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"Puritan" John Adams and "Quaker" John Dickinson: A Reassessment

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On July 1, 1776, John Dickinson and John Adams gave speeches on whether to declare independence from Great Britain. Dickinson, who had led the resistance for over a decade, was opposed; Adams, in only his third year of active participation, was in favor. After Adams prevailed, both went on to have illustrious careers building the American nation. Dickinson, more than Adams, continued to be celebrated as an icon of American liberty. But for centuries, historians of the Revolution have unintentionally overlooked, actively neglected, or enthusiastically denigrated Dickinson due in large part to an uncritical acceptance of Adams's version of events leading to that debate. Beginning with George Bancroft's history in the 1840s through David McCullough's 2001 *John Adams* and beyond, Dickinson has been portrayed as an effeminate, disloyal foil to Adams's manly patriot.[1] A clear view of the historical record, however, shows that Dickinson, much more than Adams, made the Revolution—and indeed the founding—not only possible but successful.

The root of the profound differences between the two founders—usually overlooked by scholars—was their respective religious traditions. As a Massachusetts Congregationalist, Adams was a descendant of the Puritans who had settled there in 1630. By contrast, Dickinson's family was Quaker, and he himself was a "fellow traveler" with the Religious Society of Friends, as Quakers were formally known. These two religious traditions had conflicted in both old England and New England since Quakerism arose in the 1650s. Considering that the bulk of the political theory of the early modern era derived from theology of one stripe or

another, that two men whose thinking derived from these opposing faiths would clash with one another is unsurprising.

This chapter will reassess Adams's and Dickinson's respective roles in the founding. Beginning with brief biographies and a primer on their theological traditions, it will focus on particularly the clash between Adams and Dickinson in the year before independence was declared and on the religious foundations of the tensions between them.

Two Sorts of Revolutionaries

For all that Adams and Dickinson had in common, their respect for one another, if not their friendship, should have been assured. They were both intellectuals, both dedicated and successful lawyers with a strong sense of justice. They were principled, patriotic, and committed to securing rights and liberties for their country. They were both men of deep feeling and great energy. As two of the workhorses of Congress, they were eloquent and persuasive writers and orators on the American cause. Both came to believe fervently in republicanism—one form of it or another—as a structure of government and as an ideology.

But there the similarities ended. Dickinson and Adams were diametrically opposed in personality, political style, and the underlying theology of their positions. These differences resulted in contributions to the American cause that, while frequently in tension, were equally necessary for the success of the American Revolution.

Adams was born on October 30, 1735, to a farming family in Quincy, Massachusetts. As a boy, he disliked school and initially wanted to be a farmer like his father, with whom he was close. Although he lived with his mother until he married at age 29, and she lived until he was in his 60s, he wrote hardly a word about her.[2] The elder Adams intended his son to be a minister and sent him to Harvard for training. Unconvinced that religion was his path, Adams instead taught school until he realized he enjoyed neither the work nor the children. In 1756, he went into the law, effectively

learning it on his own without much help from his master and beginning practice in 1758. After a couple of years of struggle, his practice flourished.

Although he was not initially interested in Abigail Smith, the daughter of a prominent Congregationalist minister, they eventually married in 1764 and had eight children, three boys and five girls, two of whom died young. Abigail became his best friend and intellectual partner, frequently leading her husband to more extreme and aggressive political views.[3] Adams's first public service came in 1770, when he was elected to the Massachusetts legislature. He ceased practicing law in 1777, when he became a United States diplomat.

Adams was bright and curious with a sharp wit, but he was perennially restless and frequently unhappy, given to complaining to those around him. Like many young men of his age, he desired fame, which he chased even as he questioned his own worthiness and distrusted the ambition that drove him. He was insecure, thin-skinned, and inclined to be hotheaded and combative when he felt slighted, which was often. His emotional outbursts caused some to question his ability to do his work and even his emotional stability, a charge that serious scholars have dismissed. Nevertheless, he tended to be overly candid and impulsive. Though not actually an "idiosyncratic volcano," as Adams biographer R. B. Bernstein put it, Adams was frequently his own worst enemy, alienating those around him and creating adversaries where there had been none.[4]

Dickinson was born November 13, 1732, in Maryland. His parents were Quakers, and he was raised in the Quaker colony of Pennsylvania, specifically in the three lower Pennsylvania counties that are now Delaware.[5] He was close with both of his parents, but especially his mother, who instilled in him a love of religion and literature. His father, a wealthy landowner and judge, provided him with the best legal training in the British Empire, including an apprenticeship with a former king's attorney in Philadelphia from 1750 through 1753 and training at London's Inns of Court from 1753 to 1757. Once a barrister, Dickinson returned to America and began practicing in Philadelphia in 1757, quickly rising to the top of his profession. He was elected to the legislature of Pennsylvania's Lower

Counties in 1759, and, after becoming speaker of that house, he was elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1762, where he served on and off through 1776.

In 1770, he married Mary "Polly" Norris, from the most prominent Quaker political family in the province. He had loved her for years, but she was a devout Quaker, and Dickinson's unwillingness to become a member of the Society of Friends caused her to break their engagement for a time. They had five children, of whom two girls survived. Polly discussed politics with her husband and joined him in philanthropic ventures. Dickinson continued practicing law until shortly before his death in 1808.

Cheerful, even-tempered, and gracious, Dickinson made friends easily among people of all ranks. While deeply introspective, he was not introverted. He interrogated himself vigorously toward self-improvement but possessed enough native confidence to excel in public speaking and practical politics. By temperament and training, Dickinson was a careful and methodical thinker. As much as he loved learning for its own sake, he also loved teaching others—children, apprentices, and jurors—which, if he forgot himself, could result in his coming across as a pedant. Likewise, whereas many saw Dickinson's commitment to his sense of virtue and principle as admirable, even his friends found it maddening when he stubbornly refused to compromise on matters contrary to his conscience. Uncharitable colleagues mistook his inflexibility for timidity or self-interest. Like Adams, Dickinson too thought he wanted fame—that is, until he actually got it.[6]

Adams's Puritan ancestors were a severe people, militant in their religion and intolerant of dissenters. They had not come to America for religious liberty, as lore has it. Rather, they came to create a Puritan dictatorship that would serve as a model society to the world—a "citty upon a hill," as Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor John Winthrop put it.[7] Their theology, the doctrine of predestination, held that God had chosen a select few for salvation and the rest would be condemned to hell. God covenanted, or contracted, with these elect men and women on the

understanding that if they followed his law, they would be saved. Although no one could know definitively whether he was saved or damned, there might be signs one way or another. Those showing signs of damnation—including anyone who was different in belief or behavior—must be removed or the entire community would be damned. Thus, dissenters, criminals, and misfits were banished or executed.[8]

Puritan political theory worked in the same way. God covenanted with his elect people and their king, who would all be saved if they upheld the covenant by obeying God's law. If the king disobeyed God, the people had the duty and the right to overthrow him and replace him with a godly king. The Puritans had put this theory of revolution into practice during the English Civil War when they executed Charles I in 1649. Royalists responded with their own theory, called the divine right of kings, which held that because the king was God's representative on earth, he could do no wrong. If his people felt oppressed, they had the right only to petition him and plead for relief. After the monarchy was restored in 1660, these two positions respectively solidified as Whig and Tory, radical and conservative, advocates for the people and advocates for the king. In the years preceding the 1688 Glorious Revolution, John Locke refuted divine right theory and explained the Puritan theory of revolution, now secularized, in his *Two Treatises of Government*.[9]

Americans, generally more radical than their counterparts in Britain, tended to be Whigs, although there were certainly Tories in the colonies as well. Thus, most Americans believed in the theory of revolution as the solution to an oppressive government. Like Tories, they began with humble petitioning. If that didn't work, they moved on to rioting. If still unsuccessful in securing the desired change, they advanced to the overthrow of the government. Those living in the New England colonies, as the direct descendants of Puritans, still lived the covenant theology in their daily lives through their personal and political relationships. It is no surprise, then, that the people of New England were the first to riot and the first to see revolution as the only solution to their troubles with the British government.

But Whiggism and Toryism were not the only two political theories in early modern Britain. During the 1660s in England, another idea of resistance that eventually replaced the theory of divine right monarchy and of revolution arose. It was Quaker constitutionalism. The Religious Society of Friends, called Quakers by their enemies for their trembling during worship, were dissenters who drew their theology from a unique amalgam of English Puritanism and continental Anabaptism. They were theologically exacting like the Puritans, but they were pacifists like the Anabaptists. They were also the most persecuted religious dissenters in England by the government and ordinary subjects alike. Their core theological belief, called the doctrine of the Light Within, was that all individuals could experience God's light within their consciences. In other words, all people—male or female, white or black, rich or poor, Christian or infidel—could be saved, and all were equal to the degree they experienced God's light. All people were also allowed to preach.

These unorthodox beliefs, combined with their aggressive proselytizing, caused Quakers to be beaten, tortured, imprisoned, and otherwise brutalized. But importantly, because God decreed that man must not destroy his creations, which meant other men but also the divinely ordained civil unity (or constitution), Quakers were not allowed to resist with violence. When the government violated God's law by oppressing the people, they too had a duty and right to resist, but only with peaceful means. Quakers thus pioneered the theory and practice of civil disobedience—that is, the public, nonviolent breaking of unjust laws with the intent to raise public awareness and create change from the bottom up. Early Quakers, men and women alike, stood on principle and died willingly as martyrs for the cause of religious liberty.[10]

Although Quakers were successful in helping to secure religious toleration in England and its realms, their nonviolent methods did not immediately catch on. At first, they were accused of sedition, despite the fact that Quaker methods were respectful of the established order and intended to preserve the unity of the polity—that is, the sanctity of the constitution. Then, when it became clear they were not seeking the overthrow of

the government, they were ridiculed. The attitude of many Englishmen toward Quakers' pacifism can be summarized by a passage from Locke's *Second Treatise*:

> He that shall oppose an Assault . . . without a Sword in his hand . . . will quickly be at an end of his Resistance, and will find such a defence serve only to draw on himself the worse usage. This is [a] ridiculous a way of resisting.[11]

Such "imaginary Resistance" would result in the dissenter's being "pounded and cuffed into a jelly."[12] This truism held for the self-defense of a people against their tyrannical government as much as it did for individual self-defense against a robber. Englishmen found nonviolence laughable. Yet the Quakers' methods allowed them to resist oppression actively much sooner than their Whig counterparts, at the first sign of danger.

Although Dickinson was not a Quaker and Adams was not a Puritan, they were nearly perfect exemplars of the interwoven theological and political theories that dominated in their respective colonies. With this context, we can better comprehend the actions of Dickinson and Adams in the Revolution.

Beginnings of Resistance

Before the First Continental Congress met in the fall of 1774, Adams played virtually no part in the resistance to Britain. It was rather his cousin Samuel who led Massachusetts's efforts. The single contribution John Adams made was to draft the instructions of his town, Braintree, to its representatives in the Massachusetts Assembly relative to the 1765 Stamp Act. The drafting committee removed his more strident passages.[13] Although he wrote publicly twice during this period, only a comedic newspaper article related directly to British legislation, and neither piece was published widely or known to be his until well after 1776.[14] Strikingly,

Bernstein observes that before the First Congress, Adams "did not yet grasp that the controversy with Britain was American, not just a matter for Massachusetts or for New England."[15]

Dickinson's position was entirely different. Since he had studied law in London in his early 20s, he had identified primarily as an American, rather than as a Briton or a Pennsylvanian, and prided himself on holding American values that separated him from other Britons in England.[16] Further, although he felt loyal to the king, he suspected executive power and the motives of ministers who would do anything "for the Smiles of their Prince."[17] During the earliest years of his law practice, his sense that the Crown was infringing on American merchants' right of free trade prompted him to write an essay on the topic. Keeping an eye on Parliament, he was ready when the Stamp Act passed, writing the Pennsylvania Assembly's resolves against it and then attending the Stamp Act Congress in New York, where he was the lead draftsman on the Petition to the King and the Declaration of Rights and Resolves. From the beginning of the contest, he understood it as being all of America—including at least the North American colonies, and possibly the West Indian islands and Canada—against Great Britain.

As the Stamp Act Congress met in fall 1765, the rioting that had begun in New England spread down the coast to New York and Philadelphia. Adams and Dickinson were alarmed by the riots, but only Dickinson acted. He noticed that everything written to that point against British measures was theoretical and addressed mostly to elite audiences. Because there was nothing of a practical nature addressed to ordinary Americans, he sought to provide guidance in a broadside essay he named for its intended audience: "Friends and Countrymen."

Short and clear, the broadside explained that the Stamp Act was dangerous because it would set a precedent for more taxation if obeyed. So he recommended resisting, but not by evasion or violence. Rather, he advised the Quaker method of civil disobedience, "to proceed in all Business as usual, without taking the least Notice of the Stamp Act." By this means, the American people would virtually repeal the act, which would

compel Parliament to repeal it actually. The broadside resonated with colonists from Pennsylvania's Lower Counties up to Connecticut, who eagerly accepted the advice. Dickinson wrote two other longer pamphlets against the Stamp Act, one in December 1765 on political economy and one in 1766 explaining his prescription for resistance to the Committee of Correspondence in Barbados.[18]

When the next attack on American rights came in the form of the Townshend Acts in 1767, most Americans hardly noticed. Those who had protested so violently against the Stamp Act were silent regarding these new affronts. In December, Dickinson therefore began publishing a series of 12 essays in colonial newspapers titled *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies*. He had several aims: first, to explain the offending legislation and why it was a violation of the colonists' rights; second, to rouse Americans to resist peacefully; and third, to encourage them to unite *as Americans*.

The Farmer, as Dickinson became known, struck a chord. Readers responded to these letters like nothing before, launching Dickinson to celebrity status around the Atlantic world. Even before all the letters had been published, the Massachusetts Assembly, led by Samuel Adams, was inspired on February 11, 1768, to answer the Farmer with a circular letter sent to all the colonies encouraging them to unite and join in a nonimportation agreement. The town of Boston thanked the Farmer in the newspapers for spurring them to action.[19] This was exactly what Dickinson had in mind. He encouraged the resistance during the summer with the publication of America's first patriotic song, known as "The Liberty Song." It contained America's first national motto: "By *uniting* we stand, by *dividing* we fall."[20] From these two publications, people around the Atlantic world, including Adams, and from as far away as Poland knew and idolized the Farmer. The resistance worked. Parliament began repealing the legislation in March 1770.

Most colonists, however, did not understand peaceful principles of resistance. When the governor of Massachusetts dissolved the Massachusetts Assembly after its members refused his order to rescind the circular letter, Bostonians responded with more mob violence. Having anticipated

further unrest, the British ministry had already ordered troops to be stationed in Boston. The same month that the Townshend Acts were repealed, a crowd of Bostonians instigated the so-called Boston Massacre by threatening a small group of British soldiers. At the trial of those soldiers, John Adams and Josiah Quincy, attorneys for the defendants, began by invoking the Farmer and quoting a passage from his letters about the dangers of violent resistance.[21]

As tensions mounted during the 1770s, no American wielded more power and influence than Dickinson. As historian Richard Ryerson put it, Dickinson was "an eloquent, widely respected resistance leader, a role that was uniquely his."[22] Radicals and leaders in other colonies—Alexander McDougall of New York, Samuel Adams of Boston, Richard Henry Lee of Virginia, his brother Arthur Lee in London, and the Rhode Island legislature—wrote to Dickinson seeking his legal services, soliciting his counsel, and urging him to take up his pen to guide them. He obliged strategically, when the situation warranted, and he wrote repeatedly to leaders in Boston. His message at each turn was to remain unified and resist firmly but peaceably.

With its government taken over by British officials and troops on the ground to support them, Massachusetts was certainly in a difficult position. But continued violence could only bring down the wrath of the ministry upon the colony more severely. And so it did. After the passage of the 1773 Tea Act, Dickinson wrote as "Rusticus," urging that Philadelphians be vigilant about their rights. But despite Dickinson's repeated and urgent pleas to the leaders in Boston for peace, Samuel Adams led a number of inhabitants in the Boston Tea Party in December, which, predictably, led to the passage of the Coercive Acts in early 1774. Parliament intended to make Boston an example. Knowing that this new punishment was a response to how Bostonians had "imprudently acted [in] our Past," Samuel Adams turned to Dickinson for advice.[23] Dickinson responded with another series of letters urging unity and peaceful resistance. They were reprinted in Boston with an editorial note announcing that they came from the pen of the Farmer.[24]

In 1774, Philadelphia was the site of tornadic activity with Dickinson at the center. "It was owing to his farmers letters, and his conduct," observed Philadelphia lawyer Joseph Reed, "that there was a present disposition to oppose the tyranny of Parliament."[25] With the Quaker Assembly refusing to sanction resistance, Dickinson proposed a system of committees and conventions to bypass it.[26] Over the months before independence, this system served as a shadow government in Pennsylvania, taking on the tasks the assembly refused to perform. Dickinson was a leading member of every major committee through 1775. His role during this time extended the approach he had pursued since the publication of the *Farmer's Letters*, only now more intensively: on the one hand, reining in the radical elements—in Pennsylvania and other colonies—to keep them from careening toward war and, on the other, encouraging the reluctant and conservative segments of Pennsylvania to join the resistance. It was a delicate balancing act that required masterful strategic thinking combined with force of personality and influence to realize it. By the middle of summer, it was finally established that there would be a colony-wide congress, but Dickinson's old rival Joseph Galloway, speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly, contrived to exclude him from the delegation.

Now John Adams joined the resistance as a member of Massachusetts's delegation to the First Continental Congress. When he arrived in Philadelphia, he, like most members, was eager to meet the celebrated Pennsylvania Farmer. Each time Adams interacted with Dickinson, he recorded the encounter enthusiastically in his diary.[27] Although Dickinson was not present when the Congress convened on September 5, his agenda dominated. Samuel Adams proclaimed him a "true Bostonian," and approved "his opinion that if Boston can safely remain on the defensive the Liberties of America which that Town have so nobly contended for will be secured."[28] Dickinson worked behind the scenes, writing documents and guiding the proceedings in absentia. The delegates were in agreement that they should codify their unity, seek reconciliation with Britain, and maintain their resistance using peaceful means. John Adams, while serving on committees and contributing to the debates, played a role much like

Dickinson's as he sought to restrain inhabitants of Massachusetts from resorting to violence against the British.[29]

Adams remained enamored of Dickinson until the Farmer was elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly and became a delegate to Congress in October. Then Adams watched in dismay as Dickinson's work supplanted his own. Realizing that he would not receive the recognition he thought he deserved as an author, Adams began to grumble about the proceedings, and his confessions to his diary about Dickinson cooled noticeably. Whereas before Dickinson was "very ingenious" with "an excellent Heart," now suddenly, he was "very modest, delicate, and timid."[30] Of the six documents the First Continental Congress produced, Dickinson was the primary draftsman of four: the Petition to the King, "To the Inhabitants of the Colonies," *A Letter to the Inhabitants of the Province of Quebec*, and The Bill of Rights [and] List of Grievances. There is, however, much confusion surrounding the last. Scholars have determined that both Dickinson and Adams produced drafts, but it's unclear which came first. If Dickinson was the main draftsman, Adams made contributions to the fourth resolve, which asserted that only the colonists could legislate for the colonies.[31]

Two related experiences with Quakers from this time vexed Adams for decades to come and shaped his opinion of Dickinson. One was observing Dickinson's relationship with the women in his life. During the First Continental Congress, Adams dined at Dickinson's home and met his wife, Polly, and mother, Mary, both of whom freely offered Dickinson their political opinions. Adams proclaimed himself "very fond of the Society of females," would occasionally offer enlightened views of women and their abilities, and was himself married to a highly intelligent, strong-willed, and politically savvy woman. But he also confessed that he had "a Terror of learned Ladies" and suggested they should remain in their proper place without advanced education or discussion of politics.[32]

Adams was horrified by how freely the Dickinson women spoke, along with Dickinson's willingness to accept their counsel on political matters. Despite Abigail's being at least as outspoken as Polly, Adams announced,

"If I had had such a mother and such a wife, I believe I should have shot myself."[33] Elaborating, he said, "If my Mother and my Wife had expressed such Sentiments to me, I was certain, that if they did not wholly unman me and make me an Apostate, they would make me the most miserable Man alive."[34] Dickinson, by contrast, had always been surrounded by strong Quaker women, whose religious tradition elevated women's roles in the household and the larger community.[35] He therefore believed girls should receive the same education as boys, paid special attention to women's issues in his law practice and as a legislator, and advised his daughters to maintain their independence by never giving over their property to a husband, as was common practice.[36]

Another incident set Adams against Quakers and, by extension, Dickinson. Having learned that the Baptists in Massachusetts were denied their religious liberty by being compelled by law to pay taxes to support the established Congregational Church, leading Philadelphia Quakers summoned the Massachusetts delegation to an "interview," where they took them to task. "Old Israel Pemberton"—Polly's cousin—"was quite rude, and his Rudeness was resented," Adams recounted.[37] This experience, combined with Adams's impression of Polly and Mary, informed Adams's future opinion and treatment of Quakers and Dickinson.

Between the end of the First Continental Congress in October 1774 and the beginning of the Second Continental Congress in May 1775, Dickinson and Adams worked for the American cause. Dickinson continued to serve in the Pennsylvania Assembly and on various committees in the Pennsylvania shadow government. Adams, likewise, was appointed to serve in the Massachusetts provincial congress. In early 1775, he began writing his first publication for the cause. Between January and April, Adams published 13 letters as Novanglus in response to a series of letters by Massachusettensis arguing in support of Britain. Although they did not circulate widely until well after the revolutionary era, nor was Adams's authorship known until then, the Novanglus essays offered sophisticated theorizing on republican government and were important for Adams personally as he formulated his political philosophy. With an inflammatory

tone, they were a wide-ranging defense of American actions, even though Adams ultimately argued for reconciliation with Britain and declared his loyalty to George III.[38]

War or Reconciliation?

The Battles of Lexington and Concord, on April 19, changed the equation significantly, but not entirely. Dickinson led efforts in Philadelphia to build a military force, raising the First Philadelphia Battalion of Associators, of which he was commissioned colonel. He subscribed to Quaker constitution theory to the extent that he believed the union with Britain should be preserved and reformed through peaceful means. But he was neither a Quaker nor a rigid pacifist. In other words, he believed God allowed defensive war, and he had always been a proponent of a robust militia.[39]

With the opening of the Second Continental Congress on May 10, Dickinson still controlled the body's agenda. At first, Adams deferred to him, but by midsummer, his sentiment changed, and he began working to undermine Dickinson and his plan for reconciliation. Given that scholars have relied so heavily on this period and Adams's account of it to characterize Dickinson, a careful reconstruction of the evidence is warranted.

Through the first session, which lasted until August 1, Dickinson dominated. In debates that took place between May 15 and 26, he stayed the course for reconciliation, willing the more "forward spirits," as Quakers might have called them, to check their separatist impulses. Although the records of the debates are scant, a few things can be known. On May 16, after John Rutledge asked whether America was aiming at independence, Adams responded in his "lengthy, and Argumentative" way that "a dependance on the Crown is what we own."[40] Dickinson then proposed a three-part plan consisting of steps for peace, war, and negotiations, explaining that measures for peace must go "pari pasu," that is, hand in hand, with measures for war.[41] The deliberations lasted several days.

On May 24, some members expressed great displeasure at Dickinson's insistence on slow, conciliatory steps, but Adams was not named among them.[42] On the contrary, on May 21 and 29, Adams actually thought well enough of Dickinson to write home that "the martial Spirit" in Pennsylvania was "astonishing" and "amazing" and that "the Farmer is a Col[one]l."[43] When Congress voted on Dickinson's plan on May 26, the preparations for war and the petition for peace passed unanimously, while the proposal for negotiations passed but not unanimously.[44]

In mid-June, as Dickinson worked out the elements of his plan, Adams still largely shared his understanding of how Congress should proceed. On June 10, he echoed Dickinson's language, saying that Congress should "proceed with Warlike Measures, and conciliatory Measures Pari Passu."[45] He likewise explained to Abigail on June 11 that

> America is a great, unwieldy Body. Its Progress must be slow. It is like a large Fleet sailing under Convoy. The fleetest Sailors must wait for the dullest and slowest. Like a Coach and six—the swiftest Horses must be slackened and the slowest quickened, that all may keep an even Pace.[46]

Samuel Adams was also greatly satisfied with Congress's resolutions, believing "matters are finally well decided."[47]

By the beginning of July, the two initial elements of Dickinson's plan were ready for debate. The first part was the so-called Olive Branch Petition. John Jay attempted a draft, but Dickinson produced the final version. It affirmed Americans' devotion to the king and humbly pleaded with him to rescue them from his rapacious and corrupt ministers. It mentioned neither rights nor negotiations, as Jay's version did. Today, many find this petition foolish and naive. But even as Dickinson hoped it would work, he knew it wouldn't. Rather, this was a highly strategic move by a skilled lawyer intended to give Americans legal cover in several ways. First, it would prove that they had done all they could to resolve the matter peacefully, casting them in the role of martyrs and winning the world—especially

friends in England—to their side. Second, it would give them critical time to prepare for war. Third, it would give justification—both to themselves and the world—for their resistance by arms.[48] The petition passed on July 5 with no member commenting on the debate, though Dickinson himself did report that it was "vigorously attacked," perhaps by Adams, though he doesn't specify.[49] Charles Thomson later said the petition "ought to have redounded to [Dickinson's] credit as a politician."[50]

Adams had voted in favor of the petition in May, and he signed it on July 5. On that day and July 6 in two detailed letters, one of which violated Congress's rule of secrecy, Adams complained about the "Strange Oscillation between . . . Preparations for War, and Negociations for Peace." Yet he also recognized that these measures were necessary. "We must have a Petition to the King, and a delicate Proposal of Negociation &c.," he explained. "This Negociation I dread like Death. But it must be proposed. We cant avoid it. Discord and total Disunion would be the certain Effect of a resolute Refusal to petition and negotiate." Moreover, Adams recognized that proceeding to negotiations could work to America's advantage. "We may possibly gain Time and Powder and Arms," he observed.[51] Adams also took the opportunity to complain about three "lukewarm" men in Philadelphia—Thomas Willing, William Smith, and Israel Pemberton—who, because of the unanimity on the current measures, were "obliged to lie low." Had his irritation extended to Dickinson, Adams surely would have mentioned him, but he did not.[52] Nor did he report any speech against the petition.

The second element of Dickinson's plan was the Declaration on the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms. It would ostensibly be directed to the newly mustered American troops, but its actual intended audience was Parliament. After Thomas Jefferson wrote an unsatisfactory, tepid first draft, Dickinson stepped in and revised it into a rousing, patriotic call to arms. It proclaimed America's eagerness for a just war of self-defense, assuring listeners that Americans were prepared with weapons, troops, foreign support, and God on their side. But it was all strategic bluster, intended to produce such "apprehensions" in the British that they would

reconsider engaging the colonists in a civil war.[53] So satisfied was Adams with it that he said, "It has Some Mercury in it, and is pretty frank, plain, and clear. If Lord North dont compliment . . . us, with a Bill of Attainder, in Exchange for it, I shall think it owing to Fear."[54] The Congress adopted it on July 6.

In mid-July, well after deliberations on reconciliation had concluded, Adams became increasingly discontent with the proceedings in Congress. His main bone of contention was how military officers were being appointed.[55] Unable to censor himself, he repeatedly violated congressional secrecy to complain to friends in Massachusetts. On July 23, he blamed his colleagues in general and the Massachusetts delegation in particular. "Many Things may be wrong," he said, "but no small Proportion of these are to be attributed to the Want of Concert, and Union among the Mass. Delegates."[56] The same day, speaking generally about Pennsylvania's sluggish resistance, he turned on Dickinson, although Dickinson was among those most responsible for Pennsylvania's mounting any resistance. After calling him an "overgrown Fortune," Adams described his military activities, which he had praised in May, as only "pretend[ing] to be very valiant."[57]

The next day, he wrote the now-notorious letter to the president of Massachusetts's provincial congress, James Warren, saying, "A certain great Fortune and piddling Genius, whose Fame has been trumpeted so loudly, has given a silly Cast to our whole Doings." He then listed several unrealistic goals he wanted the Congress to have accomplished before they petitioned and negotiated, including raising a navy and arresting every Loyalist on the continent. But these desires were no more realistic than his characterization of Dickinson. "Is all this extravagant?—Is it wild?—Is it not the soundest Policy?" he asked rhetorically.[58]

The reason for Congress's rule of secrecy became clear when the British intercepted Adams's letter to Warren and published the contents in *The Massachusetts Gazette* on August 17. Later that fall, Adams admitted to Continental Army General Charles Lee that he had written the letter "in a pet just after a warm squabble," that it was a "gross misrepresentation,"

and that he knew Dickinson to be "a Man of genius and integrity."[59] In the short term, the only damage Adams inflicted was on himself. So widely respected was Dickinson that the other members of Congress shunned Adams for weeks in solidarity with the Farmer.[60] But the damage that would be done to Dickinson's legacy when historians discovered the remark—and missed the retraction—was immeasurable.

Not only did Adams never apologize for the slight; he added injury to the insult with an entry in his diary 30 years later. In 1805, Adams's memory was shaky on many facts. Scholars have found that he frequently misremembered his own role in events favorably.[61] Yet many still accept Adams's account of what the editors of his papers call "the monumental dispute with John Dickinson over the second petition to the King and the whole question of reconciliation."[62] Yet there is no evidence of such a dispute.

In his diary, Adams painted a self-serving picture with a series of implausible claims. Portraying Dickinson as a pitiful figure, browbeaten by his wife and mother into pacifism, Adams claimed that Dickinson was "terrified" and "tremble[d] for his Cause" after Adams gave a compelling speech against the Olive Branch Petition. Then Adams claimed that, as he stepped out of the chamber, Dickinson chased after him and, "in as violent a passion as he was capable of feeling," accosted Adams in a "rough," "haughty," and "rude" manner, as a master would a schoolboy. According to Adams, Dickinson then threatened that he and others would break off from New England and "carry on the Opposition by ourselves in our own Way" if Adams and his faction would not agree to the petition. Adams then recounted how he remained cool and cheerful in the face of Dickinson's abuse, saying that he was "not to be threatened into an express Adoption or Approbation of Measures which my Judgment reprobates."[63]

There is much to contradict this account. First, Dickinson's wife and mother surely did urge pacifism, but it was a position Dickinson had been espousing for a decade and nothing they pressured him into. Second, the only record of Adams giving a speech is *before* Dickinson suggested the petition, and in it, Adams expressed his loyalty to the king. It is plausible

that at some point during that session, Adams and Dickinson engaged in a "squabble," with Dickinson as the aggressor. But if there had been such a squabble about the petition, presumably on July 5, how odd that no one mentioned it, not even Adams in his detailed letters about that day. Third, if Adams so disagreed with the petition, why did he sign it, especially after he allegedly claimed he could not be coerced into it? Assuming there was an encounter that precipitated the letter, the dynamic Adams describes between him and Dickinson strains credulity. Contemporaries usually described Adams as hotheaded and explosive and Dickinson as calm and considered. Finally, Adams's claim that Dickinson threatened to break away from New England is absurd, considering that Dickinson's priority was always American unity above all else.[64]

It appears that Adams spun this tale to justify his gross breach of decorum and ad hominem attacks on Dickinson in the July 24 letter. Adams concludes his 1805 account with a number of excuses for the "unfortunate Accident"—namely, the interception and publication of his letter by the British: First, he wrote it in a hurry so he could give a messenger boy some business, though the two letters he gave him don't seem rushed. Second, he had grown irritated by Dickinson's "unpoliteness" and "mortified with his Success in Congress." Finally, "the printers made it worse, than it was in the Original," a claim the editors of his papers disbelieve.[65] Despite the transparency of these protests and the misalignment of the account with the extant records, scholars' reliance on Adams's misrepresentations have, more than any other single cause, consigned Dickinson to obscurity for nearly two centuries.

During the fall of 1775, Dickinson and Adams, no longer on speaking terms, continued working for the American cause. Dickinson concentrated his efforts on the practical considerations of preparing for war, serving as a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly, the convention-committee system in Pennsylvania, and the Second Continental Congress. His reelection to the assembly by a wide margin signaled the overwhelming support in Pennsylvania for his agenda. Adams, meanwhile, continued in Congress, making a start on his major contribution to the cause. On October 18, the

New Hampshire provincial convention requested that Congress guide it on the matter of creating a stronger government. In the ensuing debates, Adams offered ideas for a republican form of government that built on his theories in *Letters of Novanglus*. These ideas caught the attention of his colleagues, and Richard Henry Lee of Virginia requested that Adams put his thoughts on paper.[66]

Aware that Adams's design was to set up republics as preparation for separation, Dickinson responded to this effort on November 7, after the assembly reappointed him as a delegate to Congress and charged him with writing new instructions for the Pennsylvania delegation. Knowing his constituents did not want separation—even radicals in Pennsylvania still proclaimed allegiance to the Crown—his instructions disallowed the delegates from voting for any measures that would result in independence and said they should reject any motion that would lead to a change in the Pennsylvania government.[67] As it would be impossible to attempt independence without Pennsylvania, with this brief document, Dickinson controlled not only Pennsylvania but the fate of all the colonies. Add to this that he de facto commanded the colony's militia, and it would seem that, in this moment, he deserved the title of most powerful man in America.[68]

Toward Independence

But in early 1776, events unfolded rapidly, and not in Dickinson's desired direction. In January, Dickinson and his allies attempted to implement the third part of his plan for reconciliation—namely, sending and receiving agents to or from Britain for negotiations. He reminded his colleagues that in anything they did, they were obliged to obtain "full & free Consent of the People plainly exprest." Now, he observed, "The Sense of America as exprest is for Reconciliation."[69] But this fact was becoming increasingly uncertain. Only a few days before this remark, Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* appeared, putting the matter of independence and republicanism

before the American people and compelling a full hearing. In February, Colonel Dickinson volunteered to lead his battalion to meet the British Army when it returned with reinforcements to occupy New York. In April, his work included facilitating negotiations with Native Americans to secure their allegiance.

Now that he was committed to revolution, arguably Adams's most important and tangible contribution to the American cause before independence was *Thoughts on Government*, published on April 22, 1776. Drawn from his work the previous year on *Letters of Novanglus* and the letter he wrote to Lee the previous fall, this brief pamphlet appeared after William Hooper and John Penn of North Carolina and Jonathan Dickinson Sargent of New Jersey also asked for Adams's advice on reforming their governments. Ryerson finds that *Thoughts on Government* was the most consequential document on republican structures. Yet he also finds that "its impact on state constitution making in 1776 cannot be determined with any certainty."[70] Besides the 1780 Massachusetts constitution, which Adams drafted, Ryerson speculates that his ideas were probably most influential in Virginia and North Carolina, where he had friends and allies.[71]

The Pennsylvania radicals were restive and increasingly resentful of the obstructionism of their assembly, led by Dickinson. They plotted to pack it with supporters at a by-election on May 1, but they failed. Instead, the election showed that Philadelphians were evenly divided on the independence question. The radicals then turned to Congress for help. Before it could respond, Philadelphians learned on May 6 that the British had hired Hessian mercenaries to fight them and on May 8 that the HMS *Roebuck* had attacked Pennsylvania's gunboats on the Delaware River.

Then, on May 10, Congress acted. Adams motioned that all colonies with royal governments or those otherwise unfriendly to independence be replaced with ones loyal to the cause.[72] Dickinson responded that the duly elected Pennsylvania Assembly could continue to act on behalf of its constituents, as it was not under the control of Pennsylvania's royalist governor.[73] Adams answered this assertion with a preamble to the motion, passed

on May 15, which said any government under the Crown that still required an oath or affirmation must be replaced.[74] On May 20, the Pennsylvania radicals held a meeting in which they essentially announced the end of the assembly and sent a protest to the colony's house affirming their agreement with the May 15 preamble. Unwilling to acquiesce to the coup of a legally elected body, Dickinson drafted and achieved passage of a resolution in the assembly on May 24 rendering oaths and affirmations unnecessary.[75]

By June, however, it was clear that Congress would declare independence. Dickinson's practical reasons for not wanting it, at least not at that moment, were these: Contrary to his bellicose language in the Declaration on Taking Up Arms, Americans were woefully unprepared. They had minimal armed forces, with little training or ability to manufacture weapons and ammunition. Neither had they committed foreign support. These deficits made them vulnerable to not only the British but also Indian attacks and foreign invasion. Among Americans themselves, there was lack of unity, with many not wanting independence. They had no national constitution or governmental structures to execute a war or protect Americans' rights. Dickinson was particularly anxious about the security of religious liberty in Pennsylvania and also for the protection of the rights of the most vulnerable in society—namely, dissenters, widows and orphans, the poor, and enslaved people. Most of these groups would have a better chance if Pennsylvania remained under the British constitution rather than an as yet undecided American one.

Uppermost in Dickinson's mind were his constituents and family—namely, Quakers and other religious dissenters who enjoyed unique protections under the 1701 Pennsylvania constitution. The clause in the constitution for freedom of conscience allowed Pennsylvanians to worship as they pleased and participate in government. If America stayed within the British Empire, their constitution would remain securely in place. If it separated, Quakers' enemies would take over. With Adams's motion, the Pennsylvania convention, which Dickinson had been instrumental in founding but which had since filled with men hostile to the Quakers, was poised to overthrow the Pennsylvania government and constitution.

Although there were other colonies that had not yet given their delegates permission to vote for independence, the only one that mattered was Pennsylvania, restrained by Dickinson's November 1775 instructions. Even as he disagreed profoundly with his colleagues in the Second Continental Congress, Dickinson understood that many were moving toward declaring independence. He believed that the decision by Congress must be unanimous to present a show of American unity to the world. Thus, on June 5, 1776, he wrote new instructions that sought to provide for both American unity and individual conscience. They permitted the Pennsylvania delegates to vote their consciences and, if they thought it proper, concur with other delegates for independence. Knowing the instructions would be approved, Lee motioned on June 7 in Congress that there be a declaration of independence. Dickinson's instructions were approved by the Pennsylvania Assembly the next day, and the Revolution was on.

The remainder of June was dense with work, with Dickinson and Adams at the center of it. Congress appointed three drafting committees to produce crucial documents—a declaration of independence, a model treaty on which to base treaties of commerce with foreign governments, and a constitution for the new United States of America. Adams was on the first two committees, and Dickinson was on the latter two. Adams was also appointed to the Board of War and Ordnance, on which over the next months he played a more active role than on either the declaration committee or the model treaty committee.[76]

On the Declaration, Adams likely made only two changes to Jefferson's draft, though historians are not certain of either.[77] On the model treaty, his role is less certain than once thought. Scholars have long believed that he drafted the entire document of 33 articles himself, writing the first 13 from scratch and drawing on reference books for the rest. But recently, an early draft of the first 10 articles and notes for three more were discovered in Dickinson's papers, in his hand. The first 13 articles Adams wrote appear to be a clean copy of these. This critical but little-known document provided the basis for American foreign policy until World War II.[78]

Dickinson worked alone on the draft of the Articles of Confederation, so his ideas are clear. They were among the most remarkable of the revolutionary era. He provided for a strong central government with states subordinate to it, giving the power to, among other things, call up militias without permission of the states. Most significantly, he wrote an extensive clause for religious liberty and toleration that would prevent the inhabitants of every state from losing any rights. In perhaps the most revolutionary—and Quakerly—move of the Revolution, he used gender-inclusive language to protect women's religious liberty and their freedom of public speech. Only two months earlier, Adams had laughed at Abigail when she implored him to "remember the Ladies" when declaring independence. Claiming facetiously that it was the women who actually held the power in society, he rejected the "Despotism of the Peticoat."[79] Dickinson also queried whether slavery should be outlawed in the states. None of his provisions survived in the version that was ratified in 1781. Some of them, however, were later adopted in the US Constitution.[80]

On July 1, the most famous debate of the Revolution occurred between Dickinson and Adams over declaring independence. Dickinson began, reiterating the same concerns he had expressed since the beginning of the contest with Britain about American unity and preparedness, internal and external threats, lack of foreign support, and other obvious disadvantages. He urged waiting to declare, arguing that after a couple of failed campaigns, the British would be ready to accede to all of their demands in the 1774 "Petition to the King."[81] Adams responded, presumably with a similar reiteration of his position. Witnesses to the speeches found them eloquent and honorable. By now, of course, the majority of Congress agreed with Adams, and a preliminary vote proved it. But despite Adams's victory and secure place as the "Atlas of Independence" in the minds of Americans, the specter of Dickinson's powerful resistance haunted him for decades.

What Dickinson did after his loss was one of the most patriotic acts of the Revolution. To give the appearance of unanimity, on July 2, he, along with fellow delegate Robert Morris, abstained from the vote on

independence. This decision enabled a slim majority of the Pennsylvania delegation to vote in favor of the measure. Following the Quaker practice of preserving unity, Dickinson was then obliged to support the cause. He thus led his battalion to the New Jersey front to fight the British in New York. The self-sacrifice of these acts is on a par with Washington's much-heralded resignation as commander in chief of the Continental Army at the end of the war. Each man relinquished considerable power and placed the American cause ahead of his own self-interest. It is clear that had Dickinson signed the Declaration of Independence, he would have secured untold power for himself in the new nation.

Ultimately, Adams had to admit that Dickinson had been correct in some key strategic assessments. "The delay of this Declaration to this Time, has many great advantages attending it," he confessed on July 3. Among other things, he said, "this will cement the Union, and avoid those Heats and perhaps Convulsions which might have been occasioned, by such a Declaration Six Months ago."[82] Although that is indeed what Dickinson had hoped, Adams was very mistaken in his assessment. In fact, Adams himself was partly responsible for one of the darkest episodes of the Revolution.

As the war was going poorly for the Americans in the summer of 1777, Paine blamed Quakers, suggesting that they were Tories and ought to be arrested. At the end of August, papers from a fictitious Quaker meeting surfaced, allegedly proving that New Jersey Quakers were conspiring against the American cause. These papers were placed before Adams, who was chair of a congressional committee to consider the matter.[83] In consequence of his report, Congress directed the Pennsylvania government to arrest and hold 20 leading Philadelphians, among them prominent Quakers such as Pemberton who were also Dickinson's kinsmen.

In September, these men were rounded up without warrant, charge, or trial and their homes searched. Although it was well-known that Quakers refused to swear oaths to anyone or anything, they were detained and sent to Virginia when they refused to swear an oath of allegiance to America. "We have been obliged to attempt to humble the Pride of some

Jesuits who call themselves Quakers," wrote Adams to Abigail, "but who love Money and Land better than Liberty or Religion. The Hypocrites are endeavouring to raise the Cry of Persecution, and to give this Matter a religious Turn, but they cant succeed. The World knows them and their Communications."[84]

The Quakers were in a hopeless situation. When they petitioned Congress, they were directed to the Pennsylvania government. When they petitioned the Pennsylvania government, they were directed to Congress. Their families and businesses suffered, and some died. They were finally released nine months later without explanation or restitution.[85] Later, two other Quakers were singled out and executed by the Pennsylvania government.[86] This targeting of dissenters was exactly what Dickinson had feared would happen without protections for rights secured at either the state or national level.

Two Lives of Service

Adams continued serving the American cause for over two decades more, but with mixed success. He chaired the Board of War for 13 months, from June 13 through October 11, 1776, and from February 4, 1777, until he left Congress on November 8, 1777.[87] Although it was a demanding position, the editors of his papers explain that, unfortunately, there is little extant information on Adams's specific work.[88] Then for a decade beginning in 1778, he served as a diplomat in France, Holland, and England, returning home only once, for four months in 1779, when he drafted the Massachusetts constitution. Congress selected Adams as a diplomatic envoy because of his vast knowledge of Europe and his powers of persuasion at home. But these strengths were offset by Adams's inability to regulate his temper and get along with his fellow diplomats, especially Benjamin Franklin, whose letter home describing Adams as "absolutely out of his Senses" damaged Adams's reputation significantly.[89] Ultimately, Bernstein finds that Adams's sole diplomatic success, aside from securing rights to

Newfoundland fisheries in the 1783 Treaty of Paris, came in 1785 when he negotiated a treaty with Prussia.[90]

While in London in 1787 and 1788, Adams published *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* to mixed reviews. Not only did this work not influence the creation of the US Constitution, as some have claimed; it convinced many that Adams was a monarchist. He returned permanently to the United States in 1788. From 1789 to 1796, he served as vice president to Washington. Another set of essays during that period, *Discourses on Davila* (1790–91), as well as his unforced error of proposing honorific titles for the president, provoked even more concerns that Adams was a proponent of aristocracy and monarchy. Ryerson explains that Adams's fascination with aristocracy was not because he favored it but because he feared it.[91] But his efforts to communicate his position clearly failed.

Adams was nevertheless viewed as the rightful successor to Washington, serving as president from 1797 to 1801. By most accounts, Adams's single term was not successful. By that time, his ideas of republicanism were significantly out of step with mainstream American thought. A better theorist than practitioner of politics, Adams was temperamentally ill-suited to the office and made unfortunate policy choices, most notably signing the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts into law. When he was not reelected, he imagined that none other than John and Polly Dickinson had fomented a conspiracy against him. Reasoning that because Dickinson and his allies could not stop Adams from achieving American independence, Adams believed that Dickinson, Polly, and their Quaker relatives had conducted a smear campaign in retaliation that persisted over the course of more than 20 years and led to Jefferson's election.[92]

Upon leaving office, Adams retired to his farm in Massachusetts and lived his remaining years without practicing law or politics but for two exceptions. From 1809 to 1812, he published a series of letters to the *Boston Patriot* newspaper, intended in part to do battle with old enemies and new—Franklin and Alexander Hamilton, both deceased, and Mercy Otis Warren, who painted him unfavorably in her 1805 *History of the Rise,*

Progress and Termination of the American Revolution. Although Adams didn't mention Dickinson by name, he too was a target: "The Quakers and Proprietary Gentry," said Adams, "were perpetually Slandering me, because they had conceived an opinion, derived probably from their Confidants in Congress [i.e., Dickinson], that I was the great Leader and Champion of Independence."[93]

Finally, Adams served as a delegate to the Massachusetts constitutional convention from November 1820 to January 1821. Having mellowed religiously in his old age, he was gradually coming closer to Dickinson's way of thinking on at least one thing. Now a Unitarian, Adams made only one motion in the convention, to broaden religious toleration under the established church, which failed.

Despite myths to the contrary, Dickinson did not retire after the Declaration of Independence passed. With the advent of the new revolutionary government in Pennsylvania, he was turned out of the assembly and Congress. Nevertheless, like Adams, he too published his ideas for state government and had a hand in constitution making. In July 1776, he published *An Essay of a Frame of Government for Pennsylvania*, clearly written at the same time as the Articles of Confederation.[94] It recommended a bicameral legislature and an executive council. A single executive, Dickinson believed, was too monarchical. He also recommended the same gender-inclusive provision for religious liberty he had written into the Articles of Confederation and a law prohibiting slavery. Pennsylvanians rejected Dickinson's ideas as they had Adams's, instead creating a constitution both men found monstrous, with a domineering unicameral legislature. Even Adams saw the merit of Dickinson's presence as a moderating force in Pennsylvania and wished that Dickinson and others "may be restored, at a fresh Election, because, altho mistaken in some Points, they are good Characters, and their great Wealth and numerous Connections, will contribute to strengthen America, and cement her Union."[95]

Adams got his wish, but it was short-lived. When Dickinson returned with his battalion to Philadelphia in September 1776, he was immediately reelected to the assembly. At the same time, members of the Maryland

constitutional convention requested his assistance in drafting their constitution and declaration of rights, inviting him to Annapolis to advise them. They believed he "could render very great and essential Service to our State."[96] Dickinson could not attend, but he did send his comments on their work.[97] His radical colleagues in Pennsylvania took the opposite view of Dickinson's, spurning his guidance. After they rejected his proposal that their faulty 1776 constitution be amended, he resigned his seat. Angered at Dickinson's departure, they fabricated charges of treason against him—including not signing the Declaration, as though that were a crime—and pursued him as an enemy of the state, seizing his house in Philadelphia, which amounted to a loss of £10,000.[98] These politically motivated acts were the only backlash during Dickinson's lifetime for his stance—or alleged stance—on the Declaration.

Dickinson's response was to double down on patriotism. The following spring and summer, he did two things unheard of for a gentleman of his stature. First, he freed conditionally, and then later unconditionally, his family's enslaved men, women, and children and became an abolitionist, one of the only leading founders to attempt to realize the ideals in the Declaration of Independence.[99] Second, he enlisted in the Delaware militia as a private and served during the summer of 1777, even as Patriots arrested his Quaker relatives. That autumn, the British burned his estate outside Philadelphia to the ground.

In 1779, he was a delegate to Congress, where he served on at least 24 committees. In 1781, after Loyalists plundered his Delaware estate, he was elected to the Delaware Assembly, then the Executive Council, then the presidency, where he reformed all the major institutions and transformed Delaware from a failing to a model state. After only one year of his three-year term, he was elected president of Pennsylvania, where he served the maximum of three terms. There, among other things, he suppressed a civil war between Pennsylvania and Connecticut residents and a mutiny of Continental soldiers fomented by members of Congress, including Hamilton, prevented a western region from seceding, settled the boundary with Virginia, and worked to establish a national bank. In

1786 and again in 1793, he attempted and failed to get a bill for the abolition of slavery passed in Delaware.

When the Annapolis Convention met to amend the Articles of Confederation in 1786, Dickinson was elected chairman, and his letter calling for a federal convention was read before Congress. Before he attended the 1787 convention, he published a brief pamphlet sketching ideas for reforming the Articles of Confederation. At the convention, despite illness, he made several significant contributions, including offering the basis for what is now known as the Connecticut Compromise (proportional representation in the House and equal in the Senate), along with the solar system metaphor to explain it.[100] He also advocated ending the slave trade and changing language in the fugitive slave clause that suggested slavery was legal. Although he wanted direct election of the executive by the people, he was responsible at least for the electors in the Electoral College being chosen by the people of each state rather than Congress.[101] After the convention, in 1788, he published a widely respected series of nine letters under the pseudonym Fabius that advocated ratification of the Constitution and fully embraced a democratic version of republicanism. From 1791 to 1792, he served as president of the Delaware constitutional convention, participating actively through both sessions. The following year, he served in the Delaware Assembly from January through June. Throughout this time, he continued to practice law, serve as a judge, and manage his vast tenant properties throughout the Delaware Valley.

When Dickinson retired from public service to Wilmington, Delaware, in 1793, he continued engaging in politics and philanthropy. During Washington's and Adams's Federalist administrations, he protested and worked to shape public opinion in various ways, including leading a citizens' group against the Jay Treaty and authoring several pamphlets on improving relations with France and one on the education of youth. He acted as a mentor to future Pennsylvania Senator George Logan, who was inspired by Dickinson's Farmer persona to become a major force behind the democratic agrarian movement.[102] After Adams passed the 1798 Sedition Act, Dickinson immediately challenged it by writing a critique of the

Adams administration.[103] During the Jefferson administration, Dickinson served as an informal adviser to the president and worked actively behind the scenes to write and pass legislation in Pennsylvania, Delaware, and the United States. He was in close contact with Senator Logan, US Attorney General Caesar A. Rodney, and former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Tench Francis, who all kept him apprised of doings in high politics. At various times, citizens in several states clamored for him to stand for election, and he refused all but once, in the fall of 1807, when he allowed his name to be put forward by the Democratic-Republicans as a candidate for Congress. He was not elected.

During the last two decades of his life, Dickinson was a leading philanthropist of the era as he advocated the causes dear to Quakers. With his lucrative law practice and tenant properties inherited from his father and father-in-law and purchased with his own money, he was one of the wealthiest men in America. But rather than live extravagantly, he dressed, dined, and spoke in the plain Quaker way and used his wealth to allow all members of American society to be contributing citizens. He had always donated his salaries to widows, orphans, and soldiers; aided the poor in general; and supported many boys through school. He also was guardian for the orphaned children of several friends, sometimes adopting them into his own family. Now, his and Polly's greatest causes were education, especially for poor black and white children of both genders; learning in general; religion without regard for denomination; and prison reform. Among the many institutions they helped found were Westtown School and the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, known today as the Pennsylvania Prison Society.[104]

Dickinson and Adams neither reconciled nor forgave one another for slights, real or imagined. For Dickinson, the animus stemmed from Adams's "piddling Genius" remark. For Adams, it originated from an imagined conspiracy against him, led by the Dickinsons. Their parting shots at one another are glimpses into their personalities. When Jefferson was elected president, Dickinson said to him, "I should like to see the son of *our* Enemy, John Adams, appointed Minister to the Court of

Petersburgh." His motive was altruistic. "This honorable Regard to a falling Family," he said, "will be soothing to them."[105] By contrast, Adams could not think kindly of Dickinson even after Dickinson's death in 1808. To Jefferson in 1813, with whom he was now reconciled, he described Dickinson as "primus inter pares," first among equals. This sounded like a compliment until he jabbed, "The leader of the Aristocratical flock."[106] Leveling the charge of aristocrat was the greatest insult in Adams's arsenal.

In the final analysis, although Adams and Dickinson were opponents, today we should not take sides. Both were essential to the founding. While Adams should be celebrated for championing independence in the final year before separation, Dickinson ought to be celebrated equally for preparing the way in the decade before and for his sacrifices to preserve the republic after. By encouraging Americans to think of themselves as one people distinct from Britain with an understanding of their rights, making vigorous preparations for war, writing key foundational documents, regulating the behavior of disparate factions, and single-handedly delaying the Declaration just long enough for America to be minimally prepared, Dickinson ensured the success of the Revolutionary War. As *The Philadelphia Inquirer* put it in 1899, Dickinson's work before separation "was as necessary to the Declaration of Independence as the subsequent labors of Washington upon the Battlefield."[107] Had Congress forged ahead with independence as some wanted in the summer of 1775, there is little doubt the Revolution would have failed.

Moreover, if Adams was correct in assuming that the Revolution would succeed, Dickinson was likewise correct that it did not go as smoothly as it could have and Americans' civil rights were violated in the process. Nor should Dickinson be ignored after independence, as he continued to play a leading role in building the nation to ensure the success of the entire revolutionary movement. His vision for the country as a democracy where rights for all people were protected is something to which we still aspire. Dickinson's actions at the moment of independence, far from indicating cowardice or indecision, present a lesson to the American people of the importance of principled dissent and a model of patriotic

behavior, of placing the welfare of the whole above individual ambitions and desires.

In sum, whereas the Puritan theory of revolution was essential to effect a revolution and establish a new constitution, the Quaker theories of unity, individual rights, and peaceful resistance are still essential if we want to keep the constitution we have.

Notes

1. George Bancroft, *History of the United States, from the Discovery of the American Continent*, 10 vols. (Little, Brown, 1842–74), esp. vol. 8; and David McCullough, *John Adams* (Simon & Schuster, 2001). The only previous discussion of Adams and Dickinson was by Bernhard Knollenberg, who wrote that Dickinson "ranks with Washington, Franklin, Jefferson, and Adams himself as one of the truly great men of the old Continental Congress." Bernhard Knollenberg, "John Dickinson vs. John Adams: 1774–1776," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 2 (1963): 144, https://www.jstor.org/stable/985444. For a fuller discussion of the historiography on Dickinson, see Jane E. Calvert, epilogue to *Penman of the Founding: A Biography of John Dickinson* (Oxford University Press, 2024).

2. What little he did say did not reflect well on her personality or intellect. He described her "cruel Reproaches" of him and her "confused, blundering Way of asking Questions." *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*., ed. L. H. Butterfield (Belknap Press, 1962), 1:64, 79.

3. Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams* (Free Press, 2009), 94.

4. R. B. Bernstein, *The Education of John Adams* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 2.

5. This date is according to the New Style calendar the British Empire adopted in 1753.

6. Calvert, *Penman of the Founding*.

7. John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, ser. 3, vol. 7 (n.p., 1838), 48, https://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html.

8. Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Belknap Press, 1956), 48–98, 141–52.

9. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: A Study in the Origins of Radical Politics* (Atheneum, 1976); and Quentin Skinner, "Part Three: Calvinism and the Theory of Revolution," in *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 2, *The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 1978), 189–358.

10. Jane E. Calvert, *Quaker Constitutionalism and the Political Thought of John Dickinson* (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

11. John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* [. . .] (London, 1690), bk. 2, chap. 19, § 235.

12. Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*. (Locke is citing the Roman poet Juvenal in offering this image.)

13. Richard Alan Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic: The One, the Few, and the Many* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2016), 50.

14. Although Adams published "A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law" in 1765, Ryerson concludes that it was not in response to the Stamp Act, nor was it widely known in America until 1783. Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic*, 48.

15. Bernstein, *The Education of John Adams*, 63.

16. John Dickinson to Mary Cadwalader Dickinson, February 19, 1755, in *The Complete Writings and Selected Correspondence of John Dickinson*, ed. Jane E. Calvert, vol. 1, *1751–1758* (University of Delaware Press, 2020), 77.

17. John Dickinson to Samuel Dickinson, June 6, 1756, in Calvert, *The Complete Writings and Selected Correspondence of John Dickinson*, 1:131.

18. John Dickinson, "Friends and Countrymen," in *The Complete Writings and Selected Correspondence of John Dickinson*, ed. Jane E. Calvert, vol. 3, *1764–1766* (University of Delaware Press, 2024), 373–78.

19. A. B. [Samuel Adams?], "Letter to Messieurs Edes and Gill," *The Boston Gazette*, March 14, 1768, in *The Complete Writings and Selected Correspondence of John Dickinson*, ed. Jane E. Calvert, vol. 4, *1767–1769* (University of Delaware Press, 2025), 148.

20. *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, "A Song. To the Tune of Heart of Oak, &c.," July 7, 1768.

21. "Adams' Minutes of Josiah Quincy's Opening for the Defense," in *The Legal Papers of John Adams*, ed. L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel (Belknap Press, 1965), 3:164–65.

22. Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765–1776* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 92.

23. Samuel Adams to John Dickinson, April 21, 1774, New York Public Library, Samuel Adams Papers, https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/0fd1acf0-10ab-0134-fcb9-00505686a51c.

24. John Dickinson, "To the Inhabitants of the British Colonies in America," *The Boston Gazette*, June 20, 1774.

25. "Copy of a Paper Drawn Up by Joseph Reed for W. Henry Drayton," Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Maria Dickinson Logan Collection.

26. Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun*, 47.

27. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 2:133–55.

28. Samuel Adams to Joseph Warren?, September 25, 1774, in *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789*, ed. Paul H. Smith (Library of Congress, 1976), 1:100.

29. Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic*, 123–24.

30. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 2:133, 157.

31. *A Decent Respect to the Opinions of Mankind: Congressional State Papers, 1774–1776*, ed. James H. Hutson (Library of Congress, 1975), 50–52; and Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic*, 124–25.

32. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 3:260; and John Adams to François Adriaan Van der Kemp, April 8, 1815, Founders Online, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-6451.

33. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past: From the Leaves of Old Journals* (n.p., 1888), 80.

34. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 3:316.

35. Barry Levy, *Quakers and the American Family: British Settlement in the Delaware Valley* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 78.

36. Calvert, *Penman of the Founding*.

37. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 2:152.

38. Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic*, 137–54.

39. See, for example, John Dickinson to Samuel Dickinson, June 6, 1756, in Calvert, *The Complete Writings and Selected Correspondence of John Dickinson*, 1:131.

40. *Silas Deane's Diary*, May 16, 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 1:352.

41. John Dickinson, notes, May 23–25, 1775, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection.

42. *Silas Deane's Diary*, May 24, 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 1:401–2.

43. John Adams to James Warren, May 21, 1775, in Smith, *Letters of Delegates to Congress*, 1:364. He repeated the same sentiments to Abigail. John Adams to Abigail Adams, May 29, 1775, in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Belknap Press, 1963), 1:207.

44. Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774–1789*, vol. 2, *1775: May 10–September 20* (Government Printing Office, 1905), 64–66.

45. John Adams to Moses Gill, June 10, 1775, in *Papers of John Adams*, ed. Robert J. Taylor (Belknap Press, 1979), 3:20–21.

46. John Adams to Abigail Adams, June 11, 1775, in Butterfield, *Adams Family Correspondence*, 1:216.

47. Samuel Adams to James Warren, June 10, 1775, in *Warren–Adams Letters: Being Chiefly a Correspondence Between John Adams, Samuel Adams, and John Warren* (Massachusetts Historical Society, 1917), 1:55.

48. John Dickinson to Arthur Lee, July 7, 1775, Harvard College, Houghton Library.

49. John Dickinson to David Barclay, August 7, 1775, Bernard Quaritch, Dickinson–Barclay Papers.

50. Charles Thomson, "Early Days of the Revolution in Philadelphia," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 1878, 423, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20084364.

51. John Adams to James Warren, July 6, 1775, in Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 3:61–62.

52. John Adams to Joseph Palmer, July 6, 1775, in Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 3:54.

53. Julian P. Boyd, "The Disputed Authorship of the Declaration on the Causes and Necessity of Taking Up Arms, 1775," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, January 1950, 51–73, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20088111.

54. John Adams to William Tudor, July 6, 1775, in Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 3:54.

55. See John Adams to James Warren, July 23, 1775, in Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 3:86–88.

56. John Adams to James Warren, July 23, 1775, in Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 3:87.

57. John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 23, 1775, in Butterfield, *Adams Family Correspondence*, 1:253.

58. John Adams to James Warren, July 24, 1775, in Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 3:89. He wrote a letter to Abigail saying essentially the same thing.

59. Charles Lee to John Dickinson, January 18, 1776, Library Company of Philadelphia, John Dickinson Papers.

60. Bernstein, *The Education of John Adams*, 78.

61. See *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 3:318.

62. Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 3:7. See, for example, Jack N. Rakove's account of this same period, based on Adams's writings, in which he says, "If his autobiographical accounts of congressional debates can be trusted." Jack N. Rakove, "The Decision for American Independence: A Reconstruction," in *Perspectives in American History*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Harvard University Press, 1976), 10:244.

63. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 3:318.

64. Calvert, *The Complete Writings and Selected Correspondence of John Dickinson*, vol. 4.

65. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 3:317–19, 321.

66. Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic*, 166.

67. For the radicals' expression of fealty to the royal family, see *Votes and Proceedings of the House of Representatives of the Province of Pennsylvania* (n.p., 1777), 538. For the instructions, see page 647. The draft of the instructions in Dickinson's hand is in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's Simon Gratz Autograph Collection.

68. John Dickinson, "To My Opponents," *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 24, 1782.

69. John Dickinson, "2 Points Recommended & Enjoined by Our Constituents," January 1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection.

70. Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic*, 179.

71. Ryerson, *John Adams's Republic*, 180.

72. Dickinson was not opposed to Adams's motion but approved of it, believing that it might hasten reconciliation. He hoped Britain would realize that the longer those governments existed, the harder it would be to offer terms agreeable to Americans. Thomas Rodney to Cæsar Rodney, May 29, 1776, Delaware Historical Society, Rodney Correspondence.

73. Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun*, 212.

74. Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 4, *1776: January 1–June 4* (Government Printing Office, 1906), 342, 357–58.

75. For a detailed account of this moment, see Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun*, 211–16.

76. Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 5, *1776: June 5–October 8* (Government Printing Office, 1906), 433.

77. See Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (Vintage Books, 1998), 110, 184.

78. For Dickinson's draft, see the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers. For the Adams draft with analysis, see Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 4:260–78.

79. Abigail Adams to John Adams, March 31, 1776, in Butterfield, *Adams Family Correspondence*, 1:370; and John Adams to Abigail Adams, April 14, 1776, in Butterfield, *Adams Family Correspondence*, 1:382.

80. Dickinson's full draft of the Articles of Confederation and notes are in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers.

81. John Dickinson, "Arguments Against the Independance of These Colonies," July 1, 1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Simon Gratz Autograph Collection.

82. John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 3, 1776, in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield, vol. 2, *June 1776–March 1778* (Belknap Press, 1963), 30.

83. Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 8, *1777: May 22–October 2* (Government Printing Office, 1907), 688–89.

84. John Adams to Abigail Adams, September 8, 1777, in Butterfield, *Adams Family Correspondence*, 2:337–38.

85. See also Jane E. Calvert, "Thomas Paine, Quakerism, and the Limits of Religious Liberty in the American Revolution," in *Selected Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Ian Shapiro and Jane E. Calvert (Yale University Press, 2014), 602–29.

86. Peter C. Messer, "'A Species of Treason & Not the Least Dangerous Kind': The Treason Trials of Abraham Carlisle and John Roberts," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123, no. 4 (1999): 303–32, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20093317.

87. Ford, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 5:434; *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 2:252; Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 7, *1777: January 1–May 21* (Government Printing Office, 1907), 85; and Worthington Chauncey Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 9, *1777: October 3–December 31* (Government Printing Office, 1907), 880.

88. Taylor, *Papers of John Adams*, 4:252–53.

89. Quoted in Bernstein, *The Education of John Adams*, 119–20.

90. Bernstein, *The Education of John Adams*, 118, 138.

91. Richard Alan Ryerson, "An Education in American Aristocracy, 1775–1783," in *John Adams's Republic*, 232–69.

92. *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 3:316.

93. "From John Adams to *Boston Patriot*, 1809," Founders Online, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5491.

94. When Adams was in France two years later, he requested that Abigail send him a copy. John Adams to Abigail Adams, June 16, 1778, *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L. H. Butterfield and Marc Friedlaender, vol. 3, *April 1778–September 1780* (Belknap Press, 1973), 44.

95. John Adams to Abigail Adams, July 10, 1776, in Butterfield, *Adams Family Correspondence*, 2:42.

96. Samuel Chase to John Dickinson, September 29, 1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers; and Thomas Stone to John Dickinson, September 1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers.

97. Samuel Chase to John Dickinson, October 12, 1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers; and Samuel Chase to John Dickinson, October 19, 1776, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers. Research has not yet been undertaken to determine Dickinson's influence.

98. John Dickinson to the Council of Safety, January 21, 1777, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers.

99. John Dickinson, manumission deed, May 12, 1777, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, R. R. Logan Collection of John Dickinson Papers. See Calvert, *Penman of the Founding*, 282–86, 303–4, 346–47.

100. Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (Yale University Press, 1911), 1:87, 153; and Jane E. Calvert, "An Expansive Conception of Rights: The Abolitionism of John Dickinson," in *When in the Course of Human Events: 1776 at Home, Abroad, and in American Memory*, ed. Will R. Jordan (Mercer University Press, 2018), 43n79.

101. John Dickinson to George Logan, January 16, 1802, Library Company of Philadelphia, John Dickinson Papers.

102. A Farmer [George Logan], *Letters Addressed to the Yeomanry of the United States* [. . .] (Philadelphia, 1791).

103. John Dickinson, *A Caution; Or, Reflections on the Present Contest Between France and Britain* (Philadelphia, 1798).

104. See Calvert, *Penman of the Founding*, esp. chaps. 13–15.

105. John Dickinson to Thomas Jefferson, June 27, 1801, Library of Congress, Thomas Jefferson Papers.

106. John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, November 12, 1813, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Retirement Series, ed. J. Jefferson Looney (Princeton University Press, 2009), 6:612.

107. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 25, 1899.