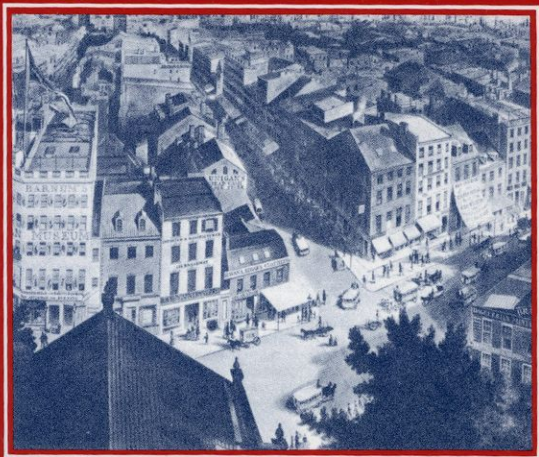

THE
MARKET
REVOLUTION



*Jacksonian America,
1815-1846*

CHARLES SELLERS

The Market Revolution

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JACKSONIAN AMERICA

1815-1846

Charles Sellers

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In memory of

Giles Sellers

1892-1960

two-mule farmer
christian
democrat
southern gentle man

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The Market Revolution

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Land and Market

1815 OPENED with the fate of the American republic—and worldwide republicanism—hanging in the balance. A pall of chill, ashes, and gloom lay over muddy little Washington. Burned out of the Capitol, congressmen found standing room in a patent office spared by British invaders' reverence for technology. Amid blackened rubble, they dreaded news from every direction.

Four days' travel to the north, the elders of New England were thought to be plotting secession behind closed doors at Hartford. A month away to the south, Sir Edward Pakenham's seasoned British army, fresh from victory over Napoleon Bonaparte, advanced through the swamps of the lower Mississippi toward New Orleans. Few thought it could be stopped by the raw western militia hastily assembling under Indian fighter Andrew Jackson.

Only forty years before, the American Revolution had loosed republicanism on the modern world. Within a generation the French Revolution and Bonaparte's legions broadcast the contagion across Europe. Through twenty years of unparalleled bloodshed, British-led coalitions of European autocracy made war on revolutionary Bonapartism. When the United States rashly joined the fray against the preoccupied British, it brought upon itself a train of left-handed humiliations even as the British right hand crushed Napoleon. And now Britain's mighty fleets and armies redeployed to choke off the republican infection at its New World source.

Americans' only hope lay in stalled peace negotiations at faraway Ghent in the European Low Countries. By last report, two months in transit, British negotiators were still dragging their heels, presumably awaiting a Pakenham victory to dismember the upstart republic.

After weeks of suspense, on February 5 glorious news arrived from below New Orleans. The invaders had been routed on January 8 by murderous fire from Jackson's hasty entrenchment behind the little Rodriguez Canal. With a loss of only thirteen men, the western citizen-soldiers cut down seven hundred Britons, including General Pakenham. Celebration climaxed eight days later, when the capital

learned that a treaty of peace had already been signed at Ghent on Christmas Eve, over two weeks before Jackson's stunning triumph.

Despite overwhelming military superiority, the war-weary, tax-ridden British agreed to leave the United States intact. With victory miraculously snatched from defeat, the republic was safe. As lumbering mail coaches spread rejoicing across the wide land, speeches, toasts, and schoolboy compositions celebrated the brilliant destiny of the most extensive republic the world had known.

Yet postwar boom ignited a generation of conflict over the republic's destiny. History's most revolutionary force, the capitalist market, was wresting the American future from history's most conservative force, the land. As market revolution stressed Americans into unparalleled mobilization, both spiritual and political, the Hero of New Orleans found another commanding role.

In the beginning was the land, immemorial provider of survival for the many and honor, riches, power, and independence for the few. When a New World to exploit galvanized an Old World swarming with too many people for too few acres, European mercantile capital reached across the seas for world dominion. A global division of labor drew Asian spices, enslaved African labor, and the New World's inexhaustible acreage into an intricate network of production for exchange, funneling back into Europe the capital that launched the industrial revolution. Wherever merchant capital reached, the market's irresistible commodities drew people into producing the commodities it demanded. As the division of labor rationalized and multiplied production, money value allocated natural resources and human energy. As traditional cultures gave way to a spreading market culture, new beliefs, behaviors, emotions, and interpersonal relations spurred work and consumption.

Where England's venturous capital met the New World's abundant acreage along the coast of temperate North America, a new kind of society developed. Reversal here of the Old World's person/land ratio opened a refuge for swarms of the needy and servile uprooted by the market from the European land. New World land—fertile, abundantly watered and wooded, and easily wrested at first from its aboriginal populace—elevated them to landowning security and respect.

Cheap land, virtually free at first, not only elevated the mass but imposed a limit on wealth by making labor expensive. With farm ownership readily attainable, Euro/Americans would not labor for others except briefly and at high wages. A few years of high wages financed enough cheap land to yield a comfort and independence inconceivable to poor Europeans. With wages too high for most farmers to pay, production was limited—no matter how much land they had—by the family labor available. While raising European immigrants to an exhilarating rural well-being, the person/land ratio inhibited further accumulation. The resulting society of roughly equal landowning families was the seedbed of American republicanism.

Yet from the beginning land and market pulled Euro/Americans toward

diverging forms of New World opportunity. Along the seaboard, Virginia colonists quickly discovered a European market for tobacco, and New Englanders for fish. As colonials learned to venture in shipbuilding and transatlantic commerce, the possibilities of wealth began to transform coastal society. Settlers clustered around the best ports—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston—and in the lower valleys of navigable rivers—the Connecticut, the Hudson, the Delaware, the maze of Chesapeake estuaries, the Savannah. Here cheap water transportation gave access to the world market for furs, timber, wheat and flour, livestock and salted meat, indigo, and rice. In the southern tidewater, planters broke through the high-wage barrier to wealth by exploiting the bound labor of indentured Europeans and enslaved Africans. Here and in the ports, wherever sea brought market, growing wealth concentrated in fewer hands, and status became steeply graded. Freed from Old World aristocracy, wealth conferred gentility, and law evolved a new conception of freely negotiable fee-simple property.

But New World land closed the interior to the market it galvanized at tide-water. Moving goods was infinitely more difficult across the thinly inhabited reaches of America than in densely populated Europe. Beyond water transportation, bulky farm products had to be wagoned over scarcely maintained and often impassable roads and trails. Hauling them more than thirty or forty miles cost more than they were worth. Consequently people who settled at any distance from navigable water mainly produced use values for subsistence rather than the market's commodity values for sale.

Profound cultural differences arose from these contrasting modes of production. The market fostered individualism and competitive pursuit of wealth by open-ended production of commodity values that could be accumulated as money. But rural production of use values stopped once bodies were sheltered and clothed and bellies provided for. Surplus produce had no abstract or money value, and wealth could not be accumulated. Therefore the subsistence culture fostered family obligation, communal cooperation, and reproduction over generations of a modest comfort.

During the eighteenth century a demographic explosion swelled this subsistence-farming sector into a major historical force. Low mortality and the fecundity of colonial mothers, combining with a new surge of immigrants displaced from the market's European core, sent population flooding into the interior. By the end of the century, a majority of free Americans lived in a distinctive subsistence culture remote from river navigation and the market world.

By 1815, however, a market revolution was surmounting the overland transportation barrier. While dissolving deeply rooted patterns of behavior and belief for competitive effort, it mobilized collective resources through government to fuel growth in countless ways, not least by providing the essential legal, financial, and transport infrastructures. Establishing capitalist hegemony over economy, politics, and culture, the market revolution created ourselves and most of the world we know.

The stressed and resistant Jacksonian majority has eluded or baffled our historiography of consensual, democratic capitalism. Despite contradictions of patriarchy, racism, and fee-simple property, they rallied around enduring human values of family, trust, cooperation, love, and equality. Understanding of both the world they lost and the world we have gained begins with understanding differences between the cultures of land and market.*

The New World's ancient immigrants, people of the land *par excellence*, throw into sharpest relief the cultural gulf separating land from market. Bark lodges in the eastern woodlands, tipis on the plains, pueblos in the arid southwest, and igloos on the Arctic ice typified Native Americans' ingenious adaptations to varied ecological niches. Through ancient human techniques of hunting, gathering, fishing, and planting, these mainly Indian peoples extracted their subsistence directly from the land. Their only domesticated animal was the dog until the European horse reached the plains, but they had brought their maize/vegetable polyculture to a high level of sophistication. Like other premarket ecological adaptations, the Indian mode of production furnished adequate subsistence without onerous labor.

From this mode of production a culture flowed. Intimately dependent on the natural order, Indians felt imbedded in its seamless animistic web. Religious taboos against overexploitation maintained the ecological balance on which survival depended. Native Americans lived in communal, cooperative, and egalitarian bands of related families. Indulgent rearing prepared children to emphasize sharing over individual accumulation. With roles allocated by sex, age, and kinship, people competed only to win honor through warrior valor or hunter/craft skill. Frequent moves minimized personal possessions, and goods were shared as needed. Self-interested calculation and bargaining were legitimate only in limited trading with other Indian groups. While hunting territories or planting fields might be period-

* For the profundity of capitalist transformation: Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, 1944); and Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought* (Cambridge, England, 1986). As explained by Ian Tyrrell, *The Absent Marx: Class Analysis and Liberal History in Twentieth-Century America* (Westport, 1986), horror at Karl Marx's politics has blinded bourgeois historians to the most powerful conceptual tools for understanding Americans' central transformation.

But Marx's European analysis requires considerable adaptation to the special circumstances flowing from cheap American land—widespread property ownership, a farming populace oriented more to subsistence than profit, and a bourgeoisie massively reinforced by small enterprisers. Here the industrial capitalism of commodified wage labor was not possible until merchant capital pushed a market revolution across the countryside to transform economy, culture, and politics by commodifying the family labor of subsistence producers. "Market," in this capitalist sense, excludes local exchange for subsistence while including production for a competitive world market with commodified slave labor. Only on the battlefields of the Civil War did the progressive bourgeoisie of free-labor exploitation finally prevail over resistant farmers, workers, and the anachronistic planter bourgeoisie of slave-labor exploitation.

For scholarly debate over subsistence farming, see the bibliographical essay under "The Land: Subsistence Farming."

ically allocated to particular kinships, allocations were based on need, and the idea of private property hardly existed.

Traditional norms served so well to regulate Indian behavior that political institutions were rudimentary. Within each band a well-understood system of retributive justice substituted for laws, courts, and police. But conflict between tribes was only partly moderated by trade and conventions limiting the lethality of warfare. Weaker neighbors were terrorized by warlike Iroquois or marauding Navajo, and some tribes practiced torture and ritual execution of captives. The limited leadership necessitated by intertribal conflict fell to patriarchs, and sometimes matriarchs, in senior lineages. Leaders mainly negotiated consensus; and if they controlled an outsized share of communal produce, it relieved the needy, entertained visitors, and constituted the communal reserve against crop failure. Status and power were asserted, as in most premarket cultures, more by giving than accumulating; and rich fisheries along the northwest coast organized potlatch cultures around cutthroat competitive gift-giving.¹

By 1815 Indians and their cultures were nearing extinction in the eastern United States. Wherever whites settled, Indians disappeared. Creeks and Cherokees still held western Georgia, and some five thousand of the once mighty Iroquois were herded onto reservations in upstate New York; but fewer than three thousand Indians survived in all New England, and they had almost vanished from the rest of the Atlantic seaboard.²

Native Americans were destroyed by lack of immunity to both the microbes and the market brought by whites. In the Carolina upcountry, after one smallpox epidemic wiped out five-sixths of the native populace, another left the woods so "offensive with the dead bodies of the Indians" that dogs, wolves, and vultures were "busy for months in banqueting on them."³ Staggered everywhere by the white invaders' lethal pathogens, Indians came under cultural attack by the market's irresistible trade goods and insatiable demand for furs. Lacking textiles and iron, they wanted the greater comfort and labor savings of warm woolen blankets, guns, and such instantly indispensable metal utensils as fishhooks, needles, knives, hatchets, traps, and cookware.

As Indians stepped up their harvest of animal pelts to exchange, taboos broke down, and overkilling disrupted the Indian ecology. As they accumulated pelts for their commodity value, the ethic of sharing came under strain. As they bought articles formerly made, traditional crafts died out. Competition for scarcer furs provoked intertribal wars, rendered more bloody by the market's firearms. If these forces of cultural demoralization were not enough, the market was happy to supply all the firewater Indians could pay for.⁴

Native American cultures were already decimated and demoralized, therefore, when they encountered the decisive phase of the genocidal process, the inexorable advance of white settlement over Indian lands. By 1815, after two hundred years of this, the crisis of Indian survival was at hand.

Whites occasionally regretted the strange “disappearance” of the Native American, assuaging conscience by claims that they were Christianizing or “civilizing” him. Civilizing was more talked about as white society became more secular, while even religious folk who actually attempted to Christianize the Indian agreed that he had to be civilized first. Civilizing meant teaching him the market’s blessings of private property, self-denial, and hard work in settled agriculture and handicrafts. And in the process of becoming civilized, he could surrender most of his hunting lands to civilized use by whites. The federal government from its inception purported to advance the Indian’s civilization by demanding ever larger land cessions and taking them by military force when not yielded fast enough. As the tide of white occupation flooded over the Appalachian crest, federal troops had much hard fighting to clear Native Americans from the upper Ohio valley. While Indians’ lands were steadily converted to civilized use, few Indians were converted to civilization. After two centuries of white profession and effort, the handful of converts drawn into the white man’s schools, religion, or style of living were only too ready to revert to Indian ways at the first opportunity.

More striking was the ease with which whites converted to Indian ways. Colonial officials had constant problems with deserters to the Indians. Hundreds of white captives in the colonial wars were taken into Indian families and refused to return to their white families. Even when captives were persuaded to come back, as Benjamin Franklin reported, “in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them.” Franklin blamed “the proneness of human Nature to a life of ease, of freedom from care and labour.” The modern historian of these white Indians concludes, however, that they preferred Indian life for its “strong sense of community, abundant love, and uncommon integrity.”⁵⁵

Confrontation between white and Native American cultures presented in the starkest terms a contrast, and for some a choice, between the cultures of land and market. That Indians and whites who faced a choice so often chose Indian ways suggests something about the human costs of “civilization.” It also suggests why so many whites clung to a more attenuated culture of the land.

Demoralized culturally by the market, Native Americans were displaced physically by Euro/American farm folk practicing a similar premarket mode of use-value production. White subsistence farmers adopted the Indian maize/vegetable horticulture to extract from the same resource base most of their caloric food values. But European livestock and short-fallow cultivation enabled whites to reproduce the permanent settlement of their peasant tradition. Where eastern woodland Indians cultivated with hoes and long fallows, periodically exhausting fields and moving their villages to fresh lands, Euro/Americans adapted to the Indian horticulture their more intensive cultivation by plough, while cultivating the same

fields indefinitely on short rotation. The livestock that made ploughing possible supplied whites with the protein requirements that Indians procured through peripatetic hunting and fishing. Paradoxically European technology made white farmers more independent of the market. Fabricating tools from iron, spinning and weaving cloth, and distilling whiskey, they produced for themselves important use values that Indians had to buy.⁶

The white mode of subsistence production needed much less land to achieve permanent settlement and greater comfort. But it demanded more labor, which families supplied by having many children. Consequently the subsistence culture could not reproduce itself over generations without a constant abundance of cheap land to provide farms for its ever more numerous offspring. Irony compounded tragedy as a doomed white culture sustained itself a few generations longer—and cleared the American land for market domination—by sweeping away a more archaic Indian culture.

The subsistence culture enforced its heavier labor demands through a paternal authority inherited from European household production. The father controlled the labor of family members for most of their waking hours and made all major family decisions. He might not even consult his wife about uprooting the family and moving hundreds of miles. Patriarchy was further inflated by the rigors of immigration, farm making, and Indian fighting in a New World where civil institutions were too weak to provide security. Even in long settled rural areas, the law of the strong prevailed, and families relied on the brawn and courage of avenging fathers and brothers. Aggressive masculinity asserted the patriarchal “honor” on which the safety and prospects of women and children depended.

Cheap land, held absolutely under the seaboard market’s capitalist conception of property, swelled patriarchal honor to heroic dimensions in rural America. The father’s authority rested on his legal title to the family land. Where European peasant landholdings were usually encumbered with obligations to some elite, the American farmer held in fee simple. Supreme on his domain, he was beyond interference by any earthly power. Except for a modest tax and an occasional half day of neighborhood road work or carousing militia drill, he owed no obligations of labor, money, service, or (finally) religious fealty to any person or entity. Fee-simple land, the augmenting theater of the patriarchal persona, sustained his honor and untrammelled will. This extraordinary independence inflated American farmers’ conception of their class far above peasantry. The hero of South Carolina’s first play, *Independence* (by William Loor, 1805), almost caricatured the prototype of the subsistence culture. “I am an independent farmer, don’t owe five guineas in the world,” he asserted. Owning a farm that yielded “every necessary comfort for me and mine,” he disdained lawyers and planters, and was always “boasting of, his INDEPENDENCE, and declaring, that an honest farmer knows of no dependence, except on heaven.”⁷

Cherishing patriarchal independence, the American farmer clung even more

fiercely than his peasant forebears to the land that conferred it. Paradoxically the capitalist doctrine of private property was the juridical foundation for both the market's expansion and the farmer's resistance. The historical outcome turned on this contradiction, as commitment to property undermined and compromised rural resistance to capitalism and its culture.

The contradiction between capitalist property and use-value communalism was apparent in the cultural norms that controlled the actual use of land. New England towns (as Yankees called both rural and urban communities) donated communal lands to families in proportions determined by communal criteria of status and need. Throughout the South and West farm folk maintained (in some areas until the twentieth century) the principle of open range that many of their forebears had known in Ulster, Scotland, and Wales. Exclusive property rights attached only to land that was used, and the landowner was obliged to fence his cultivated fields to keep other people's livestock out. Even fee-simple ownership did not permit him to fence uncultivated land or bar others and their livestock from using it. In practice much of early rural America was a great forested commons, in which everybody freely hunted, fished, trapped, grazed livestock, and harvested firewood and lumber, roots and herbs, honey, nuts, and berries.⁸

Farm people's overriding priority was to maintain and reproduce the family's subsistence way of life. Like other premarket peoples, they practiced a hard-won folk wisdom about how to utilize their labor-power and technology to extract sufficient use values from their resource base. Experience taught American farmers that the optimum division of labor and scale of production could be achieved—with considerable variation for time and place—on as little as twenty improved acres, employing a labor force of father, mother, and six to eight surviving children out of eight or ten pregnancies. And like other premarket cultures, the American subsistence culture drew upon folk experience in controlling pregnancy to maintain this balance, through delayed marriage, extended lactation, and little-understood forms of premarital contraception, especially *coitus interruptus*, that accompanied the New England practice of "bundling" and its equivalents elsewhere.

The farm family moved through a life-cycle in which it first had the nuclear appearance of a conjugal pair with an increasingly crowded houseful of children. Marriage was delayed until enough land could be had to support a family, which usually meant the middle to late twenties for men and the early to middle twenties for women. Meanwhile young people enjoyed, amid a bawdy folk vernacular, considerable sexual freedom.

Upon marriage a couple put romance behind them for the rigors of farm-making and endless childbearing. In this joint enterprise they commonly developed a durable if undemonstrative loyalty and affection. Yet "the old woman" and her "Mr. So-and-so," as she usually addressed him, valued each other primarily for

productive reliability in their respective spheres. The folk realism of an Ohio valley jingle warned newlyweds against romantic illusions:

*First month, honey month,
Next month like pie;
Third month, you dirty bitch,
Get out and work like I.*⁹

The family division of labor was along lines of sex and age. Women paid a heavy price in labor and motherhood for patriarchal afflatus. While constantly pregnant or nursing infants for fifteen or twenty years, wives were responsible for the domestic interior, cooking, extensive food preservation, gardens, poultry, dairy animals, and the endless textile processes of carding, spinning, weaving, fulling, dyeing, quilting, sewing, and mending. Husbands attended to field crops, livestock, buildings, firewood, and hunting and fishing, which afforded both recreation and additional animal proteins for the family diet. Daughters worked with mothers and boys with fathers at age-graded tasks. Probably it is going too far to say that childhood did not exist in the subsistence culture, that youngsters were in fact treated as the little adults portrayed by the self-trained folk limners who produced the earliest American family portraits. But certainly children were expected to labor as much as strength, skill, and attention span admitted. Shaming and physical punishment broke rebellious wills while enforcing prescribed behavior and labor.

The psychodynamics seem to have produced what was wanted: dutiful and reliable replicas of parents. Commonly the oldest child of each sex was named for its same-sex parent (and often, therefore, for its grandparent and great-grandparent as well); and if it died, the same name was often rebestowed on the next child of the same sex. Discouraging individuality and competitive striving, the subsistence culture socialized its young to a familism of all-for-one and one-for-all.

Demands on farmer and wife eased as maturing children's labor brought more acreage into production. In this middle phase of its life-cycle, the family needed a surplus to supply support for aging parents and farms for maturing sons. To this end it typically required children's labor well into adulthood. Holding title to the family property, the father could deny children a share of the patrimony until he permitted them to marry or withdraw their labor. Grown sons and daughters, chafing under long delays of marriage, often paid for the privilege of leaving home.

Patriarchal authority was not, of course, absolute. Premarital pregnancy often coerced parental approval of marriage; and even in straitlaced New England at times, more than one bride in three was pregnant on her wedding day. By way of compensation the subsistence culture presented young people with few identity crises, problems of career choice or entry, fears of failure, or uncertainties about

their futures. To replicate the parents was to succeed. Sons who satisfied fathers ascended in due course to paternal authority themselves.

Although white subsistence folk worked harder and under stricter supervision than Indians, their premarket way of life was considerably less arduous than most market occupations.¹⁰ So long as land was assured for the rising generation, accumulation was pointless and productive effort could be relaxed as soon as conventional standards of consumption were achieved. Work exercised varied skills and alternated with considerable leisure as dictated by season and weather. Often it was interwoven with family and neighborhood sociability.

The farm family entered the third phase of its life-cycle when it transferred property from one generation to the next. Now it became apparent that subsistence folk reproduced their way of life across generations by transmitting land through a "stem" type of extended family structure. The nuclear household was only a recurrent form in a lineal kinship system emphasizing generational continuity and cohesion. Fathers strove to accumulate enough land near the "old homeplace" to provide farms for sons, leaving daughters to look for land from families of prospective husbands. Consequently brides usually moved into the social sphere and often the neighborhood of the husband's family. Only the most successful fathers could provide land for daughters and thus bring sons-in-law within the family orbit.

The paternal homeplace was usually willed to the eldest son, or sometimes the youngest if he stayed home longer to care for aging parents. The favored heir often married and established his own household under the paternal roof before gaining title at his father's death. He also inherited his father's patriarchal responsibility for the widow and for the extended stem family's aged great-grandparents, orphaned children, and unattached women. Fathers' wills and laws governing intestate estates required adequate support for the widow and usually guaranteed her life use of part of the farm. During this phase the household often held three or four generations, one or both original parents, heir and spouse, and heir's children, along with several dependent relatives. Ubiquitous single aunts were casualties of hazardous sexuality, family exploitation, or male migration, mortality, or desertion.

This way of passing on property produced rural neighborhoods dominated by clanlike networks of related households and the patriarchs who led them. Even today certain surnames cluster in the least disturbed rural neighborhoodsthroughout the United States and in the surviving graveyards of rural churches. The once common family graveyards, lovingly maintained over many generations on patriarchal homeplaces, have almost vanished. In a world where other institutions were rudimentary, kinship was people's only source of protection and assistance.¹¹

Subsistence families were not wholly self-sufficient. Much of their comfort and security derived from a neighborhood division of labor. Some farmers, as a sideline,

furnished specialized skills to the community. During the winter months, when farm work was slack, the farmer/shoemaker carried his tools from house to house, supplying each family's yearly needs for footwear. Every Sunday the farmer/preacher left his fields to dispense the Christian gospel. Other part-time farmers operated such essential community facilities as the grist mill, blacksmith's shop, tannery, and sawmill. All rendered their services, not to an impersonal market, but to meet immediate needs of lifelong neighbors, who usually furnished the raw materials and made return in farm produce or labor.

Moreover neighboring farm families balanced their varying productive capabilities, shortages, and surpluses by constantly exchanging labor and commodities. "Trade, barter, and exchange of commodities and swapping work in corn-planting and harvest time for work back in corn-husking and hay-making time was the only commerce known," recalled one man about his boyhood farming community. Through sociable communal labor, neighbors lightened each others' most onerous tasks—raising houses and barns, cutting logs and splitting rails, harvesting wheat, and shucking the corn crop. On such occasions, an Ohioan reported, "it was the custom always to send one from a family to help, so that you could claim like assistance in return."¹²

Expecting rough reciprocity in exchange, subsistence folk were rather less altruistic than Indians. The social realm of altruism—where altruistic exchange predominates over self-interested bargaining—encompassed the whole band or village among Indians but shrank to the small nuclear household in the market world. In the intermediate subsistence culture, altruism predominated throughout the extensive stem family, while exchanges among families were neither wholly self-interested nor wholly altruistic. On the other hand, "honest, faithful memory, discarding day book and ledger, held all accounts and recorded balances of money and labor due," as an Illinois man put it. But on the other hand, "merciful, charitable memory forgot all debts of debtors too poor to pay."¹³

Actually some farmers, especially the widely literate New Englanders, did keep day books recording in money values elaborate networks of mutual indebtedness with neighbors. But accounts were balanced by further exchanges rather than money payment, and deficits were thought due only when one could pay. Interest was rarely calculated because money was not a medium of exchange and accumulation. In the subsistence world, money was a specialized commodity, needed only for limited exchanges with the outside market world, for paying taxes or buying the few store goods that farm produce could not command.¹⁴

Rural neighbors depended upon each other for companionship almost as much as for economic assistance. When the men in a community were summoned to a house raising, according to a typical account,

there was commonly some sort of mutual job laid out for women, such as quilting, sewing, or spinning up a lot of thread for some poor neighbor. This would bring

together a mixed party, and it was usually arranged that after supper there should be a dance, or, at least, plays, which would occupy a good part of the night, and wind up with the young fellows seeing the girls home in the short hours; or, if they went home early, sitting with them by the fire in that kind of interesting chat known as sparking.¹⁵

Youthful sociability provided escape from parental discipline and work demands, along with early introduction to the delights and perils of libido. But most adult sociability was sexually segregated. When men gathered, they competed in displaying the elements of male honor—strength, courage, storytelling boast and wit, and such manly skills as riding and shooting—accompanied by considerable cursing, whiskey-drinking, and fighting. Women, on the other hand, formed tight networks of neighbor and kin wives for friendship and mutual support. These networks gave women their only escape from the male-dominated world of the household and their only opportunity to value themselves by other than male standards. And through these networks women managed for each other the recurrent female trauma of childbirth. Neighborly sociability was an essential safety valve for the pressures generated in crowded cabins by the subsistence family's stern patriarchalism. No one expected the family to swathe its members in warmth and emotional intensity. The household was a practical institution of human production and reproduction, and people often found their most rewarding ties with kin and neighbors outside its confining walls.

These interdependent farm families were also roughly equal in condition. Differences were mainly ascribable to age and stage in the family life-cycle. When sons of the subsistence world looked back nostalgically from market success, they mainly professed to miss its egalitarian and cooperative quality. "Needs of mutual help bound old settlers in fraternal bonds of closest, tenderest ties," recalled one. "The dependence upon each other caused differences of education and station to disappear, and almost absolute social equality prevailed," wrote another; "hence every person felt that he or she was the social equal of every other person, each being ready and willing at all times to assist others to the extent of his or her power, the latch-string always hanging out." By the late nineteenth century, novelist William Dean Howells's father could "hardly realize how greatly things have changed." What had become almost inconceivable in a world of cutthroat competition was the subsistence world's "general dependence of all upon the neighborly kindness and good offices of others."¹⁶

While bartering crops and labor with neighbors, most farm families also secured a little money for taxes and high-utility purchases by selling some products to the market. The market's ambassador to the subsistence world was the country storekeeper. Except in the earliest period of settlement most farm folk lived within a day's ride of a store, around which there often developed a little village or county-

seat town. Country stores dispensed a limited range of high-utility commodities and accepted in return farm products sufficiently valuable in proportion to bulk and weight to bear the cost of transportation to a distant market. Periodically the storekeeper wagoned collected produce to the nearest river port or seaport, where the proceeds replenished his stock of store goods.

From the perspective of economic historians, farm folk who bartered a few hams or a tub of cheese for a frying pan or piece of calico sometimes seem incorporated into the market. But from the perspective of the household devoting its labor overwhelmingly to subsistence, the market remained marginal. Directly measuring the cost of store goods in the additional labor required to obtain them, rural America found that transport made most prohibitively expensive.

Moreover production for market was inconsistent with rural culture's fundamental commitment to maintaining and reproducing the stem family. Unpredictably fluctuating market prices put at risk the family's hold on its land. A year or two of low prices or poor yields, or both, might leave them without enough to eat, forcing them to risk the farm by borrowing. The two great bugaboos of the subsistence world were debt and taxes, through which the market world could seize the farmer's land to enforce its demands for money.

Consequently the farm household labored first and foremost to insure its subsistence and its reproduction in the next generation. Only after these requirements were met was additional labor expended to produce a small "marketable surplus" of such high-value farm products as whiskey, maple sugar, potash, and salted beef and pork, or of livestock, which could be driven to market on the hoof. Modest sales provided enough money or store credits to pay taxes and procure such essential items as salt, powder and shot, cooking and eating utensils, and iron for tools. With a little additional labor the family could periodically enjoy tea, coffee, or refined sugar and gradually acquire a few such luxuries as crockery and window glass.

The market was less threatening and more easily entered when it offered high prices for the grains and livestock raised for subsistence. Prudent farmers planted more grain than needed as insurance against a poor yield, and the prudent surplus became a marketable surplus when grain prices rose sharply enough in the late eighteenth century to offset the high cost of wagoning from the interior. Now, without altering their pattern of production or endangering their subsistence or risking the family farm, rural households could acquire more store goods by expending more labor on their marketable surplus.

For some sixty-five years preceding 1820, Europe was unable to feed itself and relied increasingly upon American wheat, flour, beef, and pork. As wheat prices rose in response, more farmers at ever greater distances from the market discovered that they could profitably enlarge their marketable surplus despite the high cost of transportation. Between 1772 and 1819, the profitable wagoning distance for

wheat doubled to over one hundred miles. A wheat exporting belt spread from the lower Connecticut to the lower James and inland to Virginia's lower Shenandoah valley.¹⁷

The wheat boom introduced many farm folk to the market or increased consumption of store goods. In highly accessible and fertile areas like Pennsylvania's Susquehanna valley, the marketable surplus may have reached a third of farm production, and some farmers were reorienting themselves to the market by hiring labor and buying more land and equipment. But even here cultural transition made slow headway against traditional commitments to family, use values, and communal obligation. The marketable surplus was not enough to push most of the Pennsylvania Dutch and their neighbors across the cultural divide into pursuit of wealth. As long as family labor was concentrated on necessities, store goods remained a secondary objective with painfully apparent labor costs.

Similarly, when a cotton boom pushed market production into the southern interior at the turn of the century, few farmers took the planter road to wealth. Producing a bale or two of cotton for taxes and store goods, most free southern families devoted most of their labor to raising corn and hogs for subsistence. This dual economy persisted throughout the antebellum period because accumulating capital to buy slaves and additional land was too difficult and borrowing too risky for farmers committed to the stem family and patriarchal independence.¹⁸

Migration was an essential feature of a culture combining farm ownership with large families. Every subsistence family confronted a dilemma after subdividing its land among a generation or two of multiplying sons and grandsons to the point where the remaining paternal farm could support only one heir. At the same time settlement thickened from natural increase and immigration, and land became too expensive to buy with the limited surplus of traditional production. Typically the son who got the shrunken farm was encumbered with years of compensating payments to landless siblings in worse plight. Only by working some years as tenant farmers or migrating to cheap frontier land could they get farms of their own; only in later years might they hope to accumulate enough acreage to support them in old age and give their children a start.

Many a far-sighted father preferred an alternative strategy that also fed the western migration, but without fragmenting the stem family and undermining patriarchal authority. Selling the family farm well in advance of the children's maturity, he used the proceeds to acquire a much larger tract of cheaper land farther west, on which the maturing children's labor could provide support for aging parents and farms for adult sons. Often many households of kin migrated as a clan, or related households followed a lead household in chain migration.

This folk migration spread the ethnocultural diversity of the Old World across the New. English genes and English ways predominated among seaboard whites,

but only in New England were farmers homogeneously English. While rural Anglo/Yankees overflowed their nucleated peasant villages to crowd Dutch peasants in New York's Hudson valley, coastal English and Welsh filtered inland farther south and west, among communities of Germans and Scotch-Irish.

By the time Jackson's artillery rattled the fancy ironwork of New Orleans' French/Spanish/African Vieux Carre, folk migration had unrolled from the Hudson to the Mississippi a mosaic of ethnic styles and artifacts. The salt-box houses with attached ells that Yankees originally brought from East Anglia mingled in upstate New York with Dutch gable-ends. The Pennsylvania "Dutch" (*Deutsch* or German) introduced the notched-log construction that housed most of rural America; and even in the grain-exporting Susquehanna valley at the end of the eighteenth century, most people lived in small, one-story log cabins with few windows. As Germans graduated to stone houses and big, fancifully decorated, overhung "Switzer" barns, the Scotch-Irish adapted log construction to the Ulster rectangular form and spread it through the South and West. Here it met other cultural forms—the square English log house brought to the uplands by immigrants from the old coastal settlements and the double-pen "dogtrot" cabin with connecting breezeway that spread through the Southwest from Appalachia.¹⁹

The American subsistence culture's explosive expansion attested its vitality. While abundantly meeting human needs for security, sociability, and trust, however, it inflicted costs—in patriarchy, conformity, and circumscribed horizons—that left rural ways vulnerable to the market ways pushed inland by the wheat and cotton booms. In coping with this challenge, moreover, the rural world was hobbled by a simultaneous demographic crisis.

Adapted to a munificent person/land ratio, the subsistence culture was ultimately doomed by its own population dynamics. It could reproduce itself only so long as its exponentially multiplying offspring could find cheap land through periodic migration. As the cheap-land frontier receded west, however, the cost of migration and farm-making became prohibitive for the eastern landless. Consequently, by the mid-eighteenth century the oldest rural communities near the northeastern ports were feeling the first tremors of a rolling agrarian crisis. As the market assailed traditional ways, shrinking farms were spawning more people than they could feed.

Peaking agrarian crisis along the northeastern seaboard in the 1790s was exacerbated by a commercial boom pushing capitalist relations into the countryside. Here the first federal census revealed spiraling population densities. Compared with nine and sixteen persons per square mile in the interior states of Vermont and New Hampshire, Delaware County adjoining Philadelphia had fifty-three, Connecticut's Fairfield County fifty-seven, and Rhode Island as a whole sixty-six. Studies of older rural communities from Massachusetts to Delaware Bay reveal a pat-

tern of demographic stress. Land prices had soared as farms contracted. Although residents were leaving in droves, enough remained to swell an increasingly insecure class of landless tenant farmers, laborers, and craftsmen.²⁰

Demographic pressure was heaviest in southeastern New England, where farms had undergone subdivision longest. Moreover the proliferating Yankees were long walled off from the cheap western acreage that elsewhere enabled the subsistence culture to reproduce itself. West of the Connecticut valley, land-seekers encountered a belt of rugged terrain over which colonial New York claimed sovereignty. The next good land, the great north-south corridor of the Hudson valley, was already occupied by New Yorkers; and beyond the Hudson, Iroquois power astride the Mohawk corridor barred the way west until after the Revolution. With most of New England's arable acreage occupied, land-hungry Yankees swarmed over the steep Berkshire hills, pushed the New York boundary almost to the Hudson by riot and defiant occupation, seized Vermont through revolution, and embarked on the disastrous experiment of trying to wrest a living from the rocky coasts and frosty heights of northern New England.²¹

This desperate expansion onto marginal lands was not enough to relieve demographic stress in the old settlements. Here farms shrank to a third or less of their former size, averaging below fifty acres in coastal Chebaco and seventy-five in Lincoln farther inland. Population density exceeded forty persons per square mile in most of the old farming towns, reaching one hundred in some, and land values had doubled or trebled. A rich "loaner class" appeared, wealth became more polarized, sons fell below the status of their fathers, and the poor were poorer and more numerous. The agrarian crisis disrupted customary human relationships to produce a rising age of marriage, a declining birthrate, an increasing incidence of premarital pregnancy (reaching 41 percent of first births in some towns), and an erosion of patriarchal authority. Fathers with no patrimony to bestow had to let sons and daughters fend for themselves, and the general practice of naming first-born sons after fathers rapidly disappeared.

Uprooted from the extended stem family, the landless poor swarmed across the New England countryside in search of livelihood. A fourth of Concord's taxpayers departed every decade, and more than half of Andover's fourth-generation natives migrated. By the 1790s Yankee emigrants were flooding northern New York and leapfrogging the Hudson valley settlements to advance along the Mohawk corridor. Simultaneously the wages of a galvanized seaboard market drew a growing stream to the ports. But many of the landless poor simply drifted from town to town, never finding a stable maintenance.

Even landowners who stayed put often found their diminished farms encumbered with obligations to landless siblings and yielding a mean living. Attempting to meet the stem family's traditional responsibilities to kin, small farmers joined the landless in a scramble for supplementary income. As they intensified the tra-

ditional neighborhood division of labor by taking up part-time crafts and providing some specialized service or product, they found markets outside the neighborhood. Wives and daughters stepped up their household spinning and weaving to produce surplus yarn and cloth for sale. Wider markets for farmer/shoemakers encouraged concentrations of full-time shoemakers in Lynn and Bedford. Hadley farmers peddled far and wide the brooms they fashioned from their special broom corn. Putting-out systems reached into the countryside to engage part-time rural labor in producing shoes, cloth, straw hats, fans, wooden clocks, and all manner of utensils, which Yankee peddlers vended throughout rural America.²²

Scrambling to sustain the traditional family, the dislocated rural populace of southeastern New England was experiencing the transition to capitalist production that would presently overtake most Americans. Under these pressures, Yankees won their reputation for sharp bargaining. Nothing tended so totally "to eradicate every moral feeling," wailed the Reverend Timothy Dwight, as the peddling resorted to by so many displaced young men. Their character "is exchanged for cunning," and they aspire "solely to the acquisition of petty gains," he complained. They "fasten upon this object; and forget every other" as "the only source of their pleasure, or their reputation." An Amherst schoolgirl noticed that people were becoming "generally avaricious" and "tight in their dealings." Traditional patterns of communal cooperation weakened, and agricultural reformers derided old-fashioned farmers "who cannot bear to work alone," who were always having to "call in a neighbour to change work." While it might be "very pleasant" to "have our neighbours at work with us," said advocates of the new capitalist order, "it tends to lounging and idleness, and neglect of business."²³

Capitalist transformation invaded the southern and western interior when postwar boom galvanized the market culture into market revolution. Fittingly the first news of peace reached the New World shore in the heart of the American market. On the frigid evening of February 11, 1815, "tumultuous joy" swept from the East River docks through the hundred thousand souls inhabiting New York City. Within twenty minutes streets blazed with the torches of densely packed revelers, and candles glittered from every window. "Men of property," as their favorite newspaper exulted, had special cause to "felicitate themselves." The war had retarded "our growth" ten years, said the *Evening Post*, "and no place in the U. States will more experience the revived blessings of a peace."

"Our growth" was already a shibboleth to New Yorkers; and its resumption was such an exhilarating prospect that they suspended all business for a day of celebration. That evening horses and carriages were banned below Chambers Street so the populace could turn out to enjoy the general "illumination" of houses with candles, a spectacular fireworks display from Governor's Island, and elaborate "transparencies" adorning all public buildings and scores of gentlemen's mansions.

Painted on cloth and backlighted, these transparencies displayed—aside from the inevitable eagles, doves, and olive branches—a heavily economic iconography. Cornucopias abounded (one at the Mechanic’s Bank discharging silver dollars and five-dollar gold eagles “in anticipation of the speedy recommencement of Specie payments”), and the streets swam with representations of loaded ships entering and leaving port. Tammany Hall’s offering included a rising sun “as an emblem of the growing prosperity of our country,” while the Union Bank featured “a female figure sitting on a Strong Box the Key in its hand, pointing to a Ship in full sail.”

Only poetry could express for one citizen what peace meant to New Yorkers.

*Commerce and Plenty, attendants in her train,
Again shall flourish through our vast domain.*

“With Peace and Commerce,” proclaimed another display, “America Prospers.” The Bank of New York put all its candlepower behind a single glowing talisman, “PROSPERITY,” while the politicians at City Hall squandered candles in their care to salute every sector of the anticipated resurgence: “Commerce unfettered, Industry encouraged, and the [mechanic] Arts revived.” Celebrants could wind up the evening at the theater, passing under a transparency entitled “The Renewal of Commerce” to witness “the Patriotic Spectacle of the FESTIVAL OF PEACE, or, COMMERCE RESTORED.”²⁴

Impatient New Yorkers were about to lead the American market into its historic takeoff. Through the eighteenth century, the country’s simple staple-exporting economy had grown only at the sluggish pace of about 0.4 percent a year, as measured in per capita goods and services. But following the War of 1812 the growth rate more than doubled to about 1 percent, then doubled again to 2 percent by midcentury, and eventually passed 3 percent. These deceptively modest figures registered such spectacular growth that by the middle of the twentieth century the American 6 percent of humanity would be producing and consuming a third of the world’s goods and services.

Economic takeoff spread from the major ports as merchant capital and government-fostered transport pushed an accelerating division of labor across the interior. Hinterlands specialized to comparative advantage in producing agricultural and extractive commodities for Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. In exchange, urban manufacturers multiplied production for the countryside by subdividing tasks and exploiting labor more totally through wages and closely supervised central workshops. As surging trade set off surging productivity, capital began shifting from commerce to more profitable wage exploitation.

By the 1830s and 1840s, trade and specialization among the four port/hinterland regions were creating an integrated sectional market embracing the Northeast as a whole. Meanwhile commercial agriculture spread over the West and

South; and during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Northeast market reached out to incorporate these sections into an integrated national market. By midcentury, capital and technology were converting enough central workshops into mechanized factories to convert the market revolution into a staggeringly productive industrial revolution.²⁵

The American economy's takeoff was fueled by the unusually feverish enterprise of its market sector. Colonial Americans pursued wealth more freely than Europeans because they were not overshadowed and hemmed in by aristocrats and postfeudal institutions. And they pursued wealth more avidly because it made them the American equivalents of aristocrats.

American merchants, planters, and large landowners, along with the lawyers and clergymen who served them, were accorded the exalted status of "gentlemen." Only gentlemen were addressed as "Mr." Cocked hats, periwigs, ruffled shirts, and lavish waistcoats asserted the superiority of this provincial gentry over men who wore leather aprons and worked with their hands. Gentlefolk lived in elegant townhouses or country mansions furnished like those of the British gentry and adorned with family portraits. Through indulgent affection and careful education, they shaped self-reliant children for venturesome enterprise, prudent hedonism, and dynastic marriage. They were waited upon by slaves and servants and vied with each other in ornateness of coaches and extravagance of entertainments. Above all they demanded deference from inferiors.

Especially daring and ingenious in pursuit of profit were the import-export merchants who dominated enterprise in the colonial ports. American exchanges of raw materials for British manufactures, southern European wines, African slaves, and West Indian sugar and molasses had to be conducted within the complex regulations of the British mercantile system. Moreover the British market had little use for the agricultural exports of the middle and northern colonies, so that credits to finance imports from the mother country had to be earned by trading somewhere else. With market information by sailing ship months out of date, success required keen intuition about trading opportunities in many far-flung parts of the globe. The gentility conferred by large profits could be snatched away by large risks.

To minimize risk, merchants diversified investments and shared the hazards of particular ventures. Six or eight might finance a single sailing, and all were constantly seeking alternative investments. The merchant was a general capitalist entrepreneur, not only sending out trading ventures but lending to local borrowers, financing retailers, speculating in urban real estate and interior lands, underwriting marine insurance, and engaging in privateering and military contracting during the recurrent colonial wars.

Urban wealth steadily concentrated in the hands of the successful. Because merchants required considerable capital to get started, the advantage went to those

with inheritances or family connections. And because credit was the lifeblood of commerce in this capital-hungry economy, success depended upon trust among merchants within communities and between remote trading points. Consequently merchants relied upon networks of acquaintance based on family and class ties, dispatching as agents to distant ports relatives or young men whose fidelity to class values was certified by graduation from Harvard, Yale, Columbia (originally King's College), or the College of New Jersey at Princeton.

Traditionally the mercantile career had required neither strenuous exertion nor large-scale organization. The typical merchant needed only a warehouse and a counting room where, with a clerk or two, he conducted his correspondence and five or six transactions a day. Much of his time he spent "on change," gathering with other merchants at a favorite tavern to mix business deals with conviviality. His life had ample space for entertaining, weekly dining clubs, and politics.

The Revolution upset this leisurely mode of doing business. Some of the biggest merchants lost out by taking the Loyalist side, and all lost their privileged access to British and West Indian markets. In the pell-mell search for new trade, established houses fell and more venturesome new men rose in their places. New Yorkers pioneered a flourishing trade with China, and a new generation of fiercely competitive Bostonians, many from the smaller outlying ports, discovered that Canton wanted sea otter furs from the northwest American coast and sandalwood from the Sandwich (Hawaiian) Islands. Nantucket and Salem ships braved Cape Horn for the whales of the Pacific and the spices of the East Indies.²⁶

A fabulous commercial boom set the stage for market revolution when these avid enterprisers were fortuitously presented with almost unlimited opportunities for profit. The great wars that broke out in Europe following the French Revolution raged with brief interruptions from 1793 until 1815, as a British-led coalition struggled for world supremacy against a coalition headed by Revolutionary/Napoleonic France. With their economies disrupted and their merchant ships liable to seizure on the high seas, both sides turned to American producers for foodstuffs and to American shipowners to carry their trade, particularly with their West Indian possessions. Under the rules observed by both sides at first, neutral American shipping could carry goods without molestation between colonies and their mother countries, but only if they were landed in an American port en route and then reexported. Commercial boom swelled American exports from \$20.2 million in 1790 to \$108.3 million in 1807. Domestically produced exports more than doubled from \$19.9 million to \$48.7 million. American shipowners' share of American trade climbed from 59 percent to 92 percent, and their earnings from \$5.9 million to \$42.1 million. These enormous increases financed an almost four-fold jump in imports for domestic consumption.

Glittering profits fueled market revolution with new entrepreneurial energies, as a host of rising venturers swamped the exclusive mercantile gentry. "Our catalogue of merchants was swelled much beyond what it was entitled to be from the

state of our population,” observed pioneer statistician Adam Seybert, and “the most adventurous became the most wealthy.” Two poor immigrants, Philadelphia’s Stephen Girard and New York’s John Jacob Astor, became the early republic’s biggest money-makers by exemplifying Seybert’s further observation that “the accumulated capital of our merchants enabled them to explore new sources of wealth,”²⁷ Girard in private banking and Far East trade, and Astor in organizing and monopolizing the fur trade of the Far West. Similarly Providence merchant Moses Brown launched the American textile industry, and Boston merchant Frederic Tudor began shipping New England ice southward as far as Havana, pioneering a trade that would transform the dietary habits of the modern world.

The torrent of profits swelled port populations and brought into being a host of specialized economic activities and institutions. Philadelphia, the largest city in 1790, increased its population 114 percent by 1810; but New York, with a growth of 191 percent during the two decades, passed it and neared the hundred-thousand mark. Although Boston, third in 1790, grew by 84 percent, it was passed by upstart Baltimore, whose 156 percent growth was fueled by a flood of Susquehanna and Chesapeake wheat, which the city manufactured into flour and exported. In all the port cities new banks and marine insurance companies sprouted, and more specialized marketing systems developed around brokers, auctioneers, wholesalers, and commission merchants.²⁸

But the commercial boom collapsed in 1807, when the British banned the lucrative reexport trade and humiliatingly, at cannonpoint, boarded and seized sailors from an American naval vessel in Chesapeake Bay. The spectre of war drove President Thomas Jefferson into his most radical demonstration of his ultimate commitments. Sacrificing market for land, he pushed through Congress an Embargo Act forbidding American ships from leaving American waters.

This Draconian secession from the world market could not be sustained politically in the face of the resulting commercial devastation. But neither could war with Britain be long avoided once the Embargo was repealed, and again American commerce languished under embargo, this time British blockade. Only with peace could the march of enterprise resume.

While enriching many, commercial boom had made life more precarious for the nine out of ten urban dwellers who worked with their hands. Already about half of these working-class people were without skills or property. Laborers, sailors, cartmen, domestics, and small shopkeepers eked out a bare subsistence, constantly threatened with disaster by unemployment or illness. Most vulnerable were blacks and women, who bore the special burdens of racial and sexual discrimination.²⁹

Insecurity was also overtaking the skilled half of the urban working class, the artisans or mechanics. These leather-apron workers were divided into dozens of different crafts, each manufacturing (“making by hand”) in home workshops a dif-

ferent product. Every neighborhood had bakers and butchers, shoemakers and tailors, to supply its daily essentials. Buildings constructed by carpenters and masons were furnished by cabinetmakers, glaziers, pewterers, and chandlers; while the merchant fleets that sustained the urban economy were built and maintained by shipwrights, caulkers, cordage makers, sailmakers, blockmakers, and riggers. A mechanic learned the “art” or skill of his particular craft as an unpaid apprentice to a master mechanic. Then he typically worked a few years for wages as a journeyman, until he acquired the tools and capital needed to set up his own shop as a master. Once established he might take on several apprentices and a journeyman or two.

The mechanic culture shared much of the precapitalist quality of the subsistence culture. Skills, tools, and shop gave master mechanics something of the security and independence that land gave farmers, as well as a similar patriarchal control over their families, including apprentices and journeymen. In the moral economy of their European artisan tradition, they were not competing for wealth but providing essential services to the community in return for the right to a decent competence. Often they banded together by craft to enforce production standards and adequate prices. Working to order for individual customers and seeking repute from quality products, mechanics, like farmers, claimed dignity from the use-values their labor created. Chairmakers, according to the banner they carried in New York parades, saw their labor as furnishing “Rest for the Weary,” while tailors marched under the legend “Naked Was I and Ye Clothed Me.” Pride in meeting human needs sustained the mechanics’ class conviction that honest labor was the only source of value.

Championing republicanism of a democratic cast in the Revolutionary crisis, mechanics had mustered class pride and influence against merchant elitism in the emerging party politics of the 1790s as Jeffersonian Republicans. In the major ports, united organizations of the various crafts mobilized “the mechanic interest” and proclaimed a mechanic ideology symbolized by an upraised arm wielding a hammer. To this emblem New York’s General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen attached the motto, “By Hammer and Hand All Arts Do Stand.”³⁰ But commercial boom inaugurated a historic shattering of mechanics’ unity by extending markets for their products beyond neighborhood and local customers. As widening markets intensified competition, cost-cutting masters with access to merchant capital in the major ports intensified the division of labor by subdividing work processes to exploit cheap, unskilled labor under close supervision in central workshops. Alternatively, to avoid the high cost of large workshops on expensive urban land, many of these mechanic/entrepreneurs paid unskilled workers low piece rates to complete at home single steps in the production process.

This “putting-out” system of preindustrial manufacturing flourished first in producing clothing and shoes, items of universal consumption that could be sold in large lots to southern slaveholders or to the “slop shops” that clothed the urban

poor. Every effort was made to simplify work processes so the cheapest labor could be used. Shoe uppers were put-out to be sewn together, precut cloth to be sewn into garments, or semifinished garments to be provided with cuffs, collars, or button-holes. Soon cheap furniture, gloves, stockings, and hats were being mass-produced in this fashion.

Most of this tedious work was done by women and children, often the families of widows with no other means of support. Barred by social convention from most jobs outside the home, they had to work for so little, compared with males, that only constant toil yielded a bare living. Increasingly such work was put-out to labor contractors, who initiated a long-lived pattern of urban sweatshop production by crowding workers into strictly supervised garret workshops.

Journeyman in these trades found themselves pushed back to the level of unskilled wage workers and unable to acquire the skills that formerly gave them bargaining power with masters and the promise of becoming masters themselves. The increasing capital required to set up in competition with established masters was harder to get. Disparities of wealth between journeymen and masters widened; the average age of journeymen approached the average age of masters; and journeymen, once fewer than masters, began to outnumber them, from three-to-one in some trades up to eleven-to-one in printing. "Very few," complained journeyman printers facing the high cost of printing presses, "ever have it in their power to realize a capital sufficient to commence business on their own account."

Although many crafts were at first less affected, especially in smaller centers, commercial boom had inaugurated an irreversible proletarianization of the mechanic class. In many of the largest urban crafts, mechanic/entrepreneurs were becoming capitalist bosses who could survive intensifying competition in widening markets only by cutting labor costs. As apprenticeship decayed into an excuse for cheap labor, journeymen became permanently dependent on wages. Sharpening competition between white workers and blacks, both free and slave, intensified pressures in Baltimore and other southern centers. Fears of total destitution in hard times were borne out in the wake of the Embargo. In 1809 over a thousand men were incarcerated for debt in New York City alone, half for owing less than ten dollars, a week's wages.³¹

Journeyman mechanics, with their tradition of skills and craft pride, fought back. They began excluding masters from journeymen's societies organized in the various crafts to defend labor against capital. Isolated strikes by journeymen are recorded as far back as 1768. The first journeymen's society clearly designed to protect wages—the first labor union in the modern sense—was organized by Philadelphia shoemakers at the beginning of the commercial boom in 1794, and a surge of journeymen organizations and strikes filled the boom years. Employers eventually resorted to the courts. Hard times and the conviction of striking shoemakers for conspiracy at Philadelphia in 1806 and New York in 1810 quelled worker militancy for a decade.³²

Masters, too, felt threatened by capitalist relations of production. When “wealthy capitalists” built an enormous bakehouse in New York to mass-produce bread with wage labor, three hundred mechanics met to declare solidarity with besieged neighborhood bakers. The Bread Company’s backers, charged “A Mechanic,” intended to “monopolize by degrees all profitable mechanical branches.” Their large capital would enable them to buy flour cheaper, or to forego profits temporarily, so as to undersell and drive out of business any “obstinate mechanics . . . unwilling to become servants.” They would then hire hundreds of mechanics at miserly wages, reserving for themselves the extra profits. “They will screw down the wages to the last thread,” this prophetic newspaper essayist asserted. “Next, the independent spirit, so distinguished at present in our mechanics, and so useful in republics, will be entirely annihilated. The workmen will be servants and slaves.” This crisis was resolved by destruction of the bakehouse in a fire of undetermined origin.³³

While deskilling and proletarianizing a majority of the urban working class, market growth opened unprecedented opportunities for a minority. Masters who commanded the capital to exploit more wage labor energized market revolution as nascent manufacturers. New York’s tax assessments identify many of these successful masters. The potter Clarkson Crolius increased his taxable worth from \$8,300 in 1808 to \$22,400 in 1815, while the holdings of the baker Thomas Mercin rose from \$2,600 to \$11,100. The 1815 assessments included a tailor worth \$15,900, a shoemaker worth \$18,300, and two builders worth \$49,500 and \$9,100.

Success on an even greater scale enabled some masters to push through the status boundary into gentility. Particularly inspiring to the upwardly mobile was Stephen Allen, who began as a penniless apprentice sailmaker, had his own sailmaking partnership by the time he was twenty-one, and ended worth \$32,000 and occupying the gentleman’s position of mayor. Painter and glazier Jacob Sherred accumulated assets valued at \$120,000. Tanner Jacob Lorrillard, beginning business with a \$3,000 loan from wealthy relatives in 1800, owned \$90,700 worth of property by 1815, including three houses, two leather stores, and forty acres of Manhattan real estate. Noah Brown, a “barefoot frontier boy” who began as an unknown journeyman shipwright, became a prominent shipbuilder. His activity in Republican politics eased his way upward, doubtless helping him obtain during the War of 1812 a \$200,000 navy contract on which he employed over two hundred men. The famous cabinetmaker Duncan Phyfe almost went broke after he served his apprenticeship and opened a small shop. Saved by the patronage of John Jacob Astor’s daughter, he developed a large shop and elegant salesroom and was eventually worth \$500,000. Phyfe’s elaborate display for the 1815 peace celebration won newspaper praise along with that of eminent gentlemen.

By example, precept, and shopfloor discipline, these successful mechanic/entrepreneurs preached a new ethic of ascetic effort against the easygoing pace and free-drinking camaraderie of traditional workways. Eschewing such working-class entertainments as cockfights and bull baitings, Duncan Phyfe followed strict Calvinist work habits, while sailmaker/mayor Allen ascribed his prosperity to working fourteen hours a day, avoiding debt as much as possible, and “employing the utmost economy in all my concerns.” Mechanics, said Allen, should labor with “industry and full attention to business.”³⁴

Through New York’s General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen, the mechanic elite established a school and a library for apprentices. “Who can tell how many Franklins may be among you?” society president Thomas Mercein asked apprentices at the library’s dedication. Baker Mercein’s \$11,100 worth lent credibility to his assertion that “your opportunities are great and liberal.” If, aided by the new library, they would shun “the alluring but fatal paths of vice and dissipation,” he promised, “industry, ardour, sobriety and perseverance in your different pursuits, will lead to successful competition in the world.”

Sharpening competition enforced the stricter discipline imposed by these exemplars of capitalist success. While most rank-and-file mechanics resisted, others embraced the ethic of “successful competition in the world” to avoid falling into the despised urban underclass of propertyless and demoralized laborers. Seeking ideological reinforcement through working-class churches and associations, some even embraced the dominant mythology, endlessly proclaimed by the successful, that opportunity was rife and that success or failure turned on effort and character alone.³⁵

Commercial boom touched off industrialization, as expansive capital engrossed the desperate rural labor set adrift by the northeastern agrarian crisis. Large-scale production started with textiles and shoes, articles of potentially enormous demand that promised high returns to capital and entrepreneurship. When shoemakers in Lynn and other towns discovered distant markets for cheap, mass-produced shoes, the more resourceful masters, usually backed by merchant capital, began putting-out various steps of the process to rural families in the surrounding countryside. Increasingly they assembled unskilled labor in central workshops to perform the steps under supervision. Long before shoemaking machinery was developed, manufacturers in many Yankee towns were mass-producing cheap shoes for a national market through the putting-out and central-shop systems.³⁶

Meanwhile cotton-spinning machinery had been developed by British inventor/entrepreneurs, and in 1791, at the onset of the commercial boom, the enterprising mechanic Samuel Slater carried his mastery of the latest technology to the United States. He found a backer in Moses Brown, a wealthy Quaker merchant of Providence. Together they built beside the Blackstone River falls at nearby Paw-

tucket the first little American factory using water-powered machinery to spin cotton fiber into thread. The thread was then put-out to rural households to be woven into cloth on hand looms.

Slater's mill was an instant success, and other capitalists joined the Brown/Slater interests in building little spinning mills on many streams in southeastern New England. Protected from English competition during the Embargo and the War of 1812, such mills spread widely, with a second concentration developing in the Delaware valley around Philadelphia. At water-power sites along Connecticut streams, little mills arose to fabricate from wood and metal all manner of products.

These early manufacturers succeeded by exploiting efficiently the most vulnerable workers forced into the labor market by agrarian crisis. To utilize the cheapest female and child labor, they hired large families, housing them in company-owned villages or compounds and feeding and clothing them from company stores. Hired by contract for terms up to a year, workers saw cash wages at the end of a term only if their earnings exceeded their charges at the company store. Constrained by debt peonage, repetitiously tending the relentless machinery twelve to fourteen hours a day, isolated from the surrounding rural culture, and frequently moving from mill to mill in search of better conditions, mill workers began to be regarded as a separate and inferior class.³⁷

Soon the American textile industry was reaching for technological parity with the British. During the War of 1812 the wealthy Boston Associates shifted much of their mercantile capital to textile manufacturing, and their leader, Francis Cabot Lowell, brought back from England the jealously guarded operating principles of the new power looms. Working closely with Lowell, a gifted Massachusetts mechanic Paul Moody designed and built the necessary series of machines, some of them improvements on the British models, and in 1814 the Boston Associates began operating at suburban Waltham the country's first fully integrated cotton factory, placing under one roof all the processes required to convert raw cotton into finished fabrics.

Cheap manufactured cloth led the market's penetration of the subsistence culture. By 1817, when Lowell died at forty-two, the Waltham mill was producing fabulous profits, and within eight years dividends exceeded the original investment. Farm families were discovering they could save labor by purchasing their textiles. With a little more labor to increase their marketable surplus, they could save the far more onerous labor of raising and processing fiber, spinning thread, and weaving and dyeing cloth. "This transition from mother-and-daughter power to water-and-steam power," the Reverend Horace Bushnell told an audience of Connecticut farmers, carried "with it a complete revolution of domestic life."³⁸

The capitalist revolution of life did not convert Americans overnight into the self-confident enterprisers of liberal mythology. Instead, as rural spinning wheels

fell silent, a historic surge of religious fervor crested to nerve their stressful passage from resistance through evasion to accommodation. Only religious intensity could reconstitute intrapsychic/interpersonal life to the imperatives of competitive effort.

Our secular mythology renders almost incomprehensible the religious mythology that organized experience for early rural America. The gnostic cosmology and stoic resignation of peasant forebears, who likewise lived at the mercy of nature and invoked its fertility with daily labor, sacralized the behavioral norms demanded by the subsistence mode of production.

A vast repertoire of orally transmitted tales, ballads, jingles, and aphorisms—much of it now irrecoverable—resonated folk conviction that the fruitful earth and all natural objects were alive and filled with spirits and magical possibilities. Following the ancient belief that heavenly bodies influenced earthly events, farm folk scheduled planting and other tasks by the zodiac, and the astrological almanac was more likely than the Bible to be the only book they had. They located their wells by divination and practiced an herbal/magical medicine derived partly from the Indians. The spirits and demons that populated their landscape and awed their children they accommodated as angels, devils, and witches to the Christianity they formally professed.³⁹

For centuries peasant animism had magicalized the patriarchal Christian God who reconciled Europeans to hazards of weather, terrors of plague, and exactions of fathers and rulers. The Protestant Reformation revitalized this magical patriarchalism to cope with the Old World market's initial surge. The awesome Jehovah proclaimed by Geneva's Protestant theologian John Calvin was brought to the New World by uprooted emigrants and preached from the Congregational meetinghouses of New England Puritans, the Presbyterian kirks of the Scotch-Irish, and the Reformed churches of Germans, Dutch, and French Huguenots. Calvinism's thrilling promise of divine encounter sacralized deep springs of animistic magic and mystery to arm rural Euro/Americans with invidious power against capricious fate. The more vividly they felt Jehovah's omnipotence, the safer they felt in a hazardous world. Paradoxically worship of an Absolute Patriarch stabilized this patriarchal society by restraining patriarchal abuse. Women found communal protection in a fellowship of intense piety that many men disdained. Where survival depended on the sexual division of labor, congregations enforced communal horror at marital infidelity and punished male drunkenness and violence. Shared fervor reinforced familial and neighborly altruism for isolated farmsteads dependent on cooperative work and mutual help.

But the farming interior's supernaturalism was threatened by the seaboard market's enterprising ethic. Holding these opposing impulses in tension, the Reformation had faced forward as well as backward. While revitalizing traditional piety against market corrosion, Calvinism also became the spiritual medium of capitalist transformation by sanctifying worldly work as religious duty and wealth

as fruit of grace. Under the New World's person/land ratio, pious venturers found worldly success by equating Christian virtue with the market ethos of self-disciplined effort. As God seemed kindlier, the environment more manageable, and their fate more dependent on their own abilities, they could no longer see themselves as sinners helplessly dependent on the arbitrary salvation of an all-powerful God. Even in Puritan New England by the early eighteenth century, Boston's most fashionable pulpits echoed Dutch theologian Arminius in relating salvation to human capability and effort. Through "arminian" heresy, commercial/planter elites of ports and the tidewater South moved toward the cosmopolitan quasi-deism and capitalist moralism of Boston-bred Benjamin Franklin.⁴⁰

Fed by the secular optimism of the European Enlightenment, arminianism foreshadowed a revolutionary mythology threatening Christianity itself. In the marketlike, self-regulating, mechanistic cosmos of Sir Isaac Newton and John Locke, rational empiricists could maximize hedonic income by manipulating inert matter. What made this promethean myth so congenial to entrepreneurial/intellectual hubris and so destructive to ages of human "superstition" was its radical new epistemological claim—that only its empirical science yielded truth.

Arminian heresy shocked the rural interior into the opposite, "antinomian" heresy that God visits ordinary people with the "New Light" of transfiguring grace and revelation. With the subsistence world's integrating mythology at stake, a Great Awakening blazed up in the 1730s and 1740s to forge evangelical Protestantism into the dominant form of American religious expression. Periodically for a hundred years, mounting market pressures reignited the wildfire of ecstatic revival—a New-Light Stir amid the Revolution's dislocations, a Great Revival amid commercial boom at the turn of the century, and a culminating Second Great Awakening amid market revolution in the Jacksonian era.⁴¹

Antinomian evangelicals insisted that the only basis for valid religious experience was the emotionally cataclysmic new birth of adult conversion. By preaching that the unconverted sinner is doomed to eternal damnation, they stoked anxiety for an ecstatic catharsis in which the New Light of divine grace flooded a "changed heart." Expressing rural culture's deep strain of pre-Christian animism in suitably Christian theological terms, antinomianism asserted the subsistence world's commitment to communal love against the market's competitive ethic.⁴²

Direct access to divine grace and revelation, subordinating clerical learning to everyperson's reborn heart, vindicated the lowly reborn soul against hierarchy and authority, magistrates and clergy. Contention and schism broke the mold of ecclesiastical uniformity, splitting traditional churches, spawning plain-folk sects, and swelling upstart Baptists and Methodists into the largest American denominations. Bathed in the New Light of a living God, antinomians activated deepening social fissures to portend American democracy.⁴³

Protestantism's antipodal heresies signified a far broader clash of cosmologies. Antinomian/arminian polarities in technical theology arrayed piety against mor-

alism, the magical spirituality of a parochial and fatalist countryside against the self-reliant effort of a cosmopolitan and activist market. While arminian moralism sanctioned competitive individualism and the market's rewards of wealth and status, antinomian new birth recharged rural America's communal egalitarianism in resistance. A heresy of capitalist accommodation confronted a heresy of precapitalist cultural revitalization in a *Kulturkampf* that would decide American destiny on the private battlegrounds of every human relationship.⁴⁴

Only after protracted spiritual mobilization did the antinomian farming majority resort haltingly to the distant abstractions, ambiguities, and power struggles of politics. Despite the rural equality and representative institutions fostered early by the American person/land ratio, colonial governments had become more oligarchic over time. An inherited European tradition of deference allowed politics to be largely monopolized by the emerging market elites who had most to gain.⁴⁵

The Awakening had an ultimately profound political effect by undermining deference. As the New Light validated heart over intellect, unlettered evangelical fervor over learned authority, humble plainness over pride and luxury, antinomian rebellion overflowed into politics to foster the subsistence culture's most enduring legacy, political democracy. By the late eighteenth century the evangelical revolt had divided Americans into rival religious communities, one concentrated along the market-oriented seaboard and the other dominating the subsistence-oriented interior, but self-consciously demarcated as they overlapped in many areas. Evangelicals were themselves unaware of their political thrust. "We concern not ourselves with the government," protested Virginia Baptists in disclaiming "any attempts to alter the constitution of the kingdom to which as men we belong."⁴⁶

The elite hysteria stirred up by this cultural rebellion is a better measure of its political as well as religious potential. An Anglican priest complained that evangelical missionaries were traversing the South Carolina upcountry "Poison[in]g the Mind of the People" with "Democrat[ic] and Common Weath Principles." It was no accident that North Carolina's Regulator movement, a massive farmers' uprising against elitist exploitation that ended in pitched battle in 1771, arose in an area recently swept by Baptist revivalism.⁴⁷

Democracy emerged during the American Revolution as a new thing under the sun. The word *democrat* did not appear in the English or French languages until 1789. "Democracy," denoting in classical political theory the popular element in mixed governments, was consistently disparaged by the liberal Revolutionary gentry. Dreading democracy, they wanted instead a "republic" providing security of property, equal rights before the law, and a carefully restricted system of representation through which enterprising elites could shape the state to the market ambitions of capital.⁴⁸

But genteel leaders found themselves dependent on farmers, workers, and shopkeepers inspired by the egalitarian implications of Revolutionary ideology. As

the market undermined traditional communities, farming and working people were appropriating the “Mr./Mrs./Miss” (Master/Mistress) formerly reserved for the gentry. The democratic impulse was driven by feelings of insecurity and powerlessness as the market disrupted ordinary lives. Contrary to liberal mythology, democracy was born in tension with capitalism, and not as its natural and legitimizing political expression.

When independence forced reconstruction of the polity, therefore, the combined influence of subsistence farming areas and urban workers made the new state constitutions far more open to popular impulse than the gentry desired. In state after state, the evangelical countryside pressed for the most democratic features—manhood suffrage, secret ballot, annual elections, unicameral legislatures. In Pennsylvania, where colonial elites were most completely discredited by their opposition to independence and where farmers were joined by the radicalized laboring and artisan classes of Philadelphia, the popular coalition won a complete victory. Even where more limited concessions were wrung from Revolutionary elites, the new state governments were considerably more democratic than the colonial regimes. Given the social roots of these democratic reforms, it should not be surprising that their backers often demanded religious qualifications for officeholding.⁴⁹

In the more open regimes, popular influence soon threatened elite interests with paper-money and debtor-relief laws. Alarmed by “this great upbearing of our masses,” a coalition of commercial and planting elites brought off the constitutional coup of 1787. Essentially they shifted the locus of power from the unreliable states to a strong central government, buttressed it with special guarantees of capitalist property relations, and carefully insulated it as much from popular influence as they thought politically feasible. Then the brilliant leader of their commercial wing, Alexander Hamilton, charted for the new federal government a series of boldly conceived policies, capped by a national Bank, through which their dreams of empire and profit might be realized.

Commercial boom made government promotion of economic growth the central dynamic of American politics. Entrepreneurial elites needed the state to guarantee property; to enforce contracts; to provide juridical, financial, and transport infrastructures; to mobilize society’s resources as investment capital; and to load the legal dice for enterprise in countless ways. Especially they strove for a powerful, gentry-led national state, through whose developmental policies they dreamed of rivaling British wealth and might.

The rural majority, by contrast, idealized the republic already at hand. Democracy promised farmers protection from intrusive government. Dreading taxes and meeting most of their social needs through their own institutions of family and church, they jealously resisted any enlargement of public functions or expense as threatening patriarchal independence. To preserve the independence and equality of a self-sufficient, self-governing citizenry, they wanted government weak, cheap,

and close to home. By threatening this yeoman republic, market elites stirred up a powerful democratic counterforce seeking a tighter control over government by ordinary voters.

Thus the clashing perspectives of land and market focused early American politics on three tightly linked questions:

1. How democratic—how responsive to popular majorities—would government be?
2. Would government power be extensive and concentrated at the federal level or limited and diffused among the states?
3. To what extent and in what ways would government promote economic growth?

When commercial boom and Alexander Hamilton unveiled the developmental capitalist state, antinomian rebellion overflowed from Great Revival into political animus against his intrusive, aristocratic Federalism. The politicalization of the democratic majority began when Hamiltonian developmentalism was challenged by a disaffected wing of the elite, the tobacco-planting gentry of the Chesapeake region. Thomas Jefferson's Republican party, by presenting itself as vehicle for the rising democratic impulse, politicized enough farmers to oust the Federalists in "the revolution of 1800."

Republicans won overwhelming ascendancy by abandoning Hamilton's expensive developmentalism while symbolically affirming the civic worth of farmers and workers. But Republicanism was compromised by contradictions between opportunity and equality, while rural egalitarianism itself was compromised by farmers' commitment to private property and the patriarchy it sustained. The potential dangers of unlimited property rights under market conditions were obscured by Americans' premarket experience with private property under a person/land ratio sustaining family security and equality. On these contradictions would turn the postwar generation's climactic struggle over American destiny.

Ambiguous Republicanism

THE NEWS of peace—reaching Washington on the evening of February 13, 1815, by “an express on its way to Alexandria for a speculation in flour”—sounded the knell of the whole system of politics pitting Federalists against Republicans. Federalism had heard its doom the evening before, when delegates bearing the Hartford Convention’s demands to a beleaguered Congress were overtaken by the rumor at Baltimore. With convention and party condemned overnight to treasonable opprobrium, the delegates abandoned their mission, and Federalism abandoned the contest for national power. As Federalist politicians retreated, however, their policies were taken up by their triumphant opponents. The peace news found Republicans creating a new national Bank (herein capitalized to distinguish it from state-chartered banks), five times bigger than the Federalist original.

Republicanism had been ambiguous from the beginning. Gutted soils and glutted world tobacco markets had wrenched Virginia’s planter patriciate into a remarkable role as midwife to democracy. Simultaneously beset during the Revolutionary crisis by British creditors and evangelical democracy, this proud, cultivated, pleasure-loving, child-indulging, slave-driving gentry had maintained its hegemony by Whig militancy and granting religious freedom. With chronic depression stifling enterprise and muting competition, both Chesapeake planters and their farmer neighbors cherished patriarchal independence and high commodity prices, and both abhorred debt, creditors, and taxes. In this unchallenging environment, a Yankee tutor found a “familiarity and frankness” quite unlike the “coldness and unfeelingness,” the “avarice and ceremony,” of “our Northern manners.” The difference, thought young William Ellery Channing, was that Virginians “*love money less than we do.*” Therefore Virginia gentlemen were less threatened politically than the commercial gentry by lower-class discontent. With slavery muzzling their black labor force and racism solidifying their leadership of white farmers, the tobacco gentry followed the bold young liberals Thomas Jeffer-

son and James Madison, first into Revolution, then into religious freedom, and finally toward fraternization with democracy.²

Traumatized by debt, Virginians were especially susceptible to the Revolutionary ideology portraying Britain as corrupted by commercialization. They saw the challenge of both Revolution and republican politics as preserving from British corruption the virtue sustaining American republicanism. Commercialization was seen as threatening virtue by engendering luxury and self-indulgence among the rich while making the poor too vicious and too dependent on others to exercise republican citizenship.³

Accordingly the hard-pressed tobacco gentry took alarm when Hamilton threatened to promote commerce at the expense of agriculture. In the light of Revolutionary ideology, they saw in his national developmentalism the funded debt, national Bank, and chartered privileges that commercialized and corrupted Britain. Reaching out for allies against the mercantile gentry, they followed Jefferson in relying on farmers who had always followed planter leadership. Experience left Virginia gentlemen few qualms about shaping their appeal to the rising demand for a democratic dramaturgy. Only gradually did they realize what a powerful (and dangerous) energy they were tapping.

Capitalizing on the swelling egalitarian mood, the emerging Republican party presented itself as champion of democracy against the Hamiltonians' aristocratic Federalism. Jefferson's "great power over the mass of the people," as Chief Justice John Marshall unhappily observed, was "chiefly acquired by professions of democracy."⁴ The Republicans were bound to triumph as soon as they managed to politicize enough of the potentially overwhelming democratic majority.

To Hamilton's political economy of promoting commercial and industrial development the Republicans countered a political economy of preserving republicanism by preserving the virtuous independence of American farmers and mechanics. The remarkable Jefferson was almost unique, even among the Virginia gentry, in his willingness to trust the political judgment of ordinary people. His radical conviction that "the earth belongs to the living" asserted every generation's right to reshape inherited institutions and property arrangements to its needs. Witnessing in Europe the squalor and demoralization that accompanied the highly developed capitalist market, Jefferson became convinced that the virtue of ordinary citizens would best preserve the republic from the market's corruption. For in America the mass of ordinary citizens were farmers, and his Virginia experience led him to regard "those who labour in the earth" as uniquely virtuous. These "chosen people of God," he said, looked "to their own soil and industry . . . for their subsistence," thus avoiding the "subservience and venality" of those depending on the market's "casualties and caprice of customers."

Jefferson understood, moreover, that political equality requires economic equality. He built his political economy on the hope that America's cheap and abundant lands would preserve a just and humane society within the existing sys-

tem of capitalist property relations. His experience of small-farming Virginia suggested a more literal reading than John Locke intended of his famous justification of private property. "The earth is given as a common stock for man to labour and live on," as Jefferson put it. All persons had a natural right to enough land to produce their subsistence, as well as a right to the property produced by mixing their labor with the land. Living this theory sanctified private property for most free Americans.

Pragmatically Jefferson recognized that the country was not ready "yet" to let the landless appropriate enough uncultivated land to meet their needs. But "it is not too soon," he insisted, "to provide by every possible means that as few as possible shall be without a little portion of land." Accordingly he persuaded the Virginia legislature to abolish primogeniture and entail, the common-law provisions for handing down large estates intact over generations. As "another means of silently lessening the inequality of property," he suggested taxing large properties at progressively higher rates while exempting small properties. But the men of large property who filled legislatures were not ready for this suggestion, and he got nowhere with his more radical proposal that Virginia give fifty acres to every landless adult.⁵

Jefferson's election to the presidency in 1800 thus seemed to mean that the federal government would not be used to promote the "Englandization" of America. Instead the Louisiana Purchase—"an empire for liberty," he called it—promised indefinite perpetuation of the yeoman republic. Beyond this what the emerging majority wanted from the federal government was exactly what it got—low taxes, rigid economy, retirement of the Hamiltonian public debt, an ostentatious simplicity of official style, and no grandiose projects.

Jefferson and Madison spent most of their four presidential administrations trying to force their remaining objective of free trade on the warring European powers. Their willingness to resort to so Draconian a measure as the Embargo, full in the face of the entrepreneurial pressures generated by the commercial boom, attested the depth of their commitment to a minimally commercialized yeoman republic. This commitment was reflected, too, in the primitive circumstances of official life. The dilapidated, unfinished public buildings rising from the bogs along the Potomac mocked the grandeur of L'Enfant's imperial design and symbolized a rapid retreat from the pomp and ceremony of the Federalists' more splendidly conceived national state. Parsimonious Republican lawmakers would expend no more to make their squalid capital decently habitable than they did for the President's salary.

The poverty of the government's headquarters was matched by its poverty of function. Except in matters of diplomacy and war, its only direct services to citizens were the lightly used postal system, the federal courts, a National Road, and scattered lighthouses and navigational aids. Excluding Congress and the military,

the entire government establishment at Washington, from President to door-keeper, numbered only 153 people at the beginning of Jefferson's administration and would increase to only 352 by 1829. In 1815 the President paid out of his own pocket the single secretary who assisted him; the Attorney General had neither clerk nor office; the Supreme Court convened for two months a year in a Capitol Hill boarding house; and during the summer only the clerks and bureau chiefs remained in the muggy capital to keep the wheels of state slowly turning.⁶

Meanwhile the Federalist/Republican struggle politicized much of the potential electorate, at least to the extent of voting. In Massachusetts, for which we have annual voter turnout figures back to the Revolution, only 10 to 12 percent of the adult white males voted in the first decade of independence. Even the bitter debtor/creditor battles surrounding Shays's Rebellion never brought more than 32 percent to the polls. What pushed Massachusetts turnout permanently over 50 percent was close competition between Federalists and Republicans in the late 1790s. And turnout climbed to a new plateau of 63 to 84 percent when party competition reached a new peak of intensity following the Embargo.

The less complete records of turnout for other states similarly show an initial peak around 1800 and a further surge in the Embargo years to impressive new plateaus. Orange County, North Carolina, managed to record over 100 percent of its adult white males as voting in 1808, as did Baltimore in 1812. Turnout was highest where the two parties were closely matched and intensely competitive, while politicians had least incentive to mobilize voters in one-sided states like Virginia where the minority party had no hope.⁷

A growing electorate meant growing Republican majorities, as a growing number of ordinary folk not only voted for Republican candidates but identified with the Republican party. Democratic-minded voters, lacking time and information to keep up with the baffling complexity of issues and candidates, could hold the aristocratic Federalists at bay by marching regularly to the polls under the Republican banner. In the mid-Atlantic states, where the struggle was fiercest, the Republicans quickly began to call themselves Democratic Republicans and soon simply Democrats.

Within a few years of Jefferson's election, most states came under almost continuous Republican control. Only the prostration inflicted by his Embargo produced a brief Federalist revival on the eve of the War of 1812. Thus, from the perspective of somnolent Washington, the country's miraculous escape from the war, coupled with Federalism's suicide in the seditious proceedings at Hartford, might suggest an indefinite perpetuation of the Jeffersonian yeoman republic.

Yet focus on Washington yields a misleading picture of the political economy. People's lives were far more affected by state and local governments. There entrepreneurial interests concentrated their political energies after they lost control of

the federal government, bidding for control of Republicanism in the most commercial states. Ambitious politicians deserted federal office in droves—more senators resigned than failed of reelection—to pursue power on the more intensely contested battlegrounds of state politics. In the bitter struggle for New York, De Witt Clinton resigned from the Senate to become mayor of New York City, and subsequently Daniel P. Tompkins would have resigned the vice presidency if he had succeeded in his campaign against Clinton for governor. In these contests the market revolution was transforming Republicanism in ways that would soon become apparent at Washington.⁸

Republican ambiguity was rooted in the Constitution, which made American politics a zero-sum game by requiring an electoral majority to win the potent presidency. To win all executive power, as politicians quickly understood, they had to piece together a national majority from the diverse elements affected by politics in widely dissimilar states. The inherent dynamic was toward competition between two heterogeneous coalitions or parties, and this two-party system came to encompass every kind of state and local rivalry and division. Each party necessarily contained jarring elements of class, interest, and culture.⁹

Where Federalism paradoxically got much of its following from the threatened rural culture of New England, Republicanism got much of its leadership from entrepreneurial and often elitist elements that were excluded or otherwise alienated from local Federalist establishments. The Crowninshields, a rising merchant family in Salem, became Republican out of rivalry with the more established Federalist Derbys. The Federalist preference for the British trade made Republicans of many merchants trading elsewhere, especially in flour-shipping Baltimore, where much of the upstart commercial establishment, resenting domination by Maryland's Federalist planter class, followed merchant/politician Samuel Harrison Smith into the Republican ranks. In New York Clintons and Livingstons perpetuated the colonial politics of baronial family factions by allying as Republicans against the Federalist Schuylers, Jays, and Morrisises—Alexander Hamilton being a Schuyler son-in-law. Everywhere the Republican party attracted such upwardly mobile outsiders as the foreign-born John Jacob Astor, Stephen Girard, Albert Gallatin, and Alexander J. Dallas; and everywhere ambitious young lawyers like Dallas in Philadelphia, James Sullivan in Boston, Joseph Story in Salem, and Aaron Burr in New York advanced themselves by organizing Republicans locally. Under the Republican banner of equal rights a recurrent paradigm of American politics emerged, as a democratic majority asserting equality empowered an aspiring elite asserting opportunity.

Thomas Jefferson was as remarkable for his pragmatism and political skill as for his ability to transcend the perspective of his class and imagine a democratic society. Fearing Federalist designs on republicanism itself, he mobilized in its

defense whatever disaffected or aspiring elites were available. Pursuing the utopian goal of a yeoman democratic republic, Jefferson accommodated to entrepreneurial Republicanism as much as he thought necessary to maintain Republican ascendancy. No doubt he exaggerated the Federalist threat to republicanism itself, and perhaps he accommodated more than necessary.

Throughout his career he kept close to him as confidant and alter ego the very different James Madison. A rather insignificant-looking little man, especially alongside the gangling, red-haired Jefferson, Madison was notable for depth of knowledge, analytical clarity, and cautious judgment. A Princeton education and precocious leadership in the Revolutionary Congresses made him a committed nationalist. He so far absorbed the commercial perspective as to collaborate with Hamilton in organizing the movement for a constitutional convention (Jefferson being in France as American minister at the time), and the convention largely followed his impressive intellectual leadership. Madison's *Federalist* essays brilliantly advocated the new Constitution as meeting the needs of a market society by organizing politics on the market principle of competing economic interests.

Soon estranged from Hamilton by rivalry, by intimacy with Jefferson, and by the sentiments of his Virginia constituents, Madison came to share Jefferson's fear that the Hamiltonians were monarchists at heart. The crucial difference between the two friends was also the crucial ambiguity at the heart of Republicanism. Jefferson was anxious about the corrupting effect of the market on American farm families, while Madison saw farmers as incipient small entrepreneurs who were to be fulfilled by the market.

Both wanted to preserve the farmers' virtuous independence, and thus republicanism, first by guaranteeing enough cheap land to supply a growing population of roughly equal farm families, and second by maintaining the freest possible flow of trade with Europe. Free trade mattered to Jefferson because he wanted to import manufactures from Europe rather than see swarms of dependent factory workers in America. Madison wanted free trade on the rather different ground that American farmers would not work hard enough to be virtuous without the incentive of profitable export markets for their produce.

Madison's affinity for the market muffled Jefferson's affinity for the land, as a besieged landed gentry accommodated to the commercial boom's expansive capital under the imperatives of two-party politics. Their friendship melded agrarian radicalism with enough market liberalism to maintain Republican hegemony. The historical Jefferson would hardly have been possible without a Madison. By always acting under the influence of Madison's cautious realism, Jefferson could succeed as a politician while sustaining the visionary breadth of social sympathy that gave Republicanism its mass appeal.¹⁰

The Jeffersonian strategy succeeded for almost a generation in denying the federal government to market forces energized by commercial boom. Shifting their

developmental demands to the states, where a democratic electorate was rejecting Federalism, they had no trouble finding entrepreneurial Republican advocates, especially in the most commercial states.

As men from the middling orders—the mechanic/entrepreneurs of the port towns, for example—responded to widening opportunities for profit, the Republican party became the political vehicle for their resentments against the exclusivism and elitism of the Federalist commercial establishment. And as the Republican party won control of more and more state governments, it increasingly attracted enterprisers who wanted government aid. Even small-farmer constituencies tended to be represented in times of political calm by county-seat lawyer/politicians sympathetic to a market-oriented minority.

In states with rapidly growing economies—particularly Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania—government aid to enterprise became as much a Republican as a Federalist policy. Republican legislatures and governors outdid their Federalist predecessors in granting direct state loans to infant manufacturing enterprises. “Works of public importance deserve public encouragement,” announced the preamble of a Pennsylvania act authorizing a state loan to a steel works; a New York act granting a loan to a manufacturer of earthenware similarly declared that “the establishment of useful manufactures is clearly connected with the public weal.” The New York legislature authorized twenty-eight such loans in five years, between 1811 and 1816. In addition state governments authorized lotteries and tax exemptions in aid of countless private businesses, exempted certain manufacturers and their employees from jury duty and militia service, and conferred direct bounties or monopolies on favored enterprises.¹¹

By 1815 the combined influence of Federalism and entrepreneurial Republicanism had completed an essential stage of the market revolution by committing the commercial states to the political economy of capitalism. This institutional transformation was most important where least visible, in the intricacies of law. Increasingly visible were the overtly developmental policies that also made the state governments indispensable engines of the market revolution.

Most dramatic was the use of state credit to amass the enormous capital for a transport network. Private capital markets could not have underwritten the mammoth state canal systems, even if they had promised enough profit to attract private investors.

The Empire City led the way. Natural advantages helped it pass Philadelphia and Boston in total volume of international trade during the commercial boom. Its harbor was unrivaled—large and deep, close to the ocean, relatively untroubled by fog or winter ice, and with miles of waterfront suitable for wharfage. The Hudson River and Long Island Sound gave it unparalleled access by cheap water transport to a far more populous hinterland than its rivals’. Between 1790 and 1810, as land-hungry Yankees flooded the Champlain country and Mohawk valley, the

population of New York State grew 182 percent, compared with 86 percent for Philadelphia's Pennsylvania, 25 percent for Boston's Massachusetts, and 11 percent for Baltimore's Maryland.

New Yorkers exploited their advantages aggressively in reaching out to engross the rising exports of southern cotton. They bought cotton in Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, and New Orleans through resident agents called factors; their ships carried it to Liverpool, usually by way of New York; and the return cargoes guaranteed their dominance of the European import trade.

With this pattern established, British exporters concentrated their postwar dumping of cut-rate merchandise in New York. Instead of resisting this destructive competition with American manufactures, New York commercial interests jumped at the chance to sell British products at the lowest possible rate through their already established system for auctioning imports to the lowest bidder. In 1817 they persuaded the legislature to reinforce this cheap-goods policy by prohibiting goods from being withdrawn from auction, no matter how low the bidding. As retailers flocked in from all over the country to replenish their stocks at rock-bottom costs, New York established during the postwar boom the preeminence it would retain for a century as the great American entrepôt for European goods. Its commercial attractions increased in 1818 when the Black Ball line scheduled weekly departures of fast sailing ships between New York and Liverpool. Speed and reliability made this first transatlantic packet service irresistible to shippers and passengers, while guaranteeing New York first news of European markets.

New Yorkers were just as aggressive in pushing commerce into their hinterland. In response to market pressures for cheaper, faster, and more reliable water transport up the magnificent water highway of the Hudson, Robert Fulton developed in 1807 the world's first successful steamboat, the *Clermont*. By the time Fulton died, a few weeks after the news of peace arrived, steamboats had dramatically increased the speed and reliability of passenger travel between New York and Albany and were rapidly extending service on New York Bay and Long Island Sound.

At the inland limits of water carriage, New Yorkers pushed the market past the overland transport barrier by persuading the state to charter turnpike companies. Seeking a profit from tolls, these companies built scores of improved roads radiating out into the countryside from energized river ports. Over one thousand miles were completed by 1810 and four thousand by 1820, more than twice the mileage of any other state. These roads reduced wagon hauling rates some 50 percent, still too much for high-weight-to-value commodities such as grain except at very high prices, but opening the countryside to consumer goods that could now be brought at lower cost from the metropolis.¹²

Only one thing threatened New York's dream of becoming the Empire City of a vast American market. The rival ports of Philadelphia and Baltimore were closer

to the trans-Appalachian West and dominated the burgeoning western trade by way of improved roads across the Appalachian Mountains to the upper Ohio. Philadelphia interests had promoted in the 1790s the country's first major turnpike, extending west to Lancaster. Subsequent extensions carried an improved wagon road all the way to the head of the Ohio at Pittsburgh. By the early 1820s about thirty thousand tons of freight moved over this route annually. Another ten thousand were hauled over the federally constructed National Road, which connected Baltimore with the Ohio at Wheeling, Virginia, a hundred miles downriver from Pittsburgh.

New York had a potential advantage, however, that more than outweighed its greater distance from the West. Only in upstate New York was there a break in the Appalachian mountain barrier that walled off the rest of the Atlantic seaboard from the interior. The Mohawk River, flowing from the west into the Hudson at the head of deepwater navigation near Albany, gave access to a relatively level transport corridor along the south shore of Lake Ontario all the way to Lake Erie, with a maximum elevation above sea level of 650 feet. Controlling this corridor, the Iroquois once dominated the trade for interior furs; the advantages of this vaunted "water level route to the West" would make the New York Central a giant of the railroad age; and in the age of the automobile the New York Thruway would funnel the country's heaviest East-West traffic along this historic thoroughfare.

For years some New Yorkers had dreamed of cheap water transportation from the Hudson to the Great Lakes, bringing the interior fully into the market by moving the bulky agricultural commodities that could not pay their way on the best roads. The most obvious route utilized the Mohawk to a point where a few miles of canal would connect with Oneida Lake, the Oswego River, and Lake Ontario. The failure of a state-backed canal company charging tolls demonstrated in the 1790s that state aid and private capital were inadequate and the short route too shallow and steep. Soon New Yorkers were hoping for federal aid to build a far more ambitious canal, independent of natural waterways, that would stretch 364 miles from the Hudson all the way to Lake Erie, bypassing Lake Ontario and the Niagara Falls barrier between Ontario and Erie. This seemed utterly visionary when the world had only one canal more than a tenth as long, and the United States only three canals more than two miles long, the longest twenty-seven miles and none profitable.

Deferred by Embargo and war, the Erie Canal project revived in the postwar boom as the focus of the city's bid for commercial supremacy. According to its chief proponent, Mayor De Witt Clinton, it would make New York "the great depot and warehouse of the western world," or "the greatest commercial city of the world." The inland surge of population and commodity production made intolerable the transport barriers that clogged the market's advance. Everywhere enterprising Americans turned to government to create the transport infrastruc-

ture required for a national market. And now that the market confronted the formidable Appalachian barrier, only the resources of the federal government would suffice. New York's mercantile gentry had long regarded government as an indispensable instrument of market growth. Their turnpikes were built under state-granted charters and rights of eminent domain; Fulton perfected the steamboat under a state-granted monopoly; and the state enforced their auction system. But the federal government had been less amenable to enterprise under the Virginia Republicans.

Too impatient to wait longer for federal funds, Governor De Witt Clinton in 1817 persuaded a Republican New York legislature to finance the Erie Canal itself. Completed in 1825 at a cost of some \$7,000,000, the Grand Canal was an instant sensation. Tolls in the first year of full operation reached nearly \$500,000, and soon paid off the entire cost of construction. More important, Clinton's big ditch cut shipping costs between Lake Erie and New York City from \$100 to under \$9 a ton, and eventually as low as \$3 for some commodities. Within a few years it carried \$15,000,000 worth of freight annually, twice the amount reaching New Orleans by the Mississippi River, and the figure would near \$200,000,000 by midcentury.¹³

This bonanza generated a transportation revolution. Philadelphia fought back with a state canal across mountainous Pennsylvania to Pittsburgh on the Ohio; Baltimore seized on the latest technology to push the world's longest railroad up the Potomac and over the Appalachians to the western waters at Wheeling; and Boston tapped the Erie's western trade with a railroad to Albany.

Although none of these projects matched the Erie's profits or regained substantial western trade from New York, they did galvanize market revolution by dramatically extending the division of labor in each port/hinterland region. As transport gave areas comparative advantage in more specialized production, diverse manufactures developed around the port cities, the adjacent countryside specialized in perishable vegetables, fruits, and dairy products for urbanites, grain and livestock were produced at successively greater distances, and interior towns processed lumber, hides, and grain.

New York itself built connecting canals in every direction—between the Hudson and Lake Champlain, the Erie and Lake Ontario, the Erie and Pennsylvania waterways, and around Niagara Falls to link Lakes Ontario and Erie. An Ohio canal connecting Lake Erie with the Ohio-Mississippi river system extended the Grand Canal's reach of continuous water transport all the way to New Orleans. Then came a second Ohio connection, an Indiana connection, and eventually an Illinois canal connecting Lake Michigan with the upper Mississippi. By the 1840s, as a consequence, a northeastern sectional economy was integrating the port/hinterland economies and reaching out to create a national market.¹⁴