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Equality and Social Conflict in the American Revolution

Gordon S. Wood

AT least no one said that the book was too long. Indeed, one of the chief criticisms of my book is that it is not long enough. I am not used to people saying that about my work, so I am at a loss about how to respond. Perhaps I should add an addendum?

But which book should I add it to? Because the three critics have characterized my book so differently, it is difficult to know. To Michael Zuckerman the book is “almost barren of conscious and compelling irony,” and to Barbara Clark Smith it expresses “a determined optimism.” To Joyce Appleby, however, it is not optimistic at all but instead “an ironic tale” about a Revolution that failed, a “fall from civic grace” that gives the book a “bittersweet undercurrent.” It seems evident that readers can make of any book what they will.

One issue raised by these critiques is the relationship among the three cultural paradigms or ideal types—monarchy, republicanism, and democracy—that I used to describe the changes that took place between the middle of the eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth. I was not saying that these cultural forms were blocks that simply sequentially displaced one another, republicanism knocking out monarchy, and democracy knocking out republicanism. Instead, they resembled templates overlying one another, so that two or more cultural forms could exist simultaneously. Zuckerman especially seems unable to imagine a society possessing at the same time different, even incompatible and contradictory, cultural traits. For him it is either one or the other, either totally monarchical, totally republican, or totally democratic. If the democratic society threw up a kingly Andrew Jackson as a Washington manqué and hundreds of copies of Greek temples, then it could not be really democratic. If the monarchical society was shot through with republican sentiments, then it had to be “a monarchical society that never was.” I would have thought that no complex culture was ever as monolithic as that. But Zuckerman’s criticism of these cultural forms only begins to reveal his deep dislike of the book.

Actually, his dislike of the book is very curious. At one point Zuckerman says that “it is hard to think of major interpretations of colonial, early national, or Jacksonian society with which [Wood] concurs or with which his account could be readily reconciled.” In fact, I can think of several. Joyce Appleby’s for one. Gary J. Kornblith and John M. Murrin’s recent interpre-

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tation in Alfred F. Young's edition of *Beyond the Revolution* for another. James L. Huston's article in the October 1993 *American Historical Review* for still another. Richard L. Bushman's interpretations in *King and People* and *Refinement of America* for others. And, for still one more, *mirabile dictu*, a 1991 article written by none other than . . . Michael Zuckerman.¹

Zuckerman's brief overview of the Revolution, "A Different Thermidor: The Revolution Beyond the American Revolution," was written to combat the so-called republican synthesis, which, he says, is unable to explain "the nation that came out of the Revolution." In his 1991 essay Zuckerman confronted the question raised by Appleby fifteen years ago of where and when scholars were to find in the frenzy of corruption and the fear of tyranny so prominent in the republican interpretation of the Revolution the sources to account, in Appleby's words, "for the aggressive individualism, the optimistic materialism, and the pragmatic interest-group politics that became so salient so early in the life of the new nation."²

This is certainly a question I have tried to answer over the past few decades. Zuckerman in fact, in a note to his 1991 essay, singled me out as one of the few historians over the years who had recognized the salience of Appleby's question "in a sustained fashion."³ In 1991 at least, Zuckerman seems to have been in agreement with my emerging interpretation of the Revolution. He actually borrowed several phrases and images of mine on the economic effects of the Revolution from an article I had published in 1987.⁴ Certainly, in 1991 he was as fascinated as I have been by the sudden transformation from republicanism to liberalism, "a transformation so swift and sweeping," he wrote, as to be "baffling," a "transition from one configuration to the other. . . . which we must study if we would understand our origins as a nation," for it was in this "transition that the ideological lineaments of modern America emerged."⁵ I could not have said it better myself.

Zuckerman goes on to explain this transition in terms of a consumer revolution, sustained by "seas of self-interest" that broke through the ideological restraints of republicanism "more quickly than anyone could have imag-

¹ Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984) and *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992); Kornblith and Murrin, "The Making and Unmaking of an American Ruling Class," in Alfred F. Young, ed., *Beyond the American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1993), 27-79; Huston, "The American Revolutionaries, the Political Economy of Aristocracy, and the American Concept of Distribution of Wealth, 1765-1900," *American Historical Review*, XCVIII (1993), 1079-1105; Bushman, *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1985); Zuckerman, "A Different Thermidor: The Revolution Beyond the American Revolution," in James A. Henretta et al., eds., *The Transformation of Early American History: Society, Authority, and Ideology* (New York, 1991), 170-193.

² Zuckerman, "A Different Thermidor," 173; Appleby quotation *ibid.*, 174.

³ *Ibid.*, 302 n. 10.

⁴ Compare the second paragraph of Zuckerman's 1991 essay, *ibid.*, 183, with the bottom paragraph on p. 77 of my 1987 piece, "Interests and Disinterestedness in the Making of the Constitution," in Richard Beeman et al., eds., *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1987).

⁵ Zuckerman, "A Different Thermidor," 174.

ined." "A people which appeared, in the righteousness of its resistance to tyranny, 'incapable' of corruption was suddenly seized by 'a spirit of avarice and speculation.'" By 1800, the transition was "essentially complete." Liberalism had destroyed the corporate republican conceptions of society and made competition and pluralism acceptable.

It unleashed struggles for status throughout the community, and it intimidated egalitarianism in principle even if it achieved no such leveling in practice. Liberalism promoted democratization because it released the energies of ordinary people and, more, because it accorded such commoners the capacity for virtuous conduct. Unlike republicanism, it did not reserve its accolades and entitlements to men of sufficient means to stand above the pell-mell of passion and the entrapments of dependence. Emphasizing opportunity as it did, liberalism offered masses of Americans "an escape from the self-denying virtue of their superiors" and the social control that attended it.⁶

This argument of Zuckerman's is extraordinary in light of his heated criticism of my very similar interpretation. The main difference is that his transition is all brought about by some reified entity called "liberalism." His ordinary people are not agents in his story; they are the victims, presumably of those whom he labels "the commercial classes" or "mercantile operators." "Few of them"—that is, common ordinary people—he says, "really wished to live under a liberal regime." What they really wanted, he writes in his most sentimental prose, was to cling together in little communities, in their small peaceable kingdoms. "On city stoops and street corners, on the stump and in smoke-filled rooms, around the hot stove and in the ladies' auxiliaries, at camp meetings and in parish halls, in all the settings in which the great majority of Americans came together, the old aspiration to close, consensual community survived."⁷ We are supposed to believe that the entire explosion of economic and popular energy in early nineteenth-century America that we label "liberalism" was carried out in opposition to the will of the bulk of the population.

Because I suggest that the bulk of the population may have welcomed this liberalism—indeed, may actually have brought it about through their many pursuits of happiness—Zuckerman now seems to be passionately anxious to reverse direction and to criticize my book—as if its mere presence endangers the kind of America he seeks. Indeed, the responses of both Smith and Zuckerman possess a degree of anger and indignation that goes beyond what one normally expects in a review of a book. In part at least, this anger and indignation seem to arise from my use of the term "radicalism." Edmund S. Morgan foresaw in a review of my book that New Left historians might be upset that I had used a term they believe they own.⁸ At any rate, Zuckerman

⁶ *Ibid.*, 182, 187, 190.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 186, 192.

⁸ Morgan, "The Second American Revolution," *New York Review of Books*, June 25, 1992.

can scarcely contain his fury: he says that I deny class at every turn and disregard race, gender, and ethnicity almost entirely, none of which is true. Smith, like other neo-Progressive or New Left historians, believes that radicalism means “substantive change in the lot of those who were most oppressed, subjugated, or marginal in the society.” In her opinion, these most oppressed, subjugated, or marginal were African-American slaves, women, and other “have-nots” on the very bottom of American society.

No one denies that these groups were oppressed in various ways, as most people were in premodern times, and that black slaves especially endured a subjugation rarely duplicated in the history of the world. We have learned a lot about the oppression of these groups in the past thirty years, and I presumed a good deal of that knowledge on the part of my readers. But despite what Smith and Zuckerman say, I do not ignore issues of slavery and gender or of ethnicity, for that matter: what, for example, is my discussion of the Germans in Pennsylvania about? To be sure, I do not repeat in detail what others have said so fully and eloquently in dozens of monographs on race and gender over the past few decades, but I believe I have set these issues in their proper context for fully understanding them. I think I have placed the proportions of the story in accord with those of the eighteenth-century, instead of those of our present, and have correctly set forth the essential challenges the Revolution made to the position of women and to slavery, including explaining the origins of the first emancipation and the abolition movement. And contrary to what Zuckerman says, I do indeed include Jefferson’s anxiety about the effects of slavery on whites.⁹

No doubt I spent less time than Smith or Zuckerman would have liked or expected on the lot of slaves and women in the Revolution. They expected more because these subjects are understandably preoccupying many historians these days. But I never intended merely to synthesize contemporary scholarship. Of course, my book does rely heavily on the writing of many historians over the past generation or so, and I am much indebted to those writings. But it tries to be much more than a simple summing up of existing scholarship; it also aims to say something new and original about the Revolution, to see it from an unconventional, if not unfashionable, perspective—which is why, to Smith’s and Zuckerman’s disappointment, “the bulk of what counts as ‘the Revolution’ in many courses and monographs is barely here.”

What I hoped to do was press beyond the issues of contemporary scholarship, which often deal with past oppressions of women and blacks in a very present-minded manner, to retrieve a kind of oppression that has been lost to us. There existed in the premodern world another, more general sort of

⁹ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 51. If I had had the benefit of Linda K. Kerber’s recent article, I could have emphasized even more strongly than I did the way the Revolution transformed the role of women—with some Americans even coming to believe in the possibility of women becoming citizens with their own direct responsibilities to the state; Kerber, “The Paradox of Women’s Citizenship in the Early Republic: The Case of *Martin vs. Massachusetts*, 1805,” *AHR*, XCVII (1992), 349–378.

oppression that I believe the Revolution eliminated, a comprehensive oppression that subsumed the oppression of both slaves and women and in which all ordinary people had a stake.

This oppression involved all common ordinary Americans, including not only blacks and women but white males as well. This oppression was, of course, scarcely comparable to the particular degradation suffered by African-American slaves; nevertheless, its elimination had to precede the elimination of the oppression of blacks and women. The age-old humiliation felt by all commoners in the premodern world is by no means as well known today as that experienced by black slaves and women, and for that reason I thought it was worth emphasizing and spending some time on. In order to understand better the changes brought about by the Revolution, I sought to demonstrate the degree to which elites for centuries had held common ordinary people in contempt. Because this oppression of all ordinary people is not an issue of our own time in the way race, gender, and ethnicity are, it is not easy to get present-minded historians like Smith and Zuckerman to understand it. In fact, so absorbed in the present cultural wars are they that it is inconceivable to them that any white males in the past, unless they were sailors or homeless or very poor, could ever have been oppressed or have felt oppressed. They imply that only those who are oppressed or marginalized in our own time were capable of being oppressed two centuries ago. If the Revolution did not totally abolish slavery and fundamentally change the lot of women, then it could not possibly have been radical. In other words, there is something profoundly anachronistic about their conception of the Revolution, as far as it is expressed in their critiques: they indict the Americans of the past for not thinking as we think and for not behaving as we would behave today. Consequently, they are unable to understand a document as fundamental to the Revolution as the Declaration of Independence.

We cannot appreciate the radical significance in 1776 of the Declaration's ringing affirmation that all men were created equal and had certain inalienable rights unless we understand the earlier presumptions of inequality and the contempt in which ordinary people, white as well as black, were held throughout previous history. What was radical about the Declaration in 1776? We know it did not mean that blacks and women were created equal to white men (although it would in time be used to justify those equalities too). It was radical in 1776 because it meant that all white men were equal. Hard as it may be for Smith and Zuckerman to understand, saying that all white males were equal in 1776 was something revolutionary and new under the sun. In my book I wanted to get that point clear; for once the claim of equality by all white males was established in the eighteenth century (no mean feat since it took a few thousand years of Western history to accomplish), then the other claims to equality could follow and, relative to the total span of Western history, although not to our brief American past, follow rather rapidly.

So when Smith says that developments concerning social leveling are not central to my story, or when Zuckerman says that I exclude from my account the ideals and passions of ordinary Americans, they could not be more mistaken. Central to my story is the struggle of ordinary people to emerge into consciousness and prominence; indeed, their emergence ultimately is what the radicalism of the Revolution is all about.

Contrary to what these critics say, my account is not written out of elite archives and is not merely a reflection of northeastern aristocrats. They assume that I am taking the point of view only of the Revolutionary leaders and the better sort and ignoring that of common ordinary people because I do not talk about Jack Tars or women in food riots or the homeless.¹⁰ The only ordinary people they can really conceive of are those on the very bottom of the society, usually the society's victims, whom they sentimentalize and wrap in a nostalgic mantle of romantic communalism. Common farmers, artisans, shopkeepers, petty merchants, protobusinessmen—those whom today we might label “lower-middle class” or “middle class”—these ordinary people have no real place in their consciousness.

Yet these sorts of ordinary people are the major actors in the Revolution and the major actors in my story. Contrary to what Appleby says, I did not describe democracy coming into being without will, motive, or agency. There were many wills, many motives, and many agents—all those common people who transformed the Revolution from a colonial war of independence into a momentous democratic upheaval. The demographic and economic forces that I talked about are not some superhuman entities. They are merely shorthand terms for the actions of hundreds of thousands of these ordinary workaday people.¹¹

These common people did have spokesmen among the Revolutionary elite. I agree with Appleby that Jefferson was the most important of these spokesmen. Better than anyone else ever has, Jefferson articulated our basic American ideology—our belief in liberty and equality, our confidence in education, and our faith in the common sense of ordinary people. But Jefferson was not an ordinary working person—he was a slave-owning aristocrat who never really worked a day in his life—and consequently he never

¹⁰ Smith, who is very much taken with the moral economy interpretations of E. P. Thompson, apparently believes that most of the Revolutionary action took place in mobs. But neither in her critique nor in her recent article on food riots (“Food Rioters and the American Revolution,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., LI [1994], 3–38) does she even try to come to terms with what I had to say in my book (brief as it may have been) about 18th-century mobs—that they were a premodern form of protest that ultimately paid a backhanded tribute to the paternalism and personal organization of the traditional society (Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 89–91, 213–214). My view of most of these old-fashioned mobs and riots so fundamentally challenges Smith's conception of the Revolution that she cannot even acknowledge its existence.

¹¹ It is the awareness of Americans themselves of the patterns formed by hundreds of thousands of people acting that leads to new understandings of the social order. Thus I am puzzled by Appleby's contention that nowhere in my book do I describe “the highly contested reconceptualization of society as a natural order.” In fact, a large part of my last chapter is devoted to just this subject.

fully saw the explosive implications of what he was saying. His words outran many of his intentions, and his common people became far more money-loving and religious than he ever imagined. Certainly, he had little awareness of the commercial nature of the popular forces he was leading.¹²

But ordinary people themselves also became spokesmen for their cause, and they spoke with a degree of anger and feeling that the liberal intellectual Jefferson could never muster. I am thinking of middling men like William Findley, Matthew Lyon, and William Manning, men to whom I devote a good deal of attention in my book. These Scots-Irish immigrants, ex-weavers, ex-servants, uneducated farmers, and all the hundreds of thousands of lowly and middling folk they spoke for—these are the real heroes and principal agents of my story, which, despite Appleby's contention, is anything but an account of "a mindless release of petty ambition." These men were intelligent and tough-minded exponents of the emerging democratic ideology; they took what Appleby calls Jefferson's "highly sophisticated set of ideas" and made those ideas meaningful in the towns and villages of America. They were the principal actors in Jefferson's democratic assault on the Federalist establishment and other remnants of an older hierarchical society, an assault that Appleby has described as well as anyone. But, contrary to her assertion, these ordinary people did not need the French Revolution to give their democratic movement its momentum. They had enough indigenous rage and resentment to make their revolution without the aid of a foreign model. They were determined to destroy the social pretensions of so-called or would-be aristocrats like Hugh Henry Brackenridge or Nathaniel Chipman or James Bowdoin and to establish the moral superiority of their hitherto despised labor. Although I did not describe the mobilization of the Democratic-Republican Party in the 1790s (because so many excellent historians, including Appleby, have), I never doubted that it involved the conflict and issues of power that Appleby stresses.

Appleby in her commentary is preoccupied with the differences between my book and her *Capitalism and a New Social Order*, and consequently she underestimates just how much she and I agree. Although our two books have different emphases, they are easily reconcilable. Both are concerned with the origins of capitalism, both make ordinary people the principal agents in the story, and both see what happened as radical. Certainly, Jeffersonian Republicans such as Findley, Lyon, and Manning are as much a part of her story as they are of mine. But Smith and Zuckerman have a very different view of the period. They abhor capitalism and can scarcely admit the existence of men like Findley, Lyon, and Manning because such white males do

¹² Jefferson's statement at the end of his life, which Appleby quotes, poignantly reveals the extent of his misunderstanding of the forces he was leading. He actually expected that people would soon free themselves from "monkish ignorance and superstition," by which he meant most organized religions. At the very moment that he thought every American then born would become a Unitarian (talk about misperceiving the future!), ordinary Americans were becoming Methodists and Baptists by the tens of thousands in evangelical revivals that transformed the society.

not fit their modern definition of oppressed people. Since the Revolution did not totally abolish black slavery or free women from patriarchal dependency, it could not have been radical; it could only have been, in Smith's word, "adequate."

How the Revolution could have been merely adequate if it transformed something as important as people's sense of equality and self-worth and their conceptions of property and labor is not addressed by these critics. Zuckerman especially has a hard time understanding the changes the Revolution made in people's sense of equality. He cannot appreciate how the society of the early republic could be regarded as egalitarian while having a less equal distribution of wealth than existed in colonial society. That is because he cannot appreciate the distinction between money equality and social equality that many past observers of America have noted and that Mickey Kaus has recently written about. The British historian and socialist R. H. Tawney, for example, realized that America "is marked indeed by much economic inequality; but it is also marked by much social equality." In his classic 1906 account *Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?* German economist Werner Sombart illustrated this social equality by contrasting the American worker with the European one: "He carries his head high, walks with a lissom stride, and is as open and cheerful in his expression as any member of the middle class. There is nothing oppressed or submissive about him." More important than equality of wealth, says Kaus, is this social equality, this equal sense of self-worth and dignity among people, a feeling of equality that allows people, regardless of differences of wealth, to look others in the eye and treat them as equals and to expect to be treated as equals in return. Americans generally have had more of this feeling of equality than other peoples, and the Revolution was crucial in creating it.¹³

Correspondingly important were changes that the Revolution brought about in people's conceptions of property and labor. These changes were linked and were based on substantial transformations in the society. Property in the premodern era had usually been associated with land and was valued largely as a source of independence, not productivity. Eighteenth-century gentry were eager to acquire landed property or any other form of property that would give them the desired independence. They wanted, in other words, the kind of property that historian George V. Taylor, in reference to eighteenth-century France, calls "proprietary wealth."¹⁴ Such wealth was composed of static forms of property that generated what we might call "unearned income"—rents from tenants, returns on bonds, interest from money out on loan—sufficient to allow its holders not to have to work for a living so that they had leisure to assume the burdens of public office without expecting high salaries. (Southern slaveholding planters

¹³ Mickey Kaus, *The End of Equality* (New York, 1992), 15, 16; Tawney and Sombart quotations, *ibid.*, 19.

¹⁴ Taylor, "Noncapitalist Wealth and the Origins of the French Revolution," *AHR*, LXXII (1967), 469–496, quoted in William Doyle, *Origins of the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1980), 17–18.

were ideally equipped to play this aristocratic role.) Although these colonial proprietary gentry, like their counterparts in England, were often involved in commercial ventures, they were not risk-taking entrepreneurs or businessmen in any modern sense. Instead, they were social leaders whose property was the source of their personal authority and independence. Their static proprietary wealth was of course very vulnerable to inflation, which is why the printing of paper money was so frightening to these gentry: inflation threatened not simply their livelihood but their very identity and social position. Until we grasp this point, we will never appreciate the depth of moral indignation behind the gentry's outcry against paper money and other debtor-relief legislation in the 1780s.

Not only was this kind of proprietary wealth very hard to come by in America, where, compared to England, land was so plentiful and rent-paying tenants so rare, but commerce and trade were creating new forms of property that gave wealth and power to new sorts of people. The Revolution accelerated the creation of this kind of property. This new property was anything but static: it was risk-taking, entrepreneurial capital—not money out on loan, but money borrowed; it was in fact all the paper money that enterprising people clamored for in these years. It was not unearned income that came to a person, as Adam Smith defined the rents of the English landed gentry, without exertion, but earned income that came with exertion—indeed, came with labor, production, and exchange. This was the property of businessmen and protobusinessmen—of commercial farmers, artisan-manufacturers, traders, shopkeepers, and all who labored for a living and produced and exchanged things, no matter how poor or wealthy they might be.

Unlike proprietary wealth, this new kind of dynamic, fluid, and evanescent property could not create personal authority or identity; it was, said Joseph Story, “continually changing like the waves of the sea.”¹⁵ Hence it could not be relied on as a source of independence. Once this was understood, then property qualifications for participation in public life either as voters or as officeholders lost their relevance and rapidly fell away.

This radical change in people's idea of property during the Revolution is linked with similarly radical changes that took place in their conception of labor. But this seems to be the wrong kind of radicalism for my critics. Zuckerman at least notes the existence of my argument about labor, only to dismiss it as contrary to existing scholarship and common sense. Perhaps the old scholarship, but not the new, which seems to be increasingly interested in the subject of labor in post-Revolutionary America.¹⁶ Zuckerman thinks

¹⁵ Merrill Peterson, ed., *Democracy, Liberty, and Property: The State Constitutional Conventions of the 1820s* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1966), 81–82. On the new democratic understanding of property as the product of labor see Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760–1820* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1990), 25, 28.

¹⁶ See Jonathan A. Glickstein, *Concepts of Free Labor in Antebellum America* (New Haven, Conn., 1991); Robert J. Steinfield, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1870* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1991); Christopher L. Tomlins, *Law, Labor, and Ideology in the Early American Republic* (Cambridge, 1993); and Huston, “American Revolutionaries.”

my discussion of labor is contrary to common sense because there were so few cities and so little industry: that is because he can imagine a working class only in terms of a modern industrial proletariat. He misses my point entirely that in the premodern world work or labor was broadly equated with the necessity of earning a living.

In a world where aristocratic leisure was valued above all—leisure being defined as the freedom from the need to labor or to have an occupation—the necessity of earning a livelihood and working directly for money was traditionally seen as contemptible.¹⁷ In fact, this need of common people to work, particularly to work with their hands, was what lay behind their degraded and oppressed position throughout history.¹⁸ Even Native American males had an aristocratic contempt for common labor; they hunted and fought and regarded ordinary work as belonging exclusively to their women. Before the American Revolution, labor, as it had been for ages in Western culture, was still widely associated with toil, trouble, and pain (which is why women's experience of childbirth was called labor in all European languages).¹⁹ To be sure, industriousness and the need for a calling were everywhere extolled in the colonies, and the Puritan ethic was widely preached—but only for ordinary people, not for the aristocratic gentry, and only for moral reasons, not for the sake of increasing an individual's prosperity or the society's productivity. Hard work was good for common people; it lifted them out of idleness and barbarism and kept them out of trouble. Despite the spread of new and radical ideas, such as Locke's labor theory of value, which were akin to the new liberal ideas about equality, much conventional thinking in the decades before the Revolution still regarded labor as mean and despicable—which, of course, was what made slavery acceptable to so many white Americans. People labored out of necessity, out of poverty, it was said, and necessity and poverty bred the contempt in which working people had been held for centuries. But changes had long been in the air, and enlightened eighteenth-century aristocrats condescended to extol the value of labor much as they condescended to celebrate the equality of all men. Just as the Revolution became the occasion for the wholesale expression of the new importance to be granted to equality, so too was it the occa-

¹⁷ See *OED*, 2d ed., in which one definition of "leisure" is the "opportunity afforded by freedom from occupations."

¹⁸ It is remarkable that professional historians should have so much difficulty grasping this point when an amateur reader of Victorian novels, sensitive to the cultural world that lay behind these novels, should understand it and explain it so well. See Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew: From Fox Hunting to Whist—The Facts of Daily Life in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York, 1993), 48–50: "Being a gentleman or lady denoted freedom, in true aristocratic fashion, from the need to earn a living A barrister's wife could be presented at court while a solicitor's could not. Surely, this was in some measure because the solicitor took fees directly, i.e., was in trade, while the barrister only received an honorarium." We academics, of course, are the last aristocrats in America.

¹⁹ See *OED*, 2d ed., for the origins of "labor" and "work." One source of work, for example, is an Old Norse term, meaning "to feel pain." One of the definitions of labor is "to exert one's powers of body or mind; in early use chiefly said of physical work, esp. performed with the object of gaining a livelihood."

sion for the full expression of this new moral value to be given to labor. As James L. Huston has recently pointed out, preserving "the fruits of labor" became a central part of the Americans' ideology in the 1760s and 1770s and "one of the most important conceptual behests [sic: bequests?] of the revolution."²⁰

This transformation in the meaning of labor is a major part of what I mean by the radicalism of the Revolution. Suddenly, all who worked for a living were no longer willing to put up with their hitherto degraded and oppressed condition. The Revolution became an important expression of their strenuous and angry struggle to establish their moral superiority over those they labeled leisured aristocrats—over those who did not have to work for a living or have occupations, over those whose income came from proprietary wealth, came, in other words, without exertion or manual labor: landed gentry, rentiers, and those we today would call professionals.²¹ Many of these leisured aristocrats, having themselves so recently praised the virtues of labor and equality, were in no position to resist this assault, and in the North they were overwhelmed.

This struggle was what the farmer William Manning and the rich manufacturer Matthew Lyon meant when they said the essential social conflict was between "those that Labour for a Living and those that git a Living without Bodily Labour" or between "the industrious part of the community" and those brought up in "idleness, dissipation, and extravagance."²² Manning and Lyon are not yet talking about the later nineteenth-century class conflict between a modern proletariat and businessmen. In the eighteenth century, hard as it may be for us to accept, rich businessmen like Lyon with many employees and struggling single shoemakers like William Brewster of Connecticut saw themselves in a similar category as laborers, sharing a common resentment of a genteel aristocratic world that had humiliated and disdained them since the beginning of time because of their need to work. Eventually, of course, this common category of laborers would break apart into employers and employees, into manual and nonmanual, and into blue-collar and white-collar workers—into, in other words, the modern

²⁰ Huston, "American Revolutionaries," 1081. As Huston points out, theorists like Locke saw early on the intellectual implications of the social and economic changes taking place in the English-speaking world and worked out labor theories of value in response to these changes, but for Americans it was the Revolution that allowed for the widespread expression of this radically new thinking about labor. Locke was not as modern as he is often made out to be. See E. J. Hundert, "The Making of *Homo Faber*: John Locke Between Ideology and History," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XXXIII (1972), 3–22. For the new, more sympathetic attitudes to labor after 1750 in the English-speaking world see A. W. Coats, "Changing Attitudes to Labour in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Economic History Review*, XI (1958), 35–51.

²¹ What is remarkable is the degree to which labor was celebrated in the antebellum North; it is what led two visiting Hungarians accompanying Louis Kossuth in the 1850s to express their wonder at American democracy. "The principle, that *labour is never degrading*," they said, "is here carried into life." Such a statement is incomprehensible except in terms of the changes in the meaning of labor that I have described. Quoted in Huston, "American Revolutionaries," 1096.

²² Manning, quoted in Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 279; Lyon, quoted *ibid.*, 278.

categories and classes that New Left historians like Smith and Zuckerman are more comfortable with. The presentist prejudices of both Zuckerman and Smith prevent them from seeing that my book is all about social and class conflict; it is just not the social and class conflict that they have been conditioned to expect.

They are unable to see the social conflict and the radicalism of the Revolution that I describe because the Findleys, Lyons, and Mannings and other ordinary white males who are featured in my story were not opposed to the development of capitalism, and everyone today knows that one has to be opposed to capitalism in order to be truly radical. This assumption that the eighteenth-century proponents and practitioners of capitalism could never have been radical is probably the ultimate anachronism that Smith and Zuckerman bring to their critiques. As Smith suggests at one point: if you do not have "historical reservations about the market," how can you even be involved in a discussion of radicalism? There was a time, however difficult it may be for post-Marxist thinkers like Smith and Zuckerman to grasp, when the development of capitalism was regarded as very radical indeed. But to link the Revolution, which, as Smith says, was "a good thing," with capitalism, which is "a bad thing"—well, that's going too far: this "harnessing our approval of the Revolution to nineteenth-century capitalism" is to make "mobile, competitive, and individualistic elements of the Jacksonian era not just revolutionary but American Revolutionary, hence worthy of celebration and deference." Smith needs to read Huston's article in order to realize that what Americans thought about politics and the economy in 1800 is no longer much with us in the late twentieth century.²³ It is quite possible for us to recognize that the Revolution and capitalism were linked and that early nineteenth-century contemporaries considered both to be good things, and yet at the same time for us to believe that capitalism today might need controlling by the government. That is what doing history is all about—recovering different, lost worlds and showing how they developed into our present. I know it is naïve and old-fashioned to believe that our responsibility as historians is merely to describe the past as it was, and not to manipulate it in order to advance some present political agenda. Such an old-fashioned approach, of course, would mean, in Zuckerman's revealing words, that we historians would become too finely attuned "to the temper of an earlier time" and we would thus fail, "finally, to address the dilemmas of [our] own day."²⁴

²³ Huston comments on the difficulty 20th-century American historians have in conceiving of a past that had fundamentally different assumptions about the role of government than we do in the present. They have particular trouble imagining that once upon a time liberals believed that government was the source of all social evils, including the maldistribution of wealth, and that therefore the proper path to reform was to reduce the power of government, create a *laissez-faire* state, and produce political equality, which in turn would produce economic equality. This notion just does not seem credible to many historians today. "The idea that political equality will produce an economic equality," says Huston, "has almost drawn a collective guffaw from scholars." Huston, "American Revolutionaries," 1102.

²⁴ These are the words Zuckerman used several years ago to criticize the work of his mentor, Bernard Bailyn. In Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Zuckerman went

The democratic world of the early nineteenth century that I attempted to describe was not a world only of crass material strivings and obsessive consumers. Throughout the book I was concerned with the different ways people related to one another. By the early nineteenth century, it is my opinion that, with the general denunciation of the monarchical adhesives of blood, family, and patronage and with the perceived weakness of republican virtue and sociability as a means of tying people together, many people had come to rely on interest as the principal and strongest source of attachment between people. This is not the same thing as saying that they cared only about money or consumer goods. I was in fact describing something resembling the "civil society of the bourgeois democratic sort" that Richard Rorty has recently talked about: "obviously, not a community in the strong approbative sense of 'community' used by critics of liberalism like Alastair MacIntyre and Robert Bellah" (and, Rorty might have added, Michael Zuckerman), but, nonetheless, a busy, functioning, democratic, civil society.²⁵

This new liberal society of the early nineteenth century may have been held together largely by interest, which was no mean adhesive, but interest was not the only adhesive. Not only did the older bonds, both monarchical and republican, linger on into the nineteenth century and even into our own day, but the Revolutionary explosion of evangelical religious passion worked to tie people together in new ways and to temper and control the scramble for private wealth—a point my book spends some time on, despite Smith's statement to the contrary. Most evangelicals were not unworldly and anticapitalist. Quite the contrary: there is considerable evidence that religion increased people's energy as it restrained their liberty, got them on with their work as it disciplined their acquisitive urges, and gave them confidence that even self-interested individuals subscribed to absolute standards of right and wrong and thus could be trusted in market exchange and contractual relationships.²⁶

If Smith and Zuckerman had been more loyal to E. P. Thompson, they might have better appreciated the connection he always posited between radicalism and evangelical Protestantism. Where do they think the evangelical America of 1800 came from? The outburst of evangelical Protestantism that took place in these years is one of the best indicators of the social radicalism of the Revolution and one that none of my critics confronts.

on to complain, the Revolution "appears as an episode essentially of the eighteenth century, devoid of subsequent significance." Not only is this complaint patently wrong, but the fact that Zuckerman could make it suggests just how explicitly and grossly political and presentist he expects history writing to be. What I consider a virtue in history writing—being as true as possible to the past—Zuckerman considers a vice: that about sums up our differences; Zuckerman, "Fiction and Fission: Twentieth-Century Writing on the Founding Fathers," in Hedva Ben-Israel et al., *Religion, Ideology, and Nationalism in Europe and America: Essays Presented in Honor of Yehoshua Arieli* (Jerusalem, 1986), 241.

²⁵ Richard Rorty, "On Ethnocentrism: A Reply to Clifford Geertz," *Michigan Quarterly Review*, XXV (1986), 533.

²⁶ For an insightful exploration of this point even among the most extreme Calvinists see William Breitenbach, "Unregenerate Doings: Selflessness and Selfishness in New Divinity Theology," *American Quarterly*, XXXIV (1982), 479–502.

In the three decades between the 1760s and the 1790s the religious landscape of America was transformed. The older state churches that had dominated colonial society for a century and a half—the Anglican, Congregational, and Presbyterian—were surrounded or supplanted by new and in some cases unheard of religious denominations and sects. By 1790 the Baptists had already become the largest denomination in the country, and the Methodists, who had no adherents in America in 1760, were moving up fast, soon to outstrip every group.²⁷ So sudden was the collapse of the age-old state traditions of orthodoxy and establishment and so dramatic was the rise of new evangelical groups and sects that J.C.D. Clark's recent account of the Revolution as a civil war of religion may not be as exaggerated as it first appears.²⁸ Perhaps only something akin to a war, it seems, can explain such a remarkable turnabout in religious sentiment.

These religious changes represented a radical shift in the American people's social relationships and cultural consciousness. Because religion (and not the ideas of Bacon, Locke, and Newton as issued from the heights of Monticello) was still the major means by which most ordinary people made sense of the world, these startling religious changes are some of the best signs we have of the radically social and class-ridden character of the Revolution. But there is more work to be done, particularly on this matter of religion. I have no doubt that the more we explore the social and cultural history of the Revolution, the more we will discover just what a radically transforming event it was. And it is not over yet.

²⁷ The best short account of this religious upheaval is an unpublished paper by Stephen A. Marini, "The Revolutionary Revival of Religion." See also Douglas H. Sweet, "Church Vitality and the American Revolution: Historiographical Consensus and Thoughts Towards a New Perspective," *Church History*, XLV (1976), 341-357; Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1992); and Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Religion in a Revolutionary Age* (Charlottesville, Va., 1994).

²⁸ J.C.D. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660-1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World* (Cambridge, 1994).