

1.

Minutemen

One of the dramatic developments of the 1990s was the emergence of self-styled militias training for guerrilla war against the federal government. Proudly patriotic, these organizations presented themselves as the true guardians of Jeffersonian values, as heirs to the Revolution's minutemen. It was hard to judge the extent or depth of the movement, but some of the literature it relied on was an apparent inspiration to **Timothy McVeigh** when he blew up a federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people. His action echoed, in fact, an event in **William Pierce's** 1978 book, *The Turner Diaries*, which imagines a war on government beginning with a fertilizer bomb that destroys a federal building.¹

It may seem absurd for small bands of men to think they can defy a federal government they describe as vast in its power and ruthless in the use of it. But the militias drew on a claim that was routinely accepted in circles less extreme than their own. The Vietcong, they argue, defied the same United States government and bested it by guerrilla "insurgency."² This is an analogy that **Wayne LaPierre**, at the time the executive vice president of the National Rifle Association, used in order to argue that gun owners in general could successfully defeat tyrannical measures taken by the government.³

The view that the Vietcong prevailed by guerrilla tactics is a belief widespread but fallacious. The conclusions drawn from a panel of military and academic experts have been amply confirmed in later studies: "The North Vietnamese finally won by purely conventional means. . . . In their lengthy battle accounts that followed Hanoi's great military victory, Generals [Vo Nguyen] Giap and [Van Tien] Dung barely mentioned the contri-

bution of local forces."⁴ But surprisingly large numbers of people have been tempted, in recent decades, to believe in an almost magic power of "people's war" to prevail against the odds. Colonial populations hoped they could launch revolutions "on the cheap."⁵ And their opponents hoped that "counterinsurgency" could also be scaled to smaller challenges. John Kennedy, recoiling from the Eisenhower era's doctrine of "massive retaliation," turned to "flexible response," relying on covert action, "psywar," and Green Beret derring-do.⁶ It was the era of small-time operators promising big results, of spooks like John Paul Vann and Edward Lansdale. (Lansdale tried to psych out the enemies in Vietnam by tampering with their astrological predictions.)⁷ The militias of the 1990s were inheritors of such illusion.

Renewed interest in the tactics of limited war led some people to recast our history in terms of the fad. Even some professional historians yielded to the rhetorical elation of the period. The military historian ~~Don Higginbotham~~ confessed that he had exaggerated the importance of militias to the Revolution when he succumbed to the excitement of the 1960s, responding to a timely "preoccupation with irregular war."⁸ During the bicentennial celebrations of the seventies, ~~William Casey~~, the future head of the Central Intelligence Agency, toured Revolutionary battlefields and wrote a book that said our forebears won the Revolution, just as the Vietnamese won their struggle, "by irregular, partisan, guerrilla warfare."⁹ The misreading of the one war prompted a misreading of the other, and indicates why Casey, when he became the head of the CIA, thought that Oliver North was an appropriate sponsor of guerrilla Contras in Nicaragua. In the early 1960s, ~~John Galvin~~, who would serve in Vietnam before becoming the commanding general of NATO, wrote *The Minute Men*, describing the Revolutionary minutemen as an elite rapid response team, just what the Pentagon was dreaming of.¹⁰

Vietnam-era romanticizing of militias served the 1990s extremists well. No matter how nutty the latter might seem, they had legitimate forebears in our history. Some of the groups even called themselves minutemen. NRA publicist Tanya Metaksa met with militiamen. Congressional officeholders and candidates defended them. Respected law professors argued that the Second Amendment had authorized a "genuine" militia, not the tame National Guard that swears allegiance to the federal government.

But Gary Hart, the former senator, argues in his 1998 book, *The Minuteman*, that the National Guard could be trained to become "citizen guerillas" for our time.¹¹ The glorification of militias reached such a pitch that Akhil Reed Amar, Southmayd Professor at the Yale Law School, collaborated with a journalist on a book proclaiming that the right to serve in a militia was one of the three most fundamental guarantors of constitutional freedoms.¹² This is not far from Charlton Heston's statement, on behalf of the NRA, that the Second Amendment is the most important part of the Constitution, since it equips people to defend all their other rights with guns.¹³

Even some who do not agree with Heston's assessment of the Second Amendment are willing to accept a rosy depiction of the colonial and Revolutionary militias. They represent, for most of us, a high ideal of citizen response to threats against our liberty. We honor Daniel Chester French's statue *The Minute Man* at Concord's battlefield in Massachusetts. The rallying of other towns to the defense of Lexington was a great moment in American history. But before we get too carried away by the cult of the militias, we should reflect on claims for them that cannot stand a close inquiry.

One of the principal boasts of the militias' admirers is that they exhibited a democratic inclusiveness. Every free white male of military age had to serve, regardless of class or social standing. That was rarely the case in colonial times. There were many exemptions—for conscientious objectors (Pennsylvania had no pre-Revolution militia because of its Quaker population), attendance at college, engagement in important business. The socially prominent could usually avoid service if they wanted to, often by paying others to go in their place. (If the militias were truly universal, there would be no "spare" men to be paid for joining.) The military historian John Shy notes that John Adams, just the right age to take up a musket in the French and Indian War of 1756–63 (when all men were supposed to be in the militias), never even considered doing so.¹⁴

But there is an even more sweeping fact that made universal service impossible throughout the colonies. There was a drastic shortage of guns. This goes against everything we have assumed about our pioneer forebears—that they vindicated their own liberties with their own arms. But there is overwhelming evidence that a majority of males did not own us-

able guns. The colonies repeatedly legislated that all men should get or be given guns, and just as repeatedly complained that this had not been accomplished. In the French and Indian War, a contingent of two hundred Virginia militiamen went to the front bearing only eighty muskets, and British officers in Massachusetts, amazed that so few colonials possessed muskets, were even more surprised to find that many had not even fired one.¹⁵ At Lexington and Concord, the opening battles of the Revolution, despite the fact that the Massachusetts militia had spent months desperately trying to arm itself, some contingents showed up at the front unarmed.¹⁶ A captain of the New Hampshire militia reported in 1775 that "not one-half our men have arms," and a militia officer in Virginia said that he had a stand of a thousand guns, but that none of them worked.¹⁷ The New York Committee of Safety refused to send troops to the field because "they have no arms."¹⁸ Thomas Jefferson, Virginia's governor, had to defend his state's militia when, lacking guns, it stole a consignment purchased by the Continental Army; and he consoled one of his commanders with the philosophical reflection that "the subsequent desertions of your militia have taken away the necessity of answering the question how they shall be armed" (J 3.224–27, 640).

If every man had his gun for militia drill, why did so many go off to battle without a musket, not only militiamen, but Continental Army soldiers too? Patrick Henry would later use the dearth of guns as a reason for refusing to ratify the Constitution. The new government promised to arm the militias, but the state of Virginia had been promising to do that for years, and had never done it. How could Virginians expect the federal government to do what they could not do for themselves? Henry told the Virginia ratifying convention in 1788 that "we have learned, by experience, that, necessary as it is to have arms, and though our Assembly has, by a succession of laws for many years, endeavored to have the militia completely armed, it is still far from being the case." In an earlier session of the convention he had asked: "Of what service would militia be to you when, most probably, you will not have a single musket in the state? For as arms are to be provided by Congress, they may or may not furnish them" (R 9.957, 10.1273).

If Congress would not supply arms, what prevented each man from taking down his musket from over the mantel? We have all been taught

that the guns were there. But they weren't. In one of the most important (but neglected) studies of the colonial frontier, Michael Bellesiles went through over a thousand probate records covering the years 1763 to 1790 from western sectors of New England and Pennsylvania. Though these were inheritance lists for white males (those most likely to own guns), and though belongings were listed in great detail (down to broken mugs), only 14 percent of the men owned guns, and 53 percent of those guns were broken or unusable.

How can this be? We have always known or assumed that men in the colonial period had to hunt for food. Bellesiles shows that this, too, is a myth. Hunting for food—with a musket, inaccurate enough when aimed at a man and generally hopeless against a rabbit; or with a rifle whose loading (after each shot) was slow and difficult—could not be an efficient use of the ordinary person's time. Though most meat consumed was from domestic animals (pigs or cows), the supplementary provisions were best caught with the trapper's or the fisherman's net.¹⁹ People's defense came from their living in communities, with select militias to guard them, using what guns were available. These guns came mainly from Europe, and the typical village's blacksmith was not very good at repairing them. (Much of the smith's time went into forging farm and transportation gear.) Though some guns were made in America, M. L. Brown established that this was "an infant, homespun, widely dispersed, and distinctly disorganized American industry" when the Revolution began.²⁰ The European source for arms was cut off by British embargo during the Revolution, and was only partially restored when the French entered the fray on the Americans' side.

Guns for both militias and the Continental Army were so scarce that George Washington fills page after page with laments for his inability to get them—and he meant muskets as well as the even scarcer cannon and artillery. If guns were not omnipresent, then obviously the skill in their use was not widespread either. Why were so many guns broken or unusable in the probate records? It was not only that the blacksmiths in small communities were not gunsmiths. Guns were mainly made of iron at the time, and interior rusting of barrel and parts would take place unless guns were cleaned and maintained. Obviously, not enough people kept them in regular use to prevent this from occurring. Though some mastered the difficult handling of the long rifle, few became truly expert. Brown quotes Benjamin

Thompson, a Continental soldier expressing the "common sentiment" about riflemen attached to the army as skirmishers:

Instead of being the best marksmen in the world and picking off every Regular that was to be seen, there is scarcely a regiment in camp but can produce men that can beat them at shooting, and the army is now universally convinced that the continual firing which they kept up by the week and month together has had no other effect than to waste their ammunition and convince the King's troops that they are not really so formidable.²¹

The famed American rifle was not of much use in war, and its wielders, according to historians George Scheer and Hugh Rankin, were "more noisy than useful." They were wielding an instrument never intended for battle:

The rifle used by these "irregulars" was practically unknown to the New Englanders, accustomed to the smooth-bore musket and fowling piece. Long in barrel, small in bore, light in weight, and perfectly balanced, it was the weapon of the professional hunter and woodsman, the man who eschewed every ounce of unnecessary burden and could not afford to waste a single charge. Its barrel was spiral-grooved to give spin to its bullet, and its effective range more than doubled the musket's sixty yards. Its greatest disadvantage was that in order to benefit from its rifling, its bullet had to be fitted so tightly that it had to be forced home with an iron ramrod and a wooden mallet, a slow process. It had other disadvantages for line firing: the weather more easily rendered it useless; it had no bayonet, so that its users could not deliver or stand a charge; and surrounded by the smoke of a battle line, the riflemen could not aim carefully enough to take advantage of their weapon's unbelievable accuracy.²²

The American army found even less use for pistols than for rifles.²³ British cavalymen and naval officers carried them as signal guns and for defense against a rebel in their ranks, but they were an ornament that Americans forbore: "Few pistols were domestically produced, for cavalry

generally performed a minor role in the Continental Army, operating primarily in the southern campaigns, and preferred the carbine and blunderbuss to the saber and the pistol."²⁴ Pistols, which gentlemen used for duels, were not handy in combat, since one had to get out one's powder and ball and load the things for each shot. In private life, knives were a quicker and more wieldy weapon, and they accounted for most individual killings in the eighteenth century. Bellesiles shows statistically that not until the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, not until the Colt company's great output and advertising, did gun ownership spread dramatically in America—and then it never stopped spreading. There was one gun for every ten people in the colonies. Now there is more than one for every man, woman, and child in America, with three for every adult male of the population. Yet this latter situation is justified by appeal to the former.²⁵

We must give up, then, the idea that every man in the colonies turned out for militia service bearing his own gun or one supplied him. But other factors prevented the militias from being universal. John Shy, the special master of this subject, says that militia composition differed from state to state and from period to period for a variety of social and economic reasons. It is best to consider the militias in four stages—before the Revolution, at its beginning, during its course, and at its end.

1. In the first settlements, short on manpower, everyone did everything possible for the common defense—women, children, slaves, friendly Indians. That condition could recur later, at times of maximum emergency. In response to the British march on Concord, the women of Pepperell township set up militia patrols after their men left town. Blacks warned households that "the Regulars are out." An old woman, "Mother" Batherick, took six unresisting prisoners in the British retreat from Lexington.²⁶

But when the pressure of crisis eased, in the colonies before the war, training sessions for the militias were cut back, and attendance was low at them. In the first half of the eighteenth century, Virginia's "militia virtually ceased to exist," since "a handful of semi-professional rangers could watch the frontier."²⁷ Later, as the slave population grew, and grew restive, the militias were drilled as a police power to intimidate and control the slaves.²⁸ The militias were becoming "more social than military organizations."²⁹ Officers held military rank as part of their general influence. Here was the birth of all those "colonels" who have dotted the southern land-

scape. When a time for actual fighting arose, the poor and vagrants were bribed or dragooned into service. "Tidy colonial laws, imposing a military obligation on almost every free adult white male, became less and less an accurate mirror of military reality, particularly in times of danger."³⁰ That is, times of crisis—for which the militias were supposed to be trained—were precisely the times when they were least in evidence. This explains the poor performance of the militias in the French and Indian War, when the British acquired a contempt for the American fighting man. Historians James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender respond to that contempt by pointing out that "these provincial soldiers were not militia, but rather outcasts from middle-class society, unfortunates who had been lured or legally pressed into service through promises of bounty payments and decent food and clothing."³¹

Even when vagrants were not being lured to replace militiamen, genuine members of the militias usually volunteered for actual fighting, under the encouragement of special rewards, as if they were not already obliged to service. The militias had become a kind of manpower pool from which volunteers could be sought, rather than a force already formed. The men dispatched to do real fighting were not normally the militia units that were supposed to have trained together, but a collection of those who could leave home with least disruption to the community. They were selected out, becoming the very thing modern celebrants of the militias say that universal citizen service was meant to prevent. They were a "select militia." And the very principle of their selection guaranteed that they would largely be untrained, undisciplined, unskilled in the use of arms, and ready at any minute to desert. That was the type of soldier who served with British Regulars in the French and Indian War, the colonial war waged just before the Revolution.

George Washington, trying to lead those militia forces, said they made him ashamed for his countrymen. His biographer describes the situation he faced as that earlier war began:

Virginia had trained no officers, had kept no troops, had organized no wagon train, and possessed few arms. The militia, as the Governor had phrased it, were in "very bad order." In Frederick, a more nearly accurate word would have been "non-existent." Lord Fairfax apparently

had no roll of the men liable to military duty; he possessed no facilities other than those of the tax-lists for preparing a roster; he had raised none of the fifty men George was supposed to find ready for him.³²

2. If that was the condition of the militias in the 1750s, why did the colonies entertain such high expectations of their performance at the beginning of the Revolution in the 1770s? The pressure of the mounting crisis of the 1760s, when Parliament imposed new taxes like the Stamp Act, made the colonies take their militias more seriously. As the break with the mother country occurred, the units were forced to reorganize. Some of their former officers were Tories, not to be trusted in a fight with British troops. Most of them had been appointed by the royal governors of each colony. Clearly, new arrangements had to be made. The units were formed on ideological lines. Whig officers would now be elected by the troops themselves, and Whig loyalties would be demanded of the troops. In New England, the new bands were formed by covenant (a powerful concept the Puritans had borrowed from the biblical covenant God made with his people).³³ In Pennsylvania, where Quakers had earlier prevented the formation of a militia, newly formed bands were called The Association, and men in it were Associators.

Even when the threat of war made some recall the ideal of universal service, not everyone could be on constant call. In Massachusetts, select teams were formed to be on ready alert—the minutemen, with their own organization, the "minute companies." (They did not operate as individuals, as our myth has it.) ~~The minutemen constituted between a fifth and a fourth of the covenanted force, and they were generally younger and more mobile than the others. They had to serve for a specified period (ten months in the case of Concord), keep arms by them at all times, and be part of a network for early response to any threat. It was through this network that Paul Revere spread the news that "the Regulars are coming out" when the British marched toward the arsenal at Concord. These minutemen's preparedness made them able to stream in from other townships to set ambushes for the British who had been broken and sent into headlong retreat from Concord back to Boston. On the other hand, it was not the minutemen who fought in the towns of Lexington and Concord, but the whole force of each township. Little Lexington, with a militia of forty men~~

or so, had not even set up a minuteman corps and Concord had been late in picking its own elite band.³⁴

The euphoria over the Massachusetts militia's early victory bred an illusion that native "virtue" was bound to prevail over hireling coercion in the British ranks. A Pennsylvania militia officer told his men, "The English army derive all their strength from a close attention to discipline, with them it supplies the want of virtue."³⁵ When the conditions of Lexington and Concord recurred during the war, militias often performed admirably—when, for instance, the Americans were forewarned and prepared, when they were fighting on their home ground, when they were facing small numbers of British troops penetrating that ground, when those troops were acting on a plan that did not foresee organized resistance. But those conditions were not to be the normal ones, and in a long war fought over a vast territory, spasms of local animation were of minor use.

3. The militias soon began to display all the marks of their earlier (inglorious) service. Their lack of discipline made them careless of sanitation (in war, disease competes with combat as a killer). Their staggered and short enlistment times were interrupted even more by their desertion rate (over 20 percent), which gave Washington grounds for some scathing comments on the militias' performance.³⁶ As his generals struggled to create conditions of discipline in the Continental Army, the use of auxiliary forces from the militias broke down what had painfully been built up. Even people who began with high praise for the militias were disabused of their admiration. Samuel Adams, who had been at Lexington on the day of the glorious clash, would later write, "Would any man in his senses, who wishes the war may be carried on with vigor, prefer the temporary and expensive drafts of militia to a permanent and well-appointed army?"³⁷ And General Charles Lee, who had desired to lead militia forces, ended up saying, "As to the minutemen, no account ought to be made of them" (and minutemen were the elite corps).³⁸ Jefferson, whose calls to the militia were met with "detestation" and defiance, said that "no possible mode of carrying it [the war] on can be so expensive to the public and so distressing and disgusting to the individuals as by militia" (J 5.34). His fellow southern governor Thomas Burke of North Carolina had begun the Revolution as an enemy of central government, but his experience with the militia convinced him "that every dodge was used to escape military service," and he

tried to set up a regular army at the state level (though that was forbidden by the Articles of Confederation).³⁹

Despite some important exceptions, when the militias fought well, their overall battle record is judiciously summed up by Don Higginbotham:

As an institution, however, the militia proved deficient. The law-making bodies of the colony-states were never able to bring these military organizations up to meeting their responsibilities. . . . When required to stay for extended lengths of time in the field far from home, when mixed closely with sizable bodies of Continentals, and when performing against redcoats in open combat, the militia were at their worst. Nothing in their modest training, not to mention their normally deficient equipment and supplies, prepared them for these duties.⁴⁰

The fervor of the early days in the reorganized militias wore off in the long grind of an eight-year war. Now the right to elect their own officers was used to demand that the men not serve away from their state. Men evaded service, bought substitutes to go for them as in the old days, and had to be bribed with higher and higher bounties to join the effort—which is why Jefferson and Samuel Adams called them so expensive. As wartime inflation devalued the currency, other pledges had to be offered, including land grants and the promise of "a healthy slave" at the end of the war. Some men would take a bounty and not show up. Or they would show up for a while, desert, and then, when they felt the need for another bounty, sign up again in a different place (so much for the claim that the militias were made up of neighbors who all knew each other). This practice was common enough to have its own technical term—"bounty jumping."⁴¹

One of the more laughable contentions of those modern politicians who romanticize the early American militias is that they prevented the corruptions of a standing army by serving voluntarily, not by compulsion, and freely, not for pay—unlike mercenaries on the other side. But the draft often had to be resorted to by governors unable to get the militia to serve without it, and the draft was often ineffective without the addition of bounties. Even after bounties were raised, evasion or defiance of the draft was common. A North Carolina militia officer told General Nathanael Greene that fifty-six of fifty-eight men drafted in one place claimed they

had a disabling hernia, and Jefferson complained that when he tried to send Virginia militiamen out of the state "I had as many sore legs, hipshots, broken backs etc. produced as there were men ordered to go."⁴² Bidding to drive bounties higher was engaged in by Continentals as well as militia, by officers as well as their subordinates. Historian Charles Royster calls the active bidding around recruitment the greatest source of corruption in the Revolution.⁴³

Yet it would be entirely wrong to say that the militias made no contribution to the Revolution. They played a vital part in it—but not the part their current fans pretend they played. They did not prevent corruption or obviate the need for a standing army. They did not defeat the foe by insurgent tactics. They did not prove superior to trained armies by force of their patriot virtue. What did they do, then? They were crucial to what was called, in the eighteenth century, **the internal police**.⁴⁴ At a time of great turmoil, the stay-at-home militias kept order. The British tried to foment slave rebellions. The militias kept a close watch on the slave population. The British also used Indian allies to raid American communities. The militias, which did have a tradition of active rangers on guard against Indians, repelled them. Roving British marauders, hoping for plunder in American villages, often found the militias there to repel them. Loyalists could have become a fifth column in many communities. But attempts on their part to agitate or denounce the war effort, or to communicate with the enemy, were subject to close scrutiny by the militias—close enough to have made them, at times, a kind of thought police. The lookout for men of suspect allegiance even led Albany County in New York to establish a Committee for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies, a partial forerunner of the Cold War's House Committee on Un-American Activities. There is a delicious irony in this. Modern defenders of the militias value them as a force that can defend the people from authority, but the Revolutionary militias were put in the position of defending the war authority against dissidents (the Loyalists).⁴⁵

What might be called this home-front importance of the militias had paradoxical results. It was at once a moderating and a radicalizing experience—moderating because it kept a measure of law and order through the paroxysm of revolution, and radicalizing because it put "new men" in the position of disciplining those who had been their social betters. Shy notes

both of these effects.⁴⁶ By keeping order at the local level, the militias helped maintain that legalism Pauline Maier finds in the Revolution, setting it off from mere mob action.⁴⁷ But by breaking down patterns of deference, the militias gave citizens a new sense of control over their lives, especially, as Steven Rosswurm notes, among the Pennsylvania Associators. In fact, one of the most common complaints about the militias as a military force—that the men and officers disobeyed commands not to their liking, and were ready to go back to their own states—was an important social force for the future.⁴⁸

4. The militias' contribution to ~~this new political atmosphere~~ at the local level explains why so many people, ~~as the numbers of men, remembered~~ the militias' performance with a kind of fondness, despite their spotty or disgraceful record on the battlefield. Besides, when the militias did act well in war, it was often when the war came into the locale of the state forces, where the troops were fighting on familiar terrain, under the eyes of their neighbors. In those circumstances, the inhabitants of the region tended to exaggerate the contribution of the militia, playing down the achievement of the Continentals with whom the militia had fought the local battle. The Continental Army was seen as a protector of the states, but also as their dominator. It seemed always to be demanding provisions, paying for them often with promises or with devaluing currency. It drew men off from the home scene for service at a distance.⁴⁹ Besides, in the course of the war, it had to depend on the same bounty system that filled ranks with vagrants and dragooned men. Joseph Reed, the president of Pennsylvania's executive council, noticed that the "jealousy" between provincial forces and the Continentals replicated the frictions between the militia and the British Regulars during the French and Indian War.⁵⁰

The difference between militia "vagrants" and Regulars of the same class was that, by the end of the war at least, enlistment in the Regulars was for three years, and distance from local politics gave Washington and his generals the opportunity to create discipline and cohesion in the core groups of officers and men. But even that was held against them. Weren't they taking on the characteristics that had always been feared in a standing army?⁵¹ They were loyal to their own (it was alleged) rather than to the larger society they were defending.⁵² These tensions came to a climax at the end of the war, when the Continental officers demanded half-pay pen-

sions for life and set up the Society of the Cincinnati to honor their own wartime deeds. Why should the states pay national taxes to give Continentals a pension when their own militia officers received none, and the noncommissioned men in both forces were ignored? In the emotion of the moment, some expressed regret that the Continental Army had ever been formed, contending that the militias could have done the job if Congress had just stuck with them. Jefferson and others were harshly critical of the Cincinnati for introducing a hereditary aristocracy into America. (Washington agreed to abolition of the hereditary feature, though his stand was ignored by the local Cincinnati groups.)

What is important for our purpose is not the right or the wrong of these particular controversies, but the way they fit into the pairing-off of values listed in my introduction. People were not defending just the record of their own militias but that whole array of values that had become attached to them. I shall not keep repeating the list of clustered values with each chapter, but it is worth listing them here, to notice how readily the militia-vs.-Regulars conflict fits into this schema. Run down the left-hand list with the militias in mind, or the right-hand with the Regulars in mind, and this will be clear except for two apparent exceptions:

Anti-governmental Values

Provincial
Amateur
Authentic
Spontaneous
Candid
Homogeneous
Traditional
Populist
Organic
Rights-oriented
Religious
Voluntary
Participatory
Rotating labor

Governmental Values

Cosmopolitan
Expert
Authoritative
Efficient
Confidential
Articulated
Progressive
Elite
Mechanical
Duties-oriented
Secular
Regulatory
Delegative
Dividing labor

The apparent exceptions are the religious-secular pairing and the candid-confidential one. But religious backing of the militias was important on the local front, while Washington opposed the Congress's attempt to appoint brigade chaplains for the Continental Army: "Among many other weighty objections to the measure, it has been suggested that it has a tendency to introduce religious disputes into the army."³ There are already, in his words, the seeds of the separation of church and state that Virginians would accomplish.

As for the candid-confidential polarity, the militias chose their own officers and demanded explanations from them for the military actions they were contemplating. If the officers refused to give them satisfaction, they complained to their state assemblies, which conducted their business in open sessions. But Congress held its deliberations in secret, and appointed Continental officers without explaining their choices, while the officers chosen expected unquestioning obedience from their men, one of the many differences in ethos between the militias and the Continentals. I could go through the whole list of anti-government values to show in detail how each value was exemplified in this case, but it will be more useful to single out two pairings.

1. *The spontaneous vs. the efficient.* If ever a society wants to be efficient, it is in time of war. Wastefulness here not only loses time or money. It loses lives—can even lose the national identity or independence. War imposes many disciplines on the citizenry as well as the fighting units. The claims on society made by the Continental Army were justified in terms of efficiency. But men resented those claims nonetheless. They asked whether they might win the war and lose their cause. Local militias might fight poorly, but they did it for the right motives, free and unforced. They were fighting for their hearth and household gods (*pro ara et focis*). The Continental Army was at a remove from those fierce motives. Professionalism for its own sake contended with or displaced patriotism in the eyes of "localists." It was symptomatic, and ominous, that the Continentals had to depend on foreigners to acquire their new disciplines—Baron von Steuben and the Chevalier de Mauduit du Plessis for battlefield drill (the titles alone were a giveaway), Casimir Pulaski for cavalry instruction, Louis Duportail and Jean Baptiste Gouvion and Lewis de la Radière for engineering standards. The Continental Army's demands may have been necessary in

war, but, like government itself, they were a necessary evil, one that should not be continued, or excessively honored, in peacetime. The militias' faults, by contrast, existed in wartime but could be profitably forgotten in peacetime, when other services they performed were still worth commemorating. Efficiency, let it be granted, won the war on the field. But the spontaneous displays of virtue in the citizen soldiers made the war worth winning.

2. *Rights-oriented vs. duties-oriented.* George Washington, who led the army without pay, embodied the classical republican ideal of virtuous service to one's country. But men of his class, though espousing an ethic of duty, were also prickly about their rights, their social honor. They asserted the latter by virtue of the former. They deserved public status because they performed public service. But some of the men serving under them, in the army and in the militias, learned in the course of the war to assert *their* rights, *their* honor. Why should officers receive pensions, and not those who fought alongside them? One of the complaints against the militias was that they disobeyed when they did not like any commands or any officers issuing them. When affronted, state contingents would just pull out of the ranks and go home. This makes for lousy war-waging, but it had an attractive air of independence at a time when independence was the cause being asserted. War is not usually a time for the vindication of individual rights within the ranks of fighting men, but after the war it was easy to excuse men who were a little too bold in asserting their rights. Within the concept of citizen soldiers, the soldier should serve the citizen, not vice versa. On this point, at least, the militias maintained that they performed better than the Continentals, who sometimes subjected the citizen to the soldier.

If one looks at the militias in terms of the values they asserted, instead of looking only at their actual record of performance, it is easy to see why modern holders of a militia ideal honor the Revolutionary units. Those units did not do most of what their admirers attribute to them. They were not individual minutemen each grabbing his own gun to vindicate his liberties. They did not prevail by the kind of guerrilla war William Casey imagined. They exerted almost as much political force upon their own people as military force upon the enemy. Yet their myth does embody the values that modern militias think they are preserving. That commonality of ideals, rather than any real historical resemblance, connects our contem-

poraries with their imagined forebears. This is the first of many cases we shall be considering where, when real history conflicts with symbolic history, the former is subsumed within the latter. Modern militias do not see any gap between ideals and performance where the early militias are concerned. They use the fake history to support the real values. If the minuteman of legend did not exist—well, in terms of what we hold dear, he should have. So let's just pretend that he did.