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Angela Skeggs '04
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Angela Christine Skeggs
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Illinois Wesleyan University
Department of History

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Introduction

The battle for the independence of the American colonies has been attributed to many competing motives and factors. Within the vast array of literature on the subject, there are different schools of interpretation. Progressive-era historians tend to focus upon economic motivations underlying the American Revolution.[1] Within this school of thought historians actually explored possible class conflict and the social ramifications of the revolution.[2] An opposing school of thought arose out of reaction against the progressive historians. The Neo-Whig school of thought placed a higher value on constitutional principles and ideas during the American Revolution, and discounted other motives driving the revolution (like economical).[3] Bernard Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* is a prime example of how Neo-Whigs interpreted history. For them, ideas were of utmost importance. The crux of the conflict was over which was more important: economic motivation or political ideas in guiding the revolution. Inherent in this conflict is also the question of action and ideas. The progressive school of historians tend to pay more attention to actual actions, and the Neo-Whigs are far more

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[1]A good example of Progressive-era history can be found in Charles Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the United States Constitution* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913).

[2]William H. Nelson, "The Revolutionary Character of the American Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 4 (July, 1965):1000.

[3]John W. Tyler, *Smugglers and Patriots: Boston Merchants and the Advent of the American Revolution* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 5.

concerned with ideas. These two schools of thought helped to shape much of the argument surrounding the American revolution, and can determine how we interpret radicalness during the American Revolution.

A hybrid of these two models may actually prove to be more useful. Both economic class-based struggle and political ideas were important in the formulation of the revolution. The revolution cannot be analyzed fairly with taking into account both of these factors. The progressive era historians may have been correct in their methodology when they interpreted actual events and class-based conflict, but wrong in not attributing some of those actions to ideology. Neo-Whigs showed the important role of ideas, but did not give due credit to action and societal conditions. When assessing the nature of the revolution one should attempt to study how ideas, and other motivating factors led to action. This hybrid model takes ideas beyond hollow rhetoric and allows us to see important contributions societal conditions made to the nature of the American Revolution.

When we view the actions and ideas which were manifested during and after the American revolution, we can begin to assess whether or not it was indeed radical. Out of a society deeply steeped in the moral superiority and innate goodness of subservient hierarchy and monarchy arose a people who dared to question their rulers. The push for a more representative and democratic government, though commonplace today, was a truly radical notion during the late 1700's. Historically, English society had questioned and tried to limit the power of monarchy, but the American colonies were the first to fully reject the legitimacy of this non-representative form of

government.[4] Various pamphlets and newspaper articles provide evidence that the American revolution challenged notions of social hierarchy, and helped to give a more powerful political voice to the emerging middle class. More specifically, we find radical expressions of the revolution found in loci of intense action. Philadelphia was one of these areas of intense radical expression, and provides an example of where radical thought led to radical action. We find that the American Revolution was radical because of its political ideology *and* the practical implementation of that ideology, which we can find specifically in Philadelphia. Note that what is important here is a hybrid of both ideology and action. Ideas can be interpreted as leading to action.

Trends of radicalism, as expressed through republicanism and the push for democracy, could be seen throughout the colonies. From New York, to Charleston, the call for liberty could be heard from diverse people.[5] Of all the colonial cities, Boston is probably the most lauded. Many are well aware of famous Boston events (the riot and massacre), and Bostonian leaders (Sons of Liberty, Samuel Adams, Paul Revere) that contributed to the revolutionary cause. Boston was a hotbed of activity and should not be discounted, but it has already been heavily analyzed in the context of revolutionary ideology. The city of Philadelphia has also been studied,

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[4]The English began a long history of revolt with the beheading of King Charles I, and the Long Parliament. After the restoration of the monarchy, the people still demanded more control over the power of the King. The Glorious Revolution led to the people disposing of another king (albeit in a less violent manner), because he did not agree with their religious beliefs. This shows a history of skepticism about the power of the King, but reverence for the legitimacy of monarchy still prevailed. See *This Realm of England, 1399-1688*, ed. Lacey Baldwin Smith (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 2001 for a good basic history of England through the Glorious Revolution.

[5]This diverse set included merchants in the north-Atlantic colonies, artisans, elites of society, and even the North Carolina Regulators.

but few authors appreciate its uniquely radical nature. As mentioned before, Philadelphia was where one can see both the ideology and action of republicanism and participatory democracy come into play.

The city of Philadelphia was home to one of the most radical and influential thinkers of the American revolution, Thomas Paine. It was in Philadelphia that Paine observed American life, and "rubbed shoulders" with elites like Benjamin Franklin, and artisans like David Rittenhouse. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* (published in January of 1776) inspired the colonists, and was the first document to outright denounce the legitimacy of monarchy. Paine's work was the catalyst in creating support for a complete break with England.

The work of radical thinkers like Paine was important, but what common people did with these radical ideas is more important. The workers in Philadelphia found their political voice at the dawn of the revolution, and embraced Paine's ideas. The artisan class eventually overthrew the elite government and established their own constitution. The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 embodied the radical spirit of the American Revolution. Modeled after the unicameral government Paine devised in *Common Sense*, it gave more power to the middle class. Philadelphia gives us a good example, therefore, of where radical thought influenced radical action.

Studying the revolution on both a micro and macro scale helps us to decide the political and social nature of the revolution. It is impossible to assess what everyone believed, especially through the study of newspapers and pamphlets, but one can make some conjectures based on arguably limited evidence. To say that the American revolution was radical is a broad claim to make, but evidence shows that attitudes about society and politics became different as a result of

the revolution. When we focus on Philadelphia we find a compelling case of where radical ideas did not exist merely in the realm of theory, but actually influenced action. We also find a case where both progressive era and neo-Whig historical interpretation can be helpful in assessing the revolution. Beliefs translated into action during the revolution, and helped to change what people believed to be justifiable rule.[6]

Models and Interpretations of the American Revolution

The Progressive era and Neo-Whig interpretations of the American revolution are highly influential, but there are also claims that the American revolution was not a true revolution. Crane Brinton's *Anatomy of Revolution* espouses this type of model for interpreting the revolution. Brinton does not interpret the American Revolution as very radical; this is in part because he bases his model on the French Revolution. Brinton's analysis is interesting, however, because it proposes a cyclical formulation of revolutions. He breaks down periods of revolution into five phases (each inspired by the French Revolution): first Stage, rule of moderates, accession of extremists, reign of terror, and thermidor. Using this formula, Brinton had difficulties classifying the American revolution among other revolutions. Unlike the French revolution, Brinton wrote, "The American Revolution was predominantly a territorial and nationalistic revolution. . . we must always remember that the American Revolution was as a social revolution in a sense an incomplete one."[7] Brinton supports the notion that the American revolution involved politics,

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[6]The more immediate effects can obviously be seen in Western Europe. French peasants were clearly inspired by the American revolution, and made Tom Paine a hero (at least for awhile). The American revolution also gave hope to other colonial nations seeking to tear away from oppressive monarchs.

[7] Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 24.

nothing more. This is but one study that attempted to make the American revolution seem rather conservative. Historian Cecelia Kenyon echoed Brinton's sentiments of the revolution when she said that "It was a limited revolution, and it was primarily a political movement."[8] These studies effectively deny that any sort of social change really took place as a result of the revolution. What might be missing in their interpretation is a linkage of ideas to action and outcomes.

One work which might be more friendly to the notion of radicalism during the revolution is Bernard Bailyns's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution.* As mentioned before, Bailyn's analysis is part of the school of Neo-Whig interpretation. He does contend that the ideology of the revolutionary generation was radical, but his analysis does not go much beyond analyzing ideology. In his forward Bailyn states that "the American revolution was above all else an ideological, constitutional, political struggle and not primarily a controversy between social groups undertaken to force changes in the organization of the society or the economy."[9] Stating that the revolution was grounded mostly in ideological claims does not give due attention to actions that emanated from the ideology, and societal factors beyond intellectual claims which influenced the revolution. Believing and discussing an idea is not enough; living in the land of rhetoric cannot help the real world. Going beyond mere ideology, we must find some evidence that action was taken because of beliefs. Philadelphia affords us a rare opportunity to see where radical ideas led to radical action. Many studies of the revolution focus either on ideology or

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[8]Cecelia M. Kenyon, "Republicanism and Radicalism in the American Revolution: An Old-Fashioned Interpretation," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 19 (April, 1962):181.
Please note that Brinton's first edition of *The Anatomy of Revolution* was published in 1938, so Kenyon may have truly been echoing his ideas.

[9]Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1967), vi.

events; rarely do they focus on both. To understand how radical ideas affected colonial society, we must see where ideas directly affected or created action.

Radicalism: A Note about Defining the Term

How I define radicalism is obviously critically important for my thesis. Above I have given a general definition, but I would like to provide a more detailed analysis of the term. A simple dictionary definition will not suffice. A proper definition of radicalism must arise out of the circumstances of the late 18th century. It is important to keep in mind that radicalism may have had a different composition during the colonial era. Pauline Maier points out that "The word itself [radicals] is an anachronism, since it was first applied to political groups only in the nineteenth century."[10] The fact is, we are attempting to place a modern label on the ideas and events of the colonial era. This is not entirely a fruitless exercise, but it must be performed with due caution. Preconceived notions of what a revolution really is in our modern world should be set aside and our minds opened to the world of the American colonists who felt that they were under the oppressive thumb of monarchy and an unresponsive parliament.

Keeping the above in mind, a definition of radicalism for the American Revolution can be created. Radical ideology embodied beliefs in republicanism and democracy. A government that exercised these two ideologies would be far different from anything in the world of their time. Turning away from monarchy, and accepting the legitimate rule of the people was actually a rather enormous leap to make. Part of this definition of radicalism accepts the view that the pre

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[10]Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), xviii.

and post-colonial life were very different. Ideas and events during the revolution helped to fundamentally change the colonists. Gordon Wood touched on some of the social and political changes that came about as a result of the revolution in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution.*[11] What is key about the revolution, according to Wood, is that "it made the interests and prosperity of ordinary people–their pursuits of happiness–the goal of society and government."[12] The revolution helped to bring about ideas and actions that would support this premise–that government was supposed to serve the people, not the other way around. I build upon his premises, but would like to emphasize the radicalizing forces during the revolution (not just after). The process of radical thought involving republicanism and democracy was in full-swing before the end of the revolution. Comparative study is important, but we should not discount the shifting of ideology and events that occurred while events were unfolding.

Other conceptions of radicalism come from diverse sources like Alfred Young, and Gary B. Nash. Both of these historians have explored the social changes during the revolution, and have adopted the radical mantle. They contend that there was social strife in the colonies and that the revolution was about more than politics as usual. Social change, as a component of radicalism, was also found in the colonies. As important as it is to show the radicalizing forces of republicanism, it may be more important to show how these ideas led to some social change. Societal factors helped to push the "lower sorts" towards supporting the revolution, and in turn helped to politicize this oft forgotten class. I hope to show that radicalism during the American

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[11]Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution: How a Revolution Transformed a Monarchial Society into a Democratic One Unlike Any That had Ever Existed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 8-9.

[12]Ibid. 9.

revolution embodied both republicanism (political) and a component of societal change. Common people awoke to political consciousness and held a higher stake in political power, while they expressed ideas of liberty and greater democracy. All of these components helped to make the American revolution truly radical.

Competing Ideologies in Pre-Revolution Colonial Life

To understand the dramatic changes that took place during the revolutionary era, one must have some notion of life before. Like any complex society, colonial America contained internal struggles about the public good, and what proper government should be. Some clung to old world values, like hierarchy and monarchy, while others challenged these values. The elite in society in particular held a stake in maintaining the status quo and keeping the emerging middle class down. Others were inspired by English history to question the power of the king and the entire hierarchal structure. Virtue led many to wonder about the excesses of monarchy and the elite in society. All these ideas entangled in pre-revolutionary society, and helped to shape the national argument about revolution.

Some colonists in society were still very much attached to medieval, old-world values. In particular, the elite ruling power of colonial society clung to hierarchy and monarchy as their paradigm. Gordon Wood's study shows how dependent some of the colonists were on the idea of hierarchy, and consequently monarchy. Some people in colonial society tended to be very attached to their monarch, and subscribed to the "great chain of being." Starting from God, this great chain of being determined every person's proper place in society; some were born to be rulers, others to be ruled. This type of society, though at first glance oppressive, may have actually been comforting to people. As Wood asserted, "The inequalities of such a hierarchy were

acceptable to people because they were offset by the great emotional satisfactions of living in a society in which everyone, even the lowliest servant, counted for something."[13] Even those at the bottom of the hierarchy had a place to exist in society. Equality would have been unheard of by the elite of society. Surely, they must have felt that they were meant to rule, while those below them were meant to be ruled This, of course, may not be what all colonists believed, but it is a generalized version of colonial society.

We find a peculiar example of the adoration of hierarchy in a newspaper article discussing a funeral of a member of the nobility.[14] The article has an extensive list of everyone in the funeral procession, and was even written in pictograph form. From the Knight Marshal, down to the yeoman guard, the funeral procession contained a mini-hierarchy. The fact that the colonists printed this in a newspaper attests to the fact that they too were very interested in seeing hierarchy demonstrated in such a dramatic way. Of course, it is hard to determine what exact audience this article was intended for. Some may have felt disgusted by the space lost to such a frivolous story.

Approval of hierarchy may be seen by how much the American elite aped the nobility of England. There was no structure of nobility in the American colonies, but this did not prevent the wealthy from creating a make-shift type of their own. A gentleman class of elites grew in the colonies which looked very much like an aristocracy, or gentry.[15] The distinction of being called a gentleman belonged to this upper tier of society (similar to distinctive titles used by the nobility).

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[13]Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 19.

[14]*Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Post-Boy*, Monday, April 1772. The noble person was the Princess Dowager of Wales.

[15]According to one estimate "the proportion of taxpayers [in Philadelphia] designated as 'gentleman' or 'esquire' tripled between 1756 and 1774." Billy G. Smith, "Inequality in Philadelphia," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 41 (Oct., 1984): 645.

Gentlemen were not supposed to gain their wealth through any sort of manual labor, or through the selling of goods. Ideally, they earned their wealth through land ownership or banking ventures. They were the type of people who could afford the luxury of reading political books and staging philosophical debates. Above all, they created a large demand for luxury items, especially anything popular in English fashion.[16] Up until the eve of the revolution, the upper class used the English system as a model for proper and dignified living. In their eyes, their place atop the social ladder was appropriate because they were the most learned, and actually aided the lower sorts by providing them with the work of producing luxury goods.[17] Though the elite may have felt that they were helping those below them, their actions and opulent tastes may have cultivated moral abhorrence against them. In the colonial world luxury was often linked with lack of virtue.

Luxury versus Virtue: Another World View

While there was great deference towards the King and hierarchy, there was also great concern about the corrupting nature of power, and luxury. Much colonial rhetoric and writing was centered on this theme of virtue and vice. We can see this theme throughout different types of colonial writings–from elegant political pamphlets to bawdy broadsides. A contemporary writer of the time "confesses that he is greatly concerned for our virtue, lest we should be cajoled,

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[16]Wood, *Radicalism*, 33-35.

[17]Ibid., 35. This notion, however, is debated by Billy G. Smith in his article "Inequality in Philadelphia." He makes the point that "the demand for luxuries created few new jobs for unskilled workers or lesser artisans, the majority of the city's inhabitants."(643) The items desired by the wealthy could only be created by skilled craftsmen, and thus did not really help the poorest in colonial society.

deceived and corrupted."[18] Loss of virtue was tied to bad government, and even the downfall of great civilizations. What was important about this concern with virtue was how closely it was tied with criticizing grandiose expenditures of the wealthy. One Philadelphia man showed disdain for the wealthy when he wrote that: "The first class consists of commercial projectors: those who make enormous gains of public confidence; speculators, riotous livers, and a kind of loungers."[19] So, while there was a certain amount of awe for wealth and hierarchy, there was also plenty of resentment. Colonial society rested uneasily upon this tension between admiration for those above, and the desire to topple them down. Wealth could bring power, but it could also destroy virtue.

In the developing, bustling world of colonial American society, many traditional ideals did not die quickly. Up until the eve of the revolution, people still publically supported the King, and largely blamed the corrupt Parliament for all their woes.[20] They believed Parliament was ignoring their remonstrances, and had become a corrupted body.[21] Cherished beliefs of hierarchy

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[18]*Pennsylvania Gazette* (#2465), "Cassandra to Cato" (James Cannon wrote as Cassandra), March 20, 1776.

[19] Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 51. To help fully understand this quote, one must understand the deep-seated resentment many colonists had of "speculators", who often bought great quantities of land for cheap, and sold them far above their value.

[20] Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution,* 208. Maier argues that it was not until the colonists believed the King participated in their oppression that they were fully willing to revolt against him. For a contemporary example see *The Boston Evening Post*, Monday, October 28, 1771. A man who writes a King a public letters says that "Wicked and Designing Men" are swaying the King's decisions on matters. The work of the ministry, not the King is at fault.

[21]The story of John Wilkes in England made many believe that the Parliament was corrupt. Wilkes was elected several times to the House of Commons, but he was denied his seat each time due to a prior conviction of seditious libel. See: Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*,162-163.

and monarchy were still largely imbedded in the minds of the colonists. Even those who may not have believed in hierarchy seemed troubled by the possible lack of virtue of the English government. Before the revolution could begin, the world view for many had to change. How could a group of dependent colonists dare defy their royal motherland? It was from England that many were able to find logic and reason behind the revolution.

Influences on the Revolutionary Generation

Events that occurred in England in the late 1600s and early 1700s greatly influenced the way the American colonists felt about government. The beheading of King Charles I, the Long Parliament and the Glorious Revolution all generated radical thinkers and radical literature. The fall of King Charles I brought about the Levelers and the New Model Army, both of which bred radically democratic ideas.[22] Once the monarchy was restored, radical elements dissipated a bit until the Glorious Revolution of 1688. King James II's forced removal from the throne, by Parliament, further demonstrated the people's power to dictate who should rule them It is from these two generations of strife that we find most literary and political influences on the colonists. Three influences cannot be discounted: the politics of the Whigs, the writings from *Cato's Letters*, and John Locke's *Second Treatise on Government.*

The Whigs

The Whigs in England helped to bring about a national discussion about liberty and freedom, and questioned the power of absolute monarchy. The Whigs rose to prominence mostly

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[22]We see in the revolutionary literature references especially to the New Model Army, who proposed more democratic ideals in the army, like the election of officers. For more information on the New Model Army and Levelers see: Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books), 1972.

during the late 1600s and the Exclusionary crisis in England.[23] During this time, the more radical elements of society wanted to "exclude" James II from ascending to the throne. He was a known Catholic, and his beliefs chafed against those in society who were afraid of "popery." The Whigs' struggle to keep James II from becoming king ultimately failed, but they did not allow this defeat to silence them. During the years leading up to the Glorious Revolution the Whigs took part in a "war of words" against Tories and other loyalists who supported the crown.[24] Their arguments published in newspapers and pamphlets were often little more than mudslinging, but there were also speeches about liberty and proper duties of government. The eventual downfall of King James II led to a lull in radical action by the Whigs, but their contributions to the Glorious Revolution, and to the later American Revolution cannot easily be denied.

The Glorious Revolution became the golden age for the Whigs. In the years after, they reflected upon it as their ultimate victory. As Pauline Maier points out, "Real Whigs were in fact the staunchest defenders of England's eighteenth century establishment, the legitimacy of which rested on the people's right to replace tyrannical monarchs as practiced in 1688."[25] During the late 1700s, Whigs looked to this golden age as a template for proper political rule and political change. Actions of government and how the people revolted against government were to be tested against the standards of the Glorious Revolution.

One's initial reaction to this backward orientation might be that the Whigs sounded rather conservative. After all, conservatism often revolves around returning to some "golden age." It

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[23]Melinda S. Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 4.

[24]Zook, *Radical Whigs*, 6.

[25]Maier, *From Radicalism to Revolution,* 29.

has even been pointed out that the colonists "revolted not against the English Constitution but on behalf of it."[26] The Americans wanted to preserve a document that had been known for its protection of individual liberties–liberties which Parliament and the king were denying to the people. Despite this clinging to the past, however, the ideas espoused by the Whigs did help to make the revolution radical. The ideas promoted by Whig Ideology were very different from traditional conservatism. The Whigs may have been looking toward some better age in England's history, but they were using lessons from the past to help create a better government in their present time.

The Whig party itself had a rather complicated ideology about government and revolution. People had a right to revolt, but only as a very last resort, after all measures were taken to reconcile the government and the needs of the people. Inherent in their belief was resistance to revolt (hence the title of Maier's book). The colonists seemed to follow Whig logic through their extensive defense and cautious nature toward the revolution. It is clear through various pamphlets and papers that the colonists felt that they had exercised every possible avenue of reconciliation with the British government. The laundry list of complaints against the King in the Declaration of Independence is an example of how the people used every means available to reconcile the disputes. Based upon Whiggish beliefs, the colonists theoretically had a strong case for revolting against the King. The British government had been unresponsive to the needs of the people and the people had tried their best to gain his attention. The Americans were ripe to latch on to Whig ideology, or as Wood said, "ideas of radical Whiggism with their heightened language

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[26]Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic: 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 10.

of intense liberalism and paranoic mistrust of power were found to be a particularly meaningful way of expressing the anxieties Americans felt."[27] The Americans viewed the Whig ideology as justifying and supporting their revolt against England. We see here the foundation not only for the justification for revolt, but also for greater democracy. The colonists, following Whig ideas, demanded a more responsive government. Whig ideology permeated many of the sources the colonists turned to for inspiration, including some very influential literary pieces.

Literary Influences

Following in the vein of Whig thought, we find *Cato's Letters*. The origin of *Cato's Letters* seems quite humble after considering how important they were in shaping the minds of the revolutionaries. Fifty years before the first shots of the American revolution were fired, two British journalists challenged the king and parliament through numerous newspaper editorials.[28] Collectively, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon wrote these pieces under the pseudonym Cato. The chief subject of the letters was the importance of guarding freedom and liberty. It was perhaps their fiery, yet logical, rhetoric which attracted the interests of the colonists in America. Their discussions of public virtue, of the corruption of government officials, and of the need to defend essential liberties rang true with the colonists.

It is sometimes difficult to ascertain the degree to which people are affected by political

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[27]Gordon Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 17.

[28]Most of the letters were written from 1720 to 1724. *Cato's Letters* began as a series of comments about a financial scheme involving the South Sea Company. Apparently the company had gone bankrupt for questionable reasons, and the government covered the company's ill money-making schemes from the public. John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and other Important Subjects, Vol. 1,* ed. Ronald Hamowy (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), xx.

writings. One way to gauge the effectiveness of a message is to determine how widespread the idea was published and generally disseminated among the common population. Bernard Bailyn, an authority on colonial pamphlets, said that *Cato's Letters* were "quoted in every colonial newspaper from Boston to Savannah, and referred to repeatedly in the pamphlet literature. . . Trenchard and Gordon ranked with the treatises of Locke as the most authoritative statement of natural liberty."[29] Another study stated that upwards of thirty-seven percent of colonial libraries and catalogues listed *Cato's Letters* among its inventory up to five years prior to the revolution.[30] The *Letters* probably served two functions for the American colonists. For one, they would have reassured the colonists that they were not merely paranoid about corruption in England. "Cato" cites numerous instances of corrupt officials having undue influence over the king, and the increasing degradation of British society. The *Letters* would have also served as a battle cry for the Americans to fight for their liberty and freedom. These two thoughts together would have inflamed the minds of the colonists. Through the *Letters*, the colonists may have believed that England was too corrupt to see how oppressive its measures were. The only option was to fight to prevent the "virtual enslavement" of the people.

Many of *Cato's Letters* called for people to stand up against ministers who misled the country and king. Letter No. 13, "The Arts of Misleading the People by Sounds" resonated with this theme. This letter gave historic examples of Kings misled by plotting ministers. King Charles I was deceived by the Earl of Stratford and Archbishop Laud, Charles II by pensionary

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[29]Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 36.

[30]David Lundberg and Henry F. May, "The Enlightened Reader in America," *American Quarterly* 28 (1976): 279. In this study, over half of the libraries researched were public libraries.

parliaments, and King James II by "popish" influences and sycophants.[31] This shows a pattern of ministers misguiding their monarch in recent British history. At the time of the American Revolution, this idea would have rung true with the colonists who believed that ministers (like Grenville) were responsible for the oppressive acts forced upon them by the Parliament and the king.

The most important portion of this letter began when the author stated the people's duty to check these corrupt officials. It is argued in the *Letter* that "every private subject has a right to watch the steps of those who would betray their country."[32] Furthermore, it is the judgment of the people which counts more than judgment of higher officials: "In short, the people often judge better than their superiors, and have not so many biases to judge wrong."[33] These statements would have lent support to the colonists who revolted against corrupt ministers in the colonies, and would have justified their criticism of the English government. One more theme is found in this letter that is of some importance. The author claims that people do not tend to rebel unless they are given reason to.[34] This statement places the blame for revolt squarely on the government, not on the people. It is the duty of the people to judge their government and to try to oust corrupt officials. This theory probably would have been very attractive to the American colonists as they were attempting to justify their revolt.

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[31]John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, *Cato's Letters or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and other Important Subjects, Vol. 1,* ed. Ronald Hamowy (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1995), 101.

[32]Ibid.,103.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 104.

Cato's Letters, though an important influece, were only one of many radical influences on the colonists. Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* was also highly influential on the revolutionary generation. Modern readers might interpret Locke's ideas as being rather conservative, but at the time they could be interpreted quite radically. Within his treatise, Locke actually defended the right of the people to revolt against a government that does not suit the needs of the people. Locke wrote:

> Whensoever therefore the *legislative* shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, *endeavour to grasp* themselves, *or put into the hands of any other an absolute power* over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people; by this breach of trust they *forfeit the power*, the people had put in their hands, for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people, who have a right to resume their original liberty.[35]

Locke essentially said that people have the right to take power away from a government once it broke its contract with the people (like not protecting property) As events leading up to the revolution accelerated , the colonists may have felt that the English government had "transgressed" its proper bounds of power. Powerful words, as noted above, may have made the colonists feel that their revolt against the monarchy was justifiable.

Another key component to Locke was his emphasis on property rights. Locke emphasized that the government's chief role was protecting property. If a government did not serve this purpose, it could ultimately be overthrown. This was Locke's chief justification for the right to revolution, and the colonists embraced this notion. The colonists could have easily seen this parallel in their own lives where various taxes were depriving them of their property without

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[35]John Locke, "Second Treatise of Government," in *Modern Political Thought: Readings from Machiavelli to Nietzshe*, ed. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1996), 378.

their consent. Locke's influence can be seen in the elite of revolutionary society, but to test its influence on society as a whole, we must find evidence of others subscribing to his tenets.[36] Though the evidence is sketchy, we do find some evidence of Locke's influence in works like the Pennsylvania Constitution, and even in the writings of Thomas Paine.[37]

Various British sources helped to shape the rhetoric and minds of colonists. This point, however, should not be overstated. It is difficult to assess how far these sources were spread in common society. What was studied and believed by a set of intellectuals in society does not always dictate what the majority of common people believed as well. There is evidence that *Cato's Letters* may have been published in a variety of colonial newspapers, and thus may have reached a broad audience with its message about corrupt English society. The most important part of these pieces is that they gave colonists a rationale to revolt. A tradition of revolt had existed in England for the past hundred years, which helped to pave a path towards more democratic government. Republicanism was a logical step from these sources of inspiration. Political ideology, however, was not the only force which guided people towards action. The realities of life for those in the lower and middle classes help to shape another dimension of radicalism during the American Revolution.

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[36]The elite influence can be seen in its more obvious way in Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. He uses Locke's "Pursuit of Life, Liberty and Property," and changed it to "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." Throughout the document, he makes overt claims about the importance of protecting property rights.

[37]The Pennsylvania Constitution stated "That the government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection and security of the people." (Section V, see p.33 for full citation). Paine stated similarly that "here to is the end of government, viz. freedom and security." *Common Sense*, 6. (See p.29 for full citation).

Societal Unrest

Thus far the discussion has focused mostly upon some literary influences, and the experience of the well-off in American colonial society. The acceptance of hierarchy and paternalism, as discussed by Wood, was mostly a construct of the wealthy elite in society. As long as the poor "knew their place" in society, the wealthy could be content to promote the status quo. The revolution, however, had the effect of politicizing the "lower sort," and the status quo would not go unchallenged. There is ample evidence that the growing gap between the rich and poor in colonial society strained relations within cities and may have aided the bitter anger shown during various riots. It is down here, in the lower or meaner sorts of society, that the revolution can be seen as more than a mere exchange of powers.

Exact figures on the proportion of the rich and poor in colonial society are difficult to find. There was no established poverty line or agencies to record those who went below it. Scholars use indirect evidence to ascertain the levels of wealth and poverty among the colonists. Gary B. Nash, in his essay "Social Change and the Growth of Prerevolutionary Urban Radicalism," used tax records and the rate of poor houses built to help determine wealth disparity in major colonial cities. In Boston, for instance, the number of "taxable" citizens declined from 3,600 in 1735 to less than 2,600 in 1771. This meant that one-third of Boston's population was too poor to pay taxes on the eve of the American revolution.[38] This decrease in the number of taxable people was not due to population changes or migrations, but was attributed to the worsening economy of the

[38]Gary B. Nash, "Social Change and the Growth of Prerevolutionary Urban Radicalism", in *The American Revolution*, ed. Alfred Young (DeKalb, Northern Illinois University Press), 9.

time.[39] We see this trend existing even into the revolution. In February of 1776 the Overseers of the Poor in Philadelphia urged the Assembly to increase taxes to fund poor houses from three-penny to six-penny.[40] This trend can be seen in most major cities throughout the colonies. The poor and the middle class were becoming worse off, and as Nash says

> Understanding that the cities were becoming centers of frustrated ambition, propertylessness, genuine distress for those in the lower strata, and stagnating fortunes for many in the middle class makes comprehensible much of the violence, protest, and impassioned rhetoric that occurred.[41]

The frustrating condition of poverty or class stagnation may have fueled the fires of revolt and made some of the riots more violent.[42] It may be contested that the riots did not carry any particular class-based tone, but it is hard to ignore the fact that there was a large body of disaffected people living in colonial society.[43] It was not a monochromatic, classless paradise as Louis Hartz and his followers proposed.[44] However, proving that poor people existed in colonial

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[39]Billy G. Smith, "Inequality in Late Colonial Philadelphia: A Note on its Nature and Growth" *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 51 (Jan. 1994), 642.

[40]Petition to the Assembly, Tuesday, February 20, 1776, *Early American Imprints*, #14999.

[41]Nash, "Social Change," 11.

[42]Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51 (Jan., 1994):17.

[43]See *From Resistance to Revolution*, 12-13. Maier does not believe that riots were particularly class-based, especially since elites often rubbed shoulders with--and led the poor and middle class in protest and revolt.

[44]Louis Hartz, "American Political Thought and the America Revolution" *American Political Science Review* (June 1952):334. Hartz echoes Alexis De Tocqueville's assessment of colonial life. Tocqueville believed that the American though of themselves as all being members of the middle class. Hartz points out that due to the lack of feudal structure in the American colonies, that no real class struggle could be found.

society is not enough to show that their poverty led to a revolutionary impulse. Other sources help to show how being poor may have led to bitterness and violence against the status quo.

The exact reason why there was such a disparity of wealth in the colonies is difficult to assess. Billy G. Smith explores one dimension of this issue in his essay, "Inequality in Late Colonial Philadelphia." Like Nash, Smith used various tax records to help assess the wealth of the citizens of Philadelphia. He used these figures to fight assertions that the wealth gap was due to immigration of poor people to the city and the emigration of the rich to the country. The increase of wealth among the rich was due mostly to boosts in commerce before the Revolution. This increase in wealth allowed the elite of society to purchase land, the most stable commodity in colonial American. As Smith points out, " a small segment of the citizenry acquired ownership of a greater part of the community's resources during the final two decades of the colonial period."[45] This was a situation where the wealthy owned a disproportionate share of property and resources in the colony. In such conditions, it is not an enormous jump in logic to believe that the poor and middle class may have been resentful towards the powerful and wealthy elite in their society.

The unequal distribution of goods and land led to occasional shortages of food in the colonies. This led to further economic distress and inequality among the poorer sections of society. Several food riots occurred as a result of this disparity in wealth, and the anger caused by unfair trade practices.[46] These riots occurred mostly in urban areas where supply and demand did not always meet. Food riots were a commonplace event, but they became more politicized through the revolution. For instance, demands for fairer prices often coincided with boycotts of

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[45]Billy G. Smith, "Inequality in Late Colonial Philadelphia," 634.

[46]One estimate says that there were over thirty riots from 1776 to 1779. Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution," 3.

British goods.[47] Though the riots were attended by a large cross-section of the community, towards the late 1770's many became more concerned with lower class needs.[48] The riots became a venue for the lower and middle classes to become politically involved, and identify themselves with the patriot cause. As Barbara Smith has explained, "Their [rioters] actions map an immediate experience of economic distress and articulate popular ideas about economic exchange, its meaning, and the crucial issues of who might claim jurisdiction over it and through what political forms."[49] This process of demanding fair prices and more equality in the marketplace politicized these lower classes in American society. The exact role and power of the poorer in society is contested, but their presence cannot be denied. Whether they came by their own accord, or were used as pawns by elites, they joined the national discussion through riots and protests. The politicization of this stratum of society helps to shape a more radical interpretation of the revolution.

Summary of the Colonies In General

The dizzying array of influences and ideologies that shaped the American revolution can make it difficult to come to concrete conclusions. There is no way to prove how people of the 1770's thought, but written records provide important clues. From the popular and oft quoted selections from *Cato's Letters* and Locke's *Second Treatise on Government* we gain a sense of the colonists' enthusiasm for liberty. Records of protests, too, provide evidence of the concern for

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[47]Ibid., 6.

[48]Ibid.,17.

[49]Ibid., 4.

liberty and freedom. Through protest and rioting, even the lower classes of society gained a voice they had not possessed before. The American revolution helped to change old-world views about the importance of hierarchy and deference and brought the term equality into the national vocabulary. This trend of politicizing the common people helped to bring a radical tone to the American revolution. Nowhere can this be seen more clearly than in the bustling city of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia, and the Rise of Artisans

The years leading up to the Revolutionary war helped to fundamentally change society in Philadelphia. In the span of only one year (1775-1776), the state government of Pennsylvania became the most radical of any of the colonies. Artisans defeated the elites of the Penn family and other prominent Quakers to become the leaders of their diverse society. Part of their inspiration, of course, was a disaffected Englishman named Thomas Paine. The story of the shifting society in Philadelphia is intimately linked with the writings of Paine, so they share much of the same story. Following Paine's ideas, and developing a type of radical egalitarianism, the citizens of Philadelphia were able to demonstrate how radical ideas could be transformed into radical actions.

Before one can understand how the new government was radical, one must understand what the old regime was like. William Penn established the colony of Pennsylvania in 1681, and his family was still very powerful up until the time of the revolution. The state itself was run by the Assembly, but it became increasingly obvious that the average person could not have a say in the state's functions. As Eric Foner describes it,

> The Assembly, in which an inequitable distribution of seats gave control to the commercial farming counties surrounding Philadelphia while vastly under-representing the swiftly growing back country to the west, was dominated by the Quaker party.[50]

This statement meant that the farming communities often had more say in the government, despite the fact that Philadelphia had a higher percentage of inhabitants. Circumstances leading up to the revolution, however, caused a shift away from the Quakers. Part of Quaker belief was a strong disapproval of war and violence. They could not consciously support the fight for revolution. They fought for reconciliation with England, which proved to be a very unpopular argument.

The voice of the elites can be seen in a set of newspaper debates. One such newspaper campaign was launched by a man who called himself Cato (not to be confused with Trenchard and Gordon). Cato was especially adamant against writings like *Common Sense* which advocated a break with England. Though his identity is debatable,[51] we can tell through his writing that he sided with the elite Quaker party when he said "I am bold to declare and hope yet to make it evident to every honest man, that the true interest of America lies in *reconciliation* with Great-Britain, upon *constitutional principles*, and I can truly say, I wish it upon no other terms."[52] He calls for reconciliation, while insisting that the English Constitution be upheld by the colonists. This individual is probably not a Tory,[53] but he does not believe fighting in a war is the best

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[50]Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, 57.

[51]One author has identified Cato as Dr. William Smith of Philadelphia. See "Thomas Paine's Political Theories" by C.E. Merriam, *Political Science Quarterly* 14 (Sep., 1899): 389.

[52]*Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 13 1776.

[53]I believe that he is not a Tory because he does in fact demand a change in British government. He is actually adopting the moderate stance that the colonies should not have fought for independence, but for the restoration of the English Constitution.

solution. Cato and others like him probably fell out of favor because their beliefs no longer agreed with the rising artisan class in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was one of the more diverse cities among the colonies. As a port city it attracted immigrants from Europe and the other colonies, and was a temporary home to sailors, sea merchants and escaped slaves from the south. Free Blacks lived in the city and evidently appeared in some social circles with white people.[54] The vast diversity of the city was also created by the many types of religion that could be found within the city, ranging from Quaker, to Scottish-Irish Presbyterian, to Anglican. It was indeed this variety of people who contributed to the fight for a more representative state government, and supported America's independence. The Scottish-Irish Presbyterians were especially important, because a large segment of them were artisans. They were also the most wary of English power, and did not hesitate to vocalize their complaints. One source described the Scots-Irish Presbyterians as "the most God-provoking Democrats on this side of hell."[55] Their beliefs helped to influence the artisan class in general.[56] Philadelphia was not entirely unique for having a great mix of people, but few colonial cities had such diverse ethnicity or as many different religions living within small quarters. The mingling of different ideas and world views added different dimensions of radicalism to the American Revolution.

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[54]One of the radical leaders in Philadelphia was Timothy Matlack. He had a sullied reputation, and was prone to get into fights. After a fist fight with a prominent Quaker, a broadside was published to defame his name. Within it said, "Your hapless babes oft' wanted bread;/ While you, unfeeling, idled time/ With Negroes–Cuff and Warner's Prime." Though this is an obvious attack on Matlack's character, it does show that blacks were probably in contact with white circles of society, even the radical elements. See Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*,111.

[55]Eric Foner, "Tom Paine's Republic: Radical Ideology and Social Change", in *The American Revolution* ed. Alfred F. Young, 203.

[56]Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, 58.

There was a power change in Philadelphia during, and as a result of, the Revolution; but who brought about the change in government? Thomas Paine's work was incredibly influential, but we must not forget a band of radicals who presided in Philadelphia and worked by his side. Foner identifies eight men who helped to shape the Pennsylvania government: Benjamin Rush, Timothy Matlack, Christopher Marshall, James Cannon, David Rittenhouse, Owen Biddle, Thomas Young, and Charles Wilson Peale all contributed to the radical cause in Philadelphia.[57] What is so interesting about this group of men is how very different they were in their personal lives. Benjamin Rush, for example, was a devout Presbyterian, while Matlack was thrown out of the Quaker church for failure to pay debts and other immoral behavior.[58] Despite their differences, however, they all played an important role in helping to politicize the artisans and working class. James Cannon, for instance, often wrote under the pseudonym Cassandra in defense of American liberties. In rebuttal to a piece written by the aforementioned Cato, Cannon (Cassandra) said that he was "always ready to defend his rights at the risque of his life, and prefers present war to future slavery, being conscious that a great continent will be much happier with the one than the other."[59] Here Cannon defended his beliefs, and the beliefs of other radicals, in a public forum. These leaders were often in the company of artisans, or were artisans themselves.[60]

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[57]Ibid., 109. Foner says that "As a group, these men were of modest wealth, who stood outside the merchant elite and had exerted little political influence in Philadelphia prior to 1776." Young and Peale were outsiders who had just recently moved to the colonies, so they were not entrenched in any particular power there. Matlack was particularly popular among the lower class, probably because he indulged in some of their past times like cock fights. Marshall and Rush are the two odd ones in the group, because they were fairly wealthy. Marshall was a retired druggist and a Quaker, while Rush was a doctor. Both, however, ascribed to egalitarian ideals.

[58]Ibid.,109-112.

[59]*Pennsylvania Gazette* (#2464), March 13th 1776.

[60]Rittenhouse and Cannon were both watchmakers, and Dr. Rush had a large clientele of artisans.

They spoke for artisans' needs (like encouraging home manufacture), and helped to crystalize them as a political entity.[61] The growing power of the artisans helped to bring about the dramatic change in Pennsylvania's government.

The dramatic story of how the power change took place is rather complicated. As discussed before, many citizens of Philadelphia felt under-represented in their state government. It was controlled by elite Quaker farmers, and was not very responsive to workers in the city. By April 1776 the demand for a different governmental regime caught the attention of radical newspaper writers. Tom Paine, writing as "The Forester" defended a change in Pennsylvania's Constitution when he said:

> The Constitution of Pennsylvania hath been twice changed through the [illegible] of former proprietors; surely, the people, whose right, power and property is greater than that of any single man, may make such alterations in their mode of government as the change of times and things require.[62]

With the aid of Paine's writings (*Common Sense* had been published earlier that year), the radicals in Philadelphia were able to fight for a new governmental body. By June 18, 1776 Philadelphia radicals created the Committee of Safety, and essentially took over as the governing body.[63] The Committee had several goals, one of which was to increase the pool of enfranchised people within the city, including members of the militia. From there, the committee supported a new constitution, just as Paine advocated. This constitution had an intimate tie with Paine, because it was based on a model he proposed in *Common Sense*. Perhaps some discussion of Paine and *Common Sense* is necessary before we can fully understand the unique government that was

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[61]Foner, *Tom Paine*, 117.

[62]*Pennsylvania Gazette* (#2467), "Letter I to Cato," April 3, 1776.

created in Philadelphia.

Tom Paine, *Common Sense*, and Philadelphia

> My Motive and object in all my political works, beginning with *Common Sense*, the first work I ever published, have been to rescue man from tyranny and false systems and false principles of government, and enable him to be free.
>
> -Tom Paine

One would only have to read a few paragraphs in *Common Sense* to understand how deeply Paine must have felt about rescuing man from tyranny and other evils of absolute government. He had experienced the oppression of the crown while living in England for the first thirty-seven years of his life. Before writing this seminal piece, he had lived a rather difficult existence in England. Paine was born in a household of minimal means, but was still able to obtain a few years of formal education. His first occupation was his father's trade as a staymaker (corset maker). Later in his life he traveled to London and surrounding areas and became an excise officer.[64] In this position he witnessed governmental corruption, and felt the brunt of the people's anger and anxiety about paying hefty taxes. Paine said that his position gave him the opportunity to "see into the numerous and various distresses which the weight of taxes even at that time occasioned."[65] While living in the city, he was able to attend scientific lectures and meetings, which were usually popular with those of the artisan class. It was in this social circle that Paine became acquainted with Benjamin Franklin, and most likely developed some of his ideas about scientific rationalism.[66] Before he departed for America, Tom Paine wrote his first pamphlet entitled "The Case of the Officers of the Excise," which essentially complained about

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[64]Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America*, 2-7. These pages cover the basic events of Tom Paine's life in England.

[65]Foner, 4.

[66]Ibid.,14-15.

poor wages and work conditions for excise officers. With a failed marriage, the loss of his job, and a letter of introduction from Ben Franklin, Paine left England and arrived in Philadelphia in 1774. The lessons he learned while struggling through the ranks of English life profoundly affected his world view, and added an element of raw anger in his plea for complete independence of the colonies.

Common Sense was published two years after Paine arrived in America. It only took him that short amount of time to establish himself as an editor of one of Pennsylvania's newspapers and to become well acquainted with his fellow artisans. He was friends with many of the radical men discussed earlier, especially Rush who urged him to write *Common Sense*, and Rittenhouse who was probably one of the few people to read the original manuscript. The events at Lexington and Concord seemed to have pushed Paine to write about a complete separation of the colonies from England (not just to censure Parliament). As Paine said, "No man was a warmer wisher for a reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775, but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England."[67] It is certainly debatable whether Paine really changed his mind only because of Lexington/Concord, but it does help to give a certain sense of reasonableness to his argument (in an argument that is often punctuated with passionate statements). Some key points from *Common Sense* should be understood, especially because they proved to be popular among the people and helped to shape the form of government in Pennsylvania.

Those who supported the crown would have been outraged to read *Common Sense*. It passionately denied the power of the king, with arguments from the biblical to the worldly. There

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[67]Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* in *Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Citadel Press) 1969, 25.

was essentially an argument to fit anyone's world view. Paine, though a deist himself, used passages from the bible to show how monarchy was abhorred even by God.[68] In this way he was able to draw in some of his religious audience to the side of fighting monarchy. He also appealed to the diverse people living in the colonies. As Paine aptly pointed out, not everyone in the colonies was from England, so it was absurd to call it a Mother nation to everyone. This idea would have especially appealed to those in Pennsylvania, where a large number of citizens were of German, Scotch, and Irish descent.[69] Paine was able to appeal to different groups in the colonies to gain support for his chief purpose: to show that the king (not just the ministry) was despotic, and that the colonies could survive and thrive without England.

As noted by other scholars, the colonists were reluctant for a long time to blame the King for the growing conflict between England and the colonies.[70] The transition from purely blaming a corrupt ministry to blaming the King and monarchy was especially difficult. Even in the midst of the growing conflict in Boston in 1770, one author wrote "Maxims for Patriots" that included "A determination to support his present majesty and his family, against the pretender and all his adherents."[71] Here we can see the author blaming problems on a "pretender," probably the ministry. Six years later we find popular support of Paine's disdain of Kings and monarchy.

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[68]Paine discusses the story of the Jews demanding a King to help judge and rule over them. In the story, Samuel refused to become King because God was supposed to rule over all people (God said to Samuel "they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, THAT I SHOULD NOT REIGN OVER THEM.") This is supposed to show that God disapproves of monarchy. Paine, *Common Sense*, 11.

[69]Paine claimed that "Not one third of the inhabitants, even of this province [Pennsylvania], are of English descent." Paine, 20.

[70]Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 208.

[71]"Maxims for Patriots", from the *Massachusetts Spy*, Tuesday, August 7, 1770.

Thomas Paine was completely unambiguous about his opinion of the monarchy. A complete break with England was necessary, not just an admonishment of the ministry. As Paine passionately stated, "but if the whole continent must take up arms, if every man must be a soldier, 'tis scarcely worth our while to fight against a contemptible ministry only."[72] Any partial break with England would not be enough, and would in fact put the colonies in a weakened position. It was perhaps Paine's bold assertion on this point which made him popular with many colonists.

What was perhaps less supported by the colonists in general (excluding Pennsylvania) was Paine's design for the ideal government. His proposal for a unicameral government offended the sensibilities of many of the revolutionary leaders, including John Adams.[73] In *Common Sense*, Paine gave some recommendations as to how the colonists could organize their governments. According to Paine's plan, the people would elect representatives to a one-body legislature. There was no lower and upper chambers, no senate and house–only a singular body which was truly representative of the people. The President of the nation would not be directly elected by the people, but chosen by members of the congress. In a round-robin fashion, each colony (or state) would take turns having a representative from their colony as President.[74] In this way, no one colony could dominate others, and power of the government could be checked by the people.

Paine showed his distrust of government in general when he made sure to point out that part of the government's function was "Securing freedom and property to all men, and above all

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[72]*Common Sense*, 24.

[73]Foner, *Tom Paine*, 79.

[74]*Common Sense*, 28. Of course, this brings up objections to the overall radicalism of Paine's ideas. Why was it that he did not trust the common people to elect a president? There are no easy answers, but at the time that idea may have been just out of reach–even for the most radical in society.

things, the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience."[75] The government was supposed to protect property (a very Lockean notion), and protect freedom of religion (for Paine this probably meant the freedom to practice no established religion as well). He also reiterated that America was to have no King; Law would be the rule of the land. This perception of government was met with mixed reaction, and helped to give Paine the reputation for creating powerful rhetoric, but not being very good at creating plausible governing bodies. Despite this perception, Pennsylvania took the bold step in modeling their state government upon Paine's ideas. Here we can see ideas not only accepted by elite scholars in society, but by the middle class as well. Going beyond ideas, the Pennsylvania Constitution was an example of how radical ideas translated into actions.

Returning to Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776

A short detour into Paine's most celebrated work in America leads us to analyze the new government created in Pennsylvania, and how radical thoughts permeated society. The Quaker party had a firm grasp on the state government up until the battles at Lexington and Concorde. This obvious sign of aggression made many unsympathetic to the state government's stance of supporting reconciliation over fighting. The ruling party, however, did not disappear without a fight. As a last ditch effort, they even attempted to support the Continental Congress, and provisionally support the war against England.[76] By spring of 1776, however, the people of Pennsylvania were beginning to support the extra-legal entity of the Committee of Safety in Philadelphia. Radical forces were overcoming even moderate forces in the city. John Dickinson,

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[75]Paine, 29.

[76]Charles Henry Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia, 1901), 191.

author of the famous *Farmer Letters*, was the leader of moderates in the Assembly before they lost power. His continual support of reconciliation, and of monarchy proved to be out of touch with what the people believed to be a righteous cause.[77] September of 1776 brought about the end of the Assembly, and the construction of the new Pennsylvania Constitution. The elements of this constitution help us to see where Paine's brand of radicalism helped to influence the actions of radicals in Philadelphia.

The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 was either highly praised or given the worst damnation. By its opponents, it was called a "Villanous Constitution" and a "Damned constitution." A number of citizens met on November 2nd and voiced their disapproval of the constitution noting, that "By our preference of a mixed and tempered legislature to that established by the Convention, we declare, that we wish for a government that shall not suffer the poor and the rich alternately to be the prey of each other."[78] This is an interesting comment because it shows a certain social tension inherent in the new constitution. Opponents also called for a "mixed" legislature in this statement, not the unicameral structure implemented by the new constitution. The constitution itself was partially written by Cannon and Rittenhouse, so the radical influence upon the document outweighed the more moderate or conservative. It is not difficult to understand why the Pennsylvania Constitution was unpopular with the entrenched elites and even the moderates in the colony.

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[77]Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country, and Class*: *The Philadelphia Militia and "Lower Sort" During the American Revolution, 1775-1783*, (London: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 84.

[78]Samuel Howell, and Jonathan B. Smith, "At a Meeting of a Number of the Citizens of Philadelphia, and the Philosophical Society's Hall, November the 2nd, *Early American Imprints Collection*: #15019.

It is quite clear that the model of government proposed in the Constitution closely echoed what Paine wrote about in *Common Sense*. Pennsylvania's Constitution called for one body of representatives (not divided into different houses) to represent the people. It also proposed a rather complex way of deciding on the executive body of the state. Members of the supreme executive body (there would be twelve members on the committee) would rotate every three years to include citizens from all around Pennsylvania. As the Pennsylvania Constitution states: "By this mode of election and continual rotation, more men will be trained to public business."[79] This would, arguably, lead to a more diverse governing body. It is also very similar to what Paine spoke about in *Common Sense*. He too called for a single legislating body, and the rotation of power to elect members of the executive branch. As Paine said:

> Each congress to sit and to choose a President by the following method. When the delegates are met, let a colony be taken from the whole thirteen by lot, after which let the Congress choose (by ballot) a President from out of the delegates of that province. In the next Congress, let a colony be taken from a lot of twelve only, omitting that colony from which the president was taken in the former Congress, and so proceeding on till the whole thirteen shall have had their proper rotation.[80]

This is a rather confusing system, but it is exactly what the framers of the Pennsylvania Constitution chose to implement as their model of governance. We see here an explicit link between a radical pamphlet like *Common Sense,* and actions of those who created a more radical government in Pennsylvania.

Beyond choosing this model of government, the Pennsylvania Constitution is also noteworthy for its concern for the needs of the middle and lower classes. Indeed, it was a direct blow to the ruling Quaker elite when the preamble to the Constitution said that the state would

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[79]*The Constitution of Pennsylvania*, Section 19, *Early American Imprints* #14979.

[80]Paine, *Common Sense*, 28.

rule "without partiality for or prejudice against an particular class, sect or denomination of men whatever."[81] Some might say that this statement could actually go against the lower classes (no class was supposed to be preferred), but in the context of 1776 Pennsylvania, it was probably supposed to be leveled against the ruling elite. The Constitution also addressed one of the key concerns of the middle or lower class: the right to vote. The new constitution widened suffrage considerably. The only requirements were that the person was a freeman who was twenty-one, had resided in the state for one year, and paid public taxes. Even this tax requirement could be bi-passed because the "sons of freeholders . . . shall be entitled to vote although they have not paid taxes."[82] These provisions still left some elements of society disenfranchised (like women), but taking away property restrictions still created a larger pool of voters. Pennsylvania took a step toward creating a more representative government, and thus espoused the type of ideas that helped to make the revolution radical.

A discussion of the Pennsylvania Constitution would not be complete without acknowledging parts where radical ideas were not incorporated. Some of the more radical elements of society, like those in the army, wanted to insert a clause about the harmfulness of accumulating too much land. As Steven Rosswurm stated, "accumulations of too much wealth would be destructive of the material basis of the independence and liberty of most in society."[83]

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[81]*The Constitution of Pennsylvania*, Preamble, 4.

[82]The Constitution of Pennsylvania, Section Six, 11.

[83]Rosswurm, 106. The clause was "the government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people, nation or community; and not for the particular emolument or advantage or any single man, family, or set of men, who are part only of that community; and that community hath an indubitable, unalienable and indefeasible right to reform, alter or abolish government in such manner as shall be by that community judged most conducive to the public weal.

Though the emerging middle class had been leaders in the radical movement, they could not carry their argument to the logical end of egalitarian politics. This shows the limits of the radical cause in Philadelphia. Despite this setback, the Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 proved to be one of the most radical and forward thinking model of government in the colonies. It was largely inspired by artisans, the middle class, and the Associators. The common people were given a greater say in the formulation of their government.

The Pennsylvania Associators

Radicalism in Philadelphia, along with the Constitution of 1776 would not have been popular if not for the Associators, the men enlisted in the Pennsylvania militia. A militia may not seem to be a fertile place for the cultivation of democracy, republicanism and egalitarianism, but in fact all these ideas flourished among the Associators. The militia in Pennsylvania was actually quite reminiscent of the New Model Army in England. Both military bodies created loose models of governance and fought for greater suffrage.[84] Consequently, both armies also proved to be more egalitarian than mainstream society was prepared for. Not all measures supported by the Associators were adopted, but they still beared a great influence on the political situation in Pennsylvania.

The Associators was a group comprised of diverse members of the Philadelphia community. Some were of the upper strata, but a majority were from the middle and lower

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[84]The Associators created committees of elected officers, which petitioned the Assembly (until its demise), and drafted letters of concern and complaint to local newspapers. The election process within the Associators was more democratic than the general election rules prior to the new Constitution. The New Model Army of England, similarly, created committees (of elected officers), and issued their own directives for the new government. See *The Head of Proposals* for a documentary source of the New Model Army. Also see Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), for further accounts about the New Model Army, and a possible Leveler influence.

classes.[85] By the end of January 1776 the "average wealth of the committee [The Committee of Privates was the elected ruling body of the Associators] dropped and the number of artisans increased."[86] The artisans managed the Associators, and helped to bring the concerns of the poorer and middle class of society to the state government. Concerns of the poorer in society were able to gain attention through the militia.

One way the Associators influenced the Pennsylvania government was through its demand of suffrage for its members. Within the Associators' internal structure they removed property restrictions on voting, and even allowed immigrants to vote. These ideas influenced the creation of the Pennsylvania Constitution, and led to fewer property restrictions in that work. Taking away property restriction in army and state elections made it possible for a wider pool of people to vote. Democratic action within the Associators even affected the type of clothing they wore. A rule created early in the formation of the Associators stated that they would wear a plain "hunting shirt." This shirt could be afforded by even the poorest members and "would level all distinctions" in the ranks.[87] Even the mode of dress was democratized by members of the Associators.

In an interesting Petition, written by the Committee of Privates, one can see further influence and concern of the lower sorts. It reads,"your petitioners [Associators], do pray this Honourable Board to appoint or recommend none [as officers in the Continental service], but such as have signed the articles of association . . . the association is principally composed of

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[85]Rosswurm, 50.

[86]Ibid., 64.

[87]Ibid., 52.

tradesmen and others, who earn their living by their industry."[88] Here, the author was making sure to identify the Associators as members of the working or artisan class, and also suggested that only those in this group should be promoted to officer. This is stepping away from a common view that officers should only be of a highly educated class. The Associators fostered this idea of greater equality among their ranks, and translated this idea to demanding a more powerful voice in the government.

One area where we can clearly see the Associators influencing the Pennsylvania Constitution is in a section pertaining to the taxing of Quakers and other conscientious objectors of the war. The Associators argued that those who did not fight to protect Pennsylvania and the colonies, should have to pay a tax to help support the militia and their families.[89] Because of their influence, this idea was placed inside the new constitution. Section VIII states that "Nor can any man who is conscientiously scrupulous of bearing arms, be justly compelled thereto, if he will pay such equivalent."[90] This allowed those who, for religious reasons, could not fight in the war to still aid in the conflict. Though this is but one small example, it shows how a group of common men were able to influence the government. By being responsive to the Associators, the new Pennsylvania government showed its dedication to the principles of democracy, and greater representation of the people. Incorporating the needs of the common people into government served as a component of radicalism in Philadelphia.

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[88] "To the Honourable Committee of Safety of the Province of Pennsylvania: The Petition of the Committee of Privates of the Association, belonging to the City and Liberties of Philadelphia", *Pennsylvania Gazette* (2460), February 14, 1776.

[89]Rosswurm, 59.

[90]The Constitution of Pennsylvania, Section VIII.

Concluding Remarks About Radicalism in Philadelphia, and in the American Revolution

Like no other colony, Pennsylvania embodied radicalism in both the realms of theory and practice. Radical thinkers like Paine inspired the "lower sorts" within the colony to support both the American Revolution and the internal revolution of Pennsylvania. The events in Philadelphia give us a unique glimpse of how ideas led to actions. Philadelphia also provides an ideal case study for testing a hybrid model of progressive and Neo-Whig beliefs about the American Revolution. This dual revolution was not found in the other colonies, and thus they did not have the same level of radical tendencies. From Philadelphia, we also have a reminder that the revolution was supposed to be an ongoing process. As Benjamin Rush reflected upon the revolution in 1786, "Most of the distresses of our country, and of the mistakes which Europeans have formed of us, have arisen from a belief that the American Revolution is over. This is so far from being the case that we have only finished the first act of the great drama."[91] The revolution, begun in the 1770s, had to continue for years to come. The fight against England was not seen just as a war, it was a catalyst for on-going social *and* political change.

The Pennsylvania Constitution of 1776 shows an intriguing link between radical thought and radical action. The model for the legislature, as proposed by Paine, was adopted by Pennsylvania. Its provision for a one-house legislature did not place representatives above the common people, but made them come truly from the people. Ideals of democracy and republicanism influenced the creation of the Constitution, and thus made it a quintessential pieces of radicalism during the American Revolution.

In Philadelphia, and the other colonies, the people were inspired to act by many different

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[91]Benjamin Rush, "Letter to Richard Price, May 25, 1786" in *Letters of Benjamin Rush: Volume I : 1761-1792*, ed. L.H. Butterfield (London: American Philosophical Society, 1951), 388.

sources. An important tradition of mob action and wariness of absolute power was inherited (ironically) from England. Literary sources, from the time of the Glorious Revolution, affirmed the colonists' views that their fight against the Crown was justified. Even those who were less literate were able to access some of these ideas from newspapers, and pamphlets. From the sources available, we begin to see a picture of a society in major flux: not just one breaking bonds from an oppressive government. The articulation of freedom and liberty was not just hollow rhetoric; they were radical ideas that could not exist before the bulwarks of hierarchy and monarchy were torn down. Both political and social forces led people in revolt against what they believed to be an oppressive government. Radical ideas led to radical action and helped to make the American Revolution truly revolutionary.

Note About Philadelphia Sources

The literature available for studying colonial Philadelphia (including the Associators) is quite diverse. The primary source I found the most useful for the study of colonial Philadelphia is the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, from 1775 through 1776. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* was ideal because it had a wide circulation, and published writings of both radicals (e.g. Paine), and conservatives (e.g. Cato). It contained the interesting exchange between the Forester and Cato about what type of government was best for Pennsylvania and America. "Cato" began writing a series of letters to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in the spring of March of 1776 in opposition to *Common Sense*. The anonymous writer criticized every part of Paine's pamphlet–from its unicameral legislature, to its interpretations of religion. In a particularly bold statement Cato stated that "I am confident that nine-tenths of the people of Pennsylvania yet abhor the doctrine."[92] Paine, did not let Cato's letters go unchallenged. Writing as the Forester, Paine defended *Common Sense* and the Pennsylvania Constitution, and fought for a complete break away from England. In addition to these (and many other) political exchanges, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* also contained petitions from Associators, and various legal proceedings of the local government .[93] If one needed to find information about nearly any aspect of colonial Philadelphia life, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* would

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[92] "Letter II,"*Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 13, 1776 (#2464). It should be noted that appearing on the page directly following this particular letter there is along statement urging American to remember what England had done to them. The dramatic pleas of "Remember the Shrieks and Cries of the Women and Children"; and "Remember the Act for screening and encouraging your Murderers" would have evoked powerful emotions in the reader. This statement may have been placed directly after Cato's Letter on purpose, to help draw the reader back into the cause against England.

[93]The only problem with using this source, was the difficulty of finding readable copies on the microfiche form. The articles were transcribed using the utmost care, and attempted to keep all the old spelling and punctuation found in documents from the 1770's

be an invaluable resource.

The other most useful primary source was Tom Paine's *Common Sense*. As other authors have noted, Paine's writing style is easy to read and appealed to a broad audience. Paine steered away from using fancy prose or flowery language and made his writings accessible to more than just the educated elite. The fact that it was re-published numerous times throughout the revolutionary periods shows how popular it was. Even George Washington noted in correspondence that "I find that *Common Sense* is working a powerful change there in the minds of many men."[94] Its popularity with a broad class of people, and its forceful message against monarchy makes it particularly suitable when discussing radicalism in the colonies, and in Philadelphia.

Historical monographs proved to be invaluable to the study of revolutionary Philadelphia. For this section, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America,* by Eric Foner; *Arms, Country and Class* by Steven Rosswurm, and *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania* by Charles Lincoln were particularly useful. They each gave thorough accounts of the events that unfolded in Philadelphia. Among these three books, however, were slightly different attitudes towards those who fought for the new Constitution of Pennsylvania. Rosswurm and Foner praised the democratic ideals that came out from the artisans, working class, and militia. Lincoln, however, seems to have largely disapproved of the radical forces. Throughout the book, he makes claims about what could have happened if the conservative, Quaker establishment would have done one thing or another to stay in power. As Lincoln said, "The one thing needed was adequate leadership, and by neglecting this opportunity the moderate Whigs opened the door to radicalism and bigotry, a condition worse

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[94]Philip Foner, *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, 2 (editor's note).

than the oligarchy of early years."[95] By making such a statement, Lincoln shows himself as being biased against the radical forces that took over in Pennsylvania. The other two sources, however, may be too forgiving of their actions for the sake of promoting radical thoughts and democracy during that era. By comparing the sources, we can perhaps go beyond some petty biases, and see more clearly the events that took place to radicalize the government and people of Pennsylvania.

[95]Charles Lincoln, *The Revolutionary Movement in Pennsylvania*, 206.

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