

I

The Artisan Republic, 1788-1825

Neither a servant nor a master am I,
I take no sooner a large price than a small price—I will have my own,
 whoever enjoys me,
I will be even with you, and you shall be even with me.

Chants Democratic, III, 7.

This page intentionally left blank

1

“By Hammer and Hand”: Artisans in the Mercantile City

In February 1815, a sloop arrived in New York harbor with first news of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent. Almost immediately, a spontaneous festival erupted, and for over a week, New Yorkers rejoiced at the expected return of commerce after four years of diplomatic wrangling and nearly three years of war. None were more jubilant than the city’s artisans. At closing time, masters, journeymen, and apprentices filled their shops with their finest wares and snake-danced tipsy through the streets, their paths lit by shimmering transparencies, of eagles and dollars spilling from a cornucopia, of brawny arms lifting mallets, above the legends “Peace, The Mechanic’s Friend” and “By Hammer And Hand All Arts Do Stand.” At dawn, they wobbled back to the shops, only to begin another round of patriotic toasting. An exultant artisan rhymester named Werckmeister caught the mood well with a pun: “*Work is over, Peace is master / Friendship ties her knot now faster.*”¹

These were the trades in their favorite array, the citizen-craftsmen, distinguished by their insignias and their leather aprons and united by a fierce pride in their skills and products—a self-proclaimed social estate embracing those the journalists called “the plain, honest men” of the mercantile city.² All craftsmen, employers and employees alike, had reason to cheer; clear sailing for the merchants and sea captains augured ample work and good wages for even the lowliest local mechanic. No one

1. *Evening Post* [New York], February 27, 28, March 1, 1815; *Columbian* [New York] February 27, 1815; R. S. Guernsey, *New York and Vicinity during the War of 1812* (New York, 1895), II, 483–94.

2. For typical references, see *American Citizen* [New York], March 11, April 13, 1801.

seemed perturbed by the gaps between the festive craft imagery and the actual conditions in the workshops and artisan neighborhoods. No one mentioned the strikes that had hit the shops before the war and that threatened to resume with the revival of business. For at least this one auspicious moment, the artisans' devotion to country, craft, and commercial prosperity submerged memory and premonition.

So New York's craftsmen greeted the peace that would bring the collapse of the artisan republic. What, then, were the changing social conditions and relations in the city's trades? And why, on those nights of jubilee, had the economic and moral universe of craft and workshop already begun to fall apart?

The Crafts in Flux

Jefferson's embargo and the War of 1812 marked a calamitous interlude in New York's rise to supremacy among America's mercantile cities.³ In 1788, Manhattan was one of several important ports of call along the Atlantic sugar routes, a city of sufficient size and prestige to be selected as the new nation's capital but not yet even remotely a commercial metropolis. Ruins left from the great fires of 1776 and 1778 remained untouched, charred reminders of the British occupation during the Revolution; the merchant Samuel Breck, on his return from France in the late 1780s, found it "a neglected place, built chiefly of wood, and in a state of prostration and decay."⁴ Ten years later, the national government had relocated to the pestiferous Potomac, safe from urban crowds, while New York emerged as the busiest of the seaboard trading cities; over the next quarter of a century, the pleasant, provincial port became a commercial emporium and a financial market of international prominence. New York's merchants, already blessed with one of the world's finest harbors and with excellent waterways to the hinterland, seized control of coastal commerce and established Manhattan as the chief entrepôt for shipping to and from Britain. The early introduction of an auction system for imports and of regular transatlantic packet-ship service widened access to British capital and increased the city's advantages over its chief rivals, Philadelphia and

3. The material in the following paragraph is drawn mainly from Sidney I. Pomerantz, *New York, An American City, 1783–1803: A Study in Urban Life* (New York, 1938), 147–225; Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815–1860* (New York, 1939), 1–15; Myron H. Luke, *The Port of New York, 1800–1810* (New York, 1953); Douglass C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790–1860* (New York, 1966), 32, 42, 51, 62–63; Bayrd Still, *Mirror for Gotham: New York as Seen by Contemporaries from Dutch Days to the Present* (New York, 1956), 54–81.

4. Breck, *Recollections of Samuel Breck* (Philadelphia, 1877), 89–90; T. E. V. Smith, *The City of New York in the Year of Washington's Inauguration, 1789* (New York, 1889), 5–6.

Baltimore. The early-nineteenth-century transport revolution—hastened by the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825—tightened New York's grip on commerce from the Atlantic to the most distant American markets. New and improved banking and credit institutions, insurance companies, brokerage houses, and a stock market kept lower Manhattan at the center of what one writer has described as the era's "business revolution."⁵ New York became a mandatory stop for foreign tourists, who marveled at its bustling streets, its merchants' brick town houses, and its forests of masts. The more astute among them noted what the city's growth meant to those inside the counting houses: henceforth, one wrote in 1823, "[n]ot a tree will be felled which does not necessarily operate to increase the trade and riches of New York."⁶

With prosperity came a mounting population, fed by rural migrants from the city's hinterland, vagabonds, and small waves of immigrants from Britain and Ireland. In the first rush of expansion, between 1790 and 1800, the number of residents counted in the census increased by more than 80 percent; by 1805, New York was the nation's largest city. Twenty years later, despite the embargo, the war, and several outbreaks of yellow fever, the recorded population had nearly tripled again, to over 160,000. The city's physical growth was almost as impressive. Although incapable of ending chronic housing shortages, new construction to the north and the subdivision of existing structures surpassed the expectations of the most enterprising New Yorkers. In 1803, when municipal officials drafted plans for a new, marble city hall, to be built on the city's outskirts, they authorized the use of red sandstone for the rear north wall, "inasmuch as it was not likely to attract much notice." By 1825, the limits of most concentrated settlement, running from river to river, reached to Fourteenth Street—almost two miles north of the hall (Map 1).⁷

This rapid development deepened existing contrasts between rich and poor. Between 1790 and 1825, New York's total wealth per capita rose by approximately 60 percent, but the distribution of wealth became increasingly unequal, accentuating disparities already evident before the Revolu-

5. Thomas C. Cochran, "The Business Revolution," *AHR* 79 (1974): 1444–66. See also *idem*, *Frontiers of Change: Early Industrialism in America* (New York, 1981), 17–37.

6. John M. Duncan, *Travels through Part of the United States and Canada in 1818 and 1819* (New York, 1823), II, 25.

7. Ira P. Rosenwaike, *The Population History of New York City* (Syracuse, 1972), 15–28; Pomerantz, *New York*, 201–9; John W. Francis, *Old New York: or, Reminiscences of the Last Sixty Years* (New York, 1858), 15. On housing shortages, see James Ford, *Slums and Housing with Special Reference to New York City* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), I, 87–90; Betsy Blackmar, "Re-walking the 'Walking City': Housing and Property Relations in New York City, 1780–1840," *Radical History Review* 21 (1979): 131–48.

tion; by the late 1820s, a mere 4 percent of the population owned half of the city's noncorporate wealth.⁸ At the pinnacle of local society stood a cosmopolitan mercantile elite of old Knickerbockers, of transplanted New Englanders, and of the odd self-made parvenu like the immigrant John Jacob Astor. Aggressive in their pursuit of regional, southern, and western markets, innovative in their use of credit, sometimes opulent in their private displays of fortune (a style exemplified by Astor, whose very name, Herman Melville would later write, "rings like unto bullion"), New York's merchants and financiers formed the most conspicuous and energetic American aristocracy of urban capitalist wealth. Clustered in their residential enclaves along Broadway and the southern portions of the city, they dined in each other's homes and married into each other's families; they also directed the city's network of charitable and cultural associations and dominated city government.⁹

At the other extreme were the laboring poor—migrants and immigrants, sailors, free blacks, day laborers, widows, orphans, and transients. No one was sure how many New Yorkers found themselves in these straits, but their numbers were obviously large and growing. In the mid-1790s, approximately six hundred paupers were lodged in the city's almshouse; by 1817, the number of inmates had almost tripled, while more than fifteen thousand persons, about one-seventh of the city's population, required some sort of public or private charity relief.¹⁰ The more fortunate of the city's manual laborers found jobs along the waterfront; the most fortunate of all managed to obtain licenses as cartmen, draymen, and hackney-coach drivers—mean, rough work but also regular, independent, and profitable work.¹¹ Thousands of others lived with more marginal prospects. By 1825, pockets of the city's central and outer wards had become dilapidated

8. Edmund P. Willis, "Social Origins of Political Leadership in New York City from the Revolution to 1815" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1967), 103–32; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 238; Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power*, 33. On poverty and inequality in New York before 1776, see Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 125–27, 239–40, 254–56, 331–32.

9. Albion, *Rise of New York Port*, 235–59; Willis, "Social Origins," 156–74, 220–21; M. J. Heale, "From City Fathers to Social Critics: Humanitarianism and Government in New York, 1790–1860," *JAH* 63 (1976): 21–41; Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power*, 9–73, 169–248; Frederick Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana, 1982), 187–96, 208–22, 231–50; Herman Melville, "Bartleby the Scrivener," in *Great Short Works of Herman Melville*, ed. Warner Berthoff (New York, 1969), 40.

10. Raymond Mohl, *Poverty in New York, 1783–1825* (New York, 1970), 14–34, 87–90.

11. Isaac Lyon, *Recollections of an Old Cartman* (Newark, 1872), 3–5; Pomerantz, *New York*, 211–12; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 205–34; Graham Hodges, "The Cartmen of New York City, 1667–1801" (Ph.D. diss., New York University 1982).

slums where even the most determined missionaries to Christ's poor walked with fear. Along Bancker Street in the Fourth Ward, poor blacks crammed into tumbledown houses, where overcrowding and poor sanitation led to periodic outbreaks of disease and fever. To the east, Corlears Hook, the sailors' resort, became a lower-class haven, a mixture of small shops, barrooms, boarding houses, and minuscule flats. Only a few blocks from the new City Hall, the Five Points district, built hastily on a landfill over the old Collect Pond, began to decay into a vaporous neighborhood of clapboard homes abandoned by their original artisan owners. Most gentlemen and visitors shunned these areas, but they could not deny the absence of what the Englishman John Lambert called a "pure republican equality." Nor could they avoid the poorest of the poor, who could be seen all over town, living as best they could from the scraps of the mercantile economy, as ragpickers, hucksters, street sweepers, wood-chip collectors (a job for children), seamstresses, and prostitutes.¹²

Between these social extremes (but overlapping them at either end) were the master craftsmen and their journeymen employees, the largest group of working people in New York.¹³ Well before the turn of the cen-

12. Ward Stafford, *New Missionary Field: A Report to the Female Missionary Society for the Poor of the City of New-York and Its Vicinity* (New York, 1817), 12-15; *Evening Post*, January 23, 1805; *New-York Spectator*, July 13, 1816; *Report of the Committee of the Medical Society of the City and County of New York* (New York, 1821); MCC, XI, 440-41; Groneman, "Bloody Ould Sixth," 20-33; John Lambert, *Travels through Canada and the United States* (London, 1814), 102-3; CCFP, Police Committee, January 31, 1825; Mary Christine Stansell, "Women of the Laboring Poor in New York City, 1820-1860" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1979), 17-56 passim.

13. Here I am defining artisans as all those engaged in the direct production of commodities, masters as well as journeymen, but not apprentices. The precise proportion of artisans in the early-nineteenth-century work force in New York City is not clear. Carl F. Kaestle, using the 1796 city directory, finds that 52.6 percent of the city's workers were artisans. See Kaestle, *The Evolution of an Urban School System: New York City, 1750-1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 1973), 31-32. Rock computes figures from the jury book of 1819 and estimates that between 50 and 60 percent of the city's workers could be classified as "mechanics"; Rock's figures, however, include cartmen and draymen as mechanics; his sources and Kaestle's tend to underestimate the numbers of laborers in the city and take no account of domestic servants. A random sample of names from the 1815 city directory revealed that 36.2 percent of those listed were artisans. Because the directory underenumerated younger workers and journeymen as well as day laborers, I would estimate that approximately two-fifths to one-half of the male work force worked in the trades, either as masters or as journeymen—a slightly larger proportion than prevailed in eighteenth-century New York. See Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 14-16. On the work force in eighteenth-century New York, see Jacob Price, "Economic Function and the Growth of American Port Towns," *Perspectives in American History*, no. 8 (1974): 131-37, 184-85. Price's figures show a dramatic decline in the relative size of New York's "industrial" sector, from 1746 to 1795. His figures and the others cited here are very different, largely because Price places individuals in various artisan trades, including carpenters, in his "service" sector. By reclassifying Price's figures, to place his subsectors II, C and D in the industrial sector, we find that about 40 percent of the male labor force worked in the trades in 1795.

tury, New York's artisans had won considerable acclaim for producing goods that compared favorably with the finest English workmanship; like their counterparts in England, they also remained a decidedly secondary power in the commercial capitalist city.¹⁴ In 1815, only a slender portion of the city's wealthiest men had any direct connection with the trades (Table 1), a situation that would persist into the 1820s and beyond.¹⁵ Although their skills differentiated them from the laborers and the poor, the majority of the artisans—masters and journeymen combined—held little or no taxable property (Table 2). The craft economy included a diverse collection of occupations, from light consumer crafts like tailoring and shoemaking to heavier local industries like sugar refining. Virtually all relied directly or indirectly on the success of the port.¹⁶

Compared with the city's merchant capitalists these artisans seemed to some New Yorkers like remnants of another era, tied to an ancient craft world of production and marketing. Through the 1820s, the majority of artisan firms were tiny: the journeyman bookbinder John Bradford's whimsical description of a typical bindery in 1815, with its three or four candlesticks and as many workers, may be taken as a rough norm for the major New York trades.¹⁷ Most of the artisans' advertisements and the jobs they enumerated in their price lists stated that their work was largely oriented to specific orders, based on informal direct credit sales. Apprenticeship remained a standard arrangement in 1820, when employers estimated that between six and eight thousand apprentice boys served local producers. Journeymen in every craft outside the building trades were paid by the piece, according, at least in principle, to a set book or list of "just" prices—evidence that artisan wage labor was not yet fully regarded as a market commodity, as labor-power subject to the impersonal laws of supply and demand. Although most municipal regulation of production and

14. Carl Bridenbaugh, *The Colonial Craftsman* (Chicago, 1950), 65–124 passim.

15. Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power*, 47–48.

16. On the range of crafts, see Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 12–13. On other manufacturing pursuits before 1825, see Albion, *Rise of New York Port*, 165–93; Pomerantz, *New York*, 158–59, 194–99. See also, for a similar situation, Sam Bass Warner, *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 65–67. For a theoretical overview of the economic structure of a mercantile city, see Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, 1978), II, 1215–17.

17. John Bradford, *The Poetic Vagaries of a Knight of the Folding Stick of Paste Castle* (Gotham [New York], 1815), 9–10. The ratio of masters to journeymen in the 1816 sample (1 : 3.0), although not definitive, suggests most craft firms were small; in some of the smaller trades, as Rock notes, the numbers of journeymen and masters were roughly equal. See Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 266–68. On the simplicity of manufacturing firms in general in this period, see Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 17–19, 50–52.

distribution was abandoned before 1788, the assize on bread remained in force until 1821; government administration of butchering and the public markets would last well beyond the 1820s. Master craftsmen at least claimed that they expected to earn no more than a “competence,” an independent estate of simple comforts. The declared axioms of artisan business, outlined in a snippet of verse dedicated to the stonemasons in 1805 and published in the city directory, were as appropriate to a seventeenth-century village as to an emerging nineteenth-century metropolis:

—I pay my debts
 I steal from no man; would not cut a throat
 To gain admission to a great man’s purse
 Or a whore’s bed; I’d not betray my friend
 To get his place of fortune; I scorn to flatter
 A blown up fool above me or crush
 The wretch beneath me

Barter persisted along with petty-commodity exchange in some corners of the trades; in 1812, it was still possible for a small master builder to tote up the occasional account in terms of turkeys or gold watches paid rather than in terms of cash tendered.¹⁸

Several factors conspired to make the growth of any more substantial industrial base seem most unlikely. Bereft of any easily harnessed water-power, Manhattan Island offered few advantages to would-be textile or cloth magnates of the kind who financed the early industrialization of New England and of the Delaware Valley. Mounting real-estate costs set off by the rapid development of mercantile facilities and the shortage of residential space further discouraged the building of mills or large central shops in the city proper. In all branches of production, even the most eager would-be craft entrepreneurs faced enormous obstacles in securing investment capital for any venture outside of shipping, transport speculation, marine insurance, or land investment: in most New York banks, the *Evening Post* observed in 1804, “the application of the laborious mechanic is treated with contempt and rejected with disdain.” As late as 1827, the

18. Rita Suswein Gottesman, *The Arts and Crafts in New York, 1800–1804* (New York, 1965), 241–65, 374–79, and passim; “To the Journeymen Carpenters and Masons” (1805), N-YHS Broadside; “To the Master Printers” (1809), N-YHS Broadside; New York Society of Journeymen Cabinetmakers, *New-York Book of Prices for Manufacturing Cabinet and Chair Work* (New York, 1817); Thomas Earle and Charles Congdon, *Annals of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen in the City of New York, 1785–1880* (New York, 1882), 281; Thomas R. Mercein, *An Address Delivered on the Opening of the Apprentices’ Library* (New York, 1820), 21; *Longworth’s American Almanack for 1805* (New York, 1805), 138–39; Ledger Book, Unidentified contractor and builder, New York City, 1812–19, December 26, 1812, January 2, 1813, December 11, 1814, NYPL MSS.

merchant John Dix could only conclude that, despite its myriad crafts, New York would forever remain “purely a trading city.”¹⁹

Yet while Dix’s observations had some merit, and while the artisan system of labor remained sturdy in large sectors of the craft economy, important changes were unfolding in the early national workshops. A few entrepreneurs in some of the heavier craft industries—leather tanning, shipbuilding, sugar refining—greatly enlarged their operations in New York, aided by the expansion of local merchant capital and by the growth of the local market. Others—above all in the consumer finishing, construction, and printing trades—moved even more decisively into the world of nineteenth-century capitalist production and exchange. As early as the 1750s, consumer finishing masters and builders had begun to free themselves from old mercantile clientage networks and to cultivate their own markets; the decline of slavery and indentured servitude in the third quarter of the eighteenth century fostered new markets in free wage labor. By the 1790s, a few consumer-trade masters had geared most of their output to supply either local retailers, regional markets, or the southern coasting trade. After 1800, improved transport links to the North and West made large-scale production of light consumer goods even more feasible and profitable. The city’s burgeoning population provided the labor pool and enlarged demand to encourage the growth of new and highly competitive local markets in house construction, shoemaking, and tailoring. Merchant demand for printed materials and newspapers lured printers from around the country to New York. By the 1820s, even the money market, although still largely the preserve of mercantile speculators, had begun slowly to open to entrepreneurs in those crafts most stimulated by the acceleration of commerce. Obscured though they were by the more dazzling expansion of the port, these developments prepared the way for a new system of enterprise in the city’s largest and most important handicrafts. By 1825, that system had already begun to replace established artisan practices with new forms of wage labor and distribution.²⁰

The city’s first small crop of manufactories suggested something of the

19. Charles H. Haswell, *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York* (New York, 1897), 109–30; *Evening Post*, March 3, 1804; John A. Dix, *Sketch of the Resources of the City of New-York* (New York, 1827), 85.

20. Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 258–63; 320–21; Allan R. Pred, “Manufacturing in the Mercantile City, 1800–1840,” *Annals of the Society of American Geographers* 56 (1966): 307–25; David T. Gilchrist, ed., *The Growth of the Seaboard Cities, 1790–1825* (Charlottesville, 1967), 95–99; Montgomery, “Working Classes.” For a splendid concise account of similar developments in Philadelphia, see Sharon V. Salinger, “Artisans, Journeymen, and the Transformation of Labor in Late Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *WMQ* 40 (1983): 62–84. On slavery in the crafts in eighteenth-century New York, see Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Negro Slavery in New York* (Syracuse, 1966), 47.

changing scale and relations of craft production. In 1820, a fragmentary census of some of the city's largest firms located twelve, predominantly in the building and consumer finishing crafts, that hired more than twenty-five persons, and thirty-five that hired ten or more—hardly a major industrial agglomeration by later standards, but impressive enough for an American city of the time. A handful of these were prototypes for later factories, but most were manufactories in the literal sense—oversized workshops that gathered between five and ten skilled workers with a few boys and women to produce, by hand, large lots of light consumer goods. In line with the limits to industrial growth in New York, few produced anything but the usual urban-craft items (a lone cotton-textile firm appeared in the census); only one in three used any kind of machinery more complicated than simple lathes and the traditional handicraft tools; almost all were unincorporated firms, run by a single master or a simple copartnership. For all their modesty, however, operations like Isaac Minard's shoe manufactory (a major supplier to the southern trade), or M. and W. Benton's boot-and-shoe works (tied to local and regional markets), signaled a shift toward the greater concentration of divided craft labor and the increased use of semiskilled workers—the first step in what is commonly described as the classic process of industrialization.²¹

More telling, and more indicative of future developments in New York, were the innovations in the smaller shops. Between (roughly) 1790 and 1825, a small group of New York merchant tailors, led in time by the peripatetic immigrant James Chesterman, began adding inexpensive, prepared British goods to their supplies. By 1820, what had once been a marginal trade in locally prepared unfitted "slop" sailors' clothing began to challenge the importers and expand into the production of cheap, ready-to-wear goods and slave clothing for the southern market. Master tailors, chafing at the competition, subcontracted a larger share of their work either to newly arrived outwork journeymen or to poor women, who worked at home at rates 25 to 50 percent of those paid to men. Shoemakers—alarmed at the flood of shoes from Lynn, Massachusetts, and other New England towns into New York—skimped on the quality of their leathers (using what one journeyman derided as "bad stuff"), crowded their workrooms with apprentice labor, hired outwork journeymen, found women and girls to work as binders, and prepared cargoes of cheap shoes for the South. Cabinetmakers, although slower to resort to subcontract-

21. Census of Manufacturing Establishments, New York County, 1820, National Archives, MSS, microfilm, Ward 1, nos. 5, 13. A total of twelve New York manufacturing firms received incorporations from the state legislature between 1790 and 1819; only one of these, a steam-engine manufactory, turned up in the 1820 census. See Aaron Clark, *List of All Incorporations in the State of New York* (Albany, 1819), 42–53.

ing than others, divided their work into its simplest procedures and readjusted piece rates to circumvent the regular price-book standards. Printers, caught in a spiral of underbidding for merchant orders, began to rely on the cheap labor of young men and boys scorned by regular journeymen as “half-ways.” Real-estate speculators turned to entrepreneurial contractors (mocked by experienced journeymen as “master builders in name only”) to hire and oversee construction crews of skilled and semiskilled men.²²

This rearrangement of the structure of small-shop production to tap Manhattan’s swelling labor pool, even more than the appearance of the manufactories, marked the beginnings of a peculiarly metropolitan form of industrialization. It was to be no simple or sudden revolution. Trades tied primarily to local neighborhood markets, above all baking and butchering, changed little. The luxury trades, and crafts like ship carpentry and coopering that could not readily be subdivided, preserved the artisanal regime. In the consumer finishing crafts, a sizable sector remained to cater to the custom trade or to local clientele, in shops that retained the traditional craft conventions. Even the most severe changes in the New York trades were far less dramatic than those afoot in the early industrial towns of New England and Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, there was cause for both exhilaration and concern especially among those artisans who worked in consumer finishing, building, and printing—between one-quarter and one-third of all the city’s masters, and between one-half and three-quarters of the journeymen.²³

Some of the problems arose directly from the acceleration of trade and affected traditional artisans as well as the most innovative entrepreneurs. Luxury-trade masters, tanners, and heavy-metal tradesmen, along with local producers of light consumer goods, watched the tariff schedules closely as New York became a major transatlantic shipping center; agitation for upward revision of duties, begun in the 1780s, continued through the early 1820s. Credit, a troublesome feature of artisan business in the eighteenth

22. Tailoring: Albion, *Rise of New York Port*, 63–64; *Evening Post*, April 20, July 13, 1819; Egal Feldman, *Fit for Men: A Study of New York’s Clothing Trade* (Washington, D.C., 1960), 1–2; Haswell, *Reminiscences*, 76–77; Stansell, “Women of the Laboring Poor, 57–64; *Longworth’s Almanack*, 1805, 124, 160–62; shoemaking: *The Independent Mechanic* [New York], January 25, 1812; *Columbian* [New York], December 9, 1813; John R. Commons et al., *Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland, 1910), III, 300; cabinetmaking: Robert Walker to Charles Watts, November 25, 1809, May 11, 1810, December 11, 12, 1815, March 4, 1816, Watts-Jones Papers, N-YHS; Charles Montgomery, *American Furniture: The Federal Period* (New York, 1966), 11–26; printing: George A. Stevens, *New York Typographical Union No. 6: Study of a Modern Trade Union and Its Predecessors* (Albany, 1913), 65–69; Rollo G. Silver, *The American Printer, 1787–1825* (Charlottesville, 1967), 29–62; building: Robert Christie, *Empire in Wood: A History of the Carpenters’ Union* (Ithaca, 1967), 5–12; *American Citizen*, May 23, 1810; *Evening Post*, June 19, 1810.

23. These figures are drawn from Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 246. For more on the persistence of small-shop production, see below, Chapter 3.

century, became a pressing one, as the city's economy became increasingly sensitive to international terms of trade and as entrepreneurial masters attempted to reorganize their businesses and expand their regional markets.²⁴

But it was labor—the changing relations of production, the very meaning of wage payment—that loomed as the most vexing problem of all in the fastest-changing trades. The transformation of the apprenticeship system dramatized the decline of the old artisan labor relations. By the mid-1820s, several craft veterans and concerned master craftsmen had complained that while apprenticeship remained almost universal, the daily life of an apprenticed boy in the city's major trades rarely matched the arrangements outlined in the signed indentures. Master tailors and shoemakers reportedly taught their apprentices only the simpler of the journeymen's tasks and used the boys as helpers. The printers were even more notorious for luring half-trained apprentices from their nominal masters and substituting them for journeymen. Throughout the trades, employers converted their customary obligations for room, board, and education to cash payments to the boy's parents, turning the system into a glorified form of juvenile wage labor for children from the city's poorest families. By 1820, an articulate apprentice could remark in public, without fear of reprimand or contradiction, that “a paternal care and circumspect watchfulness of our moral and intellectual education are seldom compatible with an apprenticed condition.”²⁵

Related to the mutation of apprenticeship, but of even greater significance, were the changing relations between masters and journeymen in those trades in which the employers tried to keep pace in the new competitive markets. The division of labor was only the most visible sign of these alterations; beyond the dilution of skill, the masters—even some in “honorable” trades²⁶—had begun to abandon their workshop role to foremen and contractors. Others evaded or ignored the old “just” price-book

24. Albion, *Rise of New York Port*, 12–13; *Independent Mechanic*, September 9, 1812; George Rogers Taylor, *The Transportation Revolution, 1815–1860* (New York, 1951), 239–40, 360–63; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 165, 177–86; Glenn Porter and Harold Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers: Studies in the Changing Structure of Nineteenth-Century Marketing* (Baltimore, 1971), 72–77; Chandler, *Visible Hand*, 20–22, 29.

25. Mercein, *Address*, 21. On the decline of the apprenticeship system, see GSMT, “To the Citizens of New York” (1820), N-YHS Broadside Collection; GSMT, “Report of the Education Committee,” GSMT MSS, Education; *New York Observer*, November 4, 1826; Stevens, *Typographical Union*, 65–70. See also Richard B. Morris, *Government and Labor in Early America* (New York, 1946), 363–87; Ian M. G. Quimby, “Apprenticeship in Colonial Philadelphia” (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1963), on the latter stages of colonial urban apprenticeship and on the early signs of decline.

26. On the employment of a foreman and the removal of the master from production in an “honorable” shop, see Account Book, Solomon Townsend [anchor manufacturer], 1795–97, N-YHS MSS. Townsend's enterprise is thoroughly studied in Alan S. Marber, “The New York Iron Merchant and Manufacturer: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Entrepreneurship” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1974).

arrangements and, where possible, hired the least-expensive hands available—including, if need be, the women and children of the laboring poor. Under the circumstances, neither master nor journeyman appeared in the process of production as an artisan; the wage, based on the market and not on custom or “justice,” became the only bond between them.

Reflecting on what all this meant, the coachmaker Abraham Quick observed in 1820 that the crafts were becoming the captives of a new breed of craft entrepreneurs, as often as not men “without any regards for their reputation or respect for their Creditors,” who would arrange to produce goods as cheaply as they could and to sell them “at any price which offers to convert them to cash.” Quick was a respected master in a trade virtually synonymous with custom work, and thus had less reason to fear the future than did local tailors, shoemakers, and cabinetmakers; still, he saw capitalist labor, cost cutting, and the creation of new markets for cut-rate goods as “very pernicious in their effects on any Mechanical Business and the Greatest Bane to honest Industry”:

Economy has like everything Else when Carried to Extreem become an Evil to the Labouring part of Society—that is the very persons who pretend to be most Strenuous & Patriotic in Supporting our Manufactories are the most opposed in Compensating the Mechanic with a fair and honest price above his Expense to Enable him to live in Encouraging, good & faithful work, all of which proves very Discouraging to those wishing to do their Employer Justice or has any regard for his reputation as a Mechanic.²⁷

These, of course, were the partial judgments of an artisan raised to older, increasingly fragile conceptions of the market, labor, industry, and justice. They glossed over the less attractive features of eighteenth-century artisanal production—the use, for a time, of slave labor and indentured servants, the web of deference and clientage that governed the workshop as well as the craft economy, the marginal prospects of the mass of independent producers. Not every craft employer would have agreed with Quick, least of all the enterprising men who abetted the system Quick so despised. But we should not take Quick’s remarks as mere posturing. At the very least, they indicate that the capitalist innovations in the trades only just begun in 1788 were well underway by 1820, enough to perturb even a coachmaker. Even more, they remind us that some mechanics experienced these transformations not as an entrepreneurial opportunity but as a disaster.

Like Quick, other New York craftsmen tried to make sense of what was changing in the first decades of the century, with varying degrees of op-

27. Report of Abraham Quick, 1820 Manufacturing Census, New York County, Ward 1, no. 30. See also *Independent Mechanic*, September 7, 1811.

timism and dread. From their different experiences and expectations came early indications that in some crafts new divisions of class were shattering the supposed brotherhood of "honest Industry."

Entrepreneurs

In principle, as their informal title indicated, New York's master craftsmen stood at the head of their trades, as men whose skills and attention to business had won an independent estate, a mastery of their respective crafts. Viewed en bloc, they appear to have prospered with the expansion of the port. In a sample drawn from the 1816 New York jury list, more than half of the masters owned their own house or shop (Table 3). The median total taxable wealth of those assessed was a respectable (if unspectacular) \$3,200.²⁸ Roughly one-third of the masters—and in some crafts, many more than that—lived among the merchants in the exclusive neighborhoods south of Chambers Street (Table 4). They formed a remarkably settled group, considering what is known of the geographic mobility of early-nineteenth-century American urban dwellers: roughly half remained in the city from one decade to the next, and about one in six stayed at the same address.²⁹ On closer inspection, however, important differences crop up among the masters. In some of the largest crafts, between one-third and two-thirds of them owned less than \$500 in taxable wealth (Table 5). A handful of those in the sample—4.8 percent of the total—held 39.1 percent of all the assessed real and personal wealth among

28. Edmund P. Willis estimates ("Social Origins," 119–25) that the median assessed wealth of New Yorkers in 1815 was about \$5,000.

29. Rough persistence rates were computed from a trade directory of craftsmen included with the regular street listings in the city directory for 1805. I checked the names from the trade directory list in the street directory; the following were the persistence rates (in percentages) of those located in 1805 who were still in the city directory in 1815:

Trade	In 1815 directory	At same address in 1815
Cabinetmakers (N=57)	50.9	14.0
Carpenters (N=274)	50.0	16.8
Coopers (N=77)	50.6	29.9
Metal workers (N=44)	40.9	31.8
Shoemakers (N=214)	68.2	9.8
TOTAL (N=666)	55.4	16.8

Although very little is known about urban geographical mobility in Jeffersonian America, these figures stand in marked contrast to those gathered for craft workers and entire urban populations in the 1830s. See Peter R. Knights, *The Plain People of Boston, 1830–1860: A Study in City Growth* (New York, 1971), 48–77; Johnson, *Shopkeeper's Millennium*, 37, 170; William Neill Black, "The Union Society of Journeymen House Carpenters: A Test in Residential Mobility in New York City, 1830–1840" (M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1975).

them. As a group, the masters may have been the leaders of their trades, but by 1815 they were dominated by an emerging elite of craft entrepreneurs, very roughly one-fifth of all the city's masters.

The craft entrepreneurs were by no means the most affluent of New Yorkers—even the wealthiest masters commanded far less capital than their merchant counterparts—but they did set a tone of solid comfort at variance with descriptions of the plain city mechanics. Although the vast majority were trained artisans, their alertness to cultivating and expanding markets and credit enabled them to run operations with as many as three workshops and dozens of journeymen employees. Their furniture was of mahogany instead of the more common pine; fineries like gilt-edged mirrors, silver cutlery, and chinaware adorned their homes. Most probably kept at least one servant; before the completion of emancipation in New York in 1827, a very few owned slaves. While none invested in real estate and other speculations on a level with John Jacob Astor and his associates, some branched out of their workshops to make additional investments in land, banking, and insurance.³⁰

Duncan Phyfe, the cabinetmaker, epitomized the successful master in the custom and consumer export trades, with a career that read like an artisan version of Astor's mercantile rise from rags to riches. Phyfe first set up shop in New York in 1792, a penniless young Scotsman with consummate skills but few contacts; except for a chance encounter with Astor's daughter, who touted his work among her friends, he would have been forced to close. By 1815, his labors and those of his journeymen had earned him three shops and extensive real-estate holdings in Manhattan and Brooklyn. All along the eastern seaboard, the distinctive Phyfe Regency styles could be found in the homes of local notables, testimony to the master's fame and his acumen for exploring the coastal market in fine goods and extending credit to his distant customers. At their busiest, Phyfe's shops would eventually employ up to one hundred journeymen at

30. For an idea of the furnishings in a master's home, see Probate Inventories, New York County, HDC, B-160, W-153. Unfortunately, the available jury books for this period do not disclose whether a household included a servant. On the employment of servants in urban areas in this period, see David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York, 1978), 104–5; Stansell, "Women of the Laboring Poor," 138, 143–44. Of the masters in the 1816 sample, two owned slaves—the ladies' shoemaker Reuben Bunn (one male and two females) and the shoemaker Jeremiah Alley (one female). On artisan landholding, see Tax Assessment Lists, New York County, Eighth Ward, 1815, MARC; no fewer than twenty-five craftsmen owned unimproved lots in the ward. On artisan speculation in land and other investments, see Stephen Allen, "The Memoirs of Stephen Allen (1767–1852)," ed. John C. Travis, typescript, N-YHS, 45–46; Ledger Book, Unidentified builder and carpenter, March 22, 1817, NYPL MSS; Indenture, Patrick and Margaret McKay with Jacob Halsey and Charles Watts, November 20, 1810, and May 1, 1817, Inventory of Estate in Charleston, both in Watts-Jones Papers, N-YHS.

a time. While the master was known for his quiet Calvinist discipline and simple demeanor—a dedicated craftsman proud of his ancestry and his art, to judge from a portrait painted about 1820 (Plate 2), the quintessential retiring Scot according to his contemporaries—Phyfe's elaborate warehouse, workshop, and showrooms confirmed his wealth and tastes as those of a merchant prince (Plate 3).³¹

Other successful masters included pioneers in the “ready made” trade, and men more directly tied to the port and the maritime crafts. A handful of merchant tailors had accumulated considerable wealth by 1815, as had a few other consumer-trade entrepreneurs (Table 6). Leather tanning, an ancient craft, became a source of enormous profit to the firms located in Frankfort and Jacob streets, a district then popularly known as “the Swamp.” Gideon Lee—like Phyfe a self-educated, self-made former apprentice—was the most clever of the “Swamp clique,” especially when it came to shifting from cash to credit sales and sending his agents to the Argentine to enter the world market in skins: in 1817, Lee established the nation's first joint-stock tanning enterprise; three years later, his New York Tannery Company, with an estimated capital of \$60,000, carried on its trade in two manufactories and ten retail outlets; Lee himself was on his way to becoming a major figure in local banking and political circles. The city's leading shipbuilders—Henry Eckford, Christian Bergh, and the brothers Adam and Noah Brown, all talented businessmen and veterans of the craft—weathered the embargo and the wartime lulls in trade to make Manhattan the most important shipbuilding center in the country. Near the dry docks, Stephen Allen, the sailmaker, cleared by his own estimate \$100,000 between 1802 and 1825, largely because of his early success in bypassing the city's ship chandlers to purchase his materials directly from the wholesalers. By the time Allen retired, at age fifty-eight, his financial interests and his reputation had won him a career in politics and seats on the boards of two banks and two insurance companies.³²

As they consolidated their businesses, these masters and others like them continued to honor the ideal of craft fellowship and collectively helped to set the conditions and destiny of their trades. As in the colonial period, they tended to live and work near their fellow tradesmen: shoe-

31. Ellen Vincent McClelland, *Duncan Phyfe and the English Regency* (New York, 1929), 91–138; Walter A. Dyer, *Early American Craftsmen* (New York, 1915), 43–69; Thomas H. Ormsbee, *Early American Furniture Makers: A Social and Biographical Study* (New York, 1930), 63–81.

32. Frank Norcross, *A History of New York Swamp* (New York, 1901), 1–8, 51–60; Shepherd Knapp to Gideon Lee, March 3, 24, 25, 1823, Gideon Lee Papers, N-YHS; “Sketch of the Life and Character of the Late Gideon Lee,” *Hunt's Merchants' Magazine* 8 (1843): 57–64; Albion, *Rise of New York Port*, 288–92; *New York Herald*, December 31, 1852; Allen, “Memoirs,” 46, 111–14.

makers settled along William Street and Maiden Lane, cabinetmakers along Beekman Street, Broad Street, and Greenwich Street, and so on. In some crafts, the masters organized friendly societies (occasionally open to journeymen), “to Promote mutual fellowship, Confidence, good Understanding, and Mechanic Knowledge,” to provide funds to support families of the sick or indigent and assist in burial expenses, and to resolve disputes among the members. Employers’ committees discussed guidelines for credit to customers and drew up lists of piece rates to enforce what in one case was called “wage control.” Ad hoc groups petitioned the municipality on various matters, from the unfair competition of out-of-state interlopers to alleged combinations to raise the price of raw materials. In more informal surroundings, the masters sprinkled their tavern talk with negotiations for loans, inquiries about new partnerships, and news of talented journeymen available for hire.³³

The meetings of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen extended these bonds across trade lines; they also, in time, testified to the transformations that were overtaking the craft economy. Founded in 1785 as a revival of the Mechanics’ Committee of the 1770s, the General Society was originally intended to be a semipolitical umbrella organization for all of the city’s independent mechanics, to help oversee the trades and secure favorable legislation from local and national government. Suspicions that the group would prove a foyer of political intrigue led the state legislature to frame its charter to permit only philanthropic projects, but within these formal limits, the group captured the ideal of mutuality and craft pride essential to artisan fraternities since the Middle Ages. Society men, one member observed, grew “accustomed to meet each other as brothers and to reciprocate sentiments of attachments”; a typical gathering at the society’s Mechanic Hall brought intense conversations, in which masters “contrasted their systems of labor,” before returning to the shops, “improved from the intercourse.” In a city where merchants and bankers were the most powerful social and political leaders, the activities of the society testified that the artisans, too, were a resourceful and purposeful group, “a body of men who do much in sustaining the prosperity of this Metropolis,” the master baker Thomas Mercein proclaimed in 1821, forming “one of the firmest pillars of our social Edifice.” While the society’s emblem and motto (Plate 4) reminded the city that no art could stand

33. Jury Books, 1816, Wards 1–3, 5, 8; Morris, *Government and Labor*, 150, 202–4; *The Constitution of the Associated Body of House Carpenters of the City of New-York* (1767; reprint, New York, 1792), 3; *Daily Advertiser* [New York], November 18, 1800; Charlotte Morgan, *The Origin and History of the New York Employing Printers’ Organization* (New York, 1930), 3–24; New-York Friendly Association of Master Bookbinders, “List of Prices” (1822), N-YHS Broadside; MCC, XII, 709, February 17, 1823; Norcross, *Swamp*, 10–42.

without the aid of artisan labor, the members pointed to their Mechanics' School and Apprentices' Library (both founded in 1820) as proof of their benevolent intents. With these institutions, Mercein contended, the city's young mechanics would "look back with delight on the bright season of their youthful days," when the foundation of their prosperity was laid. So the masters displayed their affection in other mutual-aid schemes, above all in their loans to worthy members and their financial support of deceased members' widows.³⁴

Despite the restrictions in its charter, the society also maintained an active interest in local political and business affairs. In the mid-1790s, the membership informally joined with other craft societies in the emerging Jeffersonian coalition while they encouraged campaigns to secure higher tariffs. After 1800, the society, emboldened by the Jeffersonian victory, more openly defended the trades from foreign competition; more important, as it became increasingly dominated by the city's craft entrepreneurs, the society shifted its attention from protection to the business revolution and to breaking the mercantile monopoly on credit. Its early efforts culminated in the founding of the society's own Mechanics' Bank, in 1810. From the start, the bank attracted a brisk business discounting small notes and opening credit lines to enterprising masters; unfortunately, the masters' collective expertise at high-level finance was less sure than their command of their trades, and the bank was soon plagued by mismanagement of its investments. Within two years, the directors were driven to declare temporary insolvency; by the time the bank recovered, the society had sold off most of its shares. Nevertheless, the Mechanics' survived, with several leading masters as shareholders, to become one of the largest banks in the city. Although it never proved to be the panacea for the artisans' credit problem envisioned by its creators, it provided the first important entry for craft entrepreneurs into the money market and helped to ensure, as the society pointed out in 1829, that the city's "credible mechanics" had access to their share of financial accommodations. If nothing else, it announced the masters' alertness to the changing commercial realities of the day.³⁵

34. Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 7-36; Alfred F. Young, *The Democratic Republicans of New York: The Origins, 1763-1797* (Chapel Hill, 1967), 62, 100, 157, 201, 250; M. M. Noah, *An Address Delivered before the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen* (New York, 1822), 7; Thomas R. Mercein, *Remarks on Laying the Cornerstone of the Mechanic Institution* (New York, 1821), 24; Mercein, *Address*, 13.

35. On the tariff, see GSMT Minute Book, September 3, 1788, November 3, 1788, April 1, 1789, January 28, 1799, March 14, 1800. On the Mechanics' Bank, see GSMT Minute Book, May 2, August 1, 10, September 5, 11, December 13, 1810, January 2, February 6, 1811, January 6, 14, 29, 1823; Charles Watts, Jr., to Charles Watts, February 21, 1811, Watts-Jones Papers, N-YHS; SAJ, 1828, pp. 757-58; *Memorial of the General Society of Mechanics and Tradesmen Praying for a Renewal of the Charter of*

As the society struggled to alter and improve the crafts' position, it also discovered a mission that would preoccupy the city's masters for decades to come—reshaping the mechanics' morality and work habits, to fit the new demands of the more competitive workshops and to compensate for the erosion of apprenticeship. Shortly before the War of 1812, a wide range of New York mechanics began publicly to condemn the casual customs still common in the city's shops. One article in an artisan weekly warned that "loungers who do not work to full capacity" threatened the well-being of all; others attacked the ubiquitous workshop drinking, gambling, and other wasteful entertainments with equal vehemence. In the early 1820s, the General Society—itsself given to considerable toasting and drinking in the early years of the century—suddenly came to endorse its own version of the well-regulated life, blending professions of piety and maxims on thrift, sobriety, and commercial adaptation. The Mechanics' School and the Apprentices' Library became the focal points for the new campaign. The school, although limited for the most part to children of deceased members and to those whose parents could afford the annual tuition of twenty dollars, offered some assurance that future artisans would keep clear of vice. In 1825, when the apprentices turned out for a parade to celebrate the opening of the Erie Canal, the staff summarized the library's intents and its holdings by unfurling a banner emblazoned with a picture of two books, *The Life of Franklin* and the Bible. The library, more than an attempt to shore up the apprenticeship-education system, was also deemed a bulwark against moral waywardness and lassitude. "Cherish, I beseech you, a deep-rooted abhorrence of the alluring but fatal paths of vice and dissipation," Mercein told the city's apprentices on the library's opening day. "Industry, ardour, sobriety, and perseverance in your different pursuits will lead to a successful competition in the world. . . ."³⁶

Other efforts supplemented the General Society's new departures. In 1822, John Griscom, the prominent Quaker professor of chemistry and promoter of urban reform, assembled some leading merchants, philanthropists, and General Society members and founded the New York Mechanical and Scientific Institution. To enhance the mechanical arts and stimu-

the Mechanics' Bank (New York, 1829); Earle and Congdon, *Annals*, 49–52. See also Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 166–69; Margaret C. Myers, *The New York Money Market*, vol. 1, *The Origins and Development* (New York, 1931), 111, 114, 119, 159, 163. The bank merged in 1865 to form the Mechanics' and Metals Bank and was ultimately absorbed into the Chase Bank group. The earliest surviving records date from 1854 and are held by the Chase Manhattan Bank Archives, Record Group no. 3, Merged Banks, Chase National Bank, no. 28/4/1.

36. *Independent Mechanic* [New York], August 10, 17, 31, 1811; GSMT Minute Book, January 1, February 3, June 2, 1813, March 17, 1819, November 1, 1820, March 6, 1821; Cadwallader D. Colden, *Memoir Completed at the Request of a Committee of the Common Council* (New York, 1825), 237–38; Mercein, *Address*, 12–13.

late native genius, the MSI sponsored an assortment of lecture programs on science and invention; to encourage the requisite competitive spirit, it undertook an annual fair of artisan products from New York and around the country, awarding cash prizes to the cleverest, best-wrought displays. A few masters' newspapers tried to reach an even wider audience. The New York *Mechanics' Gazette*, started in 1822 by Thomas Mercein and his brother William (like Thomas, an activist in the General Society), promised to improve "the usefulness and respectability of mechanics in general." In fact, it was more of a compendium of exhortations to industriousness and clean living. Biographical sketches of successful masters trumpeted that the way to wealth was still open to all artisans of talent and sober habits. Advertisements bid prudent craft businessmen to protect their investments by taking out insurance. Special reports discussed the benefits of savings banks and loan institutions, some of them administered by other master craftsmen. The *Gazette* did offer copious news about scientific improvements: beneath this democratic, Americanized *encyclopédisme* rested the deeper message to adapt, to expand, and otherwise to improve the commercial and productive capacities of the workshops.³⁷

Labor questions and disputes over wages—an increasingly troublesome set of problems after 1800—set the limits of entrepreneurial benevolence, but not of the masters' professed dedication to "the Trade." On occasion, employers negotiated freely with their men—for a time, the master cabinetmakers went so far as to select a delegation to sit jointly with the organized journeymen on a permanent grievance committee—but for the most part, the city's organized masters remained adamant about their ultimate control of wage rates, to the point of firing and blacklisting journeymen who challenged them, and bringing the most refractory men to court. Even then, they construed their role as that of paternal overseers, the artisans who knew best about conditions in the shops and whose authority had been won with years of work and experience. The cabinetmakers, in refusing their men's wage demands in 1802, took pains to point out that they did so for the benefit of all, to ensure that all employers could receive an adequate profit while the journeymen received an "equitable rate." The master printers, speaking "in the spirit of conciliation and harmony," refused similar demands from their journeymen in 1809 because

37. *Charter, Constitution, and Bye-Laws of the New York Mechanical and Scientific Institution* (New York, 1822), 3–15 and passim; Pasco, "Philanthropic Tradition," 415–19; *Mechanics' Gazette* [New York], June 8, 1822, April 26, May 3, 7, 14, 17, 21, 24, 28, 31, June 1, 1823. See also *American Mechanics' Magazine* [New York], 1 (1824). Stephen Allen served as the first president of the MSI and Gideon Lee as vice-president; other officers included Henry Eckford (second vice-president), John Slidell (third vice-president), and Thomas Mercein (secretary), all of them leading members of the General Society.

the masters' proposed rates were necessary (or so they claimed) to keep their businesses going, a maximum "beyond which it would be highly injurious, if not ruinous, to the interests of the trade to venture."³⁸

The men behind these projects and pronouncements were neither cynical capitalists nor guileless mechanics. They distinguished themselves in their public lives as craftsmen, a word that stirred their deepest pride— independent men who, like Duncan Phyfe, were eager to be portrayed as skilled workers, men who were, as Stephen Allen remarked about his fellow sailmakers, "on friendly terms with each other," proud of "the respect attached to their business." They claimed with all apparent sincerity to have the interests of all mechanics at heart—especially those of the apprentices whom they expected one day to take their places at the head of the crafts. Yet at the same time, even as they continued to gather beneath the sign of the hammer and hand, the city's leading masters began to project a broadened vision of capitalist growth—one that proclaimed the maxims of *Poor Richard* but forecast an order of economic change unimaginable to Franklin, that deemed commercial and financial innovation and capitalist improvement prerequisites for the future progress of the trades, and that stressed, in unprecedented ways, the importance of self-discipline, business sense, and the pursuit of Mercein's "successful competition in the world."³⁹ Later years would see a heightening of the tensions between the "communal" and the commercial features of the masters' engagements, as craft employers turned to more elaborate social and economic theories and to new methods of labor control and moral reform. Already by the 1820s, however, they had begun to anticipate the shared anxieties and idealism of a manufacturing bourgeoisie. They had begun to live in a world quite different from that of the city's small master craftsmen and journeymen wage earners.

Small Masters

The majority of master craftsmen held little or no property and knew little or nothing of keeping up with the coasting trade or winning a banker's heart: their habits and capacities tied them to the old ways. Joined perhaps by a partner, they and their families performed most of the work in the shops themselves, hired at most one or two journeymen, and served a

38. *Constitution and Rules of Order of the New York Society of Cabinetmakers* (New York, 1810), 3–4; *American Citizen* [New York], December 31, 1802; George Barnett, "The Printers: A Study in Trade Unionism," *American Economic Association Quarterly* 10 (1909): 363 (italics mine).

39. Allen, "Memoirs," 51–52. On Franklin's political economy, see Drew R. McCoy, "Benjamin Franklin's Vision of a Republican Political Economy for America," *WMQ* 35 (1978): 605–28.

local custom clientele. They lived and worked in the roughshod central and outer wards among the journeymen, day laborers, and recent immigrants. The Fifth Ward, a maze of modest, densely packed dwellings, was home to many: of the master craftsmen identified there in the 1816 sample, fewer than half (43.4 percent) owned any form of assessed property. They were mainly family men, for whom a benefit society or generous friends could be critical assets; while some were youths in their twenties, the majority in the sample (60.7 percent) were older men with dependents, masters who, because of adversity, the inherent limitations of their trades, or disinterest toward capitalist enterprise, did not fully share in the early national New York boom.⁴⁰

The small masters' petty trade brought its share of opportunity, to win a competence if not a fortune. Of those identified from the 1816 jury list, more than half were still in business in 1825; most had at least as much property as they had held nine years earlier. In those crafts relatively untouched by the rearrangements of the shops, especially butchering and baking, small masters continued to dominate their trades in the 1820s and could usually count on maintaining at least a modest competence; in no craft were small masters thoroughly eliminated. A few small masters were destined to become members in good standing in the General Society.⁴¹ Those who managed to accumulate small amounts of property also acquired at least a few luxury goods. The estate of the shoemaker Garrett Sickles was indicative of the small master's comforts: in 1822, Sickles left his heirs, among other things, one house clock, two pairs of brass andirons, chinaware, silverware, and three gilt-edged picture frames holding his most treasured documents, a reproduction of the Declaration of Independence, a picture of the Declaration's signers, and his certificate of membership in the Tammany Society.⁴²

But these were hardly the annals of spectacular entrepreneurial success or intentions; they hid both the difficulties that all small masters had to endure and the customary forms of small-shop business. Even in the food-provisioning trades, with their guaranteed markets, a combination of bad weather, interruptions in transport, and any of the other problems connected with livestock or grain supply could bring acute distress, to producer

40. Jury Books, Wards 3, 5, 8, 1816, microfilm, N-YHS.

41. The names of all masters in the 1816 sample with \$1,000 total property or less ($N=91$) were checked in the city directory for 1825; 52.7 percent were found in the directory and the tax list. Small masters in the sample who later joined the society included the shoemaker John Earle and the cabinetmakers Samuel Carter and John Tallman. See Congdon and Earle, *Annals*, 358–415. For more on small tradesmen and the persistence of the artisan system, see below, Chapter 3. On successful butchers, see Thomas F. De Voe, *The Market Book* (New York, 1862), passim; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 205–6.

42. Probate Inventory, S-134, HDC.

and public alike. The emotional and financial perils of fragile simple partnerships sometimes led to grim circumstances: in one celebrated case, the small master baker George Hart was ruined by an embezzler partner, only to descend into a life of journeywork, street selling, and drunken misery that closed in 1812 at the end of a noose. For small masters who lived on the margins of independence, any common misfortune—disease, fire, a slump in trade—meant disaster, and a tightening of customary networks of neighborhood support. The narrative of the shoemaker Samuel Avery was not an uncommon one. Avery kept a steady, if humble business in Catherine Street until 1822, when illness struck his home. Forced into debt, he borrowed from friends, withheld rent for his house and shop and payments to his leather suppliers, and began taking credit from local storekeepers. In 1824, still owing one hundred dollars to his intractable physicians, Avery declared insolvency, his only possessions being his tools, some kitchen utensils, one pine table, and his family's clothing.⁴³

Apart from business difficulties, the small masters found themselves pitted against a battery of economic and legal regulations, some old, some new, many a source of intense resentment. Certain measures, like the tariff, met with approval, especially in the consumer trades. Others, above all internal taxes, they deemed regressive encroachments on their liberties. The shoemakers, hatters, and curriers complained mightily about having to pay wartime duties on leather, which they denounced as unequal and odious, "foreign to the habits of free independent citizens." Periodic attempts by the Common Council to regulate street traffic and to rid the streets of pigs—used by poorer New Yorkers for meat as well as for rubbish clearance—raised similar complaints. Certain civil obligations, from compulsory jury duty to service in the militia, were especially obnoxious to small masters, who could ill afford to take time off from work and could not pay for stand-ins; likewise, with the growth of speculative credit, they objected to the prevailing system of arrest for debt because it was so contrary to customary notions of borrowing and reciprocity, and left so little leeway to men of small means to clear their accounts. "If a man seeks credit," one bewildered small master wrote, "he does not pledge his *personal* liberty for payment. . . ."⁴⁴

43. De Voe, *Market Book*, 234, 457; *Trial for Murder. Court of Oyer and Terminer* . . . 1811. *The People vs. George Hart, Murder* (n.p., n.d. [ca. 1812]); Insolvency Assignment no. 1824/4, HDC. See also Insolvency Assignments nos. 1815/41, 1816/232, 1817/6, 1817/16, 1817/430, 1819/31, 1819/97, 1819/171, 1819/260.

44. *Evening Post*, April 8, 21, September 4, 1815; Howard B. Rock, "A Delicate Balance: The Mechanics and the City in the Age of Jefferson," *N-YHSQ* 63 (1979): 83–114; *Independent Mechanic*, April 6, 1811. One Byronic artisan—imprisoned for debt after illness kept him from his work—summed up the problem:

Say, will this noisome air, and clay-cold floor
His feeble frame to health and strength restore?

At its worst, the small master's lot brought extreme poverty and unremitting labor producing cheap work for the city's exporters or slopshops in a grim urban equivalent of the outwork domestic system. In 1812, the Reverend Ezra Stiles Ely, then the chaplain of the New York Alms House, discovered one such situation on his daily rounds. He was searching for the son of an invalid inmate when he was directed to one of the city's cellar dwellings, where he found the boy living with a cobbler and his family who supported themselves by selling vegetables and making coarse shoes. The cobbler, Ely learned, had generously sheltered the youngster for a week but could not keep him any longer "because he was too small to sit on the bench of the profession." Even when his entire family worked, this frugal master could not feed the additional small mouth without extra income. "He cannot earn anything yet," he repeated sorrowfully to Ely, as the Reverend took his leave, boy in tow.⁴⁵

Such scenes would in time touch the souls and fire the imaginations of a generation of sentimental reformers; by the 1820s, they were the small masters' nightmares. They loomed ever larger as the commercialization of production began to leave the small masters in the fastest-changing trades with the starkest choices, that of braving the hazards of the new market, struggling on in the time-honored manner, or quitting the craft. As petty producers, the small masters confronted an unfamiliar ambiguity. On one level, the expansion of commerce and the withering away of some old restraints on production might expand petty trade; on another, most small masters had lacked either the resources or the inclination to transform their enterprises, change their own way of life, and compete successfully against those with easier access to capital. Small masters like the builder who would still work for barter followed economic imperatives alien to capitalist exchange. Men like the cellar-dwelling cobbler were unable to save money by cutting wages and could stay in business only by exploiting themselves and their families to the limits of their endurance; another, writing in 1811 under the pseudonym "Misery," claimed, "If you be a mechanic, you must promise everyone that applies to you, although it be five times as much as you can accomplish."⁴⁶ An alternative among building

Could he his liberty and health regain
To pay thy debt he every nerve would strain

See *Independent Mechanic*, August 1, 1812. Historians have only begun to analyze the significance of arrest for debt, but see Edwin T. Randall, "Imprisonment for Debt in America: Fact and Fiction," *MVHR* 39 (1952): 89-102. On the decay of municipal regulation, see Jon C. Teaford, *The Municipal Revolution in America* (Chicago, 1975).

45. Rev. Ezra Stiles Ely, *Visits of Mercy: Being the Journal of the Stated Preacher to the Hospital and Alms House in the City of New York, 1811* (New York, 1812), 162-63.

46. See *Independent Mechanic*, May 11, 18, August 31, October 12, 1811, September 12, 1812.

tradesmen was to gamble on getting contract work from speculators and hiring the cheapest labor; even then, assuming they raised the requisite credit, they ran the enormous risk that a sudden bankruptcy or decline in trade would halt their operations, leaving them responsible for all materials purchased. Masters in the finishing trades might try to become slopshop contractors, but they, too, had to gamble on the whims of the market and the merchants while scurrying to undercut their competitors. Neither was a life of independence; neither was the life of a craftsman.

Such choices and the threat that craft capitalists and interlopers would destroy the small masters' petty trade led to occasional rumblings of discontent, long before Abraham Quick set down his observations in 1820. The attempt by John B. Church, a brother-in-law of Alexander Hamilton, to set up the joint-stock New York Bread Company in 1801 raised a brief but spectacular ad hoc protest led by a committee of tradesmen; for several weeks, as the company attempted to begin its operation, small masters filled the local press with protests (some quite radical in tone) pleading for a patriotic boycott of the "monied capitalists," bidding "mechanics to be united; to be ONE" in their opposition to the company, "or a degrading vassalage will reduce the greater part of them to the vile ambition and avarice of *monopolists*." None charged arson when a suspicious fire burned the company's main building to the ground several months later, but neither was there any conspicuous display of grief at the firm's demise. So, in less organized ways, small masters complained about invading capitalists and the dangers of the new market.⁴⁷

Other small masters joined the ranks of the pious and temperate, finding in personal discipline and improvement the best means to gain self-respect and to adjust to new conditions. Joseph Harmer, a small master printer, caught their mood well in the columns of his artisan weekly, the *Independent Mechanic*, where he regularly published moral fables and scenes drawn from life on the evils of the taverns, those "nurseries of vice and receptacles of the abandoned." The tone here was very different from that of the *Mechanics' Gazette* or the General Society; Harmer and the small producers who wrote for his newspaper had little to say about commercial improvement, capital accumulation, and competition except to denounce overwork and the anxious pursuit of wealth as licentious and cruel. Industriousness was fine, one correspondent opined, "but the man that endangers his constitution by too much labour squanders away a treasure." Such men were more like the original Poor Richard than the entrepreneurs who cited Franklin as a matter of course—small masters who genuinely expected relatively little in the way of riches but who wanted to make sure that they got their independent due. For them, it

47. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 189–95.

became more necessary than ever, as Harmer pointed out, to “improve the mind and strengthen the heart” by practicing the Christian virtues, working steadily, and keeping clear of the city’s numerous temptations to dissipation.⁴⁸

It was not that hardship and (for some) poverty were anything new to the city’s small masters; we may read accounts from the bust periods of the eighteenth century of similar disappointments.⁴⁹ It was not that the small masters had turned their backs on material wealth or the market. Nor was duress inevitable, even for small masters in the most rapidly changing trades. It was the context of the small masters’ difficulties and opportunities that was changing, at least in the city’s largest crafts. The widening sphere of the cheap and nasty trade, of the multiple degradations that went with “slop” and contract work, made a mockery of even the meanest small masters’ expectations; even more, the new inequalities and the dissonances in the small masters’ experiences in trades led by successful entrepreneurs foretold greater divisions to come. There remained enough common ground between more prominent craft capitalists and small masters for them to join together in demands for higher tariffs and lower taxes, as they managed to do regularly from 1789 to 1825.⁵⁰ A fortunate few in the largest trades successfully negotiated the new rules of business. But neither a high tariff wall nor commercial innovation would offer much protection to most small shoemakers, tailors, and others forced to compete against New York’s new breed of masters and the merchant capitalists of New England. The existence of an artisan bank, with all its promises of help to the creditable, did not enable Samuel Avery and scores of others to avoid financial ruin. The society’s school and library were irrelevant to families living in cellars, who had neither time nor money for edification. Duncan Phyfe and Stephen Allen could easily retain their optimism regarding the future and their pride in the mechanical arts; a different kind of pride was reserved for a small master cobbler who had to sweat his family. Prior to 1825, small masters afflicted by these differences responded either with indictments of monopoly and untoward speculative accumulation or with a rededication to hard work, thrift, and self-reliance. After 1825, when the transformation of the trades accelerated beyond the

48. *Independent Mechanic*, April 6, 1811, September 12, 1812.

49. Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 250–53. The refrain was repeated in the post-Revolutionary period. In 1788, the Society for the Relief of Poor Debtors noted that, for many poor craftsmen, “incessant application to labor will not enable them to subsist themselves and their families. . . .” Three years later, the *Daily Advertiser* charged that “many of our skilled tradesmen, cartmen, day labourers, and others dwell upon the borders of poverty and live hand to mouth,” *Daily Advertiser* [New York], January 30, January 13, 1791, cited in Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 29.

50. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 172–77.

entrepreneurs' wildest hopes, many more small masters would reach a moment of reckoning.

Journeymen

New York's early national journeymen, like their employers, were a mixed lot, but considered as a group they formed by 1815 a distinct and growing propertyless stratum in the trades (Table 3). Virtually all were white, and most had been born either in this country or in Protestant Britain; Irish Catholics and blacks, as yet a small fraction of the city's population, were consigned largely to manual labor and casual work in and around the port.⁵¹ Nearly all journeymen lived in rented rooms (Table 3). Few knew the familial coziness supposedly typical of the preindustrial workshop household: only about one in ten boarded with his master; masters and journeymen tended to live in different neighborhoods (Table 4). While most appear to have earned enough to support a family of five—cited by the journeymen as a minimal accepted standard—their circumstances were often spartan.⁵² Advancement to independence, although not impossible, was far from assured.

51. On immigrants, see James Owre, "The Effect of Immigration on New York City, 1800-1819" (M.A. thesis, Queens College, City University of New York, 1971). Unfortunately, we can only guess at the ethnic composition of the artisan work force in this period, since available census materials do not specify place of birth. Of those artisans gathered in the 1816 sample, however, only 7.0 percent were aliens; of these, all but ten bore Anglo-Saxon names; only eleven held any assessed property. Groneman, "Bloody Ould Sixth," chap. 2, finds that while aliens made up 24.3 percent of the ward's population in 1819, they accounted for 27.0 percent of its artisans; half of the aliens were day laborers. On the basis of these figures, it is reasonable to argue that (a) the percentage of aliens in the trades was roughly the same as their proportion in the population as a whole—6.3 percent in 1806 and 9.8 percent in 1819; (b) British immigrant workers were overrepresented among the aliens in the trades; (c) most alien artisans were journeymen; (d) most immigrants—including most Irish—probably took day-laboring jobs.

The picture is much clearer regarding blacks. Although blacks composed 8.8 percent of the city's free population in 1816, only thirteen—under 2.0 percent of the total—turned up in the 1816 sample. None owned any property. There were signs of a tiny but healthy black artisan community in Jeffersonian New York: among the founding members of the New York African Society for Mutual Relief were six bootmakers; the society's first president was a house carpenter and its secretary a mechanic. Blacks also secured a strong foothold in several service and petty-retailing occupations, including barbering, catering, and laundering. Overall, however, blacks remained consigned to lowlier jobs, and played at best a marginal role in the trades. See Leo H. Hirsch, Jr., "The Negro and New York, 1783 to 1865," *JNH* 16 (1931): 382-473; Rhoda Freeman, "The Free Negro in New York City during the Pre-Civil War Era" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1966), 269-80, 291-94; Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby, eds., *The Negro in New York: An Informal Social History* (New York, 1967), 61.

52. On journeymen's wage demands and minimum standards, see *American Citizen*,

A significant number of the journeymen—roughly one in four—were single men in their twenties with flat purses and high hopes, the proverbial craft novices in search of training, a quick savings, and with luck a career to match that of Phyfe or Allen. The young printer Thurlow Weed met several when he drifted to New York from Albany in 1816. Like Weed, they encountered a life of chance, their prospects hanging on a lucky break, a good recommendation from another master, or an ability to make ends meet until they landed jobs. Given their inexperience, they could expect to lose several positions, as businesses failed or trade slackened; Weed, who had better credentials than most from his boss upstate, worked for four different masters during his first ten months in the city. Masters used numerous cost-cutting schemes—from substitution of “half-ways” to outright failure to pay wages—to keep these young men at bay; Weed recalled one who warned him that he would never get anywhere in the trade unless he was willing to persist in dunning his master for back wages. No doubt many—particularly those lured to New York from the hinterland—left the city shortly after they had begun their search for work.⁵³

Other journeymen shuttled between being small masters and wage earners, and occasionally rose to prominence. Consider the career of Elisha Blossom, a versatile cabinetmaker who set up shop in New York in 1811. Over the next seven years, Blossom worked, in turn, as a journeyman cabinetmaker, a bookseller’s clerk, and a shipwright, before settling down in 1818 as a master shipwright and a member of the General Society. In this case and others, the border between independence and journeyman’s status was extremely blurry; a handful of journeymen in the 1816 sample, having scrupulously saved their wages, married well, or received funds from their parents, owned as much property as did some masters in their trades (Table 5).⁵⁴

But by 1815, most journeymen were neither part-time masters nor hopeful youths. About half were aged thirty or more, while about one in five was over forty (Table 7). The vast majority were married men, of whom about half supported households with four or more dependents. Despite their years of experience, these older journeymen were not, as a rule, much

April 10, 1809; *Evening Post*, May 31, 1819. It remains to be determined how much the proportion of journeymen to masters changed over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; no sources yet located from before 1816 provide an adequate breakdown of masters and journeymen.

53. Harriet A. Weed, ed., *Autobiography of Thurlow Weed* (Boston, 1883), 52–66. Of the journeymen in the jury-book sample from 1816, 25.1 percent were single men without dependents; of these, the great majority (80.0 percent) were under thirty.

54. Journal of Elisha Blossom, 1811–15, N-YHS MSS; Minute Book, New York Society of Journeymen Shipwrights and Caulkers, January 22, March 12, April 9, 1818, NYPL MSS; GSMT Minute Book, February 4, 1818.

more affluent than their younger peers; few were close to winning their competence, although a larger proportion of them held some property (Tables 5 and 8). In all, approximately two out of three artisans over thirty years of age were journeymen; so were two out of three artisans over forty. Some may have been former masters who, like the unfortunate baker George Hart, had migrated to New York to work as journeymen before setting up on their own again; some may have been, like Hart in his later years, former masters plagued by drink. Weed later observed, with some surprise, that most of his fellow printers seemed destined to remain "journeymen through life," and he blamed their fate on drunkenness and impecunty. But individual exigencies alone cannot fully explain the proportions of older journeymen; by 1815, what Weed observed was due not to individual shortcomings alone, but to the structural limitations that accompanied the expansion of the wage-labor supply and the subdivision of the trades.⁵⁵

What little evidence remains of prices and artisan wage rates sketches the limits of opportunity. Two reports on journeymen's budgets, one from the carpenters in 1809, the other from the masons in 1819, estimated the basic expenses for a family of five as between \$6.50 and \$7.00 per week. According to available wage lists, journeymen could expect to earn, on the average, between \$6.00 and \$10.00 per week, although some, including the masons and the most highly skilled tailors, took home as much as \$12.00.⁵⁶ Obviously, as long as work was available, younger journeymen with a job could easily support themselves, and the older men could provide for their families. But few journeymen, however enterprising and diligent, could expect year-round, full employment in New York, given the severe seasonal fluctuations in demand and the interruptions of winter and bad weather. During the usual seasonal slowdowns and unforeseen interruptions in trade, the journeymen had a difficult time meeting even basic costs: the tailors, for example, estimated in 1819 that they could count on working only six months a year, making their true annual average income only \$6.00 per week, a bit below the minimal family wage. Journeymen in other trades, with shorter slack periods, fared better, averaging about \$7.50 per week; those in the less skilled branches of shoemaking and tailoring probably averaged closer to \$5.00 per week. During periods of prolonged distress and inflation, the journeymen's real earnings were even lower, most likely dipping close to those of common laborers.⁵⁷ Expenses for any

55. Weed, *Autobiography*, 58. In the journeymen sample, 74.9 percent headed households with a female dependent; of these, 49.5 percent had four or more dependents.

56. *American Citizen*, April 10, 1809; *Evening Post*, May 31, 1819; *Evening Post*, July 13, 1819; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 249-53.

57. *Evening Post*, July 13, 1819; Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 121. No systematic record has been found of the wage rates for unskilled laborers in New York in

individual mishaps—illness, injury, fire—could put a journeyman and his dependents on the charity relief rolls; purchase of any small extravagance might court long-term hardship unless some extra income came into the house. In the consumer finishing trades, a master's decision to put out even the lowliest piece of work had immediate and obvious repercussions for the journeyman and his family.

To supplement their earnings, the journeymen turned to other resources. Unfortunately, the information on women's work in New York prior to 1820 is very meager, and no evidence has been found to determine how many journeymen's wives and daughters worked for wages. What does remain, in the jury lists and city directories, suggests an established pattern much like that discovered in early modern Europe, in which a small but significant sector of the needle trades was open to independent women and girl apprentices. Otherwise, paid work for journeymen's wives and daughters—apart from those girls who left home to enter domestic service—was limited mainly to keeping boarders (although the jury books are unclear on this too), laundering, and the tiny returns of outwork seamstressing and binding. Given this dearth of women's wage work and given the powerful assumption, expressed several times in the *Independent Mechanic*, that the honorable artisan expected to be the family breadwinner, the family economy among married journeymen was almost certainly restricted largely to the outwork journeymen's households, in which women helped their husbands and fathers with their work.⁵⁸ A far more

this period. Donald T. Adams's studies of Philadelphia clearly suggest that unskilled men earned considerably less than journeymen—roughly 60 percent of a skilled man's wages. Adams also argues, however, that skilled wages fluctuated more than unskilled—particularly during times of commercial distress. It seems reasonable to suppose that the same held true in New York. See Donald T. Adams, "Wage Rates in the Early National Period: 1780–1830," *JEH* 28 (1968): 404–26.

58. On women's employments in Jeffersonian New York, see *Longworth's Almanack for 1805*, 124–25, 128, 136–38, 154, 157–61, 163–64. Other primary sources are silent on wage-earning women in artisan households. Groneman located 382 women enumerated as household heads in the Sixth Ward in 1819. Of these, only 78 (20.4 percent) were listed with occupations other than "lady," and of these, half ran stores or boarding-houses. Moreover, Groneman's figures show that the great majority of wage-earning women were widows, as were the majority of independent women in the ward. The dearth of paid occupations among these independent women suggests that while there was a female labor market in the Jeffersonian trades, it was still a very restricted one. Unfortunately, the sources also reveal practically nothing about domestic service, but it seems reasonable to suspect that some New York artisans' daughters worked in service before marriage. In sum, the picture looks quite similar to those drawn for early modern European cities in Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women in the Crafts in Sixteenth-Century Lyon," *Feminist Studies* 8 (1982): 46–80; and Joan Scott and Louise Tilly, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York, 1978), 47–51. On the artisans' sense of sexual norms, "breadwinning," and gender, see *Independent Mechanic*, June 15, July 21, September 14, November 23, 1811, March 21, 1812; *American Citizen*, May 23, 1810. On the scarcity of female employment, see also Stansell, "Women of the Laboring Poor," 59–60.

common course, for young journeymen and married men alike, was to tramp. A young journeyman like Thurlow Weed thought nothing of walking from Albany to New York City and to Auburn, New York, in search of steady work; master bootmakers from as far away as Rochester considered their finest workmen to be the older journeymen on call from Manhattan. A formal tramping system, complete with trade tickets and labor exchanges, aided the journeymen carpenters, who also established a house of call for tramps from other cities in 1800. The printers traveled within the even more elaborate network, an American equivalent of the European grand tour, that stretched from New England to Pennsylvania.⁵⁹

While they were in the city, the journeymen lived in the central and outer wards; even here, they, unlike the masters, were anything but settled. The social and economic ecology of the mercantile city helped shape their residential patterns: journeymen in the maritime trades naturally tried to live as close as possible to the waterfront, while building tradesmen roomed near the construction sites in the northern wards.⁶⁰ More often, the increasingly competitive housing market drove them to find whatever space they could in the early flats and rooming houses that lined the more crowded and rundown parts of the city and the outer wards. Journeymen changed their addresses constantly, either to avoid payment on their short-term leases or to search for cheaper lodgings. The First of May, the traditional terminal date for spring-quarter leases and all annual leases, saw the streets of the central and outer wards clogged with nomadic journeymen and day laborers, possessions on their backs, looking for new places to live, a raucous (and costly) transit, as the *Independent Mechanic* recounted: “Wives scold, dogs bark, and children cry, / Pots break, chairs crack, pans ring, and jarring notes of harshest discord rise on every side.” To make do, the men sought help where they could, from friends, relations, and other craft workers. Families unable to afford rent on a house shared buildings with other journeymen, sometimes crowding three or four families in a dwelling originally designed to house one or two. A common resort for the single men was the craft boardinghouse, where for as little as three dollars per week, they could get meals, a place to bed down, and word of mouth about available jobs in the city.⁶¹

59. Weed, *Autobiography*, 28–32, 50–51; Jesse W. Hatch, “The Old-Time Shoemaker and Shoemaking,” *Rochester Historical Society Publications* 5 (1926): 82–83; *Mercantile Advertiser*, April 25, 1810; Stevens, *Typographical Union*, 72–73. On the English system, see Eric Hobsbawm, “The Tramping Artisan,” in *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1968), 34–63.

60. Jury Book, 1816, Wards 5, 8. The building tradesmen’s patterns, in particular, are reflected in Table 4.

61. *Independent Mechanic*, April 13, 1811, May 9, 1812; Weed, *Autobiography*, 55; A. [pseud.], “Letters from New York,” *New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* [London], 2 (1830): 450.

From the boardinghouses and flats, it was a short walk to the tavern and the world of lower-class leisure—a world that increasingly set some journeymen apart from their masters. Walnut Street, near Corlears Hook, was a center of these pleasures, its grogshops, ballrooms, and bawdy houses enticing young mechanics, sailors, and drifters; elsewhere, cellars and saloon back rooms became impromptu gambling halls. As in the eighteenth century, cockfighting and bull baiting were favorite pastimes for journeymen with fresh wages: for several years, Samuel Winship, a small master butcher, kept a bison in the cellar beneath his market room for use in the latter. Disorderly houses, where prostitutes were permitted to ply their trade, dotted the city's poorer districts and catered to apprentices and journeymen, sometimes to the surprise and consternation of the master craftsmen: it took one master baker, Jacob Ackerman, several weeks to discover that his twelve-year-old apprentice, while supposedly vending cakes and pies in the street, was actually using the proceeds to "have connection" with a young girl. Sundry slightly more reputable recreations—nude bathing, riding the "flying horses" carousels, attending the shows of traveling musicians, daredevils, and acrobats—enlivened the journeymen's existence the year round; holidays, especially the Fourth of July, were occasions for boxing matches, horse races, and determined overeating.⁶²

We may presume that this workingman's culture was a hybrid of eighteenth-century urban customs and those brought from the countryside by the continuing migration from the hinterland and abroad. At all events, it was a culture that was very much alive in the 1820s, even as the city's entrepreneurs and small masters began making a virtue of abstemious necessity. Its centerpiece was alcohol: at all times, in and out of the shops, New York's journeymen could be expected to drink. By the 1820s, workingmen's saloons and grocery-grog shops had achieved a separate identity within New York's renowned barroom culture, one that marked the limits of a semiautonomous, unpretentious, masculine milieu, free from the responsibilities of home and workshop. Some of these drinking places served as informal labor exchanges, where employers from outside of the state set up temporary hiring halls; more directly, the publicans and liquor-vending grocers offered the journeymen credit and the quick cash loan, as well as a warm spot in which to relax, talk, and drink. At work, meanwhile, prodigious amounts of alcohol appeared at the very benches of the

62. *Independent Mechanic*, May 4, 18, 1812; *Columbian*, October 3, 1820; De Voe, *Market Book*, I, 389; *People v. Patrick Daly and Rachel Green, Court of General Sessions*, August 11, 1811, MARC; MCC, IX, 27, February 24, IX, 393, December 15, 1817, XIII, 300–303, October 13, 1823; CCFP, Police Committee, July 7, 1822, August 1, 1825; Gabriel Furman, "How New York City Used to Celebrate Independence Day," *N-YHSQ* 21 (1937): 93–96.

trades as a sort of secular sacrament, to seal the journeymen's social bonds within the customary artisan regime. Thurlow Weed remembered that journeymen in one printer's shop put down their tools each morning at eleven so that they could "jeff" for beer; often, Weed recalled, they would punctuate the day with several more intoxicating breaks. Old drinking customs and rituals like "footing"—the payment of whiskey to the shop by every newly hired journeyman on his first day of work—flourished, emblems of the trade and a means by which journeymen could enforce an informal control over the pace of their labor.⁶³

Not every master minded these stoppages. The more traditional employers actually encouraged the breaks as part of their paternal respect for the proper order of "the Trade"; while some paid their men partly in drink, most, if later temperance tracts are an indication, probably remained heavy drinkers themselves through the mid-1820s.⁶⁴ But this recognition of the journeymen's drinking rights was clearly breaking down, as the wage earners' alcoholic pastimes became matters of grave concern to the more enterprising employers. In the early 1820s, the mayor's desk was crossed by a steady stream of complaints from master craftsmen angry at the various abuses of local grocers and publicans, including violations of Sabbath drinking laws and the harboring of runaway apprentices. Inside the shops, a few masters, inspired perhaps by the General Society and other groups, tried to convince the men of the folly of the traditional Blue Monday. For the more recalcitrant journeymen, these attempts at reformation only made drinking a badge of self-esteem and manliness, setting them apart from their more upright masters. One printer's hex, hurled at an employer accused of mistreating his men, suggested the prickliness of the problem: "May you be bother'd all your life / With workmen—brandy lovers. . . ."⁶⁵

63. Montgomery, "Working Classes," 10; Weed, *Autobiography*, 58. For evidence on tavern keepers' loans, see *Insolvency Assignments* nos. 1816/14, 20, 119, 282; 1817/6, HDC. On drinking in early-nineteenth-century America, see W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York, 1979), 15, 131–32, and passim; on New York, see W. Harrison Bayles, *Old Taverns of New York* (New York, 1915). I am grateful to Elizabeth Craven of Princeton University for discussions on drinking in New York; her dissertation, on the culture of New York taverns from the Revolution to the Civil War, will, upon completion, recast these matters in wholly new ways.

64. Account Book, Unidentified carpenter and mason, June 25, 1814, NYPL MSS; New-York City Temperance Society, *First Annual Report* (New York, 1830), index, pp. 18–20.

65. Complaints against Taverns—April 1822, Stephen Allen Papers, N-YHS; CCFP, Police Committee, January 12, 1818; New York City Common Council, *Report of the Committee on the Means to Carry Into Effect the Provisions of the Act for Suppressing Immorality* (New York, 1812), 4–5 and passim; *Independent Mechanic*, June 29, 1811. For a typical rowdy night's roundup of carousing artisans, see *People v. Peter McIntyre*, *People v. John J. Moore*, and *People v. Rufus Ogden*, all April 6, 1816, Court of General Sessions, MARC.

Drinking, however, was but one side of the journeymen's world; as Weed's remarks and the printer's hex made clear, not every craft worker was exclusively a brandy lover. Some enjoyed more uplifting efforts at self-education, and they shared their preference with their like-minded colleagues. In the shops, discussions of the principles of a particular trade easily turned to more general subjects. John Frazee, the stonemason and sculptor, recalled these conversations from his apprentice days with fondness, as informal but earnest symposia that would have amused Archimedes and Newton but that "first inspired me to think philosophically." The more curious of the city's literate journeymen also read. Their chosen fare was not always refined: the typesetter David Bruce remembered that an especially popular genre about 1820 was the cheap chapbook, sold under such titles as "the 'Complete Letter Writer,' 'Dream-books,' and malefactor's 'Dying Confessions,'" quick diversions, mostly, along with the occasional book "principally of sea-songs, ancient ballads, and 'Dibdins' melodies." But just as often, Bruce recalled, the skilled workmen came to prefer more edifying material. Popular miscellanies like James Oram's and Alexander Ming's *Weekly Museum* offered them short reports on practical science and world affairs and the work of such journeymen poets as the printer Samuel Woodworth. Shakespeare, to say nothing of more accessible dramatists, was favored in some journeymen's circles; Stephen Allen described one journeyman he encountered during his apprentice days as "the best scholar in the loft," who would entertain his fellows and disarm his foes with long recitations from memory of scenes from *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Frazee, having completed his apprenticeship, quickly graduated from workshop talk, first to *Charlotte Temple* and *Robinson Crusoe* and then to Cellini's autobiography. Other journeymen read the classics for a nominal fee in the city's libraries and reading rooms and kept up with current events in the taverns, which regularly stocked several local newspapers.⁶⁶

The diverse social life of the workshops, houses of call, taverns, board- inghouses and reading rooms in turn bred a variety of formal and informal journeymen's associations. Little is known of these ad hoc drinking fraternities, "box" clubs, and reading groups, but we can be sure that the rudest of them were the gangs of younger journeymen and apprentices that roamed the streets after work and on Sundays. Taking their names either from their neighborhoods—for example, the Broadway Boys—or their trades—for example, the butchers' gang known as the Hide-Binders or High Binders—the gangs were an insular lot, who found a rough collective prestige in mimicking the styles of the city's affluent dandies and

66. John Frazee, "Autobiography. John Frazee, First American Sculptor," Transcript at N-YHS, no pagination; David Bruce, "Autobiography of David Bruce, or, Then and Now," N-YHS MSS, 6, 9; Allen, "Memoirs," 26; Weed, *Autobiography*, 59.

"bloods," attending theatricals, ogling young women, and picking fights with other gangs or with immigrant day laborers. David Bruce, who "traveled" with the Old Slippers, a gang of bookbinders and printers, recalled when he and a friend had been grabbed by two of their bitterest rivals, watermen from the White Hallers gang, and covered with molasses and sand. Court records include accounts of bands of young mechanics who sallied into crowds of dockworkers and passersby, with no other apparent purpose than to start a brawl. A primitive justice governed their set-tos—Bruce thought it a mean thing for his assailants to pick on him and his friend "as they were at least five years our senior"—but otherwise the gangs betrayed little concern for any matters more monumental than protecting their street honor or proving their courage.⁶⁷

Very different issues concerned the journeymen's benevolent societies and unions that arose independent of the masters' mutual-aid societies. These were not the first such associations in New York; at least some journeymen organized before the Revolution. The earlier efforts were rare, however, and notable mostly for their circumspection: in the first New York journeymen's "strike" in 1768—one of only three strikes on record before 1788—twenty tailors set up their own shop and complained about insufficient wages but carefully avoided any mention that they had refused to work for their masters. In 1785, a strike of journeymen shoemakers, also over wages, provoked their masters to retaliate with an employers' combination, indicating a sharpening of conflicts within the trade. Only in 1794, when several printers formed the Franklin Typographical Society, did any New York journeymen attempt to establish a permanent body of their own. Over the next thirty years, journeymen cabinetmakers, chairmakers, ship carpenters and caulkers, cordwainers, coopers, house carpenters, tailors, hatters, and masons followed suit.⁶⁸

The journeymen's societies were as much fraternal associations as trade unions: all mirrored, to some degree, the masters' dedication to mutual aid and to the harmony of "the Trade." In some societies, business revolved almost entirely around the planning of patriotic celebrations and the collection of sick funds. At times, the journeymen stressed the unity of workshop interests and glossed over the differences between themselves and the masters, even when disputes arose: in 1809, the printers' society, while successfully negotiating a new price book, declared that "between

67. Bruce, "Autobiography," 19-20; CCFP, Police Committee, August 25, 1817; *People v. William Anderson et al.*, December 3, 1815, *People v. Benjamin Smith et al.*, July 1, 1818, Court of General Sessions, MARC; *Independent Mechanic*, August 24, 1812; Norcross, *Swamp*, 5-6. See also Gilje, "Mobocracy," 159-66.

68. On the earliest associations, see Morris, *Government and Labor*, 193-207, and Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 324. On the period 1800-1820, see Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 264-94.

employers and employees there are mutual interests dependent; mutual duties to be performed."⁶⁹ Nonetheless, simply by setting up on their own, the journeymen admitted that they and their masters diverged in *some* ways, that the community of "the Trade" did not fully satisfy their needs. Steadily, between 1800 and 1825, the changing structure of the crafts fostered a more militant bearing, particularly in the consumer finishing crafts. In 1804, the organized journeyman tailors asserted that they had joined forces to prevent their masters from forcing impositions on them, something that happened "frequently in every mechanical branch." A year later, the shoemakers prefaced their constitution with a call to "guard against the artifices or intrigues that may be used by our employers to reduce our wages lower than what we deem an adequate reward for our labour." Between 1795 and 1825, more than two dozen strikes took place, a low figure by the standards of the 1830s but an unmistakable sign of an awakening militancy. In other protests, journeymen turned to boycotts and newspaper appeals; striking cabinetmakers and shoemakers established their own cooperative shops; during their strike of 1810, a group of journeymen house carpenters led a crowd of several hundred boys and workers in breaking the windows of the offices of two unfriendly newspapers and of the General Society's Mechanic Hall.⁷⁰

Like their counterparts in London and Paris, these society men were hardly the most exploited, worst-paid wage earners in New York, but they may be considered among the chief immediate victims of the new workshop order. Year by year, they saw their livelihoods and positions undermined, by those they attacked as the "few who are generally concerned in the *slop* shoes line," the "unmanly and ungenerous . . . Merchant Tailors," masters of "indifferent workmanship" whose "only object is to accumulate money." Their protests aimed to stop this deterioration, to protect themselves and all they associated with the workshop. Naturally, in a time of repeated inflation, wages were a primary issue, and most of the strikes concerned demands for a "just" rate of pay; simultaneously, however, the societies also tried to regulate shop conditions. Implicit in their insistence on a regular book of prices was their attempt to restrain masters from subcontracting, subdividing the work, or hiring "scab" journeymen who defied the society's authority. The most celebrated New York labor confrontation of the era, the cordwainers' general strike of 1808, only incidentally concerned wages, and focused on those masters who hired non-society men and "illegal" apprentices. The journeymen printers, threat-

69. George Daitsman, "Labor and the Welfare State in Early New York," *LH* 4 (1963): 248-56; Stevens, *Typographical Union*, 4-18, 52.

70. *Evening Post*, November 24, 1804; Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 364-65; *American Citizen*, May 3, 23, 1810.

ened by the use of juvenile labor, were vociferous on this point as well; so were the ship carpenters and caulkers, wary that the master shipwrights might find some way to increase the number of semiskilled helpers and degrade standards in the trade.⁷¹

The more they struck, the more the journeymen learned about the nature of the issues at stake: what had in the eighteenth century appeared as the isolated grievances of a few unfortunate journeymen in a few shops now appeared as problems of more widespread concern, intrinsic to the restructured workshops, setting masters and men unavoidably at odds. The first general strikes of single trades—by the cordwainers in 1808 and 1811 and the masons in 1819—sharpened the boundaries of conflict as the boundaries of class; so, in its way, did the carpenters' attack on Mechanic Hall. The societies' rhetoric further betrayed how much the supposed harmony of the crafts had deteriorated. The tone of civility typical of the earliest protests vanished, as journeymen addressed the offending masters with all printable terms of opprobrium, from "haughty" aristocrats to "merciless tyrants." A few more audacious souls ventured to claim that the masters had no right at all to control wages; in 1819, an English immigrant journeyman tailor insisted that the societies alone should set piece rates, since "the Journeyman is better able to decide upon the merit of his labor than the employer is for him." More often, the journeymen simply demanded their rights to bargain, either collectively or with each master individually, in order to offset what now appeared as ineluctable conflicts. The printers exemplified the shift in attitude shortly after a strike in 1817—a mere eight years after their declaration of "mutual interests"—when they banned employers (including former society members) from their meetings and announced that "the interests of the journeymen are separate and in some respects opposite those of the employers. . . ." The attempts by the various masters' associations to repress the journeymen, through the courts and with blacklists, only strengthened the men's resolve.⁷²

The societies also reinforced the members' sense of themselves as sober, self-reliant, respectable men, capable of running their own affairs. To administer sickness and burial funds and to wage strikes required a discipline and aptitude for formal organization absent in the dramshops and boardinghouses. Society constitutions forbade "frequent intoxication,"

71. Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 300; *Columbian*, December 9, 1813; *Evening Post*, April 30, July 13, 1819; Stevens, *Typographical Union*, 65–70; Constitution of the New York Society of Journeymen Shipwrights and Caulkers, NYPL MSS; *People v. James Melvin*, November 9, 1811, Court of General Sessions, MARC.

72. *American Citizen*, December 31, 1802; *Evening Post*, July 13, 1819; Stevens, *Typographical Union*, 76.

“gross immorality,” and “neglect of business.” Rules governing union meetings paid meticulous attention to decorous procedures, to the extent of covering such arcane infractions as cursing at a dismissed brother who had been reinstated in the society. Members found guilty of negligent workmanship were fined.⁷³ In the ever expanding numbers of society committees—on prices, on tramping, on apprentices—the men acquired a taste for independent action and learned the necessary organizing skills. This new discipline came not from the pleading or coercion of their masters, but from the journeymen’s own collective efforts; it also altered, at least in the journeymen’s minds, the balance of power in the trade. Where once the masters alone had regulated the workshop, the journeymen now asserted their own rights to some form of control, inspired by a new sense of their own unity and mutuality. “Man of himself is nothing,” ran the maxim of one society constitution, “but when he becomes united to his fellow mortals he becomes *useful*.”⁷⁴ Such was the raw material of class consciousness.

The journeymen’s opposition, with its glimmers of a language of class, was limited in comparison with the struggles of the unions of the 1830s. At its peak, the best-organized society in the city, the cordwainers’, included fewer than 200 members, about half of all the journeymen cordwainers in New York. At no point did the societies come close to forming an organization embracing different trades. Although at least one society, the cordwainers’, organized outworkers in order to prevent strikebreaking, nothing was said directly about unskilled or semiskilled workers in or out of the trades—except to complain about them, as in 1819, when the journeymen tailors struck those masters who hired “inferior” women “slop” workers. Even the most militant societies, meanwhile, declined rapidly over the period from the postwar readjustment through the panic of 1819, either to disappear altogether or to accept incorporation from the state legislature on terms that denied them any powers to regulate work or wages. Yet the societies’ example was not lost on the trades; nor could their decline halt the ongoing collisions between masters and men. At least five independent journeymen’s benevolent associations survived into the mid-1820s. Quiet efforts to organize journeymen hatters and tailors led to further conspiracy trials in 1823 and 1824. A flurry of strikes during the postpanic inflation of 1824 and 1825 momentarily revived the semblance of a union movement. By the time the Erie Canal beckoned to still

73. Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 364–68; Constitution, New York Society of Journeymen Shipwrights and Caulkers, Article XIII, NYPL MSS; Stevens, *Typographical Union*, 46–47, 70.

74. Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 300–301; Bradford, *Poetical Vagaries*, 13.

greater changes in the shops, journeymen in the city's largest trades had more than a quarter of a century of fitful experience at organizing on their own. More profound divisions and conflicts were on the horizon.⁷⁵

A Restive Peace

New York's artisans had many things to celebrate in 1815, but not, it would seem, the harmony and unity of the crafts. If, literally speaking, the arts still stood by hammer and hand, the artisan system was clearly in decay. Masters, small masters, and journeymen could not expect to share equally in the cornucopia of dollars. Peace, the mechanic's friend, brought ample opportunity for some but uncertain prospects for many more.

And yet, with all of these divisions, it would be mistaken to view the peace celebrations only as a high-spirited patriotic masquerade. The social changes separating masters and journeymen in the largest trades were still in their infancy. Strikes, although fast becoming a fact of workshop life, remained something of a novelty. Large sectors of the craft economy preserved the artisan system. More important, the artisans, even in the most troubled trades, still shared a sense of distinctiveness from the mercantile elite and the laboring poor, one that breathed life into an artisan idiom of mutuality and softened the new conflicts. The 1815 celebrations hinted at this idiom; beyond these hints lay a powerful set of associations, centered on the meaning of the Revolution and the craftsmen's conception of their proper place in a republican polity and society. As much as the tools of the trades, this ideology defined the artisan republic. As it shaped the artisans' perceptions of the past and present, so it prepared them for an even more unsettling future.

75. Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 370; *Evening Post*, July 13, 1819; Stevens, *Typographical Union*, 78–81; Minutes, Society of Shipwrights and Caulkers, February 20, 1818; Colden, *Memoir*, 213, 215, 225, 227, 228–29; United Societies of Journeymen Tailors "List of Prices" (1825), N-YHS Broad-sides; *Evening Post*, April 24, May 18, 24, 1824, May 22, 1825; Jacob Wheeler, *Reports of Criminal Cases* (New York, 1854), I, 154; *People v. William Smith and others*, August 12, 1824, Court of General Sessions, MARC; Commons, *History of Labour*, I, 153–57.

2

Artisan Republicanism

In the early nineteenth century, to be an American citizen was by definition to be a republican, the inheritor of a revolutionary legacy in a world ruled by aristocrats and kings. What it meant to be an American republican, though, was by no means self-evident. As early as 1788, James Madison observed that political writers had used so many definitions of the term that “no satisfactory one would ever be found” by recourse to texts alone; more democratic-minded New Yorkers agreed.¹ With the social and political transformations of the next half-century, the versions of American republicanism multiplied, as men of different backgrounds and conflicting social views—eastern bankers and western yeomen, slaveholders and abolitionists, evangelicals and infidels—came to judge themselves and each other by their adduced adherence to republican principles. A singular political language bound Americans together, an extraordinary manifestation of apparent unity when set against the continental and British experience of the age of revolution. Beneath this superficial consensus, Americans fought passionately over the fundamentals of their own Revolution, in a nation gripped by profound (if fitful) changes in economic and social life.²

1. *The Federalist*, ed. Jacob E. Cooke (Middletown, Conn., 1961), 250; “Address to the Republican Citizens of the United States, May 28, 1794,” reprinted in Philip Foner, ed., *The Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790–1800: A Documentary Sourcebook of Constitutions, Declarations, Addresses, Resolutions, and Toasts* (Westport, Conn., 1976), 173. The Democratic-Republicans, taking note of Madison’s remarks, guessed incorrectly that they had been written by Alexander Hamilton.

2. For a synopsis of the recent literature on this point, see Robert Shalhope, “Republicanism in Early America,” *WMQ* 38 (1982): 334–56.

New York's artisans, masters and journeymen, had their own sense of what it was to be a republican, as the English writer James Boardman discovered during a visit in the late 1820s. Like some of his more celebrated countrymen, Boardman was fascinated by America and its commercial capital, but he refused to restrict himself to the urbane literary drawing rooms that misled many visitors into describing New York as a genteel haven from the barbarism of the backwoods. Boardman was after the lowly shopkeepers, the poor mechanics who he hoped would enlighten him about ordinary Americans. One afternoon, he interviewed a local jeweler, who summarized the artisans' political beliefs with an anecdote. It seemed that earlier that day the jeweler had sold an ornate brooch, "executed in garnets and of French workmanship," to a fortunate young mechanic. The youth, it turned out, could not distinguish an emblem of royalty from other designs, and when a friend later told him that his new prize was in fact the Bourbon device, he blanched. "His republican feelings would not permit him to wear the badge of tyranny for a moment," Boardman later recalled, "and with breathless haste he hurried back to the jeweller for something more congenial to democratic feelings."³

Some months later, an immigrant workman named John Petheram learned that the artisans' "republican feelings" were sufficiently strong to help dictate the organization of the workshop. Petheram, the articulate son of a family of textile workers, fled to New York to seek his fortune in 1830, as rick burning and loom smashing spread across the English countryside. Trying his hand in several shops and stores, the young man was amazed at the apparent backwardness of the city's employers. He later remembered one, the drug maker John Morrison, as typical. "I tried to make the old fool Morrison believe," Petheram related, "that by dividing the labour, which was not done there as it [is] in England, more work could be done." The benighted man, it seemed, "had never read Adam Smith," nor had he considered "the volume of experience which is open to every man but which ignorance, bigotry, or prejudice prevents so many from ever looking into." "This, sir, is a free country," the offended Morrison shot back. "We want no one person over another which would be the case if you divided the labour." Morrison, it turned out, was not alone in his "prejudice." "They were all alike," Petheram lamented of the small master employers, "I have heard this over again, with the addition of 'Tories may be very well in England but we want none here.'"⁴

Reading these stories today brings a jolt: here is an America that confounds our expectations, one that does not entirely square with the impressions of the most thoughtful traveler of the age, Alexis de Tocqueville.

3. James Boardman, *America and the Americans* (London, 1833), 328.

4. John Petheram, "Sketches of My Life," MS, N-YHS, 52–53.

As Boardman found out, conformity to the egalitarian ideal, far from a pretext for money grubbing, still had visceral political meanings for ordinary mechanics; Petheram, apart from suffering the irony of having to tell his bosses how to be better capitalists, discovered that acquisitive individualism, the pursuit of profit, was not necessarily the summum bonum of the American republican character, at least when it came to division of labor in the workshops. Both men, in their search for America, stumbled upon what remained of a distinctive system of meanings, one that associated the emblems, language, and politics of the Republic with the labor system, the social traditions, the very products of the crafts.

First evident in the pre-Revolutionary crisis, this artisan republicanism hardened in the 1790s, as the craftsmen came to terms with what the Revolution meant to them; through the late 1820s, it helped mold them as a social group and offered some real basis of solidarity between masters, small masters, and journeymen. At the same time, however, the craftsmen re-examined the meanings of both craftsmanship and republicanism, in view of the ongoing changes in the social relations of the trades. As late as 1825, artisans of all ranks could still join together, much as in 1815, in mass proclamations of artisan republican unity; simultaneously, a complex process was underway, in which masters and journeymen in the dividing crafts began to invent opposing interpretations of the artisan republican legacy. From this ideological counterpoint, between continuity and change, consensus and conflict, came evidence of both the lingering power of old patterns of thought and the emerging shape of class consciousness. Its origins lay in politics and in the artisans' fight against political subordination in the mercantile city.

Redeeming the Revolution

For the leading citizens of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century New York, society was meant to be a network of lower-class loyalty and elite influence. Social distinctions derived from a combination of occupation, wealth, religion, ethnicity, and family ties; the artisans, even the wealthiest among them, were generally held at arm's length by the mercantile elite, scorned as "meer mechanicks," men of the lower or middling sort. When applied to New York's shifting array of competing family interests, this social code helped foster a fractious political system of patrician control and popular participation. Independent artisans did have an important place in electoral affairs as early as the seventeenth century, both as candidates and as voters; far more than their counterparts in Boston and Philadelphia, New York's contending gentry and merchants actively (if with detectable condescension) sought the craftsmen's support. Participation in

politics did not, however, guarantee the artisans power or unity. Caught as they were in webs of patronage, restricted by the scrutiny of viva voce polling and divided to a degree by the competing religious claims of Anglicans and Presbyterians, the artisans remained politically fragmented and beholden to their social superiors until the eve of the Revolution.⁵ The popular movements of the 1760s and 1770s widened some cracks in this establishment and permanently altered the way in which mechanics and other urban plebes took part in New York City politics. But as the elitist political persuasion revived after the Revolution and persisted after 1800, the artisans once again had to find their political voice and fight for a share of local power. Over the next two decades, in alliance with nonartisan politicians, they consolidated their position as a vital political interest and affirmed, in the reflection of the Revolution, an egalitarian political tradition all their own.

To understand fully the passions and traditions behind these developments, we must retrace our steps back to the streets and committee rooms of the 1760s and 1770s. Historians have long puzzled over the social significance of the Revolution for the urban mechanics; most recent work agrees that a democratic artisan-based popular movement evolved in New York from the Stamp Act crisis to the coming of the Revolution (culminating between 1774 and 1776), one allied with and for a time led by West Indies-trade merchants and shippers but one with its own awakening political consciousness.⁶ The movement arose only gradually and on several fronts. Mobbing and ritualized street demonstrations, the chief forms of collective protest for urban plebes in the Old World, were quite familiar to late-eighteenth-century New Yorkers, accepted as normal (if, to some, undesirable) manifestations of lower-class displeasure and high spirits. As in Hanoverian London, the causes of these disturbances ranged from the mundane to the seemingly bizarre, from competition for work and suspected price fixing to alleged grave robbing by cadaver-hungry medical students from Columbia College. So, too, the New York crowds generally stuck to the Anglo-American norms of highly symbolic actions (burning of effigies, wearing of costumes) interspersed with limited and

5. Nicholas Varga, "Election Procedures and Practices in Colonial New York," *NYH* 41 (1960): 249-77; Patricia U. Bonomi, *A Factious People: Politics and Society in Colonial New York* (New York, 1971), 178-223; Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 144-48, 362-74.

6. Bonomi, *Factious People*, 254-55; Roger Champagne, "Liberty Boys and Mechanics in New York City, 1764-1774," *LH* 8 (1967): 115-35; Staughton Lynd, "The Mechanics in New York City Politics, 1774-1785," *LH* 5 (1964): 225-46; Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (Baltimore, 1981), 124-25, 162-65. Cf. Pauline Maier, *The Old Revolutionaries: Political Lives in the Age of Samuel Adams* (New York, 1980), 78-81.

discriminate violence to property.⁷ During the Stamp Act crisis, the mobs also assumed a distinctly political and oppositional character, as crowds of Liberty Boys, led by small merchants and privateersmen, sacked the home of one British officer, forced the resignation of the local stamp distributor, burned effigies, destroyed the governor's coach, and posted placards, signed "Vox Populi," that threatened any printer who used stamped paper. Political crowds reappeared to defend the liberty pole against royal soldiers in 1766, to cheer a jailed leader of the Sons of Liberty in 1769, to engage the garrison in bloody street fights in 1770, to dump a small consignment of tea into the harbor in 1774, and to seize the local armory after news arrived of the Lexington battle. In June 1776, crowds stripped professed Tories of their clothes, rode them through the streets on rails, and threw them in jail. Political ideals and more everyday social resentments mingled in these outbursts: anger at impressment and at moonlighting troops, for example, was indistinguishable from broader issues of American liberty in the confrontations of 1766 and 1770. By taking to the streets, however, and by exerting their will—sometimes beyond the intentions of their leaders—the crowds also challenged the course and prerogatives of New York's loyalists and more conservative Whigs, in ways far more threatening to established political standards than those of earlier crowds—or so it seemed to their opponents, one of whom wrote in 1774 of the need to halt the activities of "*Cobblers and Tailors* so long as they take upon their everlasting and immeasurable shoulders the power of directing the loyal and sensible inhabitants of this city."⁸

While the mobs established a ritualized, boisterous artisan political presence, regularly organized groups created a new framework for popular patriot politics and in time elaborated a coherent set of democratic political ideals. The first semiformal associations arose alongside the mobs, as radical mechanics helped lead the anti-British agitation by adapting established campaign techniques. Open-air meetings and door-to-door canvassing, coordinated by the Sons of Liberty, galvanized opposition to the Quartering Acts and support for nonimportation. Similar activities followed the imposition of the Intolerable Acts. The formation of an independent Mechanics' Committee to replace the Sons of Liberty in 1774

7. J. T. Headley, *The Great Riots of New York, 1712–1873* (New York, 1873), 56–65; Jules C. Ladenheim, "The Doctor's Mob," *Journal of the History of Medicine* 5 (1950): 23–53; Gilje, "Mobocracy," 1–49.

8. Quoted in Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 369. See Lee R. Boyer, "Lobster Backs, Liberty Boys, and Laborers in the Streets: New York's Golden Hill and Nassau Street Riots," *N-YHSQ* 57 (1973): 281–308; Countryman, *People in Revolution*, 36–47, 55–77; as well as Carl Lotus Becker, *The History of Political Parties in the Province of New York, 1760–1776* (1909; reprint, Madison, Wis., 1960), chaps. 2–3.

revealed a maturing artisan self-confidence in political affairs, as well as a deep distrust for the city's more moderate Whigs. It also insured the survival of what Alfred Young has described as the city's militantly anti-British, increasingly democratic brand of popular Whiggery. Plenary sessions met in the committee's new Mechanic Hall, sometimes as often as once a week, to debate the intensifying crisis and coordinate radical actions. In 1776, as war became inevitable and Loyalists temporarily fled the city, the committee exercised a growing measure of power, issuing a string of declarations on American independence and demands for political reforms, including universal manhood suffrage. For one heady spring and summer, the city fell under the sway of an extraordinary popular political debate, heavily influenced by Paine's electrifying *Common Sense* (published the preceding January). The groundswell at once coalesced anti-British opinion and opened discussion about what an independent America would look like. Gouverneur Morris, that shrewd conservative, had seen what was coming two years earlier: the "mob" had, indeed, begun to think and reason.⁹

A new political world took shape in these efforts; although the British military occupation in 1776 halted popular politics in New York, the artisans resumed political action as soon as the redcoats departed. Mobbing and street demonstrations reappeared as instruments of the popular will, when reactions to the French Revolution, the panic of 1792, the announcement of the Jay Treaty in 1794, and several more minor disputes prompted the usual parades and destruction. The spectacular William Keteltas affair of 1796 repeated the pattern, with all the bravura of the London Wilkesite disturbances and the Sons of Liberty campaigns of thirty years earlier. The fracas began when two Irish ferryboat men were convicted and sentenced—one to a public whipping—for having cursed a local alderman and refused to depart from their schedule to carry him across the East River. Keteltas, a young, struggling Democratic-Republican lawyer, took up the ferrymen's case, calling the court's decision an abomination and the state legislature's failure to intercede "the most flagrant abuse of rights . . . since the Revolution." Keteltas's persistence earned him a jail sentence as well, for contempt of the authority of the assembly—but not before Keteltas and his Republican friends had mobilized the political nation out-of-doors, to accompany the lawyer to his final showdown with the legislators. The passions were genuine, but the proceedings could have been prepared as a script, as Keteltas (the assembly chamber

9. Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 11; Morris, *Government and Labor*, 188–92; Peter Force, comp., *American Archives* (Washington, D.C., 1837–53), 4th ser., I, 312. Lynd, "Mechanics in New York City Politics," remains the best detailed account of artisan political activity between 1774 and 1776, but see also Countryman, *People in Revolution*, 124–26.

hushed, its galleries packed to overflowing) delivered his final defiant refusal to recant, only to be lifted on a chair and carried through the streets to the jailhouse while thousands chanted, "The Spirit of '76." Two months later, when Keteltas was released, he was met by another crowd that once again carried him in parade, this time on a phaeton bedecked with American and French flags, a phrygian cap, and the inscription "What, you rascal, insult your superiors."¹⁰

All of this would have been familiar to anyone who had lived through the 1770s. The difference, betrayed in the almost comic tone of some of the press reports on the Keteltas affair, was that the dramaturgy of the crowd was of decidedly secondary importance in the 1790s, displaced by the more regular forms of participation begun by the artisan committees. In 1783, the mechanics' votes elected a popular Whig ticket to the assembly; in 1784 and 1785, a new committee of mechanics nominated its own slates; committee petitions pressed the legislature and the Congress for protective tariffs, payment of state debts, free public education, and restrictions on the political rights of former loyalists. Over the next two years, the mechanics' links with politicians soon to be identified with the city's Federalists also strengthened, as concerns over the tariff—and approval of a national Constitution strong enough to enact one—led them directly to Alexander Hamilton and the city's conservative nationalists. The conservatives, for their part, courted the trades, with hopes of gaining a popular base to break the radical ascendancy in state politics. When George Washington was inaugurated president in 1789, no group in the country was more fervently pro-Federalist than the New York artisans.¹¹

The Federalist liaison, convenient for a time, was far too rife with contradictions to last long. From the start, the conservatives' political assumptions flew in the face of the legacy of democratic action left to the artisans after the Revolution. Although Hamilton learned to suppress his elitism and politic among the mechanics, he never quite abandoned his faith that the artisans regarded the elite as their natural superiors—that "Mechanics and Manufacturers will always be inclined with a few exceptions to give their voices to merchants in preference to persons of their own professions and trades." Any chances for a more permanent Federalist-artisan alliance eroded in the early 1790s, amid numerous local controversies—above all over the chartering of the mercantile bank and the legislature's failure to charter the Mechanics' Committee—all exacerbated by the Washington

10. *New-York Journal*, March 8, 11, 1796; Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 476–95. For additional references to the Keteltas affair and other crowd activities, see Gilje, "Mobocracy," 50–84.

11. *New York Packet*, April 4, 7, 14, 21, 27, 1785; Lynd, "Mechanics in New York City Politics," 232–41; Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 100–102; Countryman, *People in Revolution*, 252–79.

administration's Anglophilic foreign policy and backtracking on the tariff. By 1794, some of the city's most politically active artisans had grown so disgruntled that they allied with like-minded men from outside the trades to form the Democratic Society of New York.¹²

"[B]utchers, tinkers, broken hucksters, and trans-Atlantic traitors"—thus the temporary exile William Cobbett (still the Cobbett of "Peter Porcupine," not yet the Radical Cobbett of the *Political Register*) on the Democratic-Republicans. The New York society came, in time, to turn such descriptions to its advantage; some members even took a measure of pride in the titles attributed to them. All such descriptions misled: the Democratic Society was far from wholly plebeian; in the American context, it bore only fleeting resemblance to the French Jacobin clubs, and still less to the sansculotte sections of revolutionary Paris or the "Jacobin" artisan corresponding societies of London and the English provincial cities. Its officers were merchants and professionals of wealth like the redoubtable rentier Henry Rutgers; only in the ranks of the secondary leadership did craftsmen begin to show up in any numbers, along with young lawyers and teachers. The membership was small, probably numbering no more than two hundred. Although fiercely antiaristocratic, its circulars and protests displayed none of the root-and-branch democracy, none of the belief in "Members Unlimited" and universal suffrage that propelled the British and French artisan societies. Its public stance cannot be understood as "radical," let alone "revolutionary"; in the truest test of its faith, during the Whiskey Rebellion, the society condemned government repression and the excise tax system but also stoutly disapproved of the rebels' armed resistance to "the execution of constitutional law." In its structure, temperament, and intent, the Democratic Society was more an embryonic political party-cum-vigilance committee than a revolutionary club or a mass movement. Although decidedly more egalitarian and outspoken than the mainstream of the emerging Republican opposition, it was destined to remain within the boundaries of what one historian has called New York's post-Revolutionary "partisan culture."¹³

12. *The Federalist*, 219; Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 201–7, 211–30, 354–65, 373–75.

13. William Cobbett, *A Little Plain English Addressed to the People of the United States* (Philadelphia, 1795), 70; "Address to the Republican Citizens," *New-York Journal*, May 28, 1794; *General Advertiser* [Philadelphia], January 26, 1797, in Foner, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 195; Countryman, *People in Revolution*, 193–94. Cobbett's remarks were directed against the Democratic-Republican "mother society" in Philadelphia, but the implication was obviously broader. The most useful account of the New York society appears in Alfred F. Young, "The Mechanics and the Jeffersonians: New York, 1789–1801," *LH* 5 (1964): 247–76, but see also Eugene P. Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790–1800* (New York, 1942). On the English and French artisan societies, see Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 17–25, 102–85; Albert

To stop there, however, would be to miss the importance of all that prompted Cobbett's denunciation and the society men's ripostes—and hence of the Democratic Society itself. While led by the familiar radical elite—the well-to-do libertarian dissenters, young lawyers, and shopkeepers who frequented the coffee houses and taverns off Liberty Street and Wall Street—the society also stretched into the artisan wards. How far is not clear. We know that the society held its meetings after dark because, it claimed, “[w]orkingmen must meet in the evening”; Alfred Young reckons that the vast majority of the rank and file were men of the “middling” and “lower” sort. Certainly the society reached the downtown printing shops and the tanneries and workshops in and around “the Swamp.” More important, it built its primary alliances with the Mechanics' Committee (finally incorporated in 1792 as the General Society), the individual craft groups, and the militia—the updated versions of what had been the hard center of the popular democratic movement of the mid-1770s.¹⁴

Furthermore, it is important to recall the political context of the mid-1790s—the *tone* of politics as conservatives dropped their conciliatory rhetoric for an undisguised contempt for democracy, the French Revolution, and (in some cases) the lower classes in general. Cobbett's rantings and the ham-fisted elitism surrounding the Keteltas affair were only examples of a pattern of antidemocratic alarmism in the eastern cities, a pattern less virulent in New York than in New England or Pennsylvania but just as ominously unctious in temperament. Charges that opposition to the administration was promoting demagogic factionalism soon passed into the pseudonymous slurs of one “Acquiline Nimble Chops, Democrat,” who saw fit, in one of his milder passages, to dismiss the dissenting mechanics as “the greasy caps,” the mindless multitude. A New York cartoonist's lampoons of the Democratic-Republicans made sure to include a tailor along with a pirate as part of the ignorant democratical crowd (Plate 5). Federalists were not being complimentary when they claimed that the Democratic Society had managed to attract “the lowest order of mechanics, laborers, and draymen.” “Rabble,” “a monster,” “an incoherent mass of people”—all this (and there was more) might have been excused as the hyperbolic paranoia of procrustean conservatives, had it not been delivered by the very men, and the friends of those men, who now governed in the name of the Republic, men who denounced republican France and supported the Jay Treaty and who took heart at the admonition that one high-minded Federalist directed to the upstart mechanics:

Soboul, *Les Sans-culottes Parisiens en l'an II* (Paris, 1958); Gwyn A. Williams, *Artisans and Sans-Culottes* (New York, 1969), 58–80 and *passim*.

14. Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 395, 398–405.

No tinker bold with brazen pate
Should set himself to patch the state
No cobbler leave, at Faction's call
His *last*, and thereby lose his *all*.

It all at least sounded like 1774.¹⁵

Against these outbursts and against Washington's excoriation of all "self-created societies," the Democratic Society raised the banner of Paine's *Rights of Man*, a defense of the French republican regicides and an egalitarian interpretation of the American Revolution, based on "sentiments of Democracy, founded upon the Equal Rights of Mankind." In strictly institutional terms, its efforts were most important in helping bring individual, and sometimes lowly, craftsmen and craft groups (including a portion of the fraternal, artisan-dominated Tammany Society) into what was becoming a disciplined local political opposition in Manhattan. In ideological terms, it captured the democratic thrust lost amid the Constitution debates and the consolidation of power by New York's conservative nationalists, in effect making democracy a sine qua non of republicanism. "Painite" describes the society's politics best, with its hatred of all deferential forms, its distrust of the past and mere tradition, and its admiration for the man himself (who, ironically enough, spent most of 1794 languishing in a Jacobin prison, a victim of Robespierist virtue):

To conclude—Here's success to honest TOM PAINE:
May he live to enjoy what he does well explain.
The just Rights of Man we never forget
For they'll save Britain's friends from the BOTTOMLESS PITT.

In time, such pronouncements, delivered at a Democratic-artisan Fourth of July festival in 1795, acquired something of a social coloration as well, as the society and its allies moved beyond defense of their right to associate, to ponder issues like the Hamiltonian finance program. Without coming close to questioning private property or raising the rights of the dependent poor, Democratic-Republicans did turn the classical republican fears of centralized financial power into suggestions that those who accumulated property without following a productive trade (that is, bankers, merchants, speculators) were politically suspect—suggestions that had arisen at the time of the nonimportation struggles, but never with such

15. Aquiline Nimble Chops, *Democracy: An Epic Poem* (New York, 1794); William Woolsey to Oliver Wolcott, Jr., March 6, 1794, cited in Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 94; Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 454; Regina Ann Morantz, "'Democracy' and 'Republic' in American Ideology, 1787–1840" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1971), 147–52. See also Marshall Smelser, "The Jacobin Phrenzy: Federalism and the Menace of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," *Review of Politics* 13 (1951): 457–82; Gary B. Nash, "The American Clergy and the French Revolution," *WMQ* 22 (1965): 397–98.

clarity and force. "Less respect to the consuming speculator, who wallows in luxury, than to the productive mechanic, who struggles with indigence," ran one toast of the New York Juvenile Republican Society in 1795.¹⁶ Such ideas, far from those of potential social revolutionaries, would be most effective in bringing the artisans into a developing party system. They also established in New York at the dawn of the industrial revolution the rough equation, elaborated for the British context in the second part of *The Rights of Man*, between political virtue and what would later be called the producing classes. For decades to come, such references to the spirit of '76 and the nobility of the productive mechanics would be the warp and woof of artisan political rhetoric.

It was, then, as a way-station, between revolution and egalitarian party politics, that the Democratic Society made its mark; although the group began to fade in 1797, the artisans it helped galvanize were already well on the way to forming more enduring coalitions to beat back the threat of "aristocratic" supremacy. By 1800, a clear mechanics' interest had developed, in league with Republican politicians, fed by protariff sentiments in the trades, and fully integrated as a pressure group in the city's politics. (Mobbing, of course, continued in early-nineteenth-century New York, with, if anything, greater frequency than before, but through the mid-1820s, New York crowds arose more from ethnic and racial conflicts and the punch-ups of the gangs than from political controversy. In politics, the artisans and others concentrated on party campaigns—with a street theater of their own—and on battles for local power.) Although they never challenged the mercantile elite's hold on most elective offices, craftsmen and former craftsmen, working mainly but not solely with the Jeffersonians, won a significant share of nominations between 1800 and 1815, especially to the state assembly and municipal posts. The selection of the sailmaker Stephen Allen as mayor in 1821 and the continued presence of craftsmen on party tickets until 1825 confirmed their political presence through the Era of Good Feelings. Throughout, the city's most prominent mechanics, particularly those in the General Society, used their good offices and political clout to win concessions, on restricting state prison labor, rejecting municipal workshop plans, widening the suffrage, and furthering endless more private concerns.¹⁷

16. *New York Journal*, May 31, 1794, July 8, 1795; *American Daily Advertiser* [Philadelphia], July 10, 1795, reprinted in Foner, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 233. On Paine, see Foner, *Tom Paine*, 75–106, 253–56.

17. Allen, "Memoirs," 88–106; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 101–22. A scan of the *Evening Post*, 1815–25, reveals that while lawyers and attorneys represented the largest proportion of all nominees to state-senate and assembly posts, all Republican factions nominated at least some artisans every year—though almost all of the craft candidates seem to have been successful masters. Among the more successful artisan

Plying the machinery of the early party system, the mechanics' interest assumed a political style that later generations of New Yorkers would come to associate with the New York Democracy. Unbending elitists like the young Washington Irving looked on aghast while "old cartmen, cobblers, and tailors" clambered onto the hustings, as if a set of demotic lunatics had been turned loose to arouse "that awful despot, the people." In fact, they were witnessing the emergence of a new social type, the enterprising artisan party politician. Stephen Allen was the exemplar; indeed, his political career, like his rise in business, read like a parable of the transitions from the 1770s to the Jeffersonian era. As a boy, Allen had thrilled to the activities of the popular pre-Revolutionary movement and pored over the popular Whig and radical republican texts, above all *The Crisis*: reading Paine aloud to his uncle, he later recalled, inspired "a feeling of reverence" and drew the youngster into "the enthusiasm of the people of this city in favor of liberty." This informal political education—reinforced by the frustrations of living in a patriot household during the British occupation of the city—set Allen's democratic views, and in the 1790s he joined the Democratic-Republican opposition. Soon thereafter, Allen's rising stature in the trades, capped by his election to the presidency of the General Society in 1802, attracted Jeffersonian politicians to him. In 1812, he was elected to the Common Council, where he remained for nearly a decade to devote special attention to reordering the city's finances and minor democratic reforms. His success and undisputed popularity among the mechanic voters won him three terms as mayor from 1821 to 1824.¹⁸

politicians nominated more than once were the whip maker Peter Sharpe and the stone-ware manufacturer Clarkson Crolius. In 1825, voters could choose between the following tickets of People's Party (Clintonian) and Regular (Van Burenite) Republicans:

<i>People's Nomination</i>	<i>Regular Nomination</i>
Senate	Senate
Henry Wyckoff*	Joshua Smith, boatman
Assembly	Assembly
Samuel Cowdrey, attorney	Stephen Allen, sailmaker
Charles Drake, physician	Philip Brasher, lawyer
Timothy Hedges, attorney	Francis Cooper*
Thomas Hertell, attorney	Maltby Gelston, notary
Elisha W. King, attorney	James Hall**
Abraham Le Foy*	Isaac Minard, boots and shoes
Richard E. Mount, bellows manufacturer	Shivers Parker, brush manufacturer
David Seaman, smith	Jonathan E. Robinson, merchant
Dudley Selden*	Alpheus Sherman, attorney
Ira B. Wheeler, hotelkeeper	William A. Thompson*

* no occupation listed; ** name too common to identify

See *Evening Post*, November 12, 1825; *Longworth's Directory*, 1825.

18. George D. Luetscher, *Early Political Machinery in the United States* (Phila-

Another side of artisan politics appeared in the person of the Tammany brave, Matthew Livingston Davis. Davis, a printer, was like Allen an officer in the General Society and, at least initially, a genuinely dedicated Democratic-Republican partisan. In the 1790s, Davis and his partner, the journalist-poet Philip Freneau, led the counterattack in defense of the "self-created" societies; in 1800, having joined the Tammany Society, he actively supported Thomas Jefferson. Casting his lot with the friends of Aaron Burr, Davis became, over the next quarter of a century, one of the most accomplished wire-pullers and political agents in the city, pioneering the art of painting his opponents (whatever their creed) as aristocrats, while he appropriated the rhetoric of the humble artisan. In 1803, he tried to lead the mechanics' interest into a Burrite schism, playing upon artisan dissatisfaction with Mayor Edward Livingston over the mayor's proposal for a municipal workshop for criminals and the poor; Davis's speeches rang with charges that Livingston's humanitarianism disguised aristocratic plans to build a state monopoly with convict labor and "reduce the mechanics of this city to the degraded state of those of England." Five years later, unperturbed by the failure of his scheme, Davis outlined a precocious vision of organized party politics, in which party regularity and loyalty—staying "in unison with the wishes and expectations of the party"—would be the main standard of political virtue. Davis's personal power fluctuated through the 1820s, but his achievements helped pave the way for a kind of thoroughly professional democratic party politics that would come into its own during the ascendancy of Martin Van Buren.¹⁹

These artisan Jeffersonians were effective. The tallies for the state-assembly elections, in which virtually all masters and probably most journeymen were eligible to vote, leave little question that the mechanics' interest and the artisan vote usually remained loyal to the Jeffersonians. This did not, of course, imply absolute political unanimity in the trades. Even as the crises of the 1790s shook artisan allegiances, some craftsmen—above all those not in need of tariff protection, poorer mechanics caught in clientage networks, some more substantial masters, and the relatively few ex-Loyalist artisans—remained in the Federalist fold. After 1800, the Federalists could count on winning at least one-third of the vote in the central and outer wards, and they never failed to field tickets on which at

delphia, 1903); [Washington Irving], *Salmagundi*, no. 11 (New York, 1807), 207–18 (quotation on 211); Allen, "Memoirs," 8–9, 49–51, 60–88.

19. *American Citizen*, April 14, 1803; Matthew L. Davis to William P. Van Ness, August 1808, June 3, 1811, Davis Papers, N-YHS; Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany: The Evolution of a Political Machine, 1789–1865* (Syracuse, 1971), 22–25, 35–36; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 66–68. On Livingston, the General Society, and the workshop scheme, see GSMT Minute Book, January 4, 1803; Mohl, *Poverty in New York*, 228–37.

least one of four candidates was from the crafts. Some of the city's most renowned master artisans, including Duncan Phyfe and the tanner Jacob Lorillard, were active Federalists. Other artisans, disgusted at the rise of the new parties, condemned Republican and Federalist alike, as fixers who would make "abject slaves" of independent republicans. Joseph Harmer, for one, emphasized that the title of his newspaper, *The Independent Mechanic*, should be taken literally with respect to party politics, those "filthy sloughs of party declamation, those seas of error which have neither bottom nor shore." By Matthew Davis's estimate, upward of one-half of the eligible "lower-class" voters (including mechanics and laborers) failed to vote in any given election, a normal figure by today's standards, but a mark of some apathy and early "anti-party" feeling among the trades. Nonetheless, apart from the years of the embargo, when Federalist candidates made inroads into the normally Republican districts, the Jeffersonians consistently carried the central and outer wards, with totals significantly higher than those they received from the city as a whole. For most of the active artisans, masters and journeymen, politics meant supporting the mechanics' interest and voting the Jeffersonian ticket.²⁰

The political and ideological ramifications of these developments were profound. As in the debates of the 1790s, the early Jeffersonian campaigns, whether led by apparently sincere men like Stephen Allen or by more opportunistic pols like Davis, connected the fate of American equality to the political well-being of the middling producers—and of the Jeffersonians. Their messages were less "democratic" than those of the Democratic Society and its allies; the society, for example, had, in good Paineite fashion, included several abolitionists in its ranks, while both the General Society and the Sailmakers' Society called for the end of slavery; the Jeffersonians, partners in an increasingly Negrophobic national political coalition, left the city's small black vote to the Federalists. Paine himself, his outspoken deism a political liability after his return to New York in 1803, was forsaken by the Republican politicians; he died nearly forgotten, in 1809.²¹ Within the limits of partisan politics, however, the Jeffersonians did their best to turn contests for the most minor of city posts into reprises of the 1790s—and, they implied, of the Revolution itself. Until 1807, the rhetoric changed little, as New York's slow-learning Federalists made no pretense about their belief that the Revolution had been fought for limited political goals, or about their Burkian fears that "Jacobin" Jeffersonians would excite "irreconcilable enmity between the rich and the

20. Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 30–36, 86–90; Willis, "Social Origins," 152, 164–67, 239; *Independent Mechanic*, April 6, 1811.

21. Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 529–32; Link, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 153–54; GSMT Minute Book, July 1, 1795; Foner, *Tom Paine*, 256–63.

poor” by stirring the swinish multitude. The Republicans—no Jacobins—gleefully attacked such notions as the musings of “Federal lords,” the well-born nabobs and aristocrats whose goal was to “rob the mechanics and laborers of their independence of mind,” and (as the Republican “Mechanic” told the trades in 1805) to “wantonly and basely take away your rights.”²² After 1807, when the embargo and the war finally handed New York City’s Federalists some popular issues, they altered their tone, and reached for popular support with their own “club,” the Washington Benevolent Society—but they could do no better than to appropriate the artisan as hero and condemn their foes as “pampered sons of luxury” out of touch with the suffering workingmen. Even then, the Federalists retained some of their Anglophilic anti-Jacobinism of the 1790s, so much so that they reprinted pieces like Robert Southey’s well-known philippic “The Friend of Humanity” in their party newspaper. The Republicans, for their part, denounced the Federalists as secret allies of the British war effort, fomenters of American disunity and therefore enemies of popular rights and independence. The links between the crafts and the vindication of political equality remained about the same as when they had first been forged during the Revolution. They lasted through the “one-party” politics of the 1820s.²³

The importance of this discourse, apart from its evocation of 1776 and the 1790s, was its social imagery: just as the largest of the city’s trades were beginning to divide along new lines, the artisans remained, in politics, the “noble mechanics,” graced with an assumed unity of purpose and interest against aristocratic foes that belied all evidence of strife in the shops. In fact, the mechanics’ interest, the purported political voice of all tradesmen, was decidedly controlled by the city’s leading masters. Nothing assured an artisan’s success in politics more than election as an officer of the General Society. All but three of the twenty-eight society presidents who served between 1785 and 1815 were eventually nominated for either the Common Council or the assembly, and of those nominated nineteen were elected.²⁴ None of the nominees for the Common Council or assembly was

22. *Evening Post*, November 16, 1801; *American Citizen*, April 13, 1801; Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 45–76.

23. *Washington Republican* [New York], July 29 and August 5, 1809. The Southey piece, first published in the *Anti-Jacobin* in 1797, attacked Jacobinical MPs who would rouse the lowly with the ideals of Tom Paine; as Southey saw it, the People (represented as a poor, honest knife grinder) preferred their poverty and wanted to be left in peace. On the background to the poem and on James Gillray’s hand in publicizing it in a satirical print, see Draper Hill, ed., *The Satirical Etchings of James Gillray* (New York, 1976), 114–15. On Federalist ideology, see also Linda K. Kerber, *Federalists in Dissent: Imagery and Ideology in Jeffersonian America* (Ithaca, 1970); and Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 77–100.

24. Willis, “Social Origins,” 239.

a journeyman at the time of his nomination. While the issues raised by mechanic politicians—convict labor, the tariff, Livingston's workshop scheme—touched the lives of lesser artisans and journeymen, they were of utmost direct import to independent artisans. The journeymen's protests provoked very different responses. The organized cordwainers tried for conspiracy in 1809 received virtually no political support, apart from that of their two Republican lawyers. Strikes, when reported in the party press, were treated gingerly, usually with a simple statement of the facts. One of the few exceptions, a commentary on the carpenters' turnout in 1810 by the English Jacobin emigré and Republican editor James Cheetham—himself a former journeyman hatter—denounced the strikers for raising “unreasonable” demands and threatening commerce.²⁵ In a rare instance when one of the parties addressed the journeymen, it was a Federalist apologist, “Brutus,” who attacked certain Republican tanners and master shoemakers for alleged meanness to their employees; “Brutus”'s sincerity, though, was suspect from the beginning, suspicions borne out when he dropped all references to the journeymen after the autumn election.²⁶ By otherwise sidestepping emerging class divisions within the trades, the mechanics' interest and its allies at once revealed the limits of their concerns and insulated politics from possibly fractious disputes; attacks on alleged “aristocrats” tapped an older set of anti-aristocratic, anti-elitist social resentments to provide all artisans with a common ground.

Thus, the Revolutionary legacy left artisan political life with a potentially powerful set of contradictions between the rhetoric of collective equality and the actual conditions in the trades, between the street cries of party democracy and the realities of who, in fact, held political power. In time, the underlying social divisions in the crafts and the political alienation shared by some artisans would replace the mechanics' interest and the Republican alliance with very different kinds of commitments and coalitions—but only after the Republican coalition itself collapsed in the late 1820s, the victim of its own internecine strife. In the aftermath of the 1790s, and for a quarter of a century thereafter, New York's masters and journeymen retained and responded to the ideals of the late eighteenth century, for the protection and expansion of their collective political rights against the static, deferential harmony of unquestioned elite supremacy—or, more loosely, for “equality” against “aristocracy.” Even as they came to blows in the workshops and the courts, they were as one in politics—the “sinews and muscles of our country,” as one Jeffersonian put it—ever prepared to redeem *their* Revolution against any who would trample on

25. *American Citizen*, May 3, 23, 31, June 1, 1810. On Cheetham, see Richard J. Twomey, “Jacobins and Jeffersonians: Anglo-American Radicalism in the United States” (Ph.D. diss., Northern Illinois University, 1974).

26. *Commercial Advertiser*, April 20, 1801.

their political liberties, against any who would inject "corruption . . . through the veins of the body politic."²⁷

Republican Religion

While politics offered the artisans some unifying continuities with the Revolution, the city's religious life reinforced their egalitarianism and widened their cultural distance from the mercantile elite. Colonial New York had been the most Anglican of American cities; through the early 1790s the Episcopalians (especially) and the Presbyterians, along with the remnants of the Old Dutch Reform establishment, were the city's reigning denominations. Apart from those dissenting Presbyterians who had been caught up in the millennial fervor of the Great Awakening or been pushed to the borders of Unitarianism, New Yorkers worshiped their fathers' faiths, with a dogma and sense of social exclusiveness—symbolized by the church pew rents—that enhanced the prestige of the city's leading families. Trinity Church, that former bastion of elite Anglican respectability, was formally disestablished in 1784 but retained the immense tracts of land that made it the wealthiest institution in Manhattan. So the smaller churches continued to give New York high society much of its prestige. Timothy Dwight, during his famous visit, noted with satisfaction that the city was an eminently religious one, where "few, even of the licentious, think it proper to behave disrespectfully toward persons or things to which a religious character is attached."²⁸

No one body of doctrine prevailed among New York's artisans during these years. A minority belonged to the more respectable Episcopalian and Presbyterian congregations; a disproportionate number of artisan Democratic-Republicans seem to have adhered to Presbyterianism, with its strong connections to American Whiggery and the patriot cause. The remainder included infidels, Methodists, Baptists, and an unchurched majority. Religion certainly played a part in the collective life of the trades: the craft societies' annual Fourth of July exercises, for example, invariably ended in a church, usually Presbyterian or Dutch Reform, and often included a sermon from a local clergyman.²⁹ Even in church, however, the

27. John T. Irving, *An Oration Delivered on the Fourth of July 1809, before the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order, Tailors', Coopers', Hatters', Hibernian Provident, Masons, Shipwrights', House Carpenters', and Columbian Societies* (New York, 1809), 10–11, 19.

28. Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New York and New England*, ed. Barbara M. Solomon (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), III, 331. On Trinity Church, see William Berrian, *A Historical Sketch of Trinity Church, New York* (New York, 1847); Jaher, *Urban Establishment*, 167–69, 229–31. See also Lambert, *Travels*, 72–73.

29. See Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 570; Shepherd Knapp, *A History of the Brick Presbyterian Church* (New York, 1909), 184–202.

artisans warned of the evils of ecclesiastical authority and of the lurking dangers of a resurgent, corrupt, European-style clericalism. In their diversity, they shared common ideals about the place of religion in a secular republic.

The deist movement of the late 1790s contributed, if only in a minor way, to the stock of artisan religious views. To the shock of Federalist leaders and orthodox clerics, Elihu Palmer, a blind itinerant preacher, managed to turn his newspaper, the *Temple of Reason*, into the leading exponent of early national American freethought. Lambasting Christianity as an instrument of despotism, Palmer (in time, with the help of Thomas Paine) blended humanist ethics and the natural religion of Paine's *Age of Reason* in a celebration of science and republican equality: "Poverty and riches, misery and happiness, are generally the results and consequences of good or bad governments—of wise or unwise laws—of the influence of virtue, or the prevalence of vice; and all the *natural* offsprings of human actions, not the *partial* operations of an all-just and all-wise Being."³⁰ Drawn both from the French and from the rich body of English Dissenting skepticism, Palmer's American deism attracted a mixture of home-grown merchant philosophes, liberal professionals, and artisans (with their own backgrounds in workshop science and democratic politics). Their numbers were hardly overwhelming. Even in the libertarian milieu of the Democratic Society (of which Palmer was a member) at best a handful of activists joined the deists. The milder Unitarianism of Joseph Priestley (welcomed by the Democratic-Republicans upon his arrival in New York as an exile in 1795) was better suited to New York's unorthodox democrats; when the Republican Patriotic Junior Association toasted Thomas Paine in 1797, it celebrated *The Rights of Man* but condemned *The Age of Reason*.³¹ The deists' real impact reached beyond their followers to reinforce more widespread and nebulous anticlerical suspicions. Thus the Democratic Society, in a circular letter issued in 1794, noted that "SUPERSTITION in a religious creed, and DESPOTISM in civil institutions, bear

30. *Temple of Reason* [New York], December 6, 1800. The standard work on deism in the 1790s remains G. Adolph Koch, *Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason* (New York, 1933), 51–74, 130–68. On Palmer, Roderick S. French, "Elihu Palmer, Radical Deist, Radical Republican: A Reconsideration of American Freethought," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, no. 8 (1979): 87–108, develops themes presented here; see also Herbert M. Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth-Century America* (New York, 1934); Foner, *Tom Paine*, 258–59.

31. "Address of the Democratic Society of New-York to Joseph Priestley," in Foner, *Democratic-Republican Societies*, 182; *Argus* [New York], February 7, 1797, quoted in Young, *Democratic Republicans*, 404. For a more bitter view of Paine—complete with the familiar apocrypha about his deathbed pangs of conscience—see the remarks of the ironmonger-turned-seed merchant Grant Thorburn, *Fifty Years' Reminiscences of New York* (New York, 1845), 74–82. See also Francis, *Old New York*, 134–43.

a relation to each other similar to that which exists between the children of common parents." For a time, it was enough to convince even level-headed Episcopalian conservatives like the Reverend Clement Clarke Moore that the de-Christianizing Jacobin uprising had begun, led by the Democratic-Republican followers of "those imps who have inspired all the wickedness with which the world has of late been infested."³²

Nothing of the kind was in the offing: organized deism declined rapidly between 1804 and 1810, caught between the Second Great Awakening and Republican confidence that the re-election of the freethinker Jefferson had vindicated the separation of church and state. But its traces—and the traces of a rowdier popular impiety joined to democratic politics—lingered. A few small Universalist sects like the Society of United Christian Friends struggled and survived, kindling among the craftsmen ideas on universal salvation not entirely unlike those of Paine and Palmer. Cruder activities brought legal consequences for a few men hauled before the Court of General Sessions to answer charges that they had scandalized Christianity. Anti-Federalist politics sometimes mixed with irreverence, as they had in the 1790s: in 1821, the printer Jared Bell was arrested for allegedly entering a store, "cursing and swearing and using profane language saying 'God Almighty was a *dam fool*' for creating such men as composed the Hartford Convention and that if it was in his power he would send them and the whole British nation to Hell together. . . ." More forthrightly blasphemous was the reported crime of one John Danforth—a shout in the street that "Jesus Christ is a bastard, his mother a whore, and God a damned old whore master." Even angrier spirits attacked clerics with chamber pots, menaced would-be missionaries, and destroyed church property.³³

The passions of revivalist religion, quite unlike the intensely cerebral

32. "Circular. Democratic Society, New York to the Democratic Society of Philadelphia" (1794), N-YHS Broadside; [Clement Clarke Moore], *Observations upon Certain Passages in Mr. Jefferson's Notes on Virginia* (New York, 1804), 29. Among those most prominent in Painite deist circles were the lawyer Henry Fay and the printer Alexander Ming, both of whom we will encounter again. See Gilbert Vale, *The Life of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1841), 159.

33. Koch, *Religion*, 108–13, 168–84; Russell E. Miller, *The Larger Hope: The First Century of the Universalist Church in America, 1770–1870* (Boston, 1978), 161–62, 681–83; Francis, *Old New York*, 143–44; Weed, *Autobiography*, 61; *People v. Jared Bell*, May 4, 1821; *People v. John Danforth*, July 6, 1825, Court of General Sessions Records, MARC; Stafford, *New Missionary Field*, 15; Gilje, "Mobocracy," 114–26. On Universalism, see also Minutes and Membership Roll, Society of United Christian Friends, N-YHS MSS. The society's records show that while the membership never exceeded 100, the group grew steadily from 1800 to 1810, stagnated through 1815, then grew again until the mid-1820s.

The sort of blasphemy of which Danforth was accused had long been familiar among English lower and middling classes; its history in colonial America has yet to be written. See Christopher Hill, "Plebeian Irreligion in 17th Century England," in *Studien über die Revolution*, ed. Manfred Kossock (Berlin, 1969), 46–61.

democracy of the deists or the impiety of the rowdies, also distanced its adherents from orthodox devotions. Compared with other eastern cities, particularly Boston, New York had shown little interest in the great religious upheavals of the eighteenth century, but the Second Great Awakening brought a sharp rise in church membership between 1800 and 1825. Encouraged by itinerant veterans of the British and rural American circuits, a series of increasingly intense waves of revivals hit Manhattan after 1805, on a scale that surprised even seasoned clergymen. The Methodists, a persecuted sect in colonial New York, made the greatest progress. Due largely to the efforts of Methodist missionaries in the city's central and outer wards, what had been a handful of congregations in 1800 became, in twenty-five years, one of the three leading centers of Methodist worship in the United States.³⁴

Methodism, like the other evangelizing faiths, carried with it a gamut of impulses to New York—all tied to the tensions between submissiveness and egalitarianism that lay at Methodism's core. None of the Methodist congregations, not even the most "popular," preached a faith comparable to the deists' and liberal Presbyterians'; as Sydney Ahlstrom reminds us, early-nineteenth-century Methodism derived neither from an optimistic view of human nature nor from American democracy, "but from John Wesley—a different source indeed."³⁵ More orthodox, authoritarian Wesleyans like the Reverend Nathan Bangs deplored the "extravagant excitements," the "clapping of hands, screaming, and even jumping" reported in congregations that kept to the looser ways common in eighteenth-century popular churches. Eventually, Methodist leaders, headed by Bangs and allied with the city's New School Presbyterians, would be more closely identified with efforts to enforce an industrious morality of self-discipline. But this took time to achieve: in post-Revolutionary and early national New York, Methodism was pre-eminently a religion of and for the middling and the poor, its Arminian doctrines on grace slicing through the social exclusivity of conventional Episcopalians and orthodox Calvinists. Preachers from humble backgrounds themselves—Bangs was the son of a Connecticut blacksmith—pointed out that in their churches, seats were free and open to all. Here, even journeymen and lowly day laborers could know the Redeemer, He who, in Bangs's words, "hath died for all men, and thereby opened the door of mercy for all to return and find peace and

34. Samuel Seaman, *Annals of New York Methodism* (New York, 1892), 158–214; Carroll Smith Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the American City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812–1870* (Ithaca, 1970), 45–51; Richard Carwardine, "The Second Great Awakening in the Urban Centers: An Examination of Methodism and the 'New Measures,'" *JAH* 58 (1971): 327–40. On early Presbyterian revivals, see J. D. Alexander, *The Presbytery of New York* (New York, 1887), 81–83.

35. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven, 1972), 438.

pardon." It was a message that families of the middle and outer wards had never heard; the overwhelming majority of those who heeded it were small shopkeepers, artisans, and laborers.³⁶

The more democratic aspects of evangelical religion permeated all sorts of popular devotions. Thurlow Weed noticed the difference when he visited the Methodist congregation of the immensely popular John Summerfield after having spent his first Sundays in New York at more staid Presbyterian and Episcopalian churches. What struck Weed most was the near charismatic rapport between the preacher and his audience:

He was followed from church to church by great numbers, charming and chastening all ears and all hearts. If any went to scoff, they inevitably "remained to pray." . . . [H]e was himself a simple, unostentatious, "meek and lowly" believer and follower of that Saviour to whom, in person and character, he bore such striking resemblance.³⁷

More idiosyncratic—and still more democratic in faith and style—were the sectarian preachers, the "religious enthusiasts of every belief" who David Bruce recalled could be seen along New York's thoroughfares at almost any time of day. These included some well-known locals and visitors—Lorenzo Dow, the Methodist apostle of love who used New York as a rest stop during his eastern travels; Domanic Van Velsor, the so-called stove-fence preacher; and Amos Broad, the much-persecuted upholsterer and evangelist of Rose Street—but none attracted more attention than Johnny Edwards, the Welsh immigrant and midding master scalemaker of the Ninth Ward. Edwards (it appears to have been his real name) arrived in New York in 1801 and swiftly passed through a series of religious affiliations, from Anglican to Methodist and Baptist and Quaker, before he founded his own Church of Christ, in Greene Street in about 1808. As much showman as evangelist, Edwards would drive his scale-beam wagon

36. Seaman, *Annals*, 182–83; Abel Stevens, *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D.* (New York, 1863), 183; Nathan Bangs, *The Substance of a Sermon Preached on Opening the Methodist Church in John-Street* (New York, 1818), 31–32. In order to get a rough indication of the Methodists' social base, names of Methodist class leaders from the entire city in 1812 were taken from Seaman, *Annals*, appendix P, and checked in the 1812 city directory and tax list. The occupations of those identified in the directory ($N = 64$) broke down as follows:

Merchants and professionals	9.4
Shopkeepers and retail	10.9
Master craftsmen	14.1
Small masters and journeymen	48.4
Laborers and unskilled	17.2
TOTAL	100.0

37. Weed, *Autobiography*, 61–62. On Summerfield, see Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790–1865* (Westport, Conn., 1978), 42.

to the most crowded parts of the city to regale the sinful passersby. His thoroughgoing vision of earthly corruption (according to Bruce, he would always balance his beams in his cellar because he insisted that “there is no virtue on the surface of the earth”), his devotion to the poor, and his defiance of the rich all marked him as a “mechanick preacher,” in a tradition that stretched back to the English radicals of the Commonwealth. In 1810, when Edwards joined with one Dorothy Ripley to attempt a revival, he took to appearing in Wall Street, where he shouted through a three-foot-long tin trumpet for the moneylenders to repent. Undaunted by the failure of his prediction that the world would end on June 10, 1810, he remained active; more than a dozen years later, he scoffed at efforts by city fathers to subsidize missionary efforts by more reputable clergymen: “I firmly believe it would be far more acceptable to God and all good and wise men,” he wrote in one petition to the Common Council, “had you laid out 300 dollars in fat geese and turkeys and given them to the poor who have seen better days and they would prefer it any time to 300 dollars worth of wind.” Other lay preachers expounded more directly political beliefs. One, a gardener named David Whitehead, delivered a mock Fourth of July sermon at Potters’ Field in 1826, calling down wrath upon New York’s “pretty set” who dressed in rich attire and lived in luxury and abundance. “They have established robbery by law and a law for the protection of robbers,” Whitehead exclaimed; all they cared for was wresting property from workingmen and propping up their privileges with “threats of sedition and blasphemy” borrowed from “King John the First”—John Adams.³⁸

Politics and religion also commingled in the artisan neighborhoods as matters for intense debate and discovery. They dominated the discussions of one group of artisans who met regularly in “Saturday night sessions” at the shop of Cox the Cooper, near Corlears Hook, about 1820. Celebrations of republican heroes and attacks on supposed Tory villains dominated the conversations; military relics from the Revolution and the War of 1812 were occasionally passed around for appropriate veneration. Several participants also had “brimstone on their shoulders,” and endless ar-

38. Bruce, “Autobiography,” 8, 15–16; Francis, *Old New York*, 146–50; Charles C. Sellers, *Lorenzo Dow: Bearer of the Word* (New York, 1928); *People v. Samuel E. Thompson*, November 5, 1812, Court of General Sessions Records, MARC; Alvin Harlow, *Old Bowery Days* (New York, 1931), 175; *Account of the Trial of John Edwards of the City of New York* (New York, 1822); CCFP, Charity Committee, January 26, 1824; David Whitehead, *An Oration Delivered at Potters’ Field on the Fourth of July 1826—By the First Adopted, by the Thirteen Mothers of the Union Whose Seal Is Union and Secretary Is Truth* (New York, n.d. [1826]). Christopher Hill has brilliantly elucidated the English background of the more heretical preachers; see *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas in the English Revolution* (New York, 1972), 28–30, 79–80, 231–46.

guments pitted a few Calvinists and Presbyterians against an array of Methodists, Close Communion Baptists, Universalists, and a man who arrived one evening to declare that he had “renounced the iron-clad mysteries of the [Presbyterian] Westminster Oath.” The most heterodox views received a hearing, if not always a friendly one: at least one of Cox’s friends reported he had been swayed by the sea-captain disciple of a Universalist minister “who had invented a new religion that left Hell out altogether.” “Soon as I get time,” the curious blacksmith Joe Holden wrote to his mother, “I intend to study the matter for myself and see what there is in it. Like as not his doctrine may not be so bad after all.”³⁹

Yet in the end, while impiety and popular enthusiasm exerted their influences, most artisans held to a profound and shameless indifference toward any kind of organized devotion. The extent of apathy became clear just after the War of 1812, when groups of younger, affluent Presbyterians, mindful of the evangelicals’ success, tried to bridge the social gap by sponsoring interdenominational missions, Sunday schools, and Bible groups in the central and outer wards. On ordinary Sundays, the tract missionary Ward Stafford found in 1817, fewer than one in four New Yorkers—and far fewer in the poorer areas of the city—attended church. Emblems with a magical (and, to Stafford, pagan) significance—horseshoes and other talismans—were more in evidence in lower-class homes than were Bibles. “We have found the people deplorably ignorant as it respects the subject of religion,” Stafford lamented.⁴⁰

It would be foolish to try to impose unity upon such diverse currents of artisan piety, irreligion, and apathy; most of the time, these tendencies were at war. Even so, the most contradictory forms of artisan devotion had some things in common. Among those of some faith, Christian and non-Christian, doctrines of spiritual equality and objections to unquestioned deference recurred in various contexts, implying a cultural independence and mistrust of the city’s gentlemen and their clerics. The deists and Universalists were explicit on this: “It is a point of policy in the hierarchy,” Palmer held, “to cherish [a] submissive temperament, and cultivate in the soul of man the divine virtue of humility.” More pious declarations stressed that possession of earthly riches and power did not signify grace—indeed, to some, the accumulation of great personal wealth raised suspicions of sinfulness. The Methodists’ appeal to the lower classes, despite the Wesleyan hierarchy, was quite direct here, as were the professions of spiritual equality published in the *Independent Mechanic*. The poem “Saturday Night,” by “Journeyman Mechanic,” was typical in its emphasis on the “blessed peace” that came with the Sabbath:

39. Ralph Christopher Hawkins, *Corlears Hook in 1820* (New York, 1904), 19–39.
40. Stafford, *New Missionary Field*, 7, 11.

Of rich and poor the difference what?—
 In working or in working not
 Why then on Sunday we're as great
 As those who own some vast estate.

From such statements, with all of their implied resignation to *earthly* inequality, it was a short distance to more forthright denunciations of the anxious pursuit of money and of all those who would imitate the ways of the mercantile elite, described by one mechanic as “the absurd and vicious positions of a gay, thoughtless, and licentious people,” trapped in “a personal hell.” And from here, it was a direct path to Johnny Edwards on Wall Street and David Whitehead at Potters’ Field.⁴¹

More straightforward was the artisans’ overriding resentment at what craft spokesmen of all faiths described into the 1820s as unrepublican religious authority. Only in Old World aristocracies, they charged, would “presumptuous men” of “insolent morality” use God as an adjunct to political power and social prestige. Only enemies of the Republic would hold superstitious beliefs that elevated the clergy and some classes of men over others and that chained men’s minds to a prescribed faith. As Thomas King, a Universalist shoemaker, told an Independence Day assembly of craftsmen in 1821, such “ecclesiastical despotism” had proven “the most cruel—the most unrelenting kind of despotism that ever tormented man.” Fortunately, religious reformation and republican revolution had shaped an America where such power was supposed to be illegitimate; all the same, in the wake of continuing clerical denunciations of the French Revolution and the “Jacobinical” Jefferson, the artisans and the politicians who sought their votes urged vigilance. The Republican George Eacker was direct in 1801 when he accused the Federalists of assuming a “garb of hypocritical sanctity,” and warned the tradesmen to beware the combination of monied influence and ecclesiastical influence, “in the hands of faction . . . instruments more dreadful than the dart wielded by Death!” A generation later, speakers reminded the artisans that the Republic had been founded “on the broad basis of *rational* liberty,” without any religious cast. For Thomas King, as for his fellow Universalists, such sentiments led to a celebration of rationalism and “the Sun of Science”; for the Methodists, it suggested pursuit of the millennium free from state interference; for most craftsmen, it meant that they should be left alone.⁴²

41. *Temple of Reason*, December 20, 1800; *Independent Mechanic*, June 15, November 23, 1811. Cf. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 26–54.

42. Thomas F. King, *An Oration Delivered on the 4th of July 1821 before the Tammany, Hibernian, Stone Cutters’, Tailors’, and Cordwainers’ Societies in the Mulberry Street Church* (New York, 1821), 5–7; George I. Eacker, *An Oration Delivered at the Bequest of the Officers of the Brigade of the City and County of New-York and of the County of Richmond and the Mechanic, Tammany, and Coopers’ Societies on the Fourth of July, 1801* (New York, 1801), 14.

Only very late in the early national period did more portentous signs of religious strife begin to appear in artisan discourse. The most striking, anti-Catholicism, had always been implicit in artisan rhetoric and republican politics and religion. No “idolatrous invocation to saints” marred the artisans’ public gatherings, Eacker told the crafts in 1801; on the contrary, their celebrations expressed only “abhorrence against such unblushing wickedness.” In the streets, the maraudings of the gangs sometimes turned into full-fledged riots, pitting natives and Irish Protestants against Irish Catholics; there is evidence that a New York version of the Orange order gathered some underground support in the trades just after the War of 1812. But the Scarlet Whore of Babylon never quite turned up in artisan speeches in the early years of the century, and was unlikely to, given the relatively small numbers of Catholics in the city and their even smaller proportion in the crafts. If anything, Irish resistance to British and landlord rule prompted sympathy for the “persecuted catholick” and “poor peasant,” whose talents, and intrepidity, Samuel Berrian pointed out in 1815, had won a “scanty and uncertain harvest.” By the 1820s, however, antipapist expressions became more open, as Irish Catholics—carriers of what one printer’s ode called “papal gloom”—figured more prominently in New York social and political life. In 1824, an Orange celebration of July 12, Battle of the Boyne Day, brought furious sectarian violence in and around the taverns of the Irish weavers’ community in Greenwich Village. Nothing distinguished the men of Corlears Hook more, one chronicler of the 1820s noted, than their “intense, ardent, and deep-seated” detestation of Catholicism. It would re-emerge, in more organized forms, in the 1830s and 1840s.⁴³

The continuing ferment of the Awakening and the changing relations in the workshops further altered the place of Protestantism in New York artisan life after about 1815. The tightening of Methodist discipline effected by Bangs had the dual effect of marginalizing some of the more enthusiastic preachers and congregations and binding evangelical religion ever closer to the creed of morality and self-repression. Simultaneously, the city’s largely Presbyterian and missionary tract societies began to relax their more rigid Calvinist doctrines on conversion and grace. With their

43. Eacker, *Oration*, 6–7; Gilje, “Mobocracy,” 91–105; Samuel Berrian, *An Oration Delivered before the Tammany, Hibernian Provident, Columbian, and Shipwrights Societies* (New York, 1815), 22–26; *Independent Mechanic*, May 11, July 6, August 3 and 10, and September 4, 1811, March 28, 1812; George Asbridge, *Oration Delivered before the New-York Typographical Society* (New York, 1811), 27; Hawkins, *Corlears Hook*, 14–15. On Orangism, see People v. Jonathan Burke Murphy, December 23, 1818, Court of General Sessions, MARC; on the 1824 riot, see An Unbiased Irishman, *Orangism Exposed* (New York, 1824); Rowland T. Berthoff, *British Immigrants in Industrial America, 1790–1950* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 189–90.

increased emphasis on actually winning poorer men to Christ, the tract societies and Sunday-school reformers stepped up their work, to make New York, by 1825, a leading center of what was soon to become an effective national evangelical united front. Their success at winning master craftsmen to the cause was evident in the Apprentices' Library banner in the Erie Canal march; a broader evangelical insurgence lay behind the master stereotyper Adoniram Chandler's plea to his colleagues in 1816 to "suppress vice as well as encourage virtue," and behind the exhortation of a Presbyterian minister, delivered to the city's artisan-dominated fire companies nine years later, to take "a Bible in one hand and a sword in the other" in a popular crusade against deism, Socinianism, and other infidelities.⁴⁴

After 1825, artisan anti-Catholicism and the evolving strains of evangelical Protestantism would culminate in organized nativism and in abrasive clashes between infidels and believers, churched and unchurched. The point to stress, however, is that these later developments, with all of their divisiveness, should not be abstracted from their historical context. Although ethnic tensions were constant, only in the 1830s, when migration to New York from the most heavily Catholic peasant areas of Ireland accelerated, would antipapism become a potential political tool for organizing artisans and craft workers; only in the middle and late 1840s, when the famine wave hit New York and entered a far more fractured, industrializing craft economy, would economic nativism become a vital force in the crafts. Similarly, evangelicalism began to affect the shops directly only when the new workshop regime—and the social boundaries of class—that had begun to emerge in the Jeffersonian period matured. Until then, the artisans' disparate religious views provided a rough analogue to their democratic politics, opposed to all men of "insolent morality" who would ratify their presumed social superiority with the Word of God.

And so we return to democracy and egalitarianism, to the artisans' resistance to political and social deference, as a source of unanimity in the trades. Beyond this reverence of equality lay the deeper ideological connections, noted by Boardman and Petheram, that the artisans made between their ideals of the Republic and their ideals of craft. More than egalitarianism alone, it was the ways in which the craftsmen associated politics and craft production that distinguished them as artisan republicans in a city just entering the world of the nineteenth-century workshop and market. To understand what these connections were, we must look

44. Charles Foster, *An Errand of Mercy: The Evangelical United Front, 1790–1837* (Chapel Hill, 1960), 121–77; Adoniram Chandler, *An Oration Delivered before the New York Typographical Society, July 4, 1816* (New York, 1816), 9; Hooper Cumming, *An Oration Commemorative of American Independence Delivered in the Bowery Church, July 5, 1824* (New York, 1824), 19–22. See also Noah, *Address*, 10. On the fire companies, see below, Chapter 7.

again, in more detail, at all of the artisans' regalia—for it was precisely in order to make the connections explicit that the trades maintained an extraordinary series of public ceremonies.⁴⁵

“Articels Emblemattical of Our Trade”

On July 23, 1788, between five and six thousand craftsmen—virtually every artisan in New York City—turned out for a grand procession to support ratification of the Constitution. It was a well-organized political event (a similar parade had been held in Philadelphia two weeks earlier), “pleasing for every Federalist to see,” one journalist observed—the first major street demonstration in the city since the Revolution and the emotional high-point of the Federalist-artisan alliance. It also turned into a celebration of craft, as masters, journeymen, and apprentices marched together, each trade under its own banner, to affirm the artisans' contributions to the city and the benefits to be won with a protective tariff. The display of the blacksmiths, sailors, and ship joiners was typical, headed by a scaled-down model of a frigate (named, appropriately, *Alexander Hamilton*) and featuring a banner that proclaimed: “This federal ship will our commerce revive / And merchants and shipwrights and joiners shall thrive.”⁴⁶

Nearly forty years later, and a decade after the celebration of the Treaty of Ghent, the craftsmen joined the procession to celebrate the opening of the Erie Canal. A great deal had changed—among other things, the hero on this day was Gov. DeWitt Clinton, the nephew of Hamilton's archrival in New York, George Clinton—but the crafts' regalia had not. Marching by trade (although a few journeymen's groups marched apart from their masters), the artisans once again honored their arts with ancient symbols and greeted the latest advance for American commerce as a boon to the commonwealth. Once more, nearly all employers and employees turned out, to carry banners (including some that had been used in 1788), to perform craft pageants in mock workshops, and otherwise to praise their arts. The printers' song extolled the typical themes:

The Art, which enables her sons to aspire
Beyond all wonders in story
For an unshackled press is the pillar of fire
Which lights them to freedom and glory.

45. In turning here to an analysis of parades and rituals, I have been most influenced by the writings of several European historians, above all Agulhon, *Marianne au combat*, and Alain Faure, *Paris carême-prenant: Du carnaval à Paris au XIX^e siècle, 1800–1914* (Paris, 1978). More directly related to the American scene is Alfred F. Young, “Pope's Day, Tarring and Feathering, and Cornet Joyce, Jr.” (Unpublished Paper, courtesy of Professor Young). See also Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 424–29.

46. *New York Packet*, June 27, July 22, August 4, 1788; *Independent Journal*, July 23, 1788. On similar festivities in Philadelphia, see Foner, *Tom Paine*, 206–9.

As before, the artisans seized the opportunity to celebrate themselves.⁴⁷

So the trades trooped their colors continually in the early national years. In 1794, a grand parade of different crafts (now under Republican, not Federalist, leadership) marched with fife and drum to the Battery and then, by boat, to Governor's Island, to help reinforce the city's fortifications and demonstrate their displeasure at the Jay Treaty. Similar processions, complete with trade banners, traveled to Brooklyn in the summer of 1814 to work on the Brooklyn fortifications. Independence Day, initiated by craft groups and the Tammany Society in 1794, assembled masters, journeymen, and Republican politicians through the 1820s. On a less grandiose scale, the trades held exercises with the militia companies each November 25, to honor with "profuse and patriotic jollification" the day in 1783 when the British army evacuated Manhattan. Through the first decade of the nineteenth century, the General Society was almost as preoccupied with ceremony and with public displays of its crest as with its benevolent and financial projects. Journeymen's groups like the Society of Shipwrights and Caulkers spent most of the membership's dues on such items as "a skooner to be carried in procession," "musick at celebration of the Grand Canal," certificates, badges, ceremonial caulking mallet, and other "articels emblemattical of our Trade." Special events—laying the cornerstone of the Mechanics' Institution, dedicating the Apprentices' Library—brought colorful exercises prepared by the General Society.⁴⁸

What are we to make of these demonstrations? Certainly they were something new on the American scene: although the scrappy evidence left by eighteenth-century mutual-aid societies suggests that American artisans had at least some familiarity with older British trade iconography, nothing that has so far been uncovered shows that the craftsmen in New York or any other seaboard city held any craft processions or ceremonies prior to the Revolution. Nor were the early national parades antiquarian curiosities, staged to honor a distant past: the largest processions, after all, celebrated the artisans' support for economic expansion. Progress, innovation,

47. Colden, *Memoir*, 213–36, 250–55, 261–62; William L. Stone, *Narrative of the Festivities Observed in Honor of the Completion of the Grand Erie Canal* (New York, 1825), 319–28.

48. *New York Journal*, July 4, 5, 1794; *New York Weekly Chronicle*, July 9, 1795; *GSMT Minute Book*, January 6, 1789, June 7, 1797, March 7, June 6, 1798, January 1, 1800, June 17, 1801, December 4, 1804, July 4, 1807, March 8, 1808, January 9, 1821, January 19, 1823; Thomas Hamilton, *Men and Manners in America* (London, 1833), I, 59; *Minute Book*, Society of Shipwrights and Caulkers, NYPL MSS, May 29, June 5, 8, 19, 30, September 14, October 12, 1815, January 22, 1816, February 12, 1818; *Bank Book*, Union Society of Shipwrights and Caulkers, NYPL MSS, December 8, 1825, May 1, 1826; Edwin P. Kilroe, *St. Tammany and the Origin of the Society of Tammany, or Columbian Order in the City of New York* (New York, 1913), 177–83.

and prosperity—these were the artisans' themes, not static traditionalism or corporate deference.⁴⁹

With all of their innovations, however, festivities also linked the artisans to long-standing craft ideals, to emblems and images that had grown from the matrix of British guild regulations and that evoked what one historian has called "the shadowy image of a benevolent corporate state."⁵⁰ In England many of the outward displays of craft pride—the Lord Mayors' Shows, the banners, the craft pageants, the patron saints—had long since faded or disappeared by the early nineteenth century, victims of the dislocations of capitalist development—but they had not died out completely. In New York, with the winning of independence and the creation of a benevolent republic, the old emblems still seemed appropriate enough to serve as proper representations of the crafts. A full-scale retrieval of British craft ritual ensued. In 1785, when the Mechanics' Committee designed its seal, it borrowed the arm-and-hammer sign used by several London trades as early as the fifteenth century and appropriated the artful slogan of the London blacksmiths. The Constitution procession included several features of an old Lord Mayor's Show: separate trades performed workshop pageants and carried banners that, apart from their political allusions, would have been familiar to any Elizabethan Londoner. The tailors' banner, like those in English parades, depicted Adam and Eve and bore the legend "And They Did Sew Fig Leaves Together." The cordwainers' flag included a view of the good ship *Crispin* arriving in New York harbor. The ship model carried by the joiners and shipwrights may have done Hamilton's heart good; it was also a reprise of a motif dear to seventeenth-century London shipbuilders.⁵¹

The symbolism survived over the next four decades, to reappear in even grander form in the Erie Canal parade. The journeymen tailors returned to a pastoral image in 1825, with their banner of a "Native" receiving a cloak, above the motto "Naked Was I and Ye Clothed Me." The coopers

49. See Alfred F. Young, "English Plebeian Culture and Eighteenth-Century Political Movements" (Paper delivered to the International Conference on the Origins of Anglo-American Radicalism, New York, October 1980), pt. 3. On survivals of craft culture, see Morris, *Government and Labor*, 135–56, 198–99; Stephen Barto and Paul O. Weinbaum, "Stone Marks in America and Their Origin, 1790–1860" (North Atlantic Region Curatorial Paper, National Parks Service, 1980), 1–4.

50. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 432.

51. William Hone, *Ancient Mysteries Described* (London, 1823), 255; idem, *The Every-Day Book* (London, 1825–26), I, 1387, 1397–402, 1439–54, II, 470–71, 627–29, 669–76; John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities* (London, 1823), I, 356–67, 408–10; Frederick W. Fairholt, *Lord Mayors' Pageants* (London, 1843–44); Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700–1850* (Cambridge, 1973), 51–52; John Bromley and Heather Child, *The Armorial Bearings of the Guilds of London* (London, 1960), 15, 22, 79, 86, 262; *New York Packet*, July 8, 11, 22, 1788; *Independent Journal*, July 23, 1788.

carried the same banner they had used in 1788 and erected a platform on which two men and a boy—the conventional trio of master, journeyman, and apprentice—built a large cask. The printers, as before, worked presses and turned out celebratory odes to the day. The master, journeymen, and apprentice combmakers featured a miniature workshop, in which seven men and boys “of the trade,” using the latest in simple hand-powered machines, finished 600 combs. Seven other trades performed similar pageants in motion. The hatters carried a picture of their adopted patron with the words “St. Clement—Hats Invented in Paris in 1404.” The Bakers’ Benefit Society frankly copied its banner from the one presented by Edward II to the London Company of Bakers in 1307. Other insignias, guild heralds and incorporation dates appeared beside more predictable republican images, like the chairmakers’ American eagle (Plate 6).⁵²

Between innovation and retrieval lay a set of connections between craft and politics spelled out in the banners, speeches, and street dramas. At one level, the ceremonies announced the artisans’ determination to be part of the body politic—no longer “meer mechanics,” no longer part of the vague lower and middling sort of the revolutionary mobs, but proud craftsmen, appearing for all to see on important civic occasions, marching in orderly formation up and down lower Broadway with the regalia and tools of their crafts. Apart from their skills, this pride appeared lodged in the social solidarities evoked by the ideal craft communities of “the Trade.” Marching together, the employers and employees in each craft formed a symbolic body of their own. To be sure, the independent masters took their rightful place at the head of the artisan order, a position emphasized in 1825 when highly respected masters from the different trades led their respective delegations; nonetheless, each trade stressed its collective harmony, cooperation, and self-respect. Even the most arcane icons contributed to the corporate trade ideal. The biblical allusions in the banners, for example, were no demonstrations of a secret baroque piety; rather, as in the earlier English artisan festivals, they offered each trade a collective identity, sometimes underscored in the banners’ mottoes like the coopers’ “Love As Brethren” and the cordwainers’ “United We Stand.”⁵³

Just as important were the marchers’ contentions that their work was essential to the well-being of all, an integral component in the commonwealth of trade, agriculture, and industry. The tailors’ banner, pointed out not only that their labors were as old as Eden or that they were unknown only to “Natives” but also that all God’s children need tailors. At times, the artisans advanced what appear to have been residual “precapitalist” ideals about their relationships to their clients as well as about the relations of production: utility—the use value of the handicrafts, and not the

52. Colden, *Memoir*, 213–38; Stone, *Narrative*, 372–74.

53. Colden, *Memoir*, 217, 235.

luxury or special advantages of the artisans' goods—was their central claim for their products, voiced in the name of the trade as a whole rather than as a kind of boastful advertising ploy. As if to summarize their direct services to the city, some delegations to the 1825 march, most notably the printers and combmakers, handed out samples of their work to the throngs of spectators. Several trade emblems, like the chairmakers' picture of a chair with the motto "Rest For the Weary," emphasized both pride in craftsmanship and a collective sense of public service. In all cases, a sense of worthiness prevailed, tied to an idealization of the artisan system of production and distribution quite unlike the entrepreneurial regime that had begun to emerge in the city's workshops. To drive the point home, craftsmen and Jeffersonian politicians at various celebrations noted that they had gathered to celebrate what the masters called "the common bond and mutual sympathy," the "ties and attachments . . . interwoven with the strongest feelings of the heart," that supposedly governed the artisan community.⁵⁴

Linked to the commemorations of "the Trade" was the craftsmen's treatment of politics. Guild heraldry established the antiquity of the crafts but not the craftsmen's attitude toward monarchy; in place of the old holidays and saints' feasts observed in England, the artisans substituted suitably republican red-letter days. Independence Day and Evacuation Day were the most important annual celebrations; even in their occasional ceremonies, the trades tried to assemble on July 4 or November 25, when they would "swear eternal allegiance to the principles of Republicanism." In the processions of 1788 and 1825, patriotic banners billowed beside craft banners; on the Fourth, either an artisan or a Jeffersonian politician delivered an address on the blessings of republican government; through the 1820s, speeches rang with denunciations of Old World luxury and pomp and repeated the contention of an early spokesman that "the feelings expressed by a freeman on an occasion like this are unknown to the subjects of Kings." The craftsmen's grandest efforts celebrated a benevolent republican state—one that would enact tariffs and finance canal building—but also celebrated their own sovereignty over that state. The regalia had royal pedigrees; the artisans themselves were attached to "republican simplicity," "the genius of America" and "just notions of Liberty, founded upon the RIGHTS OF MAN."⁵⁵

These exhortations did not merely displace British loyalties with more

54. *Ibid.*, 215, 220; Mercein, *Address*, 11–12; Noah, *Oration*, 7–8.

55. Eacker, *Oration*, 5; Noah, *Oration*, 12; P[eter] H. Wendover, *National Deliverance: An Oration Delivered in the New Dutch Church in the City of New York on the Fourth of July, 1806* (New York, 1806), 11; Dr. George Cuming, *An Oration Delivered at the Presbyterian Church on East Rutgers Street before the Tammany, Tailors', Hatters', Hibernian Provident, Masons', Shipwrights', Carpenters', and Columbian Societies* (New York, 1810), 8–9.

patriotic, democratic sentiments; rather, they indicated how thoroughly the tradesmen understood the framework of republican political thought and how they associated the Republic with their conception of “the Trade.” Most striking were the ways in which the speakers invoked the key concepts of eighteenth-century American republicanism—*independence, virtue, equality, citizenship, and commonwealth (or community)*—and explained their meaning for the crafts. Independence signified, in the first place, independence from Britain and the freedom of New Yorkers to ply their arts without foreign interference. “However great our natural advantage,” the Reverend Samuel Miller claimed at one of the first artisan festivals, “they would have been in vain had the shackles of British power continued to bind and restrain us.” Prior to the Revolution, the editor and General Society member M. M. Noah argued a quarter of a century later, “we saw and felt our dependent state,” as “the native ingenuity of our Mechanics was checked”; only after the “legitimate owners of the soil” had reclaimed the city could mechanical genius flourish. Even more, independence connoted *personal* independence, or what John Irving called “independent equality”—the ability of each citizen to think and act free of the restraints of others and of the corrupt privilege so evident abroad. “Suffer no one to DICTATE imperiously what line of conduct you are to pursue,” the sailmaker George Warner told the crafts in 1797, “but at the same time let no one be sacrificed on the altar of public opinion for a cordial and liberal expression of his sentiments.” Later spokesmen picked up the argument and charted a course of personal independence through the preservation of “the rights of man,” and resistance to all attempts to turn American mechanics into “vassals and slaves.”⁵⁶

As they spoke of independence, the artisans also shied away from endorsing the pursuit of self-interest for its own sake: each citizen, spokesmen explained, had to be able to place the community’s good before his own, exercising what they called, in classical republican style, *virtue*. Warner made it plain that those who sought personal gain alone, particularly in politics, were “distinct from the general interests of the community,” unvirtuous men who would lead America, like the civilizations of old, “on an inalterable course towards despotism, where the dividing line between the rich and poor will be distinctly drawn and the *latter* will be found in a state of dependence on the former.” “[L]et virtue be the foundation of distinction,” George Eacker concurred a few years later. A proper republic, John Irving declared in 1809, sustained a polity where “those are ex-

56. Samuel Miller, *A Sermon Delivered in the New Presbyterian Church, New-York, July the Fourth, 1795, . . . at the Bequest of and before the Mechanic, Tammany, and Democratic Societies, and the Military Officers* (New York, 1795), 13; Noah, *Oration*, 13; Irving, *Oration*, 20; George James Warner, *Means for the Preservation of Liberty* (New York, 1797), 14.

alted whose . . . superior virtue entitles them to confidence." Love for America's "splendid monument of political wisdom," Samuel Romaine remarked three years later, required recalling "that virtue is its basis."⁵⁷

These were ideas that came from the Painite tradition and broader currents of republican thought; accordingly, for the artisans, equality and citizenship did not imply a leveled society of absolute economic and social democracy. Not until the late 1820s did propertyless small masters and journeymen express any basic objection to what Mercein called society's "artificial distinctions" of wealth, or the inevitability that these would persist. Nor did the artisans, masters or journeymen, show any interest in promoting the fortunes of the poor, those dependent persons who could easily become the tools of tyrants, men Irving described as "that uniformed class . . . who, like dull weeds, sleep secure at the bottom of the stream." Equality instead connoted political equality, the right of all independent, virtuous citizens—including the artisans—to exercise their will without interference from a nobility of privilege, wealth, or title; citizenship, by extension, stood for men's obligations to exercise their natural political rights. It was in this sense, balancing libertarian ideas of political equality with social duties, that Warner berated those men of honest industry who "considered themselves of TOO LITTLE CONSEQUENCE to the body politic" as unintentional traitors; so, too, it was to equality and citizenship that Irving referred when he extolled the republican polity as one where leaders are "revered as legislators, obeyed as magistrates, but considered as equals."⁵⁸

These familiar republican concepts, on their own, linked the artisans with well-established patterns of American political thought and expression. What made their observations singular were the ways in which they blended American republicanism with the ideals of "the Trade." Even as they marched with other civic associations and celebrated the commonwealth, the artisans diverged from older assumptions that the trades were merely one of many important groups, a deferential estate within a larger social corporation. While they extolled commerce, they expressed misgivings about capital; without denying that prosperity demanded a proper balance between merchants, farmers, and mechanics, the artisans made quite clear that they considered the small shop as the very embodiment of republican values. Contrary to what some New Yorkers believed, Warner told the mechanics' societies, "the possession of riches is not necessarily accompanied by superior understanding or goodness of heart"; indeed, he

57. Warner, *Means*, 13; Eacker, *Oration*, 19; Irving, *Oration*, 20; Samuel B. Romaine, *An Oration Delivered before the Tammany Society, Tailors', Hibernian Provident, Shipwrights', Columbian, Manhattan, and Cordwainers' Societies in the City of New-York on the Fourth Day of July 1812* (New York, 1812), 8.

58. Mercein, *Address*, 18; Irving, *Oration*, 11; Warner, *Means*, 13.

remarked, "the experience of ages confirms that a state of mediocrity is more favorable to them both." Independence would be lost if men of great wealth ruled the Republic since, as the educator and Republican politician Samuel Mitchill (not a poor man himself) indicated, "it is soon discovered that *money is power*, that power gives the possessor of it *importance*, and that *importance begets respect*." Men of relatively little means like the craftsmen were less likely to be seduced by "the studied refinements of luxury" or "the splendid follies of wealth," the mason John Rodman hinted in 1813; the domestic arts were, he thought, "more congenial with the nature of our government and conducive to the general happiness" than any other calling. In sum, an urban variation of the Jeffersonian social theme of the virtuous husbandman emerged, one that fused craft pride and resentment of deference and fear of dependence into a republican celebration of the trades. John Irving offered the image of the artisans as "the very axis of society," in whose hands "must the palladium of our liberty rest." Others stated flatly that the craftsmen's skilled labors facilitated republican politics and exposed aristocratic threats. The printers were especially eager to point out, as George Asbridge told his fellows in 1811, that their trade was "one of the most deadly engines of destruction that can possibly be arrayed against the encroachments of despotic power." Samuel Woodworth's odes to his trade made similar claims, with suggestions that Faust, the printer of legend, was the world's first republican.⁵⁹

The metaphorical association between the Republic and "the Trade" fortified the artisans' egalitarian republicanism. Like the Republic, the crafts themselves reputedly respected individual abilities but also stressed virtuous mutuality and cooperation. Each competent master appeared, in his workshop relations, as the quintessence of independence, free to exercise his virtue uncorrupted; the dependence of journeymen and apprentices—in principle a temporary condition—was tempered by their possession of a skill and graced with the affection and respect of their masters, in what Noah described as a web of "reciprocal" obligation. The workshop, a site of collaborative labor, ideally turned out both handicrafts useful to the public and new independent craftsmen to replenish the ranks of the trades. The masters supposedly lived not solely by the labor of others but also, as in the mock workshops, by their skills and by the sweat of their brows; they along with the skilled employees were precisely the kinds of unselfish, productive men whom the Republic needed, for they neither

59. Warner, *Means*, 13-14; Samuel Mitchill, *Address to the Citizens of New York* (New York, 1800), 21; John Rodman, *An Oration Delivered before the Tammany Society, or Columbian Order, Tailors', Hibernian Provident, Columbian, Cordwainers', and George Clinton Societies* (New York, 1813), 9; Irving, *Oration*, 10-11. Asbridge, *Oration*, 11, 25-26; Chandler, *Oration*, 14-15.

exploited others nor were, in the words of one General Society speaker, “slavishly devoted” to anyone else. Moreover, the artisans’ association between craft and politics was a dialectical one: just as the bonds of the craft supported and complemented the Republic, so republicanism, as the artisans interpreted it, enhanced the economic as well as the political position of the crafts. It did not surprise the New Yorkers that British and European craftsmen were “in subjection at the point of a bayonet.” Only in republican America, they claimed, where workingmen were citizens, could the artisans hope to protect themselves from the whims of would-be aristocrats; only in a land where virtue and cooperation were prized would the arts be fostered and the connections between masters and employers endure. So corrupt were the Old World monarchies, Eacker noted, that “even with their masters, manly dignity degenerates into haughtiness and sullen pride.” It was, by contrast, “in consequence of our Republican form of government,” Samuel Berrian intoned in 1815, that “our whole experience has been a series of brilliant improvements and expanding prosperity.”⁶⁰

Here, all the strands of artisan political egalitarianism, craft pride, and social commonwealth pulled together. Like other social groups, the artisans sustained a classical republican political language long after what Gordon Wood has described as the death of “classical politics” in America.⁶¹ With that language, the artisans blended the cooperative ethos of “the Trade” with the democratic, libertarian sentiments characteristic of Paine, the artisan committees of the Revolution, and the Democratic Society—all to the point where each was indistinguishable from the other. Adaptation of those long-established ideals did not signal a mass yearning for a static past; repeatedly, the artisans railed against their former economic and political dependence and looked with optimism to a prosperous future. Their vision was egalitarian and suffused with the ethic of the small producer—but not “liberal” or “petit-bourgeois,” as the twentieth century understands the terms. It was a vision of a democratic society that balanced individual rights with communal responsibilities—of independent, competent citizens and men who would soon win their competence, whose industry in the pursuit of happiness, as in politics, was undertaken not for personal gain alone but for the public good.

Obviously, the longer the artisans repeated these idealizations, the more they diverged from actual conditions in the shops. At times, the artisans appeared to take account of these disparities by altering their rituals and speeches accordingly, attaching new meanings to the old language. On at least three occasions (and probably more often), individual journeymen’s

60. Noah, *Oration*, 17; Eacker, *Oration*, 5–6; Berrian, *Oration*, 27–28.

61. Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 606–18.

societies held their own Fourth of July ceremonies independent of their masters, to toast themselves, as the shoemakers did in 1813, as "a useful and intelligent class in society." In the Erie Canal march, five journeymen's groups assembled under their own banners. For their part, the master craftsmen, from about 1815 on, began adding exhortations to entrepreneurship to their glorification of rights and virtue, transforming the very definitions of the familiar terms. "Equality," for M. M. Noah in his 1822 address to the mechanics, also stood for equality of opportunity for men to rise in the world by dint of their own ambitions, talents, and merits. "In large cities," Thomas Mercein told the celebration to honor the Apprentice Library in 1820, "employment and intercourse with the rest of the community are extensive and multifarious, and contracts and responsibilities are constantly entered into"; thus, each artisan had to learn the ways of the countinghouse, to avoid dissipation and follow "the paths of industry and virtue, morality and religion" in order to enlarge his "capacity and knowledge to understand rights and detect errors" in his contractual dealings. Even with these adjustments, however, the festivities preserved at least a semblance of their original purport. Journeymen, even those who celebrated on their own, usually stuck to honoring the Republic, their arts, and the trades. In the Erie Canal parade, at least two of the journeymen's societies saw fit to march side by side with their masters, in joint contingents of "the Trade"; the vast majority of journeymen, including the shoemakers and hatters, performed in the time-honored fashion. The masters still spoke of their obligations to the crafts, still performed in the pageants of 1825, still retained the forms of the republican trades.⁶²

In the 1830s, even such ceremonial camaraderie could not be reconstructed; celebrations and symbols reappeared, but to define the rifts of class between masters and journeymen, not to celebrate the harmony of craft. As E. P. Thompson has remarked about similar changes in English craft ritual, this passage from the corporate identity of "the Trade" to the duality of employers' groups and journeymen's unions "takes us into the central experience of the Industrial Revolution."⁶³ For the moment, however, it is essential to note the power and persistence of craft themes of mutuality and cooperation in early national New York. Despite all that was dissolving the customary social connections, the artisans' egalitarianism remained inseparable from their small producers' ethic. At the dawn of the nineteenth century, with the American Revolution still a fresh memory—to be rehearsed and refought in elections—and with New York's variant of the industrial revolution barely underway, this set of associa-

62. *National Advocate*, March 8, 1813, quoted in Rock, *Artisans of the New Republic*, 141; Colden, *Memoir*; Noah, *Address*, 8; Mercein, *Address*, 17.

63. Thompson, *Making of the English Working Class*, 426.

tions produced the most clearcut definitions of artisan pride and social identity. They remained strong enough to unify the republican trades through the early 1820s, if only for a few days a year.

Republicanism and Conflict

What, then, became of artisan republicanism during those episodes when the harmony celebrated in the mock workshops dissolved into strikes and protests? Evidence about the ideological dimension of these events is scanty, amounting to little more than a few brief newspaper dispatches, some letters, and some courtroom speeches and testimony, only a fraction of it by the artisans themselves. What remains reveals craftsmen struggling to match their artisan republican idealism with their recognition that the trades were changing and, in some cases, had begun to disintegrate. Neither republicanism nor its artisan variant could on its own fully explain or solve the issues raised; even so, artisan republicanism, though tested and at times revised, was not obliterated. This struggle to fit old ideals to new conflicts was most clearly displayed at the trial of the journeymen cordwainers in 1809.

The trial followed one of the many attempts by journeymen in the consumer finishing trades to regulate the composition of the work force. In 1808, members of the Journeymen's Cordwainers' Society, the best-organized in the city, accused the partners James Corwin and Charles Aimes of hiring an elderly nonsociety journeyman and an illegal apprentice, contrary to society regulations. Corwin and Aimes begrudgingly fired the objectionable journeyman but refused to release the boy, and their men walked out. When, soon afterward, other masters agreed to take on Corwin and Aimes's orders, the society called a general strike of the trade and demanded both an end to the masters' collusion and an increase in piece rates. Some twenty master shoemakers, including the city's largest shoe employers, then swore out a complaint against two dozen union leaders, charging them with raising a conspiracy to interfere with trade and deprive the journeyman fired by Corwin and Aimes of his livelihood. By requesting a conspiracy prosecution, the masters hoped to sustain a judgment brought in a similar case in Philadelphia in 1806; at the least, the masters might break the union; at most, they might obtain a *de facto* legal ban on trade unionism. For their defense, the journeymen managed to acquire the services of the exiled Irish Jacobin and Jeffersonian William Sampson; the prosecution was handled by another Irish Jeffersonian with equally impressive Jacobin credentials, Thomas Addis Emmet, Robert Emmet's brother. Although the prosecution would resort to arguments about the applicability of the common law that were then popular in

Federalist circles, there is no evidence that the trial was a surrogate battle between antilabor Federalists and prolabor Jeffersonians, as historians once supposed; Sampson and his assistants were the only Jeffersonians to come to the journeymen's aid. New social problems, far more perplexing than the ins and outs of party philosophy and politics, prompted the legal debate.⁶⁴

Emmet opened up an attack on the journeymen for violations of both political and economic equality. How, he asked, could the unionists' attempts to coerce their masters and their impositions on the nonsociety journeymen and the shoeless customers be deemed "the mere exercise of individual rights?" More directly, how could the right to strike be considered "sound political economy"? Individual rights, Emmet insisted, were secured by allowing "every man, according to his own will, follow his own pursuits"; by making a combination for their own private benefit, the journeymen had perpetrated the most tyrannical violations of private right. Sampson, lacking any coherent theory of trade unionism but well-schooled in the ambiguities of political economy, tried to demolish the prosecution with the arguments of "the profound and perspicacious Adam Smith." As the defense interpreted him, Smith had proven that master tradesmen were in permanent conspiracy against their workmen, "so much so," Sampson observed, "that it passes unobservable as the natural course of things, which challenges no attention." It was this prior "sordid combination" to oppress the journeymen that led the unionists to organize; their right to do so was questioned, in Sampson's view, only by those smitten by the "superstitious idolatry" of the common law.⁶⁵

Such arguments could not have demonstrated more forcefully that conceptions of labor as a commodity, free and unrestricted in the market, had badly eroded older artisan notions of workshop justice and mutuality, at least among the master shoemakers. The trial's significance, however, rests less in the differences between master and journeyman than in how both sides tried to adapt egalitarian republican politics to a still unfamiliar confrontation: above all, it is the *plasticity* of ideals about individual rights

64. Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 252–385. See also Richard B. Morris, "Criminal Conspiracy and Early Labor Combinations," *PSQ* 52 (1937): 52–57; Marjorie Turner, *The Early American Labor Conspiracy Cases, Their Place in Labor Law: A Reinterpretation* (San Diego, 1967), 172–75 and passim; Ian M. G. Quimby, "The Cordwainers' Protest: A Crisis in American Labor Relations," *Winterthur Portfolio* 3 (1967): 83–101.

65. Commons, *Documentary History*, III, 261–63, 270–78, 328–29. Sampson's use of Smith should not at all be taken as an endorsement of the notion that labor is a commodity; rather, it was much more in keeping with the "benevolent," small-producer ethos that recent scholars have suggested lay at the heart of Smith's enterprise. See Donald Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics: An Essay in Historiographic Revision* (Cambridge, 1978).

that stands out. Compared with the adversaries of the 1830s, the parties of 1809 appear oddly awkward, unsure of where their arguments might lead; it was as if they were improvising for the first time, in the closeness of a New York courtroom, the accusations and appeals that would arouse thousands in the future. Even more, artisan republican standards of commonwealth and independence remained at the heart of the matter. As Emmet explained it, the selfish journeymen had violated not only the masters' market rights but their own duty to the commonwealth, that "tacit compact which all classes reciprocally enter into, that when they have partitioned and distributed among the different occupations . . . they will pursue those occupations so as to contribute to the general happiness." Having been seduced by private interest, they had declared war on public policy and tried to constrain the independence of others, exerting what one prosecution lawyer labelled an "aristocratic and tyrannical control." The journeymen's defense in turn admonished the employers for their hypocrisy and their own un-republican tyranny. Paradoxically, by his own use of Smith, Sampson tried to undercut the idea that the masters were simply individuals pursuing their rights; as much as ever, he proclaimed, they had collective interests—interests invisible to a casual observer. The problem, Sampson insisted, was that the "rapacity of the masters" had led them to switch their allegiances from the trade to themselves, to violate accepted workshop practices and deny their obligations, in Sampson's phrase, to "do justice by" their apprentices. Even worse, the masters, with the aid of the prosecution, tried to reinforce their position by smuggling aristocratic, unequal laws to America. "[I]s this not repugnant to the rights of man?" Sampson queried. "If it be, is it not repugnant to our constitution? If it be repugnant to our constitution, is it law?"⁶⁶

The trial ended in something of a draw. A guilty verdict was almost assured once the court had rejected defense motions to quash the indictment on the common-law question. In passing sentence, however, Mayor Jacob Radcliff equivocated, claiming that the journeymen's equal rights included "the right to meet and regulate their concerns and to ask for wages, and to work or refuse," but not to deprive their fellow citizens of their rights. He then imposed the light fine of one dollar plus court costs. It was hardly a judgment immediately to squelch journeymen's unions; within six months, the journeymen carpenters had commenced a long and bitter strike for higher wages; in 1811, the cordwainers' society—led by the very men indicted earlier—won a raise in pay with another general strike.⁶⁷

As the tensions in the crafts remained, the artisans in the city's fastest-changing trades continued to adjust their outlooks and their language.

66. *Ibid.*, 279–80, 300, 329.

67. *Ibid.*, 382–85; *American Citizen*, May 3, 1810; *People v. James Melvin* (1811).

The masters, on several occasions, condemned the selfishness and unreasonableness of journeymen's demands and mixed a liberal interpretation of their market rights with professions of their supposed benevolence and superior knowledge of the conditions in the trades—those ideas proclaimed, in different contexts, by the General Society and the *Mechanics' Gazette*. By 1825, they were on the verge of making Smithian ideas irrevocably their own. Haltingly, meanwhile, the organized journeymen tried to construct a consistent justification for their actions. The union printers' declaration of 1817 on the inevitably opposing interests of masters and journeymen suggested a temporary hardening of distinctions; by the early 1820s, some journeymen had begun to examine the deeper social and economic matrix of their plight. Throughout, however, artisan republicanism provided the journeymen a kind of moral ledger with which to judge their masters and defend themselves. Their new understanding of artisan republicanism surfaced with peculiar force during the carpenters' strike of 1810. The masters, joined by the city's architects and surveyors, adamantly refused to concede their privileges in the face of the "increasing evils and distressing tendency" of the journeymen's militancy; least of all would they grant a standard rate of wages, by which they could no longer decide what to pay journeymen "according to their several abilities and industry." The journeymen replied that they had struck because their "haughty, overbearing" masters—including some "master builders in name only"—had misinterpreted their own interests and those of all carpenters by hiring men below accepted wage rates and by depressing the earnings of all, so that the journeymen could not expect to become masters. Even those employers whose abilities as workmen still held respect had forfeited all allegiance, by riding about in their carriages, building themselves brick homes, and assuming a demeanor that "better fits them to give laws to slaves" than to be master mechanics. The masters had denied both their fellow tradesmen and the Republic and had become paragons of acquisitive corruption; the journeymen struck as free men for republican justice. "Among the inalienable rights of man are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," the journeymen declared:

By the social contract every class in society ought to be entitled to benefit in proportion to its qualifications. . . . Among the duties which society owes individuals is to grant them just compensation not only for current expenses of livelihood, but to the formation of a fund for the support of that time when nature requires a cessation of work.

After 1825, such thoughts on class, natural rights, just wages, and the proper expectations of "journeymen through life" would help lead organized wage earners to draw even more audacious conclusions—conclusions

which stressed individual liberty and moral benevolence but which also took a step beyond the perspicacious Adam Smith.⁶⁸

Artisan Republicanism and the Limits of Bourgeois Individualism

It has long been a fashion among historians of disparate viewpoints to describe American northern society as “bourgeois”—“middle-class,” “profit-oriented,” and “modern” are other common terms—virtually from the seventeenth century on. Apart, perhaps, from the would-be demesnes of the Hudson Valley landlords and patroons, no real vestiges of feudalism ever developed in this country. With its abundance of land, its great need for initiative, and a population that had fled the authoritarian monarchies of the Old World (so the argument goes), America escaped the social tensions and political economy of Europe. Capitalism arrived with the first shiploads of white men: within the fluctuating limits imposed by London, the yeoman farmers, city merchants, and industrious artisans of the colonies eagerly competed in local and, in some cases, regional markets, exemplars of a competitive and democratic individualism, neither aristocratic landlords nor downtrodden cottiers. Richard Hofstadter, who caught the emptiness as well as the opportunities of this culture, most cogently stated as a “profound truth” that in order to understand early America, one had to envisage a “middle-class world.” Early-nineteenth-century economic growth required no great ideological or social changes, but only those “revolutions” in transportation and communication necessary to unleash a pre-existing capitalist spirit, what Hezekiah Niles of *Niles’ Review* called, in 1815, “the almost universal ambition to get forward.”⁶⁹

In some respects, the artisans of early national New York conformed to these descriptions. Producing for a widening and increasingly competitive market, they could be clever entrepreneurs. The masters, or at least the leading craft entrepreneurs, had proven alive to (if not always adept at) capitalist business practices. Any doubts about the artisans’ acquisitiveness would be overturned by the oratory of the General Society or the sign of the cornucopia of dollars that illuminated the peace celebrations of 1815. If any visitors questioned their abilities as businessmen, they had only to drop by Duncan Phyfe’s workshop or to observe masters arranging for export of their goods to other cities. If any suspected that the

68. *American Citizen*, May 3, 23, 31, 1810.

69. Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (New York, 1971), 131; Niles, quoted in Benson, *Concept of Jacksonian Democracy*, 12. For an intelligent preliminary overview of this literature and its critics, see Edwin G. Burrows, “The Transition Question in Early American History: A Checklist of Recent Books, Articles, and Dissertations,” *Radical History Review*, no. 18 (1978): 173–90.

masters and journeymen lacked appreciation of the benefits of commercial expansion, they had only to view the parade in celebration of the Erie Canal.

The “middling” republican politics of the mechanics—with their distrust of the power and culture of New York’s nabobs and their lack of sympathy for the dependent poor—also call to mind what C. B. Macpherson has described as the more radical variants of bourgeois possessive individualism. The artisans’ praise of their crafts, their resentment of the unskilled, and their attacks on merchant aristocrats and overbearing clergymen, all tempered by a respect for private property, exemplified a belief that independent men of relatively small means were both entitled to full citizenship and best equipped to exercise it. Their democratic assaults on political and religious deference, their professed respect for individual initiative, and their efforts in support of the economic interests of the trades all made them appear champions of those Franklinesque virtues that have long been interpreted as the germ of bourgeois propriety.⁷⁰

Yet the mechanics, with their artisan republicanism, also stood for much more. With a rhetoric rich in the republican language of corruption, equality, and independence, they remained committed to a benevolent hierarchy of skill and the cooperative workshop. Artisan independence conjured up, not a vision of ceaseless, self-interested industry, but a moral order in which all craftsmen would eventually become self-governing, independent, competent masters—an order to match the stonemasons’ ditty that they would “steal from no man.” Men’s energies would be devoted, not to personal ambition or profit alone, but to the commonwealth; in the workshop, mutual obligation and respect—“the strongest ties of the heart”—would prevail; in more public spheres, the craftsmen would insist on their equal rights and exercise their citizenship with a view to preserving the rule of virtue as well as to protecting their collective interests against an eminently corruptible mercantile and financial elite. This fusion of independent liberties and personal sovereignty with social and corporate responsibilities—very akin to what others have called “collective individualism,” the core of early American political thought—remained in uneasy and increasingly contradictory relation to the bourgeois tendencies of artisan thinking and to the inescapable fact that with the expansion of the craft economy and the transformation of labor relations, some crafts-

70. C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes, to Locke* (Oxford, 1962), 137–60 and passim. See also, Winch, *Adam Smith’s Politics*, 70–102 and passim. Winch’s stress on the libertarian and “affective” features of Smith’s political economy helps make sense of American “liberal” thought in this era as well.

men would never escape dependence on their masters and on the wage.⁷¹ Certainly, by 1825, much of what vitiated artisan republicanism had at some point been re-examined, interpreted by some masters as a justification for their own economic well-being and their innovations in the shops, and by the organized journeymen as a defense of their societies and strikes. Yet even then, the trades had to travel some social and ideological distance and to endure more momentous changes in the crafts before they would be governed by the kind of individualism that Tocqueville observed in the 1830s. And as the journeymen shoemakers' and other early strikes portended, this transit would be resisted.

71. Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 178–80, 183–210.

This page intentionally left blank