THE ROAD TO
MOBOCRACY

Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763–1834

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Pre-Revolutionary Traditions of Anglo-American Mobs

A mobocracy . . . is always usurped by the worst men in the most corrupt times; in a period of violence by the most violent. It is a Briareus with a thousand hands, each bearing a dagger; a Cerberus gaping with ten thousand throats, all parched and thirsting for fresh blood. It is a genuine tyranny, but of all the least durable, yet the most destructive while it lasts. The power of a despot, like the ardour of a summer's sun, dries up the grass, but the roots remain fresh in the soil; a mob-government, like a West-India hurricane, instantly strews the fruitful earth with promiscuous ruins, and turns the sky yellow with pestilence. Men inhale a vapour like the Sirocco, and die in the open air for want of respiration. It is a winged curse that envelops the obscure as well as the distinguished, and is wafted into the lurking places of the fugitives. It is not doing justice to licentiousness, to compare it to a wind which ravages the surface of the earth; it is an earthquake that loosens its foundations, burying in an hour the accumulated wealth and wisdom of ages. Those, who, after the calamity, would reconstruct the edifice of the publick liberty, will be scar[c]ely able to find the model of the artificers, or even the ruins.

Fisher Ames, 1799

When Fisher Ames decried mobocracy in 1799, he was reacting to the political storms swirling about him: to the madness of the Parisian sansculottes who were just then turning from the violence of the guillotine to the despotism of Napoleon, to the frightening specter of racial warfare in the West Indies, and to the bitter, volatile political battles threatening the young American republic. Arch-Federalist and conservative that Ames was, such upheaval in the name of the people and in the guise of mob action seemed all too threatening. Thus he believed that, of all the classical forms of government, the corruption of democracy—mobocracy—was the most destructive. A monarchy could degenerate into despotism or an aristocracy into oligarchy, yet the damage inflicted upon liberty and property might not be permanent: the despot or oligarch seized property but rarely destroyed it. Mob government, however, might be compared best to natural disasters like a "West-India hurricane," sweeping all before it, or an earthquake burying knowledge and property under the rubble of a dying civilization. Mobocracy led inevitably to the worst of all possible worlds: the abandonment of the social contract and a regression to barbarism. Mob government was no government.[1]

Although the fear of mobocracy so vividly portrayed by Fisher Ames grew out of the eighteenth-century Whig science of politics, most Anglo-Americans earlier in the century viewed popular disturbances with less apprehension. Patricians—the merchants, lawyers, and gentry—feared any disorder, but they also believed that riots helped protect them from tyranny. They tolerated moments of license as part of the way society operated. Plebeians—apprentices, laborers, mechanics, and others on the lowest stratum of society—enjoyed the moments of revelry, challenged social authority without directly threatening the social system, and expressed an ideology of their own that emphasized communal welfare and individual fair play. Both sources of support for rioting converged to give the eighteenth-century rioter a sense of legitimacy in his own mind and in the minds of many others. This idea Fisher Ames was incapable of understanding.

For many Anglo-Americans in the mid-eighteenth century, then, popular disorder assumed a quasi legitimacy. Based on an image of society that recognized a single all-encompassing communal interest, this attitude reflected a belief that the people in the street often (but not always) acted in

1. *Works of Fisher Ames* (Boston, 1809), 96–97 (first appeared as Laocoon No. 2 in *Russell's Gazette* [Boston], Apr. 29, 1799). For similar statements, see 2–5, 18, 98–99, 104, 108.

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defense of common, shared values. From this perspective, mobs had certain acknowledged social and political functions. Rioting in the eighteenth century, however, was a complex phenomenon. The ideal of a corporate, single-interest world did not go unchallenged. Self-interest persistently gained wider acceptance, and divisions emerged along economic, ethnic, racial, and religious lines.[2] These developments affected patterns of mid-eighteenth-century rioting and prevented the mob from achieving full legitimacy.

To understand this popular disorder, we must first examine more closely the intellectual origins of the mixed attitude toward rioting and then relate them to the popular image of corporatism—an image not necessarily reflective of reality. But these perceptions of society only begin to reveal the true character of the problem. We must then look at the tumultuous crowd itself, dissecting its behavior to understand fully its functions in the eighteenth century and discovering, insofar as possible, who participated therein.

The Commonwealth Writers

The mixed attitude toward rioting in the mid-eighteenth century and Fisher Ames's vitriolic attack on mobocracy shared the same intellectual source—the collective work of English coffeehouse radicals known as True Whigs, or commonwealthmen. These writers created an elaborate critique of English society and politics, identifying corruption and luxury as threats to liberty. Their essays and books were reprinted in America and became very popular among the colonial elite. The ideas and even the language of the commonwealthmen appeared repeatedly in political controversies in the 1730s, 1740s, and 1750s and again during the resistance movement of the 1760s and 1770s, and they form the major intellectual influence on America in the eighteenth century.[3]

2. The best discussions of these developments are Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979); and James Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1700–1815: An Interdisciplinary Analysis* (Lexington, Mass., 1973).

3. The literature on the impact of the commonwealthmen is now vast. For a general review, see Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXIX (1972), 49–80. See also Caroline

Thus, although Fisher Ames's indictment of mobocracy reflected specific historic circumstances at the close of the century, it also stemmed from the recognition by these earlier political thinkers that rioting was potentially dangerous.[4] Mobs were unpredictable and often uncontrollable. Thomas Gordon, one of the commonwealth writers, cautioned in the 1720s that "one may at any Time gain an Interest in a Mob with a Barrel of Beer" or "by Means of a few odd Sounds, that mean nothing, or something very wild or wicked." He argued that, although "some Quacks in Politicks" ventured "publick Disturbances," believing that they could guide them for their own purposes, the likely outcome was the rise of a demagogic dictator like Caesar or Cromwell.[5]

Writing before the Age of Revolution, thinkers like Gordon still had faith that the people could discern right from wrong. Gordon advised: "It is certain, that the whole People, who are the Publick, are the best Judges whether Things go ill or well with the Publick." "Every Cobler can judge as well as a Statesman, whether he can sit peaceably in his Stall; whether he is paid for his Work; whether the Market, where he buys his Victuals, be well provided; and whether a Dragoon, or a Parish-Officer, comes to him for his Taxes."[6]

These commonwealth writers adhered to the same tripartite classical theory of politics used by Ames, but focused not on the fear that democracy might lead to mobocracy. Instead, they concerned themselves with a threat rooted in the experience of the seventeenth century; their greatest apprehension was that the monarchy would gain too much power and lead to tyranny. In fact, Thomas Gordon went so far as to argue that, even if a

Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman: Studies in the Transmission, Development, and Circumstance of English Liberal Thought from the Restoration of Charles II until the War with the Thirteen Colonies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959); Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1968), 54, 117, 137, 141, 143–144; Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), 42–93; H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1965); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969), 3–45.

4. Ames's language in his antimobocracy quote is very similar to Thomas Gordon's language decrying monarchical despotism. See [John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon], *Cato's Letters; or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects*, 3d ed. (London, 1733), I, 190.

5. *Ibid.*, IV, 247–254; I, 184–194.

6. *Ibid.*, I, 87.

tumult led to a mobocracy, the resulting anarchy was preferable to tyranny, since "all tumults are in their nature, and must be, short in duration" and "must soon subside, or settle into some order." Gordon held that "Tyranny," by contrast, "may last for ages, and go on destroying till at last it has nothing left to destroy."[7]

Under certain circumstances—to oppose tyranny, for instance—many Anglo-Americans held that they had a right, almost a duty, to riot. The source of that sense of duty lay in a distinction between natural law and civil law that was fundamental to the Enlightenment of the mid-eighteenth century. "The Essence of Right and Wrong," Thomas Gordon wrote, "does not depend upon Words and Clauses inserted in a Code or a Statute-Book . . . but upon Reason and the Nature of Things, antecedent to all Laws."[8] Natural laws, then, depended upon nature and reason, and civil laws were the statutes and edicts of the government. In a good and free republic, civil law largely coincided with natural law, but even in the best of governments there was some space between the two. That gap was to be bridged by the people themselves, either through participation in the political process or, when that was not possible, through the enforcement of their collective will as expressed by crowd action. In short, politics indoors, the normal channel of government, was to be checked by politics out-of-doors, the people in the mob.

Moreover, the commonwealth writers saw a contest between power and liberty, which affected their attitude toward popular disorder. Because of the need to safeguard liberty from the power of government and ensure that mobs could, when the occasion warranted, assert the natural law over the civil, a wide variety of popular collective activity was accepted. A permanent police establishment or persistent use of the military to curb potential disorder would have threatened liberty and might have strengthened the executive to the point of despotism. In this view holiday frolics, Pope Day processions, and other tumultuous crowd behavior as well as more spontaneous riots protesting unjust practices were all lumped together and labeled as mob activity. Such mobs were to be tolerated as long as they did not go too far, as long as the amount of property destroyed remained small, and as long as not too many people were hurt seriously. Those are nebulous limits indeed, but they most accurately describe the boundaries between toleration and suppression, because those boundaries

7. Thomas Gordon, trans., *The Works of Tacitus,* II (London, 1731), 61. See also Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York, 1972), 42.

8. [Trenchard and Gordon], *Cato's Letters,* II, 65–67.

depended on the changing *perception* of danger as much as on the changing *amount* of violence and damage. Given the eighteenth-century fear of tyranny, the accompanying disorder was a small price to pay to guarantee liberty and the protection of property.[9]

The Corporate Ideal and Its Problems

The high-minded ideals of the commonwealthmen cannot alone explain the mixed attitude toward rioting among Anglo-Americans in the mid-eighteenth century. Perhaps of greater importance was the popular image of society as a single corporate entity—an image which was under strain as more and more persons sought their private interest and thereby divided society.

The corporate image of society had its roots in the idea of the organic community, containing certain agreed-upon gradations but sharing a single identifiable interest. In the words of Thomas Gordon, "Nothing is so much the Interest of private Men as to see the Publick flourish." Not only will everyone be happier, but "every Man's private Advantage is so much wrapt up in the publick Felicity."[10] Tied in some ways to the ideas of men like Gordon, the ideal reached beyond the readership of the commonwealthmen and included a set of expectations shared by those on top as well as those on the bottom of society. In New York City, for example, corporatism was built into the duties of local government. The city corporation (the term was used purposefully) set the price of bread, regulated the butcher stalls, granted licenses to cartmen, and guaranteed the supply of firewood. In times of exceptional hardship, the city corporation stepped in to alleviate somewhat the suffering of the poor. The distribution of food and fuel in such instances was not the action of a distant, impersonal government. Rather, the magistrates and those of the city's elite who often privately joined such efforts perceived their acts of charity in a highly personal way. They knew many of the poorer members of the community and

9. Maier, *Resistance,* 3–48; William Ander Smith, "Anglo-Colonial Society and the Mob, 1740–1775" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont Graduate School, 1965); John Phillip Reid, "In a Defensive Rage: The Uses of the Mob, the Justification in Law, and the Coming of the American Revolution," *New York University Law Review,* XLIX (1974), 1043–1091; Gordon S. Wood, "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution," *WMQ,* 3d Ser. XXIII (1966), 635–642; Wood, *Creation of the American Republic,* 18–28, 319–321.

10. [Trenchard and Gordon], *Cato's Letters,* III, 192–199.

believed they had both the responsibility and obligation to protect them.[11]

Although this corporatism stood as an unattainable ideal, it was fundamental to the general tolerance for rioting. The sense of solidarity implied in corporatism supplied the theoretical framework that allowed the mob to believe that it acted for the benefit of the community. The commonwealth distinction between natural law and civil law could be translated on the local level as the distinction between the community's single interest and the intrusions of private, divisive, or outside interests. The problem arose, however, in identifying that true interest of the community.

The eighteenth century was marked by a contest between the ideal of corporatism and an increasing sense of individualism. The classic study of the English bread riot offers an insight into the clash between the ideal and the real. Popular motivation in these disturbances was rooted in a "moral economy" based less on profit than on the greater good of the community. A baker did not charge whatever price the traffic would bear. Instead, he charged the "just price"—the price set by tradition and ancient law as being fair and equitable for both himself and his customer. When fluctuations in the market system enticed the baker or grain merchant to charge more than the just price and when the local officials were unwilling or unable to stop him, very often the townspeople rioted, seized the disputed bread, and either sold it for the baker at or a little below the just price or simply walked off with it.[12]

The moral economy and community interest in these English bread riots reveal a continued faith in the corporate image of society. But they also demonstrate how much that single interest had become a fiction. The baker raised the price of bread or exported grain to more profitable markets because he put his personal aggrandizement above the needs of the community.

11. Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981), 56–60; Hendrik Hartog, *Public Property and Private Power: The Corporation of the City of New York in American Law, 1730–1870* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983), 13–58. For a discussion of this concept in Philadelphia, see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976), 19–69.

12. E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, No. 50 (Feb. 1971), 76–136. For further examination of this subject, see George Rudé, *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730–1848* (New York, 1964); Rudé, *Paris and London in the Eighteenth Century: Studies in Popular Protest* (New York, 1971); John Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics in England and Wales, 1790–1810* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); Alan Booth, "Food Riots in the North-

New York City did not experience bread riots like those in England, or like those in Boston where crowds on several occasions rioted to prevent the export of grain in times of dearth.[13] But New York City did experience the warring of marketplace and moral economy. During the fall of 1748, when merchants exported grain out of the city at the expense of the local supply and thereby raised its price, every cartload of flour taken to the wharves brought "at Least twenty Cursses from the Common People with many hard Wishes for sending it away."[14] Such grumbling, however, did not produce a riot, largely because city officials, in the spirit of corporatism, sympathized with the "Common People" and, on this and similar occasions, petitioned the provincial government to halt further shipments of grain.[15]

By the middle of the eighteenth century, in both England and America, a new, aggressive individualism emerged to compete with the ideal of communal solidarity. Without the intrusion of the market economy, there would have been no riots in defense of the moral economy. Yet the older ideal remained alive, attested to by the action of English and Bostonian bread rioters, the curses of New York's common folk, and the petitions of New York's city leaders. Thus, even as social and economic change propelled them to a new materialistic and capitalistic order, Anglo-Americans tenaciously held on to their traditional values and extolled the virtues of forgoing private gain for the public good.[16]

The challenge to the corporate image of society did not end with indi-

West of England, 1790–1801," *Past and Present*, No. 77 (Nov. 1977), 84–107; Elizabeth Fox Genovese, "The Many Faces of Moral Economy: A Contribution to a Debate," *Past and Present*, No. 58 (Feb. 1973), 161–168; Walter J. Shelton, *English Hunger and Industrial Disorders: A Study of Social Conflict during the First Decade of George III's Reign* (Toronto, 1973); Roger Wells, "The Revolt of the South-west, 1800–1801: A Study in English Popular Protest," *Social History*, II (1977), 713–714; Dale Edward Williams, "Morals, Markets, and the English Crowd in 1766," *Past and Present*, No. 104 (Aug. 1984), 56–73.

13. Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 76–80, 133–135.

14. Philip L. White, ed., *The Beekman Mercantile Papers, 1746–1799*, I (New York, 1956), 61–62.

15. *Evening Post*, Jan. 9, 1749; Countryman, *A People in Revolution*, 57.

16. Thompson, "Moral Economy," *Past and Present*, No. 50 (Feb. 1971), 76–136; Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York, 1984), 9–50; Appleby, "The Social Origins of American Revolutionary Ideology," *Journal of American History*, LXIV (1977–1978), 935–959; Henretta, *Evolution of American Society*, 95–107; Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 53–70, 75–83, 93–124, 606–607.

vidualism. An emergent market economy increased social divisions, casting rich against poor, white against black, and one ethnic group against another. In this swirling world of conflicting loyalties, it became ever more difficult to identify the true single interest of the community. But the corporate ideal persisted and served groups in conflict as each claimed to protect the real interest of the community.

One major division emerging in the mid-eighteenth century was between patrician and plebeian. Both groups remained linked through paternalism and deference, and both groups remained committed to the corporate ideal. Their differences lay outside the explicit class conflict of the nineteenth century and consisted, instead, of contrasting perceptions of the community interest. The eighteenth-century world was hierarchical; the upper levels of society, in good paternalistic fashion, held that they were the stewards of the community. As part of this charge, the elite believed that they, in their greater wisdom, knew what was best for the community. This assumption meant that, as far as the patricians were concerned, the one interest in society was their interest. More than deference supported this view. Bolstering their position was the elite's control of government and law.

The plebeian, on the other hand, although willing to defer to his betters most of the time, thought that he and his neighbors were the final arbiters of communal welfare. Common folk believed that the community's interests took precedence over any individual's interest. The basis for this simple faith in fair play was the sense of solidarity bred in a small, face-to-face world. As a tradition the notion of community interest reached back, in plebeian minds, for centuries, to the days before the Norman yoke. Although not directly challenging the standard notions of deference, in its extreme form it represented a rough kind of egalitarianism which asserted that every member of the community was entitled to a decent living.[17]

Patrician and plebeian did not always agree on how to determine the community interest, but at times their views of what was good for the community coincided. New York City, for instance, experienced several impressment disturbances, ranging from public demonstrations and the burning of a navy longboat, such as occurred in July 1764, to more violent immediate resistance to the press-gang, as in 1758 and 1760, when men were killed.[18] The seamen and laborers susceptible to the press-gang participated in these disturbances because their lives and freedom were at stake and because the gang wrenched men from the community. The patrician, of course, was immune to the ravages of the press-gang but opposed the practice because of its effect on commerce and its drain on the local labor supply. Whenever there was a threat of impressment, local coasters refused to come to the city, and provisions of wood and fuel became scarce.[19] Moreover, as Cadwallader Colden explained to British officials after the incident in 1760, "the Merchants of this Port had suffered by the Seamens removeing to the neighbouring colonies where they were free from any press."[20] When there was this coincidence of interest, even though patrician and plebeian came to it for very different reasons, the patrician might excuse, if not condone, the riot; and the social conflict evident in a moment of popular disorder was minimized.

There were times, however, when the differences between plebeian and patrician visions of the public good sharply diverged, pitting the interest of the poor against the interest of the rich.[21] A controversy over the exchange rate of copper pennies in the winter of 1753–1754 brought this division into the open. The problem began when a self-selected group of leading merchants in New York decided to devalue pennies in relation to the shilling. The ratio set by the assembly to attract specie to the colony had created an exchange imbalance with the mother country that adversely affected trade and, so the merchants claimed, the interests of the province.

Not everyone agreed. To many in New York, the merchants' arbitrary

17. E. P. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," *Journal of Social History,* VII (1973–1974), 382–405; George Rudé, *Ideology and Popular Protest* (New York, 1980), 27–38; Christopher Hill, "The Norman Yoke," in Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 1958), 50–122.

18. *Gazette: Post-Boy,* July 12, 1764; I. N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498–1909 . . . ,* IV (New York, 1922), 698; *Mercury,* Aug. 11, 1760; Nash, *Urban Crucible,* 266. See also Jesse Lemisch, "Jack Tar in the Streets: Merchant Seamen in the Politics of Revolutionary America," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXV (1968), 381–395; John Lax and William Pencak, "The Knowles Riot and the Crisis of the 1740's in Massachusetts," *Perspectives in American History,* X (1976), 163–214.

19. See *Mercury,* Mar. 27, 1758, Sept. 14, 1761.

20. *The Colden Letter Books* (New-York Historical Society, *Collections,* IX–X [New York, 1877–1878]), Pt. I, 14–17.

21. For a discussion of this clash in 18th-century England, see Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," *Jour. Soc. Hist.,* VII (1973–1974), 382–405; and Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?" *Soc. Hist.,* III (1978), 133–165.

action was for personal gain at the expense of the common welfare. One critic argued that the devaluation hurt the poor, because they bought with pennies and were paid in pennies. The merchants' action thus raised the price of bread, fixed in pennies by the city government, and decreased the wages of "all Labouring men." Distraught over this violation of the moral economy, riotous crowds gathered in the street on the morning of January 11, 1754; "armed with Clubs and Staves," with a drummer at their head, they demonstrated their opposition to the proposed devaluation.

The plebs may have viewed the issue one way; the city's elite certainly viewed it another. One newspaper, speaking for the merchants and others who supported the measure, asserted that the new valuation was correct and "calculated for the real Benefit of every Individual in this Province." The grand jury, which made a report on the riot within a week, reiterated this position and claimed that the disorder came from the mistaken zeal of a "deluded People, most of them Strangers, who know as little the true Interest of the Colony, as they themselves were known in it." It was only from "Ignorance" that the rioters could think that they were "defending the Cause of the Poor." Obviously, both plebeians and patricians believed that they knew the true interest of the community, and the patricians, at least, were unwilling to recognize the legitimacy of the plebeian position. Wedded to the notion of a single-interest society, the grand jury ignored the argument of the rioters and declared that "general Harmony . . . prevails in both publick and private Life." The rioters could be so easily dismissed because the grand jury believed that the antidevaluation demonstrators were a "weak People" and "extremely low" and because it questioned whether they really belonged to the community at all—for the rioters "seemed to be Inhabitants of the World," outsiders who were "assembled here by mere chance."[22]

Controversies directly pitting plebeian against patrician, like the 1754 coinage riot, were rare in New York. When they did occur, the poor invariably lost. In 1754 the mayor and aldermen went along with the merchants' new exchange rate, and at least half of the grand jury, nominally acting for the entire community, either were merchants who signed the devaluation agreement or were related to those merchants.[23] When the plebeian contested the power of the patrician, the outcome was rarely in doubt.

22. *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Jan. 14, 21, 1754; *Mercury,* Dec. 24, 31, 1753, Jan. 7, 21, 1754; Nash, *Urban Crucible,* 229.

23. Six men on the grand jury signed the merchant devaluation agreement of December 1753, and six others shared the last names of some of the merchants who signed the agreement. Although the identifications here are not absolute, the

Other divisions in society occasionally surfaced in disturbances during New York's colonial period. In 1712 and again in 1741, racial hatred flared in the city. In the first case, blacks seized the initiative, attempted to burn the city, and killed several whites. In the second instance, no real rebellion took place. Instead, whites acted upon the slightest suggestion of a conspiracy and, supported by the weak circumstantial evidence of suspicious fires and questionable confessions, engaged in an orgy of legal executions. The only extralegal crowd action in 1741 occurred when two convicted blacks broke down on the scaffold and identified others supposedly involved in the plot. Normally this confession would have spared their lives, at least temporarily. But when the sheriff began to return the captives to jail, the crowd became tumultuous and insisted upon an immediate hanging.[24]

Intracommunity conflict in the guise of ethnic and religious animosity was evident in mob activity against Jews. Although a part of New York society for over a century, Jews were a barely tolerated minority; and, during the 1740s, there were at least two anti-Semitic disturbances.[25] One New Testament—quoting correspondent reported in the *Weekly Journal* in May 1743 that "a Rabble" of "Rude unthinking Wretches" harassed a Jewish burial. The leader of this mob, who "by dress" appeared "to be a Gentleman," held out a crucifix and "Mutter'd in Latine . . . his Pater-Noster" as the coffin was let down into its grave. The mock ritual here, interestingly, mimicked hated papist ceremony while interrupting the Jewish last rites.[26] The second report of anti-Semitic crowd action was in a letter written by Governor Clinton to discredit Oliver De Lancey. On Feb-

convergence of names is fairly conclusive, particularly since it does not take into account individuals who may have been related through marriage or who were cousins with different names. For the merchants' agreement, see *Mercury,* Dec. 24, 1753; for the grand jury list, see Jan. 21, 1754. See also *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Jan. 14, 1754.

24. Daniel Horsemanden, *The New York Conspiracy,* ed. Thomas J. Davis (Boston, 1971 [orig. publ. New York, 1744]), esp. 109–117. See also T. Wood Clarke, "The Negro Plot of 1741," *New York History,* XXV (1944), 167–181; Thomas J. Davis, "The New York Slave Conspiracy of 1741 as Black Protest," *Journal of Negro History,* LVI (1971), 17–30; and Ferenc M. Szasz, "The New York Slave Revolt of 1741: A Re-examination," *NY Hist.,* XLVIII (1967), 215–230.

25. On the general position of Jews in colonial New York, see Jacob R. Marcus, *The Colonial American Jew, 1492–1776* (Detroit, Mich., 1970), I, 305–312, 397–411, II, 863–873, 890–892.

26. *Weekly Journal,* May 16, 1743.

ruary 2, 1749, De Lancey and a number of his followers borrowed a plebeian practice and blackened their faces, then assaulted the home of a newly arrived Jewish family. The immigrant husband and wife had lived in grand style in Holland but had arrived in New York in straitened circumstances. The rioters smashed all the windows of their house, "afterwards broke open his door," entered the building, "and pulled and tore away every thing to pieces." If this indignity was not enough for this once-affluent Jewish family, De Lancey and his friends "then swore they would lie with the woman," because, as De Lancey declared, the wife "was like Mrs Clinton, and as he could not have her, he would have her likeness."[27]

Despite—perhaps because of—the divisions within society evident in the attacks against Jews, the festering racial hatred, the struggle between plebeian and patrician in the coinage controversy, and even the differences in approach to the issue of impressment, plebeians clung to the corporate image of society. Battered, distorted, and strained, the ideal of the single-interest community remained somehow intact. Jews could be harassed because they were outsiders: the anti-Semitic rioters were merely expressing their opposition to an alien group in their midst. The sheriff could comply with the wishes of the tumultuous crowd in 1741 and hang the confessing blacks because the so-called slave conspiracy threatened the entire white community. Plebeian and patrician each stood his ground in January 1754 because each believed he protected the true interest of the community. Similar faith in corporatism lay behind patrician and plebeian opposition to impressment. Social reality may have reflected increased divisions, but the image of corporatism remained in the minds of many Anglo-Americans and helps to explain why they, at times, eagerly ran into the streets to riot.

Rules and Rituals of Mob Behavior

To understand why popular disorder was quasi-legitimate for mid-eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans, we must look beyond the writings of the commonwealthmen and the somewhat tarnished ideal of corpo-

27. It should be noted that the report of the attack on the Jewish family came from Governor Clinton, and that Clinton and the De Lanceys were political enemies. See E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York; Procured in Holland, England, and France,* VI (Albany, N.Y., 1855), 471.

ratism to the behavior of the mob itself. What did rioters do in the streets? Why did they act the way they did? Answers to these questions are difficult and varied: each rioter joined in the tumult for his own reasons. Each moment of disorder, as evident from the examples cited, was different. Yet some generalizations can be ventured. Crowds were integral to everyday life: some crowds formed at the behest of colonial leaders, some formed at the behest of plebeian organizers, and others formed extemporaneously. All had the potential for tumult. When the people assembled in the street in a riot, unspoken rules guided their collective behavior. In many cases, these rules provided a set form of popular ceremony and became a type of ritual. The rules were not always followed, but both plebeian and patrician knew what they should and should not do in a riot. One result of this awareness was to minimize physical violence by the mob and by the authorities. The emphasis both on ritual and on the avoidance of violence derived from the sense of communal solidarity behind the activities of most mobs. This concern with ritual and the attendant lack of violence also reflected the need to express social divisions while suppressing overt conflict. Rioting, then, acted to ease social tensions and to express special plebeian concerns.

Despite the lower-class orientation of mid-eighteenth-century crowds, the colonial elite encouraged some public activities that brought the people clamoring into the streets. The intention of these occasions was to tie the worlds of patrician and plebeian closer together in moments of popular celebration. Several times a year the colonial leadership organized public theater to reinforce the traditional bonds of deference and patronage. On the King's Birthday, the anniversary of his coronation, the arrival of a new governor, and the celebration of a great military victory, patricians marched in processions, escorted by the army and local militia. They ordered the cannons of Fort George to fire a salute, they called for bonfires and for all the windows in the city to be illuminated with candles, and they often treated the crowd to food and drink while secreting themselves in a private banquet.[28] For example, in 1745 to commemorate the colonial victory at Louisbourg, the New York elite held a dinner for themselves. But the officials, besides ordering the usual illuminations, had a bonfire built on the edge of the city (to prevent it from spreading to buildings) and distributed twenty gallons of good wine to the crowd.[29] The displays of pa-

28. For examples of such public celebrations, see Stokes, *Iconography,* IV, 533, 535, 537, 539, 541, 543, 554, 585.
29. *Weekly Post-Boy,* July 15, 1745.

triotism and communal good will on holidays showed the elite to be beneficent. And even though they dined separately, they also demonstrated a shared national identity and pride.

The elite used dramatic public ritual in other circumstances as well. The magistrates, sitting high on the judicial bench, frequently ordered convicted criminals to be punished publicly. Thus officials in November 1752 had one thief "whipped at the Cart's Tail, from the City-Hall, thro Wall Street, Hanover Square, and Broad-Street, up to the Hall again." The path brought the carted criminal through the central parts of the city. The judges wanted crowds to form, to shout, to jeer. They wanted the public to see the ignominy of the criminal, and they wanted the public to join in the punishment.[30] This public punishment revealed, to all who would behold, the penalties for transgression of the law. It, too, fostered interclass identity by singling out the offender as a miscreant who no longer fitted into the community. As in moments of popular celebration, the elite eagerly embraced the public forum and saw the standing and shouting of the crowd in the street as natural.

To be most effective, this public theater had to be orderly, exhibiting "Decency and Decorum." But any time a crowd formed, as everyone in the eighteenth century knew, tumult was always possible. During the celebration of the fall of Louisbourg, "young Gentlemen-Rakes" showed "their unchristian Way of rejoicing" by going about the city smashing windows and shutters. The annual celebration of the King's Birthday also had a degree of disorder. Frolickers echoed the roar and boom from the cannons at Fort George by firing their own guns, firecrackers, and squibs. Not only did the din intrude upon the city's peace and quiet, but the actions themselves were dangerous, with harm to property and injury to persons possible. In 1750 a house near Whitehall Slip caught fire, reportedly from some squibs thrown by boys. Aware of these dangers, officials frowned upon such activities. But the efforts to stifle such excesses, if the repeated reports of rowdy incidents are any indication, met little success.[31] Perhaps more extensive patrols, limiting the official celebration, or not distributing liquor could have prevented the disorder. But such measures would have curtailed the effectiveness of the dramaturgical moment, and the elite was not ready to do that.

30. *Ibid.,* Nov. 27, 1752.

31. *Evening Post,* Nov. 7, 1748; *Weekly Post-Boy,* July 15, 1745; Stokes, *Iconography,* IV, 554, 617, 623, 703, 709.

If misrule surfaced in official celebrations, it was even more evident during explicitly plebeian holidays like Pope Day, New Year's Eve, and Pinkster Day.[32] On these occasions the world was turned upside down. On November 5 (Pope Day) and New Year's Eve the lower orders took over the streets in carnival activity. Pinkster Day, a colonywide celebration during Pentecost, belonged to the black slaves. They were allowed to drink, collect in public, dance, and make merry. At times, they even briefly exchanged roles with their masters. The rowdiness of official celebrations became routine on these days.[33] Unwritten rules—rituals—guided crowd behavior during this seasonal disorder. The established ceremony during moments of misrule, whether on plebeian or official holidays, affected the behavior of the people in the street whenever a crowd formed. Examination of this ritual opens up the deeper meaning of crowd action and reveals some of the interplay between patrician and plebeian in mid-eighteenth-century New York City.[34]

Evidence on popular practices of crowd ritual is often hard to find. Passed on by word of mouth or simply through personal experience, there is often little documentation for the historian to explore. How much of the ritual of English popular culture was transferred across the Atlantic, when it was transferred, and how it might mix with strains of popular culture

32. For citations on Pope Day, see n. 53, this chapter. For rowdiness on New Year's, see *Mercury,* Jan. 7, 1765; New York, *The Colonial Laws of New York, from the Year 1664 to the Revolution, . . .* V (Albany, N.Y., 1894), 532–533; Alice Morse Earle, *Colonial Days in Old New York,* 2d ed. (Port Washington, N.Y., 1965), 185–202.

33. Earle, *Colonial Days,* 185–202; E.A.A., "Sassafras and Swinglingtow; or, Pinkster Was a Holiday," *American Notes and Queries: A Journal for the Curious,* VI (1946), 35–40; A. J. Williams-Myers, "Pinkster Carnival: Africanisms in the Hudson River Valley," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History,* IX (1985), 7–17. The Pinkster Day celebration parallels the burlesque voting on election days of blacks in New England. See Joseph P. Reidy, "'Negro Election Day' and Black Community Life in New England, 1750–1860," *Marxist Perspectives,* I (1978), 102–117.

34. For a general anthropological discussion of ritual and symbolic action, see Max Gluckman, ed., *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations* (Manchester, 1962); Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa: Collected Essays, with an Autobiographical Introduction* (London, 1963); Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, 1969); Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1974); Turner, "Symbols in Ndembu Ritual," in Max Gluckman, ed., *Closed Systems and Open Minds: The*

from other ethnic groups remain difficult questions to answer with any real precision. Although much of the exact knowledge of specific ritual may have been lost, it is clear that New Yorkers, like most colonial Americans, were conscious of many English popular traditions. If New Yorkers did not always practice the ritual of a certain tradition, the custom was often filed away in the collective mentalité to be resuscitated when the need arose, in its old form or in a new form more responsive to popular needs.[35]

Traces of four overlapping types of Anglo-American ritual can be detected in the popular disorder of New York and its environs before 1765. The first of these is the ritual of communal regulation known as the *charivari*. Called *shivaree, skimmington,* or *rough music,* it was a ritual that singled out a wide variety of misbehavior. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England, it ordinarily included treating the victim to a midnight concert of pots, pans, and improvised drums as well as shouts and screams. The musicians serenaded all kinds of miscreants, from the wife beater to the shrewish wife, and from the sexual deviant to the worker that broke an agreement with his fellow laborers. The range of activity also extended beyond simple noisemaking to include mock (as well as real) attacks on the object of ridicule.[36] Evidence of rough music in New York City in the mid-eighteenth century has not been found, but there is a reference to a "skimmington ride" in Poughkeepsie in 1751, and in nearby

Elizabeth, New Jersey, "regulators" practiced a form of "charivari" on wife beaters.[37]

Elements of the ritual, however, can be discerned in other forms of popular disorder within the city. Both the charivari and the Pope Day processions often featured effigies, parades through the streets, and raucous noisemaking. The clamor accompanying other public holidays and New Year's bore similarities to rough music. More suggestive were the overtones of the actions of Oliver De Lancey and his friends. Their efforts paralleled the behavior of those charivaris aimed at disrupting marriages objected to by the community. (The physical comparison of the Jewish wife to Governor Clinton's wife is instructive in this context.) Moreover, after 1765, aspects of the charivari again surfaced in the demonstrations against violators of nonimportation agreements and in the rail riding of suspected tories.

The second form of plebeian ritual detected in New York crowd action is the ritual of misrule. Here the normal rules of society were suspended and, as in the European carnival, all kinds of outrageous and fantastic behavior tolerated. New York crowds did not go to the extremes of southern European and Latin Mardi Gras celebrants. Nor were their symbols as loaded with class meaning as the symbols in the carnival of sixteenth-century Romans.[38] But on popular holidays such as the King's Birthday, and especially on the plebeian celebrations of Pope Day, New Year's Eve, and Pinkster Day, they did follow set patterns of behavior which purposely deviated from the accepted behavior of the rest of the year. Thus the pageantry of earlier lords of misrule in England, with "their pipers piping, their drummers thundering, their stumps dancing, their bells jingling, their handkerchiefs swinging about their heads like madmen, their hobbyhorses and other monsters skirmishing amongst the rout," resembles much of the ceremonial discord of the Pope Day processions and even the parade and burning of a royal barge in an anti-impressment riot in 1764.[39]

Limits of Naïvety in Social Anthropology (Edinburgh, 1964), 20–51; and Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1973).

35. For a discussion of the transference of popular culture across the Atlantic, see Alfred Young, "English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth-Century American Radicalism," in Margaret C. Jacob and James R. Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London, 1984), 185–212.

36. This brief summary is based on Violet Alford, "Rough Music or Charivari," *Folklore*, LXX (1959), 505–518; Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule," in Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford, Calif., 1975), 97–123; Davis, "Charivari, Honor, and Community in Seventeenth-Century Lyon and Geneva," in John J. MacAloon, ed., *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle: Rehearsals toward a Theory of Cultural Performance* (Philadelphia, 1984), 42–57; Edward P. Thompson, "'Rough Music': Le charivari anglais," *Annales: Economies, sociétés, civilisations,* XXVII (1972), 285–312; Martin Ingram, "Ridings, Rough Music, and the 'Reform of Popular Culture' in Early Modern England," *Past and Present*, No. 105 (Nov. 1984), 79–113; Bryan D. Palmer, "Discordant Music: Charivari and Whitecapping in North America," *Labour / Le travailleur,* I (1978), 5–62; Young, "English Plebeian Culture," in Jacob and Jacob, eds., *Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism,* 186–212.

37. *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Dec. 13, 1752; *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, Archives of the State of New Jersey,* 1st Ser., XIX (Paterson, N.J., 1897), 225–226, 326–327; Young, "English Plebeian Culture," in Jacob and Jacob, eds., *Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism,* 189–190.

38. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans,* trans. Mary Feeney (New York, 1979). See also Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 178–204.

39. Quoted in John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1777–Present* (New York, 1974), 27; see also 26–34; and Davis, "Reasons of Misrule," in Davis, *Society and Culture,* 97–123.

Closely allied to misrule was the ritual of role reversal, in which the crowd purposefully took on the attributes of its social betters. This mimesis was intended both to ridicule the patrician and to remind him of his duties. The lords of misrule in England, for example, chose one individual as a mock king, who would then act as the centerpiece of the ritual. In New York, Pinkster Day included such role reversal. During the Pope Day pageant, revelers carted effigies about town in the same manner as officials had criminals carted through the streets, they enforced a general illumination by smashing unlit windows, and they collected money to support their efforts in a kind of unofficial tax. Role reversal was evident also in other mob activity. Little is known about the behavior of the coinage rioters of January 1754 except that they paraded the streets with a drummer at their head "armed with Clubs and Staves." The presence of that drummer suggests an attempt to copy the forms of militia organization and, perhaps, the processions of officials on holidays. Role reversal appeared in the harassment of the Jewish burial as well, where the rioters mimicked Catholic last rites to parody a Jewish ceremony.[40]

The final ritual evident in New York mob activity was closely tied to the first three—the rite of passage. Anthropologists argue that this ritual can take many forms, including misrule and role reversal, and enabled people to deal with the awkward moments of passing from one status to another.[41] Thus, as a mode of collective behavior, it could follow any of the three rituals outlined above, or it might appear as mere rowdyism. It is treated here as a separate category because of its special association with the passage from adolescence to adulthood. The ritual misbehavior on New Year's, for instance, could be dismissed as "one of the disorderly riotous Frolicks, that most unreasonably are practiced annually," largely because the perpetrators were thought to be young men and other dependents. A similar attitude appeared whenever there was rowdy behavior connected to public celebrations. The window and shutter smashers during the celebration of the victory at Louisbourg in 1745 were "*young* Gentlemen-Rakes." To put it simply, eighteenth-century New Yorkers often tolerated the disorder

40. On ritual role reversal, see John Brewer, *Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), 163–200; Ladurie, *Carnival in Romans,* 109, 190–192, 202, 206–208, 301–324; Burke, *Popular Culture,* 188–192. See also Turner, *The Ritual Process,* 177–178.

41. Turner, *The Ritual Process;* Max Gluckman, "Les Rites de Passage," in Gluckman, ed., *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations,* 24–40.

of young men because they assumed that those young men needed occasionally to misbehave.[42]

These rituals did not provide a formula that every crowd then followed without variance. For the plebs, any tumult was fun, and the suspension of the normal rules of social behavior in riots and annual plebeian rituals alike made for grand entertainment. The participants acted out fantasies, behaved uproariously, enjoyed the pleasures of shattering glass, contributed to a blazing bonfire, and shouted as loudly as possible in the streets. For the great crowds who watched this rowdyism—and in this type of street theater the boundary between participant and audience was never sharply defined—the carnival atmosphere of mob action was enough in itself. Men and boys were running through the streets, coats turned inside out, some faces blackened, noise and disorder all around. For a brief moment the normal routine was reversed, and those on the bottom of society—be they day laborers, seamen, apprentices, journeymen, or even master craftsmen—could temporarily enjoy the pleasures of disorder. Within this turbulent festivity, however, certain patterns emerged. The people in the street knew what should and should not be done.

This emphasis on set patterns of ceremony and behavior (however honored in the breach), with the belief that the mob generally acted to protect the community's single interest, tended to minimize violence in a riot. In the 1754 coinage riot, the members of the mob did not use their clubs and staves to beat those merchants who supported the new valuation. Instead, the mob merely marched behind the drummer to demonstrate anger. In an anti-impressment riot in July 1764, New Yorkers seized a barge belonging to a British man-of-war, then paraded through the city streets carrying it to the Common, where they fed it to a devouring bonfire. Although the captain of the British warship was in the city, the crowd "offered no Injury" to him. The theme of limited violence was repeated over and over again in the anti-Jewish disturbances in the 1740s, in the rowdiness on holidays, and on almost every occasion a tumultuous crowd met.

There were, however, exceptions. Rioting evokes passions, and although those passions were ordinarily channeled along relatively peaceful lines, occasionally the rioters pushed too far and too hard. Violence be-

42. *Mercury,* Jan. 7, 1765; *Weekly Post-Boy,* July 15, 1745 (emphasis added); Davis, "Reasons of Misrule," in Davis, *Society and Culture,* 97–123; Gillis, *Youth and History,* 26–34; Bernard Capp, "English Youth Groups and *The Pinder of Wakefield,*" *Past and Present,* No. 76 (Aug. 1977), 127–133.

came most pronounced in opposition to impressment when sailors confronted the press-gang face to face. At such times the stakes were high. In 1758 and 1760, sailors, who knew that impressment into His Majesty's navy meant, in effect, forfeiting their lives to a repressive and often deadly service, turned to violence that itself led to death. In the 1758 incident several members of a merchant ship were impressed, but four of the crew resisted and barricaded themselves in their ship's roundhouse. Armed with blunderbusses, they fired at the press-gang, mortally wounding one man, and surrendered only when some regulars appeared and fired a volley at them.[43] The 1760 affair occurred in the harbor, when the crew of a ship just arrived from Lisbon refused to be boarded from a longboat sent by a British man-of-war. The sailors seized the ship's small arms and fired at the navy longboat. Reinforcements were called up and more shots exchanged, damaging the ship, wounding one sailor, and killing another.[44] Both of these cases were the actions of desperate men faced with a hopeless situation and represent the exception rather than the rule.

Brutally assailing an individual or engaging in extensive destruction of property threatened to wreak havoc in the community. Consequently, Anglo-American mobs concentrated their efforts on the symbols of their grievances as a means of limiting violence. More typical of colonial riots was the 1764 impressment disturbance, in which the rioters burned the barge of the British press-gang. Destruction of the barge prevented the immediate departure of the press-gang and their forced recruits. The action was effective and pointed. At the same time, the crowd surely knew that the barge was easily replaceable. It served best as a symbol of British authority. Likewise, when a mob assailed a bawdyhouse, it first destroyed the furniture and bedding, and then if the populace was really irate, it might pull the building down. The idea was to do away with the indispensable tools of the trade. The prostitutes themselves were left untouched. Mobs in Boston prevented the exportation of grain by unrigging the ship and dismantling its rudder. There was no permanent damage, but the ship was prevented temporarily from leaving port.[45] Property, rather than persons, was almost always the object of the mob's wrath. There were few deaths in colonial riots.

43. Stokes, *Iconography*, IV, 698.
44. *Mercury*, Aug. 11, 1760.
45. Maier, *Resistance*, 4–5; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625–1742* (New York, 1938), 70, 223–224, 382–384, 388–389.

The deemphasis of violence worked in two ways. Rioters understood what they could and could not do. But so, too, did the officials. As long as the mob kept within certain traditional bounds, magistrates did not react with violence to repress disturbances. Instead, they attempted to exert influence over the mob to persuade it to disperse.

Ultimately, of course, the local elite could also wield the full force of the state behind their requests. The magistracy could call on a posse comitatus, the militia, and even the army to coerce a crowd. But patricians were generally loath to do so.[46] They did not want to see bloodshed shatter the peace and unity of their community. They did not want their neighbors, even socially inferior neighbors, injured. Most important, they did not want to admit that they could not control their community even during a riot. To resort to force was to concede that the traditional bonds of deference and patronage had failed. Successfully limiting a disturbance by using personal influence over the mob reinforced the social authority of the elite.[47] Interestingly, the English Riot Act of 1715, which was copied by several American colonies, was so constructed as to aid the magistrates in their informal control over the crowd. The Riot Act allowed officials to call upon the military without fear of later civil suits from individuals in the mob. But no action could be taken until the mob had been granted an hour to disperse. This grace period often allowed the mob to achieve limited goals; and, in turn, the power reposed in the magistrates strengthened their hands in dealing with the mob. The community's needs were met by the action of the mob; the larger challenge to social authority was avoided.[48]

Pope Day

Insight into the complexities of eighteenth-century mob ritual can be gleaned from New York's Pope Day. This holiday commemorated the failed plot of the Catholic Guy Fawkes to blow up the Houses of Parliament in 1605 and was marked in England by bonfires, effigy processions, and some rowdyism.[49] In early New York City, Pope Day was just another

46. Maier, *Resistance*, 16–20.
47. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," *Jour. Soc. Hist.*, VII (1973–1974), 403–405.
48. Max Beloff, *Public Order and Popular Disturbances, 1660–1714* (London, 1938), 136–137; Maier, *Resistance*, 24–26; New York, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, V, 532–533.
49. Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973), 25–26, 54, 79–80.

of the officially sponsored patriotic ceremonies, and until 1748 the holiday had been celebrated largely under official auspices. For example, in 1737 one newspaper reported that the "Gentlemen of his Majesty's Council, the Assembly and Corporation [city officials], and the other principal Gentlemen and Merchants of this City waited upon" the lieutenant governor at Fort George, "where the Royal Healths were drank, as usual, under the Discharge of the Cannon and at Night the City was illuminated."[50] This celebration mirrored activities on other great patriotic anniversaries. But from 1748 on, New Yorkers in the street, borrowing and building upon the Boston practice, began celebrating the holiday with their own ritual by parading and then by burning effigies of the pope, the Pretender, and the devil.[51] This new ceremony, which later served as a model for Revolutionary mob action, not ony reveals some of the functions of mob ritual but also suggests some of the inner tensions evident in eighteenth-century crowd action.[52]

In 1755 the Pope Day effigies were carried about the city on a bier at night "hideously formed, and as humourously contrived, the Devil standing close behind the Pope, seemingly paying his compliments to him, with a three prong'd Pitchfork . . . on the Back . . . [was] the young Pretender standing before the Pope, waiting his commands." The procession halted before the lodgings of the captured French general, Baron Dieskau, to reinforce the anti-Catholic message. The baron knew how to defuse a potentially dangerous situation and paid homage to the celebrants by sending down some silver. The crowd recognized the traditional concession, returned the favor with three huzzahs, and then "march'd off to a proper Place," where they "set Fire to the Devil's Tail, burning the Three to Cinders."[53]

50. Quoted in Stokes, *Iconography*, IV, 554.

51. Newspaper reports clearly state that 1748 was the first year the effigy procession appeared in New York. *Weekly Journal,* Nov. 7, 1748; *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Nov. 7, 1748.

52. Young, "English Plebeian Culture," in Jacob and Jacob, eds., *Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism,* 186–212; Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 17–18, 71–73, 177–182, 197–217.

53. Although there is no direct evidence of Pope Day processions' occurring every year in New York City, the scattered references in 1748, 1755, 1757, and 1765 suggest that there was an annual celebration of Pope Day starting in 1748 and running to 1764. *Weekly Journal,* Nov. 7, 1748; *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Nov. 7, 1748, Nov. 10, 1755, Nov. 7, 1757; Stokes, *Iconography,* IV, 673, 675; *Mercury,*
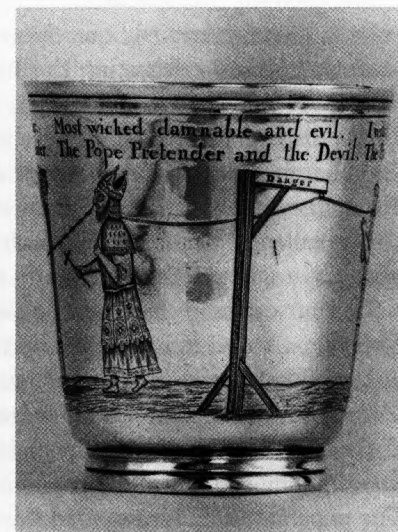
PLATE 1. Anti-Catholic, anti-Pretender, and anti-Devil Silver Beaker.
Made by Hughes Lossieux in Saint-Malo, 1707–1708, and engraved by Joseph Leddel in New York City, 1750. Courtesy of the Museum of the City of New York.
In images probably similar to those of the Pope Day effigy celebrations, the devil leads the pope and the Pretender into the mouth of Hell. Text reads: "Three mortal enemies Remember. The Devil Pope and the Pretender. / Most wicked damnable and evil. The Pope Pretender and the Devil. / I wish they were all hang'd in a rope. The Pretender Devil and the Pope."
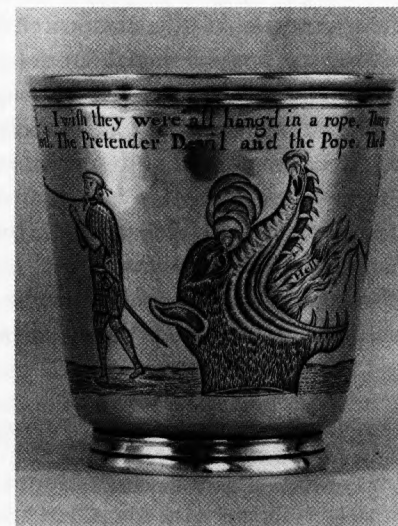
The meaning of this ritual is complex: it expressed faith in the standing order and simultaneously questioned it. On the surface, Pope Day was a patriotic holiday, celebrating the Protestant succession. All levels of society shared this patriotism, which was of particular importance to New York's disparate Protestants, who were united only in their ardent anti-Catholicism. But there are deeper meanings behind the ritual—meanings that suggest that the Pope Day ceremony after 1748 also acted as an implicit challenge to the social hierarchy. In other words, patriotic ritual served as a screen to hide the more subtle shadows of social conflict.[54]

The intricacies of the symbolic meaning of the Pope Day ritual are evident when we examine the New York crowd's selection of effigies. Although the procession occurred on the anniversary of Guy Fawkes's attempted misdeed, that Catholic fanatic held little significance for New Yorkers in the mid-eighteenth century. The crowd, instead, chose its own anti-Catholic symbols. The patriotic message of all three effigies is clear. The pope naturally represented the hated Romanism, and after the failed invasions of 1715 and 1745, the Pretender epitomized the popular fear of the arbitrary and Catholic monarch in the Stuart mold. The devil, leading, whispering, or hovering about the scene, was a common motif representing evil in eighteenth-century iconography.[55]

The submerged challenge to social authority is less evident. The attack on popery may have represented, in the popular mind, a criticism of all church hierarchy. More important is the central role of the Pretender's effigy. It is granted, of course, that its desecration represented an explicit statement of loyalty to the current regime. But there may have been other, even contradictory meanings to the effigy. The Pretender, despite all his faults, was also a member of the aristocracy. Engraved silver beakers of the

New York Pope Day effigies portray the Pretender as a Scottish lord.[56] With sword at his side, the effigy may have stood as a muted symbol of the aristocracy. Under the guise of patriotism, the common folk could denigrate and humiliate this effigy, which represented an individual ordinarily untouchable. Moreover, there is another possible meaning to the ritual which almost negates the loyalism of the holiday. The prominence of the effigy of the Pretender—who lost his claim to the throne because of the perfidy of James II—may have acted also as a reminder to the monarchy of what might become of the Hanoverian dynasty if it behaved too arbitrarily, if it got too close to the Catholics, or if it betrayed the people.

The evidence that these effigies served as a type of challenge to authority is tenuous, but this interpretation becomes more compelling when placed in the context of the commencement of the Pope Day parades. The political and economic conditions of the 1740s and 1750s certainly were conducive to a New York plebeian challenge to the standing order. During these years a bitter factional rivalry divided the provincial elite. In the process, New York's leadership began to compete for political support from the electorate. Asked to cast their ballots under the watchful eyes of patricians, the common folk witnessed a divided elite who charged one another with failing to protect the welfare of all. Furthermore, the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle with France left many New Yorkers feeling betrayed in the fall of 1748. The French remained encamped upon their frontiers, and hostile Indians continued to lurk in the forests. Negotiators in Europe had surrendered the fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton and thereby nullified the one great colonial triumph.[57] Economic developments supported these political recriminations. New York merchants scrambled to maximize profits in a mercurial economy in which fortunes were easily won and lost. At times, as in the fall of 1748, such men ignored the moral economy and exported flour to the French West Indies, violating both local customs to protect the price of bread and imperial regulations by trading with a long-

Nov. 7, 1757; G. D. Scull, ed., *The Montresor Journals* (New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, XIV [New York, 1881]), 338–339.

54. Much of the following analysis builds upon the discussion of symbols and ritual by anthropologists Max Gluckman and Victor Turner. See Gluckman, ed., *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations;* Gluckman, *Order and Rebellion in Tribal Africa;* Turner, *The Ritual Process;* and Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors.*

55. Shaw, *American Patriots,* 17–18. For the prominence of the devil in 18th-century iconography, see U.S., Library of Congress, *The American Revolution in Drawings and Prints: A Checklist of 1765–1790 Graphics in the Library of Congress,* comp. David H. Cresswell (Washington, D.C., 1975), 240, 244–247, 249, 257, 260, 271–272, 275, 278, 280, 283, 296, 304, 354, 357.

56. Alfred Young kindly informed me of these engravings and provided me with copies of pictures of them. One goblet is in the Winterthur Museum (accession no. 56.521). The other is in the Museum of the City of New York (Museum Purchase, 76.79). See also Jerry E. Patterson, *The City of New York: A History Illustrated from the Collections of the Museum of the City of New York* (New York, 1978), 53.

57. Patricia U. Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York, 1971), 103–178; Nash, *Urban Crucible,* 198–204, 227–229,

time enemy. But even beyond 1748, these decades, frequently marred by war with France, experienced an inflation which created hardship for the poor despite general prosperity and near-full employment.[58]

Thus, as New York filled with men returning from war in 1748, the Pope Day effigy procession, long practiced in Boston, offered itself as a means to express contrasting emotions—clearly hatred for French papists was dominant, but perhaps also this new ritual expressed dissatisfaction with the colonial leadership, the peace, and, subliminally, the king. Class antagonism, confused factional politics, the rise of a market economy, and lower-class national pride, then, combined to transform Pope Day from a conventional and official celebration to a special plebeian holiday from 1748 to at least 1765.

Membership of the Mob

The Pope Day processions that began in 1748, the New Year's frolics practiced throughout the century, the less regular rowdyism accompanying official celebrations, and the sporadic rioting against impressment and over issues like the coinage controversy of 1754—all were plebeian activities. Youths, seamen, mechanics, laborers, and black slaves were the main participants. The patrician might stroll across the plebeian stage and might even participate in the drama. He too, after all, was a member of the community and shared, to some degree, in the popular culture.[59] But if he did join in or lead the tumult, he was only temporarily entering a world in which he might exert some influence, but a world he could never completely control. His presence did not alter the basic plebeian character of rioting.

There are problems in identifying the participants in eighteenth-century mobs. Officials rarely made arrests, and even if they did, they did not record much information on the individuals arrested. Impressionistic evidence about the character of the rioters is unreliable. Magistrates ordinarily denied that those higher up in society participated in disturbances. Instead, they usually insisted (thus implying another connection

232. For an expression of New York dissatisfaction with the peace, see *Gazette: Post-Boy*, July 25, 1748.

58. *Gazette: Post-Boy*, Sept. 12, 1748, July 17, 1749; *Evening Post*, Jan. 9, 1749; White, ed., *Beekman Papers*, I, 61–62; Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 176–178, 180, 227–229.

59. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, 68–71.

with the more traditional rites of passage) that rioters were young men, boys, and other dependents. In 1768, for example, Governor Henry Moore referred to a group of rioters, many of whom were probably white adults, as "a Rabble of Negroes and Children."[60]

Similarly, the identification of the 1754 coinage rioters as the dregs of society cannot be trusted. One articulate spokesman published a defense of the poorer New Yorkers' position, but not of the riot, in a newspaper. There is no indication that this spokesman joined in the riot, but his willingness to speak out against the devaluation demonstrates that not all literate New Yorkers agreed with the merchants. Moreover, the grand jury itself half admitted that its generally pejorative description of the character of the rioters was misleading when it declared that "*almost* every Inhabitant of Reputation" had not participated in the riot. Perhaps, then, not all of those who armed themselves with clubs or staves and fell in behind the shrill beat of a drum on a wintry January morning were so "extremely low" that they "seemed to be Inhabitants of the World, assembled here by mere Chance."[61]

Compounding the problems of identification is the fact that not all eighteenth-century mobs were the same. Although most rioters believed that they acted for the true interests of the community, the effect of the disturbance varied. The devaluation crisis of the winter of 1753–1754 divided the community, and that division probably had some effect on the mix of the aroused crowd. The anti-Semitic mobs of the 1740s certainly marked a division within the community. But in these cases there were clearly some of the gentry involved. During the interruption of the Jewish funeral, the leader was identified by his dress and his command of Latin as a gentleman. Likewise, in all probability the friends accompanying Oliver De Lancey in his attack on the Jewish family were from his level in society and shared not only De Lancey's anti-Semitism but also his perverse sense of humor.[62]

If the degree of communal agreement could affect the composition of the mob, so, too, could the special relevance of the issue triggering the tumult. Seamen and day laborers, no doubt, dominated impressment disturbances, because it was their lives that were most immediately at stake.[63] Merchants

60. *Gazette*, Nov. 28, 1768.

61. *Gazette: Post-Boy*, Jan. 14, 21, 1754 (emphasis added); *Mercury*, Jan. 7, 14, 21, 1754.

62. O'Callaghan, ed., *Docs. Col. Hist. N.Y.*, VI, 471.

63. On one night in May 1757, the British army swept through the city, collect-

and even artisans may have sympathized with the goals of the rioters, but they themselves were relatively immune to the coercive tactics of the press-gang. Moreover, there was probably a difference between the composition of those impressment mobs that used less violence and the composition of those that produced bloodshed. In the 1758 and 1760 incidents, the men who fired shots and whose lives were threatened by impressment were identified as seamen. On the other hand, the crowd accompanying the burning of the barge no doubt represented a broad spectrum of the community. Such demonstrations tended to attract all sorts of people.[64]

Because of the paucity of evidence and this variety in rioting, little can be said *conclusively* about the composition of the eighteenth-century mob. There were mobs predominantly made up of the lowest levels of society, and there was a rare mob almost entirely made up of the elite. But, in general, most mobs had a mixture of lower and middling elements with, on occasion, a few patricians thrown in. Government officials were probably correct, then, when they asserted that "Negroes and Children" and sailors participated in the disorder of 1768. Attracted by the sheer spirit of saturnalia and by real grievances, blacks, adolescents, and jack-tars probably joined most tumultuous crowds. But so, too, did many others. Day laborers and journeymen took part in the joys of the mob, as did some shopkeepers and artisans. Occupying the middle stratum of society, many of these men were careful not to step too far beyond the bounds of accepted behavior. They were also small property owners who did not want to see the mob become wantonly destructive. Often the leaders in the workshop, they were leaders in the mob. Magistrates, merchants, and others from the higher levels of society occasionally joined in.[65] In short, the entire community might be represented in a riot. If the members of the local gentry did not participate themselves, they often condoned the mob's action. Yet, however broad the range of participants, nothing could change the essentially plebeian character of the mob.

Although there was a level of tolerance toward rioting in New York in the middle of the eighteenth century, attitudes remained mixed. In every mob action the fear persisted that the cure was worse than the disease. Too much rioting or public disorder led to mob rule; and, mob rule, while not as threatening as a tyrannical monarch in the minds of some, was still very dangerous.

Members of the New York elite especially were aware of the dangers of rioting. Many owned vast tracts of land in New York's patroonships, feared agrarian unrest, and remained suspicious of mob activity. New Yorkers did not have to look far to see examples of riotous crowds seizing the initiative, ignoring law, threatening property, and pushing toward anarchy. Across the Hudson, in nearby New Jersey, land rioters opposed quitrents and challenges to their land titles by freeing imprisoned compatriots, tearing down houses, and attacking officials during the 1740s and 1750s. New York's great landlords faced similar difficulties in the 1760s, reaching a dramatic peak with the great tenant uprising of 1766, which had to be put down, in part, with British regulars. Such troubles continued into the Revolutionary war. Moreover, the problem with land rioters extended to newly settled areas in the 1770s, when New York attempted to exert control over the area that later became Vermont.[66] In fact, the province in 1774 passed its only riot act of the eighteenth century to deal specifically with the turmoil and tumult caused by the Green Mountain Boys.[67]

Thus, for the men who controlled New York, the riot was a measure of

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ing about 800 men. Half, mostly tradesmen, were released quickly. The aim was to take in deserting sailors who wanted to sign up on the more profitable and comfortable privateers commissioned in New York. Stokes, *Iconography*, IV, 690–691.

64. *Ibid.*, 698; *Mercury*, Aug. 11, 1760.

65. Jesse Lemisch, "The American Revolution Seen from the Bottom Up," in Barton J. Bernstein, ed., *Towards a New Past: Dissenting Essays in American History* (New York, 1968), 3–45; Lemisch, "Jack Tar," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXV (1968), 371–409; Pauline Maier, "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765–1784," *Persp. Am. Hist.*, IV

(1970), 173–196; Dirk Hoerder, *People and Mobs: Crowd Action in Massachusetts during the American Revolution, 1765–1780* (Berlin, 1971); Wood, "Note on Mobs," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXIII (1966), 635–642.

66. For an overview of this land rioting, see Edward Countryman, "'Out of the Bounds of the Law': Northern Land Rioters in the Eighteenth Century," in Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 37–69. See also Thomas L. Purvis, "Origins and Patterns of Agrarian Unrest in New Jersey, 1735 to 1754," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 600–627; Gary S. Horowitz, "New Jersey Land Riots, 1745–1755" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1966); Irving Mark, *Agrarian Conflicts in Colonial New York, 1711–1775* (New York, 1940); Oscar Handlin, "The Eastern Frontier of New York," *NY Hist.*, XVIII (1937), 50–75; Bonomi, *A Factious People*, 179–228; Sung Bok Kim, *Landlord and Tenant in Colonial New York: Manorial Society, 1664–1775* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 281–415; Staughton Craig Lynd, "The Revolution and the Common Man: Farm Tenants and Artisans in New York Politics, 1777–1778" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1962).

67. New York, *The Colonial Laws of New York*, V, 647–655.

last resort. Only after all other means of redress failed or proved inadequate could reliance on the mob be condoned. Moments of public license were to be limited. Once the demonstration was over, the celebrants were to go home. For no matter how important the grievance triggering the disturbance, the irrational passions sometimes released in a riot could lead to the destruction of more property and question directly the accepted channels of authority. Even if the rioters committed no serious damage, members of the elite knew that their role as the guardians of society was being challenged, and they therefore wanted to limit the moment of disorder.[68]

Moreover, although the belief in the homogeneous interest of society pervaded all levels of a community, it increasingly failed to reflect reality in both England and America. Vast distinctions of wealth existed in Great Britain, and, as English historians have chronicled, the clash between patrician and plebeian cultures intensified.[69] These developments are less clear in colonial America. But there can be no doubt that the increasing distinctions of wealth, ethnicity, and religion were becoming much more important and thus affected patterns of rioting.[70] Slowly, too, a new ideal emphasizing individual gain and personal satisfaction arose and increasingly challenged the ideal of communal solidarity. Yet the ideal of the single-interest community remained viable; and the elite, unable to explain the changing world around it and unwilling to embrace fully a new ethos of individualism, contemptuously dismissed any disturbance that divided the community as the work of the rabble.

Most Anglo-American riots in the mid-eighteenth century, however, aimed at preserving the world as it was. Rioters wanted to protect their community, to regain lost rights, and to guard the moral welfare. How-ever, the temporary suspension of the elite's guardianship of the community, the role reversal of plebeian rituals, and the symbolism of popular ceremonies all presented covert challenges to the social structure. These challenges did not make for the development of class consciousness. Mobs were too oriented toward tradition and too backward-looking for that. But they do reveal social strain. The extremity of Fisher Ames's vitriolic denunciation of mob government at the end of the eighteenth century, then, may have reflected the context in which it was written, but the basic fear of mobs that he expressed was rooted in a long-standing apprehension among the elite. Even in the eighteenth century, too many riots might unravel the delicate social and political fabric. Too many riots led to discord, anarchy, and mobocracy.

68. Paul A. Gilje, "The Baltimore Riots of 1812 and the Breakdown of the Anglo-American Mob Tradition," *Jour. Soc. Hist.,* XIII (1979–1980), 547–564; Thompson, "Moral Economy," *Past and Present,* No. 50 (Feb. 1971), 98, 120–126; Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," *Jour. Soc. Hist.,* VII (1973–1974), 397; Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society," *Soc. Hist.,* III (1978), 145; Burke, *Popular Culture,* 200–204.

69. Thompson, "Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture," *Jour. Soc. Hist.,* VII (1973–1974), 382–405; Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society," *Soc. Hist.,* III (1978), 133–165; Douglas Hay *et al., Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York, 1975).

70. Henretta, *Evolution of American Society;* Henretta, "Economic Development and Social Structure in Colonial Boston," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXII (1965), 75–92; Jackson Turner Main, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, N.J., 1965); Nash, *Urban Crucible;* Allan Kulikoff, "The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *WMQ,* 3d Ser., XXVIII (1971), 375–412.

TWO

Rioting in the Revolution

*Last Night a Gallows with the figures of 3 Men suspended by the
Neck, said to be intended to represent Lord North, Governor
Hutchinson, and Solicitor Wedderburn, with another Figure
representing the Devil, were carried thro' the principal Streets of the
City, attended by several Thousand People, and at last burnt before
the Coffee-House Door. It is said they were decorated with suitable
Emblems, Devices and Inscriptions.*

New-York Journal, 1774

ffigy processions, such as the one described by John Holt's *New-York Journal*, became standard practice for colonial Americans in their resistance to British imperial measures. Time and again, Americans relied upon the ritual and forms of earlier plebeian crowds and paraded with such mock figures to demonstrate their opposition to the Stamp Act, the Townshend duties, and other regulations passed by Great Britain during the 1760s and 1770s. This crowd activity brought more and more people into the political arena and increased popular confidence that the mob acted for the common good. To many patrician observers, however, this development was not wholly welcome. Viewing these frequent processions with suspicion, both whig and tory leaders feared that street politics might bring on the increased discord, anarchy, and mobocracy said to accompany rampant popular disorder. The tories merely bemoaned these developments and cited them to help explain their loyalty to the king. Whigs divided into two competing camps, with both the conservative and the more radical leadership struggling to control, or at least influence, the newly emergent vox populi.

Despite outcries by loyalists and many whigs, popular processions, especially with effigies, remained one of the most potent weapons in the American arsenal of resistance in the 1760s and 1770s. In an era when the public spectacle still carried far greater impact than the written word, the customary, plebeian practice of ad hoc parades with effigies or other symbols brought the message of resistance most effectively to the people in the street.[1] Mock figures, like those in June 1774 representing the unpopular government officials "most active" in setting up the Coercive Acts against Boston and Massachusetts, allowed the mob to register symbolically its displeasure and anger while committing no personal violence. But the significance of these popular demonstrations goes much deeper than simply channeling the energies of the mob along a safe path and transcends the immediate issues of the imperial crisis. Evident on the night of June 15, 1774, and evident in every effigy displayed and in every popular demonstration in these years in New York and elsewhere, an adherence to plebeian forms and culture infused the nascent Revolutionary movement with a special meaning for the lower classes.

Obviously, the procession of June 15, with effigies of North, Hutchinson, and Alexander Wedderburn, was modeled after the earlier Pope Day

1. Rhys Isaac calls these public rituals the oral dramaturgical process. See his "Dramatizing the Ideology of Revolution: Popular Mobilization in Virginia, 1774 to 1776," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXII (1976), 357–385.

celebrations that displayed the pope and the Pretender in like proximity to the devil. Both sets of figures ended their tour of the city in "sulpherous Flames." More important, the accompanying street theater for both the Pope Day and later anti-British activities harked back to even older forms of pageantry evident in the charivari and rites of passage. Rough music, similar to the drumming and huzzahing accompanying pre-Revolutionary demonstrations, aimed at singling out a violator of local custom and often used an effigy as a means of symbolizing the victim. Ceremonial destruction or desecration of the effigy, either through physical abuse or by fire, was also part of the charivari.[2] So, too, the ritualistic mocking and destruction of those in authority, albeit for political reasons, resembles the role reversal of the European lords of misrule and the puberty ceremonies of primitive societies.[3] The "Thousands" of New Yorkers who either joined the June 15 parade or who merely watched the gallows and effigies disappear into flames before the Coffee House were participating in a familiar communal activity. Such an activity, despite all the high-sounding rhetoric uttered by orators and pamphleteers, was a plebeian affair. The Coffee House, where merchants met and where resistance might be planned, was the province of the elite. The streets and the plaza in front of the Coffee House, especially on nights like June 15, were the province of the plebs.

Yet, during the 1760s and early 1770s, this plebeian activity became charged with the political rhetoric of American whigs. The republican emphasis on virtue, which included an attack on ostentation that came dangerously close to an attack on wealth, fitted neatly into the plebeian sense of fair play and had a certain resonance for the artisan, day laborer, and sailor. Mobs in the Anglo-American world had long rushed into the street against the selfish, deceitful, and vicious man who might raise the price of bread or beat his wife. Now, in New York, they rushed into the street to condemn men who, with "their diabolical Machinations," acted "against the Rights of this Country." Thus on the backs of the effigies displayed on June 15 were signs labeling the crimes of each victim. Thomas Hutchinson, like the grain merchant who charged more than the just price, betrayed his community for personal gain and was an "arch Hypo-

2. Edward P. Thompson, "Rough Music: Le charivari anglais," *Annales: Économies, sociétés, civilisations*, XXVII (1972), 285–312; Violet Alford, "Rough Music or Charivari," *Folklore*, LXX (1959), 505–518.

3. Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Reasons of Misrule," in Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France: Eight Essays* (Stanford, Calif., 1975), 97–103; Max Gluckman, ed., *Essays on the Ritual of Social Relations* (Manchester, 1962).

crite and Traitor . . . who to aggrandize himself, has by the most artful, base and false Representations involved his native Country in the greatest Calamity and Distress." Lord North, although an English minister, was seen in a similar light and was called "an insidious and implacable Enemy to the Liberties of America" who was "a Slave of Power and Betrayer of his Country." And the English solicitor general was referred to as the "mercenary and indefeasibly infamous Wedderburne," a "traitorous wretch" whom "Treachery itself cannot trust."[4]

These placards represented a whig rhetoric less formalized than the pamphlet literature and appealed to the lower orders to act for the public good and combat the corruption, decay, and dissipation that threatened to engulf the New World. The American Revolution was more than a colonial rebellion. It was more than a reaction to the new imperial regulations of Great Britain. It was more than a contest against corruption imposed from without. The Revolution was a movement to purge the colonies of corruption from within. The various British attempts at reordering the colonial empire appeared so ominous because they threatened to heighten the corruption that already existed in the colonies.

This corruption violated plebeian sensibilities about what was fair and equitable and even offered a partial explanation for the maldistribution of wealth. Men saw evidence of corruption in the divisive contentiousness of colonial politics, in the willingness of many colonials to take offices of place and patronage, and in the increasing divisions within society. Republican ideology was highly complex: increasingly it represented a crosscurrent of older values reaffirming the organic ideal of society and newer values extolling the independence of the individual. Yet the tools of American resistance continued to reflect the reassertion of the corporate society.[5] Whig rhetoric emphasized the need for virtue and unity. Virtue became the

4. *Journal*, June 16, 23, 1774; Isaac Q. Leake, *Memoir of the Life and Times of John Lamb, an Officer of the Revolution, Who Commanded the Post at West Point at the Time of Arnold's Defection . . .* (Albany, N.Y., 1857), 86–87; A Freeman, *To the Public* (New York, 1774), broadside; A Citizen, *To the People of New-York* [New York, 1774], broadside.

5. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967); Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969), 3–124; Kenneth A. Lockridge, "Social Change and the Meaning of the American Revolution," *Journal of Social History*, VI (1972–1973), 403–439. Of course, during the Revolution, republicanism was transformed into something else and adapted more to a noncorporate image of society (Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*).

yardstick that measured the individual's willingness to sacrifice for the commonwealth, and the very term *republic—res publica*—implied a unity of interests. Rioting was a way of asserting commitment to that common good.[6] Before the 1760s, as suggested in the antidevaluation riot of 1754 and the anti-Semitic antics of Oliver De Lancey and others during the 1740s, popular disorder at times threatened social unity. But now the resistance movement submerged many of the emerging class, ethnic, and religious differences. This shift was no simple elite trick. The corporate view of society touched all social levels; the common folk wanted to believe, and did believe, that opposition to Great Britain would lead to a reformation of American society.

But the people in the street had their own ideas about what direction that reformation was to take. The repeated use of crowd politics, expressed in traditional plebeian ritual, had some unexpected consequences as the innate sense of fair play implicit in that ritual gave way to incipient egalitarianism. This politicization of the common man, clearly linked to the heavy dependence on crowd activity from 1765 to 1776, pushed the Revolutionary leaders to reformulate their own conception of good government and to include more and more people in the decision making. By 1774, laborers, seamen, and mechanics assumed that they had a voice in the affairs of the province, and the local congresses, committees, and conventions could do little without gaining the assent of the newly sovereign people. Although this active political role was increasingly formalized in the years leading up to Independence through the activities of the Mechanics' Committee, through broadening the membership of New York's other Revolutionary committees, and through open meetings and continual referendums, it was the persistent use of mobs and street politics that propelled the common man into the political arena.

Crucial in this development was the transformation of traditional forms of crowd behavior into tools of resistance and revolution. The Revolutionary mob retained some elements typical of all eighteenth-century rioting. It generally limited its activity to attacks on property symbolic of its grievances or to public assertions of communal unity, and frequently a wide spectrum of society participated in the disorder. But, under the influence of whig ideology, the Revolutionary crowd remodeled many of the tradi-

6. Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765–1776* (New York, 1972), 3–48; John Phillip Reid, "In a Defensive Rage: The Uses of the Mob, the Justification in Law, and the Coming of the American Revolution," *New York University Law Review,* XLIX (1974), 1043–1091.

tional symbols of earlier crowds into a more overtly political form. This metamorphosis is evident in the Revolutionary crowd's heavy reliance on effigy processions, bonfires, rail riding, night serenading, tar and feathers, liberty poles, and disguises like blackened faces and Indian garb.[7] All of these practices had antecedents in the activities of Anglo-American plebeian rituals and riots, such as the Pope Day celebrations, the charivari, and fertility and maypole festivities. Although New Yorkers did not practice all of these plebeian rituals in the years immediately before 1765, they remained in the collective conscious to be drawn on when the need arose.[8] There had been occasions in which this traditional activity had a political content, but now in New York it became even more evident. In other words, active participation of crowds to oppose British imperial regulations not only transformed plebeian ritual but also contributed to a growing political awareness among common men and confirmed popular belief in the value of politics out-of-doors to protect the interests of the community.

Not everyone was sanguine about the more overtly political mob. Gouverneur Morris's famous comment in May 1774, that "the mob begin to think and to reason," expressed the anxieties of many of New York's "patricians" (a term Morris used). This man, who later signed the Declaration of Independence, prophesied "with fear and trembling, that if the disputes with *Great Britain* continue, we shall be under the worst of all possible dominions; we shall be under the domination of a riotous mob." The leadership of the resistance movement, then, feared an excess of disorder and persistently argued for limiting mob action.[9]

Morris and other whig patricians had good reason to be apprehensive. The whig orientation of mobs in the 1760s and 1770s was not automatic. Divisions within the community ran deep, and personal, parochial, and class interests could challenge the fragile fabric of society.[10] For the patrician, mobs not only jeopardized his hegemony by introducing greater

7. Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 183–188, 207–215.

8. Alfred F. Young, "English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth-Century American Radicalism," in Margaret C. Jacob and James R. Jacob, eds., *The Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism* (London, 1984), 185–212.

9. Peter Force, *American Archives* (Washington, D.C., 1837–1843), 4th Ser., I, 342–343.

10. The best discussions of these developing tensions in 18th-century America are James Henretta, *The Evolution of American Society, 1750–1815: An Interdisciplinary Analysis* (Lexington, Mass., 1973); and Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).

numbers of people to street politics but also threatened the community by destroying its sense of solidarity. Even in the heat of the imperial debate, and with the obvious need for mob action to enforce compliance with the resistance movement's goals, tumult still threatened to engender mobocracy.

Yet under that threat, not all of New York's patricians rejected the mob. Although some whig leaders feared crowd politics, others recognized that a balance was necessary: these more radical whigs believed that the people in the street could be an effective and constitutional means of resistance if they were limited and guided along a nonviolent and nondestructive path.[11] To this end, groups like the Sons of Liberty in the 1760s and the Committees of Safety and Correspondence in the 1770s struggled to keep the American mob within traditional modes of behavior by assuming leadership in the street and reinforcing plebeian crowd behavior with whig forms and ideology.

The Stamp Act, the Crowd, and the Whig Leaders

The efforts of whig leaders to guide the people in the street and the plebeian orientation of Revolutionary crowd action can be seen as early as 1765. As whig leaders appealed to the mob and then struggled to control the ensuing popular disorder, the lower orders practiced and expressed, through crowd action, their own interpretation of whig ideology. The whig attack on virtue could become, at the hands of the mob, an attack on wealth and ostentation. The combination of whig ideology and plebeian ritual continued throughout the months of resistance to the Stamp Act and persisted even after the law was repealed. The expression of plebeian animosity toward symbols of wealth during some of the crowd activity threatened to magnify class distinctions. Yet the ability of whig leaders to restrain the mob and place its activity within a whig context muted this challenge. The final result was to strengthen both the resistance movement and the popular faith in mob action.

11. Several historians emphasize the conflict within the whig leadership. See Carl Lotus Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (Madison, Wis., 1909); Staughton Lynd, "The Mechanics in New York Politics, 1774–1788," *Labor History*, V (1964), 225–246; Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763–1797* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1967), 3–32; Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981).

Plebeian patterns of crowd behavior appeared almost as soon as New Yorkers began to resist the Stamp Act on the eve the law was to take effect. While merchants met on the night of October 31 to agree not to import goods from England, a crowd in the street mimicked a formal public funeral (such as might occur when a government official died) and held a "serious" ceremony to inter "liberty." Then, just as at countless official celebrations, some of the demonstrators broke away and "proceeded thro' the streets in a mobbish manner whistling and Huzzaing," breaking lamps and windows, and threatening to pull down houses.[12]

On the following night there was an even larger demonstration, displaying popular opposition to the Stamp Act, plebeian ceremonial activity, and a degree of restraint. Two separate processions formed. Both had parallels to Pope Day: each paraded with effigies, featuring most prominently Lieutenant Governor Cadwallader Colden. One party, in mock ceremony, marched through the streets with its effigy of Colden seated in a chair and was accompanied by a growing crowd carrying lights. Raiding Colden's coach house outside Fort George, this group strengthened the message of the farce by transferring the effigy to the governor's own carriage. Then the crowd headed uptown toward the Fields (New York Common).

The second party, which had been gathering at the Fields, even more clearly followed the ritual of Pope Day. Colden's effigy was placed in a movable gallows with stamped paper in one hand and a boot, symbolizing George III's unpopular adviser the earl of Bute, in the other. Just as in the 1755 New York Pope Day celebration, the devil, "the grand Deceiver of Mankind," was positioned in such a manner as to seem to urge Colden "to Perseverance in the Cause of Slavery." The parallel in symbolism did not end there. Hanging on the effigy's back was a drum which, as a label on the chest indicated, was "supposed to allude to some former circumstance of his Life" when Colden had served in the Pretender's army as a drummer.[13]

Joining forces, the two groups vowed not to break any windows and together moved down to Fort George, where Colden had sought safety. The mob taunted the soldiers stationed inside by throwing bricks and stones at the fort and daring the guards to fire. Placing their hands on the top of the ramparts and knocking at the gate, the New Yorkers grew

12. R. R. Livingston to [former Gov. Monckton], Nov. 8, 1765, Livingston Family Papers, box 3, transcripts, NYPL; G. D. Scull, ed., *The Montresor Journals* (New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, XIV [New York, 1881]), 331 (hereafter cited as *Montresor Journals*); *Gazette: Post-Boy*, Nov. 7, 1765.

13. *Gazette: Post-Boy*, Nov. 7, 1765.

1. Stamp Act riot outside Fort George, Nov. 1, 1765
2. Stamp Act riot at Major James's residence, Nov. 1, 1765
3. John Street theater riot, May 5, 1766
4. Liberty pole disturbances, 1766–1770
5. Golden Hill riot, Jan. 19, 1770
6. New York tea party, Apr. 22, 1774
7. Tarring-and-feathering of shoemaker Tweedy, Aug. 22, 1775

A. Merchant's Coffee House
B. Burn's City Arms Tavern
C. Montagne's Tavern
D. Methodist meetinghouse

- - - - Ward Boundary

MAP 1. Revolutionary Rioting, 1765–1775.
After Lester J. Cappon et al., eds., Atlas of Early American History: The
Revolutionary Era, 1760–1790 *(Princeton, N.J., 1976)*

bolder. One effigy "was brought up within 8 or 10 feet of the Fort Gate with the grossest ribaldry from the Mob." Then the crowd took the effigies, the carriage, and two sleighs also commandeered from Colden's coach house to Bowling Green. With wood from some recently dismantled palisades, they burned the effigies and vehicles in a tremendous bonfire before thousands of people and within sight of Fort George.[14]

Besides demonstrating a strident antiauthoritarianism by derisive treatment of the Colden effigies and the taunting behavior at the fort, some New Yorkers also gave vent to an odd combination of feelings. A group of rioters expressed their dislike of the local commandant, Major Thomas James, and a resentment of his wealth by marching to his house and ransacking it, destroying furniture and private belongings. Then they proceeded to several nearby bawdyhouses and attacked them. Here the crowd expressed its own sense of morality. Although houses of prostitution ordinarily were tolerated, these dens of corruption, no doubt patronized heavily by British soldiers, now appeared to sully American virtue.[15]

Passions remained high the next few days as Pope Day approached. Colden began to work out a compromise, and whig leaders attempted to avoid further conflict. On November 2, people "were the whole Day collected in Bodies throughout the Town which seemd to be in the greatest Confusion and Tumult," and there were rumors of a planned assault on the fort.[16] By night the mob became increasingly riotous, and Colden, in consultation with government officials and several of the city's leading gentlemen, decided that he would not distribute the stamps until Sir Henry Moore, the new governor, arrived. Armed with this concession, whig leaders went into the street to pass the word. Eager to restrain the mob, these men enlisted the aid of several ship captains to exert influence over any "Sons of Neptune" who might riot.[17]

The next day was a little quieter, but notices and broadsides appeared threatening more violence unless trade were resumed without stamped clearances from the Customs House. More ominous, and revealing the

14. *The Colden Letter Books* (New-York Historical Society, *Collections,* IX–X [New York, 1877–1878]), Pt. I, 55–56 (hereafter cited as *Colden Letter Books*).
15. The above account of the Nov. 1, 1765, disturbances is a composite drawn from *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Nov. 7, 1765; *Montresor Journals,* 336–337; *Colden Letter Books,* Pt. II, 54–63, 74–75, 78–82, 89–93, 97–100, 103–107, 461; R. R. Livingston to [Monckton], Nov. 8, 1765, Livingston Family Papers, box 3, transcripts, NYPL.
16. *Colden Letter Books,* Pt. II, 103–107.
17. R. R. Livingston to [Monckton], Nov. 8, 1765, Livingston Family Papers, box 3, transcripts, NYPL; *Colden Letter Books,* Pt. II, 103–107, 461.

continued influence of plebeian ritual on the forms of resistance, were the "advertisements and many papers placarded throughout this city declaring the storming of the Fort" on November 5 "under cover of burning the Pope and pretender unless the Stamps were delivered."[18] Again, whig merchants sought the help of sea captains to prevent—or at least mitigate—violence. November 4 thus passed with little more than the gathering of a large crowd at the Common at night. By the following day, the traditional Pope Day, Colden relented and surrendered seven boxes of stamps to the city magistrates, who placed them in City Hall. The threat of an assault on the fort was never carried out.[19]

The potential confrontation with British troops at Fort George, the destruction of Major James's property, the attacks on bawdyhouses, and the presence of bold mobs came a bit too close to mobocracy for many whig leaders. This fear forced men like Robert R. Livingston, one of the whig merchants who went out into the streets to persuade mobs to disperse, to speak out in the early days of November to control the passions of the crowd—even though, as Livingston later claimed, it left him in jeopardy from the "Vox Populi." More effective than the "Men of greatest Property" in influencing the crowd were the sea captains, who knew the "Sons of Neptune" and others in the street personally.[20]

Soon middling merchants (including ex−sea captains) and leading mechanics organized the Sons of Liberty to guide resistance to the Stamp Act. This organization, in response to the threatened anarchy, attempted to restrain the crowd and issued statements urging less misconduct. To limit mob action, the Sons of Liberty asserted its leadership of the whig cause in the coming months and began supervising noncompliance with the Stamp Act by inspecting ships suspected of harboring stamp paper. The merchants and mechanics who dominated the Sons of Liberty were concerned as much with protecting property as with opposing the Stamp Act. They organized popular demonstrations to intimidate anyone who did not adhere to the ban on stamps and to assert a communal unity in support of stamp resistance.[21] The Sons of Liberty were thus willing to

18. *Montresor Journals,* 338–339.

19. *Ibid.; Gazette: Post-Boy,* Nov. 7, 1765; *Colden Letter Books,* Pt. II, 58–63, 74–75, 78–82, 103–107, 461; and R. R. Livingston to [Monckton], Nov. 8, 1765, Livingston Family Papers, box 3, transcripts, NYPL.

20. R. R. Livingston to [Monckton], Nov. 8, 1765, Livingston Family Papers, box 3, transcripts, NYPL.

21. For New York Sons of Liberty, see Roger J. Champagne, "The Sons of Liberty and the Aristocracy in New York Politics, 1765–1790" (Ph.D. diss., Univer-
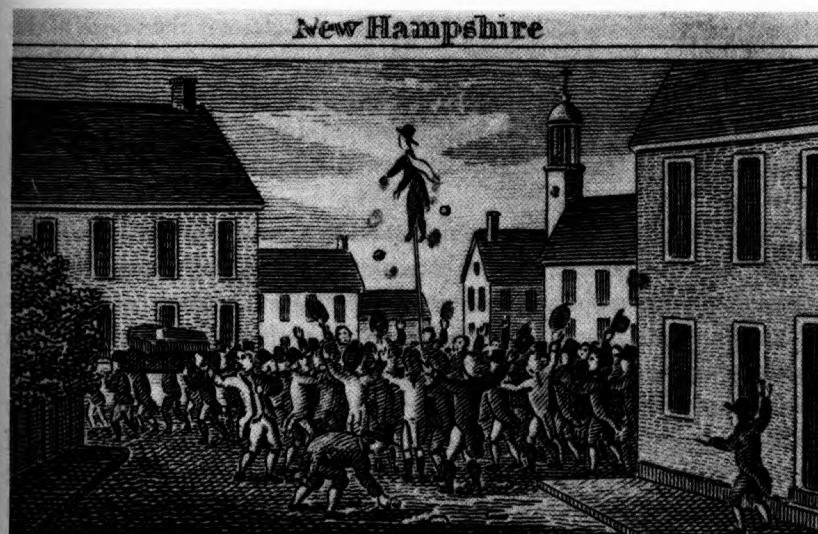
PLATE 2. Effigy Demonstration.
Wood engraving from J. W. Barber, Interesting Events in the History of the United States *(New Haven, Conn., 1829). Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Charles Allen Munn, 1924.*
This stoning of a stamp-master in effigy in New Hampshire shows a plebeian crowd activity repeated frequently in New York City between 1765 and 1776.

flirt with the use of the mob both as a tool of coercion and as a traditional means of representing communal support. But they carefully tried not to let the mob get beyond control.

Although the tensions within the city relaxed appreciably after the surrender of the stamps to city officials, the streets remained far from quiet. Several demonstrations took place in November and December. On November 28, three hundred New Yorkers crossed over to Long Island to intimidate the Maryland stamp distributor into resigning. In mid-December, a crowd paraded with the effigies of Lord Colville, George Grenville, and General William Murray hanging from a gallows. Toward the end of December one crowd boarded a ship to search for stamps con-

sity of Wisconsin, 1960); Henry B. Dawson, *The Sons of Liberty in New York* (Poughkeepsie, N.Y., 1859); Maier, *Resistance,* 69, 78–112, 277–278, 302–303; Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams* (New York, 1980), 51–100; Herbert M. Morais, "The Sons of Liberty in New York," in Richard B. Morris, ed., *The Era of the American Revolution: Studies Inscribed to Evarts Boutell Greene* (New York, 1939), 269–289.

signed to Connecticut, and another threatened to destroy the house of the naval officer Captain Archibald Kennedy.[22] Despite the efforts of the Sons of Liberty, mobs became a constant presence in New York. By January and February, the British journal keeper John Montresor reported, "Children nightly trampouze the Streets with lanthorns upon Poles and hallowing."[23]

Plebeian ritual had left a deep imprint on this crowd activity. The influence of Pope Day persisted in the parading of effigies singling out specific targets. But other plebeian practices surfaced as well. With mobs marching in the streets nearly every night, it was as if the Stamp Act crisis allowed some New Yorkers to partake in ceremonial misrule without end. Youth groups, in particular, took to the streets not only to intimidate would-be compliers with the Stamp Act but also to act out the rituals of symbolic inversion. Previously, "lanthorns upon Poles" and candles had been symbols of loyalty to the crown. Now those symbols became inverted and represented the new resistance.[24]

The emphasis on plebeian forms meant that plebeian ideas about what was good for the community also became important. At times the crowd wanted to take action that exceeded the bounds set by the Sons of Liberty. Such conflict was potentially explosive. In mid-February the Sons of Liberty castigated two merchants for using stamped paper. In an action typical of the resistance movement, John Lamb, Isaac Sears, and Joseph Allicote held a ceremony, publicly burning the stamps before thousands of New Yorkers. Here the Sons of Liberty consciously played up to the crowd, trying to guide and control it. They were not entirely successful. The language of whig resistance, emphasizing virtue over corruption, worked upon plebeian sensibilities. By using stamped paper the two merchants revealed their own corruption. The devil had enticed them, and they, for personal gain, had willingly sinned. For many of the people in the street, the surrender and burning of stamped paper was not punishment enough. That evening, "tho' the Sons of Liberty exerted themselves to the utmost" to "prevent the gathering of the Multitude," a mob formed and burst into the house of one of the offending merchants. The rioters began to destroy the furniture—a symbol of wealth and ill-gotten gains. At that point several members of the Sons of Liberty arrived and prevailed upon the mob to leave the house. They assured the mob that the two merchants

22. *Montresor Journals,* 340, 342–344; *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Dec. 19, 26, 1765.
23. *Montresor Journals,* 346, 349.
24. Shaw, *American Patriots,* 186.

would appear in the Fields to atone for their misdeeds. The next morning, reminiscent of older forms of Anglo-American collective action and directly calling to mind religious and judicial rituals of absolution, this dramatic rite of public confession took place. But even this humiliation did not satisfy everyone. A great throng escorted the merchants afterwards to their respective houses and forced the offenders to repeat the confessions before their own doors. In this case, as in others, the Sons of Liberty barely managed to control the situation.[25]

The tension in the relationship between whig leaders and the lower orders manifested itself yet again in a riot in the spring of 1766. At that time, the city theater, which had been closed throughout the Stamp Act controversy, reopened. The theater proprietors had miscalculated. On opening night a mob arrived, huzzahed, shouted "Liberty, Liberty," and drove the theater patrons helter-skelter into the street, often with the loss of "their Caps, Hats, Wigs, Cardinals, and Cloaks . . . torn off (thro' Mistake) in the Hurray." The building was "Torn to Pieces" and the debris dragged to the Common, where it was burned in a public spectacle.[26]

This disturbance again revealed a combination of whig and plebeian ideals. The impact of whig rhetoric appeared in the shouts of "Liberty, Liberty." Of more significance, however, were the plebeian elements. The building was torn down, taken to the Common, and burned just as the barge in the impressment disturbance of 1764 and many of the effigies in the preceding months had been. The plebeian content also included a distinct resentment of wealth. The items of clothing lost "thro' Mistake" were obvious symbols of ostentation, and Weyman's *Gazette* commented that the bonfire in the Common, a typical plebeian action in the eighteenth century, was "much to the Satisfaction of Many at this distressed Time and the Great Grievance of those less inclined for the Public Good." Those New Yorkers who stood in the dancing shadows of the raging bonfire that night were participating in a public theater far more meaningful than the stage show planned by New York's would-be entertainers.[27]

Whig leaders saw the threat to social authority of this mob activity. Yet, regardless of the dangers, the mob remained a necessary weapon for American whigs: it ensured compliance with the ban on stamp paper

25. *Montresor Journals,* 349–350; Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution,* rev. ed. (New York, 1962), 250–251.
26. Weyman's *Gazette,* May 12, 1766; *Gazette: Post-Boy,* May 8, 1766.
27. *Ibid.; Montresor Journals,* 364.

while serving its traditional function of asserting communal unity. Without the mob, without some effective vehicle of coercion, any resolve by a Stamp Act Congress, a meeting of merchants, or action by the Sons of Liberty was meaningless. Clearly the Sons of Liberty knew this. Repeatedly, whenever the Sons of Liberty stepped in to search a ship for stamps, intimidate would-be compliers, or harass uncompromising officials, they made sure that a noisy and threatening crowd was nearby. And just as clearly, whenever the Sons of Liberty called upon a crowd, that crowd might have a mind of its own.

The Liberty Pole

In the years after 1766 the mixture of whig and plebeian elements continued in a series of street confrontations between New Yorkers and British soldiers over another crucial symbol of the emerging Revolution—the liberty pole. In gamelike behavior, typical of youth groups in traditional societies, civilians and servicemen competed to protect or to destroy this fertility symbol, which, at first, was more maypole than liberty pole. This contest was not just mere adolescent frolicking. The liberty pole riots revealed a community protecting common laborers from outside competition; they served as a means of defending American liberty as defined by whig rhetoric. The joining of these two issues in what might otherwise have been a frivolous contest strengthened, with ideological content, the plebeian struggle to be guaranteed a fair and livable wage while it widened popular support for the whig cause. Together, the whole process of the conflict further legitimized direct popular action and politics out-of-doors.

Had there been no opposition to the imperial regulation of the 1760s, the presence alone of British armed forces on the American continent would have provoked conflict. Soldier and civilian had a natural antipathy toward each other that reached beyond any ideological argument against standing armies.[28] The presence of the military always intruded upon and disrupted a community. Soldiers drank, brawled, and visited brothels. A port like New York could absorb such behavior, but the addition of hundreds of unattached males in red coats tested the limits of that toleration. Moreover, off-duty servicemen unfairly competed with civilian laborers for jobs. The British soldiers, who were provided food and shelter and probably did not have families to support, worked for lower wages. It is little

28. See Fred Anderson, *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984), 115–116, 119–120.

wonder, then, that there was conflict. During the 1750s a few civilian-military disturbances had occurred.[29] This antagonism worsened in the declining economic conditions of the 1760s. The arrival of two full regiments of reinforcements in the spring of 1766 only aggravated New Yorkers' complaints that British military personnel in the city unfairly took jobs for less pay.[30]

Soon after the strengthening of the British garrison, New Yorkers held a ceremony to honor the King's Birthday and to celebrate the news of the Stamp Act repeal. In typical eighteenth-century fashion, grand festivities were planned on New York Common, including the serving of two roasted oxen and "25 Barrels of strong Beer, a Hogshead of Rum, Sugar and Water, to make Punch, Bread, &c." This public treat centered on two poles: one was a tall mast surrounded by a pile of twenty cords of wood, "to the Head of which was hoisted 12 Tar and Pitch Barrels"; the other was a flagstaff with colors displayed.[31] Both poles revealed odd mixtures of symbolism. The mast with the tar and pitch barrels probably represented the triumph of American maritime interests now that trade was renewed. But the appearance of those barrels suspended from the top of the pole, much like the streamers of the maypole, also enhanced the resemblance of the pole to that traditional symbol of English folk celebrations of rebirth. This similarity, it might be noted, is not surprising, for the King's Birthday, after all, was in the spring. The other flagstaff also mixed symbols. Although a band played "God Save the King" and there was a standard of George III, the inscriptions on the pole exposed the true sympathies of the crowd; Pitt's name and the word "liberty" were in larger letters and displayed more prominently than the king's name. In short, New York whigs organized the festivities in apparent jubilation over the repeal of the Stamp Act and in recognition of a traditional springtime fertility rite—not from loyalty to the Hanoverian dynasty.[32]

Within days of the King's Birthday, the colonial assembly, to the plaudits of many New Yorkers, refused to comply with the new Quartering Act to provision the army. Quickly the flagstaff, erected on ground often used for military exercise and parade, became an irksome symbol of

29. George William Edwards, *New York as an Eighteenth Century Municipality: 1731–1776* (1917; rpt., Port Washington, N.Y., 1967), 109; Stanley McCrory Pargellis, *Lord Loudoun in North America* (New Haven, Conn., 1933), 129.

30. *Montresor Journals,* 346.

31. *Mercury,* June 9, 1766.

32. *Ibid.; Montresor Journals,* 370; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 28; *Journal,* Mar. 26, 1767.

American opposition to His Majesty's troops stationed in the city. For two months the soldiers contained their seething anger until the night of August 10, when a party of redcoats tore the pole down. Then began the great game of down-again, up-again confrontations. The following day the soldiers and citizens clashed more directly. Two thousand to three thousand persons attended a public meeting called by the Sons of Liberty to demand an explanation why their "Tree of Liberty" was cut down. A party of soldiers also appeared on the Common, and tempers rose as both sides exchanged hard words. A volley of brickbats from the whigs forced the soldiers to draw their bayonets, and with them they beat back any attempt to replace the pole. A few days later the New Yorkers were more successful, as British officers restrained their men from interfering. But on September 23, soldiers acting at night again knocked down the pole. Two days later the pole was restored without violence.[33]

Throughout this period tension remained high between civilian and soldier as each accused the other of provoking incidents. Within a few days of the initial destruction of the liberty pole it became unsafe for soldiers to walk about town, since they were "daily insulted in the Streets without the least provocation." To show popular ill will toward the army, the Sons of Liberty proposed "for the Innholders and Inhabitants not to have any Intercourse with the military or even admit them in their houses." By the fall it was the British regulars who seized the initiative and started to attack New Yorkers in the street and even in their own homes.[34]

While these conflicts surfaced throughout the city, the liberty pole remained the centerpiece of the antagonism between soldier and civilian, and this attention added to its importance. For Americans it became much more than a plebeian fertility symbol; it now increasingly represented American virtue and liberty and became a focal point for patriotic festivities. On March 18, 1767, for instance, New Yorkers organized their celebration of the anniversary of the repeal of the Stamp Act around the liberty pole. But the land surrounding this symbol of American whig principles also became a battleground where civilian and soldier could vent their long-festering mutual antagonisms. The liberty pole now became an easily assailable target for the British soldier to insult colonial pride. On the night after the celebration of the anniversary of the Stamp Act repeal,

33. *Montresor Journals,* 382–384; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 32–33; *Gazette: Post-Boy,* Aug. 21, 1766.

34. *Montresor Journals,* 383–384; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 33; *Journal,* Oct. 23, Nov. 6, 1766; Weyman's *Gazette,* Oct. 27, 1766.

some redcoats retaliated by once again knocking down the liberty pole. Up it went the next day, reinforced this time with iron bands. On the night of the twentieth a few ambitious soldiers attempted to blow the pole up with gunpowder. They failed, and the whigs placed a guard to protect it. Confrontations ensued the next two nights, but the British efforts were to no avail.

The liberty pole stood unmolested for nearly three years, until January 1770, when antagonism between soldiers and civilians flared once again. Opposition to Great Britain intensified at this time with the anonymous publication of a pamphlet by Alexander McDougall. In it McDougall denounced the New York Assembly for finally buckling under to imperial pressure and complying fully with the Quartering Act.[35] Frustration began to build on both sides. Faced with continued popular opposition and growing hostility in the street, the enlisted men eagerly looked for opportunities to insult New Yorkers. For their part, the Sons of Liberty became increasingly hard-pressed to maintain a nonimportation agreement passed two years earlier in response to the Townshend duties, and they felt their political power draining away. The laborer in the street, meanwhile, faced several problems. Every winter made work more difficult to obtain as trade and business slackened with the rhythms of the seasons. Years of limiting trade with England, in accordance with the resistance movement, only exacerbated the situation. Moreover, there were far too many merchants and employers willing to hire off-duty soldiers at half the pay of the normal day laborer. As both soldier and civilian eyed one another in early January, mutual suspicion, distrust, and dislike mounted.[36] Starting on the night of the thirteenth, soldiers and civilians again began to clash around the liberty pole.[37]

Irate over the attacks on this pole *"sacred to Constitutional Liberty,"* New York whigs on January 16 issued handbills throughout the city that decried the presence of the British army. These broadsides emphasized the ill effects of the employment of off-duty soldiers. One resolution highlights

35. A Son of Liberty [Alexander McDougall], *To the Betrayed Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New-York* (New York, 1769); Roger J. Champagne, *Alexander McDougall and the American Revolution in New York* (Schenectady, N.Y., 1975), 17–40.

36. A Merchant, *The Times, Mankind Is Highly Concerned to Support That, Wherein Their Own Safety Is Concerned, and to Destroy Those Arts by Which Their Ruin Is Consulted* (New York, Jan. 27, 1770), broadside; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 54.

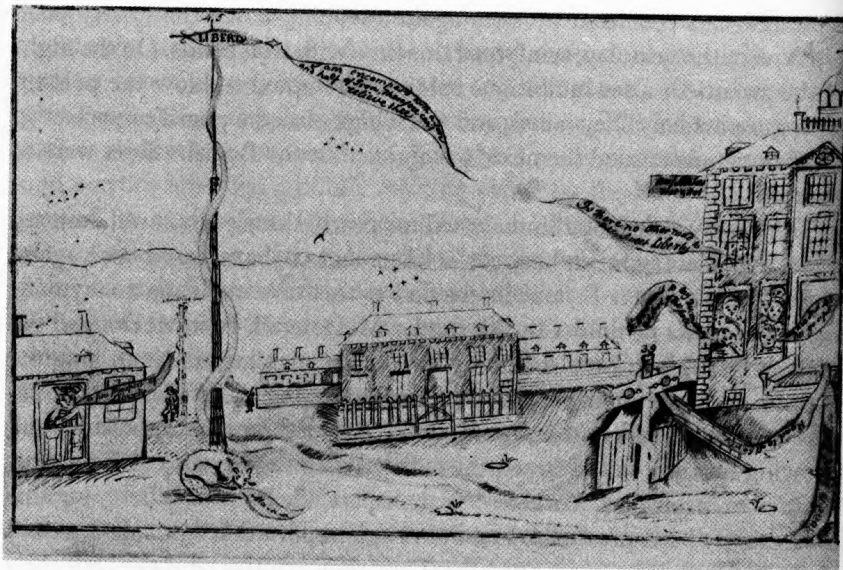37. *Journal,* Jan. 18, Feb. 8, Mar. 1, 1770; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 54–55.

PLATE 3. New York Liberty Pole.
Drawing by Pierre Eugène Du Simitière. Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.
On the right on the "Road to Liberty" is "Libel Hall" (Montagne's Tavern); in background are Upper Barracks.

lighted the themes of moral economy and communal solidarity so dear to plebeians: "Whoever seriously considers the improverished state of this city, especially of many of the poor Inhabitants of it, must be greatly surprised at the conduct of such as employ the soldiers, when there are a number of the former that want employment to support their distressed families." The impoverishment of the lower orders might be avoided, the resolution continued, "if the employers of labourers would attend to it with that care and benevolence that a citizen owes to his neighbour, by employing him."[38] By this time, then, the liberty pole had come to represent both the resistance to Great Britain and the local plebeian concerns of employment and communal obligations.

The conflict intensified when, that night, the soldiers blew up the pole. The next day thousands attended a great meeting on the Common in protest. Despite demands for immediate action, the whig leaders again emphasized the need for restraint, and the meeting limited itself to passing resolu-

38. *Journal,* Feb. 8, Mar. 1, 1770.

tions against British soldiers and for reerecting the pole.[39] To counter this action, the soldiers printed a derisive handbill of their own and posted it throughout the city. On January 18, Isaac Sears, a merchant and leader in the Sons of Liberty, and Walter Quakenbos, a baker, seized two soldiers distributing this handbill and held them in custody for the civil authorities. An attempted rescue led to a massive riot, popularly called the Battle of Golden Hill, in which scores of British soldiers fought in hand-to-hand combat with hundreds of civilians. There were several injuries, but no fatalities. Tensions persisted, and violence flared up again on January 19, when American sailors and some soldiers engaged in a brawl.[40]

Each clash between soldier and civilian made the liberty pole standing in New York Common ever more important. Yet this significance emerged almost accidentally. Even New York whigs admitted that the pole "in it self" was a "Trifle," serving at first a "temporary Purpose," and would perhaps have been little thought of "till it had fallen by natural Decay; but being destroyed by Way of Insult, we could not but consider it a Declaration of War against our Freedom and Property, and resent it accordingly."[41] The liberty pole thus became a symbol of American virtue and an emblem of the Sons of Liberty.

But it was much more than that. Labor competition remained the source of much of the agitation. A loyalist report declared that after the riot on the seventeenth, "a Set of lawless Men" patrolled "the Streets, with great Clubs in their Hands, entering Houses and Vessels, and forcibly" turned out and drove away "all of the Soldiers whom they found at work." They also threatened "vengeance against any Inhabitants, who should presume to employ" British soldiers.[42]

The protection of the community against all outsiders was at the heart of these popular disturbances. The aim was not only to prevent soldiers from working. Suggested in the calls for "care and benevolence" owed by neighbors to use local workers even at a higher wage was the attempt to

39. *Ibid.,* Jan. 18, Mar. 1, 1770; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 55.
40. *Journal,* Jan. 18, Feb. 8, Mar. 1, 1770; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 55–59; William Smith, *Historical Memoirs of William Smith, Historian of the Province of New York, Member of the Governor's Council, and Last Chief Justice of That Province under the Crown, Chief Justice of Quebec,* ed. William H. W. Sabine, 2 vols. (New York, 1956–1958), I, 72–73; *Colden Letter Books,* Pt. II, 211, 216–219; Whitehead Hicks, *To the Inhabitants of This City* (New York, Jan. 22, 1770), broadside.
41. *Journal,* Feb. 8, 1770.
42. A Merchant, *The Times, Mankind.*

persuade employers to pay a just price for labor. But the context and significance of this typical eighteenth-century protest was enlarged by the resistance movement against Great Britain. By rallying around and defending the liberty pole, the New York laborer found a symbol and a language to represent his grievances. The Sons of Liberty, on the other hand, were provided an audience ready to listen to their rhetoric and willing to defend the whig cause against the British imperial policy.

The Committees and the Mob

The joining of patrician whig and plebeian communal interests in New York would not always work as smoothly as in January 1770. After 1773, elite concern over popular disorder heightened as the imperial crisis intensified, as the royal government disintegrated, and as the people out-of-doors became more vocal. The man in the street asserted his own political awareness more forcefully than ever before. Frightening loyalist and elite whig alike, he joined committees and crowds to demand allegiance to the Revolutionary cause.[43] The whig leadership needed the popular base, but it strove to control the "poor reptiles" who had just reached their "vernal morning" and who, according to Gouverneur Morris, were in May 1774 "struggling to cast off their winter's slough."[44] Without the support of the plebs, there could be no resistance movement. With that support, the resistance movement became a revolution.

The strain of controlling the people in the street, evident since November 1765, appeared again in the resistance to the Tea Act of 1773. The response of New Yorkers and other Americans to this measure followed the patterns of earlier resistance: a series of semisupervised crowd activities ensured that the law could never be carried out. New Yorkers planned to imitate the Boston Indians and their Tea Party, but when the long-

43. The story of New York's experience in the years before Independence has been recounted several times. Carl Becker's account still stands out for its completeness (*Political Parties*). See also Countryman, *A People in Revolution;* Leopold S. Launitz-Schürer, Jr., *Loyal Whigs and Revolutionaries in New York, 1765–1776* (New York, 1980); Bernard Mason, *The Road to Independence: The Revolutionary Movement in New York, 1773–1777* (Lexington, Ky., 1966); Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *Father Knickerbocker Rebels: New York City during the Revolution* (New York, 1948); Bruce Bliven, Jr., *Under the Guns: New York, 1775–1776* (New York, 1972).
44. Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., I, 342–343.

awaited tea ship *London* arrived in New York on April 22, 1774, New York's Mohawks moved too slowly. The "body of the people" collected on the wharf "were so impatient" that, before the intended raid could occur, they boarded the ship and began to dispose of the tea. Several "persons of reputation" hastily posted themselves as a guard about the companionway and hold to ensure that this crowd dispensed with only the detested beverage. With the tea dumped into the murky waters of New York harbor, the crowd dispersed, to meet in a massive rally around the liberty pole the next day. At this well-attended meeting, with banners flying and amidst the strains of "God Save the King," the people of New York affirmed their support of the previous night's activities.[45] Such tea parties, then, exemplified the whig reliance on organized but limited collective activity; and their widespread community support demonstrated their adherence to traditional forms of crowd behavior. But New York's tea party reveals also a whig leadership scrambling to restrain the mob.

During the next two years the effort to control the resistance movement confronted demands for more radical action from a new Mechanics' Committee and from popular meetings. The whig leadership was divided, and some men fled into the loyalist camp. Radicals like Alexander McDougall, Isaac Sears, and Abraham Lott fought the conservatives over the delegates to the Continental Congress and the commitment to nonimportation. Despite temporary victories by the conservatives, the momentum of events allowed them only to delay acts of resistance. By the fall of 1774, the Committee of Fifty-one (the near-official resistance committee) complied with the Continental Congress, adopted the Suffolk Resolves and the Association, and reorganized itself as a new and larger Committee of Inspection (the Committee of Sixty).[46]

As the whig leadership—struggling among themselves and with the crowds in the street—strove to control the popular movement, a complex relationship emerged between the formal political activity of committees and the informal political activity of the people out-of-doors. For example, despite the conservative orientation of the Committee of Fifty-one, within

45. *Ibid.,* 248–258; *Journal,* Apr. 28, 1774; *Rivington's Gazetteer,* Apr. 28, 1774; *Gazette,* Apr. 25, 1774; Smith, *Historical Memoirs,* I, 184–185; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 83–84; *To the Public* (New York, Apr. 19, 1774), broadside (Evans no. 13671); *To the Public* (New York, Apr. 19, 1774), broadside (Evans no. 13672).
46. Becker, *Political Parties,* 142–173; Countryman, *A People in Revolution,* 137–143; Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., I, 309–330, 372.

three days of its organization in May 1774 it felt compelled to ratify its position with a meeting of "the inhabitants of the city and county," which included those persons not ordinarily enfranchised.[47] Similar meetings were held throughout the summer and fall, at times called by the Committee of Fifty-one, at times by the Mechanics' Committee, and at times by ad hoc committees.[48] Suddenly, the people out-of-doors wielded new power as the whig leadership sought sanction for the actions of its committees.

Crowd politics, however, expanded beyond public meetings on New York Common. Moderate "men of property" may have taken a lead in the committee work "to protect the city from the ravages of the mob"; yet as Colden reminded Lord Dartmouth, "the spirit of mobbing" remained "much abroad."[49] Throughout the fall and winter, the riotous crowd continued to be a tool of coercion. Likewise, the interaction between crowd and committee remained tense yet interdependent.[50]

This peculiar relationship can be seen in February 1775, when the captain of the *James* attempted to unload his cargo contrary to the orders of the Committee of Inspection. The committee was supposed to watch the wharves to ensure that no contraband was unloaded, but before it could act, "the banditti" hired to unload the ship were "suppressed by the inhabitants, who are for supporting the Association, and who began to assemble in great numbers." The size of the crowd so intimidated the captain that he set sail and anchored four miles away. The committee then sent a delegation to guarantee the ship would not approach the wharves a second time. But when the vessel attempted to dock a few days later, a

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47. Becker, *Political Parties,* 114–115; Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., I, 293–294.

48. A Citizen, *To the Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New-York* ([New York], 1774), broadside; Another Citizen, *To the Inhabitants of the City and County of New-York* ([New York], June 5, 1774), broadside; An Honest American, *To the Respectable Public* (New York, 1774), broadside; Isaac Low *et al., To the Respectable Publick* (New York, 1774), broadside; *To the Public* (New York, May 17, 1774), broadside; *To the Public* (May 18, 1774), broadside.

49. Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., I, 1030.

50. E. B. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York; Procured in Holland, England, and France,* VIII (Albany, N.Y., 1857), 493; *Journal,* Oct. 6, Nov. 10, 1774; *Rivington's Gazetteer,* Oct. 13, 1774; Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., I, 1030, 1070–1072; A Citizen, *To the Public: Stop Him! Stop Him! Stop Him!* (New York, 1774), broadside; The Free Citizens, *To the Public* (New York, 1774), broadside; Legion, *To the Publick* (New York, 1774), broadside; *To the Public* (New York, Sept. 28, 1774), broadside; *To the Public,* affidavit of Thomas Mesnard ([New York], Dec. 30, 1774), broadside; Plain English, *To the Inhabitants of New-York* ([New York, 1774]), broadside.

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mob again swung into action. An "exasperated" crowd went to the captain's lodgings, seized him, paraded him "through the principal streets," and sent him in a rowboat to meet his ship with orders to prevent its arrival. The committee then decided to leave a delegation aboard the *James* until it left port. But when the captain of the British man-of-war refused to allow the controversial ship to depart because it did not have the proper clearance papers, again the people in the street acted on their own. A tumultuous mob visited the lodgings of the captain of the British warship and persuaded him to allow the *James* to sail.[51]

By early April the whig leaders were losing their hold on the crowd, and the boundary between formal and informal political activity became ever more hazy. The "sway of the mob," as one loyalist put it, "which includes despotism, the most cruel and severe of all others," appeared on the verge of dominating. City officials as well as conservative and radical whigs futilely strained to control the situation. Great public meetings were held, resolutions were passed against England, and supplies of the British army at Boston were visited by tumultuous mobs.[52]

Although there were moments when they could barely control the crowds they thought they led, a few of the most radical whigs, like Isaac Sears, Alexander McDougall, John Lamb, and Marinus Willett, continued to ally themselves with the people in the street. Under their influence and driven by the intensifying imperial crisis, much of New York's crowd activity began to shade into a form of warfare and militia action. When news of Lexington and Concord arrived on April 23, all regular government disappeared, the committee temporarily lost its power, and the people in the street briefly ruled supreme. John Lamb and Isaac Sears wasted little time organizing a militialike mob to seize guns and ammunition.[53] A few days later, on April 28, they even took over the Customs House.[54] For a week radical whigs armed themselves, paraded through the

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51. Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., I, 1243–1244.

52. *Ibid.,* II, 347–349; *Journal,* Mar. 9, 23, Apr. 13, 1775; *Rivington's Gazetteer,* Mar. 9, 1775; Ralph Thurman, *To the Inhabitants of the City and County of New-York* ([New York], 1775), broadside; Smith, *Historical Memoirs,* I, 219–220; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 101; Plain English, *To the Inhabitants of New-York.*

53. *Journal,* Apr. 13, 1774; Thurman, *To the Inhabitants;* Smith, *Historical Memoirs,* I, 219–222; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb,* 101–102; William M. Willett, ed., *A Narrative of the Military Actions of Colonel Marinus Willett . . .* (New York, 1831), 30–31; Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., II, 347–349, 364.

54. Smith, *Historical Memoirs,* I, 222; O'Callaghan, ed., *Docs. Col. Hist. N.Y.,* VIII, 571–572; R. R. Livingston to his wife, May 3, 1775, Livingston Family Papers, box 3, transcripts, NYPL.

streets, and made preparations for war. All was "continual confusion," with Sears and Lamb "calling out the People almost every Day to the Liberty Pole."[55] Whig leaders scrambled to reassert control. The Committee of Sixty perceived "with great anxiety the disorder and confusion into which this City has been unfortunately involved," and it asked for a new, expanded committee of one hundred to deal with the crisis. In short order, the members of the new Committee of One Hundred were chosen, and a Provincial Congress was organized.[56]

Even with these extralegal institutions in place, creating a semblance of government, the mob continued to push toward more open rebellion. In early May rioters drove the arch-defender of the British, Thomas Cooper, from King's College to the safety of the Royal Navy. Printer James Rivington, on the same night, barely escaped a mob as he too fled the city.[57] In early June, "a body of people" led by Marinus Willett, a member of the Provincial Congress and the committee, stripped some evacuating British troops of their arms and baggage. Soon afterwards, popular whigs raided the royal storehouse at Turtle Bay.[58] In August, New Yorkers led by Isaac Sears fought a brief engagement with the British ship *Asia* over the control of the cannons at the Battery.[59] The mob and the militia were becoming indistinguishable. This trend became even more evident in November 1775, when Sears headed a band of Connecticut Liberty Boys on a raid to New York, which included the destruction of the press of tory printer James Rivington.[60] For popular whigs, patriotism increasingly became identified with a willingness to countenance or join this kind of activity.

The whig leadership in the Provincial Congress, on the other hand, strove to limit this mobbing. While pursuing measures of opposition, the

55. R. R. Livingston to his wife, May 3, 1775, Livingston Family Papers, box 3, transcripts, NYPL; Smith, *Historical Memoirs*, I, 221–222.

56. Becker, *Political Parties*, 193–199; Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., II, 400, 427, 448–449.

57. Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., II, 547–548; R. R. Livingston to R. Livingston, Apr. 22, 24, 1775, R. R. Livingston MSS, box 2, NYHS; *Colden Letter Books*, Pt. II, 421–422.

58. *Colden Letter Books*, Pt. II, 426–428; Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., II, 2, 1285, 1290.

59. *The Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden* (New-York Historical Society, *Collections*, LVI [New York, 1917–1923]), VII, 300–301; *Rivington's Gazetteer*, Aug. 31, 1775; *Gazette*, Aug. 28, Sept. 5, 1775; Leake, *Memoir of Lamb*, 166–168.

60. O'Callaghan, ed., *Docs. Col. Hist. N.Y.*, VIII, 568.

new Provincial Congress trod a delicate line in an effort to avoid a complete break with the loyalists in the colony and with the British government. No doubt the ominous presence of His Majesty's warships stationed in New York harbor contributed to this circumspect course. But the Provincial Congress also wanted to guarantee its own control of events and discountenanced undirected rioting. The Provincial Congress condemned the seizing of arms and baggage from the evacuating British and ordered some of its members to intervene personally to stop the looting of the stores at Turtle Bay.[61] On June 7 they warned that individuals should not interpret the recommendations and resolutions of the Continental Congress for themselves and asserted "that any attempts to raise tumults, riots, or mobs" on the basis of such personal interpretations "is a high infraction of the General Association, and tends directly to the dissolution of this Congress."[62] After the exchange of fire accompanying the removal of some of the guns on the Battery in August, the Congress decreed that "no more Cannon or Stores be removed . . . until further orders from this Congress," and allowed supplies from the city to flow to the British fleet uninterrupted.[63]

Despite its efforts, the problems of the Provincial Congress with the mob's militialike activity continued. For example, in July 1775 a crowd burned a supply barge belonging to the *Asia*. The Provincial Congress moved to correct this affront to authority by ordering the construction of a replacement. When that, too, was destroyed, the Provincial Congress passed a resolution condemning the depredation and dispatched a guard to the carpenter's shop where the boat was being built.[64]

One reason for the inability of the Provincial Congress to control this popular disorder was the lenient attitude of many prominent whigs. Young Alexander Hamilton wrote to John Jay at the Continental Congress after the Sears raid, exclaimed his distaste for the mob, and declared that "while the passions of men are worked up to an uncommon pitch there is great danger of fatal extremes." But Hamilton also admitted, "Irregularities I know are to be expected." A similar theme appeared in the reaction of the Provincial Congress to the raid. It sent an official complaint to Gover-

61. *Ibid.*, 646; Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., III, 1626–1627.

62. Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., II, 1282.

63. *Ibid.*, III, 550, 555, 558. See also Becker, *Political Parties*, 224–225.

64. Force, *American Archives*, 4th Ser., II, 1785–1786, 1792, 1811–1812, 1818–1820, III, 15, 139, 259–263, 526–527, 533, 535, 555.

nor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, but basically admitted that the attack resulted from misplaced zeal.[65] Moreover, firebrands like Sears and Willett, who led some of the tumultuous crowds themselves, sat on the committees and in the Provincial Congress.

Whig leaders also knew, as they became increasingly engaged in outright rebellion, that they had to base their rationale for resistance on the legitimacy of extralegal activity. As the Monitor No. XII essay explained: "Magistracy is essential to civil society" and should be "revered" as long as "it operates consistent with its own nature; and according to the great principles of the social compact, on which it depends." But by itself it conveys "no inherent indefeasible sacredness to the persons of those, who are invested with it." They have authority and respect only "if they act in all things mindful of the end for which they received it." If not, and they deviate from or pervert that end, "they are to be only considered, as *men*;— men who have betrayed the most sacred trust, who have trampled upon all the bonds of fidelity and duty; and who have depreciated the most valuable jewel of society, by dedicating it to the vilest purposes."[66] That was the rationale of the resistance of the committees and congresses; that, too, was the rationale of the actions of the mob.

Armed with this reasoning, a group like the Mechanics' Committee, organized in 1774 by shopkeepers and artisans as a radical counterweight to the Committee of Fifty-one, began to act almost as a government unto itself. It persistently pushed for open support of a declaration of independence in the spring of 1776, and it moved to stifle all opposition.[67] For example, when Samuel Loudoun announced his intention to publish a rebuttal to Tom Paine's *Common Sense,* they hauled him before their tribunal. When Loudoun appeared to persist in his efforts, about forty members of the Mechanics' Committee broke into his shop, seized the controversial pamphlets, carried them to the Common, and publicly burned them. Efforts by Loudoun, a good whig, to get redress from the Provincial Congress were fruitless.[68]

65. Hamilton to John Jay, Nov. 26, 1775, in Harold C. Syrett and Jacob E. Cooke, eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton,* I (New York, 1961), 176–178; Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., IV, 400–401, VI, 1398–1399.
66. *Journal,* Jan. 25, 1776.
67. Force, *American Archives,* 4th Ser., VI, 614–615, 895–898.
68. *Ibid.,* V, 438–440, 1389, 1441–1442, VI, 1348, 1363, 1393.

Tar and Feathers and the Revolution

The public burning of Loudoun's pamphlets in the Common emphasizes the persistence of plebeian practices as New Yorkers approached revolution. The various committees and congresses might maneuver to influence events, and some mob activity might take on the guise of the militia, but the people in the street continued to follow ritual behavior borrowed from plebeian ceremonies. Common folk had burned the pope, the Pretender, and the devil in effigy, had likewise kindled a royal barge in 1764, and had ignited countless effigies of political figures since 1765. A bonfire, then, may not seem like a unique act, but taking place within the same arena, and given the special history of such conflagrations, the Mechanics' Committee would appear to be extending a long-rehearsed ritual to a highly political purpose.

The development of mob practices from older plebeian ritual appeared also in the use of tar and feathers. This lower-class activity emerged first in coastal Massachusetts in 1768 and 1769. Shortly after it appeared in New England, New Yorkers tarred and feathered a customs informant. The tarring-and-feathering in both New England and New York represented a combination of popular, official, and traditional maritime punishments. The parading of the victim through town to public opprobrium recalled the practices of the charivari (or skimmington) and the decrees of magisterial tribunals. In addition, the coating of tar and feathers long had been used by seamen to single out offenders of custom and morality. Moreover, these tarring-and-featherings came amidst several public ceremonies orchestrated by whig leaders to single out violators of nonimportation. The ritual organized by the local committees emphasized public confession, not physical violence. However, tar and feathers was at least one step beyond what the whig leaders wanted, though generally applied only by and to members of the lower orders.[69]

During the heightening tensions in 1775, tar and feathers reappeared in New York. The victim was from the lower class—a shoemaker named Tweedy who had spoken out against the congresses and committees. On

69. Young, "English Plebeian Culture," in Jacob and Jacob, eds., *Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism,* 189–194. See also Shaw, *American Patriots,* 21, 185–188; Reid, "In a Defensive Rage," *N.Y.U. Law Rev.,* XLIX (1974), 1075–1083; Frank W. C. Hersey, "Tar and Feathers: The Adventures of Captain John Malcom," Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications, Transactions,* XXXIV (1941), 429–473.

PLATE 4. Destruction of the Royal Statue.
La destruction de la statue royale à Nouvelle Yorck, *engraving by Francis
Haberman. Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.
This contemporary French depiction may resemble Paris more than New York.*

the night of August 22, "the Populace" seized Tweedy on a dock near Beekman's Slip. Finding himself "in the Power of the People," he revealed his own awareness of Revolutionary mob ritual by quickly begging forgiveness and making "the most abject Submissions, and lavish Promises of Reformation and Amendment." Although the crowd wanted to treat Tweedy more severely, some of the whig leaders interceded. The mob, therefore, contented itself "with causing him to strip" and coating him amply with "Tar, plentifully decorated with feathers." The agonizing ritual, however, was not yet over; for then Tweedy had to fall to his knees and repeat his ritualistic confession, "praying for Success to General Washington, and the American Arms, and Destruction to General Gage and his Crew of Traitors."[70]

By late spring 1776, plebeian crowd actions flourished almost unchecked as the situation in New York City worsened. The British forces began to gather for the summer's campaign against the city. Fear of bombardment and invasion drove thousands into the countryside, including many of the more affluent. The Continental army filled the empty houses

70. *Gazette,* Aug. 28, 1775.

and streets and brought with it the noise and disorder typical of armies occupying cities. Soldiers disrupted Anglican services in an odd inversion of the English church-and-king mob tradition.[71] On June 10 and 11, in a ceremony reminiscent of the charivari, several tories were stripped and ridden through town on rails. Others, who were more contrite, were merely forced to parade the streets with candles held high in the air.[72] This new ritual, like the use of lights and candles during the Stamp Act crisis, parodied traditional demonstrations of loyalty to the monarch.[73] A month after the rail-riding episode, plebeians expressed their antimonarchical sentiments further. When the news of the Declaration of Independence became official, a mob toppled the statue of George III in Bowling Green and desecrated royal symbols throughout the city.[74]

For many conservatives the increased mob activity and the overt challenge to government promised the very dissolution of society. In April 1775 a public meeting called by radicals condemned Ralph Thurman, who had been a member of the Committee of Inspection organized to enforce the nonimportation in 1769 and had been a member of the Committee of Fifty-one, for sending supplies to the British in Boston. His reaction was typical of conservative attitudes. Thurman asserted that these public meetings "are a Reproach to the Community, and an Insult to the present Committees." Although fearing that the civil authorities could do nothing against the mob, Thurman declared, "Those Enemies to Peace and good Order shall not rule over me; I despise their Threats," and he expressed his determination "to do Justice to Liberty."[75] Many of those who became loyalists agreed with Thurman. As early as the fall of 1774 Samuel Seabury, in a pamphlet attacking the Continental Congress, exclaimed: "Tell me not of Delegates, Congresses, Committees, Riots, Mobs, Insurrections,

71. I. N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498–1909* . . . , IV (New York, 1922), 913–932; O'Callaghan, *Docs. Col. Hist. N.Y.,* III, 641.

72. "Diary of Ensign Caleb Clap, of Colonel Baldwin's Regiment, Massachusetts Line, Continental Army, March 29 until October 23, 1776," *Historical Magazine,* 3d Ser., III (1874), 135; "Diary of Rev. Mr. Shewkirk, Pastor of the Moravian Church, New York," in Harry P. Johnson, ed., *The Campaign of 1776 around New York and Brooklyn (Memoirs of the Long Island Historical Society,* III [Brooklyn, N.Y., 1878]), 108.

73. For examples of such illuminations before the resistance movement, see Stokes, *Iconography,* IV, 537, 554, 585, 591, 600.

74. *Gazette,* July 15, 22, 1776; *Journal,* July 11, 1776; *Pennsylvania Evening Post* (Philadelphia), July 13, 1776; Force, *American Archives,* 5th Ser., I, 144.

Associations—a plague on them all.—Give me the steady, uniform, un-biassed influence of the Courts of Justice."[76] It was the "Sons of Discord," not the king, who threatened liberty, and during the long months of mob activity and resistance in 1774, 1775, and 1776, many New Yorkers became convinced that only attachment to George III could maintain the social order. Others, who supported the Revolution, openly pondered how to curb the "mobility" and how to limit the "tribunal powers" of mobs and extralegal committees. The dangers of seemingly unchecked mobs appeared greater than ever before: they threatened the social system and might lead to mobocracy.

The Revolution, however, did not lead to mob government. From the confusion of mobs, extralegal committees, congresses, and conventions, new state governments emerged.[77] In some ways, this successful revolution ratified and further legitimized rioting. On the other hand, conservatives maintained and in some ways even extended their reservations about tumultuous crowds. But from the perspective of the people in the street, mobs, because of their use of plebeian ritual, their role in politicizing the common man, and their significance in propelling Americans into revolution, appeared after 1776 more potent than ever before.

75. Thurman, *To the Inhabitants*. See also Benjamin H. Hall, ed., "Extracts from the Letter Books of John Thurman, Junior," *Historical Magazine*, 2d Ser., IV (1868), 283–297.

76. [Samuel Seabury], *Free Thoughts on the Proceedings of the Continental Congress Held at Philadelphia, Sept. 5, 1774 . . .* ([New York], 1774) (Evans no. 13602), 16. See also [Seabury], *The Congress Canvassed; or, An Examination into the Conduct of the Delegates at Their Grand Convention, Held in Philadelphia, Sept. 2, 1774: Addressed to the Merchants of New-York* ([New York], 1774).

77. For this process, see Countryman, *A People in Revolution;* and Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 306–343.

THREE

Popular Disorder in Wartime and the Post-Revolutionary Period

A little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical.

Thomas Jefferson, 1787