

BICENTENNIAL REFLECTIONS
An Essay Delivered
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BICENTENNIAL RELFECTIONS

I. The Dangers of "Bicentennialism"

The bicentennial year of a nation presents unquestionable challenges, but, in addressing this society tonight, I am conscious of the need to deal first, and candidly, with some real dangers--for they distort understanding, mislead inquiry, and ultimately destroy our respect for the process of national celebration itself. There is the danger, first, of outright distortion--that we will rewrite our national heritage as an uncritical and falsified set of myths.

That course dangerously misleads us. We do not need further additions to the already overstocked literature of hero worship and national self-congratulation. The second threat is commercialism. The bicentennial theme, from all indications, is an advertiser's paradise. But surely there will come market saturation and consumer boredom. By July 4, 1976 we will probably have heard the last tolerable "Yankee Doodle" radio jingle: noticed with dismay our final starred-and-stripped give-away souvenir: and firmly vowed never to attend another bicentennial super-discount sale. Did Jefferson and Washington ever dream how their likenesses and words would be abused in the twentieth century market?

Perhaps most insidious is the danger that the bicentennial celebration will become an exclusively retrospective exercise in patriotic nostalgia. Thomas Jefferson once proclaimed, "I would rather dream of the future than read the history of the past." But faced with an uncertain and even terrifying future, how many of us are not sometimes tempted to revel in the golden age of our own history? It seems a welcome refuge from the anxiety of pressing decisions: decisions for a complex world, decisions which

literally implicate the future of human life on this planet? Because of this temptation, there is danger that our heritage will become--not a source of inspiration and direction--but a place for ostrich-like retreat. The effort is still worth making. I agree with that most sensitive of observers of America, John Dos Passos, who explained, eloquently, the importance of one's historical bearings: In times of change and danger when there is a quicksand of fear under men's reasoning, a sense of continuity with generations gone before can stretch like a lifeline across the scary present. . . •

II. The Perils of the Historical Craft

A final warning: I am not a "professional" historian, and as Shakespeare reminded us with respect to the scriptures, it is likewise true that the devil may cite history for his own purposes...particularly, I suppose, an untrained and unprofessional devil. So much for the warnings. Now for the rationale.

Apart from the richness and intrinsic fascination which beckons one to the American revolutionary period, I have explored this province of history for three additional reasons: reasons which I believe ought to concern us all as we contemplate our past history and our future mission. The first is in protest against a current trend. I fear and challenge the current de-emphasis on the teaching of history in primary and secondary schools. Across the nation, the study of history is being downgraded in favor of a broad "social studies" approach, issue-oriented rather than based on a rigorous knowledge of historical fact. News analyst William Shannon's indictment is powerful: History has the narrative power of any good story...rich in colorful personalities and dramatic incidents. Properly taught, it is irresistible. But distorted by this myopic quest for relevance and submerged into the formless glop of social studies, known to the irreverent as "social stew," it breeds boredom and reinforces ignorance.

Unfortunately, teacher skepticism is echoed by students. A recent poll in Scholastic magazine revealed that 60 percent of high school students questioned the value of the study of history, including that of their own revolutionary period. We need again to show the power of history as a humanitarian discipline, but in so doing we should also be concerned with a trend within the scholarly ranks of historians themselves. This is the second rationale for my choice of topic. Seldom in the vast outpouring of recent

historical scholarship does one find the truly integrative work; one which not merely documents events, but attempts to argue their significance on a broader canvas of explanation and human meaning.

Consider the indictment of two decades ago by a respected professional historian, Professor W. Stull Holt. Scholarly history, he argued, is no longer being written "by specialists for specialists, but by specialists for a small fraction of the specialists." - This development, if unchecked, will doubtless contribute to a further rejection by our larger society of the sense of its own past. Henry Ford's famous remark, "History is bunk!" surely has too many unthinking adherents as it is.

Do not mistake my meaning. I do not call for a new Spengler or Toynbee to integrate all of human history into a comprehensive set of themes: social forces which both explain the past and predict the future. Nor do I welcome populizers who misuse the tools of a scholarly discipline for the sake of journalistic sensationalism. And historians are far from alone as an academic discipline in witnessing communication fragmented by overspecialization. Indeed, the sociologists of Max Weber's school argue that such specialization is inevitable in all aspects of a western industrial society.

But after all the excuses are tendered, there remains my final perspective. Just as war is "too important to be left to the generals"; just as the Constitution (as Watergate demonstrated) is too vital to become the exclusive province of lawyers; likewise, history is too important to be left exclusively to teachers and professors of history. History has few unequivocal "lessons", but surely it is important that we attempt collectively to integrate the meaning of our past, utilize it as a tool to understand the present, and--as I will attempt in my conclusions tonight--suggest ways in which we may use its perspectives to face and then construct our own precarious future.

In the biographies of the founding fathers, and the interpretive studies of the American revolutionary period, one fact emerges repeatedly, and with startling clarity: These men and women, by the thousands, deliberately studied and talked about History--ancient and modern. The countless pamphleteers and committees of correspondence combed history for lessons, for parallels, and for enlightenment respecting their own future. 2 / They read and quoted widely from the heritage of classical antiquity, the writings of Enlightenment rationalism, the traditions of the English

common law, the political and social theories of New England Puritanism, and the radical social and political thought that originated in the English Civil War and has been sustained by opposition publicists in England.

No matter that the American colonists made mistakes of scholarship, that their learning was sometimes superficial, their quotations occasionally inaccurate, and their theoretical understanding imperfect. The point is, they tried. They tried and achieved on a scale we would be lucky to emulate. Political understanding was not a task left to the "experts" or specialists.

The debate centered on the principles of a good society and on the purposes of government. It attracted, from all evidence, an enormous degree of knowledgeable participation from all corners of colonial society. The intensity of this exchange of ideas is evidenced in the last will and testament of the revolutionary Josiah Quincy, Jr., in 1774: "I give to my son, when he shall arrive to the age of fifteen years, Algernon Sidney's works, -- John Locke's works, - Lord Bacon's works, -- Gordon's Tacitus, -- and Cato's Letters. May the spirit of liberty rest upon him!" 3 / As a statement of hope; as an affirmation of the future; as a declaration of what is valuable in the heritage conveyed by one generation to another, I wonder who in our time can rival that concern?

To anticipate one of the questions I will ask but leave unanswered tonight: how was a colonial society with a population of two-and-one-half million inhabitants--no larger than that of contemporary Oregon--able to generate this kind of learning and public inquiry? It outranks in quality, quantity, and concentration of focus almost anything we witness today in the entire United States. It is not even necessary to join the cosmic debate about the influence of ideas in history to make my point. For if ideas have any role, if conclusions rationally reached can ever affect our future, then we have a profound obligation to rescue historical perspective and reintroduce it into (?) contemporary discussions.

III. The American Revolution:

A Search for Meaning and Some Conclusions

I lack the time, the knowledge, and the expressive power to convey the full sweep of the American revolutionary period. I will not recount the well-known "facts," so much

as develop conclusions about them--conclusions relevant, I hope, to our own time. We know, most of us, about the stamp act crisis, the Boston massacre, Paul Revere's ride, the drafting of the Declaration of Independence, and General Washington's leadership and ultimate military victory.

Less clear, and much more disputable is the significance of the revolutionary period itself. Indeed, one must choose from interpretations offered by a series of historical schools. Consider the options: The first generation of historians (including many of the participants) agreed that the colonists were unreservedly right and the British utterly wrong. The colonists were fighting, as they proclaimed for freedom, against a tyrant, and, really, to restore the traditional civil rights of Englishmen to the colonies. These writers, the so-called "Whig" historians, saw their task as did their 19th century successors, as simply the assignment of credit or blame to particular individuals among the glorious founding fathers. Was one a Jeffersonian or Hamiltonian? Did Adams really help Jefferson draft the Declaration of Independence? Which one of George III's ministers was the worst. This school of thought, incidentally, was paralleled by a group of Canadian and British historians, associated closely with Tory loyalists who fled or were forced from the colonies, who argued that the British were utterly right, and the colonists mere ingrates misled by subversive liars and self-aggrandizing propagandists. In this respect, the English simply carried on their side of a long-standing grudge match with the colonists. One English visitor to the colonies in 1770 had found the Americans "of a disposition haughty and insolent... impatient of rule, disdain[ing] subjection, and by all means affect[ing] independence." This state of affairs compared unfavorably to the situation in another colony where the traveller noted with approval the "remarkably pliant and submissive disposition of the inhabitants of Bengal" [India]. (Pamphlet *The Importance of the British Dominion in India Compared with that in America*, PP 58-60 [London: 1770]). Regardless of the factual justification for this name calling, in either type of interpretation, history simply becomes a grand morality play, and the ultimate object of the historical narrative rapidly descends into national self-justification.

A second major interpretive school emerged in the late nineteenth century and undertook the more limited but to its practitioners more "scientific" task of gathering

detail about the actions of particular states, individuals or institutions. To their detailed efforts we can attribute publication of most of the documents, personal papers, and national records of the Revolutionary era. The major convulsion in historical writing about the revolution came shortly before World War I in the wake of the "Muckrakers" with the so-called "new history". Carl Becker and others, most notably Charles Beard in his famous work, *An Economic History of the Constitution* (New York: 1935), rejected the patriotic and idealistic interpretation for a version far less flattering. To the progressive historians, the revolutionary period and the adoption of the Constitution were best explained by rejecting the causal importance of ideas. To them--as to Marx and Freud--political ideas, however noble, were largely rationalizations rather than driving forces. They masked rather than revealed the underlying interests and forces which actually determine social behavior.

On a wide variety of fronts, for more than a generation, historical writing of the progressive school sought to explain the revolution and the formation of the Constitution in terms of socio-economic relationships and interests, rather than in terms of ideas. 5/ In these theories, the colonists were engaged in two revolutions: the first to obtain "home rule" from the Mother Country; the second to determine who should rule at home. The thesis, in over-simplified form, suggested--and with some serious documentation--that the Colonial upper classes ultimately put sharp limits on the extent to which they permitted the social revolution of the colonial lower classes to run its course. They saw the revolutionists' ideas, not as concepts in themselves worthy of acceptance as principles of government, but simply as propaganda, as the revolutionary technique by which skilled colonial publicists and agitators cemented a consensus against King and Parliament. Arthur M. Schlesinger concluded that the revolution simply could not be understood if it were regarded "as a great forensic controversy over abstract governmental rights." 6 /

As is often the case in scholarship generally, - and this, incidentally is one of its most profound justifications - the extremism of the progressive historians, generated its won dialectic of opposition. By the late 1950's the Becker-Beard thesis was in disrepute. One eminent set of commentators concluded that the more recent historical scholars "demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that Becker's and Beard's positions were at

best highly questionable. " 7 Another author, Professor John C. Miller, argued in the new introduction to his own encyclopedic study, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Stanford: 1959) that rejection of the economic interpretation of the causes of the American revolution had been so total that the reaction against Beard and the progressive historians had probably gone too far.-

These developments have led to the emergence of yet a fourth major "school" in the interpretation of the American revolution. His own brilliant study of the rich pamphlet literature of the American revolutionary era led Harvard historian Bernard Bailyn back (or forward, if that be your taste) to a "neo-whig" interpretation. In short, Bailyn concluded, Americans believed what they said, in favor of revolution and liberty, had good reasons for believing it, and acted not on hidden motives, but forthrightly on the basis of profound theoretical doctrine. The revolution was not primarily a controversy between social groups, but an ideological-constitutional struggle--a fundamental alteration in the way Americans looked at themselves. Those who believe in the importance of ideas as historical forces - on the notion that Americans revolted because of great principles of freedom can scarcely have a stronger ally than is found in Bailyn's recent Pulitzer and Bancroft prize-winning study.-

This brings modern historians full circle back to the interpretation of the historians who themselves lived in the revolutionary era, and who saw the revolution not as social upheaval, but as an essentially conservative, principled defense of American (and British) freedom. The larger debate is not over. Bailyn's work has suggested yet another school of interpretation. Gordon S. Wood in a provocative and widely cited article, "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," 10/ finds the colonial revolutionaries so extreme in their rhetoric, so frenzied in their outbursts, so excessive in their accusations that the factual misdeeds of Crown and Parliament, however real, could not justify the attack. Incidentally, that conclusions would undoubtedly have pleased George the Third, who referred to his not-so-faithful American subjects simply as "those deluded people".-11/

Woods theoretical departure is too new to have been tested, but he suggests that the very extremism of American reaction itself demonstrates the existence of deep problems within colonial society - problems and psychic tensions separate from those

traceable to British policy, and not fully understood by colonial patriots, or yet by us. In this fifth departure - this attempt to merge an analysis of political behavior with the substance and historical development of political ideas - there may yet emerge a new school of historical interpretation.

So much for our brief review of interpretations of the revolutionary era. But what of the men and women who made it? Do they deserve the almost mythological status our history has given them? Despite the efforts of modern biographers to tell it, warts and all, it is a difficult conclusion to resist. Washington's biographer, James Thomas Flexner, searched the historical record to discover evidence apart from the mythical cherry-tree episode relating to Washington's legendary character. ^{12/} He found a penchant for modest gambling at cards and a somewhat questionable land speculation venture. He also reported an occasion where Washington palmed off a shipment of flour on an unsuspecting buyer. He advised that the flour should be sold in bulk rather than parcels since he knew it would "look better to the eye than it will prove to the taste," being, he feared, "a little musty". Otherwise, Washington's character was exemplary. His influence was deservedly commanding. And, in what might well be the most astounding act of self denial in western political history, Washington declined repeated opportunities to be made king.

Consider, too, Benjamin Franklin, of whom it was said, together with Thomas Jefferson that he had mastered all knowledge accessible to his civilization. Printer, pamphleteer, self-educated scientist, and diplomat....all were interchangeable roles. He was also a bon vivant - perhaps even a dirty old man - who "[ignored] the temperance he preached and who practiced abstinence only so long as he had to." ^{13/} In Europe he was a master propagandist and ambassador. As the man who, in the epigram, had "wrested the lightning from heaven and the scepter from tyrants," he took Europe by storm as the embodiment of rustic American virtues.

What of Jefferson? He was incredible by almost every measure: Gentleman farmer; President; compulsive letter writer; architect of Monticello; inventor of the swivel chair, dumbwaiter, and a hemp beater; student of agronomy and of urban planning, founder of a university, author of the American decimal system of coinage, author, in a different sense, of matchless political rhetoric, the list is almost endless. ^{15/} The human

flaws are evident, too. His attitudes as President toward civil liberties, as we have been reminded, did not always live up to the noble words he penned in the Bill of Rights. 16 He did not circulate his anti-slavery views, nor fully reconcile them with his philosophy of liberty, a point which remains valid whether or not one accepts Fawn Brodie's somewhat questionable biographical account of his alleged affair with Sally Hemmings.

The list goes on: James Madison the scholarly architect - architect, that is, of lasting political institutions; Patrick Henry - certainly this western land speculator and country lawyer was a bit demagogic. After a blistering attack on the religion of a good reverend in a trial, Henry afterwards quietly apologized for the violence of his language, assured the cleric it was nothing personal, and stated that he was merely trying to make himself popular. But as Tom Paine put it, "Great scenes inspire great ideas." Henry combined personal courage, exceptional oratorical skills with the "ability to comprehend the essential meaning and import of most of the principal political issues of the period." 18/ And he defined to a nation its destiny. Among the founding fathers - signers of the Declaration of Independence - were names lesser known today, though no less eminent. The list includes the man who designed the American flag, Francis Hopkinson of New Jersey--who was an incredibly versatile man by any standards: he practiced law, composed music, wrote verses and essays, directed theatrical productions, played the harpsichord, designed the New Jersey state seal, and invented the shaded candlestick. The signers were hardly anti-establishment malcontents. Among them was Charles Carroll of Maryland, America's richest man. The most renowned physician in America, Dr. Benjamin Rush of Pennsylvania, was also a signer. Dr. Rush, who later served as treasurer of the United States mint, also established the first free dispensary in America, at Philadelphia in 1786. An editorial in the American Medical News (2-24-75) recalls Dr. Rush's awesome achievements: "He was the first professor of chemistry at the nation's first medical school, wrote the first chemistry textbook in America, published the first book on mental illness in the U.S., founded the first free clinic, was founder of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, served as a physician general of the Continental army and fought in some of its battles, championed the cause of the poor, the black, the alcoholic, and the criminal, and was a supporter of public schools as well as founder of two colleges. "

These personalities seem superhuman. But this is a characterization we should try to resist. It is one thing to be inspired by these men, and I have left out countless of them: but if we elevate them to demigod status, we lose the will to emulate them. For another thing, they were human. For yet another, neither they nor their peers treated the colonial loyalists very well. For all of the talk of liberty, loyalist dissenters lived in quiet terror of revolutionary mobs. Consider William Paterson, who became Attorney General of New Jersey, and pursued what he termed the "pernicious class of moderates" with witch-hunting vengeance. He used his official position to buy the confiscated lands of the loyalists on advantageous terms, became rich as a consequence and lived to be a Justice of the United States Supreme Court. 19/ No Watergate special prosecutor of his day touched him throughout this successful and self-righteous display of avarice.

So much for the personalities. But what was their collective achievement for our heritage? I am struck by a number of conclusions and perspectives of significance. They emerge from the weight of the evidence, or from general agreement of the historians, from interpretive studies or even, at times from the historians' collective perplexity.

First, and evident throughout this period is the power of ideas, ideas, undoubtedly working in tandem with social forces, but ideas which nonetheless assumed a motive force of their own. One insight of John Adams was unquestionably right. The key to the revolution lay, he thought, in the rapid transformation of the American mind and in the colonist's collective development of their political ideas. "The war?" Adams wrote Jefferson in 1815, "That was no part of the revolution; it was only an effect and a consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected, from 1760 to 1775, in the course of fifteen years before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington. " 20/ Indeed, what else but such a profound change of outlook could explain this breach between "two people who spoke the same language, hated arbitrary government with equal fervor, and proclaimed the ideal of liberty under law?"- 21/

Second, in spite of this dramatic transformation, the pattern of events was not always clear to the participants. This, at least should be a comfort to those who wrestle today with complex problems while only able dimly to perceive larger trends at work.

Colonial publicists developed their theoretical conclusions haltingly, at times unwilling to follow the arguments for rebellion and self government to their logical conclusion. 22/ Indeed, the goal of many, until at least 1775 was to reform the British empire, not 23/ withdraw from it.

Even in 1775, the American radicals sensed the conservation of the public and withheld a demand for independence they knew would be rejected by the people. 24 That cunning master propagandist Samuel Adams constantly warned his fellow radicals "wait 'till the fruit is ripe before we gather it." 25/ That fighting broke out at all seems in retrospect far from inevitable. Many factors came together: the continued intransigence of George III and Parliament, the timely publication in 1776 of Tom Paine's brilliant and incendiary pamphlet, *Common Sense*, and the hiring of foreign troops - the Hessian mercenaries. We know especially in the twentieth century how this last act cements national unity and creates the conditions for guerilla warfare in colonial nations.

If the outbreak of fighting was far from inevitable, so was the form of government under which the colonies conducted the war. Some of the "reluctant revolutionaries" of Tory cast viewed the potential of mob rule with undisguised disgust, and considerable fear. Edward Biddle of Philadelphia professed himself "sickened" at the thought of "thirteen unconnected petty democracies: if we are to be independent," he proclaimed, "let us, in the name of God, at once have an empire, and place Washington at the head of it." 26/

Just as the outbreak of the war, and the association of the colonies were occasioned by a large dose of happy accident, the favorable conclusion of the war also seemed far from certain. General Washington and his militiamen deserve full credit. But they had a lot of help from their friends. The American revolution was, as R.R. Palmer reminds us, an event within an Atlantic civilization as a whole. 21 The British government faced then, as now, a divided England and an unreliable Ireland. Lafayette, Kosciusho, Pulaski, De Kalb and Von Steuben brought their superb European military and technical experience to the colonists. France furnished the muskets which won at Saratoga, and supplied Rochambeau's army and De Grasse's fleet which, together with Washington forced Lord Cornwallis to surrender at Yorktown. Third, and paradoxically,

there is interesting evidence for the conclusion that much of the American revolution was over before it began. Based upon his study of colonial Massachusetts,-
 28/ Professor Robert E. Brown argued that the American revolution as a democratic movement fought to preserve what was already possessed. Indeed colonial society had no titled aristocracy, and no established church. The colonial legislatures were well developed as representative institutions, enjoyed a considerable measure of self-won
 29/ autonomy— and indeed, provided the nucleus of leadership and communication from which the revolutionary movement obtained its cement. Extreme poverty was almost unknown in the colonies, and there existed greater equality of wealth than anywhere in the western world. 30/ Wilderness environment and religious evangelism militated against elaborate social distinctions,31/ and law was enforced by local courts marked by provincial autonomy 32 /

Recent studies on the activities of political mobs in the American revolution reach similar conclusions by a different route: 33/ American mobs were no more polite than their European counterparts; they argue. Rather, they were simply more successful because they lacked resistance from serious internal opposition, and were unrestrained by authoritarian or institutional bulwarks. Thus they completed the democratic transformation of society without the bloodshed or terror of the French revolution.

I am inclined to disagree with the proposition that the American revolution was a "conservative" revolution simply because America was already democratic. For one thing, the revolutionary period saw greater political participation by ordinary people, and a change 34/ toward greater democracy in the power structure of state legislatures.-A variety of popularly oriented social changes took place in the law during the conflict, though not to the extent that it constituted a radical break 35/ with the past.-

The revolutionary changes that did take place, however, were not in social conditions, but in the world of ideas; in conceptions of law, freedom, constitutionalism, and government. These changing legal and theoretical conceptions, to which I cannot do full justice are really the fourth aspect of profound significance in the American revolution and of lasting importance to our society. I tread no new ground tonight on these points. I point only to Bernard Crick's profound admonition: "Boredom with established truths is a great enemy of free men."

The change, to repeat, is how the colonial revolutionaries thought about government. And they thought carefully. In contrast to the great evolutions of the twentieth century, the American revolution succeeded in accomplishing what it set out to do - to give men more liberty than they had previously possessed. Read again the Declaration of Independence. It is not only an indictment of tyranny and an enumeration of the English liberties which Americans claimed as a birthright: it also lays down a program of action to guide future generations. Its signators would judge a rebellion by its fruits, and judge it good only if it liberates rather than enslaves.

In this sense the colonists, unlike most strident revolutionaries of our decade worried deeply, as Robert Dahl put it, about what would happen "after the barricades." They even wrote treatises about it - treatises marked by that astonishing combination of sophisticated knowledge, political theory, historical perspective, law, and practical common sense to which I have already referred. In 1776 John Adams wrote in his *Thoughts on Government* (Philadelphia: 1776) how unique in history was America's chance, literally, to construct its government. His later work, *Defense of the Constitutions...* is encyclopedic in its historical sweep. Jefferson's Declaration of Independence speaks for itself. His lesser-known and later *Notes on Virginia* was a comprehensive examination of the social bases he thought necessary to maintain a democratic society•

The enormously sophisticated *Federalist Papers*, written hurriedly as newspaper tracts by Hamilton, Madison and Jay helped to secure ratification of the Constitution. Whether the *Federalist* deserves Jefferson's compliment to Madison that it was "the best commentary on the principles of government which was ever written," it is surely evidence of the seriousness and intellectual depth which pervaded the founders' behavior. The first point about the revolution, then, is that to its participants it was a conscious and carefully chosen point of departure to a new form of government. The second point, and the point at which Palmer identifies the true genius of the revolution and the founding fathers is in the discovery - truly revolutionary for that time - of a written constitution as a legitimating principle of government. They acknowledged popular sovereignty, in the sense that a convention of the people should assemble to set up the institutions

-18- of government rather than act as governors themselves. The people should then vote to ratify the convention's action. This was a profound innovation in the justification for governmental authority. It formed a new, truly revolutionary basis for political order. It was, as R.R. Palmer brilliantly develops the idea, a notion of "the people as constituent power." 36/ The distinctive work of the revolutionary era, then, was not in its ideals of liberty and equality, but in furnishing a practical model of how to put these ideas into effect in a limited government. While a decade would pass before the Constitution of the United States was conceived, 10 states had begun the process of constitution making by 1777.

The final point follows from the last. It deals with liberty. The revolutionary thinkers were by all evidence almost paranoid in the subject of tyranny. The spectre of the "conspiracy" against liberty by Crown and a corrupt Parliament, runs rampant through the texts of colonial pamphlets. 37/ The consequence was a constitution limiting government and so fragmenting the exercise of power by political institutions as to make many Europeans wonder how the government could work at all.

That, then, is how I evaluate their achievement. The question which has long obsessed me... the question to which this monologue has tortuously led is: where are our "founding fathers" when we need them now? A colleague of mine argues that they, in fact, are here, but that our political system neither rewards nor advances them. Then, too, one might argue that the very explosion in knowledge, the increased specialization of our work, and the growing gulf in our ability to communicate across professional boundaries limits the ability of any individual to play the role of Jefferson or Franklin - to know all there is to know. Indeed, does anyone today know all there is to know about computers, world finance, nuclear weaponry, the sociology of racial conflict? The questions answer themselves.

Consider what mankind has done in the century since our first centennial. We all know about the accelerating pace of social and technological changes to which we have been privy: but we seldom stop to realize how large they are in order of magnitude...or how rapid and enormous they are compared to all previous changes in history. In the last century we have increased our speed of communication by ten million times; our speeds of data handling and the power of our weapons by one million times; our energy

resources by ten-thousand times; and the speeds of our travel and our ability to control diseases by something like one thousand times. 38/

More and more of our world is man-affected or man-made. The natural environment has been displaced by man's own ecosystem. Transportation, communication and technological interdependence magnify and speed the pace by which the impacts of change are transmitted throughout the whole social fabric. Perhaps changes and innovations will increase at a rate which exceeds the capacity of humans, mentally and emotionally, to adjust and control them. In the foreign policy arena alone, our time for reaction, our margin for error, and the consequences of human miscalculation are so different than the considerations facing actors in our revolutionary era as to defy imagination.

I have no time, in these concluding moments to discuss the futurists and the prophets of doom. Robert Heilbroner's chilling *Inquiry into the Human Prospect* is one endeavor, the current decennial issue of the periodical *The Public Interest* is another. Both lead to conclusions I resist. The authors in *The Public Interest* argue that democracy, as a form of government is no longer popular or viable, at least as an ideology. Heilbroner argues on the basis of a staggering array of evidence, that surrender of a considerable degree of personal freedom may be the only alternative to global annihilation from hunger, weapons, environmental degradation, or energy starvation.

As we face these challenges I think there are some messages in the legacy of the revolution: first, the colonists were not afraid of political social change; second, they were obsessed with resisting the sources of tyranny, even the psychological sources they saw within themselves; third, they advanced the notion that governmental institutions were neither divine, nor royal, nor the result of chance, but could be designed deliberately - and changed - in order to protect individual liberty and advance common interests; and fourth, the study of government and history was a serious enterprise, but not one limited to the elite or the wealthy or the "specialists." Political dialogue about the purposes of government and the meaning of liberty was widespread, was communicated in a commonly understood vocabulary, and was subject to a process of evolution that caused people to take political action.

I doubt that truths are "self-evident" to us in the same way they were to the colonists. But I think it is too early to throw in the towel on the central value of human freedom. Let us hope that the legacy of the revolutionary era will continue. I hope we will participate in the decisions of our nation with the strength of their vision about what free people, collectively, can do.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 W. Stull Holt, "Who Reads the Best Histories?" *XL Miss. Valley Hist. Rev.* p. 619 (1954). Similar concerns were echoed in J.B. Plumb, *The Death of the Past* (London: 1969).
- 2 See generally, B. Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Ch. 2 (1967).
- 3 Quoted in *Id.* at 22.
- 4 *The Last Best*. See generally, Govan, Decker & Hope p. 230, "Historiographical and Biographical Note.
- 5 Gordon S. Wood, "Rhetoric and Reality in the American Revolution," 23 *William and Mary Quarterly*, p. 3 (1967)
- 6 A.M. Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776*, (New York: 1958). at 44; A.M. Schlesinger, *New Viewpoints in American History* (New York: 1923) p. 179 quoted in Wood, *supra* at 10.
- 7 *op. cit. supra*, n. 5 at 234. See also *The Economic Origins of the Constitution*,
- 8 Govan, Decker & Forrest McDonald, *We the People*: (Chicago: 1958).
- 9 John C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution*, p. xiv (Stanford: revised 1959).
- 10 *Op. cit. supra*, n. 5 at 15.
- 11 J.W. Fortescue, III, *Correspondence of King George III*, 248, 282 (1927-28).
- 12 James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington: The Forge of Experience*, p. 255 (Boston: 1965).
- 13 John Morton Blum, *The Promise of American Life*, p. 2 (Baltimore: 1965).
- 14 Palmer, *op. cit.* at 249.
- 15 Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, pp. 23-25 (New York: 1958)
- 16 L. Levy, *Jefferson and Civil Liberties: The Darker Side*, (1963)
- 17 J.C. Miller, *op. cit. supra* at 42.
- 18 *Id.*
- 19 Richard R. Beeman, *Patrick Henry: A Biography*, p. 192 (New York: 1974).
- 20 Adams to Jefferson, 1815 quoted in Bailyn, *op. cit. supra.* at 1.
- 21 Miller, *supra* note 8 at xiii.
- 22 See generally, Bailyn, *op. cit.* Ch. 5.
- 23 Miller, *op. cit. supra*, note 8 at 167.
- 24 *Id.* at 460.
- 25 Quoted in *Id.* at 445.
- 26 Quoted in *Id.* at 499.
- 27 R.R. Palmer, *I The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, pp. 209-210 (Princeton: 1959).
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- 29 Miller, *supra* at 35.
- 30 *Id.* at 53.
- 31 Bailyn, *op. cit.* at 383.
- 32 *Id.* at 203-04.
- 33 See, e. g., Gordon S. Wood, "A Note on Mobs in the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 635-642 (1975).
- 34 Jackson Turner Main, "Government by the People: The American Revolution and the Democratization of the Legislatures," *William and Mary Quarterly* 391 (19).
- 35 Compare J.F. Jameson, *The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement* (Princeton: 1926) with F.B. Tolles, "The American Revolution Considered as a Social Movement: A Re-Evaluation," *LX American Historical Review* 1-12 (Oct. 1954)
- 36 Palmer, *op. cit. supra* ch. VIII, pP. 213.
- 37 Bailyn *op. cit. supra* ch. 4 "A Note on Conspiracy." pp. 144-159.
- 38 John Platt, "What We Must Do," vol. 166 *Science*, p. 1115 (Nov. 28, 1969)