

Introduction

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This volume on the American Enlightenment presents representative selections from the writings and papers of five memorable Americans: Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton. The selections attempt to show the scope of their abilities and activities and the nature of the contributions they made to the formation of American society. In a very real sense, these are the men who pre-eminently fulfill the role of makers of the American political tradition. Their vision and their spirit provided the foundations for that free society which developed in subsequent years into the most flourishing democratic civilization in the modern world.

It is natural to expect that a historian will write of his chosen period of time and thought "con amore." For it would be a sad task to devote many years of a meager human life to the study of men, minds, actions and achievements that were devoid of the glitter and pull of deep human significance. The reader must therefore be on guard from the opening of this volume to its close for the implicit judgment of the editor, that the period of the American Enlightenment was an exceptional, indeed, a glorious, time of thought and human constructive effort; and that the writings which were its products represent a rich vein of moral and political wisdom hard to match anywhere in the history of Western civilization.

1

The period of the American Enlightenment spanned the half century from 1765 to 1815 and was, in the words of John Adams, "an age of revolutions and constitutions." It opened with the developing arguments

for separation from Great Britain, culminating with the Declaration of Independence. Efforts were then made to establish securely the new political order for which the revolution was fought. These creative inventions included the Articles of Confederation, state constitutions, and the Federal Constitution. The third and final phase embraced the first critical steps toward transforming a ratified paper constitution into a functioning representative government on a national scale.

Each of these three major phases were stages in a continuing revolution, maturing, unlike later revolutionary developments, in more effective democratic institutions. For this reason, the period of the American Enlightenment marked a new chapter in the history of man. The first revolutionary phase witnessed the making of an entirely new kind of revolution against imperial power which caught the imagination of the entire civilized world, with incalculable consequences for the redirection of thought and reconstruction of society. The second constitutional phase involved another unprecedented process: the creation of an "extensive republic" unlike any that existed before, both in terms of the process of deliberation by a group of enlightened men which produced and ratified the constitutions—state and federal—and in terms of the central human ethos reflected in the provisions of these organic laws. The third phase established the first new nation in the modern sense, a nation under a two-party system and in a setting of economic growth.

These claims for the significance of the American Enlightenment are not simply personal or parochial prejudices. They are supported by the judgments of political and philosophical critics the world over, in successive waves from the eighteenth century to our own day. For example, in the key year 1776, as far away as Naples, the Abbe Galiani addressed a friend in Paris in this revealing way: "The epoch has become one of the total fall of Europe, and of transmigration into America. All here turns into rotteness—religion, law, arts, sciences—and all hastens to renew itself in America. This is not a jest; nor is it an idea drawn from the English quarrels; I have said it. . . . for more than twenty years, and I have constantly seen my prophecies come to pass. Therefore, do not buy your house in the Chaussée d'Antin; you must buy it in Philadelphia."

It is well known that the enlightened philosophes in France outdid other Europeans in acclaiming and affiliating themselves with the American cause. Nor should we forget the famous young lords of the Queen's circle—Ségur, Noailles, the Dillons, Lafayette—who had, in the Count de Ségur's words, grown tired of the "gilded servitude" of the court and were ready to stake fortune and risk life serving in a far-away Revolutionary War that represented an ideal "cause." In addition, there were the French soldiers and sailors who tended to be enthusiastic gospelizers for American freedom and the American "ex-

ample" when they returned to France. And finally we must reckon with the innumerable friends of the adored Dr. Franklin who coalesced, as well they might, their reverence for him with his country's venture. The list of the illustrious Doctor's friends and admirers is too long to print here; but prominent among them were the intimates of Madame de Helvetius' brilliant salon—the Marquis de Condorcet, the Abbé Morellet, Cabanis, Volney, Destutt de Tracy. Other great and influential friends of America were Turgot, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, Dêmeunier, the Abbés Mably, Chalut and Arnoux. Since for all well-wishers the American "example" of freedom was more than a question of detached study, myths and legends flourished. But one kernel of truth was apprehended by them all. It was most strikingly expressed by the Marquis de Chastellux, in his journals: "I firmly believe that Parliament has no right to tax America without her consent," he wrote, "and I also believe that when a noble people say 'We want to be free' it is difficult to prove that they are in the wrong." So powerful, indeed, did the pro-American sentiment become in France that it must be counted one of the intellectual causes of the French Revolution.

Across the channel, English liberals and radicals too numerous to name were also eager students and advocates of the American cause. Richard Price, who spoke for so many of them, was an ardent friend who did not hesitate, in his published works, to celebrate what had been achieved in America and to recommend what he believed should be the next steps. As he wrote to Benjamin Rush in 1783: "The struggle has been glorious on the part of America; and it has now issued just as I wished it to issue: in the emancipation of the American States and the establishment of their independence. . . . I think it one of the most important revolutions that has ever taken place in the world. It makes a new opening in human affairs which may prove an introduction to times of more light and liberty and virtue than have been yet known."

So far, the views cited are those of the Italian, French and English liberal intellectuals in the late eighteenth century who contributed to the European Enlightenment. But the judgment that the work of the American Enlightenment constituted a momentous new chapter in Western civilization is reaffirmed by later commentators in the nineteenth century. Who is not familiar with Prime Minister Gladstone's pronouncement that the American Constitution was "the most remarkable work known to me in modern times to be produced by the human intellect at a single stroke (so to speak) in its application to political affairs"? Perhaps less familiar is the more memorable appreciation we owe to the French social philosopher, Alexis de Tocqueville, who wrote: "In that land the great experiment of the attempt to construct society upon a new basis was to be made by civilized man; and it was there, for the first time, that theories hitherto unknown, or deemed impracticable, were to

exhibit a spectacle for which the world has not been prepared by the history of the past."

The tenor of the foregoing appraisals is echoed by students of the American Enlightenment in our own time. Thus, we have the judgment of the late Harold Laski that this fruitful period was a veritable political and social renaissance in America, animated by "one of the most informed public debates on the nature of free institutions ever to grace the annals of any nation;" while even more recently Max Beloff, the Gladstone Professor of Politics at Oxford, wrote that the American and French Revolutions together precipitated "the most prolonged and far-reaching examination of the basis of society and government which had been attempted since the age of Plato and Aristotle."

Finally, one turns homeward for support of foreign estimates of the American Enlightenment movement. Here one evaluation suffices, that of the contemporary American philosopher, Herbert Schneider, who, in his *History of American Philosophy*, aptly said: "Never in America were philosophical thinking and social action more closely joined—Never was history made more consciously and conscientiously, and seldom since the days of classic Greece has philosophy enjoyed greater opportunity to exercise public responsibility." For this reason, he concludes: "It is impossible to read and write dispassionately of the American Enlightenment, for it contains the heart of our heritage as a people and our deepest ties to the rest of humanity."

2

These reflections on the American Enlightenment focus our attention on the greatest of all historical forces, the human agent. A social movement, and the democratic revolution above all, must be understood in terms of men who made it: the root is man. The developments in the three major phases of the American Enlightenment were not fated by divine intervention, as suggested by the nineteenth century American historian, George Bancroft; or forced by economic causes, as proclaimed early in the twentieth century by the inimitable Charles Beard. They were largely the outcome of multiple, often conflicting human acts and choices under eighteenth century American conditions and favored by chance elements which we may call "luck."

In the first revolutionary phase, the over-riding need to unite the colonies, to organize the men and materials for the bleak and extended trial of seven years of battle, bloodshed, flight and stand, demanded intellectual power, moral courage, and the intelligence to meet and master a thousand unexpected necessities and emergencies. The second or constitutional phase may not have been the "miracle" it was pronounced to be by Gladstone, but it was surely a miracle of everyday patience, negotiations, political sagesse and invention, to prevail over

the jealous sovereignties of the states. The period of political argument and reflection persisted through the third phase of launching the Republic, in the critical decade when the new instrument of popular will was tested in practice, to establish whether it would float or founder—whether President Washington could succeed in holding the contending party factions together in peacetime, under non-military auspices to assure a unique democratic succession.

Seen in this perspective, the American Enlightenment required genius from its leading men. And what leaders there were! From the opening of the movement for independence in the 1760's to the establishment of the federated republic and its first decade of administrative solidification on the threshold of a new century, there were men of superb ability: James Otis, Sam Adams, Patrick Henry, John Dickinson, Benjamin Franklin, George Mason, George Wythe, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Jay, James Wilson, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, Benjamin Rush, among others.

Since the age of democratic revolution had a rich supply of gifted leaders, the editor's decision about which men to take as "representative" was far from easy. Unlike other periods in the American past—or in the history of any modern Western nation—this one embarrasses us with its luxuriant supply of leadership. A word, then, is required to explain why an indisputably great man, George Washington, is not represented by selected writings in this volume; and why the five men chosen *are* representative of the American Enlightenment.

We may get at the key criterion by citing the judgment of an English historian to the effect that Washington was "not an architect in ideas; he was essentially a man of deeds." He surveyed unexplored land, travelled on military missions into Indian country, mastered the art of military command and organization, read enough books to know the special character of the age he lived in, and sensed the repeated needs of his country for fresh experiments in government and union. It is true that his contribution to the winning of independence extended far beyond the field of his military genius in the technical sense. Indeed, the enlightened philosophes and statesmen of Europe made a cult of the *virtues* of this heroic and wise revolutionary leader, who firmly spurned every person who approached him to use his military command to make himself a dictator, or as some preferred, a king! He rightly and dutifully became the first President of the Republic he had already done so much to bring about, and he proved anew that he was *the* critical man, uniting all the former colonies of the new United States and accepting the ardors of political life for a second term (at the urging of such powerful antagonists as Hamilton and Jefferson) to assure its continued national existence as a republic. In terms of the primary contribution Washington made to the success of the revolutionary war,

and through the magic of his name in the unification of the Americans—North, South and West—to support “the great Experiment,” one can hardly question that he is entitled to his name as “father” of the country.

It is thus appropriate at the outset to quote Washington on the central core of faith shared by all these men as conscious and conscientious believers in the mission of Enlightenment. At the end of the War of Independence, Washington, much concerned about its political outcome, addressed a circular letter in June, 1783, to the governors of the thirteen states with the hopeful prophecy that the future of the Republic would be assured if the union of the states could be preserved. He wrote these words not simply as the military commander of a successful war effort, but as the statesman and political leader he was already becoming:

“The foundation of our Empire was not laid in the gloomy age of ignorance and superstition, but at an Epoch when the rights of mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period; the researches of the human mind after social happiness, have been carried to a great extent, the treasures of knowledge, acquired by the labours of Philosophers, Sages and Legislators, through a long succession of years, are laid open for our use, and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the establishment of our forms of Government. . . . At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be entirely their own.”

Yet it remains true that if one would uncover the intellectual aspects of the American Enlightenment, one must turn to other American statesmen than Washington for its deeper and more detailed meaning. Like Washington, Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton were men whose deeds left their mark on the American political tradition. But, unlike Washington, they were architects of ideas, whose thought and writings were crucial in formulating our goals and forming our political institutions. They were our first advocates and illustrious representatives to the world at large. Much that is known, and will ever be known, as “American” had to do with the impression that these five statesmen were able—sometimes singly, sometimes as a group—to inspire in the judgment of men who were their contemporaries. Yet it is all-important to recognize that without a deep new vision, defined in writing and productive of social and institutional programs, the rage for “the American Experiment” would have been as insubstantial and fleeting as a brightly-colored gas balloon! This vision flowed from the conjunction of political philosophy and social engineering and formed a new moral imagination that would take the American Experiment beyond the letter, beyond the technicalities of simply one new set of men in power. The fact that there were areas of firm agreement and yet

sharp differences among them helps us to feel the shock of real alternatives in the formative years of the democratic experiment and thus more able to see history in other terms than a flat and fictive determinism. The event-making and thought-making roles that established these five statesmen as most representative of the American Enlightenment can be seen in their leadership in each of the major patterns of that densely-textured tapestry of events we call the American Experiment.

3

In the first, revolutionary phase, Franklin, Adams and Jefferson provided the intellectual leadership which defined the rights of British Americans and then argued philosophically, legally and politically, for independence. Franklin, the oldest and most prudential of the group, initially argued for reform. As early as 1754, he proposed a thorough plan of inter-colonial union for defense, the so-called Albany Plan of Union. Franklin's plan did not bear fruit at the time, but like other interesting, short-run defeats, this one was, in fact, far from total. It sharpened Franklin's own perception of the growing need for some form of federation. Even his famous political cartoon for the Albany Plan—the cartoon of the severed body of the snake, captioned "Join or Die"—corroborates the point. In the American Revolution, it was snatched up and given wide use, its shattered parts apparently glistening with the sap of life which the revolutionaries were determined to set a-flowing again! In Franklin's own development, the Albany Plan was a notable first step which led him in the second Continental Congress to compose a draft "Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union," again in advance of others, but this time his was an idea that did not have long to wait for action.

The great legal philosopher of the trio, John Adams, for his part was employing the casual phrase "we Americans" in his Diary as early as 1763. He confided that he was thrown into whirlwind action in the fateful year 1765 when the news of the Stamp Act blew up a storm in Massachusetts and the other colonies. In Adams' first influential essay, "A Dissertation on Canon and Feudal Law," he wrote that "It was not religion alone as is commonly supposed; but it was a love of universal liberty, and a hatred, a dread, a horror, of the infernal confederacy (between the two tyrannical systems of the canon and the feudal law) that projected, conducted, and accomplished the settlement of America." From bold sentiments of colonial liberty which he voiced in his influential "Braintree Instructions," and from a set of powerful essays printed in the Boston Gazette in 1775, Adams was building the moral, legal and political justification for resistance. He was erudite, as he threaded his way in questions of Parliamentary statutes, royal proclamation, traditions

of natural law and political philosophy, and he was eloquent as he marshalled the grievances of the colonies into the logic of separation from the British Empire—all but! For, lawyer-like, he drew a tenuous line arguing for a voluntary recognition (based on custom and not much more) of loyalty to the King and reaffirming that the American Whigs “*still consented*” that Parliament should regulate the trade of the “dominions.” By the time Adams rode into Philadelphia to take his place in the first Continental Congress he was, as he promptly reported, a marked man, known for his radical sentiments.

Jefferson, the talented young Virginian, entered the lists in 1773, when he joined the group of bold new patriot leaders like Patrick Henry and Richard Henry Lee. Acting as a standing committee of the Virginia House of Burgesses, these patriots and their associates were responsible for the first effective call for an inter-colonial linkage of the Committees of Correspondence. After the Boston Tea Party and the passage of the Coercive Acts which closed the port of Boston in 1774, Jefferson wrote his *Summary View of the Rights of British America*, the most fundamental protest against the oppressive legislation of Parliament. Jefferson's paper was drafted to guide the Virginia delegates to the first Continental Congress and it argued that Parliament had *no* authority over the colonies, that America had simply the same executive chief but no other political tie that warranted taxation or legislation of any sort whatever. This attempt to urge the concept of a commonwealth of nations, an imperial partnership, was based on an uncompromising concept of free men, possessed of the natural right to emigrate and establish laws on the basis of choice and reason. It was considered too bold at the time because it suggested goodbye to compromise. Nevertheless, it was printed and won fame quickly as a “handsome” public paper. Its audacity and clean logic earned Jefferson, in the view of Adams and others, the reputation that justified his selection to draft the Declaration of Independence.

As a result of their influential and effective intellectual leadership, Franklin, Adams and Jefferson were brought into close mutual contact in the second Continental Congress, and the three worked together for Independence. It seems natural that these three men were selected to serve together on the five-man Committee charged with producing a draft of the Declaration of Independence. The glory of authorship of this document unsurpassed in the history of human freedom is clearly Jefferson's. Only a few and small changes are due to Adams and Franklin, none to Sherman and Livingston, the other two Committee members. Changes were more extensively made when the document went before the Congress. But Jefferson himself viewed Adams' role as strategic in securing the vote for the Declaration. He often volunteered statements like: “He [Adams] was the pillar of its support on the floor of Congress,

its ablest advocate and defender against the multiple assaults it encountered." Thus, although Jefferson as the author of the Declaration comes first to mind, it is important to remember that all three men—Franklin, Adams and Jefferson—were associated in the processes of philosophical inquiry, political action, and sustaining sentiment that produced this central achievement of the heart and will of the American Enlightenment.

4

In the second constitutional phase that developed as the natural sequence of the logic of Independence craved by free men, these three Americans were joined by the younger statesmen, Madison and Hamilton, in fighting for and formulating a basic constitutional philosophy and the cognate institutions that would secure democratic liberties as the fruits of colonial revolution. The culminating work of this period of experimentation with state constitutions is surely the central achievement of the mind of the American Enlightenment—the Federal Constitution. Here Madison as the "father" of the Constitution comes first to mind. But this, too, was not a solo performance. If we look deeper and try to gain more insightful understanding of its place in the processes of philosophical inquiry, political action and sentiment which produced it, we are made aware of the fact that all five American statesmen played major roles.

Three of these eminent statesmen—Franklin, Adams and Jefferson—recognized that the issuing of such manifestoes as the Declaration of Independence represented only the beginning of their work. Freedom, not anarchy or a new tyranny, was the desired goal and for this it was necessary to do more than win the revolutionary struggle. Franklin himself, as we have seen, drafted articles for confederation that updated the Albany Plan of Union and helped in the consideration of the Articles of Confederation which were soon adopted. Under the Confederation system, Congress acted principally as a committee, with the basic powers for the processes of government left to the states. It was therefore essential to organize these state governments on a firm representative basis.

The whole object of the revolutionary effort, Jefferson said, was to draft good republican constitutions for the states: "for should a bad government be instituted for us in future, it had been as well to have accepted at first the bad one offered to us from beyond the water without the risk and expense of contest." Jefferson proceeded to the constructive phase of the program with the proposal of new and basic legislation. In the spring of 1776, from Congress where he was a delegate, Jefferson sent his draft of a constitution for Virginia to the Virginia Convention.

It arrived late in the Convention's work, but Jefferson's preamble was adopted in its entirety as well as several other features. This was important since Virginia's was the first of the state constitutions to be formulated in the period of independence.

But it was in another context, in the autumn of 1776, that Jefferson entered upon a program of political reform that must truly be described as Herculean: the task of the revisal of the laws of Virginia. His aim was to bring the accumulated laws of colonial Virginia into conformity with republican principles and the dignity of a self-governing modern state. In this vast work he was associated with some of the finest legal minds in America—especially George Wythe and Edmund Pendleton, but Jefferson by himself drafted 126 bills—a system, as he described it in his autobiography, “by which every fibre would be eradicated of ancient or future aristocracy; and a foundation laid for a government truly republican.”

Even more urgent than Jefferson's perception of the need for constitutional anchors was John Adams' anguished conviction that independence could become *merely* a destructive movement—“Samson, pulling down, unless the people also—preferably first—build up the house in which they will live.” Not content with the fact that Congress adopted his resolution recommending that the colonies assume all the powers of government, he hastened early in the year 1776 to compose a small dissertation, in the form of a letter originally addressed to George Wythe of Virginia. This letter was in fact an essay on republican government and on how to construct a permanent constitutional framework, providing for elective, limited and balanced government. The exhilaration Adams felt with his pioneer role as lawgiver, as philosophical legislator, is reflected in his outburst to George Wythe: “You and I, my dear friend, have been sent into life at a time when the greatest lawgivers of antiquity would have wished to live. How few of the human race have ever enjoyed an opportunity of making an election of government—more than of air, soil, or climate—for themselves or their children! When, before the present epoch, had three millions of people full power and a fair opportunity to form and establish the wisest and happiest government that human wisdom can contrive?” Adams' creative encounter with lawgiving proved to be extensively influential in the constitutions adopted by the various states. He later became the principal architect of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, which provided, in his words, “a social compact, by which the whole people covenants with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people, that all should be governed by certain laws for the common good.” He thus tended to find confirmation for his notion that he had a unique role to play as Solon for all America.

Having seen to these preliminary safeguards for a constitutional

order, the three older statesmen were each in turn called upon to secure foreign financial, commercial and ideological support for the cause of the new American nation. In this critical effort of diplomacy, much depended upon Franklin's mastery of satire, his adroit and mysterious *sang-froid* in the company of the most sophisticated and sometimes cynical Europeans, and his vital fund of animal spirits and playfulness that kept the curse of dry-as-dust plaintiveness out of his relentless campaign to win respect for the new American experiment. Much also depended, in turn, upon Jefferson, whose cultivated and urbane comportment never masked an inner void, as he avidly entered upon discussions of ideas, and tirelessly hand-picked books from the bulging book-stalls of Paris to send home to politically active friends for their enlightenment as well as for his extensive personal library. The esteem he won from the enlightened philosophes and statesmen of the French Revolution, especially in its early phase, brought him the affection and praise of leaders of government and opinion—men like Lafayette, Condorcet, the Abbé Morellet and the Marquis de Chastellux. These key men helped him in his task to establish the reputation of America as a new force for modern free society. In his distinctive style of blunt and more aggressive pressure, John Adams, too, earned the respect and cooperation of Dutch bankers, although he deliberately provoked the displeasure of French officials like Vergennes. In England, where Adams assumed the cruel office of America's first Ambassador, he achieved less than in the Netherlands, or even in France, in the immediate arena of diplomacy; but he made himself intimately welcome with the group of nonconformist ministers and constitutional reformers who were the daring liberals of that day. Amidst these friendly reformers, even his demurs and dissents from the political idealism of this circle were effective in inciting doubts about what had come to be dogma of a sort. They introduced a note of Yankee hard-headedness and caution in the highly emotional atmosphere of political debate and commitment that flourished in an age of impending revolution.

Madison and Hamilton, without leaving American shores, nonetheless managed to further America's influence throughout the entire world. Widespread dissatisfaction with the ineffectual Articles of Confederation had inspired these young statesmen to agitate for a strong national union. They employed every means at their disposal—detailed argument in person and in letters to influential people, active membership in the Continental Congress, skillful promotion of the Annapolis Convention, and, when that failed of its purpose, the Federal Convention in Philadelphia—all steps to secure more power for the national government.

Franklin was present when the momentous Federal Constitution finally opened in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787; an American Ulysses, returned from his many years of invaluable diplomacy abroad,

ready for one more service to his country. The fact that he was old, ill, and so greatly famed, that he was bringing his tested skills and philosophical temper to the deliberation of the Convention, satisfied the other members and, indeed, the country, that his wisdom and experience would protect them, as he scrutinized bold measures for a stronger and more lasting union. His final address to the delegates—a masterpiece of philosophical and political common sense—could hardly have failed to secure signatures for the document from wavering men.

Once the Constitution had been signed, Madison and Hamilton contributed more to its defense and survival through the dangerous stage of ratification by the states than any other two men in America. As part of this strategic campaign to gain ratification of the Constitution, Madison and Hamilton assumed the shining mask of "Publius" as they wrote the classic defense of the federal republic of the United States. If each of these statesmen had thought and accomplished nothing else but collaboration in this writing of *The Federalist Papers*, they would have achieved a world-wide reputation; for that series of political essays was quickly recognized at home and abroad as a major contribution to the theory of modern federalism and constitutional government. It also provided a deepened and deliberate emphasis upon the competition of numerous interests and the protection of individual liberty that gave to the structure of the constitutional republic being advocated an unmistakably free and popular spirit.

5

The leading roles which Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton played in the third and fulfilling phase of the American experiment are more the familiar stuff of history. Yet even so, few people realize that after the new government had been established, it was a touch-and-go affair—more precarious than it would ever be again. It obviously could not count upon precedent and tradition, and it could easily have taken one or another fatal turn. Madison declared that the men in Congress and in other offices in the new American Republic were "in a trackless wilderness without a single footstep to guide us." Their perplexities about infusing the Constitution with life under an effective working government cannot help but move us, even today. The American experiment in democratic human values under a constitutional Republic could have proved itself unsteady, unworkable, unworthy of a further trial. It might, for example, have been diverted into a forced and forceful materialism—or it might have become a variety of satellites in the orbit of a "big" European empire—or it might have simmered and seethed with bloody contests until a domestic or imported dictator put an end to commotion and riot by iron rule. That none of these tragic

losses of liberty actively came about is the extraordinary fact about the first decade of political life under the Constitution.

Somehow, the contest and conjunction of the four political leaders—Jefferson, Madison, Adams and Hamilton, under the popular command of Washington—succeeded in establishing a strong national government, and yet in stubbornly winning increased commitment to the equal rights of man! An important part of their success in this unique experiment was the discovery of certain basic and hard truths about a free society. They came more or less reluctantly to see that a one-party state is a dictatorship; that there is no monopoly on political right, insight, ways and means; that, accordingly, there should be no monopoly on political power; and that those who challenge the prevailing power, so long as they conform to the fundamental rules of an open society, are not conspirators to be silenced or crushed. The will of the majority is something more than a dumb show; it is the spirit and real process of political choice. In short, just as personal freedom necessitates the presence of real alternatives which can be scrutinized prior to intelligent action, so political freedom requires the diversity of political groups within parties and usually between or among parties to make “government by consent” an operational reality. These truths were won out of the political battles in which the great statesmen of the early Republic engaged. As a result of their efforts, three of them were called to the highest office in the new government—Adams, Jefferson, and Madison—while Hamilton played the role of a singularly powerful Cabinet member, advising Washington on all matters, propounding a vast new program for economic growth and leading one of the two first major political parties.

It should be evident from this summary view that all our five American statesmen made indispensable contributions in the thought and leadership of at least two of the three momentous phases of the American Experiment. The calibre of these men, their memorable writings and the record of their far-seeing policies and acts entitle them to be considered “the representative men” of the American Enlightenment.

6

The selections from the collected writings of these five statesmen attempt to suggest the broad range of their abilities and activities. It is sometimes forgotten that the kind of men they were, their manner and style of living, and the ideal component of life which they tried to serve have as much to do with the basic institutions of a free society as do the mechanics of political events. American character is admittedly a complex of rough as well as shiny traits. That aspect of our character, however, which is persistently our “best” is the open-minded, experi-

mental temper. The philosopher-statesmen made a fateful and fortunate difference to American culture, as it developed, precisely because they were concerned for broader human interests, without sacrifice of a sharply realistic and acute sense of the modes and means by which their objectives could be furthered.

The ever-perceptive de Tocqueville had already perceived part of this truth, when he wrote, in the 1830's, that Jefferson was "the most powerful advocate democracy has ever had." Despite his praise for a solo performance, we have seen that the constellation of these five great men kindled a more powerful light than could have come from any one of them alone. For instance, we have Jefferson's word for it that Franklin was "the father of American philosophy;" he considered himself fortunate to have had the friendship of this incomparable pacesetter. We also have Jefferson's avowal of his lifelong debt to his great collaborator, James Madison, whose constant association with him over half a century "in the cause of liberty" he acknowledged shortly before he died: "Take care of me when dead," he wrote, "and be assured that I shall leave with you my last affections." And it is the same Jefferson who, from Paris, wrote home to Madison, in the warmth of his close friendship with John Adams: "You would love him"—adding something like, "if you came to know him as I do." The record shows that Jefferson and Adams became political enemies in the decade of the 1790's; yet in time the friendship was renewed because Jefferson never lost his deep respect for the statesman whom he considered a tower of strength and learning; while Adams knew well the value of the humble yet noble Virginian.

On the other hand, what may we say of Hamilton in this company? Here Jefferson's known enmity was never blissfully healed, and neither of these men felt in their hearts the slightest stirring of affection. Yet they properly respected each other, each painfully aware of the rival's masterful intelligence. There is a certain justice, then, in saluting a great adversary who challenged Jefferson and Madison to their ultimate political potential as they vied with the enemy, never to be forgiven!

For Franklin too, Adams nourished something akin to undying enmity, and in truth Franklin, whose *sang-froid* was hard to penetrate, seemed to return this cordial and lively animosity. In their joint years of diplomatic service in Paris, Adams and Franklin had been thistle and burr in each other's flesh. Franklin, so rarely ruffled, once rose from the mat of daily struggle with his pugnacious fellow Bostonian in Paris to wing the message to friends in Congress that Adams was "always an honest man, often a wise one, but sometimes, and in some things, absolutely out of his senses." Adams, in turn, tended a smouldering hatred against the man he had once characterized so flatteringly, though even then with perceptible envy, as the idol of France, his reputation

"more universal than that of Leibniz or Newton, Frederick or Voltaire, and his character more beloved and esteemed than any or all of them." Once his vanity had been irreparably wounded by Franklin's disagreements with him, Adams used his quill in private character assassinations (in his Autobiography, for example). These may have given him the solace of a primitive who pierces the wax effigy of his enemy, in a magic rite to slay him.

These fragmentary evidences of enmity as much as friendship among these men of genius are put forward precisely to suggest that although they were "founding fathers," they were not dull dogs. Nor were they a group of "demigods"—but men, diverse in talent, temperament, taste and inner striving; and by no means an angelic company. Like other great men, they transcended their human weaknesses by their profound concern and exceptional understanding. On the whole, they were acutely alive to each other and spent their lives in the consciousness of the talents the others possessed. And painful though the admission might have been, even the "enemy" was conceded a patriotic love of his country and the will to serve it. Respect for one another's talents glittered through practically every written contest we have on record. Thus at the peak of the political struggle of Jefferson and Madison with Hamilton, Jefferson characterized his opponent as "a Colossus to the anti-republican part—an host within himself." On the other hand, Hamilton, in one of his wildest attacks on Jefferson's character to President Washington, yet noted that he was "possessed of considerable talents;" and some years later, when he learned of Federalist maneuvers to push Burr into the Presidency, in order to defraud Jefferson of his election, he hastened to argue against the immoral character of Burr and his "Bonapartist" ambitions at the same time that he admitted (what he must have known all along) that there was "no fair reason to suppose him [Jefferson] capable of being corrupted." Hamilton also argued with innumerable political associates and followers that an understanding should be sought with Jefferson, who was a man of principle, not with Burr, whose word would mean nothing.

There is no need to multiply these instances and to search out the intricate figures in the carpet. For it is exactly as a group of *highly individual* men that these statesmen could bring their learning, insight, and organizational skill to the making of the American Republic and the shaping of its vastly influential early institutions. They could not be a phalanx of homogeneous or uniform believers. Seeing their writings and catching their tones of emphatic agreement and disagreement will do much to prevent dogmatic appeals to the mere words of the "founders," and will preclude childish notions of the absolute, unerring, and prescriptive correctness of their views. The reflex patriot must meet Franklin's shrewd and quizzical glance; Jefferson's probing intellect;

Adam's penetrating suspicion; Madison's powerful logic; Hamilton's impatient realism.

It is also natural that readers will quickly see that these men do not all sound alike, nor write alike. Franklin and Madison may have enjoyed each other and shared some common beliefs—but only a man born deaf to diction would confuse the two. Franklin as printer, community organizer, business man, colonial politician, scientist, journalist—a rare combination of wit and sagacity—offers a different range of talents from that of the modest younger man, Madison, whose logical penetration was noted by the contemporaries who heard him speak and whose consummate skills of philosophical legislation are more responsible for the substance of the Federal Constitution than that of any other member of the Convention.

Nor can Jefferson be assimilated to Hamilton or even to his friend, John Adams. For Jefferson was an eighteenth-century man, who nonetheless held before himself the Renaissance ideal. He was as a person aristocratic, humanistic, and yet full of the insight and learning that favored political creation. He was superbly and notoriously versatile; mastery, originality, characterized his performance not only in political thought and leadership but in the fields of law, architecture, scientific farming and education. He was noted for his vast and choice private library, his remarkable circle of friends (including the ablest philosophes of Europe as well as men of distinctive intellectual calibre in America). His urbane manners, vast resources of information, and distinctive style of life won the envy of lesser men and the admiration of his peers. But his genius for getting to the heart of moral and political principles in cadenced and memorable prose was a lifelong trait. His countrymen could not then or ever forget that he had composed the Declaration of Independence. We now know, from the treasury of his enormous private correspondence and body of public papers that he was literally creating a complex literature of American politics in the midst of the rigorous duties that were his for half a century.

Adams and Hamilton, on the other hand, shared a consuming interest in the principles of government, though they brought a radically different vision to this majestic study. For Adams, all of human nature, all moral insight, was an essential foundation to the "laws" and basic elements of "the divine science" of politics. Working with this philosophically broad conception of government and law, Adams maintained a profound unifying perspective in all his highly-excited reports of new experience and in all his ironic reflections on that queer creature, man. Everything, from the oddities of behavior of his fellow "mites" and "worms" to his first-hand discoveries of the way the "old world" of European diplomacy works, was grist to his mill. Intellectual hunger

and passion characterized Adams' earthly pilgrimage and elevated even his fits of bad temper into luminous insights and prophetic hints.

Hamilton, on the other hand, was preoccupied with the organization of power for an efficient and productive state, and his lifelong quest was therefore stringently conceived. This boldly brilliant man was an endless fountain of ideas, ideas characteristically directed to questions of political power, governmental energy, and economic growth on a presumed basis of an unalterable human nature. Without remorseless inquiry into human nature itself, Hamilton lacked Adams' relish for the human drama, and even for the human comedy in its place. He was therefore less the philosopher-statesman than the other men of genius in this group. On the other hand, his powerful comprehension of the meaning and workings of law, of political debate and management, and of directed economic growth and his marked abilities as an administrator cannot be overlooked. Both his keen sense of governmental strength and activity and his powerful logic supporting a broad and flexible interpretation of the Constitution comprise one line of indispensable thought in the American Enlightenment, even as they challenge some of its distinctive ideals.

The only impregnable conclusion of these observations is that these leading representatives of the American Enlightenment were a cluster of extraordinary men such as is rarely encountered in modern history. They were not supermen, either by conscious will or supra-human immunities. On the contrary, they were recognizably human in their trials and tears, their efforts, disappointments and successes. They are unforgettable men because they brought more to these trials, and created more out of the surrounding welter of confusion and obstacles, than men ordinarily do. In this sense they were able to achieve a measure of timelessness. What they perceived truly about human growth, cooperation, negotiation and fulfillment—about the independent and unquenchable human spirit in a society that honors and promotes it—is worth study and reflection in our own troubled time, when men are still seeking, still groping to comprehend the art of common life and commonwealth.

These eighteenth century philosopher-statesmen are the human agents whose personal vision and mental and moral traits captured the imagination of followers in their time, and exerted continuing influence over successive generations of Americans who could share their vision. They show by their writings why they were capable of achieving such wide and enduring influence: they are men of acute mind and disciplined habit; their talents are joyously diverse; and they are at many points so aware of the deepest layers of human experience, that their reflections sound surprisingly modern—perhaps because their struggle for freedom and order is still the central challenge of human society.

The claim is here put forward that these five great men best represent the American Enlightenment precisely because they were both learned and politically inventive, competent in so-called "abstract" or general ideas and in their practical applications for human conduct. This much they shared as a group, and one thing more: Franklin, Adams, Jefferson, Madison and Hamilton each perceived that the historical imperative of their time was the advancement of human freedom, beyond what had been achieved anywhere in the world of their day. On so many matters they differed, in so many sensitivities, loyalties, interests and ideals they thought alone as proud men must. But since they loved their country, and were determined to protect and promote its interests, they realized that what they recommended for the United States must square with the simple truth that men, to be human, must be free. This shared understanding was enough to bind them together as a group, however emphatic their differences or disagreements as creative philosophical statesmen in the second-order problems of economic and political means to this great end.

7

Now, given these general observations on the thought and deeds of five highly creative American statesmen, we may turn to the question of the nature and temper of the American Enlightenment as they gave it definition in their works and by their own life-styles. At once, the question of what the American Enlightenment means implies the larger context of the Enlightenment in general. Let us agree, then, that for our purposes, the Enlightenment relates to that movement of thought in the eighteenth century when learned men in all of Europe sought to assimilate, popularize, extend and apply the scientific and philosophic heritage of the "new science" of the seventeenth century. The deepest influences were Bacon, Newton and Locke; the high places were London, Edinburgh, Paris and Geneva; and the greatest figures, perhaps, were Hume, Voltaire and Rousseau. In France where "le siècle des lumières" shone with special radiance, many philosophes of unquestioned genius must be remembered as Voltaire's friends, associates or followers. Thinkers of the order of Diderot, d'Alembert, and Condorcet are ignored at very great risk and under very strong pressure for a compressed story. Voltaire, who was the inspiration and the literary master of the age, must be taken as formulator of a basic doctrine which the younger philosophes concurred in, even though they naturally had their own resources to develop and express.

It is important to recognize that there is no fixed doctrine or comprehensive philosophy that unites all Enlightenment figures. There are significant variations among the major national movements in France and England, for example, and there are also deep or considerable variations

among the major figures within each national movement. Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus of orientation and attitude that seems to distinguish Enlightenment thought from preceding or succeeding thought. These elements revolve around three basic concepts—reason, experience and progress; and three major strands of thought: that one must turn to reason for whatever one believes; that experience, gained through personal life, through history, and through active discoveries of nature and of human conditions all over the globe, supplies the basic materials with which reason must work; that there is hope that man, enlightened by reason, and lightened by improved tools and inventions may entertain hope of progress to more humane conditions.

In this view, the Enlightenment moves beyond sixteenth century Humanism and seventeenth century Reformation, since it finds *light* in reasons and *lightens* men's necessary toil. Progress becomes linked with reasonable efforts, through the improvement of human knowledge and the improvement of human techniques. The nature of science as method joins with the role of science as technology to permit lifting the conditions of human existence, lightening man's burdens and permitting all men to have the intelligence and education to share in governmental choices through representation. Thus the technical aspect, the technocratic basis of Enlightenment humanism, goes beyond Renaissance humanism which was still *élitist* in its confinement of intellectual life to a small and special class. And the resort to reasons without recourse to revelation, the resort to justifications on avowedly and explicitly human bases, distinguished the Enlightenment from the Reformation. For the opposition was not only to popery and papal infallibility, as reflected in the crisis of modern science symbolized by the burning of Bruno and the trial of Galileo, but also to religious sectarianism of the Reformation variety. The Enlightenment thinkers did not form a sect. They viewed reasons as individual decisions which ultimately had to be justified on personal grounds. By opposing both revelation and sects, they not only committed themselves to the logic and practice of toleration. By making reason universal in man, the trait that distinguishes man from all the rest of nature, they introduced (or reintroduced) the notion of the human family, of mankind as the center of human concern. Thus, they considered philosophical legislation and introduced certain moral claims as "the rights of man." They believed that man, properly brought up, with the aid of reasonable, minimum means of livelihood and education, could share in the government. Thus no break was required between a permanent, small governing *élite* and all others. This new outlook implied the democratization of humanism.

If we now consider the specific character of the American Enlightenment, we are likely to encounter the inevitable iconoclast who denies that there was such a thing as "the American Enlightenment." He is

typically ready to concede that there were, of course, changes from seventeenth century colonial patterns—changes that even encompassed a revolution, the creation of a federal republic, and the establishment of a durable constitutional system of popular government. Yet these vast changes supposedly came about through an alchemy of “favorable conditions,” spiced with sub-intellectual “know-how,” and borrowing lavishly from available English traditions of law and liberty. The moral and political thought of the founding fathers has been brushed off as “derivative” and “unoriginal”—at once systematic importations and at the same time, oddly enough, a tissue of inconsistencies, irrelevancies and rhetoric—a “salad of illusions.” Meanwhile ideological symbols and images are substituted for what the great and individual American statesmen had to offer in their writings, or in their individual lives, in their actuality. The real issues these philosopher-statesmen managed to face are evaded; and the intellectual response they made to the root problems and crises of their time are brewed into a homogeneous synthetic fluid dubbed “reason” or “rationalism,” or “innocence;” “mission” or “the cult of progress.” What was distinctly philosophic in their formulations of a characteristic point of view is thus lost, just as what was modified over time in their development as thinkers and statesmen—instructed by experience, temperament and their original talent responding to the search for ever wider understanding, is left unexplained and unexplored. This is only to say that what some critics and their followers have done is to drain out the human agents and human agencies, in all their grandeur, all their comedy and share of tragedy, from the history of this intensively creative period of America’s birth.

To get at something more like reality, we should insist upon a few obvious and indispensable truths. First, the waves of Enlightenment philosophy reached American colonial shores early in the eighteenth century and would normally have had a coterie of believers and followers no matter what the historic imperatives of the later part of that century would prove to be. For example, John Wise, to defend the old Congregational ways of the New England churches, virtually at the opening of the eighteenth century, appealed to man’s natural reason, to a “Noble Democracy” that should be included in every wise Monarchy, and spoke in terms of praise (borrowed, it seems, from Pufendorf’s seventeenth-century exposition of natural law systems) of the equal rights of men. This liberal philosophy Wise put at the service of the movement to maintain the organizational independence and autonomy of the individual churches. Doubtless, some such influence—if not in the churches, in other and related areas of social and political life, would naturally have reflected this current of European thought. Barring other factors, a meek and mild school of enlightened thought might easily have been the outcome.

But the supreme fact of the American affiliation with this European and

British line of thought is that it was political. The temper of the Colonists, the reasons which they employed to question the authority of British Ministers and Parliament—especially in the decade before Independence—had the urgency of life and death. The moral-political crisis called for, and found, native genius! The distinctive American Enlightenment was born in this struggle—a moral and political struggle, *immediately: ultimately*, a struggle to come to grips with the overarching issues of a philosophy of man, nature and society, to meet the remorseless demands that a career of independence and experiment set up—to provide a sense of direction and commitment.

Thus, there is cohesion and a core of profound agreement about the basic tenets of the American Enlightenment that individuates it when we compare it with the English or French variety. The comparison with the English tradition is particularly important, since it was peculiarly true that “Whig principles” exercised a powerful sway over the minds of the colonial spokesmen who argued for American liberty. Nonetheless, Whig principles would prove not to be the whole story nor the whole achievement of the American Enlightenment. Locke’s philosophy and its “real Whig” followers in eighteenth-century England would continue to agitate by pamphlet and newspaper opinion and a multiplicity of constitutional reform societies, but they would never engage in the anguished moral, political, legal and emotional search for identity that was precipitated by the need to ask what an American style and destiny would be if all ties were cut with the British Crown and realm.

On the other hand, the French Enlightenment, in all its brilliant achievements and rich profusion of doctrines and dogmas, did not cast up the kind of sagacious and flexible leadership that came to the highest places of power in the American Revolution and in the ensuing years of Confederation and Constitutional Republic. Moreover, by the time the French Revolution was to open, a veritable cult of America as the new world, the world of promise, the ideal Republic of liberty, would intervene between the original English Enlightenment heritage and the native varieties of qualified monarchism that had been propounded by great French philosophes like Montesquieu and Voltaire. Rousseau, as a conceivable exception, as an influential advocate of Republicanism, was in fact markedly different in political theory as well as personal mode of influencing society from the American philosopher-statesmen. It is tiresome to repeat again what is so widely known, but Rousseau’s concept of “the general will” in its inherent unity and its imperial latitude over particular wills, is incompatible in spirit, root and branch, with the major traditions and procedures of American Enlightenment thought. In short, neither the *Encyclopédie* nor the salons, neither Socialists, liberal reformers, nor democrats and fanatical radicals who would come to brief power in the Jacobin and post-Jacobin phase of the Revolution, produced

statesmen capable of devising durable forms of government and exercising responsible power.

To put it differently, the American Revolution did not devour its own leaders as did the French Revolution. Moreover, it was not merely an incident of the *kind* of revolution that took place in each country that encouraged a set of benign and creative leaders to achieve stable control in America. At least part of this unique sequence of events in America must be attributed to the temperate, philosophical and informed understanding of the leading men who mastered the intricate arts of peaceful political leadership on the one hand, and who were able to formulate a philosophy that eschewed extremes of doctrine precisely because they appreciated the factor of experience and respected the spirit and equal rights of each individual. We are impressed by the fact that they were moved by the twin demands of life: thought *and* action; contemplation, deliberation, and patient scrutiny of ideas *as well as* the fertile invention of laws and institutions; theory *and* practice; political ideals and the exercise of actual political power; mental and moral "science," and also the devising of moral positions and attitudes that put basic notions of good and right into a fresh and functional context. All these men of the American Enlightenment admired Bacon and his experimental philosophy; yet none of them seemed to share Bacon's admitted unhappiness as typified in his remark to Sir Thomas Bodley: "Knowing myself by inward calling to be fitter to hold a book than to play a part, I have used my life in civil causes, for which I was not very fit by nature, and more unfit by the preoccupation of my mind." These great men of the American Enlightenment, one can only observe, were "fit" for *their* special calling—to think deeply and even profoundly of a new human ethos, to envisage a new philosophy and role for man, and to carry on this stubborn inquiry at the very time and in the midst of the pressures and urgent issues of political leadership.

Perhaps the point is that the statesmen presented here were a special kind of "architect of ideas"—their blueprints were essentially livable and durable. They tried to design a vast republic—an "extensive" republic was Madison's phrase—to be inhabited by men whose worth and judgment would bring them not only to the management of private life (kept really private by the priceless "right to be let alone") but to responsible participation in public or political life. The common-wealth was to be in their vigilant keeping. How easy it would have been to design a wedding-cake affair, only to find out its perishability on first trial! Or to strain and force the fancy into an "ideal" structure, forgetting that "utopia" belongs in the skies for contemplation, otherwise literally nowhere. Or, finally, to perfect a faithful copy, in detail, of the most modish and celebrated of the established dwellings! Before we tire of the metaphor, let us say plainly that these statesmen were inventive in

the most thoughtful and functional way. They were developing *relevant* ideas for a world partly formed, partly in the process of becoming. They were consciously mediating between the purely ideal and the needlessly narrow habits of their society. Their ideas issued in plans, their ideals in policies.

Meeting the twin demands of thought and creative action, our five Americans were, in sum, philosopher-statesmen. They accepted the responsibilities of political leadership and continuous action on the political scene, and yet they were profound and stubborn critics of government, of man, of society. It should be understood that they differed widely in type from the Philosopher-King, who plans and reveals only what he must to the "guardians" of the Republic, and manages paternally and on his sole responsibility the lives of the great producing class of society. Unlike the Platonic super-statesman, the American philosopher-statesmen regarded their share of power as entrusted, delegated, limited in tenure, dependent upon specific office, and inexorably committed to ultimate election and rejection by the people. But equally, the philosopher-statesmen should be sharply differentiated from the mere politician whose comprehension of human ends and goals is neither far-ranging nor serious, and whose concern is immediately and narrowly tied to his own political career as *summum bonum*. For the philosopher-statesmen the dimension of political thought, debate and program was a majestic and engrossing adventure. While not the crown of life, to that adventure they brought themselves—in the full service of men with strong hearts, clear heads, and the wisdom and patience to cope with tragic necessities without abandoning hope for significant human freedom.

8

We can now turn to the charge that the political philosophy of the American statesmen was merely derivative, a massive ritual, full of English liberal slogans, and signifying nothing new. We can appraise this charge by examining one aspect of the Declaration of Independence, since there is a general view that the Declaration is simply a copy of the political philosophy of John Locke.

The truth of the matter is that a wholly new element was introduced into natural rights philosophy in the American document. Its opening words cue us to the novelty of the case: the opinion of mankind is solicited, as a court of judgment on the justice of the American cause and the need to wage a revolutionary struggle to defend it. Recall that there was no precedent in history for such a document. No colony had ever advanced a reasoned statement of its need and decision to rebel from an imperial power.

The ensuing political philosophy is also irreducible to earlier models and discontinuous with earlier feelings and sentiments. Men are declared

to be born equal, with natural rights among which are specified the rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." No public document had ever employed language pointing to this kind of moral ideal—equal rights paired with the individual pursuit of happiness. *Property* had been invoked in the past; public happiness had been stated as the *theoretical* objective of a lawful or good government. But the individual right to pursue happiness, and to include in its scope the techniques and deliberations required for constant participation in self-government, envisaged a fuller meaning for the individual person. The free man, in this perspective, would grow towards real individuality by social partnership with others; the process of selecting officials, scrutinizing the rules of government, deciding when, why and how to alter or abolish them would promote self-government in a double sense: for the person, for the public. Also, unlike property, "the pursuit of happiness" has no class boundary. It is thus neither an exclusive privilege, nor is it a merely formal ideal. Franklin made "Poor Richard" say that an empty bag cannot stand upright: and men who set this strange new value on the public "pursuit of happiness" would not require the advent of Marxism to teach them that without means, without control over the laws (including the laws of property) men could be reduced to "mere automata" of servitude and suffering.

The upshot of the thinking that permeates the philosophical sections as well as the statement of particular and local "grievances" in the Declaration is a tough new political logic: government *by consent*, or government *without and possibly against* consent. In short, freedom or tyranny. This hard new political logic embodied what came to be called "the principles of 1776." It was not meant to imply that men were wholly free or wholly captive, nor did it call for utopias. It did argue in principle, however, that there could be no middle ground between government based on the consent of the governed, and government carried on *over* the people, without their consent. Political theorists in the past had toyed with doctrines of "tacit" consent, or of merely formal consent—sometimes even substituting coerced "consent" for the real thing. These were all subterfuges according to the philosophy of the Declaration. From antiquity on, and including Montesquieu, political philosophers had envisaged three basic models of government—monarchy, aristocracy, republics—and had assigned different principles and justifications for each. The new position made no compromise with monarchy or aristocracy. Governments were free if and only if they were ready to make good the promise of self-government—that is, ready to provide effective processes of consent. Such processes must be devised and maintained in order to permit the people to judge infringements of rights and suitable occasions to "alter and abolish" bad laws or despotic governments.

This notion of the people as the constituent power is realized in various instruments devised deliberately to create new governments. Most notable of these inventions, perhaps, was the calling of conventions to draft con-

stitutions which, in the demands of the American theory, were to be subject to ratification by the people. The use of this device was urgently proposed by Jefferson in his criticism of the wartime constitution of Virginia and call for a convention to draft a new constitution "when peace shall be established and leisure given us for entrenching within good forms, the rights 'for which we have bled.'" More weight must be given, however, to the example set with the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, which followed upon the prior choice by the separate towns of delegates to a state convention expressly devoted to framing a new constitution and subjecting the constitution to ratification by the people. In this celebrated Massachusetts Constitution for the first time there appears the phrase, "We, the people . . . agree, hope, ordain and establish" whence it passed into the Federal constitution and later state constitutions. John Adams, who was the principal architect, reflected with pleasure that Massachusetts had turned to the people as sovereign source for fundamental law—"a phenomenon in the political world that is new and singular," he pointed out. He had often been angry with his fellow citizens in Massachusetts, dreading, as he had habitually confessed from 1776 on, their "rage for innovation" and their levelling tempers and moves. But he now loved them for being "the first people who have taken so much time to deliberate upon government—that have allowed such universal liberty to all people to reflect upon the subject, and to propose objections and amendments—and that have reserved to themselves at large the right of finally accepting or rejecting the form." This new and widespread consciousness of the real meaning of government by consent and self-government, Adams hailed as an "epoch in the history of the progress of society."

Whatever else one may conclude about these representative men of the American Enlightenment, as political leaders and thinkers they were in one profound sense unlike Marx, who in his conception of revolutionary strategy spoke contemptuously of the demand for plans for the society to come after revolution as a demand for kitchen "recipes." On the contrary, they found complete accord in the belief that to revolt without *constituting*, without planning the orderly transition to that "self-government" in whose name the revolution was being waged, was the road to needless turmoil, bloodshed and political servitude. The experiment in popular sovereignty, unless deliberately held to constitutional laws and parliamentary debates and popular discussions on legislation, might be foreclosed, perverted to a greater tyranny than the one they had known. However high the ideals of the philosopher-statesmen might reach, they were entirely realistic about the capacity of any slogan—including the slogan of freedom, liberty, self-government—to become a disguise for new oppressions. Out of loyalty to the free principles of '76, they tended carefully their kitchen recipes.

We turn finally to consider another major reason often cited for rejecting any serious philosophic thought in the American Enlightenment—the alleged fact that it produced no systematic treatises, no books of political theory. This charge proves to be indefensible when scrutinized, and on two main grounds. First, we have learned enough in the modern world from a variety of philosophical schools and movements, not to assume automatically that men who do not write “systematic treatises” in the high style, are conveniently to be read out of the ranks of serious and philosophical minds. What is clear, now more than ever, from the body of extensive writings of these five brilliant American political leaders is that there is indeed a *massive* literature which is the fruit of the American Enlightenment. The papers and writings of these enlightened Americans reflect their double role and capacity; they were deeply committed to humanistic learning and letters—and they were pressed to put that learning to the test of potential usefulness. Everything significant that had been said about human nature, forms of government, laws natural and civil, ideas of freedom and determinism, of sin, of doing good, education, scientific progress, the patterns of history in the rise and fall of nations, the characters of conquerors and the different aspirations of the moral heroes of mankind from Socrates to Voltaire—became for them a matter of study, reflection and revision. It is true that these men were working in the tradition of the European Enlightenment—at least in one or another line within the tradition. But they selected what they considered valuable in it, they responded favorably to some of the philosophy and not the rest, and they changed, expanded, or made themselves go beyond what was given. The papers and writings that comprise this book should confirm these observations.

Second, the writings of the philosopher-statesmen were not wholly confined to notes, manifestoes and specific papers dealing with immediate, therefore urgent, social and political problems. Even if we pass over the comprehensive analysis by Madison and Hamilton in the one undisputed political classic of the age, *The Federalist Papers*, Jefferson and John Adams (who seemed to anticipate by their own performance what Emerson would demand of the American scholar—that he be a “university of knowledges”) must each be credited with at least one political treatise. Jefferson’s *Notes on Virginia* and Adams’ *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, published when they were diplomats abroad, are interesting, original and important works, and, in the eighteenth century, were probably more widely influential than the justly famous classic, *The Federalist Papers*, which we all know by name at least. These unusual publications formulated two distinct visions and

versions of the political freedom and thereby set the range of American political views, values and measures into a new and deeper focus on both sides of the Atlantic.

Jefferson's *Notes* is full of the sense of the American terrain, its fertility and possible growth, and expounds a new American culture that he finds vigorous and promising in infancy and vast in its potential if mistakes are corrected and liberal principles courageously enacted. The *Notes* is a primer of the new country, the American version of free society. The *Notes* make it clear that Jefferson belongs to that select group of American patriots who took to heart the fully progressive sense of the revolutionary faith. Jefferson, in his adherence to this ideal, devised ways and means to introduce it in every sector affecting the well-being and happiness of man. To give only one important example: he argued for man's right to economic self-sufficiency as a human value which transcended the merely legal sanctity of property. Many of his provisions in the draft he drew for a constitution for Virginia in 1776 had envisaged a new type of economic justice, and attendant political participation. Thus, he had provided that free male adults who could not meet the small property qualifications for the franchise, be given "in free and absolute dominions" fifty acres of land by the state, and, thus, qualify for suffrage. Later, in Paris, with his sympathies deepened by the sight of widespread poverty, he formulated his sweeping principle that "the earth belongs to the living" for their use and sustenance.

Adams' *Defence*, composed late in the 1780's and taking stock of European and American developments, is a searching would-be "science" of politics, depicting man's inhumanity to man and the eternal cycle of rulers and ruled. Only the precious "balance" of orders in society and mixed government can contain runaway human nature, whether in the people or in the aristocrats and the rulers. The State governments in the United States are defended as conforming to natural truths about man in society and the implication is that these must hold in any future government for free man (whether for an extensive nation or a modest state).

If we now move our perspective to the larger scene of the eighteenth century world in the late 1780's, it must be said that Adams sensed very early that a vast movement of social and political revolution was gaining headway on the continent of Europe. He thus provided, through his elaborate work, a rehearsal of the arguments that would later erupt into the great controversy between Burke and Paine over the French Revolution and the rights of man. It was precisely in this sense that the *Defence* functioned, both in England and in France. In Paris, a democratic-republican *refutation* of his doctrine was read by French philosophes before the work itself was translated. An American pamphlet "Observations of Government, including some animadversion on Mr. Adams' *Defence* . . .

and Mr. De Lolme's Constitution of England" by "Farmer of New Jersey" (John Stevens, in reality) was translated into French in 1789 as "Examen du gouvernement d'Angleterre, comparé aux constitutions des États-Unis" (a revealing title) and accompanied by lengthy notes and commentary by Dupont de Nemours, Condorcet, and a few others. Thus, Lafayette, Condorcet, Dupont and many of their associates were fully apprised of the conservative case against democratic Republicanism, before they made their decision to advocate a liberal program of human rights. They continued to lead the "Patriot party" in proposals for the reform of the desperate evils of French society and for the substitution of a limited constitutional monarchy, bound by a bill of rights for the monarchy of Louis XVI. In these moves, Lafayette brought his group into close consultation with Jefferson, including one rather indiscreet dinner and discussion meeting at the American Minister's residence. Jefferson also advised Lafayette and made some changes in his draft of the French bill of rights. Ultimately, when the French Revolution moved far beyond these moderate reformers, Adams concluded self-righteously that he had predicted sooner even than Burke that it would devour its own children.

10

More than a century ago, George Bancroft confided to Jared Sparks: "The people of the United States will by degrees learn that theirs is a history worth knowing." Both of these early historians believed this so deeply that it sustained their arduous historical inquiries all through their lives. And yet the judgment remains little more than prophecy for us. Many Americans assume that modern industrial democracy is totally different from the small agricultural world which fashioned the American republic. They call that eighteenth century world "Arcadian," or the "lost world"—in any case it *is* lost to them! Others become converts to Zen Buddhism or "Existentialism" or theosophy and find they need not bother with anything so local, so close to home and presumably uninteresting as the democratic culture of which they are, consciously or not, a part. And on the whole, if Americans do discover in themselves some lively curiosity about the past, their reading about it tends to be drawn from second-hand accounts: magazine articles, fictionalized biography, historical accounts of varying degrees of excellence and accuracy which the readers rarely try to check against their own impressions of something first-hand.

In an animated epistolary discussion of the American Revolution, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, both by then elder statesmen retired from public office, entertained some searching doubts about the historian's treatment of its meaning and worth. Jefferson, in the course of this ex-

change in 1815, permitted himself the following outburst: "On the subject of the history of the American Revolution, you ask who shall write it? Who can write it? And who will ever be able to write it? Nobody; except merely its external facts; all its councils, designs, and discussions having been conducted by Congress with closed doors, and with no members, as far as I know, having even made notes of them. These, which are the life and soul of history, must forever be unknown."

One notices Jefferson's vigorous distinction between the external facts, and the life and soul of history. Records of debates, of committee deliberations and motions, and evidences of conflict of various sorts of interests; the power to plan, solve problems and persuade by reason; or to influence by personal traits and social position; the evidence of political hostilities—all these he knew to be essential to the meaning of the American Revolution. Without recourse to the record of what men had thought and argued, designed and even tried to get accepted but failed—a record that would catch the thoughts and accents of the human agents who led the revolution, who, in infinite diversity, were moved by what they had learned and read as well as by what they reflected from their particular positions in colonial society—without that evidence, a historical account of the revolution would afford "merely its external facts."

Fortunately, our own era is witnessing the long overdue publication of documentary records of the American past. Especially is this true of the highly creative period of the American Enlightenment. In the past dozen years, and in the years to come, readers on at least two continents are in a new position to grasp something of "the life and soul of history" for that exhilarating era. Comprehensive new editions, superbly and faithfully edited, are in progress and will restore the papers of the five great early American statesmen to their friends everywhere. This vast program is giving us the Julian Boyd edition of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, estimated to run 50 volumes; the Leonard Labaree edition of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, projected at 40 volumes; the Lyman Butterfield edition of *The Adams Papers* (primarily collections of documents by and to John Adams, John Quincy Adams, and Charles Francis Adams) which may together amass 100 volumes; and 40 volumes each are anticipated for *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* and *The Papers of James Madison*.

To introduce the reader to this growing and impressive library and thereby overcome the state of affairs which has confined our knowledge to second-hand sources, this volume of readings presents first-hand sources: letters, speeches, public papers, essays by the five greatest philosophical statesmen of the American Enlightenment. The readings have been selected in each case out of a gigantic collection of papers which each of these statesmen wrote, and the implicit wager of this book is that the men and their times will emerge more meaningfully than

through synthetic accounts, at second hand. The world these statesmen inhabit may no longer be mis-named "lost," "Arcadian," "abstract" or "simple;" for it is not likely to lack connections with the world of current experience—including its hopes, fears and crises. And as one senses the power of intelligence that emanates from these great men and catches glimpses of their wisdom, their vision and distinctive charm, one will naturally be "learning by degrees" that our history is worth knowing.

It is in this spirit that the present volume of readings has been prepared, to facilitate the meeting between twentieth century Americans and five of their surprisingly enlightened forebears. It also reflects the hope that the founders of the American political tradition who created our "deepest ties to the rest of humanity" will prove to be worth the friendly scrutiny of men and women anywhere in the world who continue to concern themselves with freedom, justice, order—and truth! Beyond these primary concerns, this American Enlightenment reader is offered simply to introduce or recall to mind five extraordinary men, who in an era of crisis proved themselves to be *philosophical* in their sustained reflections on moral and political issues; *practical* in their ability to formulate policies and wield political power in the interests of enlightened human goals; and wholly *individual* in their characteristic style of expression and conduct of life.

Today, as never before, the American world is charged with understanding and explaining to a world-wide community its revolutionary past, its federalism, its concern with freedom and equality, its ideas, ideals, institutions, and the great men who helped make its history. In this connection one might cite the aperçu of the irrepressible Denis Brogan, that the trend in American-British relations is from contempt to concern; and that these countries must learn the historical forces which shape their respective characters.

Americans who learn to read and comprehend the record may now have within their grasp the means to fulfill a cherished goal of James Madison:

"It has been the misfortune of history that a personal knowledge and an impartial judgment of things can rarely meet in the historian. The best history of our country therefore must be the fruit of contributions bequeathed by contemporary actors and witnesses, to successors who will make an unbiased use of them. And if the abundance and authenticity of the materials which still exist in private as well as in public repositories among us should descend to hands capable of doing justice to them, then American History may be expected to contain more truth, and lessons certainly not less valuable, than that of any Country or age whatever."