Patrician Leadership and the American Revolution in New England
Four Case Studies

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The first exposure most new students of American history have to problems of scholarly interpretation invariably centres on the modern chestnut "conflict or consensus." Is American history the product of a long series of battles between diametrically opposed forces reflecting a society with deep internal divisions or of a slow evolutionary liberal process of change reflecting a society in essential agreement? A general weariness with the debate seems to be setting in but the historical profession has so far been unable to formulate a new paradigm to replace the old one.

One problem bedevils both the consensus and the conflict historians of the American Revolution. Proponents of the consensual model, no matter how much they emphasize the shared experience of the revolutionaries, cannot dispel from most minds the conviction that at the very least geographic disputes between East and West, agricultural countryside and commercial urban areas, seacoast and backcountry, or river valley and uplands, split the revolutionaries. Given the wide acceptance by historians of one of these splits in most colonies, it is hard to imagine that there would not be political divisions. Yet, while the conflict historians score this basic telling point, they cannot explain what held the revolutionaries together enough to enable them to be so successful. Given internal conflict, why did the revolutionary movement not disintegrate into warring factions? Why was one insurrection, Shay's Rebellion, the only serious internal challenge to the orderly process of fighting a war and forming a nation? When this cohesion is juxtaposed with the evidence of serious divisions, we seem to be left with the conclusion that the revolutionary movement had some conflict and some consensus; enough of one to make the road from colony to nation bumpy but enough of the other to ensure a safe arrival at the destination.[1]

One of the means of resolving the conflict-consensus debate about the Revolution lies in understanding the leadership roles of a few wealthy, patrician Whigs. In the New England colonies, for example, deep divisions

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[1] This moderate view is essentially accurate. Although not dramatic, it is historical and accomodates the evidence presented by both conflict and consensus historians. See Edmund MORGAN, *The Birth of the Republic* (Chicago, 1956), pp. 4-13, 99-101, and *passim*. Morgan argues that the colonists' English background, Protestant religion, widespread ownership of property, long tradition of self-government, and love of the English constitution were sufficient to overcome regional, social, economic, and ideological differences.

existed that were serious enough to weaken the cohesiveness of society; but at critical moments in each colony's history, when events threatened to rip it apart, a wealthy patrician associated in the strongest possible sense with the colony's governing elite managed to emerge as a conciliatory unity figure who could avert the tragedy of a true civil war. Recent quantitative studies of leadership shed valuable and needed light on subtle shifts and trends that may have occurred or started in the Revolution. But one could measure ten percent drops in the social origins of leaders *ad infinitum* and still miss the crucial importance of these men whose vital statistics would not significantly affect a quantitative model.[2] For their decisive roles only a qualitative analysis will suffice.

An understanding of a basic tension in colonial New England society is crucial to this qualitative analysis. From their seventeenth-century roots as Englishmen and covenanted Puritans living in homogeneous nucleated agricultural villages, all the experience of New Englanders had taught them to prize unity and fear conflict. It is clear, however, that since at least 1700 the social structure of New England, growing more pluralistic with every decade, militated against social harmony. Immigration and emigration, the differentiation of communities ranging on a scale from old settled urban areas to new frontier towns, growing disparities in social and economic classes, acute religious ferment, and the rise of economic individualism, all combined to shatter the organic unity within each colony. Yet, while the reality disappeared or perhaps never existed the goal lingered on and a gap emerged between New England's ideas and practice. Contending "factions," as contemporaries said, characterized New England from at least the Great Awakening onwards and created a society in the words of one historian, of "antipartisan theory and partisan reality."[3]

As the Great Awakening religious struggles blended into the pre-revolutionary struggles of the 1760s, it seemed to many New Englanders that society could not survive the conflicts. The revolutionary generation, fighting for freedom from one tyranny, was sufficiently wise, however, to realize that repressing conflict would not eliminate it. Rather than suppress what would only rear up again, they sought leadership that would have sufficient wealth, ancestry, and dignity to inspire awe and respect, unchallengeable credentials as Whig friends of liberty but moderate, compromising natures, and the delicate ability to cater to the middle

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[2] I do not mean to suggest that the recent work of James Kirby Martin which analyzes quantitative changes in leadership during the Revolution is not valuable — it is. Martin's work, however, analyzes only one aspect of leadership and I believe that my present essay significantly adds to the picture he has drawn of leadership and the Revolution. Martin and I both agree that elite leadership played a major role in the revolution. I believe, however, that his evidence of a change from an imperial to a local elite should not necessarily be interpreted as a democratizing shift in power. See James Kirby MARTIN, *Men in Rebellion. Higher Governmental Leaders and the Coming of the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1973).

[3] This point is perceptively developed by both Stephen PATTERSON, *Political Parties in Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Madison, Wisconsin, 1973), chap. I; and Richard D. BROWN, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772-1774* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970), pp. 9-10.

classes while all the while maintaining a social distance clearly above them. In short, a wealthy patrician, revolutionary but moderate, aloof but sensitive to the people, was the ideal leader to balance all the tensions in society — a father figure, a tender patriarch, who like all fathers was not arbitrary and severe but knew more than his children and had deep concern for them.[4] Such men emerged in the crucial moments of the Revolution in Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island: John Hancock, William Pitkin, Meshech Weare, and Joseph Wanton.

JOHN HANCOCK AND THE FIRST GUBERNATORIAL ELECTION IN MASSACHUSETTS

The most sophisticated consensus historian of the Revolution in Massachusetts, Richard D. Brown, in his work on the relationship between the Boston Committee of Correspondence and the towns, while emphasizing essentially the shared convictions of eighteenth-century Massachusetts men, does admit that pre-revolutionary era divisions did surface in a "court" and "country" party that emerged in 1739 in a dispute over economic policies.[5] The labels "court" and "country" were replaced by "Tory" and "Whig" a generation later. The most recent conflict historian of Massachusetts in this era, Stephen Patterson, in his book on revolutionary politics, argues that the conflict in late colonial Massachusetts imposed itself upon the Revolution and did not end with the separtion of the loyalists from the patriots. Patterson believes that deep sectional, ideological, and class conflicts over the direction of the new state resulted in five bitter years of struggle among the revolutionaries that saw the partisan rejection of one proposed constitution in 1778 and the near rejection of another in 1780. Middle-class agrarian westerners in Patterson's view fought for democratic reforms against an eastern merchant-dominated elite who resisted all attempts to alter the nature of society and government.[6] Though many historians would be unwilling to accept the ideological and class characteristics Patterson attributes to the conflict, few would deny that at least a naked power struggle raged between the East and the West. Robert Taylor's definitive study of western Massachusetts during the Revolution shows that westerners "had a mind of their own" that grew increasingly distrustful of the eastern seaboard after the decision for independence was made.[7] The other serious scholar of western Massachusetts, Lee Newcomer, while trying to maintain a consensus overview, is forced to admit that a populist wing centring in the Berkshire Mountains adjacent to the province of New York dissented vociferously from the eastern revolutionary leadership. Newcomer tries to submerge the conflict as "strife within an oversized family" but the

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[4] BROWN, *Revolutionary Politics*, p. 10, discusses the wise patriarch as the ideal ruler.

[5] BROWN, *Revolutionary Politics*, p. 7.

[6] PATTERSON, *Political Parties*, passim.

[7] Robert TAYLOR, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution* (Providence, Rhode Island, 1954), p. 3.

evidence he amasses speaks louder than his consensual conclusions and shows that the West bitterly blamed the "locusts and cankerworms" in the East for a variety of ills.[8] Richard D. Brown agrees that the divisions over the constitutions pitted East against West as both regions vied for control of the new government.[9]

Division was so deep that probably a majority of Massachusetts' freemen opposed the constitution of 1780 and only gimmickry in the method of ratification resulted in its adoption.[10] With such entrenched antagonism one would expect that the first election fought for control of the new government under the new constitution would be a political bloodletting. Surprisingly, almost miraculously considering the background, John Hancock secured election as governor, the most powerful executive position in the new nation in 1780, by the resounding triumph of 9,475 votes to the 888 for his nearest rival, James Bowdoin. No historian has adequately explained the popularity Hancock enjoyed in both the East and West that resulted in this deluge of approval. With such conflict over power how can one account for such consensus over leadership?

A confluence of circumstances made John Hancock such a popular and unifying figure that the governor's chair could not possibly have been filled by any other. Foremost among these circumstances was his prestigious ancestry. His grandfather, John Hancock, a minister, achieved such fame for his piety and godliness in a society which was still fundamentally Puritan and prized these as its highest attributes that he was known as "Bishop Hancock." His father, also named John, and also a minister, fell short of similar fame only by a premature death. John, the patriot, was raised by his uncle, Thomas Hancock, America's wealthiest merchant. No other Massachusetts man had as formidable a combination of piety and wealth in his ancestry.[11] "King Hancock," as he was dubbed, had wealth and economic power sufficient to cause the normally sceptical John Adams to accept at face value the exaggerated statement that "not less than one thousand families were, every day in the year, dependent on Mr. Hancock for their daily bread."[12] The naming of Hancock in Hampshire County Massachusetts in 1776 testifies to the family's esteem.

Not only Hancock's economic power and ancestral piety inspired awe in the electorate; his highly visible aristocratic living style commanded the attention of all. This was not a generation that looked for republican simplicity in its leaders. Hancock was a grandee and never tried to hide

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[8]   Lee NEWCOMER, *The Embattled Farmers: A Massachusetts Countryside in the American Revolution* (New York, 1953), pp. 87, 88, 99.

[9]   BROWN, *Revolutionary Politics*, p. 241.

[10]   Samuel Eliot MORISON, "The Struggle Over the Adoption of the Constitution of Massachusetts, 1780," *Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings*, L (1916-1917): 353-412.

[11]   See Herbert ALLAN, *John Hancock: Patriot in Purple* (New York, 1953), pp. 1-3; W.T. BAXTER, *The House of Hancock: Business in Boston, 1724-1775* (Cambridge Massachusetts, 1945), pp. 4, 6, 224; and Lorenzo SEARS, *John Hancock, The Picturesque Patriot* (Boston, 1912), pp. 12-15.

[12]   Adams is quoted in Arthur SCHLESINGER, *The Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (New York, 1918), p. 254.

it. He travelled in an elegant coach drawn by six horses and attended by four servants — his coach and entourage were used to convey the first French ambassador when he presented his credentials to the Continental Congress — seemed to be addicted to beautiful and elegant clothes, always insisted upon his social due as New England's foremost aristocrat and a senior revolutionary statesman, and made a "hobby [of] the dinner table."[13] Hancock's whole person was the antithesis of the simple yeoman revolutionary. Radical egalitarians like Samuel Adams may have condemned these trappings as contrary to what they perceived the revolutionary spirit to be but the masses did not. To them Hancock was risking one of the greatest fortunes and reputations in the colonies in order to make people free from oppressive power. Not only did every aspect of Hancock's bearing impress them but the fact that he had so much to lose — that he risked so much — made his commitment all the more meaningful. The Reverend Thatcher, Hancock's pastor, expressed this when he preached that Hancock's combining of "a fortune superior to any" with such ardent patriotism "rendered him the idol of his fellow citizens."[14] Instead of his regal bearing costing him popularity, it occasioned it by making clear to all just how important a man had committed himself to the movement.

Hancock had other assets that commended him to the people as the proper leader of the Revolution in Massachusetts. Though his commitment to liberty was clear and known to all, after all one of the most celebrated pre-revolutionary events involved a British Custom's attack on a Hancock ship, the Liberty, Hancock's cautious personality always caused him to adopt moderate compromise views around which discordant Revolutionaries could group. Virtually every scholar who has examined Hancock's revolutionary career concludes that he was a "trimmer" who never took a hard position on either side of any debate. He trimmed between the apprehensive merchants worried over losing their fortunes and the inflamed populace which demanded total adherence to the non-importation agreements. Intellectually inferior to most of the members of the Continental Congress, Hancock's saving grace as President was his ability to mediate between bitterly antagonistic factions and maintain unity. The adoption of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 and of the Federal Constitution of 1787 in Massachusetts owes much to his ability to compromise opposing views. Many elite contemporaries condemned Hancock's invariable fence-straddling and most historians have considered it his most serious weakness. His "vacillating" and "chameleon" character usually is ascribed to his love of popularity and his ambition to be governor.[15] A composite negative picture has emerged of a man too weak to take any stand that might cost him the approval of the masses.

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[13] ALLAN, *Hancock*, p. 4; BAXTER, *House of Hancock*, pp. 148, 169; and SEARS, *Hancock*, pp. 176, 177.

[14] ALLAN, *Hancock*, p. 4; BAXTER, *House of Hancock*, p. 308; and SEARS, *Hancock*, p. 325.

[15] See ALLAN, *Hancock*, pp. X, 134, 180, 191, 206, 324; BAXTER, *House of Hancock*, pp. 149, 224, 240; PATTERSON, *Political Parties*, pp. 71, 72, 87, 132, 185, 186; SCHLESINGER, *Merchants*, p. 255; SEARS, *Hancock*, pp. ix, x; and TAYLOR, *Western Massachusetts*, p. 174.

The people of Massachusetts, however, did not perceive Hancock's constant compromising to be a character flaw but instead saw it as the virtue of a man who tried to heal society's wounds. If Hancock's goal was to retain popularity and be the leader of his native province, he was phenomenally successful. The people of Massachusetts, respectful of his wealth, ancestry, and piety, impressed by his devotion to liberty and the risks he ran for it, and grateful for the moderating role he played between the forces threatening to tear their society apart, saw him as the one man they could rally around and trust with the care of their new government. Hancock's overwhelming election as governor in 1780 transcended all internal differences and prevented Massachusetts from degenerating into two warring camps. A leader like Samuel Adams who lacked noted ancestry and personal wealth but who was known for his devotion to republican simplicity and purity of principle never could command the popular support in Massachusetts of Hancock. Historians may be impressed by Adams' credentials as a revolutionary but to Massachusetts men he was too "middlin'" to inspire great respect and too controversial and partisan to be trusted with the new government. Adams would increase the society's divisions and aggravate its wounds while Hancock could close and heal them.

WILLIAM PITKIN AND THE STAMP ACT ELECTION IN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut, famed as the "land of steady habits," experienced a steady erosion of this virtue throughout the eighteenth century.[16] The fundamental agreement of Connecticut society on most matters of importance that had characterized the seventeenth century ended when economic ambition fueled by land fever engendered controversy both at the colonial and local level. The Great Awakening which affected Connecticut more than any other colony resulted in the formation of two clearly defined factions fighting for control of the colony. The New Lights, proponents of the revival, drew their strength primarily from the eastern part of the colony which was its most recently settled area, and seemed to stand for a new order in Connecticut society emphasizing individualism and anti-authority impulses. The Old Lights, drawn primarily from the older towns of the colony in the West, viewed the new religion as "enthusiastic," which was akin in today's language to vulgar, feared its leveling tendencies, and tended in their more exaggerated statements to stigmatize it as anarchic. Amidst the viciously partisan struggles in the 1740s and 1750s which intruded into all aspects of public affairs and which horrified everyone, the Old Lights managed to maintain a tenuous hold on the governorship, an elected position in Connecticut, and on the Assistants'

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[16] For a discussion of "steady habits" and other traits of colonial Connecticut see Bruce C. DANIELS, "Connecticut's Place in the American Colonies: What's In a Nickname?" *Bulletin of The Connecticut Historical Society* (in press).

Coucnil, which was the upper house of the legislature and collectively advised the governor on all matters of state. [17]

As in Massachusetts, the struggles of the era of the Great Awakening fastened themselves on the pre-revolutionary debates in Connecticut. [18] The most climatic and crucial moment in Connecticut's revolutionary years came early in 1766, when the New Lights ousted the Old Lights from the governorship and the Assistants' Council in a political battle fought over the Stamp Act. The Old Lights had, like all Connecticut men, opposed the passage of the Stamp Act but as men with a commitment to law and order they agreed to uphold the Act once it became law. The New Lights, more devoted to purity of principle and less devoted to accepting authority, asserted that the Act should never be obeyed. Connecticut's Sons of Liberty opposed the Act by peaceful petition, a newspaper and pamphlet campaign, and even by physical attacks on ·men implementing the law. It seemed to most sober Connecticut men that violence might engulf the entire colony and prevent the East and West from ever again acting in harmony or agreeing upon the essentials of government. When Governor Thomas Fitch, an Old Light, and three assistants took the oath in November 1765 to uphold the Act, the New Lights intensified their attempts to drive these "enemies of liberty" from the government. In the elections of spring 1766, William Pitkin replaced Fitch as governor by "votes too numerous to count" and all three assistants were defeated. The New Light triumph was complete and historians acknowledge the driving of the Old Lights from power and William Pitkin's election as Connecticut's Revolution. The triumph of Pitkin and the New Lights, however, did not exacerbate the existing tensions, but presaged the end of the severe warfare between the East and West that had threatened to destroy Connecticut's homogeneity. Though political fighting did not immediately end, never again was it as vitriolic or destructive, and as anger began to recede it was clear that Connecticut had successfully weathered a severe storm.

Pitkin's name is not as familiar to school children as Hancock's, but he occupied much the same position in Connecticut as Hancock did in Massachusetts. [19] In a colony known for its propensity to revere a few select old families and trust them with its leadership, the Pitkin claim to ancestral superiority could hardly be surpassed. Both William's grandfather and father, William Pitkin I and II, had been assistants to the governor and had probably only missed being elected governor

[17]   The best discussion of this whole process is in Richard BUSHMAN, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967). The secondary literature on the erosion of "steady habits" is summed up and analyzed in Christopher Collier, "Steady Habits Considered and Reconsidered," *Connecticut Review*, 5 (April 1972): 28-37.

[18]   See Oscar ZEICHNER, *Connecticut's Years of Controversy, 1750-1776* (Williamsburg, Virginia, 1949); and Christopher COLLIER, *Roger Sherman's Connecticut: Yankee Politics and the American Revolution* (Middletown, Connecticut, 1971).

[19]   An extensive secondary literature does not exist for William Pitkin as it does for John Hancock. The subsequent discussion is based on Bruce DANIELS, *Connecticut's First Family: William Pitkin and His Connections* (Chester, Connecticut, 1975).

by premature deaths. The Pitkins were the only family to have two close relatives serving together in the Assistants' Council since the Winthrops had in the seventeenth century. The family, large and concentrated almost entirely in Hartford, dominated the politics of the capital town during the eighteenth century. As large landowners with interests all over the colony, major merchants engaged in the import-export trade, and particularly as owners of many mills on the Connecticut River, the Pitkins collectively and individually appeared to "middlin'" men as gentlemen of great fortune.

William, the governor, had a long career in Connecticut politics before his revolutionary election and was deputy governor during his rival Fitch's governorship. As a Hartford town leader, deputy to the General Assembly, assistant to the governor, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and deputy governor, William always appeared to be a moderate, conciliatory politician. His devotion to the New Light version of religion during the Great Awakening and to liberty in the early 1760s could not be questioned, yet Pitkin never seemed to be controversial or under attack as mots New Light leaders were. He was at his best when sorting out some thorny local problem as an arbiter appointed by the General Assembly; and once, in an almost unparalleled case, he resolved a bitter local town dispute in the capacity of a private person requested to arbitrate by both contending parties. Pitkin drafted petitions to his fellow magistrates in humble and respectful language and managed miraculously to appear to rise above the partisan battles of the era while all around him his Connecticut contemporaries flayed away at one another. He was, in short, a man of renowned piety, ancestry, wealth, and accomplishment, judicious and conciliatory, and yet firmly attached to the cause of liberty.

The New Lights never seriously considered anyone else as their candidate to oust Fitch in 1766. Connecticut had its equivalent of Samuel Adams; Eliphalet Dyer, the fierty purist from Windham, was identified far more than Pitkin with the most ardent spirit of the pre-revolutionary movement. [20] Connecticut men perceived, however, that a purist or upstart could not heal the colony's wounds while a moderate politician respected by all would have a soothing effect on the colony and would lower the political intensity instead of raising it. No other New Light possessed the stature and character necessary to ease Connecticut government into the hands of a friend of liberty with a minimum of trauma and discord.

Pitkin, like Hancock, enjoyed unusual popularity and survived successfully all future attempts by Fitch to regain the governorship. The only criticism leveled by contemporaries accused him of pandering to the wishes of the masses. An anti-New Light ballad written shortly after his death chided Pitkin metaphorically for steering the ship of state with too close an attention to the crew and of trying to "accomplish every measure by a how do you do, with a decent bow, and a shaking of hands forever." His Old Light adversaries never fully perceived that it was the very

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[20] See George GROCE, "Eliphalet Dyer: Connecticut Revolutionist," *The Era of the American Revolution*, Richard MORRIS, ed., (New York, 1939): 290-305.

combination of his elite image with his attempt "to please the seamen" that made Pitkin the leader Connecticut turned to when its society seemed to be coming apart.

MESHECH WEARE AND THE GRAFTON COUNTY REVOLT AGAINST NEW HAMPSHIRE

New Hampshire politics, controlled to a strong degree by a small oligarchy of wealthy Portsmouth merchant families, was remarkably free of serious divisions until the ruling elite committed itself to supporting the Townshend Acts. The ground swell of protest against the Acts and the colony leadership which supported them abated somewhat with repeal in 1770 but the anti-court fervour did not disappear. Four factors combined in the years after 1770 to weaken the hold the ruling elite had on the populace's loyalty: the proselytizing activities of the Anglicans, which was supported by the government; the presence of British troops marching across the colony, which rekindled old fears of a standing army; the fiery example of Massachusetts; and Governor John Wentworth's loss of influence in England, which made him unable to disregard English policy that adversely affected New Hampshire and compelled him to enforce unpopular legislation. Until the outbreak of hostilities between the colonies and England, however, sectional, ideological, and class divisions did not emerge; instead a government clique backing unpopular policies was arrayed against an increasingly angry citizenry. [21]

When in response to the military events in Massachusetts Governor Wentworth fled New Hampshire in the summer of 1775, most of the colony's ruling oligarchy left also. In the power vacuum created, internal divisions surfaced that pitted merchant against farmer, creditor against debtor, radical against moderate, and in particular the South, the East, and the seaboard against the North, the West, and the interior. The divisions manifested themselves most seriously in 1781 when thirty-five Grafton County towns in the northern interior Connecticut River Valley, angered because they could not get their desired share of representation in the new state government, seceded from New Hampshire and joined the forces that were involved in negotiating with the Continental Congress for the creation of a new state — Vermont. Ultimately, after a tense year during which internal warfare threatened to break out, the Grafton County towns returned to the fold. With this crisis over, the divisions receded and New Hampshire entered the post-revolutionary period as a reasonably unified state. [22]

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[21] This paragraph based on Jere DANIELL, *Experiment in Republicanism: New Hampshire Politics and the American Revolution, 1741-1794* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1970).

[22] The only two serious historians of the Revolution in New Hampshire, while disagreeing on an overall interpretation agree on the progression of events. See DANIELL, *Experiment in Republicanism,* and Richard UPTON, *Revolutionary New Hampshire: An Account of the Social and Political Forces Underlying the Transition from Royal Province to American Commonwealth* (Port Washington, New York, 1970). Early New Hampshire is woefully understudied by professional historians.

The man who more than anyone else held New Hampshire together and ended the northern secession movement was the state's first president, Meshech Weare. Weare, a wealthy landowner from Hampton Falls, came from a family "justly proud" of its ancestry that had long been associated with New Hampshire leadership. His grandfather, Nathaniel Weare, had been one of the greatest men of the province and had led the much-gloried overthrow of the tyrant Governor Cranfield; his father, also Nathaniel, was Hampton's most illustrious citizen and a prominent member of the colony's assembly. Meshech, destined to political leadership by virtue of birth, was elected the moderator of a town meeting at age twenty-six and six years later succeeded his father as a deputy to the General Assembly. He was elected successively auditor and clerk and was made speaker at the age of forty-one in 1752, all unusual positions for a young man in a society known to revere age. Weare led the colony's delegation to the Albany Conference on the Plan for Union in 1754 and served as a justice of the Superior Court on the eve of the Revolution. Few men in New Hampshire could lay greater claim to a place of respect. His home was a sumptuous mansion, he paid the largest tax in his home town of Hampton Falls, he owned land in sixteen towns, and a town, Weare, chartered by Governor Benning Wentworth in 1764, was named after his family. [23]

Weare possessed personal assets to match his ancestral, political, and economic ones. At an early age he had an "appearance of genius" and later won prizes for academic excellence while at Harvard. Weare studied divinity and showed signs of being a great preacher; he only turned away from a career in the ministry because, as a friend wrote, he felt "impelled to give up clerical pursuits for the care of his estates and public service, by circumstances of family life, inheritance of estates, and the ready desire of his fellow townsmen to employ him in civil matters." Even after deciding against a career as a minister he preached as a guest in many pulpits around his home. Every historian who has written of him stresses what one called his "amiable and discreet deportment." The words "cautious" and "moderate" occur frequently in descriptions of Weare showing him to have been a man of exceptional judiciousness. [24]

Despite his cautious nature, Weare became known as a friend of liberty by the time of the Stamp Act debate and as an ardent patriot when he wrote and published poetry against the Tea Act. In New Hampshire's second provincial congress, called to deal with the revolutionary crisis, Weare emerged as the unquestionable leader of the moderate

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[23] Avery BUTTERS, "New Hampshire History and the Public Career of Meshech Wear, 1713 to 1786," (Ph.D. thesis Fordham University, 1961), pp. 5, 11, 14, 123, 30, 40-50; DANIELL, *Experiment in Republicanism*, chaps. 2 and 3; Clifford SHIPTON, "Meshech Weare," *Biographical Sketches of Harvard Graduates*, Vol. IX, 590-605; UPTON, *Revolutionary New Hampshire*, p. 14; and William LITTLE, *History of Weare* (Concord, 1888).

[24] BUTTERS, "New Hampshire History," pp. 15, 20, 23; DANIELL, *Experiment in Republicanism*, p. 121; SHIPTON, "Meshech Weare," pp. 596, 597, 604; and UPTON, *Revolutionary New Hampshire*, p. 44.

Whigs and was chosen president of the third congress. When most of New Hampshire's elite leaders abdicated their power and discord engulfed the state in factional fighting, Weare was almost everyone's choice to head the new government; under a new constitution he was elected the President of the Council, the state's chief executive position. Jeremy Belknap, New Hampshire's first comprehensive historian, described Weare's popularity as unrivaled in the history of the colony and a more recent historian quoted one observer as remarking that Weare "acquired so much popularity his countrymen expected salvation from his wisdom or arm alone."[25]

It would not be too much of an exaggeration to argue that perhaps New Hampshire's salvation, if salvation can be defined as staying intact as a political unit, came from Weare's wisdom alone. Cautiously, he used his prestige and great popularity to bring stability to the state. He halted the rampant inflation by persuading the assembly to levy heavy taxes; these provided money to support the war effort. When the new revolutionary government seemed on the brink of falling apart, Weare championed constitutional reform and arranged for the transfer of executive power to the Committee of Safety of which he and two other men were the chief members. In particular, Weare acted as a calming influence on the radicals among the revolutionaries and kept them from initiating measures that would have ripped the new state apart into warring parties. Finally, under another new constitution, as the first President of New Hampshire, Weare personally rode over the White Mountains in the dead of winter to contain the Grafton County Revolution. Bloodshed between Grafton County and the rest of New Hampshire could easily have occurred; troops were authorized to quell the rebellion, but forebearance of the new state government under Weare delayed the development and a political solution was arranged. The final compromise came when Weare who was both old and ill retired as Chief Justice of the Superior Court and arranged for a Grafton County man to replace him.[26]

Weare's devotion to the revolutionary cause, caution and moderation, and great popularity, are the qualities always singled out by New Hampshire historians. His contemporaries, mindful of these qualities and their role in guiding New Hampshire from colony to state, were also impressed that someone with Weare's wealth and position in society would risk both in such an uncertain venture. As one wrote, "truly sensible I am that you have sunk a fortune and exposed a large family to danger of being ruined."[27] The assets that to a later and more socially democratic nation would seem artificial, wealth and family, were the very

[25] BUTTERS, "New Hampshire History," pp. 122, 123-26, 277; DANIELL, *Experiment in Republicanism*, pp. 127, 128; SHIPTON, "Meshech Weare," p. 595; and UPTON, *Revolutionary New Hampshire*, p. 14.

[26] BUTTERS, "New Hampshire History," pp. 203, 269; DANIELL, *Experiment in Republicanism*, pp. 124, 125, 130, 150, 151, 161, 162; SHIPTON, "Meshech Weare," p. 598; and UPTON, *Revolutionary New Hampshire*, pp. 44, 45, 53-57.

[27] BUTTERS, "New Hampshire History," p. 276; and SHIPTON, "Meshech Weare," p. 602.

qualities that, combined with Weare's natural leadership and moderation, gave him the popularity to lead New Hampshire through deep divisions that could have resulted in civil war and the dismemberment of the state.

JOSEPH WANTON AND THE ENDING OF THE WARD-HOPKINS CONTROVERSY IN RHODE ISLAND

The factional and contentious nature of Rhode Island society and politics was legendary in colonial New England; eighteenth-century citizens of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut referred to Rhode Island as "Rogues' Island" or "the land where people think otherwise." The prospect of "Rhode Islandism" coming to their colony was a horrible spectre guaranteed to frighten inhabitants of the old Puritan colonies.[28] Factions were more developed towards political parties in Rhode Island than in any other mainland colony except New York. For the twenty years before the revolutionary period two well-defined political machines, one led by the Wards of Westerly and Newport and the other by the Hopkins of Providence, vied for control of the colonial government. The struggle, bitter and steeped in vituperation, aroused Rhode Island into a semi-annual frenzy. All serious students of Rhode Island's past agree that the vicious divisions were rooted in a contest between two different geographical sections and had no ideological overtones; power, wealth, patronage, and personal ambition fueled the fight and not differing visions of the good society.[29]

While the rest of New England assumed that Rhode Islanders gloried in dissent and loved every contentious minute of it, the discord was always deplored, especially by those most intimately involved in fomenting it. Even Rhode Island men, famed for their political infighting, bemoaned partisan activity, feared combinations to gain office, and shared the eighteenth-century quest for unity and the public good. Both the Ward and the Hopkins factions feared the colony would be torn apart and not survive the struggle. Both sides were continually sending forth compromise proposals to end the fighting and bring some semblance of peace to the strife-ridden society.

Suspicion between the two sides overcame the early attempts at a compromise solution, but the divisions that emerged between mother country and colonies in the 1760s added a new urgency to the campaign for internal unity. As the revolutionary crisis grew more grave in the late 1760s, by mutual agreement factional fighting had to come to an end. Both Stephen Hopkins and Samuel Ward, while unalterably opposed to

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[28] Sydney JAMES, *Colonial Rhode Island: A History* (New York, 1975), p. 296.

[29] The best account of the Ward-Hopkins years is in David LOVEJOY, *Rhode Island Politics and the American Revolution, 1760-1776* (Providence, Rhode Island, 1958), *passim*. See also Samuel ARNOLD, *History of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, 2 vols. (New York, 1860), II, pp. 245-93; Frank BATES, *Rhode Island and the Formation of the Union* (New York, 1898), pp. 37, 38, 39; JAMES, *Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 296; and Irwin POLISHOOK, *Rhode Island and the Union* (Evanston, Illinois, 1969), pp. 12, 13, 43.

each other, also unalterably opposed encroachments on Rhode Island's liberties by Parliament. As Rhode Island's first important historian wrote, "the famous controversy... ceased forever in the presence of a more momentous struggle." Governor Stephen Hopkins proposed, from a position of strength, to end the feud by a compromise that would remove both himself and Samuel Ward from active officeholding and put the governorship in the hands of a man mutually acceptable to both. Accordingly in April of 1768 Josias Lyndon was chosen governor as a compromise candidate but the compromise was shortlived and political warfare blazed again because Lyndon could not keep in the good graces of both factions.[30]

The election of Joseph Wanton to the governorship in 1769 proved to be the event which ended the Ward-Hopkins controversy as a significant force in Rhode Island politics. Under the conciliatory leadership of Wanton the colony enjoyed six years of relative stability and most Rhode Islanders approved their governor's firm protests against British imperial policy. Historians may now argue that Wanton was a candidate of the Hopkins factions, but contemporaries did not see him as a stalking horse for anyone and perceived him as someone who rose above the petty partisan battles.[31] His moderate image had widespread appeal and Wanton, burying Ward in the election, even won a majority in Ward's home town and power base, Newport, and in the adjacent towns of Middletown and Portsmouth. The Ward's closest allies in Providence, the Browns, supported Wanton, and the coalitionist spirit and movement overwhelmed the Ward family who did not accept it but were not strong enough to continue the fight. After Wanton's election, Rhode Island was never again threatened with disunion during the Revolution and the colony whose name was a symbol of divisiveness declared independence and fought the Revolution without widespread internal dissent.[32]

Joseph Wanton, a merchant prince from Newport, was descended from a family of colonial governors; his father William, his uncle John Wanton, and his cousin Gideon Wanton all had occupied the governor's chair and his son, Joseph Junior, had previously been a deputy governor. The family, engaged in extensive shipbuilding and the West Indian trade in the eighteenth century, had first amassed a fortune as privateers in the late seventeenth century and then been co-opted into the Newport elite. Wanton, a Harvard graduate, had an "amiable disposition, elegant manners, and handsome person" and enjoyed such perquisites of a gentleman as expensive clothes and a sumptuous table. He early showed himself to be a patriot but, known not to like bitter fights, he did not thrive on controversy as so many politicians seemed to: clearly he was a

[30] ARNOLD, *History*, II, pp. 281-93; BATES, *Rhode Island*, pp. 39-40; JAMES, *Colonial Rhode Island*, p. 296; LOVEJOY, *Rhode Island Politics, passim;* and POLISHOOK, *Rhode Island*, pp. 12, 13, 43.

[31] LOVEJOY, *Rhode Island Politics*, pp. 150, 151, argues this.

[32] *Appleton's Cyclopedia of American Biography*, VI; ARNOLD, *History*, II, pp. 281-315; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIX, p. 412; LOVEJOY, *Rhode Island Politics*, pp. 150-51, 179, 181; and POLISHOOK, *Rhode Island*, pp. 12, 13.

moderate. As governor, he steered a course between the extreme "sons of liberty" and "sons of tyranny" and did his best to mediate all divisons. His best was very good: Wanton had virtually no opposition while in office and Rhode Island enjoyed six years of internal concord which were unparalleled in its past. [33]

Wanton led the opposition to the imperial policies up to the final moments before hostilities broke out and was an ardent enough patriot that the British suspected him of complicity in the scuttling and burning of a revenue ship off the Rhode Island coast. Yet, in the final analysis, Wanton could not bring himself to renounce his loyalty to the king and direct military operations against the British regular army. Shortly after his election to a seventh term in May 1775, he walked out of a room to be conveniently absent when the revolutionaries seized his trappings of office. Because of Wanton's immense popularity and past patriotism, the Whigs did not install his successor until seven months after he was deposed and gave him every opportunity to reconsider and take back the governorship. An old and sick man, Wanton opted out of the struggle rather than make war on his king, but in contrast to his hated counterpart in Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, Wanton lived out his life in his home colony as a respected figure. [34]

Although technically a Loyalist, Wanton did more to secure Rhode Island's unified response to the Revolution than any Whig. Nor did his deposition (abdication?) mean the elevation to the governor's chair of any out-of-power rabble-rouser. Wanton's deputy governor, Nicholas Cooke, also a wealthy merchant and a moderate, was confirmed as the new governor. [35]

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The careers of John Hancock, William Pitkin, Meshech Weare, and Joseph Wanton, suggest that neither the consensus nor the conflict model alone can successfully explain the Revolution in New England. Each of the four colonies at some point in the Revolutionary years experienced a geographical division bitter and deep enough to push the imperial struggle into the background and potentially split the colony in

[33] BATES, *Rhode Island*, pp. 37, 58; LOVEJOY, *Rhode Island Politics*, p. 179; POLISHOOK, *Rhode Island*, p. 37; and William WEEDON, *The Economic and Social History of New England*, 2 vols. (New York, 1890), II, p. 583.

[34] ARNOLD, *History*, II, pp. 347-61; *Dictionary of American Biography*, XIX, p. 412; JAMES, *Colonial Rhode Island*, pp. 319, 346; LOVEJOY, *Rhode Island Politics*, p. 184; and Mack THOMPSON, *Moses Brown: Reluctant Reformer* (Williamsburg, Virginia, 1962), p. 115.

[35] JAMES, *Colonial Rhode Island*, p. 346; Matt JONES, ed., "Revolutionary Correspondence of Governor Nicholas Cooke, 1775-1781," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, XXXVI (1926): 231-53; LOVEJOY, *Rhode Island Politics*, p. 184; and POLISHOOK, *Rhode Island*, pp. 11, 37.

half.[36] Yet, each colony managed to group around one figure and form a relatively unified whole to wage a revolution, fight a war, and create a stable government. These four men were merely the most visible examples of a widespread model of leadership. A recent essay that analyzed the attributes of the ninety-nine most important leaders of 1776 and 1787 reveals that their collective identity resembled the British peerage more than the American yeomanry.[37] Hancock, Pitkin, Weare, and Wanton had an abundance of the qualities society looked for in its leadership and had the rare opportunity and ability to make the most of these qualities. Other men of the same type preceded and succeeded them.

As intellectual historians have shown, the goals of colonial society, concord and harmony, were ideally attained through non-partisan activity. By the fourth decade of the nineteenth century a contrary world of institutionalized division had emerged where partisan activity was the accepted norm. Long before this world of normalized discord could be legitimized by Jacksonian rhetoric it had emerged *de facto* in the colonial world out of the attempts by one area of a colony to capture control of the colony's government.[38] The naked realities of electing a government gave rise to deep divisions; embryonic institutions were created to respond to these divisions long before the social values of pre-industrial man allowed him to accept them. The lack of acceptance made the divisions seem all the deeper and more treacherous and made men search desperately for a real consensus to match their ideological world. When the revolutionary divisions between the mother country and colonies emerged, each of these colonies looked for saviors to prevent society from disintegrating. Wealthy patricians like Hancock, Pitkin, Weare, and Wanton, men of patriotism and moderation, men above the people but loved by the people, men with long familial histories of leadership, were the natural figures for revolutionary society to turn to in an anachronistic attempt to realize a beleaguered communal ideal.

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[36] Although possible, it is less clear that meaningful ideological and class differences always accompanied these geographical divisions; historians do not agree on this and more basic research will have to be done to confirm or disprove that more than sectional differences existed. If ideological and class differences did not exist, historians may be tempted to say that there was no *meaningful* conflict in the Revolution since a consensus on ideology existed. They could liken this situation to late 19th-century America when two parties agreed upon essentials but still fought viciously for control of the government. However, the fact that the political fights in colonial and Revolutionary America were based so strongly on geography, unlike the party struggles of a later period, shows that at least one important issue was at stake — for which section's benefit was the colony or state to be developed? This is not the same type of issueless conflict as the late 19th century indulged in; these divisions could have destroyed the territorial integrity of each of the colony's boundaries or even destroyed the revolutionary movement itself.

[37] Richard D. BROWN, "The Founding Fathers of 1776 and 1787: A Collective View," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XXXIII (July 1976): 465-80.

[38] Most historians would agree that, despite its divisions, New England was much more homogeneous and unified than the Southern Colonies and in particular more so than the Middle Colonies. The success of these two regions waging the Revolution would suggest that the model presented here could also apply to them. Certainly, the roles of men such as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin give a surface indication that other colonies were searching for moderate father figures.