_____Charles Sellers_____

THE MARKET REVOLUTION

Jacksonian America: 1815-1846

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Ch. 1: "Land and Market"

___Excerpts___

[Beginning of chapter]

1815 OPENED with the fate of the American republic—and worldwide republicanism—hanging in the balance. A pall of chill, ashes, and gloom lay over muddy little Washington. Burned out of the Capitol, congressmen found standing room in a patent office spared by British invaders' reverence for technology. Amid blackened rubble, they dreaded news from every direction.

Four days' travel to the north, the elders of New England were thought to be plotting secession behind closed doors at Hartford. A month away to the south, Sir Edward Pakenham's seasoned British army, fresh from victory over Napoleon Bonaparte, advanced through the swamps of the lower Mississippi toward New Orleans. Few thought it could be stopped by the raw western militia hastily assembling under Indian fighter Andrew Jackson.

Only forty years before, the American Revolution had loosed republicanism on the modern world. Within a generation the French Revolution and Bonaparte's legions broadcast the contagion across Europe. Through twenty years of unparalleled bloodshed, British-led coalitions of European autocracy made war on revolutionary Bonapartism. When the United States rashly joined the fray against the preoccupied British, it brought upon itself a train of left-handed humiliations even as the British right hand crushed Napoleon. And now Britain's mighty fleets and armies redeployed to choke off the republican infection at its New World source.

Americans' only hope lay in stalled peace negotiations at faraway Ghent in the European Low Countries. By last report, two months in transit, British negotiators were still dragging their heels, presumably awaiting a Pakenham victory to dismember the upstart republic.

After weeks of suspense, on February 5 glorious news arrived from below New Orleans. The invaders had been routed on January 8 by murderous fire from Jackson's hasty entrenchment behind the little Rodriguez Canal. With a loss of only thirteen men, the western citizen-soldiers cut down seven hundred Britons, including General Pakenham. Celebration climaxed eight days later, when the capital learned that

a treaty of peace had already been signed at Ghent on Christmas Eve, over two weeks before Jackson's stunning triumph.

Despite overwhelming military superiority, the war-weary, tax-ridden British agreed to leave the United States intact. With victory miraculously snatched from defeat, the republic was safe. As lumbering mail coaches spread rejoicing across the wide land, speeches, toasts, and schoolboy compositions celebrated the brilliant destiny of the most extensive republic the world had known.

Yet postwar boom ignited a generation of conflict over the republic's destiny. History's most revolutionary force, the capitalist market, was wresting the American future from history's most conservative force, the land. As market revolution stressed Americans into unparalleled mobilization, both spiritual and political, the Hero of New Orleans found another commanding role.

In the beginning was the land, immemorial provider of survival for the many and honor, riches, power, and independence for the few. When a New World to exploit galvanized an Old World swarming with too many people for too few acres, European mercantile capital reached across the seas for world dominion. A global division of labor drew Asian spices, enslaved African labor, and the New World's inexhaustible acreage into an intricate network of production for exchange, funneling back into Europe the capital that launched the industrial revolution. Wherever merchant capital reached, the market's irresistible commodities drew people into producing the commodities it demanded. As the division of labor rationalized and multiplied production, money value allocated natural resources and human energy. As traditional cultures gave way to a spreading market culture, new beliefs, behaviors, emotions, and interpersonal relations spurred work and consumption.

Where England's venturous capital met the New World's abundant acreage along the coast of temperate North America, a new kind of society developed. Reversal here of the Old World's person/land ratio opened a refuge for swarms of the needy and servile uprooted by the market from the European land. New World land—fertile, abundantly watered and wooded, and easily wrested at first from its aboriginal populace—elevated them to landowning security and respect.

Cheap land, virtually free at first, not only elevated the mass but imposed a limit on wealth by making labor expensive. With farm ownership readily attainable, Euro/Americans would not labor for others except briefly and at high wages. A few years of high wages financed enough cheap land to yield a comfort and independence inconceivable to poor Europeans. With wages too high for most farmers to pay, production was limited—no matter how much land they had—by the family labor available. While raising European immigrants to an exhilarating rural well-being, the person/land ratio inhibited further accumulation. The resulting society of roughly equal landowning families was the seedbed of American republicanism.

Yet from the beginning land and market pulled Euro/Americans toward diverging forms of New World opportunity. Along the seaboard, Virginia colonists quickly discovered a European market for tobacco, and New Englanders for fish. As colonials learned to venture in shipbuilding and transatlantic commerce, the possibilities of wealth began to transform coastal society. Settlers clustered around the best ports—Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston—and in the lower valleys of navigable rivers—the Connecticut, the Hudson, the Delaware, the maze of Chesapeake estuaries, the Savannah. Here cheap water transportation gave access to the world market for furs, timber, wheat and flour, livestock and salted meat, indigo, and rice. In the southern tidewater, planters broke through the high-wage barrier to wealth by exploiting the bound labor of indentured Europeans and enslaved Africans. Here and in the ports, wherever sea brought market, growing wealth concentrated in fewer hands, and status became steeply graded. Freed from Old World aristocracy, wealth conferred gentility, and law evolved a new conception of freely negotiable fee-simple property.[†]

But New World land closed the interior to the market it galvanized at tidewater. Moving goods was infinitely more difficult across the thinly inhabited reaches of America than in densely populated Europe. Beyond water transportation, bulky farm products had to be wagoned over scarcely maintained and often impassable roads and trails. Hauling them more than thirty or forty miles cost more than they were worth. Consequently people who settled at any distance from navigable water mainly produced use values for subsistence rather than the market's commodity values for sale.

Profound cultural differences arose from these contrasting modes of production. The market fostered individualism and competitive pursuit of wealth by open-ended production of commodity values that could be accumulated as money. But rural production of use values stopped once bodies were sheltered and clothed and bellies provided for. Surplus produce had no abstract or money value, and wealth could not be accumulated. Therefore the subsistence culture fostered family obligation, communal cooperation, and reproduction over generations of a modest comfort.

During the eighteenth century a demographic explosion swelled this subsistence-farming sector into a major historical force. Low mortality and the fecundity of colonial mothers, combining with a new surge of immigrants displaced from the market's European core, sent population flooding into the interior. By the end of the century, a majority of free Americans lived in a distinctive subsistence culture remote from river navigation and the market world.

By 1815, however, a market revolution was surmounting the overland transportation barrier. While dissolving deeply rooted patterns of behavior and belief for competitive effort, it mobilized collective

[†] *fee-simple* property: land owned without limitation or condition, in which the owner is entitled to the entire property, including land and buildings, with the right to occupy it forever and to designate it to heirs in his/her will; in contrast to *fee tail* (feudal Europe), in which land designated to a tenant would revert back to the feudal lord if the tenant died with no descendants. Today most land is held as fee-simple property. [Footnote added by NHC]

resources through government to fuel growth in countless ways, not least by providing the essential legal, financial, and transport infrastructures. Establishing capitalist hegemony over economy, politics, and culture, the market revolution created ourselves and most of the world we know. The stressed and resistant Jacksonian majority has eluded or baffled our historiography of consensual, democratic capitalism. Despite contradictions of patriarchy, racism, and fee-simple property, they rallied around enduring human values of family, trust, cooperation, love, and equality. Understanding of both the world they lost and the world we have gained begins with understanding differences between the cultures of land and market.*

The New World's ancient immigrants, people of the land *par excellence*, throw into sharpest relief the cultural gulf separating land from market. Bark lodges in the eastern woodlands, tipis on the plains, pueblos in the arid southwest, and igloos on the Arctic ice typified Native Americans' ingenious adaptations to varied ecological niches. Through ancient human techniques of hunting, gathering, fishing, and planting, these mainly Indian peoples extracted their subsistence directly from the land. Their only domesticated animal was the dog until the European horse reached the plains, but they had brought their maize/vegetable polyculture to a high level of sophistication. Like other premarket ecological adaptations, the Indian mode of production furnished adequate subsistence without onerous labor. . . .

By 1815 Indians and their cultures were nearing extinction in the eastern United States. Wherever whites settled, Indians disappeared. Creeks and Cherokees still held western Georgia, and some five thousand of the once mighty Iroquois were herded onto reservations in upstate New York; but fewer than three thousand Indians survived in all New England, and they had almost vanished from the rest of the Atlantic seaboard.[2]

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*For the profundity of capitalist transformation: Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston, 1944); and Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought* (Cambridge, England, 1986). As explained by Ian Tyrrell, *The Absent Marx: Class Analysis and Liberal History in Twentieth-Century America* (Westport, 1986), horror at Karl Marx's politics has blindered bourgeois historians to the most powerful conceptual tools for understanding Americans' central transformation.

But Marx's European analysis requires considerable adaptation to the special circumstances flowing from cheap American land—widespread property ownership, a farming populace oriented more to subsistence than profit, and a bourgeoisie massively reinforced by small enterprisers. Here the industrial capitalism of commodified wage labor was not possible until merchant capital pushed a market revolution across the countryside to transform economy, culture, and politics by commodifying the family labor of subsistence producers. "Market," in this capitalist sense, excludes local exchange for subsistence while including production for a competitive world market with commodified slave labor. Only on the battlefields of the Civil War did the progressive bourgeoisie of free-labor exploitation finally prevail over resistant farmers, workers, and the anachronistic planter bourgeoisie of slave-labor exploitation.

For scholarly debate over subsistence farming, see the bibliographical essay under "The Land: Subsistence Farming."

[2] Jedidiah Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States, on Indian Affairs* . . . (New Haven, 1822), 375.

[NHC: footnote #1 relates to text not included in this excerpt.]

Native Americans were destroyed by lack of immunity to both the microbes and the market brought by whites. In the Carolina upcountry, after one smallpox epidemic wiped out five-sixths of the native populace, another left the woods so "offensive with the dead bodies of the Indians" that dogs, wolves, and vultures were "busy for months in banqueting on them."[3] Staggered everywhere by the white invaders' lethal pathogens, Indians came under cultural attack by the market's irresistible trade goods and insatiable demand for furs. Lacking textiles and iron, they wanted the greater comfort and labor savings of warm woolen blankets, guns, and such instantly indispensable metal utensils as fishhooks, needles, knives, hatchets, traps, and cookware

As Indians stepped up their harvest of animal pelts to exchange, taboos broke down, and overkilling disrupted the Indian ecology. As they accumulated pelts for their commodity value, the ethic of sharing came under strain. As they bought articles formerly made, traditional crafts died out. Competition for scarcer furs provoked intertribal wars, rendered more bloody by the market's firearms. If these forces of cultural demoralization were not enough, the market was happy to supply all the firewater Indians could pay for.[4]

Native American cultures were already decimated and demoralized, therefore, when they encountered the decisive phase of the genocidal process, the inexorable advance of white settlement over Indian lands. By 1815, after two hundred years of this, the crisis of Indian survival was at hand.

Whites occasionally regretted the strange "disappearance" of the Native American, assuaging conscience by claims that they were Christianizing or "civilizing" him. Civilizing was more talked about as white society became more secular, while even religious folk who actually attempted to Christianize the Indian agreed that he had to be civilized first. Civilizing meant teaching him the market's blessings of private property, self-denial, and hard work in settled agriculture and handicrafts. And in the process of becoming civilized, he could surrender most of his hunting lands to civilized use by whites. The federal government from its inception purported to advance the Indian's civilization by demanding ever larger land cessions and taking them by military force when not yielded fast enough. As the tide of white occupation flooded over the Appalachian crest, federal troops had much hard fighting to clear Native Americans from the upper Ohio valley. While Indians' lands were steadily converted to civilized use, few Indians were converted to civilization. After two centuries of white profession and effort, the handful of converts drawn into the white man's schools, religion, or style of living were only too ready to revert to Indian ways at the first opportunity.

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[3] James H. Merrell, "The Indians' New World: The Catawba Experience," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41 (Oct. 1984): 537-65, quotation 543.

[4] Calvin Martin, *Keepers of the Game: Indian-Animal Relationships and the Fur Trade* (Berkeley, 1978); Shepard Krech III, ed., *Indians, Animals, and the Fur Trade: A Critique of* Keepers of the Game (Athens, Ga., 1981); Harold Hickerson, "Fur Trade Colonialism and the North American Indians," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 1 (1973): 15-44.

More striking was the ease with which whites converted to Indian ways. Colonial officials had constant problems with deserters to the Indians. Hundreds of white captives in the colonial wars were taken into Indian families and refused to return to their white families. Even when captives were persuaded to come back, as Benjamin Franklin reported, "in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them." Franklin blamed "the proneness of human Nature to a life of ease, of freedom from care and labour." The modern historian of these white Indians concludes, however, that they preferred Indian life for its "strong sense of community, abundant love, and uncommon integrity."[5]

Confrontation between white and Native American cultures presented in the starkest terms a contrast, and for some a choice, between the cultures of land and market. That Indians and whites who faced a choice so often chose Indian ways suggests something about the human costs of "civilization." It also suggests why so many whites clung to a more attenuated culture of the land.

Demoralized culturally by the market, Native Americans were displaced physically by Euro/American farm folk practicing a similar premarket mode of use-value production. White subsistence farmers adopted the Indian maize/vegetable horticulture to extract from the same resource base most of their caloric food values. But European livestock and short-fallow cultivation enabled whites to reproduce the permanent settlement of their peasant tradition. Where eastern woodland Indians cultivated with hoes and long fallows, periodically exhausting fields and moving their villages to fresh lands, Euro/Americans adapted to the Indian horticulture their more intensive cultivation by plough, while cultivating the same fields indefinitely on short rotation. The livestock that made ploughing possible supplied whites with the protein requirements that Indians procured through peripatetic hunting and fishing. Paradoxically European technology made white farmers more independent of the market. Fabricating tools from iron, spinning and weaving cloth, and distilling whiskey, they produced for themselves important use values that Indians had to buy.[6]

The white mode of subsistence production needed much less land to achieve permanent settlement and greater comfort. But it demanded more labor, which families supplied by having many children. Consequently the subsistence culture could not reproduce itself over generations without a constant abundance of cheap land to provide farms for its ever more numerous offspring. Irony compounded

[5] James Axtell, *The European and the Indian: Essays in the Ethnohistory of Colonial North America* (New York, 1981), quotations 161, 166, 206.
[6] Peter A. Thomas, "Contrastive Subsistence Strategies and Land Use as Factors for Understanding Indian-White Relations in New England," *Ethnohistory* 23 (Winter 1976): 1-18.

tragedy as a doomed white culture sustained itself a few generations longer—and cleared the American land for market domination—by sweeping away a more archaic Indian culture.

The subsistence culture enforced its heavier labor demands through a paternal authority inherited from European household production. The father controlled the labor of family members for most of their waking hours and made all major family decisions. He might not even consult his wife about uprooting the family and moving hundreds of miles. Patriarchy was further inflated by the rigors of immigration, farm making, and Indian fighting in a New World where civil institutions were too weak to provide security. Even in long settled rural areas, the law of the strong prevailed, and families relied on the brawn and courage of avenging fathers and brothers. Aggressive masculinity asserted the patriarchal "honor" on which the safety and prospects of women and children depended.

Cheap land, held absolutely under the seaboard market's capitalist conception of property, swelled patriarchal honor to heroic dimensions in rural America. The father's authority rested on his legal title to the family land. Where European peasant landholdings were usually encumbered with obligations to some elite, the American farmer held in fee simple. Supreme on his domain, he was beyond interference by any earthly power. Except for a modest tax and an occasional half day of neighborhood road work or carousing militia drill, he owed no obligations of labor, money, service, or (finally) religious fealty to any person or entity. Fee-simple land, the augmenting theater of the patriarchal persona, sustained his honor and untrammeled will. This extraordinary independence inflated American farmers' conception of their class far above peasantry. The hero of South Carolina's first play, *Independence* (by William Ioor, 1805), almost caricatured the prototype of the subsistence culture. "I am an independent farmer, don't owe five guineas in the world," he asserted. Owning a farm that yielded "every necessary comfort for me and mine," he disdained lawyers and planters, and was always "boasting of, his INDEPENDENCE, and declaring, that an honest farmer knows of no dependence, except on heaven."[7]

Cherishing patriarchal independence, the American farmer clung even more fiercely than his peasant forebears to the land that conferred it. Paradoxically the capitalist doctrine of private property was the juridical foundation for both the market's expansion and the farmer's resistance. The historical outcome turned on this contradiction, as commitment to property undermined and compromised rural resistance to capitalism and its culture.

The contradiction between capitalist property and use-value communalism was apparent in the cultural norms that controlled the actual use of land. New England towns (as Yankees called both rural and urban communities) donated communal lands to families in proportions determined by communal

[7] Charles S. Watson, "Jeffersonian Republicanism in William Ioor's *Independence*, the First Play of South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 69 (July 1968): 194-203; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982).

criteria of status and need. Throughout the South and West farm folk maintained (in some areas until the twentieth century) the principle of open range that many of their forebears had known in Ulster, Scotland, and Wales. Exclusive property rights attached only to land that was used, and the landowner was obliged to fence his cultivated fields to keep other people's livestock out. Even fee-simple ownership did not permit him to fence uncultivated land or bar others and their livestock from using it. In practice much of early rural America was a great forested commons, in which everybody freely hunted, fished, trapped, grazed livestock, and harvested firewood and lumber, roots and herbs, honey, nuts, and berries.[8]

Farm people's overriding priority was to maintain and reproduce the family's subsistence way of life. Like other premarket peoples, they practiced a hard-won folk wisdom about how to utilize their labor-power and technology to extract sufficient use values from their resource base. Experience taught American farmers that the optimum division of labor and scale of production could be achieved—with considerable variation for time and place—on as little as twenty improved acres, employing a labor force of father, mother, and six to eight surviving children out of eight or ten pregnancies. And like other premarket cultures, the American subsistence culture drew upon folk experience in controlling pregnancy to maintain this balance, through delayed marriage, extended lactation, and little-understood forms of premarital contraception, especially *coitus interruptus*, that accompanied the New England practice of "bundling" and its equivalents elsewhere.

The farm family moved through a life-cycle in which it first had the nuclear appearance of a conjugal pair with an increasingly crowded houseful of children. Marriage was delayed until enough land could be had to support a family, which usually meant the middle to late twenties for men and the early to middle twenties for women. Meanwhile young people enjoyed, amid a bawdy folk vernacular, considerable sexual freedom.

Upon marriage a couple put romance behind them for the rigors of farm-making and endless childbearing. In this joint enterprise they commonly developed a durable if undemonstrative loyalty and affection. Yet "the old woman" and her "Mr. So-and-so," as she usually addressed him, valued each other primarily for productive reliability in their respective spheres. The folk realism of an Ohio valley jingle warned newlyweds against romantic illusions:

First month, honey month,
Next month like pie;
Third month, you dirty bitch,

[8] T. H. Breen, *Puritans and Adventurers: Change and Persistence in Early America* (New York, 1980); Forrest McDonald and Grady McWhiney, "The Antebellum Southern Herdsman: A Reinterpretation," *Journal of Southern History* 41 (1975): 156-58; Steven Hahn, "Hunting, Fishing, and Foraging: Common Rights and Class Relations in the Post-bellum South," *Radical History Review* 26 (1982): 37-64, especially 38-43.

Get out and work like I.[9]

The family division of labor was along lines of sex and age. Women paid a heavy price in labor and motherhood for patriarchal afflatus.[†] While constantly pregnant or nursing infants for fifteen or twenty years, wives were responsible for the domestic interior, cooking, extensive food preservation, gardens, poultry, dairy animals, and the endless textile processes of carding, spinning, weaving, fulling, dyeing, quilting, sewing, and mending. Husbands attended to field crops, livestock, buildings, firewood, and hunting and fishing, which afforded both recreation and additional animal proteins for the family diet. Daughters worked with mothers and boys with fathers at age-graded tasks. Probably it is going too far to say that childhood did not exist in the subsistence culture, that youngsters were in fact treated as the little adults portrayed by the self-trained folk limners who produced the earliest American family portraits. But certainly children were expected to labor as much as strength, skill, and attention span admitted. Shaming and physical punishment broke rebellious wills while enforcing prescribed behavior and labor.

The psychodynamics seem to have produced what was wanted: dutiful and reliable replicas of parents. Commonly the oldest child of each sex was named for its same-sex parent (and often, therefore, for its grandparent and great-grandparent as well); and if it died, the same name was often rebestowed on the next child of the same sex. Discouraging individuality and competitive striving, the subsistence culture socialized its young to a familism of all-for-one and one-for-all.

Demands on farmer and wife eased as maturing children's labor brought more acreage into production. In this middle phase of its life-cycle, the family needed a surplus to supply support for aging parents and farms for maturing sons. To this end it typically required children's labor well into adulthood. Holding title to the family property, the father could deny children a share of the patrimony until he permitted them to marry or withdraw their labor. Grown sons and daughters, chafing under long delays of marriage, often paid for the privilege of leaving home.

Patriarchal authority was not, of course, absolute. Premarital pregnancy often coerced parental approval of marriage; and even in straitlaced New England at times, more than one bride in three was pregnant on her wedding day. By way of compensation the subsistence culture presented young people with few identity crises, problems of career choice or entry, fears of failure, or uncertainties about their futures. To replicate the parents was to succeed. Sons who satisfied fathers ascended in due course to paternal authority themselves.

[9] John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven, 1979), passim for patriarchy, quotation 155.
[†] afflatus: a divine imparting of knowledge or power. (Merriam-Webster; footnote added by NHC)

Although white subsistence folk worked harder and under stricter supervision than Indians, their premarket way of life was considerably less arduous than most market occupations.[10] So long as land was assured for the rising generation, accumulation was pointless and productive effort could be relaxed as soon as conventional standards of consumption were achieved. Work exercised varied skills and alternated with considerable leisure as dictated by season and weather. Often it was interwoven with family and neighborhood sociability. . . .

While bartering crops and labor with neighbors, most farm families also secured a little money for taxes and high-utility purchases by selling some products to the market. The market's ambassador to the subsistence world was the country storekeeper. Except in the earliest period of settlement most farm folk lived within a day's ride of a store, around which there often developed a little village or county-seat town. Country stores dispensed a limited range of high-utility commodities and accepted in return farm products sufficiently valuable in proportion to bulk and weight to bear the cost of transportation to a distant market. Periodically the storekeeper wagoned collected produce to the nearest river port or seaport, where the proceeds replenished his stock of store goods.

From the perspective of economic historians, farm folk who bartered a few hams or a tub of cheese for a frying pan or piece of calico sometimes seem incorporated into the market. But from the perspective of the household devoting its labor overwhelmingly to subsistence, the market remained marginal. Directly measuring the cost of store goods in the additional labor required to obtain them, rural America found that transport made most prohibitively expensive.

Moreover production for market was inconsistent with rural culture's fundamental commitment to maintaining and reproducing the stem family. Unpredictably fluctuating market prices put at risk the family's hold on its land. A year or two of low prices or poor yields, or both, might leave them without enough to eat, forcing them to risk the farm by borrowing. The two great bugaboos of the subsistence world were debt and taxes, through which the market world could seize the farmer's land to enforce its demands for money.

Consequently the farm household labored first and foremost to insure its subsistence and its reproduction in the next generation. Only after these requirements were met was additional labor expended to produce a small "marketable surplus" of such high-value farm products as whiskey, maple sugar, potash, and salted beef and pork, or of livestock, which could be driven to market on the hoof. Modest sales provided enough money or store credits to pay taxes and procure such essential items as salt,

[10] Robert E. Gallman, "The Agricultural Sector and the Pace of Economic Growth: U.S. Experience in the Nineteenth Century," in David C. Klingman and Richard K. Vedder, eds., *Essays in Nineteenth Century Economic History: The Old Northwest* (Athens, Ohio, 1975), 35-76.

powder and shot, cooking and eating utensils, and iron for tools. With a little additional labor the family could periodically enjoy tea, coffee, or refined sugar and gradually acquire a few such luxuries as crockery and window glass.

The market was less threatening and more easily entered when it offered high prices for the grains and livestock raised for subsistence. Prudent farmers planted more grain than needed as insurance against a poor yield, and the prudent surplus became a marketable surplus when grain prices rose sharply enough in the late eighteenth century to offset the high cost of wagoning from the interior. Now, without altering their pattern of production or endangering their subsistence or risking the family farm, rural households could acquire more store goods by expending more labor on their marketable surplus.

For some sixty-five years preceding 1820, Europe was unable to feed itself and relied increasingly upon American wheat, flour, beef, and pork. As wheat prices rose in response, more farmers at ever greater distances from the market discovered that they could profitably enlarge their marketable surplus despite the high cost of transportation. Between 1772 and 1819, the profitable wagoning distance for wheat doubled to over one hundred miles. A wheat exporting belt spread from the lower Connecticut to the lower James and inland to Virginia's lower Shenandoah valley.[17]

The wheat boom introduced many farm folk to the market or increased consumption of store goods. In highly accessible and fertile areas like Pennsylvania's Susquehanna valley, the marketable surplus may have reached a third of farm production, and some farmers were reorienting themselves to the market by hiring labor and buying more land and equipment. But even here cultural transition made slow headway against traditional commitments to family, use values, and communal obligation. The marketable surplus was not enough to push most of the Pennsylvania Dutch and their neighbors across the cultural divide into pursuit of wealth. As long as family labor was concentrated on necessities, store goods remained a secondary objective with painfully apparent labor costs.

Similarly, when a cotton boom pushed market production into the southern interior at the turn of the century, few farmers took the planter road to wealth. Producing a bale or two of cotton for taxes and store goods, most free southern families devoted most of their labor to raising corn and hogs for subsistence. This dual economy persisted throughout the antebellum period because accumulating capital to buy slaves

[17] Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *Journal of American History* 68 (Mar. 1982): 831-48; James T. Lemon, "Household Consumption in Eighteenth-Century America and Its Relationship to Production and Trade: The Situation among Farmers in Southeastern Pennsylvania," *Agricultural History* 41 (1967): 59-70; James T. Lemon, *The Best Poor Man's Country: A Geographical Study of Early Southeastern Pennsylvania* (Baltimore, 1972.), especially 27, 180-81; Robert D. Mitchell, *Commercialism and Frontier: Perspectives on the Early Shenandoah Valley* (Charlottesville, 1977). [Footnotes #11-16 relate to text not included in this excerpt. NHC]

and additional land was too difficult and borrowing too risky for farmers committed to the stem family and patriarchal independence.[18]

Migration was an essential feature of a culture combining farm ownership with large families. Every subsistence family confronted a dilemma after subdividing its land among a generation or two of multiplying sons and grandsons to the point where the remaining paternal farm could support only one heir. At the same time settlement thickened from natural increase and immigration, and land became too expensive to buy with the limited surplus of traditional production. Typically the son who got the shrunken farm was encumbered with years of compensating payments to landless siblings in worse plight. Only by working some years as tenant farmers or migrating to cheap frontier land could they get farms of their own; only in later years might they hope to accumulate enough acreage to support them in old age and give their children a start.

Many a far-sighted father preferred an alternative strategy that also fed the western migration, but without fragmenting the stem family and undermining patriarchal authority. Selling the family farm well in advance of the children's maturity, he used the proceeds to acquire a much larger tract of cheaper land farther west, on which the maturing children's labor could provide support for aging parents and farms for adult sons. Often many households of kin migrated as a clan, or related households followed a lead household in chain migration. . . .

While enriching many, commercial boom had made life more precarious for the nine out of ten urban dwellers who worked with their hands. Already about half of these working-class people were without skills or property. Laborers, sailors, cartmen, domestics, and small shopkeepers eked out a bare subsistence, constantly threatened with disaster by unemployment or illness. Most vulnerable were blacks and women, who bore the special burdens of racial and sexual discrimination.[29]

Insecurity was also overtaking the skilled half of the urban working class, the artisans or mechanics. These leather-apron workers were divided into dozens of different crafts, each manufacturing ("making

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[18] Morton Rothstein, "The Antebellum South as a Dual Economy: A Tentative Hypothesis," *Agricultural History* 41 (Oct. 1967): 373-82; Gavin Wright and Howard Kunreuther, "Cotton, Corn, and Risk in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Economic History* 35 (Sept. 1975): 526-51; Gavin Wright, *The Political Economy of the Cotton South: Households, Markets, and Wealth in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1978), ch. 3; Steven Hahn, "The Yeomanry of the Non-Plantation South: Upper Piedmont Georgia, 1850-1860," in Robert C. McMath, Jr., and Vernon Burton, eds., *Class, Conflict, and Consensus: Antebellum Southern Community Studies* (Westport, 1982).

[29] Howard B. Rock, *Artisans of the Young Republic: The Tradesmen of New York City in the Age of Jefferson* (New York, 1979), 13-16; Billy G. Smith, "The Material Lives of Laboring Philadelphians, 1750 to 1800," *William and Mary Quarterly* 38 (Apr. 1981): 163-202; Billy G. Smith, "The Vicissitudes of Fortune: The Careers of Laboring Men in Philadelphia, 1750-1800," in Stephen Innes, ed., *Work and Labor in Early America* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 221-51; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York, 1986), 3-18. [Footnotes #19-28 relates to text not included in this excerpt. NHC]

by hand") in home workshops a different product. Every neighborhood had bakers and butchers, shoemakers and tailors, to supply its daily essentials. Buildings constructed by carpenters and masons were furnished by cabinetmakers, glaziers, pewterers, and chandlers; while the merchant fleets that sustained the urban economy were built and maintained by shipwrights, caulkers, cordage makers, sailmakers, blockmakers, and riggers. A mechanic learned the "art" or skill of his particular craft as an unpaid apprentice to a master mechanic. Then he typically worked a few years for wages as a journeyman, until he acquired the tools and capital needed to set up his own shop as a master. Once established he might take on several apprentices and a journeyman or two.

The mechanic culture shared much of the precapitalist quality of the subsistence culture. Skills, tools, and shop gave master mechanics something of the security and independence that land gave farmers, as well as a similar patriarchal control over their families, including apprentices and journeymen. In the moral economy of their European artisan tradition, they were not competing for wealth but providing essential services to the community in return for the right to a decent competence. Often they banded together by craft to enforce production standards and adequate prices. Working to order for individual customers and seeking repute from quality products, mechanics, like farmers, claimed dignity from the use-values their labor created. Chairmakers, according to the banner they carried in New York parades, saw their labor as furnishing "Rest for the Weary," while tailors marched under the legend "Naked Was I and Ye Clothed Me." Pride in meeting human needs sustained the mechanics' class conviction that honest labor I was the only source of value.

Championing republicanism of a democratic cast in the Revolutionary crisis, mechanics had mustered class pride and influence against merchant elitism in the emerging party politics of the 1790s as Jeffersonian Republicans. In the major ports, united organizations of the various crafts mobilized "the mechanic interest" and proclaimed a mechanic ideology symbolized by an upraised arm wielding a hammer. To this emblem New York's General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen attached the motto, "By Hammer and Hand All Arts Do Stand."[30] But commercial boom inaugurated a historic shattering of mechanics' unity by extending markets for their products beyond neighborhood and local customers. As widening markets intensified competition, cost-cutting masters with access to merchant capital in the major ports intensified the division of labor by subdividing work processes to exploit cheap, unskilled labor under close supervision in central workshops. Alternatively, to avoid the high cost of large workshops on expensive urban land, many of these mechanic/entrepreneurs paid unskilled workers low piece rates to complete at home single steps in the production process. . . .

[30] Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City & the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York, 1984), 3-103, quotations 89, 91; Rock, *Artisans*, 1-147, quotation 131; Susan E. Hirsch, *Roots of the American Working Class: The Industrialization of Crafts in Newark, 1800-1860* (Philadelphia, 1978), 3-13; Charles G. Steffen, *The Mechanics of Baltimore: Workers and Politics in the Age of Revolution, 1763-1812* (Champaign, 1984), 3-190.

Democracy emerged during the American Revolution as a new thing under the sun. The word *democrat* did not appear in the English or French languages until 1789. "Democracy," denoting in classical political theory the popular element in mixed governments, was consistently disparaged by the liberal Revolutionary gentry. Dreading democracy, they wanted instead a "republic" providing security of property, equal rights before the law, and a carefully restricted system of representation through which enterprising elites could shape the state to the market ambitions of capital.[48]

But genteel leaders found themselves dependent on farmers, workers, and shopkeepers inspired by the egalitarian implications of Revolutionary ideology. As the market undermined traditional communities, farming and working people were appropriating the "Mr./Mrs./Miss" (Master /Mistress) formerly reserved for the gentry. The democratic impulse was driven by feelings of insecurity and powerlessness as the market disrupted ordinary lives. Contrary to liberal mythology, democracy was born in tension with capitalism, and not as its natural and legitimizing political expression.

When independence forced reconstruction of the polity, therefore, the combined influence of subsistence farming areas and urban workers made the new state constitutions far more open to popular impulse than the gentry desired. In state after state, the evangelical countryside pressed for the most democratic features—manhood suffrage, secret ballot, annual elections, unicameral legislatures. In Pennsylvania, where colonial elites were most completely discredited by their opposition to independence and where farmers were joined by the radicalized laboring and artisan classes of Philadelphia, the popular coalition won a complete victory. Even where more limited concessions were wrung from Revolutionary elites, the new state governments were considerably more democratic than the colonial regimes. Given the social roots of these democratic reforms, it should not be surprising that their backers often demanded religious qualifications for officeholding.[49]

In the more open regimes, popular influence soon threatened elite interests with paper-money and debtor-relief laws. Alarmed by "this great upbearing of our masses," a coalition of commercial and planting elites brought off the constitutional coup of 1787. Essentially they shifted the locus of power from the unreliable states to a strong central government, buttressed it with special guarantees of capitalist property relations, and carefully insulated it as much from popular influence as they thought politically feasible. Then the brilliant leader of their commercial wing, Alexander Hamilton, charted for the new federal government a series of boldly conceived policies, capped by a national Bank, through which their dreams of empire and profit might be realized

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[48] R. R. Palmer, "Notes on the Use of the Word 'Democracy,' 1789- 1799," *Political Science Quarterly* 68 (June 1953): 203-26. [Footnotes #31-47 relate to text not included in this excerpt. NHC]

[49] Elisha P. Douglass, *Rebels and Democrats: The Struggle for Equal Political Rights and Majority Rule during the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1955).

Commercial boom made government promotion of economic growth the central dynamic of American politics. Entrepreneurial elites needed the state to guarantee property; to enforce contracts; to provide juridical, financial, and transport infrastructures; to mobilize society's resources as investment capital; and to load the legal dice for enterprise in countless ways. Especially they strove for a powerful, gentry-led national state, through whose developmental policies they dreamed of rivaling British wealth and might.

The rural majority, by contrast, idealized the republic already at hand. Democracy promised farmers protection from intrusive government. Dreading taxes and meeting most of their social needs through their own institutions of family and church, they jealously resisted any enlargement of public functions or expense as threatening patriarchal independence. To preserve the independence and equality of a self-sufficient, self-governing citizenry, they wanted government weak, cheap, and close to home. By threatening this yeoman republic, market elites stirred up a powerful democratic counterforce seeking a tighter control over government by ordinary voters.

Thus the clashing perspectives of land and market focused early American politics on three tightly linked questions:

1. How democratic—how responsive to popular majorities—would government be?

2. Would government power be extensive and concentrated at the federal level or limited and diffused among the states?

3. To what extent and in what ways would government promote economic growth?

When commercial boom and Alexander Hamilton unveiled the developmental capitalist state, antinomian rebellion overflowed from Great Revival into political animus against his intrusive, aristocratic Federalism. The politicalization of the democratic majority began when Hamiltonian developmentalism was challenged by a disaffected wing of the elite, the tobacco-planting gentry of the Chesapeake region. Thomas Jefferson's Republican party, by presenting itself as vehicle for the rising democratic impulse, politicized enough farmers to oust the Federalists in "the revolution of 1800."

Republicans won overwhelming ascendancy by abandoning Hamilton's expensive developmentalism while symbolically affirming the civic worth of farmers and workers. But Republicanism was compromised by contradictions between opportunity and equality, while rural egalitarianism itself was compromised by farmers' commitment to private property and the patriarchy it sustained. The potential dangers of unlimited property rights under market conditions were obscured by Americans' premarket experience with private property under a person/land ratio sustaining family security and equality. On these contradictions would turn the postwar generation's climactic struggle over American destiny.
[End of chapter.]