



REBELS RISING

*Cities and the American
Revolution*

Benjamin L. Carp

REBELS RISING

This page intentionally left blank

Rebels Rising

Cities and the American Revolution

Benjamin L. Carp

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

2007

OXFORD

UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Inc., publishes works that further
Oxford University's objective of excellence
in research, scholarship, and education.

Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto

With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam

Copyright © 2007 by Benjamin L. Carp

Published by Oxford University Press, Inc.
198 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016

www.oup.com

Oxford is a registered trademark of Oxford University Press

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise,
without the prior permission of Oxford University Press.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Carp, Benjamin L.

Rebels rising : cities and the American Revolution / Benjamin L. Carp.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-19-530402-2

1. United States—History—Revolution, 1775–1783—Social aspects. 2. Cities
and towns—United States—History—18th century. 3. City and town life—United
States—History—18th century. 4. United States—Social conditions—To 1865.
5. United States—History, Local. 6. Political participation—United States—
History—18th century. 7. United States—Politics and government—
1775–1783. I. Title.

E209.C33 2007

973.3'1091732—dc22 2007001802

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America
on acid-free paper

For Peter Onuf
and for Robert and Jane Carp
Three cherished teachers

This page intentionally left blank

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe debts to many people for their various contributions to my work on this manuscript. First and foremost, I would like to dedicate this book to my adviser, Professor Peter S. Onuf. I arrived at the University of Virginia with Joanne Freeman's assurance that Professor Onuf was the greatest mentor on earth. In the ensuing years, he embodied the truth of her assertion with his insights, wit, candor, encouragement, and careful criticism. I can never thank him enough. I am also deeply indebted to the other members of my dissertation committee, Professors Gary W. Gallagher, Maurie D. McInnis, and the late Stephen Innes. All three were influential in myriad ways, as teachers and critics. Susan Ferber of Oxford University Press took an early interest in this project, and I have been grateful for her continued enthusiasm.

I have appreciated the contributions of the scholars and friends who commented on earlier versions of this manuscript. David Waldstreicher, Jane Kamensky, and a particularly heroic William A. Pencak each read through entire drafts, and their sharp comments helped me to improve the manuscript at crucial moments. Jon Butler and Louis Nelson also gave extensive assistance during the writing process. Elaine Forman Crane, S. Max Edelson, Eliga H. Gould, Derek S. Hoff, Joshua Kavaloski, Jason M. Opal, Joseph S. Tiedemann, Dell Upton, and Douglas L. Winiarski read earlier drafts of individual chapters and provided useful suggestions. I am also grateful to participants at various conferences where I presented chapters and at the lively seminars hosted by the McNeil Center for Early American Studies and the Omohundro Institute for Early American History and Culture.

Faculty members and graduate student colleagues in the Department of History at Virginia offered insightful critiques, especially participants in Ronald G. Dimberg's dissertation seminar, Edward L. Ayers's Southern seminar, and Michael F. Holt's thesis seminar. Members of the Early

American Seminar, under the auspices of Peter Onuf and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy of the International Center for Jefferson Studies, bore with me patiently over the course of several chapters. Thanks to all of them for their helpful comments, especially those in and around my cohort: Laurie Hochstetler, Charles F. Irons, Johann N. Neem, Robert G. Parkinson, Katherine A. Pierce, Leonard J. Sadosky, and Brian Schoen.

I have twice benefited from the financial support of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation as a recipient of the Andrew W. Mellon Fellowship in Humanistic Studies (1998) and the Charlotte W. Newcombe Doctoral Dissertation Fellowship (2003). The University of Virginia offered a variety of forms of support, including a President's Fellowship. The Leverhulme Trust and the University of Edinburgh funded a research fellowship in 2005, and I used part of the time for the completion of this manuscript. I owe them a great deal of gratitude, and my fondness for the American historians at Edinburgh abides—thanks to Francis D. Cogliano, Alan F. Day, Owen Dudley Edwards, Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, Robert Mason, and Mark Newman. Herbert Sloan and Eric Foner enabled me to conduct research at Columbia University during the fellowship year. Funding from Tufts University helped me to apply the finishing touches to the manuscript. The Department of History at Tufts has extended a warm welcome, and I am deeply grateful.

I have also received generous support from the following grants: the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati Fellowship from the Massachusetts Historical Society; the Price Visiting Research Fellowship from the William L. Clements Library; the Winterthur Fellowship from the Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library; the Kate B. and Hall J. Peterson Fellowship from the American Antiquarian Society; the W. M. Keck Foundation and Fletcher Jones Foundation Fellowship from the Huntington Library; the Barbara S. Mosbacher Fellowship from the John Carter Brown Library; the Gilder Lehrman Fellowship in American History for research at the New-York Historical Society; the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies Fellowship for research at the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Library Resident Fellowship from the American Philosophical Society Library.

I am profoundly grateful for the research assistance I received from the staffs of each of the preceding libraries. In addition, I would like to thank the staffs at the Boston Public Library, the British Library, the Columbia University libraries, the Houghton Library at Harvard University, the Library of Congress, the Museum of the City of New York, the New York County Clerk's Office, the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, the New York Public Library, the Newport Historical Society, the Public Record Office, the Rhode Island Historical Society, the South Carolina Historical Society, the South Carolina Room of the Charleston County Public Library, and Tisch Library at Tufts University. I would especially like to thank the

staffs of Alderman Library, Clemons Library, Fiske Kimball Fine Arts Library, and the Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library at the University of Virginia, as well as the staff of the George Washington Papers. They have facilitated my research in countless ways. Thanks also to the institutions who provided image reproductions, and especially to Bronwyn Low and Aimee Saunders for their able assistance. I could not have finished this without them.

In my travels I have had the privilege of meeting and corresponding with a number of scholars who took the time to offer advice or references. These include Rohit T. Aggarwala, Jonathan M. Beagle, John L. Bell, George A. Billias, Patricia U. Bonomi, Carl P. Borick, Gretchen Buggeln, John E. Crowley, Stephen C. Bullock, Kenneth Cohen, Richard Drayton, Dan Finamore, Paul A. Gilje, Jack P. Greene, Sally Hadden, Kevin R. Hardwick, Paul D. Halliday, Tim Harris, Emma Hart, Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, Bernard L. Herman, Benjamin J. Hinerfeld, Michael J. Jarvis, Joseph F. Kett, Albrecht Koschnik, Jesse Lemisch, Michelle Craig McDonald, Allan Megill, Matthew Mulcahy, Simon P. Newman, Marcus Rediker, Kym S. Rice, Thomas N. Rightmyer, Seth Rockman, Sophia A. Rosenfeld, John W. Shy, Christopher Sleeper, Barbara Clark Smith, Holly Snyder, Harry S. Stout, Jose Torre, Thomas M. Truxes, and Alfred F. Young. They deserve recognition for helping the wheels of scholarship turn.

I will conclude by honoring the memory of Itzolin Garcia, Stephen Innes, and Ann and Herman Rothblatt, who each brightened my world. Thanks also to the friends and family members whose kindnesses helped bring this manuscript about in a variety of ways: Anna Baker, George Boudreau, Herb and Selma Carp, Jay Dixit, Eliot and Tyra Duhan, Elizabeth Dunn, Joel Hafvenstein, Amy Kuras, Jessica Leshnower, Jonathan Marr, Damon May, Carlos Mena, Steve Mooney, Janice and Ken Negin, Daniel Negin, Adam Raviv, Jennifer and Derek Roth Gordon, Rachel Rothblatt, Richard Rothblatt, Robert and Sharon Rothblatt, Jeffrey Shih, Jill and Brian Sowell, Juliet and Bram Spector, and Clifton Stubblefield. I must also thank a remarkable run of wonderful teachers, from Hewlett-Woodmere Public Schools through Yale University to the University of Virginia. Finally, I offer my everlasting love and thanks to my brothers, Brian and David, and my parents, Robert and Jane, who make it all possible. This book is also dedicated to my parents, who are still my greatest teachers.

This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS

Introduction.	Political Mobilization in the Urban Landscape	3
Chapter 1.	Port in a Storm: The Boston Waterfront as Contested Space, 1747–74	23
Chapter 2.	Orderly and Disorderly Mobilization in the Taverns of New York City	62
Chapter 3.	“And Yet There Is Room”: The Religious Landscape of Newport	99
Chapter 4.	Changing Our Habitation: The Revolutionary Movement in Charleston’s Domestic Spaces	143
Chapter 5.	Philadelphia Politics, In and Out of Doors, 1742–76	172
Epilogue.	The Forgotten City	213
Appendix 1.	Population Estimates for the Largest American Cities, 1740–83	225
Appendix 2.	Licenses Granted for Retailing Strong Liquors in New York City, 1753–73, and the Population of New York	226
Appendix 3.	Newport Denominations: Meetinghouse Size, Congregants, Communicants	228
Appendix 4.	Newport Religious Leaders, 1740–83	229
Abbreviations		232
Notes		234
Bibliography		278
Index		319

This page intentionally left blank

REBELS RISING

This page intentionally left blank

INTRODUCTION

Political Mobilization in the Urban Landscape

In the cities of eighteenth-century America, any two people might know one another. The populations of the largest colonial cities numbered in the tens of thousands, not millions, and the inhabitants lived in compact, concentrated settlements clustered at the tips of islands or peninsulas. Houses were low to the ground and crowded together—their close proximity characterized them as much as anything else.¹ The people of these cities also felt much closer to the rivers and harbors—their main avenues of transportation and trade—that flowed beside them. When they craned their necks, the highest things they saw were ships' masts and church steeples, along with the occasional tower atop a public building.

City dwellers jostled one another in the streets, dodging pigs and reckless wagons. They haggled with one another in the shops and in the marketplace, hauled goods from ships' holds to warehouses and back again, saw the law handed down in the assemblies and courthouses, and prayed in places of worship. On occasion, large crowds might gather for a parade or celebration, or a riot or a hanging. The cities of British America, like other cities around the world, were shared places where people came together.

If one looks more closely at the ways people moved through the cities, however, this sense of community begins to crumble. For some, the city represented boundless opportunities. A wealthy merchant or lawyer could saunter forth from his mansion and find comfortable seating in a number of locations—in the carriage he rode around town, in the pew he owned at church, in the upscale tavern where he met to debate philosophy, or perhaps even in the Assembly where he helped make decisions for the rest of the colony. A gentleman such as this could also find comfort at the local mercantile exchange, library, playhouse, or pleasure garden. A middle-class retailer or artisan would not usually have access to such luxury.

He might own a shop or a marketplace stall, and attend periodic meetings of the local Freemasons or fire company. If he accumulated enough wealth, he might strive to own a pew or a substantial dwelling. For others, the city was divided up into walls, locked doors, and restricted areas. A laboring person might wake up in a rented room of a modest dwelling, go to work at the docks or a cobbler's shop, knock back a dram of rum at a seedy grogshop, and perhaps find solace praying in the galleries of a wooden church on Sundays. When such people fell behind in payments or stole for sustenance, a workhouse or prison would limit their movements even more.

Women of any class never held seats of legislative or judicial power, and belonged to no tavern associations, but they still maintained a vigorous presence as buyers and sellers in the marketplace, patrons of fashion and culture, mistresses of the household, workers in and out of the home, and communicants at church. A black slave, or even a free black person, was more limited in the places where he or she could go, especially after dark—nevertheless, blacks saw much of the city as they used the side entrances of white-owned properties, gathered in illegal taverns known as “disorderly houses,” met for religious worship (often relegated to the worst seating in churches), worked or traded around the city, and slept in garrets and outbuildings.

James Hamilton, a governor of Pennsylvania, once claimed that “he formerly knew every person white & black men women, & children, in the City of Philadelphia, by name,” though by 1775 this was no longer the case.² Whether they were neighbors or strangers, city people interacted in meaningful ways. They met in back rooms and plotted political tactics. They cornered each other in taverns and debated the issues of the day. They heard politically charged sermons, and their prayers took on political significance. They confronted one other on the wharves and in the streets. The authorities placed restrictions on liberty and ordered executions, while masters had the power to grant freedom or send slaves out of town and away from their families. Even people's consumer choices came under scrutiny.³

Because they had such tight concentrations of people (see appendix 1) and such a pluralistic mixture of inhabitants and newcomers, the largest cities offered fertile ground for political consciousness, political persuasion, and political action. After 1763, Americans noticed that the British Empire was enforcing commercial regulations, enacting new taxes, challenging the power of provincial assemblies, limiting westward expansion, and establishing firmer secular and ecclesiastical authority over the colonies. As a result, American dissatisfaction with the empire erupted during the 1760s and 1770s, and Americans began to see the imperial government as an oppressor rather than a protector. Connected economically and politically, city dwellers had always depended on one another for their livelihoods. Now American city dwellers found that they depended on one

another for their independence as well. The cities' panoply of interdependent groups would need to work together to mobilize against the mother country.

The residents of the cities drew upon their turbulent history of charged political action, and they were the first to voice their discontent. In the cities, merchants began meeting to discuss the repercussions of new laws, printers fired off provocative pamphlets and newspaper articles, and protesters took to the streets. During the dozen years before the Declaration of Independence, city dwellers developed a political awareness of imperial proportions and organized to perform a series of political acts: mass meetings, petition signings, tea protests, boycotts, bonfires, and riots.⁴ Together with their rural neighbors, they formed coalitions in defense of their rights and interests. Through this process, Americans began to imagine themselves as an independent national community. Ultimately, many of them rebelled against Parliament and the Crown; yet the coalitions that organized for rebellion were also shaky. The electric political atmosphere gave city dwellers the opportunity not just to unite but also to negotiate their differences.

This heightened political awareness and the collaborative political action it inspired were most evident in the prerevolutionary cities. An exploration of political mobilization is crucial for understanding the key developments of the late colonial period and the nature of the colonists' resistance to Great Britain. *Mobilization* represents the difference between reading a fiery pamphlet and acting on it—the difference between a peaceful, orderly, obedient city and a city filled with active, organized groups attending tense meetings or engaging in violent acts. By focusing on some of the most cataclysmic events of the eighteenth century as they unfolded in the most dynamic places in Anglo-America, I argue in *Rebels Rising* that city dwellers coalesced into civic communities, defined the boundaries of their community, and contended with the challenges inherent in social and political change. Revolutionary mobilization contained within it new challenges to local authority, as well as the broader challenge to imperial authority. These various forms of urban mobilization during this period helped make the Revolution possible.⁵

Traditional studies of political mobilization during the Revolutionary era focus on rebellious action within colonial institutions and new, “extralegal” structures, such as the Sons of Liberty, committees of correspondence, or crowds.⁶ This book builds on these works by examining the ways in which city dwellers persuaded one another and cooperated with one another in a variety of everyday settings. The participants in revolutionary political mobilization required resolutions to questions of home rule and independence, as well as the questions of democratization and social change. Americans would not settle such contentious issues in just a pamphlet, in an assembly, in a meeting, or in a riot; they would have to search for answers by negotiating on many fronts at once. The cities were

crucial for the successful mobilization of a broad Patriot coalition; at the same time, the cities presented a complex and unpredictable setting for the formation of alliances.

Historians have noted instances of revolutionary mobilization in small towns, where life was simpler, where people knew their leaders and had long-standing relationships with one another. While rural villages and towns (where most Americans lived) were small enough to embody their residents' will, this was much more difficult in cities, where populations, politics, and alignments shifted constantly.⁷ The cities therefore provide the best laboratories for observing and understanding the nature of political mobilization during the American Revolution. The inhabitants of the American cities were more directly connected with the empire than other colonists, so for them the stakes were higher during the imperial crisis.

Only five cities in the thirteen rebellious colonies had more than 9,000 people by 1775, and each was the most important economic, political, and social hub in its province. These were Boston, Massachusetts; Newport, Rhode Island; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Charleston, South Carolina.⁸ During the eighteenth century, these cities had grown from small towns to flourishing commercial centers in just a few generations. The rapid progress of the cities was remarkable—Philadelphia had become the largest city in British America in less than a century. The cities owed their growth partly to physical advantages that encouraged trade: deep harbors, access to rivers, and robust hinterlands. They had developed specialized economic functions and crafts, and each had multiple taverns, public buildings, houses of worship, sophisticated entertainment, and intellectual opportunities. Their populations displayed a wide array of religious beliefs (and degrees of religious belief), ethnic and racial backgrounds, and social gradations. Urban associations and intercity alliances generated social capital that enabled the American cities to meet economic and political challenges such as war, depression, debt, taxation, and imperial unrest.⁹

While they had grown into vibrant, exciting metropolises in their own right, the American provincial cities were also part of a larger British imperial system. London remained the metropolis for every subject of the British Empire. Americans took their social and cultural cues from London, the pound sterling remained the ultimate source of specie, Parliament had the power to overturn their laws, and the colonists swore all oaths to the king. The American cities had a distinctive role as way stations of the British Empire, and they would also become the hubs of the revolutionary movement. Their role in the empire is crucial, therefore, for understanding the actions of city dwellers in the eighteenth century.

The cities were primarily important to the empire as centers of trade.¹⁰ Here it becomes difficult to generalize about the cities, since each meant different things to the British Empire, and each was subject to competition, slumps, and other economic factors. The American export trade relied

upon the cities: Boston built ships for trade and exported fish, potash, and whale oil; New York and Philadelphia sent wheat, flour, beef, and pork to the Caribbean and elsewhere; Newport was a key nexus for the trade of molasses, rum, and slaves; and Charleston exported rice and indigo to Great Britain. Of course, the rural countryside was crucial to the production of agricultural products, but the cities were the hubs of trade and transport. Not all of America's valuable exports needed cities—tobacco trading, for instance, was largely concentrated in Britain and had no American entrepôt of its own.

The largest cities' mills, tanneries, distilleries, and sugar refineries also helped process goods, while urban artisans produced goods for regional markets. In the realm of finance, underwriters and brokers allowed for more efficient deployment of capital. At the same time, transatlantic merchants in the American cities relied on credit from London or Liverpool, or were sometimes employees of British firms. In times of economic contraction, these credit relationships left the cities particularly vulnerable. If British merchants decided to call in their debts, such a decision could send waves of financial hardship through the cities, from American merchants down to the customers who were in turn indebted to them.

All of the cities also played a vital role in importing goods. Tea, textiles, wine, ceramics, glassware, metalware, and hundreds of other commodities washed ashore for urban consumption, for reexport to other towns, and for sale to the countryside. Though precise measurement is difficult, cities no doubt took in a disproportionate share of consumer goods. Each city teemed with wealthy customers engaging in a conspicuous, competitive display of consumption that reached downward toward the middle classes. The cities also keenly felt one of the great economic grievances of the pre-revolutionary decades—competition from British exporters who undersold American merchants. Under the Navigation Acts, some “enumerated” commodities could travel only between the colonies and England, while other goods freely traveled among American cities as part of the coastal trade, or to other parts of the world. At the same time, smugglers operated within shadowy commercial networks, bringing sugar from foreign ports or delivering tea to the various inlets and coves along the American coasts. Finally, the cities were significant places of exchange for the trade in laborers, indentured and enslaved as well as free.¹¹

Political power concentrated in the largest cities. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were not only the largest population centers in their respective colonies but also the seats of the governor, supreme judiciary, and legislature for these colonies. Some colonies, such as Rhode Island and New Jersey, had multiple (even competing) centers of government. In other colonies, such as Virginia and Maryland, other cities dwarfed the political power centers in size and economic importance. The inhabitants of commercial and administrative centers like Boston and Charleston came face to face with the constant reminder that they

belonged to an empire that governed them. Royally appointed governors, as well as customs officials from the Treasury, became familiar figures in these cities. Many city dwellers had close political connections to the British Empire, and substantial groups of them supported the king and Parliament during the imperial crisis. It would take a great deal of political mobilization for the city dwellers to decide to cut themselves loose from the empire.

These cities commanded spheres of cultural and economic influence that reached beyond colonial boundaries to take in entire slices of the Atlantic coast.¹² They pulled the empire together as centers of communication and transportation. As entrepôts for transatlantic shipping and coastal trade, as postal distribution points and travel hubs, their taverns and exchanges were conduits for written and oral communication of ideas, news, goods, and cultures from every direction of the compass. Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston all had multiple printers, who digested and distributed news from around the world to city dwellers and to the countryside. Religious denominations took advantage of cities, too—influential ministers often used large and wealthy urban congregations as a base of operations, and cities provided convenient places for Presbyterian Synods, Quaker Yearly Meetings, colleges, revival meetings, and the dissemination of printed sermons and tracts. Communities of faith also tapped these religious networks to exchange information, establish trade connections, facilitate migration, raise money, and advocate their shared interests. Other social and cultural networks, from the horse-racing circuit to the American Philosophical Society, engendered a shared language and identity, while also bringing people together for recreational pursuits, scientific inquiry, and the arts. Unsurprisingly, the seventeenth-century founders of the American settlements had believed that establishing cities would ensure that the colonies remained civilized.¹³

The colonial cities' military value was mixed. Military recruiters often found sailors (sometimes forcibly, a practice known as impressment) and soldiers in American cities. All the cities built fortifications (though they often neglected their upkeep), and in times of war or colonial unrest, Boston's Castle William or New York's Fort George might serve as barracks for British redcoats or headquarters for important military commanders. A stronghold overlooking the mouth of the Delaware or Hudson river, or guarding Massachusetts or Narragansett bay, or glowering southward and westward from the Carolina coast, provided the British Empire with some strategic advantage. Nevertheless, the British military presence was always stronger in the port towns of the Caribbean and the areas that became Canada. The warships of the Royal Navy found safe harbor in American cities and also found them to be fruitful targets for customs interdiction. Still, after midcentury, Halifax, Nova Scotia, was more important than any of the American cities for the outfitting and repair of warships.¹⁴

Given these realities, how did the imperial leaders in London regard the American cities? On the whole, British imperial leaders were able to take

the cities for granted. After all, the colonies were thousands of miles distant from London. Compared to the influence of provincial cities like Bristol and Liverpool on British politics, and compared to the economic importance of Caribbean sugar, Newfoundland fisheries, and Chesapeake tobacco, the colonial cities barely registered.¹⁵ Contemporary British officials generally did not think about these cities as distinct from the colonies, or from “America” as a whole. Still, during the imperial crisis, British leaders offered hints of their deep investment in the idea that American cities were inferior to the London metropolis. The British economist and clergyman Dr. Josiah Tucker imagined “Vice-Roys sent over from . . . Philadelphia, or New York, or at some other *American* imperial city” to rule over the British, and concluded, “The *English* would rather submit to a *French* yoke, than to an *American*; as being the lesser Indignity of the two.”¹⁶ The British found the cities useful as outposts of empire; at the same time, they expected their colonial inhabitants to demonstrate due obedience to Crown and Parliament.

From the eastern side of the Atlantic, the cities may have seemed insignificant, but in America the cities had a disproportionately large influence on the surrounding countryside. War, economic shifts, new legislation, and news from around the globe flowed into the urban seaports before they reached upriver to rural places. As a result, American cities became the first places to feel the effects of imperial policies. As another historian of the colonial cities argued half a century ago, these five cities played a crucial “preparatory” role in the coming of the Revolution, as population centers where leaders, crowds, and events conjoined. These cities were often the generators of revolutionary thought and action—they nurtured the Enlightenment in the New World, they helped unleash the dynamic forces of republicanism, they developed a burgeoning sense of American nationality, and they succeeded in spreading their views to the rural hinterlands.¹⁷ Later historians added the idea that the cities also sparked internal upheaval, including religious revivals, economic disorder, and class conflict.¹⁸ Whether we argue that the American Revolution was radical in its overthrow of British government or radical in its inflammation of internal struggle, the American cities were undeniably important as sites of radical change.¹⁹

This study takes as its starting point the 1740s, a decade of change and unrest across North America and the Atlantic world. Great Britain declared war on Spain in October 1739, the War of Jenkins’ Ear. The ensuing War of the Austrian Succession in Europe, known in North America as King George’s War, also brought the French and British into conflict from 1744 to 1748. The war devastated Boston, which sent many of its young men into combat. New York, however, grew fat off the profits of privateers, private vessels commissioned to prey upon enemy vessels. Philadelphia did not participate as much in musters or privateering, but during this period it swelled with new immigrants and prospered from its trade with the West

Indies. The cities matured and (except in the case of Boston) grew. As Americans grew wealthier, they began to demand a wider selection of consumer goods. Urban shops and warehouses filled with new merchandise.²⁰

Meanwhile, the leadership of Sir Robert Walpole in Parliament had ended in 1742. Walpole had permitted a colonial policy of what Edmund Burke would later call “salutary neglect,” largely allowing the American colonies to govern themselves. Under Lord Halifax, the Board of Trade in 1748 began working to establish regular transatlantic mail service to New York City. The board demanded that colonial laws conform to royal instructions, and it began cooking up ways to extract more revenue from the colonies. Such developments were ominous portents for the cities.²¹

Other events helped to make the 1740s a particularly turbulent decade for the cities. The influential itinerant preacher George Whitefield first toured the American seaports from 1739 to 1741, heralding the beginning of a wave of religious revivals. In 1740 a major fire swept through Charleston, destroying hundreds of buildings. In 1741 black New Yorkers burned Fort George and several other buildings in an alleged conspiracy that resulted in more than thirty executions. Philadelphia witnessed a contentious election riot in 1742. Major conflicts over the Royal Navy’s impressment of local seamen took place in Boston throughout the 1740s, culminating in three days of rioting in 1747. This event inspired Samuel Adams to begin writing for the radical *Independent Advertiser*, one of many newspapers that challenged the authority of government in the years following the celebrated 1735 trial of John Peter Zenger in New York.²²

During the Seven Years’ War (or French and Indian War), which began in North America in 1754, military contracts and wartime privateering brought prosperity to the cities, but the end of the conflict sank the seaports into a deep economic depression. British decisions surrounding the 1763 Treaty of Paris indicated that the security of the seacoast colonies was the empire’s first priority. British statesmen believed Benjamin Franklin’s assurances that the colonies would not develop their own manufacturing, and his confidence that the fractious colonies could never unite against the mother country. Ironically, although Great Britain had articulated its war aims with the continental American colonies in mind, its subsequent decisions appeared to take the colonists’ dependence on the empire for granted. Imperial policy following the Seven Years’ War made life harder for the seacoast cities, as well as for Americans who hoped to move west following the removal of the French threat.²³

The Seven Years’ War, while bathing Great Britain in military glory, had saddled the British Empire with crippling debts and massive troop commitments in the trans-Appalachian West. Parliament therefore began to enforce existing customs duties and to levy new duties on colonial traders to pay for the conflict and the postwar settlement. In trying to earn a return on its investment in the American colonies, Parliament made itself deeply unpopular in America. These new laws concerning trade and navigation,

when coupled with the depression that followed the war, struck the cities' inhabitants as a particular hardship, as did naval impressment and the quartering of peacetime garrisons in American cities. The colonists, with their fiercely independent legislatures and proud dissenting traditions, were dismayed to find that Parliament was no longer willing to treat them with the "salutary neglect" that they had enjoyed for most of the eighteenth century. Americans began to fear for their pocketbooks, their liberties, and their lives.

The imperial crisis unfolded in a series of actions and reactions, which are best understood as three periods of controversy: the Stamp Act crisis, the Townshend Acts crisis, and the crisis surrounding the Tea Act and Intolerable Acts. Each crisis forced city dwellers to confront difficult choices that would determine their own fate and that of the world beyond.²⁴

Three acts in 1764 and 1765, coupled with more rigid customs enforcement, spawned the first crisis. The Sugar Act altered the restrictions and duties on foreign rum and molasses and mandated more rigorous procedures for the customs service. The Currency Act prohibited colonial issues of paper money. The Stamp Act levied taxes on court documents (including attorneys' licenses), ship clearances, college degrees, land deeds and land grants, mortgages and leases, contracts, bonds, articles of apprenticeship and appointment to public office, liquor licenses, playing cards and dice, pamphlets, newspapers, advertisements, and almanacs. All such items required stamped paper, which the Treasury Office would distribute through its appointees in the colonies. These new laws particularly affected urban Americans, including merchants, brokers, mariners, distillers, lawyers, taverngoers, newspaper printers, and local officials. In 1766, Parliament repealed the Stamp Act, while also passing a Declaratory Act that affirmed Parliament's right to legislate for the colonies "in all Cases whatsoever." Finally, the Revenue Act of 1766 included further restrictions on the trade of sugar and other commodities, designed to help British merchants and manufacturers, as well as West Indian planters, at the expense of American merchants and consumers.

Charles Townshend, as chancellor of the exchequer, initiated the second crisis with a series of new laws in 1767. A new Revenue Act levied duties on paper, lead, painters' colors, glass, and tea. In addition, Parliament expanded the power of the vice-admiralty courts in America and created an American Board of Customs Commissioners, which took up its headquarters in Boston in November 1767. Colonial assemblies began urging a united stand against Townshend's program, and in the meantime legislatures in New York and South Carolina clashed with Parliament over the quartering of troops and the use of provincial funds. The presence of troops in Boston and New York ultimately led to violence in 1770, the same year that Parliament repealed all the Townshend duties except one.

This remaining duty ultimately precipitated the final crisis that led to the American Revolution. The Tea Act of 1773 reaffirmed the tax on tea

while giving significant commercial advantages to the monopolistic (and nearly bankrupt) East India Company. By effectively lowering the price of tea, the new law threatened to seduce Americans into paying the duty. Tea ships sailed for Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston, and in each city, the inhabitants destroyed the tea, turned back the ships, or stored the tea unsold.

An outraged British ministry passed a series of acts in Parliament “for reestablishment of lawful authority” in Massachusetts, which the colonists called the “Intolerable Acts” of 1774. The Boston Port Act closed the city’s harbor beginning June 1. The Massachusetts Government Act amended the colony’s charter, giving the king greater powers to appoint several types of officials. The Administration of Justice Act allowed royal officials to stand trial outside of Massachusetts if accused of certain crimes. The Quartering Act, which applied to all the colonies, allowed governors to demand quarters for soldiers in uninhabited buildings. Though Parliament had aimed most of these acts at Massachusetts, colonists throughout North America saw them as dangerous precedents for the subversion of constitutional rights and liberties. Bostonians became martyrs suffering for the cause of all America. Americans sent aid to the blockaded city, and twelve colonies sent delegates to the first Continental Congress at Philadelphia in September 1774. These delegates proclaimed the Intolerable Acts unconstitutional and called for a boycott of British goods.

The objections, meetings, and disturbances that followed these imperial actions became impossible to ignore. During the years leading up to the Revolution, the mobilization of people from all social ranks was particularly intense in the urban centers. Because these populous polities were the loci of economic activity and government, they sharply felt the effects of imperial policies. As enforcement of the Navigation Acts and Quartering Acts became vital to the British Empire, American cities increasingly became the headquarters of the customs officials, vice-admiralty judges, naval and military officers, and governors who tried to ensure that city dwellers complied with imperial policies.

The cities also became the flashpoints for legislative protests, committee meetings, massive outdoor gatherings, intercolonial collaboration, newspaper harangues, boycotts, customs evasion, military-civilian violence, and riots. As centers for communication and social life, the cities were the hubs for the transmission of information and recruitment during times of crisis. Eighteenth-century urban political culture flowed through multiple avenues of communication, association, and social interaction—everything from the press to the streets, taverns, and churches.²⁵ The cities provided places for people to interact, and the imperial crisis accelerated such interactions and stimulated a variety of revolutionary transformations.²⁶ Americans faced choices about their identity, loyalty, and course of action, and they made their decisions about the revolutionary conflict in an environment of circulating ideas, arguments, and beliefs.

This environment was what scholars of architectural history call the “cultural landscape.” City dwellers acted and moved within and among this cultural landscape: the cities’ buildings, the spaces between them, and the material objects within them. City dwellers had helped to create, define, and explain their physical surroundings, based on their cultural backgrounds, values, and metaphors. The urban landscape hosted formal, ordinary activities such as court proceedings, ceremonies, and economic exchange, as well as informal or unexpected activities such as riots, smuggling, or clandestine meetings. In addition, city dwellers’ use of certain spatial metaphors also revealed their political mindset, such as calling the empire a household. As British policies threatened to transform the cities, Americans’ expressions and actions reflected their choices and anxieties. The Revolution changed Americans’ understanding of their urban landscapes and the cities’ relationship to the Atlantic system.²⁷

The urban landscape helped to set the parameters of political mobilization and social change. While John Adams famously said, “the revolution was in the minds and hearts of the people,” it is also correct to say that the Revolution took root in Americans’ homes, streets, and public buildings.²⁸ As American city dwellers began to participate in politics on a broad scale, they developed a new brand of political culture. Although they had incongruent, even conflicting goals and motivations, they needed to achieve some degree of common ground in order to launch a large-scale rebellion. The dynamic commercial centers gave people the opportunity to discuss their common purposes and negotiate their disparate interests.

The cities offered several challenges to would-be revolutionaries. First, they needed to wade through the pluralistic urban environment and overcome any tendencies toward a civic impasse. Second, social unrest forced city dwellers to define the limits of mobilization. Third, rebels clashed directly with government countermobilization. Fourth, the cities would have to communicate with one another and with the rural hinterlands. The revolutionaries’ attempts to overcome these challenges highlight the cities’ significance for the study of political mobilization.

As their first challenge, revolutionaries needed to enlist the cooperation of the diverse range of groups that made up the pluralistic cities. City dwellers in the eighteenth century were not physically separated from one another. Residential clustering by religion or ethnicity was insignificant. Clustering by wealth became more common by the end of the eighteenth century, while clustering by occupation seems to have been the strongest trend. Cities offered increased economic opportunity and economic mobility to their inhabitants, even as the yawning disparity between the wealthy and the poor also stimulated envy and resentment. A mixture of races and ethnicities fostered assimilation and cultural exchange, as well as conflict and repression. The presence of different religions encouraged pluralism and tolerance, as well as more strident delineations of doctrinal differences. Diversity provided city dwellers with

a degree of flexibility and freedom, while forcing them to articulate their differences or negotiate a common ground.²⁹

A civic impasse might also result, however, from suspicion, disagreement, or apathy among Americans. Radicals emerge in societies all the time, after all, and in many cases (when authorities do not stamp out such radicalism immediately), the complacent majority will laugh or brush them off, and go about their business. Even when the threat to a person's livelihood or liberty is real, he or she may not feel willing or able to risk joining, or identifying with, a political coalition. City dwellers had to learn new forms of behavior to overcome their inactivity and their differences, and mobilize in support of a new and radical political movement.

City dwellers had to invent their own mechanisms of political mobilization, since Great Britain had established no institutions in the colonies for making decisions or resolving conflicts, and colonists had no legal means other than petitions (indirectly through London interest groups, or directly through their agents) to influence the British government—and the influence of these appeals was declining.³⁰ Such petitions illustrated the bonds of dependence within the larger empire, but the cities had their own internal networks of dependence as well, and they turned these networks into tools of mobilization. The notion of dependence often connoted inferiority, as when city dwellers were employees or debtors, apprentices or slaves, women or children, political clients, devotees of God, or deferential to their social betters.³¹ Yet city dwellers depended on one another in so many ways that “interdependence” is a better word for characterizing urban life. As they grew, the largest North American cities developed a sense of interdependence: civic consciousness, civic responsibility, and civic power. When threats arose, revolutionaries could harness this civic awareness in the service of resistance and revolt.³²

Colonial urban Americans came to have a distinct sense of the public good and began to recognize the value of communal action. People from all ranks could embody this communal spirit: “city fathers” in positions of social, economic, and political power; “middling” organizations such as fire companies, militia companies, or benevolent associations; and the “lower sort” in the form of crowd action. In this book I will show how a civic consciousness developed among Boston's waterfront community, New York taverngoers, Newport congregations, Charleston's elite patriarchy, and the gatherings in Philadelphia's State House Yard. Certainly, urban coalitions were often fragile or fleeting. Nevertheless, the development of such alliances for the public good, in accordance with republican principles, contributed to Americans' sustained resistance to Great Britain. These interactions helped to overcome the turgid inactivity of civic impasse.³³

The formation of consensus was not always easy, and the civic community rarely acted as an organic whole. As city dwellers mobilized against the British, they faced a second challenge when they found their coalitions unstable and subject to various forms of dissent. Women, antislavery advo-

cates, white mechanics, blacks, seamen, and other groups separately (and sometimes jointly) spoke and acted with regard to the social inequalities they faced or specific social grievances. These grievances occasionally threatened to undermine and distract the Patriot coalition from its central goal, which was the overturning of offensive imperial policies and (ultimately) rebellion. When crowds mobilized against local offenders, committing property damage and violence, elite leaders tended to reject these mobilization tactics. As these Whig leaders tried to maintain control, urbanites on the margins of established society were attempting to expand the boundaries of the polity and test the limits of Patriot mobilization. By definition, revolution involved the contestation and the destabilization of the civic world.³⁴

Since society regarded these marginal groups as being outside the political sphere, laws and customs often prohibited them (legally or socially) from moving on an equal footing through the buildings that established citizens constructed. Slaves could not bear arms or testify in court, nor could they gather in public without their masters' permission. Women, non-whites, and the poorest of white men could not vote or hold office. Members of minority religious sects were sometimes forced to pay taxes to an established church they did not recognize. Nevertheless, many of these socially and politically disenfranchised people agitated in their own ways—it would be misleading to say that these marginal groups had no access to the political sphere, or that they slavishly relied upon their social betters for such access. Many city dwellers moved through an alternative “shadow landscape,” one that included not just formal buildings, but “the spaces and interstices within and between buildings.”³⁵ Such groups challenged the political establishment from the margins, using the means at their disposal—participation in open town meetings, writing petitions or publishing polemics, and crowd action. If they were not refined enough to argue with gentlemen in the cities' finest taverns, they voiced grievances and made plans in dramshops or illegal watering holes. Sailors and vagabonds may not have been welcome in the countinghouses that ruled the waterfront, but they thrived in the transitional zone amidst the docks and wharves. Many marginal city dwellers searched for salvation at the fringes of spiritual life, when they found that existing congregations did not meet their needs. These groups held out hope that equality before God might translate into political equality. When members of the shadow landscape found themselves excluded from the politics of the courthouse and statehouse, they took to the streets outside them.³⁶

In the shadow landscape, city dwellers could escape from traditional mores and hierarchies. They could form alternative communities. They could express their grievances and even undertake social revolution. They challenged prevailing notions of patriarchy and hierarchy, and voiced controversial views about the social, economic, and political order. To be sure, women and non-whites had restricted access to urban networks of sociability

and communication, and white men had a definite interest in keeping those restrictions in place. At the same time, the propertied white men who led the legislatures, tavern companies, meetinghouses and countinghouses often showed an intense interest in recruiting the assistance of women, slaves, poor men, and other peripheral groups. The Patriot leaders who were the most skillful at mobilizing ordinary city dwellers mingled in the shadow landscape and participated in ritualized associational life, revelry and leisure, riots and parades. They walked among their fellow city dwellers on the waterfront, in the taverns, and in the streets. Rich men and politicians often supported crowd actions when it served their purposes, even the tarring and feathering of Loyalists, or did little to prevent such actions. Continent-wide boycotts of British goods, and the spinning of homespun clothing, required the assistance of women and lower-class consumers. Rich and poor, black and white might share in religious revivals or the banishment of British troops and customs officials. Thus, elite and ordinary city dwellers shared in the burdens of political mobilization, with a key difference: society did not permit women and non-whites to take advantage of the prestige, the notions of brotherhood, the sense of voluntary civic duty that so distinguished institutions such as the legislature or the Sons of Liberty.³⁷

The revolutionary movement was therefore both inclusive and exclusive. Mobilizing groups pushed at and expanded the boundaries of social and political inclusion, but Patriots did not (and could not) entirely discard the concept of limits and boundaries. In the process of revolution and social transformation, Americans constructed a new social order with new structures and limits.³⁸ Poorer and middling white men ultimately gained inclusion in the civic community and enjoyed greater participation in society and politics. At the same time, the propertied white men who led the Revolution were largely content to leave certain segments of society in the shadows. In some cases, preconceived notions of wealth and status determined the limits of the Revolution; in more fundamental ways, race and gender imposed severe constraints, and some marginal groups remained excluded from social and political life after the Revolution ended. Still, their actions sounded revolutionary refrains amid the wider urban din of the Revolutionary era.

Rebellious Whigs faced another type of significant opposition. Supporters of the Crown did their best to counteract Patriot mobilization, which presented a third challenge to revolutionaries. The largest cities all had high concentrations of Loyalists or Tories, dedicated to maintaining the empire's existence rather than joining the resistance. Friends of government, like rebellious Americans, used many of the available mechanisms of mobilization. These groups engaged in countermobilization, disseminating their own opinions on and interpretations of events, positing their own arguments in taverns, listening to very different sermons in church, and maintaining their own definitions of authority on the waterfront and in the

assemblies. Still, supporters of imperial government faced significant difficulties in their attempts at countermobilization. The source of their authority was three thousand miles away, which weakened their ability to exercise their power effectively. Government officials in the colonies and their allies in the legislature (when they had any) could wield some influence over city dwellers, but imperial power often stretched no further than this. Parliament could send British officers and troops to protect state interests, but use of the army and navy as tools of peacetime control tended to backfire. Anglican ministers and laypeople sometimes acted as staunch allies—but here, too, the British found that a person weighed his or her religious identity against other factors.³⁹

Some historians argue that most Americans' interests and identity had become too far divorced from the interests and identity of the mother country, so Loyalist mobilization was doomed from the start.⁴⁰ Other scholars argue that friends of government were less successful at mobilization than the rebels because Patriot ideology was more coherent and appealing than Loyalist ideology.⁴¹ Indeed, many Loyalists were archconservatives with a firm belief in social hierarchy, who generally disdained politics in waterfront taverns or out of doors, and engaged in it half-heartedly, if at all. In practice, this limited the Loyalists' ability to mobilize city dwellers effectively. Focusing primarily on how Patriot persuasion worked, I suggest that the contours of urban life also helped to shape the reasons that Whig mobilization was ultimately more effective than government countermobilization. On the waterfront, in taverns, in churches, in households, in the streets, and in meeting places, the British and their supporters constantly found themselves outmatched. In the end, the friends of government were unable to enjoy the same success that urban Whigs had at disseminating their opinions, persuading their neighbors, and establishing unity.

The final challenge arose as revolutionaries attempted to spread civic awareness inland and unify Americans throughout the continent. Urban centers played a vital role as nodes of communication, and catalysts of political mobilization did their best to take advantage of the existing networks that linked these cities to one another, to London, and to the rural hinterlands. Personal correspondence and travelers facilitated the transmission of ideas and identity from urban centers, while printed material helped to spread the cause to local communities. Newspapers and pamphlets, "The general source throughout the nation, / Of every modern conversation," transmitted the facts and inflammatory fictions of the Stamp Act controversy or the Boston Massacre and disseminated the opinions of influential writers to the population. One printer, singing the praises of newspapers, wrote that his readers belonged to "that Aggregate called the Town, or the World, or the People." In this way, newspapers helped bring individuals, or as the printer put it, "Atoms," together. Such "aggregates" helped create a shared identity among North Americans living at a great distance from one another. At times, rural people—tenants, backcountry

farmers, or debtors—saw urban merchants and politicians working against their interests. Yet if urban Patriot leaders could convince rural residents that they shared a common danger—and therefore a common interest—with each other and with more cosmopolitan communities, the Revolution would become a national cause.⁴²

While each of the Anglo-American cities had its peculiar characteristics, unique characters, and distinctive challenges, they had in common an interconnected landscape of layered geographies that was ripe for political mobilization. These urban spaces included the waterfront, taverns, houses of worship, households, and statehouses, as well as the streets that snaked among the buildings. As city dwellers moved among these urban spaces, they could draw upon a wide array of networks for cooperation and mobilization. In this book, each chapter focuses on one of these spaces and explores one city as a case study.

The waterfront was the beating heart of urban commerce. More than any other part of the city, the docks and wharves exemplified the dynamism of the cities, as visitors and migrants came and went, as seamen rolled in and out of port, and as merchants extended their capital throughout the Atlantic world. Because of their close connections with Atlantic commerce, the denizens of the waterfront community were usually the first to feel the effects of imperial policies. From Charleston, South Carolina, to Falmouth down east (in what is now Maine), merchants, shipbuilders, and seamen stood at the forefront of resistance to Great Britain.

The first chapter focuses on the imperial conflict as it unfolded in the maritime and commercial spaces of Boston. No city could be more appropriate for opening a discussion of the imperial conflict. Boston was the name that plagued imperial officials throughout the late colonial period, with its raucous rap sheet of crowd actions—the Knowles Riot of 1747, the Stamp Act riots of 1765, the *Liberty* riot of 1768, the Boston Massacre of 1770, and the Boston Tea Party of 1773. British authorities repeatedly tried to assert control over Boston's waterfront community, and each time, the community mobilized in response to impressment, customs duties, and other impositions of imperial authority. Five times the Bostonians banished imperial officials, soldiers, and other pariahs to Castle Island in the harbor. The central significance of the Boston waterfront had crystallized by 1774, when Parliament singled the city out for punishment. In response, donations poured in from around North America to ameliorate the harsh effects of the Boston Port Act. Rural communities throughout Massachusetts and beyond were inspired to resist the Coercive Acts. Boston's conspicuous (and early) leadership among the waterfront communities of North America warrants special attention because its actions demonstrated how mobilization could unify city dwellers from throughout the social spectrum and across the continent.

When city dwellers wanted a break from the bustle of commercial and maritime life, they often collected together in taverns to eat and drink, converse, exchange news and information, and debate politics. During the

imperial crisis, taverns or public houses brought together a cross-class political network that would be necessary for the coherence of a revolutionary alliance.⁴³ Voluntary societies, which flourished in eighteenth-century cities, functioned as mechanisms of urban mobilization, often gathering in taverns. Local groups could translate their sense of shared interests and civic responsibility into the first stirrings of nationalism.⁴⁴ City dwellers (particularly men) gained a sense of community belonging and became actively involved in the local civic life of fire companies, tavern clubs, fraternal orders, and militia companies. Americans demonstrated during these years that they were a “nation of joiners.” Commerce and sociability became new reasons for city dwellers to transcend distinctions of age, ethnicity, religion, and occupation. These groups tapped into networks of intercolonial communication and gathered in popular sites of sociability. As a result, they provided templates for the merchants’ committees, Sons of Liberty, and committees of correspondence—and thereby helped to bolster intercolonial resistance to Great Britain.⁴⁵

New York City, the case study of the book’s second chapter, stood at the pinnacle of alcohol consumption, communication, and sociability in the American colonies. The city functioned as the terminus for official packet boats sending mail from England, and so its taverns benefited from the fastest news.⁴⁶ Furthermore, New York’s taverns and grogshops frequently played host to British officers, troops, and sailors, bringing Whigs and friends of government face to face. Even as clubs and associations, laws and polite hierarchies were in place to maintain an orderly tavern setting, rebels and other dissenters often capitalized on the entropic, drunken atmosphere of taverns to create societal disorder and political upheaval. In the complex world of New York politics, whichever faction could organize and rally tavern companies would have the greatest success at mobilizing the populace.

The churches, meetinghouses, and synagogues where colonial Americans participated in religious life could be a source of political mobilization or a source of civic impasse. In some parts of America, revolutionaries were able to harness houses of worship for political mobilization. Bostonians were relatively homogenous in their religious belief, and their clergymen historically equated the Church of England with tyrannical authority. The Bay Town’s Congregationalist ministers effectively politicized the pulpit during the imperial crisis and formed a network of Patriot preachers that Loyalist Peter Oliver called the “Black Regiment.”⁴⁷ In other cities, the diversity of religious belief posed particular difficulties for Patriots attempting to build a political coalition. In Philadelphia, Quakers and Presbyterians hurled invective at one another during the controversies of the 1760s. In New York, conflict between Anglican and Presbyterian factions frustrated attempts to build unity among Whigs.⁴⁸ In this way the religious landscape sometimes fractured city dwellers rather than uniting them.

The third chapter discusses political mobilization in this religious landscape. Newport is an interesting case study because the political allegiances

of many city dwellers drew upon the prevailing New England denominational conflicts that were so evident in Boston *and* because the religious diversity of Newport's residents fostered a pluralistic political climate resembling that of the middle colonies. The city was a particularly important gathering place for Baptists, Quakers, and Jews, and it had influential populations of Anglicans and Congregationalists.⁴⁹ Amidst the acceptance and flexibility that characterized a cosmopolitan city with Enlightenment ideals, this religious diversity also caused suspicion and contention in Newport, which created a civic impasse that frustrated political mobilization. In addition, the urban setting provided fertile ground for religious revivals among women and blacks. While the attendant social agitation (especially against slavery) failed to create lasting revolutionary transformation, such revivals nevertheless had a significant impact on public life. The pluralistic mixture of American cities shaped the characteristics of urban political mobilization, both in the established cultural landscape and in the shadow landscape.

Households were the individual units that made up the urban body politic. Each household was a microcosm of the city, playing out political mobilization and its attendant conflicts in an endless variety. Because these houses were crowded together in the city, residents depended on their neighbors. Eighteenth-century Americans had not yet developed the notions of privacy that became more common in the nineteenth century. The realms of family, market, coffeehouse, clubs, and court did not neatly separate into public and private spheres. In the era of the imperial crisis, business and family concerns had repercussions that were as public as discussions in taverns, churches, courthouses, and assemblies.⁵⁰ Colonial laws governed relationships between masters and servants, as well as men and women, and neighbors had countless opportunities to observe these relationships. When city dwellers purchased consumer goods, their decisions had wider effects on the economy and (during the intercolonial boycotts) carried political meaning as well. Urban households, and the politicized relations among these households, are the subjects of the fourth chapter.⁵¹

Urban townhouses framed many important aspects of urban life, including consumption, gender and race relations, and paternal authority. In Boston or Philadelphia or Charleston, the wealthiest merchants and landowners sat atop the pyramid of colonial patriarchal society, and they built grand houses that bespoke their mastery and refinement. These plush Georgian mansions sat alongside the more austere townhouses of their neighbors, where increasing numbers of middling city dwellers nonetheless had the means to participate in the consumer economy and fill their homes with imported British goods. During the imperial crisis, American spending habits came under fire from Patriots seeking to boycott imported goods. Women had important voices in matters of spending, and Patriot men needed the support and assent of their wives and female relatives. Wealthy elite masters also had to worry about maintaining social control over their neighbors, their servants, and slaves, and they clung to tradi-

tional notions of patriarchal regulation to keep their houses and cities in order. Elite city dwellers also found it difficult to maintain rigid, patriarchal domination when rioters might bring pressure to bear on upper-class neighbors who supported obnoxious British policies, when slaves might revolt or run away, and when women asserted their decision-making power. The imperial crisis caused social unrest that gave the urban gentry several reasons to feel less than secure about their households.

In all these matters of domestic life, Charleston was the quintessential example. There the level of wealth, luxury, Anglicization, and high fashion astounded visitors.⁵² In Charleston, patriarchy was particularly central to the culture of Lowcountry planters.⁵³ As the largest port of entry for persons of African descent, the city had the largest colonial populations of slaves and free blacks.⁵⁴ Like members of the elite in other cities, Charleston's elite patriarchs had reasons to be suspicious of urban crowds, fearful of their slaves interacting with free blacks in the cities, and anxious that luxury goods from Great Britain would corrupt them. As the revolutionary movement spread, Charlestonians negotiated with one another about the proper arrangement of their households and the appropriate limits of mobilization.

In most of the thirteen colonies, the assembly house became a rallying point for official or semiofficial resistance to British policies. Legislative houses like the Virginia House of Burgesses were notorious in their defiance. At the same time, the legislatures and courthouses were responsible for governing the colonies—some in an aristocratic, authoritarian fashion and others with more democratic responsiveness. In Charleston, for instance, the political elite were so united and so dominant in South Carolina politics that they were able to maintain power while ignoring the will of the electorate. Rhode Island and Massachusetts had more responsive provincial and local governments, and so the people of Boston and Newport were generally able to make their opinions heard in the assemblies and town meetings. New Yorkers and Philadelphians, however, experienced a sharp disjuncture between popular demands and legislative response.⁵⁵

Philadelphia is the case study for the fifth chapter because of the famous political meetings that occurred inside the State House (now known as Independence Hall), as well as the dramatic mobilization of Philadelphians "out of doors." This chapter examines the various types of political activity that took place outside the Court House and the town meetings in the State House Yard. During the decade that preceded the Revolution, groups outside the political elite increasingly began mobilizing just outside the halls of power. By 1774, these outdoor gatherings had cleared the way for the meetings of the Continental Congress at Carpenter's Hall and the State House that ordained Philadelphia the capital of the American Revolution.

These five cityscapes exemplify the processes of mobilization that took place throughout urban America and beyond in the years preceding the Revolutionary War. This book's epilogue shows how things changed, however, during the war years. British military occupation immobilized urban politics,

posing a challenge to the rebels that was much more difficult to surmount. While government countermobilization may have been ineffective, George III ultimately attempted to resolve the imperial crisis by sending thousands of troops to the colonies. In doing so, the British were able to smother Patriot political activity in the cities they occupied. In 1774, General Thomas Gage, commander of the king's forces in America, succeeded Thomas Hutchinson as governor of Massachusetts, supported by an occupying British force. Gage attempted to enforce the Intolerable Acts, the most extreme measures of countermobilization Parliament had yet devised, by appointing sympathetic judges and suspending town meetings. Gage moved to seize local stores of arms, powder, and ammunition, and New England rebels gathered to meet him each time. On April 19, 1775, British redcoats exchanged fire with Americans at Lexington and Concord, and within days, militia from all over New England converged on Boston to besiege Gage and his men.

During the subsequent eight-year War of American Independence, all five of the largest American cities played host to major military engagements. As the British armed forces descended on American shores, they found they needed the cities to prosecute the war against the rebellious colonists. The cities had deep harbors, they were commercial centers that could supply the ships, they could provide winter quarters for troops, and they still served as excellent nodes of communication. Furthermore, the British hoped to rely on the cities' Loyalist populations and use the cities as footholds for reestablishing civil government. Thus, from the American standpoint, the very physical characteristics that rendered the cities ideal for political mobilization also made them vulnerable to British occupation or even naval bombardment and destruction. As each of the five cities in this study became untenable as sites of political mobilization, Patriot sympathizers abandoned them for the countryside. The Revolutionary War disrupted the cities' economic functions and displaced the rebellious politicians who had been such a vital force over the previous decade. As a result, the war period witnessed the immobilization of all five of Anglo-America's largest cities, and the movement of administrative, military, and economic management inland, out of the reach of the British navy. The cities had no choice but to capitulate to occupying forces—residents took oaths of loyalty to the Crown and survived by supplying the British army.

This ignominious wartime history has motivated many Americans to gloss over the cities' significance during the prerevolutionary and revolutionary years. No wonder George Washington and Thomas Jefferson privileged farmers over the fractious inhabitants of the sinful urban centers. No wonder they ultimately chose a remote riverbank rather than an established metropolis as the site of the new nation's capital. Although the cities of the United States retained their importance as centers of commerce and manufacturing, it was uncertain whether they would ever again play so crucial a role in political mobilization and the advancement of democratic ideas and practices.