American Insurgents, American Patriots

THE REVOLUTION OF THE PEOPLE

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III

The chapters that follow narrate the chronology of insurgency. They explain how the angry insurgents of 1774 channeled resistance into an elaborate infrastructure of revolution that respected a rule of law and demanded a government capable of addressing their interests. It is a complicated story involving many thousands of Americans who often left only fragmentary and incomplete accounts of their thoughts and actions. Fortunately, in total the record is rich enough to tell their story in full. Before we do so, however, it is worth pausing over one insurgent who, by virtue of his actions and resolve on behalf of insurgency, became indisputably an American patriot before being erased almost entirely from our collective story.

Samuel Thompson made other people, especially those who fancied themselves his social betters, uncomfortable. He still has that capacity. Born in 1735 to a Scotch-Irish family, he owned a modest tavern in Brunswick, an inland community in what would eventually become part of the state of Maine. Although Thompson has slipped from the pages of the history of the Revolution, he sparked a crisis during the spring of 1775 known as "Thompson's War," a moment of insurgency that exposed the raw, violent side of popular resistance to the British Empire.[47]

Thompson could have come from any colony. He was a product of his times, a representative man. Dr. David Ramsay, a revolutionary officer who wrote an account of the Revolution, observed in 1789 that "The great bulk of those, who were active instruments of carrying on the revolution, were self-made, industrious men. Those who by their own exertions, had established or laid a foundation for establishing personal independence, were most generally trusted, and most successfully employed in establishing that of their country."[48] Thompson fit Ramsay's general description. He managed to support a large family in a community that offered meager economic opportunities.

Social distinctions counted for little in Brunswick. In terms of manners and education, Thompson would not have stood out from most of his neighbors. What separated him from these people, in fact, was his ability to articulate forcefully what was on their minds. Although his detractors in Falmouth called him uncouth, Thompson unquestionably exercised a kind of charismatic leadership within this small town of 876 residents. What these qualities were remain obscure. His physical appearance certainly did not inspire respect. Contemporaries reported that he was "short, stocky, [and] opinionated." Others were more uncharitable, using words such as "portly" and "corpulent." But however he carried himself, everyone rated him an extraordinarily impressive speaker. They said this even though whenever Thompson became excited—a regular occurrence—he stuttered quite noticeably. It was the passion of his pronouncements that riveted public attention. His oratory was characterized as "impetuous, noisy, and sometimes even furious."[49] Wit and intelligence, no doubt, helped elevate him above the level of populist demagogue.[50]

Thompson proclaimed an absolute commitment to social equality. The source of this principle may have been Universalism. People of this religious persuasion took inspiration directly from the Bible. They taught that it is God's purpose, through the grace revealed in Jesus Christ, to save every member of the human race from sin. Universalists accepted no institutional authority beyond the locally gathered congregation, and when a local minister preached doctrines that ran counter to those held by the majority of his parishioners, he lost his job. Within these churches one person's opinion deserved as much respect as another's. Thompson often responded to questions—not only about British policy—with the observation, "It is all right in the great plan."

We should not treat these words lightly. They are the stuff of radical resistance. Such a belief can give a person a powerful sense of moral certainty; those who resist the plan or who fail to see the logic of the divine blueprint deserve little sympathy. When great plans become guides to revolutionary politics—as they have repeatedly over the last several centuries—they encourage the violent suppression of dissent. Whatever his perception of the great plan may have been, Thompson deferred to no one. When a person who thought highly of himself exclaimed that if Thompson had had a proper education, he would have

been a great man, Thompson replied, "If I had your education, I could put you in my pocket." On another occasion a member of the Massachusetts General Court expressed pity for Thompson's lack of formal learning. To which Thompson observed, "If I have no education perhaps I can furnish some ideas to those who have."[51]

In 1774, news that Parliament had closed Boston to all commerce and restructured the government of Massachusetts Bay marked Thompson's own revolutionary moment. His anger focused initially on people who seemed slow to demonstrate their support for the American cause or, worse, who suggested that the British might have a point. Thompson raised a group of vigilantes—probably members of the local militia—who took it upon themselves to enforce a boycott of British imported goods and to expose ideological dissenters. Their methods shocked moderates who still insisted that well-meaning gentlemen like themselves could resolve the constitutional differences with the mother country without violence.

The insurgents of Brunswick favored stronger measures. They physically beat suspected loyalists. One target almost drowned while being interrogated about his politics. Thompson and his followers forced another opponent to dig his own grave; not surprisingly, when the insurgents pointed their guns at his head and urged him to prepare for his own death, the man experienced a dramatic patriotic conversion. The terror spread through neighboring towns. Anglican ministers came in for especially harsh treatment. It is no wonder that one person at the time described Thompson as "running over with zeal and patriotism."[52]

Reports from Lexington and Concord that reached Maine in late April 1775 convinced Thompson that Britain had declared war on America. And without much reflection he decided that the attack on the Massachusetts countryside called for an appropriate response. Writing from Brunswick to the head of the committee of safety at Cambridge, Thompson announced that "having heard of the Cruill murders they have don in our Province, makes us more Resolute than ever, and finding that the Sword is drawn first on their side, that we shall be animated with that noble Spirit that wise men ought to be, until our Just Rights and Libertyes are Secured to us. Sir, my heart is with every true Son of America."[53] Unlike John Patten, Thompson did not march off to

Boston. Instead, he devised his own plan in Maine to revenge what General Gage had done, and in the process of launching a guerrilla action against the British navy, he hoped to embarrass the merchants of Falmouth who still seemed eager to appease the enemy.

Without receiving orders from higher-ranking officers—not even those who spoke for the new provisional government of Massachusetts—Thompson decided that he would capture HMS *Canceaux*, a small British warship that provided protection for those in Falmouth who supplied General Gage's troops in Boston with food and fuel. The vessel was under the command of Lieutenant Henry Mowat, a tough officer who proved himself a worthy opponent for the indomitable Thompson. The insurgents thought that they might be able to take the *Canceaux* by surprise. The plan involved hiding sixty Americans on a barge and—after maneuvering it next to the British ship—launching a successful strike. It all came to naught. Someone alerted Mowat to the danger before Thompson's group had made much progress.

Without having a clear backup scheme, Thompson's irregulars began taking up positions on May 8 in the woods near Falmouth. They wore no uniforms. Their only mark of identity as insurgents was a sprig of spruce attached to their hats. For their standard they raised a pole that still had branches at the top. The men milled about, grumbling that the citizens of Falmouth did not have the courage to make a proper stand. Then Thompson's little army had an extraordinary piece of luck. Unaware that the Americans were lurking nearby, Mowat and another British officer came ashore for a meeting with local leaders, and as they were walking though town, Thompson seized them. In exchange for the two officers, Thompson demanded that the *Canceaux* immediately depart from Falmouth waters.

The British, however, showed not the slightest interest in bargaining with the insurgents. The officer left in charge of the ship threatened to bomb the town. To which Thompson responded, "Fire away! Fire away." He declared that for every shot the *Canceaux* fired, "I will cut off a joint," a threat of his own to dismember Mowat piece by piece. The terrified townspeople rushed to save their possessions. One witness reported that the confrontation "frightened the women and children to such a degree that some crawled under wharves, some ran down cellar and some out of town. Such a shrieking scene was never before pre-

sented to view here."[54] The leading gentlemen of Falmouth came to Thompson, begging him to stand down, and when he seemed unwilling to compromise, several local spokesmen promised that if he let Mowat return to his ship on parole, they would take Mowat's place as prisoners. The parties sealed the deal; Mowat left the woods of Maine, never to set foot there again. He claimed that he feared for his life—a fair, if cowardly, assessment of the situation.

Thompson's insurgents took their disappointment out on the townspeople, stealing goods and liquor from those who had spoken in favor of avoiding violence. According to one report, "The soldiery thought nothing too bad to say of the Falmouth gentry. Some of them were heard to say as they walked the streets yesterday, 'this Town ought to be laid in Ashes.'"[55] On May 10 Thompson's War was over. The leaders of Falmouth apologized profusely to Mowat, and in a letter to the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts they complained that insurgency was no way to resist the British. "We are afraid that if any number of men at any time, and in any manner, may collect together, and attack any thing, or any person they please, every body may be in danger."[56]

The incident at Falmouth had several unexpected results. In October, Mowat reappeared in the harbor. Resistance to British rule had spread to other towns on the Maine coast, and Mowat was determined once and for all to stop the insurgency. Despite the townspeople's assumption that he came as a friend, the *Canceaux* bombed the defenseless community. Marines came ashore and burned what the cannons had not already destroyed. As the *New-England Chronicle* reported on November 23, "The savage and brutal barbarity of our enemies in burning Falmouth, is a full demonstration that there is not the least remains of virtue, wisdom, or humanity in the British court; and that they are fully determined with fire and sword, to beggar and enslave the whole American people."[57] The British learned a little late in the day that punishing insurgency—especially by attacking innocent people—is usually counterproductive, turning moderates into radicals and enhancing the reputation of the local resistance forces.

However much some gentry leaders disliked Thompson, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts thought highly of his patriotic zeal; to the disgust of those who thought that good breeding and college education should translate directly into military command, Thompson received an appointment as a brigadier general. A short piece that appeared a few years later in a Boston newspaper helps us better understand his popular appeal. In an address before the members of his brigade, he declared "that there had been Stories reported that the Officers and Soldiers in his Brigade were against him; therefore, if it was the case, he never would rule over a People, if he could not rule in their Hearts, therefore desired the commanding Officers to try a vote." Not one officer cast a negative ballot. When he learned the result, Thompson pledged to the Maine soldiers, "I never will forsake you." The person taking down Thompson's words that day wrote, "It was enough if he could at his Death see his Country Free, and it was a Pleasure to Die for the Rights of this People rather than submit to the cruel Hand of Tyranny, and if we go back we Die twice." Thompson asked only one concession from his troops. If on "the Day of Battle" he held back, "Slay me . . . for it will be just."[58]

After the Americans had won independence, Thompson returned to Maine, held many elective offices, and, as a delegate to the Massachusetts ratifying convention in 1788, spoke passionately against the Constitution of the United States. He demanded annual elections for senators and congressmen. When his critics chided him for his radicalism, Thompson responded, "We cannot have too much liberty." He was particularly bothered by the Constitution's failure to outlaw racial slavery in the new republic. As a revolutionary insurgent, he had fought for equality, and after sacrificing for independence, he asked those who remembered Thompson's War, "Shall it be said, that after we have established our own independence and freedom, we make slaves of others?"[59] Once again he had spoken truth to power. Perhaps for this reason obscurity was his reward. Thompson had the honor of having a single gun battery bear his name. It was in a fort constructed in the late nineteenth century to protect the citizens of Maine from possible attack during the Spanish-American War.[60] This is hardly sufficient. It is time to reconsider the stories we tell ourselves about our own Revolution and to restore Thompson and thousands of other American insurgents to our revolutionary history. For absent these patriots in the wings, there would quite possibly be no revolutionary history to celebrate.

The breaking point came on August 9, when Gage announced the names of the individuals appointed to the council under the provisions of the Massachusetts Government Act. Dartmouth anticipated that publication of the list of twenty-four people would stir up trouble. Neither he nor Gage had had the leisure properly to vet the various suggestions put forward, and in the rush to curtail what they called the democratic element in the Massachusetts constitution, they selected persons they hoped could be trusted to implement a tough new colonial policy. On June 3—before the public release of the names—Dartmouth had confessed to Gage, "It would have been a great satisfaction if, in the choice of the persons recommended to the King to be of the new Council, we could have procured more perfect and satisfactory information both of the characters and connections of the principal persons in the colony qualified for such a trust; but the case would admit of no delay."[25] Dartmouth's inability to collect more reliable intelligence proved of secondary importance. Simply naming these people—known as mandamus councilors—put them in harm's way. Imperial oppression was now given real names and personalities. It had inescapably fastened itself on to specific colonists who suddenly had a lot to answer for. Overnight, they became targets of popular wrath.

Appointees residing in Boston were safe enough, but since Gage did not have sufficient troop strength to secure the towns outside the capital, the councilors who lived in the countryside were forced to look out for themselves. This at a time when Gage reported to Dartmouth, "It is agreed that popular fury was never greater in this province than at present."[26] How the governor acquired information about the people's anger was not clear. He may have read the newspapers or had agents in the field. Whatever his sources were, they proved accurate. The "inhabitants of the 5th parish in Gloucester," for example, described themselves as "being few in number, and chiefly poor fishermen, [who] have not time nor skill in the studies of politicks." But the appointment of a new council made insurgents of them. In a piece that appeared under the title "The Fish Hook and Fowling Piece," they declared, "we have in our colonies, many stupid villains endeavoring to aid in fastening on

our necks and that of our posterity the yoke of bondage . . . How warm we feel; good God, our trust in thee. Our fowling pieces are ready while our fishing lines are in hand."[27] A writer from New London asked readers, "whether there is any Native Inhabitant of the Massachusetts Colony left . . . base enough to accept the empty title of Councilor, on the new fangled constitution? And if so, whether it ought to be considered in any other light, than an unnatural child, aiding an assassin to rip up his mother's bowels? And ought [he] not be shunned and abhorred more than an inhabitant of Hell?"[28] The Massachusetts Government Act had the unintended effect of declaring open season on anyone who dared accept a commission from the Crown.

Timothy Paine was one of the first to fall. He had long played the part of the country gentleman in central Massachusetts. A graduate of Harvard College, he served in a number of judicial posts, dabbled in real estate, and married a very wealthy woman who happened to be his stepsister. Although he insisted that he had never asked to become a mandamus councilor, his name appeared on the official list. The popular response came quickly. Early on the morning of August 27, companies of men appeared on the Worcester Commons. Estimates of their number varied wildly, but the best guess was about fifteen hundred, a figure roughly equal to the town's entire population. The visitors, who apparently did not carry arms, milled around for several hours, and at about nine o'clock they elected a committee of representatives to speak with Paine at his house, not far from the Commons. He received the group as cordially as one might expect in the circumstances, asking them to explain their business. They demanded not only that he resign from the new council, but also that he provide the representatives with a written statement of his intentions.

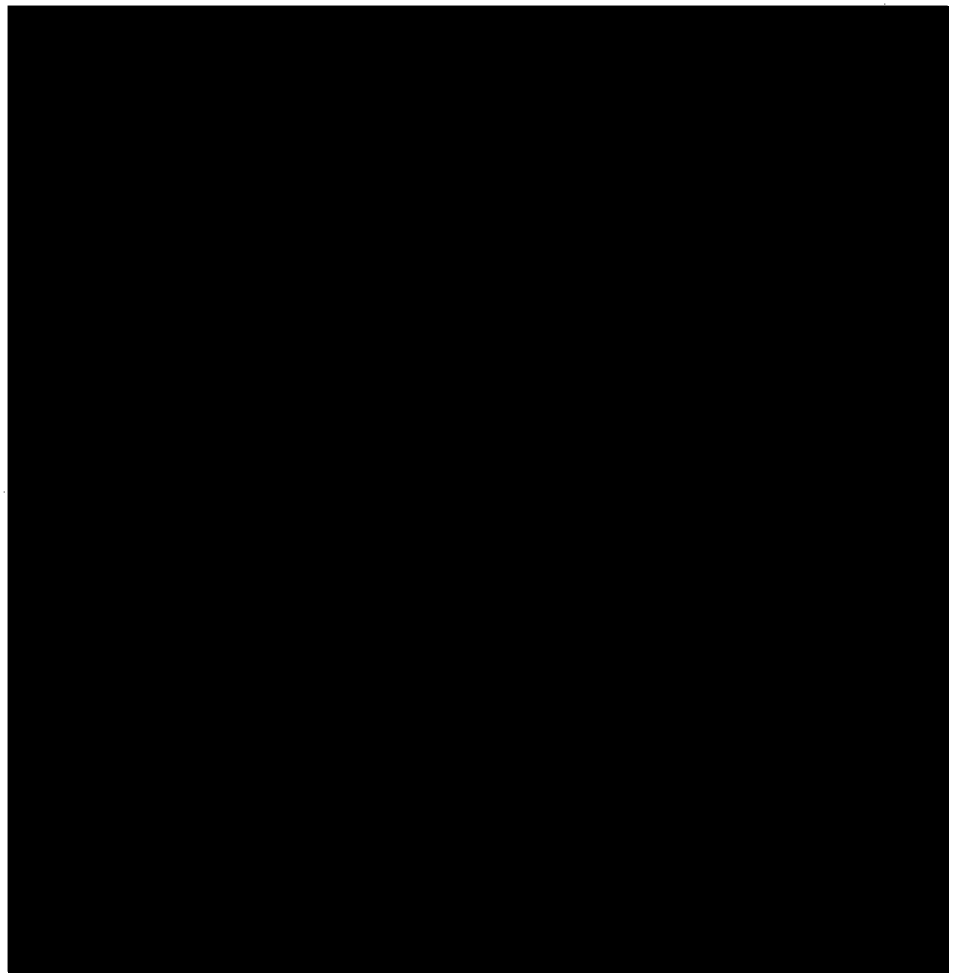
The whole business annoyed Paine, who expected ordinary people to show him proper respect. But there was little he could do. As he explained laconically in a letter to Governor Gage, "I found myself under a necessity of complying." As soon as Paine had scribbled out his resignation, the committee demanded that he read the paper to the entire body of fifteen hundred men waiting on the Commons. Paine feared for his life, but the representatives of the "people" assured him that he would be safe. On the way to the town center he "met with no insult" except that some members of the assembled farmers demanded that he "walk with [his] hat off when [he] passed through them."

The hat incident suggested that for the people, more than Paine's public resignation was at stake. The men who had traveled to Worcester Commons took the occasion to humiliate a person who had perhaps behaved over the years as if he believed himself superior to the ordinary lot. A spirit of equality demanded that he appear before them bareheaded—as an ordinary colonist. At that moment, no one—most especially not Paine—inquired by what authority this spontaneously formed assembly claimed to speak for the people. There had been no plebiscite. No doubt an extraordinarily large turnout provided powerful evidence that the crowd really did represent the people. At the end of the day, however, it was merely a rhetorical device. By assuming this voice, insurgent groups legitimized—perhaps to the very people they claimed to represent—attacks on Crown officials. Paine was lucky. The farmers judged his performance acceptable, and within a short time they dispersed. Paine, however, remained in shock. Writing to Gage, he observed, "You see an open opposition has taken place to the Acts of the British Parliament . . . [the] people's spirits are so raised they seem determined to risk their lives and everything dear to them in the opposition, and prevent any person from executing any commission he may receive under the present administration."[29]

Residents of Hingham identified Joshua Loring as the commodore. During the Seven Years' War he had received a commission as captain in the British navy and had served with distinction during campaigns on Lakes Champlain and Ontario. During those exciting times he had come to love the empire. Although his loyalist sentiments were no secret, the political nightmare that began at midnight on August 29 must have come as a surprise. A loud pounding on the front door awakened his family. Loring threw open an upstairs window and "saw five men disguised, their faces blackened, hats flapped and with cutlasses in their hands." When asked who sent them, the insurgents answered that they "came from a mob." And they demanded that Loring resign immediately from the new council. After it became clear that the commodore had no intention of stepping down, a spokesman warned that the group would return the next night to obtain satisfaction. But before departing, sixty or more men gathered on the road fired their guns.

Loring had seen enough. He fled to Boston, leaving his frightened wife and son to deal with the night visitors. When the men did return, they insisted on an audience with Loring himself. The son played for

time, but the leaders, still with "faces blackened and cutlasses in their hands," cut off negotiation. They noted that they had now gathered twice at Loring's home. Their patience was running out. According to Loring, they told his son "to beware of the third" visit, for if a public announcement of resignation did not soon appear in the newspaper, "the consequences . . . would be very severe, that his house should be leveled to the ground, and many other of the like threats." All this time a crowd of several hundred men armed with clubs lined the road, screaming threats and drumming loudly on a fence. In a stunning understatement, Loring explained that the noise "was designed to intimidate." The tactic worked. Even without having to destroy the house, the people successfully drove another mandamus councilor from the countryside.[30]



The number of people involved in these incidents in Massachusetts reveals a lot about the developing insurgency. How many Crown officers were driven from their homes is hard to determine. Several score seem to have fled to Boston during the summer of rage. Far more significant, however, are the figures for popular resistance. Although frightened mandamus appointees probably exaggerated the size of the crowds, they were certainly correct in reporting that thousands of ordinary farmers had participated in confrontations with imperial authorities throughout the colony. Only religious revivals had so dramatically and so publicly generated numbers of this size. And for the most part the militants showed little concern about preserving their anonymity. Paine and Oliver knew full well the townsmen who demanded their resignations. The beleaguered officials also knew that there was nothing they could do to stem the tide.

The popular rage burned just as strongly in neighboring colonies. In early September 1774 Abijah Willard, another newly appointed councilor, journeyed to western Connecticut on business. As soon as he reached the town of Union, he expected to meet two lawyers from Windham. They were there, but to his surprise, they loudly condemned Willard for being "a Traitor to his Country." The charges provoked the people living in the area. About four hundred of them kidnapped Willard, carried him to Brimfield, and organized a tribunal, which sentenced the prisoner to hard labor at the Newgate Prison in Simsbury. The group had no sooner set off for the jail than Willard decided to sign an oath declaring his contempt for the Massachusetts Government Act. He acted just in time. When a Captain Davis of Brimfield attempted to intervene on Willard's behalf, the people "stripped him and gave him the New Fashion Dress of Tar and Feathers." According to intelligence that Gage received, Willard's journey home to Lancaster was almost as difficult as what he had already endured. Communities along the road turned out to insult the hated councilor. Some angry colonists "even put [arms] to his breast with threats of instant death unless he signed a paper the contents of which he did not know or regard."[34]

Although the mandamus councilors found themselves the main focus of public rage, other figures in the countryside—many of whom did not even hold commissions from Gage—became targets for vengeance. The largest group consisted of leading Massachusetts lawyers and merchants who had publicly thanked the previous royal governor Thomas Hutchinson for a job well done. Their motives varied. Some claimed that conciliatory rhetoric might serve to promote a more constructive relationship with Parliament. Others were sincere loyalists who believed that a number of radical troublemakers had misled the people about imperial policy.

Whatever their thinking may have been, composing a congratulatory letter to Hutchinson as he sailed from Boston for London and then publishing the signed texts in regional newspapers constituted a serious error in judgment. The notices contained scores of names. Since the people blamed Hutchinson for the Coercive Acts, they proclaimed his enthusiastic supporters traitors to the American cause. And their identities were now a matter of public record. One newspaper lectured Hutchinson—now long departed from the colony—"If the curses of a whole people can have any effect, you will never have another peaceful moment . . . your name [will be] handed down, for an execration, and a curse, a hissing, and a proverb of reproach, to all future generations." Another piece in the *Essex Gazette* observed that the world was full of people "who pay religious worship to the Devil thinking, and designing, by such means, to flatter, cajole, and keep him in good temper." It seemed that the compliments lately paid to Hutchinson fell into this category.[35]

Of the many signers of the Hutchinson addresses who suffered popular retribution, Francis Green may have had the most harrowing experience. In late July, pressing legal matters necessitated that he travel from his home in Massachusetts to various towns in Connecticut. It probably did not help his reception that Green intended to collect overdue debts. Reports that he had praised Hutchinson spread throughout the area, and soon after he and a companion engaged rooms at Carey's Tavern in Windham, an angry crowd collected. At first the people merely shouted for Green to make an appearance. Between nine and ten o'clock in the evening one organizer informed him that if he had not left the community by six o'clock the next morning, he should "beware of the consequences." Good to its word, the group reappeared the next day. Church bells rang out an alarm; a cannon was placed before

the tavern door. Finally, a few local protesters broke into Green's rooms, forcing him to get out of town without further delay. The ordeal was not over. Messengers ran ahead of him, warning people in the next towns that a hated Hutchinson supporter would soon pass through. In Norwich guns were fired and voices in the crowd were heard to say, "Let us go and fetch the cart," a frightening reference to tarring and feathering. In the end, the people were content simply to throw Green into his own carriage, and as he drove off, the residents lined the road, tossing stones and trash at the vehicle.

When Gage later complained directly to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut about Green's humiliation, some men implicated in the attack responded that what had happened in Connecticut was none of Gage's business, and in any case, they reasoned that Gage should have been aware that "it is well known that Governor Hutchinson is considered by all the Colonies as the principal agent who procured the Act for blocking up the port of Boston, and the other distressing Acts, and that it is the general sense of the whole Continent that those Acts are unconstitutional and oppressive." Green's politics provoked the assault. He should certainly not have been surprised when the people declared his "personal presence . . . disagreeable." Trumbull, who had been elected rather than appointed to office, read the temper of the times better than did Gage. He explained to the Massachusetts governor that he had investigated Green's charges, "and find that others, well knowing the affair do put a very different face and color on those transactions."[36]

In the district of Maine the violence of the summer of 1774 visited individuals whose major transgression amounted to little more than expressions of support for British authority. Local farmers in Gorham took it upon themselves to harass suspected loyalists, and a group of about thirty to forty of them—probably members of a loosely organized militia unit—decided that Dr. Abiathar Alden had been insufficiently enthusiastic about American resistance to the Coercive Acts. It made no matter that Alden lived in Scarborough. The vigilantes forced him out of his house, placed him on a convenient hogshead, and demanded he recant his objectionable principles. To help him make up his mind, every militiaman pointed a gun at him. They warned that he would experience instant death if he should refuse. Not surprisingly, the frightened physician confessed his alleged sins. He had been wrong to speak in favor of

Parliament; he had erred in opposing the resistance of the people to despotism. At the end of Alden's ritual apology his tormentors ordered him to shout, "[I] am very thankful for my life."

A few days later the Gorham militia learned that one of Alden's friends had supplied Gage's troops with materials needed to build military barracks. Richard King, who had aggressively endorsed the Stamp Act a few years earlier, was compelled to stand on a table and read a statement of contrition to the assembly. But King did not quite get it right. During his confession he observed that a very few Americans scattered over a huge territory had anything to hope for in a contest with the first nation of the Old World. Although this assessment of the American prospects seemed reasonable enough, the insurgents condemned the argument. They reportedly rattled their weapons in disapproval, and their captain demanded, "Down upon your knees, Sir, and erase that sentence; these soldiers can't endure the sentiment." Having obtained satisfaction, the visitors finally dispersed, but the man who defended the empire fell into depression. He died a few months later—supposedly of madness—and among his papers someone discovered a document containing a summary of his true political beliefs. "Our only Safety is in remaining firm to that Stock of which we are a Branch," he wrote, "and as a Prudent Man that guards against a Pestilential Air when a plague is in the City, so should we guard against those false Patriots of the present day who advise us to resist." In a final cry borne of incomprehension of the insurgency, he prayed, "Great God prevent our madness!"[37]

III

These scattered incidents upset traditional narratives of the American Revolution. It is tempting, therefore, to dismiss the outbursts of popular rage as isolated cases that in no way detract from a familiar chronicle that leads directly from the destruction of the tea in Boston Harbor to the meeting of the First Continental Congress in September 1774. That would be a mistake. However disturbing the rising of an angry countryside may be, it cannot be ignored. To be sure, American insurgents did not destroy homes or murder royal officials in their beds. To take from this the notion that the American Revolution was a reasonable, largely

intellectual affair, while other world-changing revolutions were defined by massive violence, is to miss the point.

Within the context of the lives of the colonists, assaults on councilors and other officials of the Crown had no precedent. Thousands of ordinary people—most of them farmers—were drawn into a political situation that required them to make hard decisions. Again, numbers were important. The individuals who pressed into Worcester or Cambridge to demand resignations from the hated mandamus councilors gained a sense of empowerment simply by seeing so many other people willing to come forward in support of a common cause. And purging the region of prominent representatives of the Crown was in itself a major accomplishment. Public resignations and confessions eroded the psychic bonds of empire. Every time a councilor was forced to step down, it became harder for Americans living in small communities to remain neutral or, like Richard King, to question whether resistance had any chance to succeed. The night visits and acts of terror revealed—if nothing else—the impotence of Gage's government. A misguided policy of toughness had demonstrated not only that the British were not really all that tough, but also that the Americans were more determined in their resistance than either they or their rulers had imagined at the start of the crisis.

Dartmouth failed to appreciate the real test facing the New England insurgency. At issue was not whether Gage could overwhelm popular resistance in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island with a larger army. The most pressing question for the Americans during the summer of 1774 was whether ordinary people in other colonies would support the rising in New England. As Samuel Adams explained to Richard Henry Lee, the challenge is whether "the people of America consider these measures [the Coercive Acts] as an attack on the Constitution of an individual Province, in which the rest are not interested, or will they view the model of Government prepared for us as a system for the whole Continent."[38] Implicit in Adams's query was the realization that—for New England at least—there was no turning back. The Ghost of History would have been proud.