INTELLECTUAL ORIGINS OF AMERICAN RADICALISM

NEW EDITION

Now an established classic, *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* was the first book to explore this alternative current of American political thought. Stemming back to the seventeenth-century English Revolution, many questioned private property, the sovereignty of the nation-state, and slavery, and affirmed the common man's ability to govern. By the time of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine was the great exemplar of the alternative intellectual tradition. In the nineteenth century, the antislavery movement took hold of Thomas Paine's ideas and fashioned them into an ideology that ultimately justified civil war.

This updated edition contains a new preface by the author, which describes the inquiries that he undertook in his books of the 1960s and their conclusions. David Waldstreicher has contributed a new historiographical foreword that discusses the book's lasting importance and contrasts its ideas with the work of Bernard Bailyn and Gordon Wood.

Staughton Lynd received his BA from Harvard College and his MA and PhD from Columbia University. He taught at Spelman College and at Yale University. He is the author, editor, or co-editor of more than a dozen books and has published articles in journals including the *Journal of American History*, the *William and Mary Quarterly*, and the *Political Science Quarterly*.

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STAUGHTON LYND

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For by naturall birth, all men are equally and alike borne to like propriety, liberty and freedome, and as we are delivered of God by the hand of nature into this world, every one with a naturall, innate, freedome and propriety (as it were writ in the table of every mans heart, never to be obliterated) even so are we to live, every one equally and alike to enjoy his Birthright and priviledge; even all whereof God by nature hath made him free.

RICHARD OVERTON, *An Arrow Against All Tyrants and Tyranny, Shot from the Prison of New-Gate into the Prerogative Bowels of the Arbitrary House of Lords* (London, 1646)

There is a higher law than the law of government. That's the law of conscience.

STOKELY CARMICHAEL, UPI dispatch October 28, 1966

Political freedom . . . is an elemental condition of the individual will.

CARL OGLESBY, *Containment and Change* (New York, 1967)

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AFTER FORTY YEARS: A NEW PREFACE

I

I decided to study the period of the American Revolution in 1959. It seemed to me that if there was anything good in the past of the United States on which a hopeful and idealistic future could be built, it might be found in the period that produced the Declaration of Independence.

To be sure, the failings of the great white men who stood astride the events of the American Revolution were manifest. When I was a boy, the five-cent piece in the United States was the "Indian head" nickel. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson, a friend of the family, remarked that the history of the United States could be seen in this coin. On one side of the nickel was the head of a Native American and the word "Liberty." On the other side was the image of a bison and the words "E pluribus unum," or as Bateson translated them: "There used to be a lot of us and now there's only one."

Later, when I was in high school, my history teacher took me to Monticello. What stayed in memory from that visit was the device Jefferson used to make copies of his letters. Recently I returned to Monticello with a ten-year-old grandson. This time I saw what seemed like an oversized wooden deck, which turned out to be the roof over a passageway. There slaves cooked Mr. Jefferson's meals and carried them to a spot directly underneath the dining room, whence they could ascend on a dumbwaiter and appear on a "lazy Susan," both designed by the master. It struck me that in this way the Sage of Monticello could entertain guests without the troubling appearance of a black face.

And yet, what alternative do we have to the American Revolution as the archetype of our hopes and dreams? Surely it is significant that when United States soldiers in Vietnam and Iraq searched for a way that they could dissent profoundly and yet continue to think of themselves as patriotic Americans, they returned in imagination to the citizen-soldiers of the American Revolution. Remembering the words of Thomas Paine's first *Crisis* pamphlet about sunshine patriots and summer soldiers, they called themselves "winter soldiers."[1]

II

I began my study of the American Revolution by setting out to prove or disprove what other historians—especially Carl Becker and Charles Beard—had to say about the political choices made by poor and working people during the American Revolution. I studied farm tenants in Dutchess County, New York, and artisans in New York City.

What I learned about tenants was that in southern Dutchess County and neighboring Westchester County tenant farmers supported the Revolution. I held in my hands the petitions that they wrote to the Revolutionary New York legislature in which they asked for confiscation of Loyalist estates.

Thus far, Becker's idea that the Revolution was a struggle over who should rule at home, as well as a struggle for home rule, worked well. While a coalition of classes struggled for independence, little people at the bottom demanded more: economic

independence in the form of freehold ownership of the land that they tilled.

But in northern Dutchess County the tenant farmers were Loyalists. They made their way out into the Hudson River, where the Continental Congress had strung nets to obstruct the junction of British forces from New York City and Albany, stole the lead used to weight the nets, and made bullets out of it. In 1777 they staged a tenant uprising on Livingston Manor in support of the King.

So what can explain this ideological diversity? Why were the tenants who rented from Beverly Robinson in southern Dutchess County ardent patriots, whereas the tenants on the land of Robert R. Livingston only a few miles away became Tories?

There is a simple answer, I suggest. It all depended on the politics of your landlord. If you rented from a Tory like Robinson, who sheltered Benedict Arnold when the latter fled across the Hudson, you supported the Revolution in the hope that if Robinson and his friends were defeated, you might get fee-simple ownership of your farm.

But if you rented from Livingston, an ardent Whig, your calculus was just the opposite. You sought victory for the King of England because if he won, Livingston might be deprived of his lands, and in this way you too might realize the American dream and become the owner of the land that you cultivated.

So it was not ideology that determined the political choices of Hudson Valley tenant farmers. It was economic interest.

While the politics of Hudson Valley tenants may be little known, it is otherwise with city artisans. These are the Sons of Liberty. These are the folks who erected liberty poles, enforced nonimportation agreements, dumped tea into Boston Harbor, and carried the news that the British were coming. These were Paul Revere and friends in Boston, who met at the Green Dragon tavern, and comparable groups in New York City, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Carl Becker said they were the heart and soul of both the struggle for home rule and the struggle over who should rule at home. And he was right.

There is only one problem. As Charles Beard noted in passing but did not explain, these same artisans enthusiastically supported

the Federalists' constitution in 1787. They did so not only at the ballot box, but in elaborate parades in every major seacoast city.

So how did the artisan radicals of 1763–1776 become Hamiltonians in 1787? And what does this ideological transformation tell us about the relationship of economic interest and ideology?

Again, there is a simple answer. What preoccupied these folks before the Revolution was the danger that imported British manufactured goods might destroy their livelihoods. Hence they supported all things anti-British, especially nonimportation agreements.[2]

And what preoccupied them in the mid-1780s as British manufactures once again began to pour into American seaports was . . . exactly the same thing. Hence they supported the project of a strong national government that could impose an effective tariff on imported manufactured goods.[3]

Artisans were altogether consistent. There only appears to have been an inconsistency because we have supposed their politics to be driven not by economic interest, but by ideology.

As I have reflected on these findings over the years, it seems to me that historians of "the inarticulate" sometimes seek to discover among the poor the internally coherent discourse one might expect at an Ivy League sherry party. I have not found such coherence, either as a historian or as a lawyer for poor and working-class clients in Youngstown, Ohio, for more than thirty years. When it appeared that the automobile assembly plant in nearby Lordstown, Ohio, might close, workers encouraged their children to write postcards to General Motors' headquarters in Detroit, pleading with the powers-that-be to keep the plant open. But when steel mills closed in Youngstown and Pittsburgh, workers seriously considered using the power of eminent domain to permit worker-community–owned steel companies to acquire the mills by compulsion.[4]

My tentative answer to questions about the political choices of working people is, accordingly, as follows. Poor and working people, unendingly pressed by economic necessity, will ordinarily focus on personal, short-run, material gain: owning the land that one tills, protecting the market for the goods produced in one's shop. Extensive experience with other kinds of workers, common

oppression (as in a prison or in war), or a dramatic disruption of shared expectations (such as a plant closing), may give rise to a broader class point of view. But it will always be more difficult for lower-class protagonists to rise above the interests of the moment than it is for upper-class historical actors, who, then and now, have more money, more leisure, and a smaller number of persons to organize into a cohesive force, and who instinctively gravitate to the preservation of the system as a whole.

This conclusion should not be understood to devalue the aspirations of poor and working-class persons, then or now. It does not denigrate the lives of farm tenants to recognize that they wished to own the farms on which they toiled. Nor should urban laborers be faulted for overriding concern with economic survival.[5]

III

How then might we describe what the period of the American Revolution offers to latter-day efforts to create a more just society? This was the question I sought to answer in *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism*. My answer, in a nutshell, is: certain ideas, presented to the world by particular persons who were marginal dissenters in their own time just as many of us are today.

Much as the same worker may view the world differently now than he did only a few weeks ago, so in any group, such as "tenants" or "artisans" or (more recently) "steelworkers," there are likely to be individuals whose outlook is quite different from that typical of the group as a whole. The great artisan radical Thomas Paine was also to some extent atypical and should not be understood merely as a spokesman for a group. Such atypical figures may be like mutations, prefiguring species changes still in the making.

In *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*, published a year before *Intellectual Origins*, I suggested that the "artisan radicalism" of Thomas Paine might be a source for an American radical tradition distinct from the more familiar vision of Thomas Jefferson. I wrote that Paine's artisan radicalism affirmed that "strong central government accessible to the people was more democratic than decentralized rule by gentlemen; that common men, whether or not formally educated, had the capacity to govern; that slavery must stop."[6]

Some academic commentary has blurred the uniqueness of Paine's ideas and of the radical intellectual tradition that he originated. Edmund Morgan, for example, concedes that the best and brightest men who led the American independence movement "accepted the continuance of slavery," but argues that Paine, who harshly condemned slavery throughout his adult life, "was one of them."[7]

Soon after arriving in Philadelphia in 1774, Paine denounced slavery in two essays. These essays prefigured the moral urgency of nineteenth-century abolitionism, very much in contrast to the "deistic coolness of temper" of the Founding Fathers.[8]

In "African Slavery in America" the man later reviled as an atheist took his stand on "the time of reformation" and "gospel light":

> All distinctions of nations, and privileges of one above others, are ceased; Christians are taught to **account all men their neighbors; and love their neighbors as themselves; and do to all men as they would be done by; to do good to all men; and man-stealing is ranked with enormous crimes**. Is the barbarous enslaving our inoffensive neighbors, and treating them like wild beasts subdued by force, reconcilable with all these **divine precepts**? Is this doing to them as we would desire they should do to us? If they could carry off and enslave some thousands of us, would we think it just?—One would almost wish they could for once; it might convince more than reason, or the Bible.[9]

In the second essay, "A Serious Thought," Paine expressed the hope that the first legislative act of the colonies when they became independent of Great Britain would "put a stop to the importation of Negroes for sale, soften the hard fate of those already here, and in time procure their freedom."[10]

Paine tried to put into practice what he advocated. On March 1, 1780, the Revolutionary legislature of Pennsylvania passed the first law in the new United States for the emancipation of African American slaves. Paine was Clerk of the Assembly when the measure was introduced. It has been suggested that he wrote its preamble[11] or even "draft[ed] the legislation."[12] The preamble stated in part:

> we conceive that it is our duty, and we rejoice that it is in our power, to extend a portion of that freedom to others, which has been extended to us. . . .

Continuing, the preamble declared: "Weaned, by a long course of experience, from those narrow prejudices and partialities we had imbibed, we find our hearts enlarged with kindness and benevolence toward men of all conditions and nations." The condition of Negro and mulatto slaves, it concluded,

> not only deprived them of the common blessings that they were by nature entitled to, but has cast them into the deepest afflictions, by an unnatural separation and sale of husband and wife from each other and from their children, an injury, the greatness of which can only be conceived by supposing that we were in the same unhappy case.[13]

In the late 1780s Paine attended meetings of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully Held in Bondage.[14] Paine's antislavery activities in the 1780s coincided with the work of his British contemporaries Granville Sharp and Thomas Clarkson, who founded the British antislavery movement in the same month (May 1787) that the Constitutional Convention assembled in Philadelphia.[15] Together these men refute the argument that it is "ahistorical" and anachronistic to insist that the Founding Fathers should have done more to abolish slavery at the Constitutional Convention in 1787.

During several tumultuous years in revolutionary France, Paine's closest associates "[a]ll were critics of slavery": one of them, J. P. Brissot de Warville, was "a leading figure in the French Society des Amis des Noirs."[16] Paine consistently expressed solidarity with the successful slave insurrection in Haiti. He wrote to William Short in 1791 that the Haitian revolution was "the natural consequence of Slavery," and to Jefferson in 1805: "All that Domingo wants of France, is, that France agree to let her alone, and withdraw her forces."[17]

Four years before his lonely death, Paine wrote a long letter to Jefferson in which he discussed the newly acquired Louisiana Purchase, believing (correctly) that whether it ultimately became slave or free would determine the future of the United States. Therein:

1. Paine advocated that Louisiana should be settled not by plantation owners with their slaves, but by indentured servants from Germany. He had gone so far as to discuss with a merchant in

Hamburg, Germany, the cost of shipping such laborers to the United States. Anticipating the Homestead Act and the Reconstruction demand for "forty acres and a mule," Paine urged that just as an indentured servant at the end of his time received some means of livelihood from his master, so Congress should give each of these German indentured servants twenty acres of land.

2. Referring to the city of Liverpool as the center of the slave trade in Great Britain, Paine wrote: "Had I the command of the elements I would blast Liverpool with fire and brimstone. It is the Sodom and Gomorrah of brutality."
3. Paine recalled that when they were together in France, Jefferson had spoken of a plan to "allot to each Negro family a quantity of land for which they were to pay to the owner a certain quantity of produce" (in other words, sharecropping). Paine urged that free Negroes be provided for in this way in Louisiana. Congress should pay their passage to New Orleans; they should hire themselves out for a year or two to learn the business; thereafter they should be placed on tracts of land.
4. Finally, as in previous correspondence with Jefferson, Paine urged mediation between the French Emperor and the Emperor of the new African American state Haiti.[18]

Perhaps Paine's lifelong condemnation of slavery helps to explain why, when he died, certain free African Americans are said to have been among the handful of mourners.[19]

Eric Foner, in his study of Paine's life and thought, explored other aspects of my suggestion that Paine's "artisan radicalism" differed from the "agrarian radicalism" of Thomas Jefferson. He found the difference between Jefferson and Paine primarily in their "differing conceptions of the nation's future." Foner agrees with me that Jefferson was deeply pessimistic about the long-run future, believing that when the West had been settled "America would come to resemble Europe, with its crowded cities, landless lower classes, social conflict and governmental corruption." Paine was more optimistic, even naive, about the predictable impact of commerce on democratic self-government.[20]

When I revisited Paine in the first edition of this book, I argued that the American radical tradition originating with Paine

contemplated the use of centralized *means* to achieve the *goal* of a decentralized good society.[21] It now appears to me that Paine had an experimental attitude about what kinds of governmental institutions could best address the needs of poor and working people. The very years in which Paine first experienced America were the years in which the extra-legal committees of the American Revolution reached fullest expression. He wrote about these committees:

> For upward of two years from the commencement of the American War, and to a longer period in several of the American states, there were no established forms of government. The old governments had been abolished, and the country was too much occupied in defense, to employ its attention in establishing new governments; yet during this interval, order and harmony were preserved as inviolate as in any country in Europe.[22]

Hannah Arendt offers similar reflections on committees like those that Paine celebrated. She compares the "sections" of the French Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian soviets in 1905 and 1917, the workers' and soldiers' councils of post–World War I Germany, and the council system that sprang into existence in Hungary in 1956. What happened in each case, Arendt writes, was "the amazing formation of a new power structure which owed its existence to nothing but the organizational impulses of the people themselves."[23]

During the course of the Revolutionary War, however, Paine became disillusioned with the efforts of popular committees to regulate prices. He entered into an unpublicized agreement with Philadelphia financier Robert Morris, New York aristocrat Robert R. Livingston, and George Washington, who paid Paine to write public letters and pamphlets in support of a stronger national government.[24]

Later still, in his *Rights of Man*, Paine put forward what Eric Foner terms a "new vision . . . of the republican state as an agent of social welfare."[25] Yet the actual administration of the fund (drawn from "surplus taxes") to assist every poor family in the education of its children was to be in the hands of "the ministers of every parish."[26]

In his last major writing, *Agrarian Justice*, Paine held up the decentralized society of North American Indians as a model for

what "the state of society ought to be."[27] He proposed that the "primary assemblies" of every "canton" (he was writing for revolutionary France) elect commissioners who would administer an inheritance tax intended to compensate each member of society for that member's original right to a portion of the value of the land once held by society in common. But a national bank—a principal object of Paine's American writings on behalf of a stronger national government—also had a role to play in Paine's European Utopia. Each inheritor would give bond to the canton commissioners to pay one-tenth of the value of his inheritance into the local compensation fund within the space of one year or sooner. One half of the inheritance was to serve as security for payment of the bond. The bonds themselves would be held by a national bank, which would issue bank notes, to be used by the canton commissioners to pay the appropriate sums in compensation.[28]

I look back on Paine's proposals now with the benefit of eighteen years' experience in one of the few enduring institutions created by the 1960s, National Legal Services:

> It is the conviction, or alleged conviction, of many Americans that anything funded by the government must be centralized, bureaucratic, and wasteful. . . . Legal Services workers are in an opportune position to rebut this nonsense. We know, from experience, that money can be appropriated by Congress, allocated to offices in the field on the basis of objective criteria, administered in communities by more-or-less democratic boards of directors, monitored to assure compliance with national statutes and regulations, and spent to provide a needed service free of charge.[29]

The intertwining of local and national administration in National Legal Services is effective. And it works in a fashion remarkably similar to what Thomas Paine proposed in *The Rights of Man* and *Agrarian Justice*.

Paine's radical views about society and government cannot be separated from his marginal position in Revolutionary high society. A great social gulf separated Paine from the well-to-do leaders of the Revolution. Paine was imprisoned and very nearly executed in revolutionary France after he passionately opposed the execution of the King. Gouverneur Morris, the United

States ambassador to France at the time, considered Paine "a mere adventurer . . . without fortune, without family or connexions, ignorant even of grammar" and did nothing to obtain his release.[30]

IV

One final aspect of Paine's thought deserves respectful attention. Paine, and after him, Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Albert Parsons, and Eugene Debs, transcended any form of nationalism with the words "My country is the world."[31] This was and is an astonishingly radical idea. It is the thesis that dissenters in the United States cannot be content with *any* interpretation of the American experience confined within national boundaries. So long as we limit ourselves to that which has occurred within the framework of a single nation, we will always arrive at a place that is parochial and chauvinistic. A merely American set of values will always be Athenian in the sense that whatever equality it extends to those who are considered "citizens," even if that designation is extended to, say, women, people of color, and Native Americans, there will always be those not included, whom the Greeks called "barbarians." A society that affirms anything less than the belief that every human being on the face of the earth is equally entitled to the good things that the earth provides will in the end find some group of enemy combatants to hate.

I conclude that the American Revolution most deserving to be remembered is not a tradition associated with any of the better-known Founding Fathers. Rather, what is most enduring from this period is the set of ideas promulgated by Paine, and by other self-taught workingmen in the succeeding 125 years.

In recent judgments, the Supreme Court of the United States offered impressive support for the concept that there are universal human rights, the existence of which arises not from the laws of any nation but from human nature itself. In their decisions about the rights of prisoners at the Guantánamo detention facility, the justices turned historian and cited such precedents as the case in which Lord Mansfield set free an African slave purchased in Virginia, bound for Jamaica but temporarily detained on a ship docked in England.[32] In another decision about a Mexican doctor

kidnapped by drug enforcement agents, the Court continued to probe the "ambient law" of the Revolutionary era, concluding that courts of that period were open to claims based on "the law of nations" and that a court today should likewise entertain a claim that rests "on a norm of international character accepted by the civilized world."[33]

These decisions affirm the tradition that "my country is the world." The most riveting expressions of that tradition come from Henry David Thoreau. In Thoreau's essay on "Civil Disobedience," he famously observed that "the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race" should find good citizens in "the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor," namely, prison.[34] Less well-known is another comment that just as he who would save his life must be prepared to lose it, so it is more important for the American people to abolish slavery and to give up war on Mexico than that the United States should survive as a nation.

> If I have unjustly wrested a plank from a drowning man, I must restore it to him though I drown myself. This, according to Paley [a writer on moral questions], would be inconvenient. But he that would save his life, in such a case, shall lose it. This people must cease to hold slaves, and to make war on Mexico, though it cost them their existence as a people.[35]

In "Slavery in Massachusetts," written after the abduction of a fugitive slave from Boston, Thoreau called on his countrymen to be "men first, and Americans only at a late and convenient hour."[36]

Here is an American revolutionary tradition on which scholars, activists, and even courts of law can take a stand together.

Notes

1. Richard Moser, *The New Winter Soldiers: GI and Veteran Dissent during the Vietnam Era* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996). The words with which Paine began the pamphlet were: "These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands it **now**, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: The Citadel Press, 1945), v. 1, p. 50. Testifying before the Senate Committee

on Foreign Relations, April 22, 1971, John Kerry began by summarizing an occasion "several months ago in Detroit [when] over 150 honorably discharged and many very highly decorated veterans testified to war crimes committed in Southeast Asia, not isolated incidents but crimes committed on a day-to-day basis with the full awareness of officers at all levels of command." Kerry explained to the Committee: "We call this investigation the 'Winter Soldier Investigation.' The term 'Winter Soldier' is a play on words of Thomas Paine in 1776 when he spoke of the sunshine patriot and summertime soldiers who deserted . . . because the going was rough." "Legislative Proposals Relating to the War in Southeast Asia," http://www.truthout.org/article/transcript-john-kerrys-1971-senate-testimony, last visited Mar. 20, 2009.

2. See on this point Gordon S. Wood, review of T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence*, in *The New York Review of Books*, June 10, 2004, p. 29:

> The one major middling group that actively participated in the boycott movements did so not as consumers but as producers. Artisans and mechanics who wanted to manufacture some of the goods that Americans were importing naturally had a vested interest in stopping imports of British goods. . . . [W]hat evidence we have suggests that artisans and mechanics were major participants both in the anti-British "Sons of Liberty" organizations and in the enforcement of the boycotts.
>
> . . . By 1768 colonial manufacturers were supplying Pennsylvania with eight thousand pairs of shoes a year. . . . In 1767 the town of Haverhill, Massachusetts, with fewer than three hundred residents, had forty-four workshops and nineteen mills. By the 1760s the growing number of immigrants and ex-soldiers who were becoming mechanics and craftsmen in Philadelphia alarmed British authorities worried about American manufacturing competition.

3. I wrote in *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution*, new edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 125: "Imported manufactures brought the menace of British economic power directly home to the New York City artisans. . . . [A]fter, as before, the Revolution, the encouragement of native manufactures seemed a part of the struggle for independence."

   This would appear to be the conclusion of every student of artisan politics in the 1780s. In Philadelphia, for example, at the end of the Revolutionary War "Great Britain flooded American markets with manufactured goods." Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750–1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 75. The state tariff enacted by the Pennsylvania legislature in the mid-1780s "did not solve the problem of English competition for Philadelphia's laboring classes. By 1787 they would follow their collective interests and support the federal Constitution, which promised full and effective tariffs on a national level." Ronald Schultz, *The Republic of Labor: Philadelphia Artisans and the Politics of Class, 1720–1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993),

p. 99. "From the mechanics' point of view, everything hung on the single question of a tariff. . . . Ratification of the 1787 Constitution was considered by mechanics to be a logical and satisfying culmination of the Revolutionary movement, not a thermidorian reaction." Charles S. Olton, *Artisans for Independence: Philadelphia Mechanics and the American Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1975), pp. 101, 117–18.

4. Lynd, "The Genesis of the Idea of a Community Right to Industrial Property in Youngstown and Pittsburgh, 1977–1987," *Journal of American History*, v. 74, no. 3 (Dec. 1987), pp. 926–58.
5. See James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 295–96: "[T]o require of lower-class resistance that it somehow be 'principled' or 'selfless' is not only utopian and a slander on the moral status of fundamental material needs; it is, more fundamentally, a misconstruction of the basis of class struggle. . . . 'Bread-and-butter' issues are the essence of lower-class politics and resistance."
6. Lynd, *Class Conflict*, p. 267.
7. Edmund S. Morgan, "The Other Founders," *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 22, 2005, p. 43, and "History from Below," *The New York Review of Books*, Dec. 1, 2005, p. 69.
8. Lynd, *Class Conflict*, p. 183.
9. *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 2, p. 17 (emphasis in original).
10. *Ibid*., p. 20.
11. *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 1, p. xix.
12. Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth Century England and America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 139.
13. *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 2, pp. 21–22.
14. James V. Lynch, "The Limits of Revolutionary Radicalism: Tom Paine and Slavery," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, v. 123 (July 1999), pp. 181–82.
15. See Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), pp. 95–96, 106–8.
16. Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, updated and with a new preface (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 235–36.
17. *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 2, pp. 1321, 1453–55.
18. Paine to Jefferson, Jan. 25, 1805, *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 2, pp. 1456–64.
19. Two Negroes were reported to be among the six persons who accompanied Paine's body from Madame Bonneville's home in Greenwich, near New York City, the twenty-two miles to his farm in New Rochelle for burial. London *Packet*, Aug. 7, 1809, quoted in Moncure Conway, *The Life of Thomas Paine*, v. II (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893), p. 417; Eric Foner, *Tom Paine*, p. 261.
20. Eric Foner, *Tom Paine*, pp. 100–6.
21. See pp. 162, 165, 170.

22. "The Rights of Man, Part II," in *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 1, p. 358.
23. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Viking Press, 1963), p. 260 and chapter 6.
24. Eric Foner, *Tom Paine*, p. 189.
25. *Ibid*., p. 217.
26. "Rights of Man, Part II," in *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 1, p. 425.
27. "Agrarian Justice," in *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 1, p. 610.
28. *Ibid*., pp. 622–23.
29. "Toward a Program for Publicly-Financed Jobs," in Lynd, *Living Inside Our Hope: A Steadfast Radical's Thoughts on Rebuilding the Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 137–38.
30. *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, p. xxxv; Eric Foner, *Tom Paine*, pp. 85, 244.
31. "Rights of Man, Part II," in *Complete Writings*, ed. Philip Foner, v. 1, p. 414 ("my country is the world, and my religion is to do good"); for Garrison and Debs, see pp. 9 (Debs) and 131–38 (Garrison). For additional instances of the same working-class rhetorical tradition, see, for Frederick Douglass in the 1840s, Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006), pp. 416–18; and, for Albert Parsons, speaking to his jury before being sentenced to death in 1886, James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing That Divided Gilded Age America* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006), p. 237 ("Opening his arms wide, he declared: 'The world is my country, all mankind my countrymen'").
32. *Somersett v. Stewart*, 20 How. St. Tr. 1, 79–82 (K.B. 1772), cited in *Rasul, et al. v. Bush, et al*., 542 U.S. 466, 481 n.11 (2004), and again—this time in the text, not in a footnote—in *Boumediene, et al. v. Bush, et al*., 128 S.Ct. 2229, 2248 (2008) ("a petitioner's status as an alien was not a categorical bar to habeas corpus relief").
33. *Sosa v. Alvarez-Machain, et al*., 542 U.S. 692, 714–25 (2004).
34. Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience," in *Nonviolence in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Staughton Lynd and Alice Lynd (revised edition; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 29.
35. *Id*., p. 25.
36. Henry David Thoreau, "Slavery in Massachusetts," in *Anti-Slavery and Reform Papers* (Montreal: Harvest House, 1963), p. 35.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

No one could be more aware than I that the following pages present an exploratory sketch rather than a definitive analysis. But as C. Wright Mills once said in a similar connection, I had a choice between conclusively demonstrating something trivial (such as who influenced whom in the genesis of the concept that the earth belongs to the living generation) or being provocative about a matter of importance—whether, and if so in what sense, one can speak of an American radicalism before the Civil War—and, naturally, I chose the latter.

Any critic of the American present must have profoundly mixed feelings about our country's past. On the one hand, he will feel shame and distrust toward Founding Fathers who tolerated slavery, exterminated Indians, and blandly assumed that a good society must be based on private property. On the other hand, he is likely to find himself articulating his own demands in the Revolutionary language of inalienable rights, a natural higher law, and the right to revolution.

The tradition I have attempted to describe made the following affirmations: that the proper foundation for government is a universal law of right and wrong self-evident to the intuitive common sense of every man; that freedom is a power of personal self-direction which no man can delegate to another; that the purpose of society is not the protection of property but fulfillment of the needs of living human beings; that good citizens have the right and duty, not only to overthrow incurably oppressive governments, but before that point is reached to break particular oppressive laws; and that we owe our ultimate allegiance, not to this or that nation, but to the whole family of man.

This tradition is both English and American. One of my principal conclusions is that its theoretical axioms were first clearly articulated by a group of English radicals in the quarter-century preceding the Declaration of Independence. The reader may find the first two chapters, dealing with these axioms, hard going. I can only plead that the Declaration itself emerged in part from the polemics of Price and Priestley, Sharp, Cartwright, and Paine; and further, that as radical abolitionists used the Declaration to justify nonvoting, tax refusal, and other extreme tactics, they repeatedly drew directly on the same English theorists. Radical American "praxis" (the word Marx used to describe practical-critical activity) derived from radical English theory.

This Anglo-American tradition was linked, in turn, both to Rousseau, who influenced America by way of England, and to Marx, whose concepts of alienation and fetishism can be paralleled in the pages of *Walden*. David Herreshoff writes in his *American Disciples of Marx* that "the socialist and individualist movements of the nineteenth century had common intellectual origins." I agree; and this book seeks to explore certain intellectual themes which Marxism and native American radicalism share.

Hopefully it will also be clear that there are a number of things worth doing which the present study does *not* attempt. Ideas do not exist *in vacuo*; and it goes without saying that impinging social pressures in England were connected with Price's clarification of the theory of ethics and Priestley's of political philosophy. Those connections have begun to be assessed by scholars such as George Rudé and E. P. Thompson. But they did not seem essential to

the argument here, for which it is enough to say that, by whatever processes, a certain complex of ideas appeared in England which became available to Americans as an intellectual resource.

Nor have I felt obligated to demonstrate in detail the impact of the ideas of English radicals on their American readers. Every student of the ideas of the American Revolution has recognized that impact (see pages 25–26). The phenomenon of Thomas Paine should be demonstration enough that the transmission of English radical ideas to the American resistance movement is no mere scholar's invention.

But let me put the baldest face on my intention. In one sense the concern of the following chapters is ahistorical. I am less interested in eighteenth-century radicalism than in twentieth-century radicalism. Accordingly, the process of historical causation—how certain ideas came into being, what influence they subsequently had—matters less to me than the fact that those ideas existed. I want to show, simply, that we are not the first to have found an inherited deterministic radicalism inhibiting, nor is ours the first attempt to make an opportunity of that dilemma. The characteristic concepts of the existential radicalism of today have a long and honorable history. Acquaintance with that history may help in sharpening intellectual tools for the work of tomorrow.

As to acknowledgments, Kenneth Rosenthal not only checked and rechecked footnotes and quotations, but he did significant independent research on the themes of the book. Jim Bond performed similar services at a later stage. I am deeply grateful.

S. L. 1968

FOREWORD TO THE NEW EDITION

DAVID WALDSTREICHER

For the generation that came of age intellectually during the 1970s and 1980s, this book was one you could find in any good used bookstore because it had been widely read. I acquired my tattered Vintage paperback while trolling for cheap course books during my freshman or sophomore year in college. I devoured it and it has ever since had a place of honor on my shelf. Its most important lesson had a great impact on me and perhaps still does. A dissenting tradition informed the American Revolution. It survived the capture of the Revolution and its legacy by conservative nationalists, not least because it was older, broader, and altogether truer to ideals than the Revolution itself. Only years later did I learn how true to those ideals Staughton Lynd himself has been.

Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism came out a year after Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* and issued a potent challenge to that book's interpretation of Revolutionary-era political thought.[1] Radicalism, bourgeois or otherwise, could not be conceived of as merely a "contagion of

liberty" resulting from the Revolution, much less from the Revolution's motivating, anticonspiratorial ideology derived from early-eighteenth-century "real whig" opposition writings. There was an earlier radical tradition, Lynd insisted, religious but no less radical for being so, that trusted in ordinary people's consciences. It was not so much American as Anglo (but not only that), in some iterations explicitly internationalist, and dissenting with respect to both church and state depending on the time and place. We see echoes of it in many different sorts of attacks on wealth and power throughout U.S. history. This tradition included Garrisonian abolitionism, native socialisms, aspects of Jefferson and Lincoln as well as Thomas Paine. Radicals could claim a true and thoughtful, not merely rhetorical or mythical, connection to the American past—as some of them have done ever since.

That this view was ever controversial, or that it raised some hackles in 1968, perhaps requires some explanatory history as well as historiography. Between 1961 and 1968 Staughton Lynd published a body of work—articles and anthologies as well as the two books now being republished by Cambridge University Press—that was remarkable for its breadth and vision.[2] Indeed, the rapid publication of his essay collection *Class Conflict, Slavery, and the United States Constitution* (1967) and *Intellectual Origins of American Radicalism* by trade presses reflected the demand for his research and teaching, as well as the recognition he had already achieved among historians during the same years and, to a significant extent, *before* he became famous as an antiwar activist. He certainly had every reason, while working on *Intellectual Origins*, to believe that he'd earned the right, and perhaps even had the responsibility, to creatively combine his political work and his historical writing—and that there would be a ready crossover audience for such an effort. He had been hired by Yale because of his standing, in the public eye and in the profession, as perhaps the best "New Left" historian yet to emerge.[3]

Lynd's writings on the possible confluences of history and activism were also widely admired and anthologized. Being at Yale, in turn, made it even more likely that he would be turned to as a leader and speaker by the movement, whether at demonstrations against the war or at meetings of the American Historical