

England, the Pennsylvania hinterland, and piedmont Virginia—where the enemy hardly appeared or not at all, there Tories either ran away, kept quiet, even serving in the rebel armies, or occasionally took a brave but hopeless stand against revolutionary committees and their gunmen. After the war, of course, men remembered their parts in the successful revolution in ways that make it difficult for the historian to reconstruct accurately the relationship between what they thought and what they did.

The view which I have presented of how armed force and public opinion were mobilized may seem a bit cynical—a reversion to Thomas Hobbes. True, it gives little weight to ideology, to perceptions and principles, to grievances and aspirations, to the more admirable side of the emergent American character. Perhaps that is a weakness; perhaps I have failed to grasp what really drove Bill Scott. But what strikes me most forcibly in studying this part of the Revolution is how much in essential agreement almost all Americans were in 1774, both in their views of British measures and in their feelings about them. What then is puzzling, and thus needs explaining, is why so many of these people behaved in anomalous and in different ways. Why did so many, who did not intend a civil war or political independence, get so inextricably involved in the organization and use of armed force? Why did relatively few do most of the actual fighting? Why was a dissenting fifth of the population so politically and militarily impotent, so little able to affect the outcome of the struggle? Answers to these questions cannot be found in the life of one obscure man, or in the history of one backwoods town. But microscopic study does emphasize certain features of the Revolution: the political structuring of resistance to Britain, the play of social and economic factors in carrying on that resistance by armed force, and the brutally direct effects on behavior, if not on opinions, of military power.

A Spy's View of Washington's Army, 1775

What do contemporary sources tell us about Washington's army? What follows is an eyewitness version—written by a spy. He was a New Englander named Benjamin Thompson, in the pay of the British. He was, in other words, a British patriot, who later moved to Europe, where he became famous as a scientist and philosopher known to the world as Count Rumford. As you read, note that Rumford's observations were made at about the same time that Peter Oliver interviewed William Scott (see p. 189). Do Rumford's observations seem believable to you? What do you think his attitude toward "lower-class" soldiers was? Would it surprise you to know that Washington might have agreed with most of what Rumford

says? What do you think lies behind Rumford's attempt to puncture the myth of the deadly accuracy of American riflemen? It might all be simply true, of course. But could it also reflect his desire to cause the British officials to be confident in their capacity to defeat the Americans militarily? Or could this opinion have something to do with social class? What would you suppose was the class status of the riflemen? Of Rumford?

Observations by Benjamin Thompson

Boston, November 4, 1775

... The army in general is not very badly accoutered, but most wretchedly clothed, and as dirty a set of mortals as ever disgraced the name of a soldier. They have had no clothes of any sort provided for them by the Congress (except the detachment of 1,133 that are gone to Canada under Col. Arnold, who had each of them a new coat and a linen frock served out to them before they set out), tho' the army in general, and the Massachusetts forces in particular, had encouragement of having coats given them by way of bounty for insisting. And the neglect of the Congress to fulfill their promise in this respect has been the source of not a little uneasiness among the soldiers.

They have no women in the camp to do washing for the men, and they in general not being used to doing things of this sort, and thinking it rather a disparagement to them, choose rather to let their linen, etc., rot upon their backs than to be at the trouble of cleaning 'em themselves. And to this nasty way of life, and to the change of their diet from milk, vegetables, etc., to living almost intirely upon flesh, must be attributed those putrid, malignant and infectious disorders which broke out among them soon after their taking the field, and which have prevailed with unabating fury during the whole summer.

The leading men among them (with their usual art and cunning) have been indefatigable in their endeavors to conceal the real state of the army in this respect, and to convince the world that the soldiers were tolerably healthy. But the contrary has been apparent, even to a demonstration, to every person that had but the smallest acquaintance with their camp. And so great was the prevalence of these disorders in the month of July that out of 4,207 men who were stationed upon Prospect Hill no more than 2,227 were returned fit for duty.

The mortality among them must have been very great, and to this in a great measure must be attributed the present weakness of their regiments; many of which were much stronger when they came into the field. But the number of soldiers that have died in the camp is comparatively small to those

From "Miscellaneous Observations upon the State of the Rebel Army," in Great Britain Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on the Manuscripts of Mrs. Stopford-Sackville, 2 vols. (London: H. M. Stationery Office, by Mackie, 1904-1910), Vol. II, pp. 15-18.

vast numbers that have gone off in the interior parts of the country. For immediately upon being taken down with these disorders they have in general been carried back into the country to their own homes, where they have not only died themselves, but by spreading the infection among their relatives and friends have introduced such a general mortality throughout New England as was never known since its first planting. Great numbers have been carried off in all parts of the country. Some towns 'tis said have lost near one-third of their inhabitants; and there is scarce a village but has suffered more or less from the raging virulence of these dreadful disorders. . . .

The soldiers in general are most heartily sick of the service, and I believe it would be with the utmost difficulty that they could be prevailed upon to serve another campaign. The Continental Congress are very sensible of this, and have lately sent a committee to the camp to consult with the general officers upon some method of raising the necessary forces to serve during the winter season, as the greatest part of the army that is now in the field is to be disbanded upon the last day of December.

Whether they will be successful in their endeavours to persuade the soldiers to re-enlist or not, I cannot say, but am rather inclined to think that they will. For as they are men possessed of every species of cunning and artifice, and as their political existence depends upon the existence of the army, they will leave no stone unturned to accomplish their designs.

Notwithstanding the indefatigable endeavours of Mr. Washington and the other generals, and particularly of Adjutant General Gates, to arrange and discipline the army, yet any tolerable degree of order and subordination is what they are totally unacquainted with in the rebel camp. And the doctrines of independence and levelism have been so effectually sown throughout the country, and so universally imbibed by all ranks of men, that I apprehend it will be with the greatest difficulty that the inferior officers and soldiers will be ever brought to any tolerable degree of subjection to the commands of their superiors.

Many of their leading men are not insensible of this, and I have often heard them lament that the existence of that very spirit which induced the common people to take up arms and resist the authority of Great Britain, should induce them to resist the authority of their own officers, and by that means effectually prevent their ever making good soldiers.

Another great reason why it is impossible to introduce a proper degree of subordination in the rebel army is the great degree of equality as to birth, fortune and education that universally prevails among them. For men cannot bear to be commanded by others that are their superiors in nothing but in having had the good fortune to get a superior commission, for which perhaps they stood equally fair. And in addition to this, the officers and men are not only in general very nearly upon a par as to birth, fortune, etc., but in particular regiments are most commonly neighbours and acquaintances, and as such can with less patience submit to that degree of absolute submission and subordination which is necessary to form a well-disciplined corps.

Another reason why the army can never be well united and regulated is the disagreement and jealousies between the different troops from the different Colonies; which must never fail to create dissatisfaction and uneasiness among them. The Massachusetts forces already complain very loudly of the partiality of the General to the Virginians, and have even gone so far as to tax him with taking pleasure in bringing their officers to court martials, and having them cashiered that he may fill their places with his friends from that quarter. The gentlemen from the Southern Colonies, in their turn, complain of the enormous proportion of New England officers in the army, and particularly of those belonging to the province of Massachusetts Bay, and say, as the cause is now become a common one, and the experience is general, they ought to have an equal chance for command with their neighbours.

Thus have these jealousies and uneasiness already begun which I think cannot fail to increase and grow every day more and more interesting, and if they do not finally destroy the very existence of the army (which I think they bid very fair to do), yet must unavoidably render it much less formidable than it otherwise might have been.

Of all useless sets of men that ever incumbered an army, surely the boasted riflemen are certainly the most so. When they came to the camp they had every liberty and indulgence allowed them that they could possibly wish for. They had more pay than any other soldiers; did no duty; were under no restraint from the commands of their officers, but went when and where they pleased, without being subject to be stopped or examined by any one, and did almost intirely as they pleased in every respect whatever. But they have not answered the end for which they were designed in any one article whatever. For instead of being the best marksmen in the world, and picking off every regular that was to be seen, there is scarcely a regiment in camp but can produce men that can beat them at shooting, and the army is now universally convinced that the continual fire which they kept up by the week and month together has had no other effect than to waste their ammunition and convince the King's troops that they are not really so formidable adversaries as they would wish to be thought. . . .

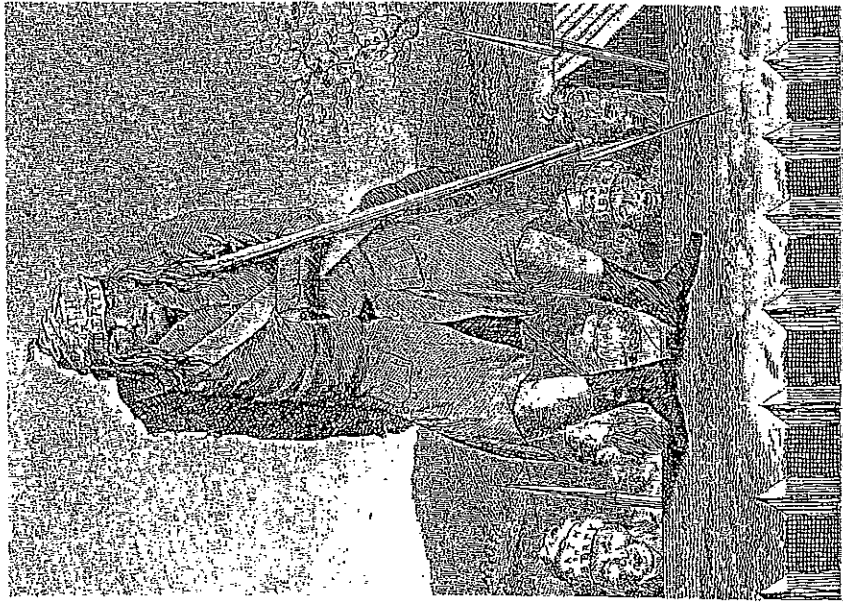
Three Views of the American Soldier

Here are three representations of the American soldier. The first is an English caricature. The second is a painting by Charles Willson Peale (a soldier himself) that shows the highest ideal the Americans had of soldierly appearance and conduct, George Washington. The Marguis de Lafayette is the center figure, and to the right is Washington's aide,

General Tench Tilghman. The third is a French painting showing two infantrymen, a rifleman, and an artilleryman. (Each is wearing a different uniform, not just because they serve in different branches of the army, but because they come from different colonies.)

As you examine these three pictures, keep these points and questions in mind. Patrick Henry's famous remark, "Give me liberty or give me death," is mocked in the British picture. But what is the effect of reversing the order of the words? Compare the clothing, stance, and the facial expression of Washington to those shown in the pictures of the merchants in Chapter 6. What kinds of class values and attitudes do you think Peale is trying to depict here? In the French picture, do the soldiers look "American" at all, or do they conform more to your image of a typical European soldier of the Napoleonic period? Or is there a mixture?

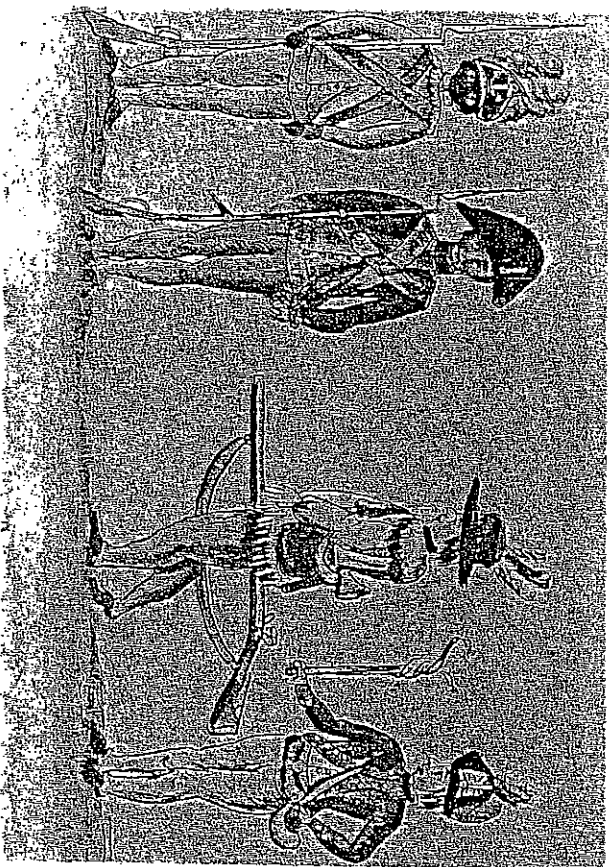
British Caricature.
Metropolitan Museum
of Art. Bequest of
Charles Allen Munn,
1924.



THE AMERICAN REFUGEE VIGN



Washington, with the Marquis de Lafayette. By the American artist Charles Willson Peale. M.E. Warren Photography/Photo Researchers.

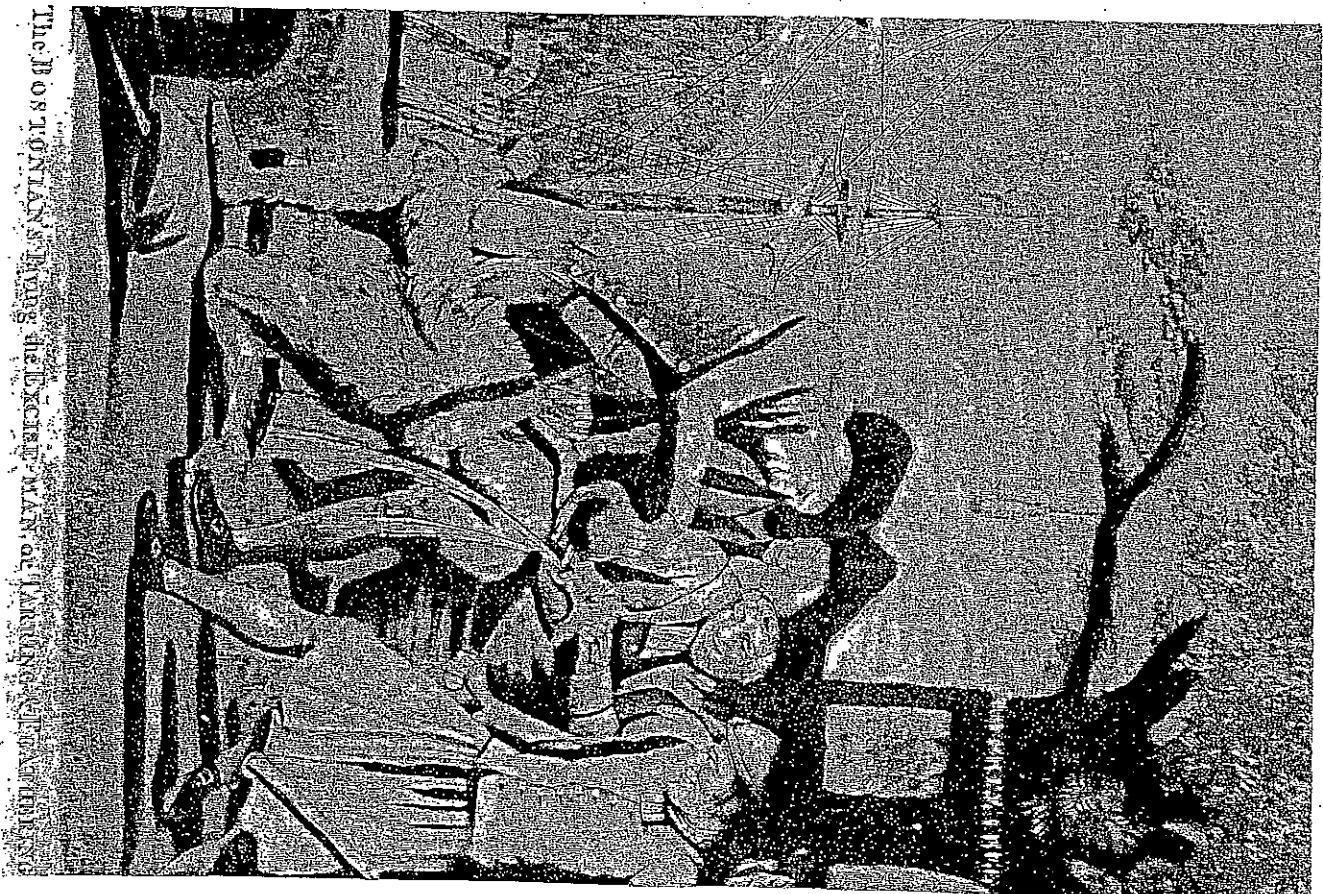


A Contemporary French Painting. Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection/Brown University Library.

Silencing the Tories

The following documents tell us something about the American treatment of Tories, who probably constituted about 20 percent of the population—potentially a powerful and dangerous force. The first is a cartoon drawn in London mocking the way the rebels treated John Malcomb, a Crown official who had tried to collect the tea tax in Boston in 1774. What do the clothes tell you about the kinds of people the British thought were in rebellion? Look at the facial features. How does the cartoonist try to convince us that John Malcomb is made of finer stuff than the men who have tarred and feathered him?

The second document is part of the letter from a Tory woman, Ann Hulton, a Bostonian, about another 1774 tarring and feathering; the third is a rebel description of a similar event in New York about a year later. Which document do you find more convincing? Taken together, do they support Shy's point about the importance of using military and quasi-military force to keep revolutionary order? Or do they hint at a rabble acting in undisciplined anger?



The BOSTONIAN Having the DIGNITY MAN of PARIS, GILFILLANING.
Library of Congress.

Ann Hulton to Mrs. Lightbody.

Boston, January 31, 1774

... But the most shocking cruelty was exercised a few nights ago, upon a poor old man, a tidesman, one Malcolm. He is reckoned creasy, a quarrel was picked with him, he was afterward taken and tarred and feathered. There is no law that knows a punishment for the greatest crimes beyond what this is of cruel torture. And this instance exceeds any other before it. He was strip stark naked, one of the severest cold nights this winter, his body covered all over with tar, then with feathers, his arm dislocated in tearing off his cloaths. He was dragged in a cart with thousands attending, some beating him with clubs and knocking him out of the cart, then in again. They gave him several severe whippings, at different parts of the town. This spectacle of horror and sportive cruelty was exhibited for about five hours.

The unhappy wretch they say behaved with the greatest intrepidity and fortitude all the while. Before he was taken, [he] defended himself a long time against numbers, and afterwards when under torture they demanded of him to curse his masters, the King, Governor, etc., which they could not make him do, but he still cried, "Curse all traitors!" They brought him to the gallows and put a rope about his neck, saying they would hang him. He said he wished they would, but that they could not, for God was above the Devil. The doctors say that it is impossible this poor creature can live. They say his flesh comes off his back in stakes.

It is the second time he has been tarred and feathered and this is looked upon more to intimidate the judges and others than a spite to the unhappy victim tho' they owe him a grudge for some things particularly. He was with Govr. Tryon in the battle with the Regulators and the Governor has declared that he was of great service to him in that affair, by his undaunted spirit encountering the greatest dangers.

Govr. Tryon had sent him a gift of ten guineas just before this inhuman treatment. He has a wife and family and an aged father and mother who, they say, saw the spectacle which no indifferent person can mention without horror.

These few instances amongst many serve to shew the abject state of government and the licentiousness and barbarism of the times. There's no majestrate that dare or will act to suppress the outrages. No person is secure. There are many objects pointed at, at this time, and when once marked out for vengeance, their ruin is certain.

The judges have only a weeks time allowed them to consider whether they will take the salaries from the Crown or no. Govr. Hutchinson is going to England as soon as the season will permit.

We are under no apprehension at present on our own account but we can't look upon our safety secure for long.

From Ann Hulton, *Letters of a Loyalist Lady* . . . 1767-1776 (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), pp. 70-72.

From the records of the Committee of Safety.

New York, December 28, 1775

The 6th of December, at Quibbletown, Middlesex County, Piscataway Township, New-Jersey, Thomas Randolph, cooper, who had publickly proved himself an enemy to his country, by reviling and using his utmost endeavours to oppose the proceedings of the Continental and Provincial Conventions and Committees, in defence of their rights and liberties; and he, being judged a person of not consequence enough for a severer punishment, was ordered to be stripped naked, well coated with tar and feathers, and carried in a wagon publickly round the town; which punishment was accordingly inflicted. And as he soon became duly sensible of his offence, for which he earnestly begged pardon, and promised to atone, as far as he was able, by a contrary behaviour for the future, he was released, and suffered to return to his house in less than half an hour. The whole was conducted with that regularity and decorum that ought to be observed in all publick punishments.

From Peter Force, ed., *American Archives: Fourth Series*, 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1837-1846), Vol. IV, p. 203.

