and his like were "disaffected" incendiaries, young John Adams chose only to deny the implied passivity of the people. His premise was that "the people are capable of understanding, seeing and feeling the difference between true and false, right and wrong, virtue and vice"; it was to "the sense of this difference" that he and those like him had recurred. It was a mistake to view the people as so much flammable matter ready at any moment to be touched off and exploded. "I appeal to all experience, and to universal history, if it has ever been in the power of popular leaders, uninvested with other authority than what is conferred by the popular suffrage, to persuade a large people, for any length of time together, to think themselves wronged, injured, and oppressed, unless they really were, and saw and felt it to be so."[63]

For John Adams, reflection and the exchange of reasons were central to the age of founding and constitution making. Far from being an irrelevance, the capacity for thoughtful response was taken to be broadly distributed in society, albeit in different degrees and kinds. The counterpart of the thinking revolutionary in America was not some sodden peasantry. But by the same token, neither was that population a vast, continuous seminar in political theory. Newspapers were scarce, and books no less so; "Every class of men cannot be supposed to have been aided by extensive literary views." And yet a variety of social and political arrangements made it possible for Virginians, for example, "to catch the full spirit of the theories which at the fountainhead were known only to men of studious retirement."[64] In leaving their retirement and speaking as they did, the thinking revolutionaries sought to honor themselves and their public. On this basis rested their confident invitation to all—contemporaries and successors alike—to examine their principles and acts. That invitation still stands.

63. John Adams, "Novanglus," No. 1, Jan. 23, 1775, in Taylor *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John Adams*, II, 229. What began as an "apprehension," would then "arouse the attention, not only of the inquiring mind, but of the common people, and urge them to close thinking on the constitutional authority of parliament over the colonies." Adams to Jedidiah Morse, Dec. 2, 1815, in C. F. Adams, ed., *Works of John Adams*, X, 185.

64. Edmund Randolph, *History of Virginia*, ed. Arthur H. Shaffer (Charlottesville, Va., 1970), 193–194.

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Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution

GORDON S. WOOD

I

During our bicentennial celebrations of the Constitution we will gather many times to honor the makers of that Constitution, the Federalists of 1787–1788. We have certainly done so many times in the past. We have repeatedly pictured the founders, as we call them, as men of vision—bold, original, open-minded, enlightened men who deliberately created what William Gladstone once called "the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the hand and purpose of man."[1] We have described them as men who knew where the future lay and went for it. Even those like Charles Beard who have denigrated their motives have seen the founders as masters of events, realistic pragmatists who knew human nature when they saw it, farsighted, economically advanced, modern men in step with the movement of history.

In contrast, we have usually viewed the opponents of the Constitution, the Antifederalists, as very tame and timid, narrow-minded and parochial men of no imagination and little faith, caught up in the ideological rigidities of the past—inflexible, suspicious men unable to look ahead and see where the United States was going. The Antifederalists seem forever doomed to be losers, bypassed by history and eternally disgraced by their opposition to the greatest constitutional achievement in our nation's history.

But maybe we have got it all wrong. Maybe the Federalists were not men of the future after all. Maybe it was the Antifederalists who really saw best

1. Gladstone, quoted in Douglass Adair, "The Tenth Federalist Revisited," in Trevor Colbourn, ed., *Fame and the Founding Fathers* (New York, 1974), 81.

and farthest. Is it possible that all those original, bold, and farsighted Federalists had their eyes not on what was coming, but on what was passing? Perhaps the roles of the participants in the contest over the Constitution in 1787-1788 ought to be reversed. If either side in the conflict over the Constitution stood for modernity, perhaps it was the Antifederalists. They, and not the Federalists, may have been the real harbingers of the moral and political world we know—the liberal, democratic, commercially advanced world of individual pursuits of happiness.

If this is true—if indeed the founders did not stand for modernity—then it should not be surprising that they are now so lost to us, that they should have become, as we continually lament, "a galaxy of public leaders we have never been able remotely to duplicate since."[2] Instead of being the masters, were they really the victims of events? Is it possible that their Constitution failed, and failed miserably, in what they wanted it to do?

Naturally, we are reluctant to admit that the Constitution may have failed in what it set out to do, and consequently we have difficulty in fully understanding its origins. To be sure, we readily accept the necessity for a new central government in 1787. Unable to imagine the United States as ever existing without a strong national government, we regard the creation of the new structure in 1787 as inevitable. (For us it is the Articles of Confederation that cannot be taken seriously.) But the new central government seems inevitable to us only for reasons that fit our modern preconceptions. As long as people in the 1780s explain the movement for the Constitution in terms of the weaknesses of the Confederation, we can easily understand and accept their explanations. But when people in the 1780s explain the movement for the Constitution in terms other than the palpable weaknesses of the central government—in terms of a crisis in the society—we become puzzled and skeptical. A real crisis? It hardly seems believable. The 1780s were, after all, a time of great release and expansion: the population grew as never before, or since, and more Americans than ever before were off in pursuit of prosperity and happiness. "There is not upon the face of the earth a body of people more happy or rising into consequence with more rapid stride, than the Inhabitants of the United States of America," Charles Thomson told Jefferson in 1786. "Population is encreasing, new houses building, new lands clearing, new settlements forming, and new manufactures establishing with a rapidity beyond conception."[3] The general mood

2. Henry Steele Commager, *Jefferson, Nationalism, and the Enlightenment* (New York, 1975), xix.

3. Thomson to Jefferson, Apr. 6, 1786, in Julian P. Boyd *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, N.J., 1950-), IX, 380. On the demographic explosion of the 1780s, see J. Potter, "The Growth of Population in America, 1700-1860," in D. V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley, eds., *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography* (Chicago, 1965), 640.

was high, expectant, and far from bleak. No wonder then that historians of very different persuasions have doubted that there was anything really critical happening in the society.[4]

Yet, of course, we have all those statements by people in the 1780s warning that "our situation is critical and dangerous" and that "our vices" were plunging us into "national ruin." Benjamin Rush even thought that the American people were on the verge of "degenerating into savages or devouring each other like beasts of prey." But if we think that Rush is someone with a hyperactive imagination, here is the 1786 voice of the much more sober and restrained George Washington: "What astonishing changes a few years are capable of producing. . . . From the high ground we stood upon, from the plain path which invited our footsteps, to be so fallen! so lost! it is really mortifying."[5]

What are we to make of such despairing and excited statements—statements that can be multiplied over and over and that were often made not in the frenzy of public debate, but in the privacy of letters to friends? Many of those historians who, like Charles Beard, believe that such statements are a gross exaggeration can conclude only that the sense of crisis was "conjured up" by the Federalists, since "actually the country faced no such emergency." But such a conspiratorial interpretation of the Constitution is hardly satisfying and tells us nothing of what such statements of alarm and foreboding meant. Why did some men, members of the elite—those who saved their letters for us to read—think America was in a crisis?[6]

4. For examples of the various historians who have minimized the criticalness of the 1780s, see Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York, 1913), 48; E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), 337; Merrill Jensen, *The New Nation: A History of the United States during the Confederation, 1781-1789* (New York, 1950), 348-349; Bernard Bailyn, "The Central Themes of the American Revolution: An Interpretation," in Stephen G. Kurtz and James H. Hutson, eds., *Essays on the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1973), 21.

5. "Amicus Republicae," *Address to the Public . . .* (Exeter, N.H., 1786), in Charles S. Hyneman and Donald S. Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing during the Founding Era, 1760-1805* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1983), I, 644; Rush to David Ramsay, [Mar. or Apr. 1788], in L. H. Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Benjamin Rush* (Princeton, N.J., 1951), I, 454; Washington to John Jay, Aug. 1, 1786, May 18, 1786, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington . . .* (Washington, D.C., 1931-1944), XXVIII, 503, 431-432.

6. Jackson Turner Main, *The Antifederalists: Critics of the Constitution, 1781-1788* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961), 177-178.

Certainly it was not the defects of the Articles of Confederation that were causing this sense of crisis. These defects of the Confederation were remediable and were scarcely capable of eliciting horror and despair. To be sure, these defects did make possible the calling of the Philadelphia Convention to amend the Articles. By 1787 almost every political leader in the country, including most of the later Antifederalists, wanted something done to strengthen the Articles of Confederation. The Confederation had no power to pay its debts, no power to tax, and no power to regulate commerce, and it was daily being humiliated in its international relationships. Reform of the Articles in some way or other—particularly by granting the Congress a limited authority to tax and the power to regulate commerce—was in the air. This desire to do something about the central government was the Federalists' opportunity: it explains the willingness of people to accede to the meeting at Annapolis and the subsequent convening of delegates at Philadelphia. In fact, so acceptable and necessary seemed some sort of change in the Confederation that later Antifederalists were remarkably casual about the meeting at Philadelphia. William Findley of western Pennsylvania, for example, later claimed he was selected to go to the convention but declined when he learned that "the delegates would have no wages." Thus the seven delegates Pennsylvania sent to the convention were all residents of the city of Philadelphia (including even one, Gouverneur Morris, who was really a New Yorker), and no one at the time complained.[7]

Thus the defects of the Confederation were widely acknowledged, and many looked to the Philadelphia Convention for a remedy. But these defects do not account for the elite's expression of crisis, nor do they explain the ambitious nature of the nationalists' Virginia Plan that formed the working model for the convention's deliberations. The nationalists' aims and the Virginia Plan went way beyond what the weaknesses of the Articles demanded. Granting Congress the authority to raise revenue, to regulate trade, to pay off its debts, and to deal effectively in international affairs did not require the total scrapping of the Articles and the creation of an extraordinarily powerful and distant national government, the like of which was virtually inconceivable to Americans a decade earlier. The Virginia Plan was the remedy for more than the obvious impotence of the Confederation; it was a remedy—and an aristocratic remedy—for what were often referred to as the excesses of American democracy. It was these excesses of democracy that lay behind the elite's sense of crisis.

7. Findley to Gov. William Plumer of New Hampshire, "William Findley of Westmoreland, Pa.," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, V (1881), 444; Jerry Grundfest, *George Clymer: Philadelphia Revolutionary, 1739–1813* (New York, 1982), 293–294; John Bach McMaster and Frederick D. Stone, eds., *Pennsylvania and the Federal Constitution, 1787–1788* (Philadelphia, 1888), 115.

What excesses of democracy? What on earth could have been happening to provoke fear and horror? Not Shays's Rebellion that broke out in the winter of 1786–1787. That was an alarming clincher for many Federalists, especially in Massachusetts, but it was scarcely the cause of the Federalists' pervasive sense of crisis, which existed well before they learned of Shays's Rebellion.[8] No, it was not mobs and overt disorder that really frightened the founders. They knew about popular rioting, and had taken such occurrences more or less in stride for years. What bothered them, what they meant by the excesses of democracy, was something more insidious than mobs. It was something that we today accept as familiar, ordinary, and innocuous, but the founders did not—good old American popular politics. It was popular politics, especially as practiced in the state legislatures, that lay behind the founders' sense of crisis. The legislatures were unwilling to do "justice," and this, said Washington, is "the origin of the evils we now feel." The abuses of the state legislatures, said Madison, were "so frequent and so flagrant as to alarm the most stedfast friends of Republicanism," and these abuses, he told Jefferson in the fall of 1787, "contributed more to that uneasiness which produced the Convention, and prepared the public mind for a general reform, than those which accrued to our national character and interest from the inadequacy of the Confederation to its immediate objects."[9] Hard as it may be for us today to accept, the weaknesses of the Articles of Confederation were not the most important reasons for the making of the Constitution.

Throughout the whole period of crisis, Madison, the father of the Constitution if there ever was one, never had any doubt where the main source of the troubles lay. In his working paper drafted in the late winter of 1787 entitled "Vices of the Political System of the United States," Madison spent very little time on the impotence of the Confederation. What was really on his mind was the deficiencies of the state governments: he devoted more than half his paper to the "multiplicity," "mutability," and "injustice" of the laws passed by the states.[10] Particularly alarming and unjust in his eyes were the paper money acts, stay laws, and other forms of debtor-relief legislation that hurt creditors and violated individual property rights. And he knew personally what he was talking about. Although we usually think of Madison

8. On this point, see Robert A. Feer, "Shays's Rebellion and the Constitution: A Study in Causation," *New England Quarterly*, XLII (1969), 388–410.

9. Washington to Jay, May 18, 1786, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XVIII, 432; Madison to Jefferson, Oct. 24, 1787, in Boyd *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, XII, 276.

10. Robert A. Rutland, editorial note to "Vices of the Political System of the United States," in William T. Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of James Madison* (Chicago, Charlottesville, 1962–), IX, 346.

as a bookish scholar who got all his thoughts from his wide reading, he did not develop his ideas about the democratic excesses of the state governments by poring through the bundles of books that Jefferson was sending him from Europe. He learned about popular politics and legislative abuses firsthand—by being a member of the Virginia Assembly.

During the years 1784 through 1787 Madison attended four sessions of the Virginia legislature. They were perhaps the most frustrating and disillusioning years of his life, but also the most important years of his life, for his experience as a Virginia legislator in the 1780s was fundamental in shaping his thinking as a constitutional reformer.

Although Madison in these years had some notable legislative achievements, particularly with his shepherding into enactment Jefferson's famous bill for religious freedom, he was continually exasperated by what Jefferson years later (no doubt following Madison's own account) referred to as "the endless quibbles, chicaneries, perversions, vexations, and delays of lawyers and demi-lawyers" in the assembly. Really for the first time, Madison found out what democracy in America might mean. Not all the legislators were going to be like him or Jefferson; many of them did not even appear to be gentlemen. The Virginia legislators seemed so parochial, so illiberal, so small-minded, and most of them seemed to have only "a particular interest to serve." They had no regard for public honor or honesty. They too often made a travesty of the legislative process and were reluctant to do anything that might appear unpopular. They postponed taxes, subverted debts owed to the subjects of Great Britain, and passed, defeated, and repassed bills in the most haphazard ways. Madison had enlightened expectations for Virginia's port bill in 1784, but the other legislators got their self-serving hands on it and perverted it. It was the same with nearly all the legislative proposals he sought to introduce, especially those involving reform of the legal code and court system. "Important bills prepared at leisure by skilful hands," he complained, were vitiated by "crudeness and tedious discussion." What could he do with such clods? "It will little elevate your idea of our Senate," he wrote in weary disgust to Washington in 1786, to learn that the senators actually defeated a bill defining the privileges of foreign ambassadors in Virginia "on the principle . . . that an Alien ought not to be put on better ground than a Citizen."[11] This was carrying localism to absurdity.

It was not what republican lawmaking was supposed to be. Madison continually had to make concessions to the "prevailing sentiments," whether or not such sentiments promoted the good of the state or nation. He had to agree to bad laws for fear of getting worse ones, or give up good bills "rather than pay such a price" as opponents wanted. Today legislators are used to this sort of political horse-trading. But Madison simply was not yet ready for the logrolling and the pork-barreling that would eventually become the staples of American legislative politics. By 1786 he had "strong apprehensions" that his and Jefferson's hope for reforming the legal code "may never be systematically perfected." The legislature was simply too popular, and appealing to the people had none of the beneficial effects good republicans had expected. A bill having to do with court reform was, for example, "to be printed for consideration of the public"; but "instead of calling forth the sanction of the wise and virtuous," this action, Madison, feared, would only "be a signal to interested men to redouble their efforts to get into the Legislature." Democracy was no solution to the problem; democracy was the problem. Madison repeatedly found himself having to beat back the "itch for paper money" and other measures "of a popular cast." Too often Madison had to admit that the only hope he had was "of moderating the fury," not defeating it.[12]

Madison, like other enthusiastic Revolutionary idealists, emerged from his experience with democratic politics in the mid-1780s a very chastened republican. It was bad enough, he wrote in his "Vices of the Political System of the United States," that legislators were often interested men or dupes of the sophistry of "a favorite leader" (like Patrick Henry). Even more alarming for the fate of republican government, however, was the fact that such legislators were only reflecting the partial interests and parochial outlooks of their constituents. Too many of the American people could not see beyond their own pocketbooks or their own neighborhoods. "Individuals of extended views, and of national pride," said Madison (and he knew whom he meant), might be able to bring public proceedings to an enlightened cosmopolitan standard, but their example could never be followed by "the multitude." "Is it to be imagined that an ordinary citizen or even an assemblyman of R. Island in estimating the policy of paper money, ever considered or cared in what light the measure would be viewed in France or Holland; or even in Massts or Connect.? It was a sufficient temptation to both that it was for their interest."[13]

Madison's experience with the populist politics of the state legislatures

11. Jefferson quoted in Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (New York, 1971), 162; Drew R. McCoy, "The Virginia Port Bill of 1784," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, LXXXIII (1975), 294; Madison to Edmund Pendleton, Jan. 9, 1787, to Washington, Dec. 24, 1786, in Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Madison*, IX, 244, 225; A. G. Roeber, *Faithful Magistrates and Republican Lawyers: Creators of Virginia Legal Culture, 1680-1810* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981), 192-202.

12. McCoy, "Virginia Port Bill" *VMHB*, LXXXIII (1975) 292; Madison to Washington, Dec. 7, 1786, to Pendleton, Jan. 9, 1787, to Washington, Dec. 24, 1786, to Jefferson, Dec. 4, 1786, in Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Madison*, IX, 200, 244, 225, 191; Ketcham, *Madison*, 172.

13. "Vices," in Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Madison*, IX, 354, 355-356.

was especially important because of his extraordinary influence in the writing of the Federal Constitution. But his experience was not unusual; indeed, the Federalists could never have done what they did if Madison's experience was not widely shared. By the mid-1780s gentlemen up and down the continent were shaking their heads in disbelief and anger at the "private views and selfish principles" of the men they saw in the state assemblies, "men of narrow souls and no natural interest in the society." Selfish, ignorant, illiberal state legislators—"Characters too full of Local attachments and Views to permit sufficient attention to the general interest"—were bringing discredit upon popular government. They were promoting their own or their locality's particular interest, pandering "to the vulgar and sordid notions of the populace," and acting as judges in their own causes. "Private convenience, paper money, and ex post facto laws" were the "main springs" of these state lawmakers. Many of the delegates to the Philadelphia Convention were so ready to accept Madison's radical Virginia Plan and its proposed national authority to veto all state laws precisely because they shared his deep disgust with the localist and interest-ridden politics of the state legislatures. "The vile State governments are sources of pollution which will contaminate the American name for ages. . . . Smite them," Henry Knox urged Rufus King sitting in the Philadelphia Convention, "smite them, in the name of God and the people."[14]

We today can easily appreciate the concerns of the founders with the weaknesses of the Confederation government: these seem real and tangible to us, especially in light of what we know our national government has become. But we have more difficulty in appreciating the fears the founders expressed over the democratic politics of the state legislatures—the scrambling of different interest groups, the narrow self-promoting nature of much of the lawmaking, the incessant catering to popular demands. Surely, this behavior cannot be accurately described as the "wilderness of anarchy and vice." This "excess of democracy" is, after all, what popular politics is about, and it is not different from what Americans in time came to be very used to.[15]

14. Washington to Henry Lee, Apr. 5, 1786, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXVIII, 402; Grundfest, *Clymer*, 165, 164; E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984), 209; Knox quoted in William Winslow Crosskey and William Jeffrey, Jr., *Politics and the Constitution in the History of the United States* (Chicago, 1980), III, 420, 421.

15. Rush to Jeremy Belknap, May 6, 1788, in Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Rush*, I, 461; Elbridge Gerry in Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven, Conn., 1911, rev. ed., 1937), I, 48.

It may not have been different from what Americans came to be used to, and it may not even have been different from what some of the Revolutionary leaders had occasionally experienced in their colonial assemblies. But for most of the founding fathers, popular political behavior in the states during the 1780s was very different from what they expected from their republican Revolution, and for them that difference was what made the 1780s a genuine critical period.

II

Republicanism was not supposed to stimulate selfishness and private interests, but was to divert and control them. But in states up and down the continent various narrow factional interests, especially economic, were flourishing as never before, and, more alarming still, were demanding and getting protection and satisfaction from the democratically elected state legislatures. Although interest groups and factionalism had been common in the colonial legislatures, the interests and factions of post-Revolutionary politics were different: more numerous, less personal and family-oriented, and more democratically expressive of new, widespread economic elements in the society. The Revolution, it appeared, had unleashed acquisitive and commercial forces that no one had quite realized existed.

We are only beginning to appreciate the immense consequences that the Revolution and, especially, wartime mobilization had on American society. When all the articles and monographs are in, however, I think that we will find that the Revolutionary war, like the Civil War and the two world wars, radically transformed America's society and economy. The war effort was enormous. The war went on for eight years (the longest in American history until that of Vietnam); it eventually saw one hundred thousand or more men under arms, and it touched the whole of American society to a degree that no previous event ever had. The inexhaustible needs of the army—for everything from blankets and wagons to meat and rum—brought into being a host of new manufacturing and entrepreneurial interests and made market farmers out of husbandmen who before had scarcely ever traded out of their neighborhoods. To pay for all these new war goods the Revolutionary governments issued huge sums—four hundred million to five hundred million dollars—of paper money that made its way into the hands of many people who had hitherto dealt only in a personal and bookkeeping barter economy.[16] Under the stimulus of this wartime purchasing, speculative

16. The best study of wartime mobilization in a single state is Richard Buel, Jr., *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War* (Middletown,

farmers, inland traders, and profiteers of all sorts sprang up by the thousands to circulate these goods and paper money throughout the interior areas of America. By 1778, wrote Henry Laurens, "the demand for money" was no longer "confined to the capital towns and cities within a small circle of trading merchants, but spread over a surface of 1,600 miles in length, and 300 broad." The war and rapidly rising prices were creating a society in which, as one bitter commissary agent complained, "Every Man buys in order to sell again."[17] No event in the eighteenth century accelerated the capitalistic development of America more than did the Revolutionary war. It brought new producers and consumers into the market economy, it aroused latent acquisitive instincts everywhere, it stimulated inland trade as never before, and it prepared the way for the eventual momentous shift of the basis of American prosperity from external to internal commerce.

The paper money and the enormous amounts of debts that all these inland entrepreneurs, traders, shopkeepers, and market farmers thrived on were the consequences neither of poverty nor of anticommercial behavior. Debt, as we of all generations in American history ought to know, was already emerging as a symptom of expansion and enterprise. Farmers, traders, and others in these Revolutionary years borrowed money, just as they married earlier and had more children than ever before, because they thought the future was going to be even better than the present. Common people had been increasingly buying consumer goods since at least the middle of the eighteenth century, but the Revolutionary war now gave many more ordinary farmers, often for the first time in their lives, the financial ability to purchase luxury goods that previously had been the preserve of the gentry—everything from lace finery to china dishware. It was this prospect of raising their standard of living and increasing their "pleasures and diversions" that got farmers to work harder and produce "surpluses" during the war, and there is evidence that when the availability of these "luxury" goods diminished during the war the farmers' productivity and their "surpluses" diminished too.[18] For ages men had thought that industry and frugality among

Conn., 1980). For an insightful general assessment of the effects of mobilization, see Janet Ann Riesman, "The Origins of American Political Economy, 1690-1781" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1983), 302-338.

17. Laurens quoted in Albert S. Bolles, *The Financial History of the United States from 1774 to 1789: Embracing the Period of the American Revolution*, 4th ed. (New York, 1896), 61-62 (I owe this citation to Janet Riesman); Carp, *To Starve the Army*, 106.

18. Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, after May 24, 1778, in Richard K. Showman ed., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1976-), II, 404; Richard Buel, Jr., "Samson Shorn: The Impact of the Revolutionary War on Estimates of the Republic's Strength," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds.,

the common people went together. Now suddenly in America the industriousness of ordinary people seemed dependent not on the fear of poverty, but on the prospect of luxury.[19]

The economic troubles of the 1780s came from the ending of the war and government purchasing. Too many people had too many heightened expectations and were into the market and the consumption of luxuries too deeply to make any easy adjustments to peace. The collapse of internal markets and the drying up of paper money meant diminished incomes, overextended businesses, swollen inventories of imported manufactures, and debt-laden farmers and traders. The responses of people hurt by these developments were very comprehensible: they simply wanted to continue what they had done during the war. The stay laws and other debtor-relief legislation and the printing of paper money were not the demands of backward-looking and uncommercial people. They were the demands of people who had enjoyed buying, selling, and consuming and desired to do more of it. In order to have prosperity, argued one defender of paper money in 1786, it was not enough to have an industrious people and a fertile territory; money was essential too. And for many ordinary people in the 1780s money—in the absence of gold and silver coin—meant paper money issued by governments or government loan offices. "By anticipating the products of several years labor," farmers were able to borrow loan office certificates based on land in order "to accelerate improvements" and "so to augment industry and multiply the means of carrying it on" and thereby "enrich" both themselves and the state.[20]

Arms and Independence: The Military Character of the American Revolution (Charlottesville, Va., 1984), 157-160. On the growth of commercial farming in the middle of the 18th century, see especially Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History*, LXVIII (1982), 833-849. There is nothing on 18th-century America's increased importation of "luxuries" and "comforts" resembling Neil McKendrick *et al.*, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington, Ind., 1982). But see the articles of Carole Shammas, especially "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," *Journal of Social History*, XIV (1980), 3-24; Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Inventories and the Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1658-1777," *Historical Methods*, XIII (1980), 81-104; and Gloria L. Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650-1720* (Princeton, N.J., 1982).

19. For examples of the new thinking about luxury as an inducement to industry, see Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), 97.

20. [William Barton], *The True Interest of the United States, and Particularly of Pennsylvania Considered* . . . (Philadelphia, 1786), 12.

These calls for paper money in the 1780s were the calls of American business. The future of America's entrepreneurial activity and prosperity lay not with the hundreds of well-to-do creditor-merchants who dominated the overseas trade of the several ports along the Atlantic seaboard. Rather, it lay with the thousands upon thousands of ordinary traders, petty businessmen, aspiring artisans, and market farmers who were deep in debt and were buying and selling with each other all over America. For these people, unlike the overseas merchants who had their private bills of exchange, publicly created paper money was the only means "capable of answering all the *domestic* and *internal* purposes of a *circulating medium* in a nation" that lacked specie. The prosperity of a country, it was now argued, involved more than external commerce, more than having a surplus of exports over imports. "The *internal* commerce of the country must be promoted, by increasing its *real riches*," which were now rightly equated with the acquisitions, improvements, and entrepreneurial activity of ordinary people.[21]

There is no exaggerating the radical significance of this heightened awareness among Americans of the importance of domestic trade. Hitherto most Americans had thought of internal trade, as William Smith of New York put it in the 1750s, as publicly worthless—a mere passing of wealth around the community from hand to hand. Such exchanging, said Smith, "tho' it may enrich an Individual," meant that "others must be poorer, in an exact proportion to his Gains; but the collective Body of the People not at all."[22] Such was the traditional zero-sum mercantilist mentality that was now being challenged by the increased entrepreneurial activity of thousands of ordinary people. Farmers "in a new and unimproved country," it was now said, "have continual uses for money, to stock and improve their farms" or, as Madison noted, to "extend their consumption as far as credit can be obtained." And they now wanted more money than could be gotten by the old-fashioned means of applying "to a monied man for a loan from his private fortune." Consequently these farmers and other small-time entrepreneurs in state after state up and down the continent were electing representatives to their legislatures who could supply them with paper money, paper money which, as the preamble to a 1785 Pennsylvania statute establishing a loan office stated, was designed "to promote and establish the interests of internal commerce, agriculture and mechanc arts."[23] Not the defects of the Articles of Con-

21. *Ibid.*, 4, 25–26.

22. [William Smith], *The Independent Reflector . . . by William Livingston and Others*, ed. Milton M. Klein (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 106. See J. E. Crowley, *This Sheba, Self: The Conceptualization of Economic Life in Eighteenth-Century America* (Baltimore, 1974), 38–39, 44, 49, 87, 97–99.

23. *Remarks on a Pamphlet, Entitled, "Considerations on the Bank of North-America"* (Philadelphia, 1785), 14; Madison to Monroe, Apr. 9, 1786, in Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Madison*, IX, 26; [Barton], *True Interest*, 20; Pa. Statute of 1785, cited in E.A.J. Johnson, *The Foundations of American Economic Freedom: Government and Enterprise in the Age of Washington* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1973), 43 n.

federation, but this promotion of entrepreneurial interests by ordinary people—their endless buying and selling, their bottomless passion for luxurious consumption—was what really frightened the Federalists.

The Federalists in the 1780s had a glimpse of what America was to become—a scrambling business society dominated by the pecuniary interests of ordinary people—and they did not like what they saw. This premonition of America's future lay behind their sense of crisis and their horrified hyperbolic rhetoric. The wholesale pursuits of private interest and private luxury were, they thought, undermining America's capacity for republican government. They designed the Constitution in order to save American republicanism from the deadly effects of these private pursuits of happiness.

III

The founders did not intend the new Constitution to change the character of the American people. They were not naive utopians; they were, as we have often noted, realistic about human nature. They had little or no faith in the power of religion or of sumptuary or other such laws to get people to behave differently. To be sure, they believed in education, and some of them put great stock in what it might do in reforming and enlightening American people. But still they generally approached their task in the 1780s with a practical, unsentimental appreciation of the givenness of human beings. They knew they lived in an age of commerce and interests. Although some of the landed gentry like Jefferson might yearn wistfully at times for America to emulate China and "abandon the ocean altogether," most of the founders welcomed America's involvement in commerce, by which, however, they commonly meant overseas trade.[24] They believed in the importance of such commerce, saw it as a major agent in the refining and civilizing of people, and were generally eager to use the power of government to promote its growth. They knew too all about "interest," which Madison defined "in the popular sense" as the "immediate augmentation of property and wealth." They accepted the inevitability and the prevalence of "interest" and respected its power. "Interest," many of them said, "is the greatest tie one man can

24. Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, ed. William Peden (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1955), Query XXII, 175; Jefferson to G. K. van Hogendorp, Oct. 13, 1785, in Boyd *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, VIII, 633.

have on another." It was, they said, "the only binding cement" for states and peoples. Hamilton put it more bluntly: "He who pays is the master."[25]

Since 1776 they had learned that it was foolish to expect most people to sacrifice their private interests for the sake of the public welfare. For the Federalists there was little left of the revolutionary utopianism of Samuel Adams. Already by the 1780s, Adams's brand of republicanism seemed archaic and Adams himself a figure from another time and place. Soon people would be shaking their heads in wonderment that such a person as Adams should have ever existed in America. "Modern times," it was said, "have produced no character like his." He was "one of Plutarch's men," a character out of the classical past. He was a Harvard-educated gentleman who devoted himself to the public. He had neither personal ambition nor the desire for wealth. He refused to help his children and gloried in his poverty. He was without interests or even private passions. Among the Revolutionary leaders he was unique. No other leader took classical republican values quite as seriously as Adams did.[26]

In fact, the other Revolutionary leaders were very quick to expose the unreality and impracticality of Adams's kind of republican idealism. As early as 1778 Washington realized that the Revolution would never succeed if it depended on patriotism alone. "It must be aided by a prospect of interest or some reward."[27] All men could not be like Samuel Adams. It was too bad, but that was the way it was. Human beings were like that, and by the 1780s many of the younger Revolutionary leaders like Madison were willing to look at the reality of interests with a very cold eye. Madison's *Federalist* No. 10 was only the most famous and frank acknowledgment of the degree to which interests of various sorts had come to dominate American politics.

The founders thus were not dreamers who expected more from the people than they were capable of. We in fact honor the founding fathers for their realism, their down-to-earth acceptance of human nature. Perhaps this is part of our despairing effort to make them one with us, to close that terrifying gap that always seems to exist between them and us. Nevertheless, in

25. Madison to Monroe, Oct. 5, 1786, in Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Madison*, IX, 141; *Carlisle Gazette* (Pa.), Oct. 24, 1787, quoted in Herbert J. Storing, ed., *The Complete Anti-Federalist* (Chicago, 1981), II, 208; Washington to James Warren, Oct. 7, 1785, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXVIII, 291; Hamilton, in Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention*, I, 378. On the nature and role of interests in 18th-century British politics, see Michael Kammen, *Empire and Interest: The American Colonies and the Politics of Mercantilism* (Philadelphia, 1970).

26. Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams* (New York, 1980), 3–50, quotation at 47.

27. Washington, quoted in Lester H. Cohen, *The Revolutionary Histories: Contemporary Narratives of the American Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), 273.

our hearts we know that they are not one with us, that they are separated from us, as they were separated from every subsequent generation of Americans, by an immense cultural chasm. They stood for a classical world that was rapidly dying, a world so different from what followed—and from our own—that an act of imagination is required to recover it in all its fullness. They believed in democracy, to be sure, but not our modern democracy; rather, they believed in a patrician-led classical democracy in which "virtue exemplified in government will diffuse its salutary influence through the society." For them government was not an arena for furthering the interests of groups and individuals, but a means of moral betterment. What modern American politician would say, as James Wilson said in the Philadelphia Convention, that "the cultivation and improvement of the human mind was the most noble object" of government? Even Jefferson, who of all the founders most forcefully led the way, though inadvertently, to a popular liberal future, could in 1787 urge a Virginia colleague: "Cherish . . . the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors, but reclaim them by enlightening them." All the founding fathers saw themselves as moral teachers.[28] However latently utilitarian, however potentially liberal, and however enthusiastically democratic the founders may have been, they were not modern men.

Despite their acceptance of the reality of interests and commerce, the Federalists had not yet abandoned what has been called the tradition of civic humanism—that host of values transmitted from antiquity that dominated the thinking of nearly all members of the elite in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world. By the late eighteenth century this classical tradition was much attenuated and domesticated, tamed and eaten away by modern financial and commercial developments. But something remained, and the Federalists clung to it. Despite their disillusionment with political leadership in the states, the Federalists in 1787 had not yet lost hope that at least some individuals in the society might be worthy and virtuous enough to transcend their immediate material interests and devote themselves to the public good. They remained committed to the classical idea that political leadership was essentially one of character: "The whole art of government," said Jefferson, "consists of being honest."[29] Central to this ideal of leadership was the quality of *disinterestedness*—the term the Federalists most used as a synonym

28. Joseph Lathrop (1786), in Hyneman and Lutz, eds., *American Political Writing*, I, 660; Wilson, in Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention*, I, 605; Jefferson to Edward Carrington, Jan. 16, 1787, in Boyd *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, XI, 49. See also Ralph Ketcham, *Presidents above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789–1829* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984).

29. Jefferson, "Summary View of the Rights of British America" (1774), in Boyd *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, I, 134.

for the classic conception of civic virtue: it better conveyed the increasing threats from interests that virtue now faced.

Dr. Johnson defined *disinterested* as being "superior to regard of private advantage; not influenced by private profit"; and that was what the founding fathers meant by the term.[30] We today have lost most of this older meaning. Even educated people now use *disinterested* as a synonym for *uninterested*, meaning indifferent or unconcerned. It is almost as if we cannot quite conceive of the characteristic that disinterestedness describes: we cannot quite imagine someone who is capable of rising above a pecuniary interest and being unselfish and unbiased where an interest might be present. This is simply another measure of how far we have traveled from the eighteenth century.

This eighteenth-century concept of disinterestedness was not confined either to Commonwealthmen or to the country tradition (which makes our current preoccupation with these strains of thought misleading). Nor did one have to be an American or a republican to believe in disinterestedness and the other classical values that accompanied it. Virtue or disinterestedness, like the concept of honor, lay at the heart of all prescriptions for political leadership in the eighteenth-century Anglo-American world. Throughout the century Englishmen of all political persuasions—Whigs and Tories both—struggled to find the ideal disinterested political leader amid the rising and swirling currents of financial and commercial interests that threatened to engulf their societies. Nothing more enhanced William Pitt's reputation as the great patriot than his pointed refusal in 1746 to profit from the perquisites of the traditionally lucrative office of paymaster of the forces. Pitt was living proof for the English-speaking world of the possibility of disinterestedness—that a man could be a governmental leader and yet remain free of corruption.[31]

This classical ideal of disinterestedness was based on independence and liberty. Only autonomous individuals, free of interested ties and paid by no masters, were capable of such virtue. Jefferson and other republican idealists might continue to hope that ordinary yeoman farmers in America might be independent and free enough of pecuniary temptations and interests to be virtuous. But others knew better, and if they did not, then the experience of the Revolutionary war soon opened their eyes. Washington realized almost at the outset that no common soldier could be expected to be "influenced

30. Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language* . . . (London, 1755); Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979), 22–23.

31. John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), 97.

by any other principles than those of Interest." And even among the officer corps there were only a "few . . . who act upon Principles of disinterestedness," and they were "comparatively speaking, no more than a drop in the Ocean."[32]

Perhaps it was as Adam Smith warned: as society became more commercialized and civilized and labor more divided, ordinary people gradually lost their ability to make any just judgments about the varied interests and occupations of their country; and only "those few, who, being attached to no particular occupation themselves, have leisure and inclination to examine the occupations of other people." Perhaps then in America, as well as in Britain, only a few were free and independent enough to stand above the scramblings of the marketplace. As "Cato" had written, only "a very small Part of Mankind have Capacities large enough to judge of the Whole of Things." Only a few were liberally educated and cosmopolitan enough to have the breadth of perspective to comprehend all the different interests, and only a few were dispassionate and unbiased enough to adjudicate among these different interests and promote the public rather than a private good. Virtue, it was said as early as 1778, "can only dwell in superior minds, elevated above private interest and selfish views." Even Jefferson at one point admitted that only those few "whom nature has endowed with genius and virtue" could "be rendered by liberal education worthy to receive, and able to guard the sacred rights and liberties of their fellow citizens."[33] In other words, the Federalists were saying that perhaps only from among the tiny proportion of the society the eighteenth century designated as "gentlemen" could be found men capable of disinterested political leadership.

This age-old distinction between gentlemen and others in the society had a vital meaning for the Revolutionary generation that we have totally lost. It was a horizontal cleavage that divided the social hierarchy into two unequal parts almost as sharply as the distinction between officers and soldiers

32. Washington to John Hancock, Sept. 24, 1776, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, VI, 107–108.

33. Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford, 1976) (V.i.f. 50–51), II, 781–783; [John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon], *Cato's Letters; or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, 5th ed. (London, 1748), III, 193; Phillips Payson, "A Sermon Preached before the Honorable Council . . . at Boston, May 27, 1778," in John Wingate Thornton, ed., *The Pulpit of the American Revolution* . . . (Boston, 1860), 337; Jefferson, "A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Education" (1779), in Boyd *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, II, 527. On the 18th-century British developments out of which "Cato," Smith, and others wrote, see the illuminating discussion in John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730–80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London, 1983), 17–50.

divided the army; indeed, the military division was related to the larger social one. Ideally the liberality for which gentlemen were known connoted freedom—freedom from material want, freedom from the caprice of others, freedom from ignorance, and freedom from manual labor. The gentleman's distinctiveness came from being independent in a world of dependencies, learned in a world only partially literate, and leisured in a world of workers.[34] Just as gentlemen were expected to staff the officer corps of the Continental army (and expected also to provide for their own rations, clothing, and equipment on salaries that were less than half those of their British counterparts), so were independent gentlemen of leisure and education expected to supply the necessary disinterested leadership for government.[35] Since such well-to-do gentry were "exempted from the lower and less honourable employments," wrote the philosopher Francis Hutcheson, they were "rather more than others obliged to an active life in some service to mankind. The publick has this claim upon them." Governmental service, in other words, was thought to be a personal sacrifice, required of certain gentlemen because of their talents, independence, and social preeminence.[36]

In eighteenth-century America it had never been easy for gentlemen to make this personal sacrifice for the public, and it became especially difficult during the Revolution. Which is why many of the Revolutionary leaders, especially those of "small fortunes" who served in the Congress, continually complained of the burdens of office and repeatedly begged to be relieved from these burdens in order to pursue their private interests. Periodic temporary retirement from the cares and commotions of office to one's country estate for refuge and rest was acceptable classical behavior. But too often America's political leaders, especially in the North, had to retire not to relaxation in the solitude and leisure of a rural retreat, but to the making of money in the busyness and bustle of a city law practice.[37]

34. The best discussion of the distinctiveness of the gentry in colonial America is Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), esp. 131–132.

35. Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 86–95; John B. B. Trussell, Jr., *Birthplace of an Army: A Study of the Valley Forge Encampment* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1976), 86.

36. Francis Hutcheson, *A System of Moral Philosophy in Three Books . . .* (London, 1755), II, 113. "Let not your Love of Philosophical Amusements have more than its due Weight with you," Benjamin Franklin admonished Cadwallader Colden at midcentury. Public service was far more important. In fact, said Franklin, even "the finest" of Newton's "Discoveries" could not have excused his neglect of serving the commonwealth if the public had needed him (Franklin to Colden, Oct. 11, 1750, in Leonard W. Labaree *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* [New Haven, Conn., 1959–], IV, 68).

37. Jack N. Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretative History of the Continental Congress* (New York, 1979), 216–239, quotation by William Fleming to Jefferson, May 10, 1779, at 237; George Athan Billias, *Elbridge Gerry, Founding Father and Republican Statesman* (New York, 1976), 138–139.

In short, America's would-be gentlemen had a great deal of trouble in maintaining the desired classical independence and freedom from the marketplace. There were not many American gentry who were capable of living idly off the rents of tenants as the English landed aristocracy did. Of course, there were large numbers of the southern planter gentry whose leisure was based on the labor of their slaves, and these planters obviously came closest in America to fitting the classical ideal of the free and independent gentleman. But some southern planters kept taverns on the side, and many others were not as removed from the day-to-day management of their estates as their counterparts among the English landed gentry. Their overseers were not comparable to the stewards of the English gentry; thus the planters, despite their aristocratic poses, were often very busy, commercially involved men. Their livelihoods were tied directly to the vicissitudes of international trade, and they had always had an uneasy sense of being dependent on the market to an extent that the English landed aristocracy, despite its commitment to enterprising projects and improvements, never really felt. Still, the great southern planters at least approached the classical image of disinterested gentlemanly leadership, and they knew it and made the most of it throughout their history.[38]

In northern American society such independent gentlemen standing above the interests of the marketplace were harder to find, but the ideal remained strong. In ancient Rome, wrote James Wilson, magistrates and army officers were always gentleman farmers, always willing to step down "from the elevation of office" and reassume "with contentment and with pleasure, the peaceful labours of a rural and independent life." John Dickinson's pose in 1767 as a "Pennsylvania Farmer" is incomprehensible except within this classical tradition. Dickinson, the wealthy Philadelphia lawyer, wanted to assure his readers of his gentlemanly disinterestedness by informing them at the outset that he was a farmer "contented" and "undisturbed by wordly hopes or fears."[39] Prominent merchants dealing in international trade brought wealth into the society and were thus valuable members of the community, but their status as independent gentlemen was always tainted

38. See William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York, 1961).

39. Wilson, "On the History of Property," in Robert Green McCloskey, ed., *The Works of James Wilson* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), II, 716; Dickinson, "Letters of a Farmer in Pennsylvania" (1768), in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Writings of John Dickinson*, Vol. I, *Political Writings, 1764–1774* (Pennsylvania Historical Society, *Memoirs*, XIV [Philadelphia, 1895]), 307 (hereafter cited as Ford, ed., *Writings of Dickinson*).

by their concern for personal profit.[40] Perhaps only a classical education that made "ancient manners familiar," as Richard Jackson once told Benjamin Franklin, could "produce a reconciliation between disinterestedness and commerce; a thing we often see, but almost always in men of a liberal education." Yet no matter how educated merchants were or how much leisure they managed for themselves, while they remained merchants they could never quite acquire the character of genteel disinterestedness essential for full acceptance as political leaders, and that is why most colonial merchants were not active in public life.[41]

John Hancock and Henry Laurens knew this, and during the imperial crisis each shed his mercantile business and sought to ennoble himself. Hancock spent lavishly, bought every imaginable luxury, and patronized everyone. He went through a fortune, but he did become the single most popular and powerful figure in Massachusetts politics during the last quarter or so of the eighteenth century. Laurens especially was aware of the bad image buying and selling had among southern planters. In 1764 he advised two impoverished but aspiring gentry immigrants heading for the backcountry to establish themselves as planters before attempting to open a store. For them to enter immediately into "any retail Trade in those parts," he said, "would be mean, would Lessen them in the esteem of people whose respect they must endeavour to attract." Only after they were "set down in a Creditable manner as Planters" might they "carry on the Sale of many specie of European and West Indian goods to some advantage and with a good grace." In this same year, 1764, Laurens himself began to curtail his merchant operations. By the time of the Revolution he had become enough of an aristocrat that he was able to sneer at all those merchants who were still

40. "We have found by experience, that no dependence can be had upon *merchants*, either at *home*, or in *America*," Charles Chauncy told Richard Price in 1774, "so many of them are so mercenary as to find within themselves a readiness to become slaves themselves, as well as to be accessory to the slavery of others, if they imagine they may, by this means, serve their own private separate interest" (D.C. Thomas and Bernard Peach, eds., *The Correspondence of Richard Price* [Durham, N.C., 1983], I, 170). For Adam Smith's view that the interest of merchants and indeed of all who lived by profit was "always in some respects different from, and even opposite to, that of the publick," see Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, ed. Campbell and Skinner, (I.xi.p.10) I, 267.

41. Jackson to Franklin, June 17, 1755, in Labaree *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Franklin*, VI, 82. On the colonial merchants' "detachment from political activity," see Thomas M. Doerflinger, "Philadelphia Merchants and the Logic of Moderation, 1760–1775," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XL (1983), 212–213; and Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981), 113.

busy making money. "How hard it is," he had the gall to say in 1779, "for a rich, or covetous man to enter heartily into the kingdom of patriotism."[42]

For mechanics and others who worked with their hands, being a disinterested gentleman was impossible. Only when wealthy Benjamin Franklin retired from his printing business, at the age of forty-two, did "the Publick," as he wrote in his *Autobiography*, "now considering me as a Man of Leisure," lay hold of him and bring him into an increasing number of important public offices. Other artisans and petty traders who had wealth and political ambitions, such as Roger Sherman of Connecticut, also found that retirement from business was a prerequisite for high public office.[43]

Members of the learned professions were usually considered gentlemen, particularly if they were liberally educated. But were they disinterested? Were they free of the marketplace? Were they capable of virtuous public service? Hamilton for one argued strongly that, unlike merchants, mechanics, or farmers, "the learned professions . . . truly form no distinct interest in society"; thus they "will feel a neutrality to the rivalships between the different branches of industry" and will be most likely to be "an impartial arbiter" between the diverse interests of the society. But others had doubts. William Barton thought "a few individuals in a nation may be actuated by such exalted sentiments of public virtue, . . . but these instances must be rare." Certainly many thought lawyers did not stand above the fray. In fact, said Barton, "professional men of every description are necessarily, as such, obliged to pursue their immediate advantage."[44]

42. William M. Fowler, Jr., *The Baron of Beacon Hill: A Biography of John Hancock* (Boston, 1980); Charles W. Akers, *The Divine Politician: Samuel Cooper and the American Revolution in Boston* (Boston, 1982), 121, 128, 130, 141, 176, 311; Laurens to Richard Oswald, July 7, 1764, in Philip M. Hamer *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Henry Laurens* (Columbia, S.C., 1968–), IV, 338 (see also Rachel N. Klein, "Ordering the Backcountry: The South Carolina Regulation," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXVIII [1981], 667); David Duncan Wallace, *The Life of Henry Laurens . . .* (New York, 1915), 69–70, quotation at 335. In the 1780s Elbridge Gerry likewise retired from mercantile business and "set himself up as a country squire" (Billias, *Gerry*, 135–136).

43. Leonard W. Labaree *et al.*, eds., *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (New Haven, Conn., 1964), 196; Christopher Collier, *Roger Sherman's Connecticut: Yankee Politics and the American Revolution* (Middletown, Conn., 1971), 14, 21–22.

44. Jacob E. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist* (Middletown, Conn., 1961), No. 35; [Barton], *True Interest*, 27. For arguments in pre-Revolutionary Virginia whether lawyers were practicing "a grovelling, mercenary trade" or not, see Roeber, *Faithful Magistrates and Republican Lawyers*, 156–157. Some conceded that lawyers were members of one of the "three genteel Professions," but that they were guilty of more "petit Larceny" than doctors and clergymen. Madison was not convinced of the disin-

Everywhere, men struggled to find a way of reconciling this classical tradition of disinterested public leadership with the private demands of making a living. "A Man expends his Fortune in political Pursuits," wrote Gouverneur Morris in an introspective unfinished essay. Did he do this out of "personal Consideration" or out of a desire to promote the public good? If he did it to promote the public good, "was he justifiable in sacrificing to it the Subsistence of his Family? These are important Questions; but," said Morris, "there remains one more," and that one question of Morris's threatened to undermine the whole classical tradition: "Would not as much Good have followed from an industrious Attention to his own Affairs?" Hamilton, for one, could not agree. Although he knew that most people were selfish scavengers, incapable of noble and disinterested acts, he did not want to be one of them. Thus he refused to make speculative killings in land or banking "because," as he put it in one of his sardonic moods, "there must be some *public fools* who sacrifice private to public interest at the certainty of ingratitude and obloquy—because my *vanity* whispers I ought to be one of those fools and ought to keep myself in a situation the best calculated to render service." Hamilton clung as long and as hard to this classical conception of leadership as anyone in post-Revolutionary America.[45]

Washington too felt the force of the classical ideal and throughout his life was compulsive about his disinterestedness. Because he had not gone to college and acquired a liberal education, he always felt he had to live literally by the book. He was continually anxious that he not be thought too ambitious or self-seeking; above all, he did not want to be thought greedy or "interested." He refused to accept a salary for any of his public services, and he was scrupulous in avoiding any private financial benefits from his governmental positions.

Perhaps nothing more clearly reveals Washington's obsession with these classical republican values than his agonized response in the winter of 1784–1785 to the Virginia Assembly's gift of 150 shares in the James River and

terestedness of lawyers (*ibid.*, 157, 147; Ketcham, *Madison*, 145). On the efforts of some 19th-century thinkers to make professional communities the repositories of disinterestedness against the selfishness and interestedness of businessmen, see Thomas L. Haskell, "Professionalism *versus* Capitalism: R. H. Tawney, Emile Durkheim, and C. S. Peirce on the Disinterestedness of Professional Communities," in Thomas L. Haskell, ed., *The Authority of Experts: Studies in History and Theory* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 180–225.

45. Morris, "Political Enquiries," in Willi Paul Adams, ed., "'The Spirit of Commerce, Requires that Property Be Sacred': Gouverneur Morris and the American Revolution," *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, XXI (1976), 329; Hamilton to Robert Troup, Apr. 13, 1795, in Harold C. Syrett *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York, 1961–1979), XVIII, 329.

Potomac canal companies. Acceptance of the shares seemed clearly impossible. The shares might be "considered in the same light as a pension," he said. He would be thought "a dependant," and his reputation for virtue would be compromised. At the same time, however, Washington believed passionately in what the canal companies were doing; indeed, he had long dreamed of making a fortune from such canals. He thought the shares might constitute "the foundation of the *greatest* and most *certain* income" that anyone could expect from a speculative venture. Besides, he did not want to show "disrespect" to his countrymen or to appear "ostentatiously disinterested" by refusing the gift of the shares.[46]

What should he do? Few decisions in Washington's career called for such handwringing as this one did. He sought the advice of nearly everyone he knew. Letters went out to Jefferson, to Governor Patrick Henry, to William Grayson, to Benjamin Harrison, to George William Fairfax, to Nathanael Greene, to Henry Knox, even to Lafayette—all seeking "the best information and advice" on the disposition of the shares. "How would this matter be viewed then by the eyes of the world[?]" he asked. Would not his reputation for virtue be tarnished? Would not accepting the shares "deprive me of the principal thing which is laudable in my conduct?"—that is, his disinterestedness.

The story would be comic if Washington had not been so deadly earnest. He understated the situation when he told his correspondents that his mind was "not a little agitated" by the problem. In letter after letter he expressed real anguish. This was no ordinary display of scruples such as government officials today show over a conflict of interest: in 1784–1785 Washington was not even holding public office.[47]

These values, this need for disinterestedness in public officials, were very much on the minds of the founding fathers at the Philadelphia Convention, especially James Madison's. Madison was a tough-minded thinker, not given to illusions. He knew that there were "clashing interests" everywhere and that they were doing great harm to state legislative politics. But he had not

46. Washington to Benjamin Harrison, Jan. 22, 1785, to George William Fairfax, Feb. 27, 1785, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXVIII, 36, 85.

47. Washington to Benjamin Harrison, Jan. 22, 1785, to William Grayson, Jan. 22, 1785, to Lafayette, Feb. 15, 1785, to Jefferson, Feb. 25, 1785, to George William Fairfax, Feb. 27, 1785, to Gov. Patrick Henry, Feb. 27, 1785, to Henry Knox, Feb. 28, 1785, June 18, 1785, to Nathanael Greene, May 20, 1785, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXVIII, 36, 37, 72, 80–81, 85, 89–91, 92–93, 167, 146. The only friend whose advice on the disposition of the canal shares Washington did not solicit was Robert Morris, perhaps because he feared that Morris might tell him to keep them. Instead he confined his letter to Morris to describing the commercial opportunities of the canals. To Morris, Feb. 1, 1785, *ibid.*, 48–55.

yet given up hope that it might be possible to put into government, at the national if not at the state level, some "proper guardians of the public weal," men of "the most attractive merit, and most diffusive and established characters." We have too often mistaken Madison for some sort of prophet of a modern interest-group theory of politics. But Madison was not a forerunner of twentieth-century political scientists such as Arthur Bentley, David Truman, or Robert Dahl. Despite his hardheaded appreciation of the multiplicity of interests in American society, he did not offer America a pluralist conception of politics. He did not see public policy or the common good emerging naturally from the give-and-take of hosts of competing interests. Instead he hoped that these clashing interests and parties in an enlarged national republic would neutralize themselves and thereby allow liberally educated, rational men, "whose enlightened views and virtuous sentiments render them superior to local prejudices, and to schemes of injustice," to promote the public good in a disinterested manner. Madison, in other words, was not at all as modern as we make him out to be.[48] He did not expect the new national government to be an integrator and harmonizer of the different interests in the society; instead he expected it to be a "disinterested and dispassionate umpire in disputes between different passions and interests in the State." Madison even suggested that the national government might play the same superpolitical, neutral role that the British king had been supposed to play in the empire.[49]

The Federalists' plans for the Constitution, in other words, rested on their belief that there were some disinterested gentlemen left in America to act as neutral umpires. In this sense the Constitution became a grand—and perhaps in retrospect a final desperate—effort to realize the great hope of the Revolution: the possibility of virtuous politics. The Constitution thus looked backward as much as it looked forward. Despite the Federalists' youthful energy, originality, and vision, they still clung to the classical tradition of civic humanism and its patrician code of disinterested public leadership. They stood for a moral and social order that was radically different

48. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist*, No. 10; Gordon S. Wood, "Democracy and the Constitution," in Robert A. Goldwin and William A. Schambra, eds., *How Democratic Is the Constitution?* (Washington, D.C., 1980), 11–12. On the tendency to misread Madison, see Robert J. Morgan, "Madison's Theory of Representation in the Tenth Federalist," *Journal of Politics*, XXXVI (1974), 852–885; and Paul F. Bourke, "The Pluralist Reading of James Madison's Tenth *Federalist*," *Perspectives in American History*, IX (1975), 271–295.

49. Madison to Washington, Apr. 16, 1787, to Edmund Randolph, Apr. 8, 1787, in Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Madison*, IX, 384, 370; John Zvesper, "The Madisonian Systems," *Western Political Quarterly*, XXXVII (1984), 244–247.

from the popular, individualistic, and acquisitive world they saw emerging in the 1780s.

IV

The Antifederalists, of course, saw it all very differently. Instead of seeing enlightened patriots simply making a Constitution to promote the national good, they saw groups of interested men trying to foist an aristocracy onto republican America. And they said so, just as the Federalists had feared, in pamphlets, newspapers, and the debates in ratifying conventions. Fear of aristocracy did become the principal shibboleth and rallying cry of the opponents of the Constitution. Already during the 1780s the classical demand that government should be run by rich, leisured gentlemen who served "without fee or reward" was being met by increasing contempt: "Enormous wealth," it was said even in aristocratic South Carolina, "is seldom the associate of *pure* and *disinterested virtue*."[50] The Antifederalists brought this popular contempt to a head and refused to accept the claim that the Federalists were truly disinterested patriots. In fact, many of them had trouble seeing anyone at all as free from interests. If either side in the debate therefore stood for the liberal, pluralistic, interest-ridden future of American politics, it was the Antifederalists. They, not the Federalists, were the real modern men. They emerged from the confusion of the polemics with an understanding of American society that was far more hardheaded, realistic, and prophetic than even James Madison's.

There were, of course, many different Antifederalist spokesmen, a fact that complicates any analysis of the opposition to the Constitution. Yet some of the prominent Antifederalist leaders, such as Elbridge Gerry, George Mason, and Richard Henry Lee, scarcely represented, either socially or emotionally, the main thrust of Antifederalism. Such aristocratic leaders were socially indistinguishable from the Federalist spokesmen and often were as fearful of the excesses of democracy in the state legislatures as the Federalists. Far more representative of the paper money interests of the 1780s and the populist opposition to the "aristocracy" of the Federalists was someone like William Findley—that pugnacious Scotch-Irishman from western Pennsylvania. Gerry, Mason, and Lee did not really point the way to the liberal, interest-ridden democracy of nineteenth-century America, but Findley did. Until we understand the likes of William Findley, we won't

50. Jerome J. Nadelhaft, "'The Snarls of Invidious Animals': The Democratization of Revolutionary South Carolina," in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Sovereign States in an Age of Uncertainty* (Charlottesville, Va., 1981), 77.

understand either Antifederalism or the subsequent democratic history of America.

Findley came to the colonies from northern Ireland in 1763, at age twenty-two, in one of those great waves of eighteenth-century emigration from the northern parts of the British islands that so frightened Dr. Johnson. After trying his hand at weaving, the craft to which he had been apprenticed, Findley became a schoolmaster and then a farmer—until he was caught up in the Revolutionary movement, moved through the ranks to a militia captaincy, and became a political officeholder in Pennsylvania. Findley was the very prototype of a later professional politician and was as much a product of the Revolution as were the more illustrious patriots like John Adams or James Madison. He had no lineage to speak of, he went to no college, and he possessed no great wealth. He was completely self-taught and self-made, but not in the manner of a Benjamin Franklin who acquired the cosmopolitan attributes of a gentleman: Findley's origins showed, and conspicuously so. In his middling aspirations, middling achievements, and middling resentments, he represented far more accurately what America was becoming than did cosmopolitan gentlemen like Franklin and Adams.[51]

By the middle eighties this red-faced Irishman with his flamboyant white hat was becoming one of the most articulate spokesmen for those debtor-paper money interests that lay behind the political turbulence and democratic excesses of the period. As a representative from the West in the Pennsylvania state legislature, he embodied that rough, upstart, individualistic society that eastern squires like George Clymer hated and feared. In the western counties around Pittsburgh, gentry like Clymer could see only avarice, ignorance, and suspicion and a thin, weak society where there were "no private or publick associations for common good, every Man standing single."[52] Findley never much liked Clymer, but he reserved his deepest antagonism for two others of the Pennsylvania gentry—Hugh Henry Brackenridge and Robert Morris.

Findley's political conflicts with these two men in the Pennsylvania legislature in the 1780s foreshadowed and, indeed, epitomized the Antifederalists' struggle with the Federalists. It is perhaps not too much to say that Findley came to see the Constitution as a device designed by gentry like Brackenridge and Morris to keep men like himself out of the important affairs of government. This was especially galling to Findley because he

51. On Findley, see his letter to Gov. William Plumer of New Hampshire, Feb. 27, 1812, "William Findley of Westmoreland, Pa.," *PMHB*, V (1881), 440–450; and Russell J. Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania Politics* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1938), 39–40.

52. Grundfest, *Clymer*, 141.

could see no justification for the arrogance and assumed superiority of such men. Brackenridge and Morris were in reality, he believed, no different from him, and during the 1780s he meant to prove it.

Hugh Henry Brackenridge, born in 1748, was seven years younger than Findley. He was a Princeton graduate who in 1781 moved to western Pennsylvania because he thought the wilds of Pittsburgh offered greater opportunities for advancement than crowded Philadelphia. As the only college-educated gentleman in the area, he saw himself as an oasis of cultivation in the midst of a desert. He wanted to be "among the first to bring the press to the west of the mountains," so he helped establish a newspaper in Pittsburgh for which he wrote poetry, bagatelles, and other things.[53] He was pretty full of himself, and he never missed an opportunity to sprinkle his prose with Latin quotations and to show off his learning. This young, ambitious Princeton graduate with aristocratic pretensions was, in fact, just the sort of person who would send someone like William Findley climbing the walls.

William Findley was already a member of the state legislature in 1786 when Brackenridge decided that he too would like to be a legislator. Brackenridge ran for election and won by promising his western constituents that he would look after their particular interests, especially in favoring the use of state certificates of paper money in buying land. But then his troubles began. In Philadelphia he inevitably fell in with the well-to-do crowd around Robert Morris and James Wilson, who had cosmopolitan tastes more to his liking. Under the influence of Morris, Brackenridge voted against the state certificates he had promised to support and identified himself with the eastern establishment. He actually had the nerve to write in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* that the "eastern members" of the assembly had singled him out among all the "Huns, Goths and Vandals" who usually came over the mountains to legislate in Philadelphia and had complimented him for his "liberality." But it was a dinner party at Chief Justice Thomas McKean's house in December 1786, at which both he and Findley were guests, that really did him in. One guest suggested that Robert Morris's support for the Bank of North America seemed mainly for his own personal benefit rather than for the people's. To this Brackenridge responded loudly, "The people are fools; if they would let Mr. Morris alone, he would make Pennsylvania a great people, but they will not suffer him to do it."[54]

Most American political leaders already knew better than to call the people fools, at least aloud, and Findley saw his chance to bring Brackenridge down a peg or two. He wrote a devastating account of Brackenridge's state-

53. Claude Milton Newlin, *The Life and Writings of Hugh Henry Brackenridge* (Princeton, N.J., 1932), 71.

54. *Ibid.*, 80–81, 78; Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania*, 66–69.

ment in the *Pittsburgh Gazette* and accused him of betraying the people's trust by his vote against the state certificates. It was all right, said Findley sarcastically, for a representative to change his mind if he had not solicited or expected the office, "which is the case generally with modest, disinterested men." But for someone like Brackenridge who had openly sought the office and had made campaign promises—for him to change his vote could only arouse the "indignation" and the "contempt" of the people. Brackenridge may have professed "the greatest acquired abilities, and most shining imagination," but he was in fact a self-seeking and self-interested person who did not have the public good at heart.

Brackenridge vainly tried to reply. At first he sought to justify his change of vote on the classical humanist grounds that the people could not know about the "complex, intricate and involved" problems and interests involved in legislation. "The people at home know each man his own wishes and wants." Only an educated elite in the assembly could see the problems of finance whole; it required "the height of ability to be able to distinguish clearly the interests of a state." But was Brackenridge himself a member of this disinterested elite? Did he really stand above the various interests of the state? He admitted under Findley's assault that he had a "strong *interest* to prompt me to *offer* myself" for election, but his private interest was the same interest with that of the western country where he lived. "My object was to advance the country, and thereby advance myself."[55]

It was a frank and honest but strained answer, a desperate effort by Brackenridge to reconcile the presumed traditional disinterestedness of a political leader with his obvious personal ambition. The more he protested, the worse his situation became, and he never recovered from Findley's attack. The two men crossed swords again in the election of delegates to the state ratifying convention in 1788, and Brackenridge as an avowed Federalist lost to the Antifederalist Findley. Brackenridge then abandoned politics for the time being and turned his disillusionment with the vagaries of American democracy into his comic masterpiece, *Modern Chivalry*.

Findley sent Brackenridge scurrying out of politics into literature by attacking his pretensions as a virtuous gentlemanly leader. He attacked Robert Morris in a similar way, with far more ruinous consequences for Morris. Findley and Morris first tangled while they were both members of the Pennsylvania legislature in the 1780s. During several days of intense debate in 1786 over the rechartering of the Bank of North America, Findley mercilessly stripped away the mask of superior classical disinterestedness

55. Newlin, *Brackenridge*, 79–80, 83–84; Ferguson, *Early Western Pennsylvania*, 70–72.

that Morris had sought to wear. This fascinating wide-ranging debate—the only important one we have recorded of state legislative proceedings in the 1780s—centered on the role of interest in public affairs.

Findley was the leader of the legislative representatives who opposed the rechartering of the bank. He and others like John Smilie from western Pennsylvania were precisely the sorts of legislators whom gentry like Madison had accused throughout the 1780s of being illiberal, narrow-minded, and interested in their support of debtor farmers and paper money. Now they had an opportunity to get back at their accusers, and they made the most of it. Day after day they hammered home one basic point: the supporters of the bank were themselves interested men. They were directors or stockholders in the bank, and therefore they had no right in supporting the rechartering of the bank to pose as disinterested gentlemen promoting the public good. The advocates of the bank "feel interested in it personally." Their defense of the bank, said Findley, who quickly emerged as the principal and most vitriolic critic of the bank's supporters, revealed "the manner in which disappointed avarice chagrins an interested mind."

Morris and his fellow supporters of the bank were embarrassed by these charges that they had a selfish interest in the bank's charter. At first, in George Clymer's committee report on the advisability of rechartering the bank, they took the overbearing line that the proponents of the bank in the general community "included the most respectable characters amongst us," men who knew about the world and the nature of banks. But as the charges of their selfishness mounted, the supporters of the bank became more and more defensive. They insisted they were men of "independent fortune and situations" and were therefore "above influence or terror" by the bank. Under the relentless criticism by Findley and others, however, they one by one grew silent, until their defense was left almost entirely in the hands of Robert Morris, who had a personal, emotional involvement in this debate that went well beyond his concern for the bank.[56]

Morris, as the wealthiest merchant in Pennsylvania and perhaps in all of North America, had heard it all before. The charges of always being privately interested had been the plague of his public career. No matter that his "Exertions" in supplying and financing the Revolution were "as disinterested and pure as ever were made by Mortal Man," no matter how much he sacrificed for the sake of the public, the charges of using public office for personal gain kept arising to torment him. No prominent Revolutionary

56. Mathew Carey, ed., *Debates and Proceedings of the General Assembly of Pennsylvania on the Memorials Praying a Repeal or Suspension of the Law Annulling the Charter of the Bank* (Philadelphia, 1786), 19, 64, 10, 30.

leader had ever been subjected to such "unmeritted abuse," such bitter and vituperative accusations of selfishness, as he had.[57]

Now in 1786 he had to hear it all over again: that his support of the bank came solely from his personal interest in it. What could he do? He acknowledged that he was a shareholder in the bank, but he tried to argue that the bank was in the interest of all citizens in the state. How could he prove that he was not self-interested? Perhaps if he sold his bank stock? If he did, he assured his fellow legislators that he would be just as concerned with the bank's charter. At one point he gave up and said he would leave the issue of his self-interestedness to the members of the house to determine. But he could not leave it alone, and was soon back on his feet. Members have said "my information is not to be trusted, because I am interested in the bank: but surely," he pleaded, "I am more deeply interested in the state." He hoped, "notwithstanding the insinuation made, that it will never be supposed I would sacrifice the interest and welfare of the state to any interest I can possibly hold in the bank." Why couldn't his arguments for the bank be taken on their merits, apart from their source? he asked. Let them "be considered, not as coming from parties interested, but abstractedly as to their force and solidity."

Such nervous arguments were symptoms of his mounting frustration, and he finally exploded in anger and defiance. Once more he stated categorically: "I am not stimulated by the consideration of private interest, to stand forth in defence of the bank." If people supposed that he needed this bank, they were "grossly mistaken." He was bigger than the bank. If the bank should be destroyed, he on his "own capital, credit, and resources" would create another one; and even his enemies ("and God knows I seem to have enough of them") would have to deal with him, if only "for the sake of their own interest and convenience."[58]

It was an excruciating experience for Morris. At one point in the debate he expressed his desire to retire from office and become a private citizen, "which suits both my inclination and affairs much better than to be in public life, for which I do not find myself very well qualified." But the lure of the public arena and what it represented in the traditional aristocratic terms of civic honor were too great for him, and instead he retired once and for all from his merchant business and like Hancock and Laurens before him sought to ennoble himself. In the late eighties and early nineties, he shifted all his entrepreneurial activities into the acquisition of speculative land—

57. Morris to Washington, May 29, 1781, E. James Ferguson *et al.*, eds., *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781–1784* (Pittsburgh, Pa., 1973–), I, 96; Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *Robert Morris, Patriot and Financier* (New York, 1903), 52–56, 70–71.

58. Carey, ed., *Debates*, 33, 79–80, 98 (quotations on 80, 98).

something that seemed more respectable for an aristocrat than trade. He acquired a coat of arms, patronized artists, and hired L'Enfant to build him a huge, marble palace in Philadelphia. He surrounded himself with the finest furniture, tapestry, silver, and wines and made his home the center of America's social life. Like a good aristocrat, he maintained, recalled Samuel Breck, "a profuse, incessant and elegant hospitality" and displayed "a luxury . . . that was to be found nowhere else in America." When he became a United States senator in 1789, he—to the astonishment of listeners—began paying himself "compliments on his manner and conduct in life," in particular "his disregard of money." How else would a real aristocrat behave?[59]

For Morris to disregard money was not only astonishing, however; it was fatal. We know what happened, and it is a poignant, even tragic story. All his aristocratic dreams came to nothing; the marble palace on Chestnut Street went unfinished; his dinner parties ceased; his carriages were seized; and he ended in debtors' prison. That Morris should have behaved as he did says something about the continuing power of the classical aristocratic ideal of disinterestedness in post-Revolutionary America. It also says something about the popular power of William Findley, for it was Findley, more than anyone else in the debate over the bank, who had hounded Morris into renouncing his interests in commerce.

Findley in the debate knew he had Morris's number and bore in on it. "The human soul," Findley said, "is affected by wealth, in almost all its faculties. It is affected by its present interest, by its expectations, and by its fears." All this was too much for Morris, and he angrily turned on Findley. "If wealth be so obnoxious, I ask this gentleman why is he so eager in the pursuit of it?" If Morris expected a denial from Findley, he did not get it. For Findley's understanding of Morris's motives was really based on an understanding of his own. Did he love wealth and pursue it as Morris did? "Doubtless I do," said Findley. "I love and pursue it—not as an end, but as a means of enjoying happiness and independence," though he was quick to point out that he had wealth "not in any proportion to the degree" Morris had. Not that this made Morris in any way superior to Findley. Indeed, the central point stressed by Findley and the other western opponents of the bank was that Morris and his patrician Philadelphia crowd were no different from them, were no more respectable than they were. Such would-be aristocrats simply had "more money than their neighbours." In America, said

59. *Ibid.*, 81; Oberholtzer, *Morris*, 285–286, 297–299, 301–303; Eleanor Young, *Forgotten Patriot: Robert Morris* (New York, 1950), 170; Barbara Ann Chernow, *Robert Morris, Land Speculator, 1790–1801* (New York, 1978); H. E. Scudder, ed., *Recollections of Samuel Breck* . . . (Philadelphia, 1877), 203; *The Journal of William Maclay* (New York, 1927 [orig. pub. 1890]), 132.

Findley, "no man has a greater claim of special privilege for his £100,000 than I have for my £5." That was what American equality meant.

Morris, like all aspiring aristocrats in an egalitarian society, tried to stress that social distinctions were not based on wealth alone. "Surely," he said in desperate disbelief, "persons possessed of knowledge, judgment, information, integrity, and having extensive connections, are not to be classed with persons void of reputation or character." But Morris's claims of superiority were meaningless as long as he and his friends were seen to be interested men, and on that point Findley had him. Findley and his western legislative colleagues had no desire to establish any claims of their own to disinterestedness. In fact they wanted to hear no more spurious patrician talk of virtue and disinterestedness. They had no objection to Morris's and the other stockholders' being interested in the bank's rechartering: "Any others in their situation . . . would do as they did." Morris and other legislators, said Findley, "have a right to advocate their own cause, on the floor of this house." But then they could not protest when others realize "that it is their own cause they are advocating; and to give credit to their opinions, and to think of their votes accordingly." In fact, said Findley, such open promotion of interests meant an end to the archaic idea that representatives should simply stand and not run for election. When a candidate for the legislature "has a cause of his own to advocate, interest will dictate the propriety of canvassing for a seat." Who has ever put the case for special-interest elective politics any better?[60]

These were the arguments of democratic legislators in the 1780s who were sick and tired of being told by the aristocratic likes of James Madison that they were "Men of factious tempers" and "of local prejudices" and "advocates and parties to the causes which they determine." If they were interested men, so too were all legislators, including even those such as Morris and Brackenridge who were supposed to be liberal-thinking genteel men of "enlightened views and virtuous sentiments." "The citizens," Findley later wrote, by which he meant citizens like himself, "have learned to take a surer course of obtaining information respecting political characters," particularly those who pretended to disinterested civic service. They had especially learned how to inquire "into the local interests and circumstances" of such characters and to point out those with "pursuits or interests" that were "inconsistent with the equal administration of government." Findley had seen the gentry up close, so close in fact that all sense of the mystery that had hitherto surrounded aristocratic authority was lost.[61]

60. Carey, ed., *Debates*, 66, 87, 128, 21, 130, 38, 15, 72–73.

61. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist*, No. 10; [William Findley], *A Review of the Revenue System Adopted at the First Congress under the Federal Constitution* . . . (Philadelphia, 1794), 117.

The prevalence of interest and the impossibility of disinterestedness inevitably became a central argument of the Antifederalists in the debate over the Constitution. Precisely because the Constitution was designed to perpetuate the classical tradition of disinterested leadership in government, the Antifederalists felt compelled to challenge that tradition. There was, they said repeatedly, no disinterested gentlemanly elite that could feel "sympathetically the wants of the people" and speak for their "feelings, circumstances, and interests." Would-be patricians like James Wilson, declared William Findley, thought they were "born of a different race from the rest of the sons of men" and "able to conceive and perform great things." But despite their "lofty carriage," such gentry could not in fact see beyond "the pale of power and wordly grandeur." No one, said the Antifederalists, however elevated or educated, was free of the lures and interests of the marketplace. As for the leisured gentry who were "not . . . under the necessity of getting their bread by industry," far from being specially qualified for public leadership, they were in fact specially disqualified. Such men contributed nothing to the public good; their "idleness" rested on "other men's toil."[62]

But it was not just the classical tradition of leisured gentry leadership the Antifederalists challenged. Without realizing the full implications of what they were doing, they challenged too the whole social order the Federalists stood for. Society to the Antifederalists could no longer be a hierarchy of ranks or even a division into two unequal parts between gentlemen and commoners. Civic society should not in fact be graded by any criteria whatsoever. Society was best thought of as a heterogeneous mixture of "many different classes or orders of people, Merchants, Farmers, Planter Mechanics and Gentry or wealthy Men," all equal to one another. In this diverse egalitarian society, men from one class or interest could never be acquainted with the "*Situation* and Wants" of those from another. Lawyers and planters could never be "adequate judges of trademens concerns." Legislative representatives could not be just *for* the people; they actually had to be *of* the people. It was foolish to tell people that they ought to overlook local interests. Local interests were all there really were. "No man when he enters into society, does it from a view to promote the good of others, but he does it for his own good." Since all individuals and groups in the society were equally self-interested, the only "fair representation" in government, wrote the "Federal Farmer," ought to be one where "every order of men in the

62. Jonathan Elliot, ed., *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution* . . . (Philadelphia, 1896), II, 260, 13; [Findley], "Letter by an Officer of the Late Continental Army," *Independent Gazette* (Philadelphia), Nov. 6, 1787, in Storing, ed., *Complete Anti-Federalist*, III, 95; Ruth Bogin, *Abraham Clark and the Quest for Equality in the Revolutionary Era, 1774–1794* (East Brunswick, N.J., 1982), 32.

community . . . can have a share in it." Consequently any American government ought "to allow professional men, merchants, traders, farmers, mechanics, etc. to bring a just proportion of their best informed men respectively into the legislature." Only an explicit form of representation that allowed Germans, Baptists, artisans, farmers, and so on each to send delegates of its own kind into the political arena could embody the pluralistic particularism of the emerging society of the early Republic.[63]

Thus in 1787–1788 it was not the Federalists but the Antifederalists who were the real pluralists and the real prophets of the future of American politics. They not only foresaw but endorsed a government of jarring individuals and interests. Unlike the Federalists, however, they offered no disinterested umpires, no mechanisms at all for reconciling and harmonizing these clashing selfish interests. All they and their Republican successors had was the assumption, attributed in 1806 to Jefferson, "that the public good is best promoted by the exertion of each individual seeking his *own good* in his own way."[64]

As early as the first decade of the nineteenth century it seemed to many gentlemen, like Benjamin Latrobe, the noted architect and engineer, that William Findley and the Antifederalists had not really lost the struggle after all. "Our representatives to all our Legislative bodies, National, as well as of the states," Latrobe explained to Philip Mazzei in 1806, "are elected by the majority *sui similes*, that is, *unlearned*."

> For instance from Philadelphia and its environs we send to congress not *one* man of letters. One of them indeed is a lawyer but of no eminence, another a good Mathematician, but when elected he was a Clerk in a bank. The others are plain farmers. From the next county is sent a Blacksmith and from just over the river a Butcher. Our state legislature does not contain one individual of superior talents. The fact is, that superior talents actually excite distrust, and the experience of the world perhaps does not encourage the people to trust men of genius.[65]

This was not the world those "men of genius," the founding fathers, had wanted. To the extent therefore that the Constitution was designed

63. Philip A. Crowl, "Anti-Federalism in Maryland, 1787–88," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., IV (1947), 464; Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763–1789* (Columbia, S.C., 1959), 132; [James Winthrop], "Letters of Agrippa," *Massachusetts Gazette*, Dec. 14, 1787, in Storing, ed., *Complete Anti-Federalist*, IV, 80; "Essentials of a Free Government," in Walter Hartwell Bennett, ed., *Letters from the Federal Farmer to the Republican* (University, Ala., 1978), 10.

64. Benjamin Latrobe to Philip Mazzei, Dec. 19, 1806, in Margherita Marchione *et al.*, eds., *Philip Mazzei: Selected Writings and Correspondence* (Prato, Italy, 1983), III, 439 (I owe this reference to Stanley J. Idzerda).

65. *Ibid.*

to control and transcend common ordinary men with their common, ordinary pecuniary interests, it was clearly something of a failure. In place of a classical republic led by a disinterested enlightened elite, Americans got a democratic marketplace of equally competing individuals with interests to promote. Tocqueville saw what happened clearly enough. "Americans are not a virtuous people," he wrote, "yet they are free." In America, unlike the classical republics, "it is not disinterestedness which is great, it is interest." Such a diverse, rootless, and restless people—what could possibly hold them together? "Interest. That is the secret. The private interest that breaks through at each moment, the interest that moreover, appears openly and even proclaims itself as a social theory." In America, said Tocqueville, "the period of disinterested patriotism is gone . . . forever."[66]

No wonder the founding fathers seem so remote, so far away from us. They really are.

POSTSCRIPT

Were the Antifederalists right? Was no one in government without interests? Perhaps Brackenridge and Morris had interests, but did other Federalists? Were the "men of intelligence and uprightness" and "enlightened views and virtuous sentiments" that Federalists like James Wilson and James Madison spoke of also interested? Were such liberally educated cosmopolitans really no different from the debtor farmers of western Pennsylvania? These were essentially Charles Beard's questions, and they are still good ones.[67]

66. James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's "Democracy in America"* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980), 242, 243; Tocqueville to Ernest de Chabrol, June 9, 1831, in Roger Boesch, ed., *Alexis de Tocqueville: Selected Letters on Politics and Society* (Berkeley, Calif. 1985), 38; Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley (New York, 1954), I, 243. It was not, of course, as simple as Tocqueville made it out to be. The ideal of disinterested politics did not disappear in the 19th century, and even today it lingers on here and there. It formed the basis for all the antiparty and mugwump reform movements and colored the thinking of many of the Progressives. For Theodore Roosevelt in 1894 "the first requisite in the citizen who wishes to share the work of our public life . . . is that he shall act disinterestedly and with a sincere purpose to serve the whole commonwealth" (Roosevelt, *American Ideals and Other Essays, Social and Political* [New York, 1897], 34 [I owe this reference to John Patrick Diggins]). Of course, at almost the same time, John Dewey was telling Americans that it was psychologically impossible for anyone to act disinterestedly. See John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York, 1984), 341–343. See also Stephen Miller, *Special Interest Groups in American Politics* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1983).

67. Wilson, in Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention*, I, 154; Cooke, ed., *The Federalist*, No. 10. Vernon Parrington asked the same questions. If ordinary

Most Federalist leaders certainly saw themselves as different from the likes of William Findley, and to a large extent they were different. They certainly had wealth and property; otherwise they could not have been the leisured gentlemen they aspired to be. But what was the nature of that property? How did most of them make their incomes? The founding fathers' sources of income is not a subject we know much about. How, for example, did Franklin actually support his genteel living through all those years of retirement? Merchants lived off the profits of their overseas trade, and southern planters earned money by selling in transatlantic markets. Some gentry were landlords living off the earnings of tenants, and many others were professionals who earned money from fees. A few relied on the emoluments of government offices, though in the Revolutionary years this was not easy.

But with the exception of rents from property, most such direct sources of income were defiled by interest. That is, the income of most American gentlemen did not come without work and participation in commerce, as Adam Smith suggested it ought to for leaders to be truly disinterested. The "revenue" of the English landed aristocrats was unique, said Smith; their income from rents "costs them neither labour nor care, but comes to them as it were, of its own accord, and independent of any plan or project of their own." Thus would-be disinterested American public leaders struggled to find an equivalent, a reliable source of income that was not stained by marketplace exertion and interest. Many gentlemen of leisure found such a source in the interest from money they had lent out. It is not surprising that so many of the gentry used their wealth in this way. After all, what were the alternatives for investment in an underdeveloped society that lacked banks, corporations, and stock markets? Land, of course, was a traditional object of investment, but in America, as John Witherspoon pointed out in an important speech in the Continental Congress, rent-producing land could never allow for as stable a source of income as it did in England. In the New World, said Witherspoon, where land was more plentiful and cheaper than it was in the Old World, gentlemen seeking a steady income "would prefer money at interest to purchasing and holding real estate."[68]

The little evidence we have suggests that Witherspoon was correct. The

men were motivated by self-interest, as the Federalists believed, why would "this sovereign motive" abdicate "its rule among the rich and well born? . . . Do the wealthy betray no desire for greater power? Do the strong and powerful care more for good government than for class interests?" (*Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginnings to 1920* [New York, 1927], I, 302).

68. John Witherspoon, "Speech in Congress on Finances," *The Works of John Witherspoon* . . . (Edinburgh, 1805), IX, 133–134.

probate records of wealthy individuals show large proportions of their estates out on loan. In fact, it was often through such loans to friends and neighbors that great men were able to build networks of dependents and clients. In 1776 Cadwallader Colden was the creditor of seventy-three different people. All sorts of persons lent money, said John Adams: merchants, professionals, widows, but especially "Men of fortune, who live upon their income." Because earning interest from loans was considered more genteel than most other moneymaking activities, John Dickinson reinforced the disinterestedness of his persona, the "Pennsylvania Farmer," by having him living off "a little money at interest." When merchants and wealthy artisans wanted to establish their status unequivocally as leisured gentlemen, they withdrew from their businesses and, apart from investing in property, lent their wealth out at interest. Franklin did it. So did Roger Sherman, John Hancock, and Henry Laurens. By 1783 Hancock had more than twelve thousand pounds owed him in bonds and notes. As soon as the trader Joseph Dwight of Springfield, Massachusetts, had any profits, he began removing them from his business and lending them out at interest. By the time of his death in 1768 he had more than 60 percent of his assets out on loan.[69]

As Robert Morris pointed out, in the years before the Revolutionary war, "monied men were fond of lending upon bond and mortgage: it was a favourite practice; was thought perfectly safe." Even many of the great planters of the South earned more from such ancillary activities as lending money at interest than they did from selling their staple crops. Charles Carroll of Maryland had twenty-four thousand pounds on loan to his neighbors. A large landowner in the Shenandoah Valley, James Patton, had 90 percent of his total estate in the form of bonds, bills, and promissory notes due him. In this context all the bonds and loan office certificates sold by the state and congressional governments during the Revolution became just one more object of investment for gentlemen looking for steady sources of income.[70]

69. Robert J. Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution* (Providence, R.I., 1954), 20; Robert A. East, *Business Enterprise in the American Revolutionary Era* (New York, 1938), 20–22; Dickinson, "Letters of a Farmer," in Ford, ed., *Writings of Dickinson*, 307; Fowler, *Baron of Beacon Hill*, 251; Margaret E. Martin, *Merchants and Trade of the Connecticut River Valley, 1750–1820 (Smith College Studies in History*, XXIV [Northampton, Mass., 1938–1939]), 159. See also Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of a Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York, 1980), 145–153.

70. Carey, ed., *Debates*, 96; Aubrey C. Land, "Economic Base and Social Structure: The Northern Chesapeake in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History*, XXV (1965), 650; Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 133; East, *Business Enterprise*, 19; Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville, Va., 1977), 116, 123.

For these sorts of creditors and investors, inflation caused by the excessive printing of paper money could have only devastating consequences. "A depreciating Currency," warned John Adams, "will ruin Us." Indeed, for all those local creditors who were at the same time urban merchants or southern planters dealing in overseas trade with transatlantic obligations, excessive paper currency was doubly harmful: they received cheapened money from their debtors but had to pay their overseas creditors in rising rates of exchange. Washington was both a planter and a banker. In the 1780s he was angry at what his debtors and the promoters of inflation through paper money emissions had done to him while he was away fighting the Revolution. Such scoundrels, he complained more than once, had "taken advantage of my absence and the tender laws, to discharge their debts with a shilling or six pence in the pound," while to those whom he owed money, he now had "to pay in specie at the real value." Rather than enter into litigation, "unless there is every reason to expect a decision in my favor," he reluctantly agreed to accept paper money in place of specie for his rents and debts, "however unjustly and rascally it has been imposed." No wonder then, said Robert Morris, that wealthy men, at least those who had survived the Revolution, had stopped taking up bonds and mortgages; they were "deterred from lending again by the dread of paper money and tender laws."[71]

We have always known that the skyrocketing inflation fueled by the excessive printing of paper money during these years was devastating to creditors, but we have not always appreciated precisely what this meant socially and morally. Credit was the principal sinew of the society and was absolutely essential for the carrying on of any form of commerce. Establishing one's creditworthiness in this personally organized society was nearly equivalent to establishing one's existence as a person, which is why letters of recommendation were so important. The relationships between creditors and debtors were not supposed to be merely impersonal legal contracts. Such engagements, even when they spanned continents and oceans, depended ultimately, it seemed, on personal faith and trust. Debts were thus thought by many to be more than legal obligations; they were moral bonds tying people together. That is why defaulting debtors were still thought to be more than unfortunate victims of bad times; they were moral failures, violators of a code of trust and friendship who deserved to be punished and imprisoned.[72]

71. Adams to James Warren, Feb. 12, 1777, in Robert J. Taylor *et al.*, eds., *Papers of John Adams* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), V, 83; Riesman, "Origins of American Political Economy," 135–136, 144; Norman K. Risjord, *Chesapeake Politics, 1781–1800* (New York, 1978), 124; Washington to Gov. George Clinton, Apr. 20, 1785, to Battaile Muse, Dec. 4, 1785, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of Washington*, XXVIII, 134, 341; Carey, ed., *Debates*, 96.

It is not surprising therefore that many of those whom George Clymer called "honest gentry of intrinsic worth" tended to see all actions interfering with this relationship between creditor and debtor as morally abhorrent. Inflation artificially induced by Rhode Island's printing of paper money threatened, said a Boston gentleman, nothing less than "the first principles of society." Paper money, Madison told his fellow Virginia legislators, was unjust, pernicious, and unconstitutional. It was bad for commerce, it was bad for morality, and it was bad for society: it destroyed "confidence between man and man." Thus most Federalists who stood up for credit and the honest payment of debts did not see themselves as just another economic interest in a pluralistic society. They were defending righteousness itself. "On one side," said Theodore Sedgwick, "are men of talents, and of integrity, firmly determined to support public justice and private faith, and on the other there exists as firm a determination to institute tender laws, paper money, . . . and in short to establish iniquity by law."[73]

The Federal Constitution's abolition of the states' power to emit paper money was therefore welcomed by most gentry as the righting of a moral and social wrong. The wickedness of such inflationary state policies was so much taken for granted by the members of the convention that this prohibition of the states' authority in Article I, Section 10 of the Constitution was scarcely debated. Even a proposal to grant authority to the Federal Congress to emit bills of credit was thrown out by the convention, nine states to two. The truth is there were almost no real Antifederalists, such as William Findley, present in the convention to defend the states' paper money emissions of the 1780s. Of the delegates present, only eccentric Luther Martin spoke out against the prohibition of the states' emitting bills of credit. The Federalists morally controlled the debate over paper money in 1787–1788 and browbeat most potential defenders of it into silence. As

72. Roy A. Foulke, *The Sinews of American Commerce* (New York, 1941), 66–68, 74–75, 89; William E. Nelson, *Americanization of the Common Law: The Impact of Legal Change on Massachusetts Society, 1760–1830* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), 44–45. For a sensitive analysis of the Virginia planters' etiquette of debt, see T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1985), esp. 93–106.

73. Grundfest, *Clymer*, 177; *Providence Gazette*, Aug. 5, 1786, quoted in David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, Mass., 1980), 51; Madison, "Notes for Speech Opposing Paper Money" [Nov. 1, 1786], in Hutchinson *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Madison*, IX, 158–159; Taylor, *Western Massachusetts*, 166.

William R. Davie pointed out to the North Carolina ratifying convention, gentlemen in their speeches attached such dishonesty and shame to paper money that even "a member from Rhode Island" (which was defiantly excessive in emitting paper money) "could not have set his face against such language."[74] So dominant were classical values and so disturbing seemed the moral and social consequences of paper money that even those who defended paper emissions in the 1780s often did so in terms that conceded the Federalists' traditional argument against ordinary people's earning and spending money beyond their station.[75] Only in time, with the spread of paper-issuing banks and a new understanding of the economy, would Americans find the arguments to legitimate the position of men like William Findley.

Whatever the confusion of the Antifederalists, most Federalists believed they understood what their opponents were like. "Examine well the characters and circumstances of men who are averse to the new constitution," warned David Ramsay of South Carolina. Many of them may be debtors "who wish to defraud their creditors," and therefore, for some of them at least, Article I, Section 10 of the Constitution may be "the real ground of the opposition . . . , though they may artfully cover it with a splendid profession of zeal for state privileges and general liberty."[76] But even if this were not true, the Federalists at least knew that the end of the states' printing of paper money would be of "real service to the honest part of the community." If the new Constitution, said Benjamin Rush in 1788, "held forth no other advantages [than] that [of] a future exemption from paper money and tender laws, it would be eno' to recommend it to honest men." This was because "the man of wealth realized once more the safety of his bonds and rents against the inroads of paper money and tender laws."[77] That was putting it about as selfishly as it could be put.

74. Farrand, ed., *Records of the Federal Convention*, II, 310, III, 350.

75. Ruth Bogin, "New Jersey's True Policy: The Radical Republican Vision of Abraham Clark," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXV (1978), 105.

76. David Ramsay, "An Address to the Freemen of South Carolina on the Subject of the Federal Constitution" (1787), in Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *Pamphlets on the Constitution of the United States* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1888), 379–380. Madison thought that the Antifederalist pamphlets omitted "many of the true grounds of opposition" to the Constitution. "The articles relating to Treaties, to paper money, and to contracts, created more enemies than all the errors in the System positive and negative put together" (Madison to Jefferson, Oct. 17, 1788, in Boyd *et al.*, eds., *Papers of Jefferson*, XIV, 18).

77. Rush to Jeremy Belknap, Feb. 28, 1788, quoted in John P. Kaminski, "Democracy Run Rampant: Rhode Island in the Confederation," in James Kirby Martin, ed., *The Human Dimensions of Nation Making: Essays on Colonial and Revolutionary History*

Yet in the end it should not be put that way. To rest something as monumental as the formation of the Federal Constitution on such crude, narrow, and selfish motives was Beard's mistake, and it should not be repeated. The Federalists certainly had far more fundamental concerns at stake in 1787 than their personal credit and their social status. They were defending, not their personal interests (for they were often debtors as well as creditors), but rather a moral and social order that had been prescribed by the Revolution and the most enlightened thinking of the eighteenth century. So committed were they to these classical humanist values that they were scarcely capable of understanding, let alone admitting the legitimacy of, the acquisitive and enterprising world that paper money represented. They saw themselves, as sincerely and thoroughly as any generation in American history, as virtuous leaders dedicated to promoting the good of the nation. However strong and self-serving their underlying interests may have been, the Federalists always described their ideals and goals in the language of classical republican disinterestedness; and this language, these ideals and goals, repeated endlessly in private correspondence and public forums up and down the continent, inevitably controlled and shaped their behavior. Washington's agony over the canal shares and Morris's abandonment of his mercantile career are object lessons in the power of this culture to affect behavior. Self-interest that could not be publicly justified and explained was self-interest that could not be easily acted upon.

The founders thus gave future Americans more than a new Constitution. They passed on ideals and standards of political behavior that helped to contain and control the unruly materialistic passions unleashed by the democratic revolution of the early nineteenth century. Even today our aversion to corruption, our uneasiness over the too blatant promotion of special interests, and our yearning for examples of unselfish public service suggest that such ideals still have great moral power. Yet in the end we know that it was not the Federalists of 1787 who came to dominate American culture. Our wistful celebration of their heroic greatness, our persistent feelings that they were leaders the likes of whom we shall never see again in America, our ready acceptance of parties and interest-group politics—all tell us that it was William Findley and the Antifederalists who really belonged to the future. They, and not the Federalists, spoke for the emerging world of egalitarian democracy and the private pursuit of happiness.

(Madison, Wis., 1976), 267; Rush to Elias Boudinot, July 9, 1788, in Butterfield, ed., *Letters of Rush*, I, 471.

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