A NEW JERSEY ANTHOLOGY

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Declarations of Dependence:  
War and Inequality in Revolutionary New Jersey, 1776–1815  

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Shortly after British troops withdrew from the United States, New Jersey's "poet of the American Revolution," Philip Freneau, revised "The Rising Glory of America" to condemn Great Britain for employing foreign mercenaries, rebel slaves, and Indian warriors in a war against American women and children:

Vengeance must cut the threat,—and Britain, sure  
Will curse her fatal obstinacy for it!  
Bent on the ruin of this injured country,  
She will not listen to our humble prayers,  
Though offered with submission:  
Like vagabonds and objects of destruction,  
Like those who all mankind are sworn to hate,  
She casts us off from her protection,  
And will invite the nations round about,  
Russians and Germans, slaves and savages,  

To come and have a share in our perdition—  
O cruel race, O unrelenting Britain,  
Who bloody beasts will hire to cut our throats,  
Who war will wage with prattling innocence,  
And basely murder unoffending women!!

Embedded within this and other examples of early American rhetoric are clues toward the solution of a problem that has long fascinated American historians: How did white, male, republican writers and activists reconcile their revolutionary ideals with their customary disregard of the "equal rights" of blacks, women, and Indians? Why did the advocates of republican liberty fail, with apparent paradox, to confront the gulf between their revolutionary enthusiasm for the equality of men, and their acceptance of legal discrimination based on gender and race?

This essay will attempt to provide answers to these questions by examining the interplay of republican ideas with the reality of a revolutionary war. It will examine the manner in which the Patriots of New Jersey construed their changing world while they were constructing their government. It will argue that as these Patriots applied their republican "science of politics" to the social landscape about them, they interpreted the appalling violence of that world in ways that justified, for them, the persistence of American inequality. As they saw the forces of counterrevolution threaten their young state, they came to suspect the groups that they had always excluded from political equality of disaffection, corruption, and treason. When the republican ideals of propertied white men shined down on the deeply fissured terrain of New Jersey's fratricidal revolution, blacks, women, and Indians remained in the shadows.

The "Republican Synthesis"

Within the past twenty years a "republican synthesis" has come to dominate the study of early American political thought. As this synthesis has drawn the attention of scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, historians have paid particular attention to the republican conceptions of power, liberty, virtue, and corruption. The colonists, according to the republican school, drew upon an English tradition of political opposition that discovered in all politics a dramatic tension between the forces of power and liberty. Aggressive, thrusting power, they believed, naturally
attempted to subvert delicate, passive liberty. Power, assisted by its ingratiating clients, could be checked only by virtue. The republican vision was of a triangular struggle: Power and virtue, both masculine personifications, struggled over feminine liberty, with power seeking to corrupt her and virtue rushing to her defense. Republicans of the eighteenth century, attempting to define the proper balance between power and liberty, invested their hopes in the virtue of the citizenry. Without such virtue, as William Paterson believed, “An artful Prince ... abetted by a set of obsequious dependents, generally prepossesses the people in his favor, and does everything in his power to beguile them into a belief in their security and indeed fairly to lay them to sleep.”

Historians of the republican school have concentrated on the efforts of the founders to establish a polity and a political economy in which virtue would flourish and the republic prosper. In designing this polity, republicans held before their counymen the image of an ideal citizen; he was a freeholding citizen-soldier, possessed of an unwavering concern for the public good, shunning luxury and self-indulgence. This ideal became the measure against which revolutionary thinkers placed would-be participants in the political nation.

But ideological heritage did not alone influence the thinking of rebellious New Jerseyans. The ideology had its earthly context; each ideal type possessed its social or political counterpart. New Jersey’s republicans did not need to ruminate in order to summon the vision of a powerful Britain struggling with virtuous, freeholding rebels over the issue of American liberty; rather, the vision lay clearly before them, in the social, political, and military struggles of a revolutionary war. The state saw some of the bloodiest fighting of the war; the British crossed it three times, raided it repeatedly from their base in New York City, and supported the counterrevolutionary activities of a large Loyalist population. As the crisis of the revolution deepened—as the safety of the new state was increasingly threatened both from within and without—white, male, republican thinkers confronted what they believed to be moral shortcomings and antirepublican machinations among those groups traditionally excluded from the political nation: blacks, women, and Indians.

**Blacks**

During the revolutionary era many of New Jersey’s outspoken republicans declared their opposition to slavery. Gov. William Livingston, who freed his slaves in 1778, was typical in his recognition of the inconsistencies between republican liberty and Anglo-American slaveholding. Livingston, writing to the antislavery Quaker Samuel Allinson, called the institution “utterly inconsistent, both with the principles of Christianity & Humanity; & in Americans who have almost idolized liberty, peculiarly odious & disgraceful.” Others who opposed the institution exploited it for its propaganda value: in black slavery, they reasoned, was an illustration of Britain’s miserable design for the colonies. At the College of New Jersey’s 1780 commencement, for example, one student said of the slaves: “we have in them a picture of what cruel ravages oppression can make upon the human mind.—How much better should we have been, trampled on, insulted, and oppressed by foreigners?”

The expression of such sentiments did not, however, release New Jersey’s approximately eleven thousand slaves, about 8 percent of the population. New Jersey’s republican thinkers may have agreed that black slavery and republican liberty were incompatible, but they questioned the legality and the expediency of abolition. Primarily they felt compelled to respect the property rights of slaveholders, for property was the principal source of that liberty that they believed bred virtue. For the government to single out one type of property for confiscation, they reasoned, would be tantamount to that very arbitrary exercise of power against which they struggled.

But the sanctity of property was not their only concern. Racist thought, deeply embedded in New Jersey as well as in the South, also inhibited the abolition of slavery. Like republican thought, racist thought was divorced neither from New Jersey society nor from the events of the revolution. As New Jersey’s internal war dragged on, republicanism and racism became wedded in a manner that reinforced the traditional exclusion of blacks from political equality and may have prolonged their enslavement.

Shortly after the fighting broke out, and well before the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, Virginia’s Loyalist Governor John Murray, Earl of Dunmore, unwittingly scored a propaganda coup for his rebel enemies when he declared, “all indented servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they going to His Majesty’s Troops, as soon as may be, for a more speedily reducing the colony to a proper sense of their duty, to His Majesty’s crown and dignity.” Dunmore’s proclamation clearly articulated
a position that had already achieved some currency among black and white Americans; fugitive slaves, if armed, paid, and directed by British authorities, would not only furnish His Majesty’s troops with valuable information, but could disrupt the rebellious activities of slaveholding colonists.\textsuperscript{11}

Even free blacks came under Patriot suspicion. In 1776 the Shrewsbury Committee of Observation required local blacks to turn in their firearms “until the present troubles are settled.”\textsuperscript{12} After it was reported that blacks had actually participated in Loyalist raids in Virginia, Philip Freneau, once a critic of West Indian slavery, now cried for deliverance, “not only from British dependence,” but also “From the valiant Dunmore, with his crew of banditti, Who plundered Virginians at Williamsburg city.”\textsuperscript{13}

Freneau’s easy identification of blacks with “banditti” became more widespread in New Jersey following two raids by “negroes and refugees” into Monmouth County. The first occurred at Shrewsbury in July 1779. Shortly afterwards, the New-Jersey Journal ran a poetic satire of the King’s employment of escaped slaves:

\begin{quote}
A Proclamation of late he sends  
To thieves and rogues, who are his only friends  
those he invites; all others he attacks  
but deference pays to Ethiopian blacks.\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

There was another alarm the following June, when a “negro, who bears the title of Colonel, and commands a motley crew at Sandy-Hook,” led another Loyalist raid into Monmouth County, attacking Capt. Joshua Huddy’s home.\textsuperscript{15} Seen through republican eyes, the raids clearly demonstrated the dangerous potential of the British to manipulate slaves.

In the final stages of the war, as Freneau’s confidence in an American victory swelled and as the threat of black insurrection receded, the poet lampooned Dunmore, portraying the earl as wishing that “six years ago I had joined with your votes; Not aided the negroes in cutting your throats.”\textsuperscript{16}

For Freneau and for others, the British attempts to inspire slave insurrections confirmed certain aspects of revolutionary political thought. Because landowning was seen as a prerequisite to independence, and independence a prerequisite to virtue, the colonists would not accept the notion that the black allies of Britain fought as freedom fighters in their own interest. Rather, the Whigs saw the black soldiers as the hungry, outcast mercenaries of the British. They perceived the blacks as the deceived tools of monarchical oppression.

These attitudes had an immediate impact on New Jersey’s blacks, both slave and free. During the revolution, New Jersey’s Councils of Safety arrested blacks on the “Suspicion of intending to join the Enemy.”\textsuperscript{17} Denied equal protection before the law, the burden of proof of innocence rested upon white acquaintances, if any could be found. If none could be found, the blacks, presumed to be guilty of escaping to the British, were “sold to pay charges.”\textsuperscript{18} The New-Jersey Gazette, despite the antislavery opinions of its printer, Isaac Collins, carried advertisements for fugitive slaves that convey the same fear of black treachery: “Run away, a negro boy about 15 years of age, named JACK, has a down look, and is a very great liar. He was in Trenton last Saturday night, and left it on Sunday morning. His intention is to escape to the enemy.”\textsuperscript{19}

Fears generated by the war not only reinforced customary assumptions of black treachery, but also the republican distrust of propertyless persons. The widely held idea that power subverts fair liberty through the agency of desperate, servile dependents intertwined with the image of the treacherous black slave to quicken the republicans’ conviction that blacks were the logical abettors of British tyranny. Once they defined blacks as the potential tools of despotism, the advocates of American liberty could more comfortably countenance the persistence of black slavery.

A comparison of New Jersey’s patterns of both slaveholding and revolutionary violence with contrasting patterns in Rhode Island and New York lends support to the thesis that republican fears of British-inspired slave conspiracies delayed New Jersey’s abolition. A purely economic interpretation of this delay cannot explain why Rhode Island and New York, two other northern states with substantial slave populations at independence, were quicker than New Jersey to abolish slavery. While economic concerns were critical, also important was an intense fear of free blacks, a fear that clearly worked to the slaveholders’ advantage, but that was both expressed in republican terms and exaggerated by the peculiarities of New Jersey’s revolution.

Of all northern states, only in New Jersey did fierce partisan warfare occur in counties with large slave populations. Rhode Island, with the third largest northern slave-to-free-person ratio, saw virtually no fratricidal warfare. The lines between British-occupied Newport and the rest of the state were clearly drawn; the fear of British agency among the slaves in rebel-held regions was consequently less pronounced. Rhode Island passed an abo-
lition bill in 1784, twenty years before New Jersey. In New York, on the other hand, partisan warfare reached what may have been its northern apex but was concentrated in counties where slaveholding was uncommon: along the east bank of the Hudson River and on both banks of the Mohawk River. Where slaves were numerous, as in Queens, Kings, and Richmond counties, there was a comparative calm. Upstate New York's partisan warfare did aggravate the dread of counterrevolutionary conspiracies, which probably helped to delay New York's abolition until 1799. But in New Jersey slavery and civil war overlapped, and conspiratorial fears were far more powerful.

Partisan warfare in New Jersey was concentrated in the northeastern portions of the state. Bergen and Monmouth counties, where blacks comprised 20 and 12 percent of the populations, respectively, were racked by internal war, alarmed by real and imagined slave rebellions, and plagued with reports that slaves familiar with the disputed ground had crossed from British lines. Such rumors and events fed the republicans' worst fears about both the treachery of slaves and their susceptibility to manipulation by the enemy. Defenders of slavery later seized upon such fears, which may in some measure explain New Jersey's tardy abolition. Such fears may also shed light on the state's denial, at first customary and then legal, of civil equality to the state's free black men and women.

In what most scholars agree was an accident, and what many contemporaries saw as a sin of omission, the drafters of New Jersey's Constitution in 1776 extended the franchise to all free inhabitants worth £50. According to the letter of the law, free blacks should have been admitted to the polls. There is little evidence that blacks actually exercised this right before the early 1790s. In that and the following decade, however, as strife between Federalists and Republicans came to a head, the Federalists violated custom by soliciting the blacks' votes. The staunchly Republican Centinel of Freedom reported one such instance in 1800: "Federal corruption displayed itself some time since, in its blackest colours, at Elizabethtown, when they brought forward many free blacks . . . , and persuaded them to vote for the Federal ticket." Here again, though in a different context, republican rhetoric portrays blacks as the malleable tools of corruption, without the virtue required for citizenship in the republic. The press in New Jersey continued to exhibit concern about black voting until it was prohibited by law in 1807. That restriction, a bipartisan measure which passed the legislature by a mar-

gin of thirty-one to five, limited the franchise to free, white, adult men worth £50. Republicans refused blacks equality largely because their theory of politics and their predisposition to racist thought led them to interpret revolutionary events in a manner that denied to blacks the capacity for virtuous manhood.

Women

The ideology of the American Revolution and the experience of the war itself also enabled white, male radicals to deny women a place in the political system. Republican rhetoric, in fact, implicitly labelled the character of women. Whig political language was full of masculine and feminine imagery. The major symbols—power, liberty, virtue, and luxury—each readily evoked a specific gender. Aggressive, thrusting, and intensely masculine power, as we have seen, hotly pursued and plotted against feminine, delicate liberty. Virtue, which derives from the Latin word for man (vir), carried the connotations of masculine strength and virility. Selfless civic virtue not only defined fair liberty, it shunned effeminating luxury. "Let us guard," warned John Witherspoon, "against using our liberty as a cloak for licentiousness. . . . Let us endeavour to bring into, and keep in credit and reputation, everything that may serve to give vigour to an equal republican constitution . . . Let us check every disposition to luxury, effeminacy, and the pleasures of a dissipated life. Let us in public measures put honour upon modesty and self denial, which is the index of real merit." Although such rhetoric placed action almost entirely within the masculine sphere—with power and virtue struggling over passive liberty—effeminate luxury might seduce virtue into a deceptive comfort, thus paving the way for the triumph of oppression. As New Jersey's Patriots struggled with their enemies, these republican images resonated remarkably well with the rebels' perception of events.

In mid-November 1776 the British made their first major incursion into New Jersey, seizing Forts Washington and Lee before crossing the state from New York to the Delaware River in pursuit of the rebels. Though repulsed from Trenton by the Continentals in December, the British remained in control of portions of the state until July 1777. During this thrust into the already divided colony, Gov. William Livingston collected the first of many reports that rapes and other atrocities had been committed against women by British and Hessian troops. In February,
Livingston wrote to Caesar Rodney, “Among other Points that I have in charge from the Congress to procure Affidavits of, concerning the Conduct of the Enemy upon their Irruption into this State, is their ravishing of Women.” Livingston’s language suggests that these were eruptions within eruptions; that there were two types of rape occurring; the one metaphorical, the other, real.

Affidavits soon came in, though the government had the usual difficulties securing them. In March, Isaac Smith wrote to Livingston, “There are undoubtedly many more Instances of the like Kind happening to young Women but from a mistaken Modesty they conceal it. Widow Phillips’s abuse was attended with this very singular & very shocking aggravation that it was committed in the Presence of her aged Father & Mother.” The crowning incident occurred in June 1780, when Hannah Caldwell was shot dead while home nursing her child. Reports quickly circulated that the culprit was a Hessian mercenary. The Caldwell murder story survived well into the nineteenth century and gained a currency within New Jersey to rival that of the more nationally famous murder of Jane M’Crea. Shortly after the Caldwell incident, a College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) student deplored the “sufferings of virgin and matron innocence” at the hands of the British. “Let us remember,” declared a classmate, “in order to add vigour to our genius, and force to our descending swords, that we are avenging the cause of virgin innocence.” Twenty years later, the Centinel of Freedom invoked the same language, asking its readers to resist Federalist power: “Say ye patriots of ’76, have you so soon forgot when your aged matrons experienced the insults of a military host, when your virtuous daughters were marked out as the victims of the soldiers’ most insatiable lust . . . can it be possible that you are so blind to your own interests as to have them taken without a struggle?” Republican-minded citizens thus remembered the days when the pattern of events prophesied by their ideology vividly materialized in the heat of the struggle in New Jersey. Corruption British power violated not merely abstract liberty but the very women of New Jersey. As if following the ideological model, the reporting of such incidents portrayed opposing males as actively fighting over New Jersey’s defenseless daughters. To the republicans, moreover, women’s defenselessness meant dependence upon men; as dependents women could not exercise true civic virtue.

The republican ideology, however, did not define feminine characteristics as unwaveringly passive; an active, albeit corrupt, potential was also assigned to women. Whigs believed that, like effeminate luxury, women could be used by the crown as the seductive solvents of virtue. Revolutionary leaders like William Livingston strove both to defend the passive, virtuous, patriotic women of New Jersey, and to discover and punish the female agents of British power.

In September 1777, New Jersey’s legislature approved an “Act for constituting a Council of Safety,” which imposed a fine or imprisonment on any woman caught crossing enemy lines without the necessary authority. Second offenders faced the death sentence. Livingston, who approved of the act, believed women to be more subject than men to the temptations of luxury. “Of all those who have applied to me,” he wrote, “for recommendations to the commanding officer at Elizabeth Town to go to Staten Island or New York not above one in twenty appeared intitled to that indulgence; and many of them were as venomous Tories as any in the country. It is either from a vain curiosity (extremely predominant in women) cloaked with the pretence of securing their debts . . . or for the sake of buying tea & trinkets (for which they would as soon forfeit a second paradise, as Eve did the first, for the forbidden fruit) that they are perpetually prompted to those idle rambles.” Republicans believed that women lacked the necessary strength of physique and character to preserve their own virtue without the protection and guidance of men who were Patriots. Once seduced in the interest of the enemy they became especially dangerous. As luxury was the solvent of virtue, so could virtuous men, “from a mistaken complaisance[,]” fall prey to the temptress.

Livingston described his image of the Tory seductress as he rebuked the Continental Congress for releasing a woman charged with violating the law against crossing enemy lines. “I make not the least doubt,” he said, “but that you & every other Member of Congress who have interested themselves in behalf of Mrs. Yard entertain a favourable Opinion of her; and that they really believe ‘her late visit to New York was not only innocent but laudable.’ But I also believe that Adam was deceived by Eve; and that Delilah got the better of Sampson.” In a state in which an estimated one third of the adult population retained its allegiance to the crown, it should not be surprising that women were suspected of working actively for the British. What is fascinating is the way the Patriots perceived this activity, the manner in which they brought to the events they witnessed a set of symbols that stood
as guide posts for their interpretations. Power, liberty, virtue, and luxury—with all their masculine and feminine connotations, with all their potential for agency, action, and corruption—were ideological chords which strongly resonated to the dissonant strains of New Jersey's revolution.

The framers of the New Jersey Constitution of 1776 extended the franchise to women in the same way they granted the suffrage to blacks; that is, by accident. And as with blacks, though the constitution enfranchised all inhabitants worth £50, women were not admitted to the polls in significant numbers until the 1790s, when innovative thinking among Quakers and Federalists apparently led to the brief inclusion of women in New Jersey politics.

In a little understood move in 1790, the New Jersey Assembly revised the election law for several counties. Tradition has it that Joseph Cooper, a West Jersey Quaker, strongly advocated the enfranchisement of women, and that “to please him the committee reported a bill in which the franchise was confered upon voters referred to as ‘he or she.’” Whatever Joseph Cooper’s role was, it is remarkable that the bill passed with only three dissenting votes. When the provisions of the act were later extended to the rest of the state’s counties, New Jersey had legally and explicitly enfranchised women. The wording may, however, have been tongue-in-cheek, for women still did not vote until the Federalist innovations of 1796 and 1797. In the latter year, the Federalists, seeking electoral power, encouraged women to vote their ticket. This partisan move raised an uproar in the Republican press. Republican critics aired their anger in the Centinel of Freedom. One writer mixed sexual innuendo with anti-aristocratic language:

Oh, what parade those widows made! some marching cheek by jowl sir, In stage or chair, some beat the air, and press’d onto the Pole, sir; While men of rank who played this prank beat up the widows quarters; Their hands they laid on every maid and scarce spared wives or daughters! . . . Now one and all proclaim the fall of Tyrants!—Open wide your throats, And welcome in the peaceful scene of government in petticoats!!

Some Republicans chose to fight fire with fire, as did William Sanford Pennington, who boldly marched to the polls with a black woman in 1800. Ultimately, the Federalists recoiled from their innovations and accompanied the Republicans in voting for the explicit exclusion of blacks and women from the franchise in 1807. That bill actually extended the white, male franchise to all taxpayers, which essentially meant white manhood suffrage. In practice this aspect of the bill meant little, for white manhood suffrage had been the norm since the politicization of poor white men in the early years of the revolution. The two parties agreed, it seems, that while even those white men who were not truly “independent” could vote, women and blacks could not exercise the strength and independence of will necessary for virtuous participation in the polity. Republicans could argue that the propertyless whites had proved themselves in the struggles against Britain and aristocracy; republicans could not so perceive the contributions of blacks and women. Women could play the critical role of raising good Christian, republican children, and they could give comfort to their virtuous male protectors and defenders of liberty, but they could not act entirely of their own free will. These attitudes, latent in Whig political thought and reinforced by the republican interpretation of the war’s events, would face challenges in the nineteenth century as women appropriated the language of virtue and identified the man’s sphere as the source of corruption. Such changes would eventually signal the death of revolutionary republicanism.

Indians

By the time of the American Revolution, there were few Indians left in the state. Gov. William Franklin had reported in 1774 that some fifty or sixty of them lived on the Brotherton Indian Reservation in Burlington County. These, he noted, were a “quiet inoffensive People.” Although Franklin believed that all of the colony’s Indians lived on the reservation, others lived in the neighborhoods of Vincentown, Crosswicks, Cranbury, and scattered throughout South Jersey. New Jersey’s Indians, many of whom sought to conform to Anglo-American standards of behavior, posed no threat to the colony as it entered the revolution. Following the revolution, John Witherspoon, whose fellow Presbyterians had actively supported the Brotherton
reservation, wrote that their numbers had “dwinded away, so that there are few of them now left.”

Without a true Indian frontier, New Jersey suffered no serious Indian raids during the war. Yet Indians, like women and blacks, figured frequently in the writings and orations of New Jersey’s republicans. And much as the revolutionaries denied the civic virtue of women and blacks, they denied the capacity of the so-called savages to act virtuously in their own tribal or national interest. When Indians took up arms against white frontier people, republicans in New Jersey interpreted the struggles as yet another manifestation of British corruption.

In the summer of 1777, British General Sir John Burgoyne issued a proclamation threatening the Patriots with Indian raids. William Livingston, quick to see the propaganda value in Burgoyne’s broadside, published a gruesome parody of it in August. Livingston drew on the old, Puritan image of the Indians as Satan’s hellhounds, but in this version, Burgoyne replaces the devil:

I will let loose the dogs of Hell,
Ten thousand Indians, who shall yell,
And foam and tear, and grin and roar,
And drench their mawkesins in gore;
To these I’ll give full scope and play
From Ticondroge to Florida;
They’ll scalp your heads, and kick your shins,
And rip your guts, and flay your skins,
And of your ears be nimble croppers,
And make your thumbs, tobacco-stoppers...

Anglo-Americans and black slaves on the frontier would probably have found little to laugh about in Livingston’s parody. For them, the Indian war, with all its attendant horrors, was very real. From Ticonderoga to Florida, from the Gulf Plains to the Great Lakes, Creeks, Cherokees, Shawnees, Delawares, Iroquois, and a host of Northwestern nations took up arms in an attempt to arrest the expansion of the settlements. The Indians were more than willing to give essential supplies—arms and ammunition—from the British, but they were by no means under British control. Nor were they fighting in the name of any interest but that of their own people. Republicans, however, were quite as unwilling to concede that Indians had the capacity to fight in their own national interest as they had been to view the rebellious slaves as freedom fighters.

The most compelling symbol to come out of the West of Britain’s cruel manipulation of the Indians was the figure of “The Great Renegade,” personified by Simon Girty, a Pittsburgh Tory who fled west in 1778, joined the British Indian Department, and came to be charged by the Patriots with inciting the Indian wars. In one popular captivity narrative of the day, Col. William Crawford, a Patriot, while suffering a slow immolation at the hands of his Delaware Indian captors, “called out to Simon Girty and begged of him to shoot him,” but instead the Great Renegade jeered the dying man, “laughed heartily, and by all his gestures, seemed delighted at the horrid scene.”

But the Delaware Indians did not need a Simon Girty to encourage their hatred of white settlers in general, or of Crawford in particular. When they executed Crawford, they both retaliated against the Pennsylvania militia for its recent, cold-blooded massacre of ninety-six of their neutral, Christian kinsmen at Gnadenhutten and paid the colonel a personal debt, for he led the 1774 expedition that destroyed the Mingo Indians’ Salt Lick Town.

Following Crawford’s death, an exchange of letters concerning it appeared in the New-Jersey Gazette between Gen. George Washington and the British commander in New York, Sir Guy Carleton. Carleton pointed out that the Indians had been attacked by Crawford and were fighting in defense of their villages. Washington, however, declared that he could not “ascribe the inroads of the savages upon our northwestern frontiers to the causes from whence your Excellency supposes them to originate: neither can I allow they are committed without directors from Canada...” The frontier war, as viewed from distant and tumultuous New Jersey, reinforced, indeed encouraged, the notion that the Indians were the treacherous agents of British authority, hired for baubles and trinkets to extinguish the spirit of fair liberty.

This image of the Indian as the puppet of Britain had a long tenure. In 1809, as the War of 1812 drew near, Philip Freneau assigned to England the responsibility for Indian war:

Then arouse from your slumbers, ye men of the west,
Already the Indian his hatchet displays;
Ohio’s frontier, and Kentucky distrest;
The village, and cottage, are both in a blaze:
Then Indian and English
No longer distinguish,  
They bribe, and are bribed, for a warfare accurst;  
Of the two, we can hardly describe which is worst.46

The republican notion that the Indians were the dangerous dependents of British power might seem to us bizarre, for we can clearly see the Indian wars as primarily defensive actions. Even during the revolution settlers pushed westward; it was indeed in these years that Anglo-Americans gained secure footholds in Kentucky and Tennessee. What notions reinforced the idea of the Indians’ dependence on Britain, an idea that, significantly, permitted the Americans to ignore the Indians’ claims to territorial sovereignty and national self-determination? Foremost among these, from a republican perspective, was that of Indian savagery. The republicans placed the Indian savage, whether noble or ignoble, outside of civil society. Without civilization, they could hardly be expected to display civic virtue. Far from exhibiting the qualities of the sturdy yeoman and the citizen-soldier, Indian men—so the argument ran—did not even cultivate the soil. In the words of Elias Boudinot, “The objects which engage their attention, and indeed their whole souls, are war and hunting. Their haughty tempers will not condescend to labour—this they leave to their women.”47 Republicans repeatedly accused Indian men of sloth—as their wives raised the crops—and so they were also incapable of virtuous independence.

Although the radicals of the revolution universally decried what they saw as British manipulation of the Indians, they disagreed with one another about the capacity of the Indians for civilization. This was particularly true in the eighteenth century. Some, notably Henry Knox, Thomas Jefferson, and, in New Jersey, Elias Boudinot,48 strongly supported the efforts of missionaries and of government officials to bring “the arts” to the Indians. If the Indians were taught civilization, they might be taught virtue. But even proponents of the civilizing mission disagreed with one another. While Jefferson once claimed to hope for a mingling of Indians and whites, and indicated at another time that Indians differed from whites only in culture,49 Boudinot clearly thought that Indians were innately inferior. “The enormities of the Indians,” he wrote, “form no excuse for the enormities of white men. It has pleased heaven to give them but limited powers of mind, and feeble lights to guide their judgments; it becomes us who are blessed with higher intellects to think for them, and to set them an example of humanity.”50

Many other revolutionaries not only proclaimed the innate inferiority of the Indians, but also scorned any serious consideration of Indian education. According to the College of New Jersey President John Witherspoon, “The chief thing that a philosopher can learn from the Indians in New Jersey is, that perhaps the most complete experiment has been made here how they agree with cultivated life... On the whole it does not appear, that either by our young people going among them, or by their being brought among us, that it is possible to give them a relish of civilized life. There have been some educated at this college, as well as in New England; but seldom or never did they prove either good or useful.”51 Philip Frenaeu, portrayed by biographers as a friend of the Indian, also believed them to be uneducable. In his poem, “The Indian Student, or, Force of Nature,” an Indian at college asks why

... did I forsake  
My native wood for gloomy walls;  
The silver stream the limpid lake  
For musty books and college halls... [?]

Where Nature’s ancient forests grow,  
And mingled laurel never fades  
My heart is fixed,—and I must go  
To die among my native shades.52

Frenaeu, influenced by the noble savage theme then ascendant in Europe, meant the poem not so much to show the student’s ineptitude, as to point up the shortcomings of civilization when compared with a sylvan existence.53 But the theme of the Indians’ incapacity for “cultivated life” is there, and—as with many examples of the noble savage theme—the Indians’ alternative to civility is death. Other Frenaeu poems betray the same conviction, as is evident in such titles as “The Dying Indian” and “The Indian Burying Ground.” It may not be too much to say that for Frenaeu, the much-acclaimed admirer of the children of nature, the only good Indian was a dying one.

Frenaeu hoisted his true colors in 1815, when, in “The Suttler and the Soldier,” he said of the Indians

They scarce are men—mere flesh and blood—  
Mere ouran-outangs of the wood,
Forever on the scent of blood,
And deers at heart.

When men, like you, approach them nigh,
They make a yell, retreat, and fly:
On equal ground, they never try
The warrior's art.54

But it was Witherspoon's student and Freneau's friend Hugh Henry Brackenridge of the Pennsylvania frontier who carried the critique of the Indians to its ultimate conclusion, arguing in 1802 "That the nature of an Indian is fierce and cruel, and that the extirpation of them would be useful to the world, and honorable to those who can effect it."55

Republican ideology had not a little to do with these sentiments. That Indian men were not full men was demonstrated, when viewed through the republican prism, by their failure to cultivate the soil, their reliance on the labor of women, and their treacherous dependence on Britain in both the American Revolution and the War of 1812. It should come as no surprise that the Americans refused even to discuss the notion of Indian territorial sovereignty at the Treaty of Paris, which ended the revolutionary war.

Jefferson, in his Notes on the State of Virginia, summed up that aspect of eighteenth-century political thought which most concerns this paper. "Dependence," he wrote, "begs subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition."56 The events of the revolution, when seen through the lens of republican rhetoric, demonstrated the need for an independent, masculine citizenry. The expedient British alliance with fugitive slaves and western Indians implicated blacks and Indians as the dependent tools of overwhelming power. The suffering of New Jersey's women at the hands of British and Hessian troops reinforced the notion that women were weaker vessels who required virtuous guardians. For the revolutionaries of 1776, and their republican heirs of the early nineteenth century, the polity could only consist of white men: women had no role in government, blacks had little room in society, and for "savage" Indians there was, rather simply, no place at all.

Notes

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2. The "republican school" is itself quite divided. Bernard Bailyn, in Ideological Origins of the American Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), describes republican concepts clearly, though he has been criticized both for reducing colonial fears of conspiracy to paranoia, and for neglecting to moor republican ideology in a social context. Gordon S. Wood, in The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787 (New York, 1969), agrees with Bailyn that the colonists drew on the English opposition tradition, but pays more attention than does Bailyn to the influence of social tensions on politics. His work thoroughly describes the transition of republicanism from an ideology of opposition to one of constructive government; see 31–34 for the concepts outlined in the text. John M. Murrin, in "The Great Inversion, or Court versus Country: A Comparison of the Revolution Settlements in England (1688–1721), and America (1776–1816)," in J.G.A. Pocock, ed., Three British Revolutions, 1641, 1688, 1776 (Princeton, N.J., 1980), more firmly and surprisingly welds the republican school to the progressive school, suggesting not only that political disputes within the Republic were grounded in fairly clear social and sectional differences, but that the disputes followed an ideological pattern established in England during its Glorious Revolution settlement.


4. Jack P. Greene, All Men Are Created Equal: Some Reflections on the Character of the American Revolution (Oxford, 1976). Greene convincingly argues that republican political theory permitted the exclusion of blacks and women from political equality so long as the two groups were seen to lack the independence and civic competence necessary for virtue.


8. Zilversmit, “Liberty and Property,” 5–6, 222; see also Davis, Problem of Slavery, 257.


16. Pattee, Poems of Philip Freneau, 2:115; see also William Livingston’s satire of British mercenaries in Prince et al., Livingston Papers, 1:224–33.

17. Prince et al., Livingston Papers, 1:338, 2:22.

18. Trenton New-Jersey Gazette, November 21, 1781. See also Prince et al., Livingston Papers, 1:338.


21. See, for example, Zilversmit’s discussion of the proslavery argument that Quakers conspired to dominate the state through the manipulation of free blacks, in The First Emancipation, 186.


24. Wright, “Negro Suffrage,” 175–76. New Jersey thus barred its black citizens from the polls a mere three years after having finally adopted gradual abolition.


29. De Pauw, Fortunes of War, 17.


32. Prince et al., Livingston Papers, 2:104.

33. Ibid., 2:519.

34. Ibid., 2:471.

35. A bill to disfranchise blacks and women was turned down by the assembly two years later. But like the “he or she” clause, the bill was introduced before women and blacks voted in significant numbers. See Turner, “Women’s Suffrage,” 167–69. See also Wright, “Negro Suffrage,” 172–73; and Mary Beth Norton, Liberty’s Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750–1800 (Boston, 1980), 191–94.


37. Wright, “Negro Suffrage,” 175.


41. John Witherspoon, The Miscellaneous Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon (Philadelphia, 1803), 312. The most thorough student of the Brotherton Reservation, Edward M. Larrabee, writes nothing of its revolutionary war experience. There are no substantive references to Brotherton in the newspapers of the period; it seems to have been too small and remote to have drawn much attention. The inhabitants undoubtedly wanted it that way. See Edward M. Larrabee, “Recurrent Themes and Sequences in North American Indian-