, letter to Abigail Adams, April 12, 1778, *The Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1973), 3:10; John Adams, April 6, 1778, diary entry, in *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, ed. Charles Francis Adams (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1856), 3:121; John Adams, December 30, 1779, diary entry, in Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*, 3:244; and Benjamin Franklin to Joshua Babcock, January 13, 1772, in Lemay, *Benjamin Franklin: Writings*, 873–74.

42. Franklin, "Information to Those Who Would Remove to America," in Lemay, *Benjamin Franklin: Writings*, 975.

43. James Harrington, *The Commonwealth of Oceania*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 57.

44. On the populist strain of republicanism, especially as articulated by Niccolò Machiavelli, see John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and John P. McCormick, *Reading Machiavelli: Scandalous Books, Suspect Engagements, and the Virtue of Populist Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018).

45. See, for example, Clement Fatovic, *America's Founding and the Struggle over Economic Inequality* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015), 57–84. For a perspective that sees the Constitution in more egalitarian terms, see Ganesh Sitaraman, *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution: Why Economic Inequality Threatens Our Republic* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 59–104.

46. Benjamin Trumbull, *A Discourse, Delivered at the Anniversary Meeting of the Freemen of the Town of New Haven, April 12, 1773* (New Haven, CT: 1773), 30.

47. On the republican "axioms" that guided revolutionaries on this score, see James L. Huston, "The American Revolutionaries, the Political Economy of Aristocracy, and the American Concept of the Distribution of Wealth, 1765–1900," *American Historical Review* 98, no. 4 (October 1993): 1079–105, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2166599.

48. Colin Bonwick, "The American Revolution as a Social Movement Revisited," *Journal of American Studies* 20, no. 3 (December 1986): 355–73, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-american-studies/article/abs/american-revolution-as-a-social-movement-revisited/FBBA6FCA7E3783B947D191703487D9F8.

49. Alexander Hamilton to John Jay, March 14, 1779, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 2:17–19.

50. Judith Sargent Murray, "On the Equality of the Sexes," *Massachusetts Magazine* 2 (March 1790): 132–35, https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/murray/equality/equality.html. Though the essay was not published until after the Revolution, it was drafted in 1779.

51. Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, 228–55.

52. Even conservatives such as Gouverneur Morris approved the notion that "taxes should be raised from individuals in proportion to their wealth." Morris, "An American: Letters on Public Finance for the *Pennsylvania Packet*," February 29, 1780, in *"To Secure the Blessings of Liberty": Selected Writings of Gouverneur Morris*, ed. J. Jackson Barlow (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2012), 122.

53. Many Loyalists explicitly equated republicanism with a demand for agrarian laws and other redistributive policies designed to empower the lower orders. For example, see selections from James Chalmers's *Plain Truth* and an untitled document by William Smith Jr. in Ruma Chopra, ed., *Choosing Sides: Loyalists in Revolutionary America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 87–89, 217–22.

54. Thomas N. Ingersoll, *The Loyalist Problem in Revolutionary New England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 215–73. See also Richard D. Brown,

"The Confiscation and Disposition of Loyalists' Estates in Suffolk County, Massachusetts," *William and Mary Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 1964): 534–50, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1923305.

55. Ingersoll, *The Loyalist Problem in Revolutionary New England*, 263.

56. Edward Countryman, "The Uses of Capital in Revolutionary America: The Case of New York Loyalist Merchants," *William and Mary Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (January 1992): 11, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2947333.

57. Marcus Gallo, "Property Rights, Citizenship, Corruption, and Inequality: Confiscating Loyalist Estates During the American Revolution," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 86, no. 4 (Autumn 2019): 474–510, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/pennhistory.86.4.0474.

58. John R. Maass, "'The Cure for All Our Political Calamities': Archibald Maclaine and the Politics of Moderation in Revolutionary North Carolina," *North Carolina Historical Review* 85, no. 3 (July 2008): 251–81, https://journals.scholarsportal.info/details/00292494/v85i0003/251_cfaopcomirnc.xml.

59. Robert G. Mitchell, "The Losses and Compensation of Georgia Loyalists," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (Summer 1984): 233–34, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40581224.

60. For more details, see Howard Pashman, "The People's Property Law: A Step Toward Building a New Legal Order in Revolutionary New York," *Law and History Review* 31, no. 3 (August 2013): 587–626, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/law-and-history-review/article/abs/peoples-property-law-a-step-toward-building-a-new-legal-order-in-revolutionary-new-york/2AF0DEB3413D98C14DFF3C3BD24436ED.

61. As a result, the distribution of property ownership before and after the confiscation program remained more or less the same. Robert S. Lambert, "The Confiscation of Loyalist Property in Georgia, 1782–1786," *William and Mary Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (January 1963): 89, 94, https://www.jstor.org/stable/1921356.

62. On the complicated theory and law of inheritance in the 18th-century British world and how the revolutionary generation transformed it, see Stanley N. Katz, "Republicanism and the Law of Inheritance in the American Revolutionary Era," *Michigan Law Review* 76, no. 1 (November 1977): 1–29, https://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3901&context=mlr.

63. John V. Orth, "After the Revolution: 'Reform' of the Law of Inheritance," *Law and History Review* 10, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 35–36, https://www.jstor.org/stable/743813. The near absence of primogeniture laws in New England was one reason John Adams thought an oligarchy was unlikely to form in that part of the country, stating "the tendency of the laws of inheritance [in New England] is perpetually to distribute and subdivide whatever portion of land acquires any great market value." John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of the United States of America*, in Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, 4:359–60.

64. Holly Brewer, "Entailing Aristocracy in Colonial Virginia: 'Ancient Feudal Restraints' and Revolutionary Reform," *William and Mary Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (April 1997): 307–46, https://www.academia.edu/40474992/Entailing_Aristocracy_in_Colonial_Virginia_Ancient_Feudal_Restraints_and_Revolutionary.

65. Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography*, in *The Works of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1904–05), 1:68. Jefferson's condemnation of the "unnatural" features of these laws echoed critiques in popular mid-century novels that extolled the virtues of more egalitarian family relations. See Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims*, 51–53.

66. Orth, "After the Revolution," 41–42. Promoting equality along one dimension sometimes undermined it along another: Equalizing the inheritance rights of children came at the expense of the dower rights of widows, who lost the third share to which they had formerly been entitled. See Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 146.

67. Thomas Jefferson, *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian Boyd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950), 2:139–40.

68. Quoted in Fatovic, *America's Founding and the Struggle over Economic Inequality*, 48.

69. For more details about Morris's tax plans, see Fatovic, *America's Founding and the Struggle over Economic Inequality*, 47–49.

70. Quoted in Fatovic, *America's Founding and the Struggle over Economic Inequality*, 120. Despite his reputation as an unapologetic plutocrat, an examination of Hamilton's tax proposals at both the state and national levels reveals a consistent effort to shift tax burdens to the wealthy and relieve, if not eliminate, burdens on the poor. See Fatovic, *America's Founding and the Struggle over Economic Inequality*, 119–24.

71. For an overview of the Constitution's egalitarian dimensions, see Sitaraman, *The Crisis of the Middle-Class Constitution*.