

to participate, depriving the enormous region of any voice at the proceedings. The closest thing they had to a delegate was Thomas McKean, a fiery Ulster-Scots patriot from Philadelphia who represented northern Delaware at the meeting and foiled his Midland colleagues at every turn. In North Carolina, where Borderlanders formed a majority, two of three congressional delegates had played key roles in crushing the backcountry Regulators in 1771. Excluded from the proceedings in Philadelphia, Appalachian people reflexively opposed whatever position their respective provincial delegations took. Thus Pennsylvania Borderlanders became ardent patriots (in opposition to the passivity of the Midland elite), while the Carolina and Virginia backcountry became a stronghold of loyalism (in response to the cautious patriotism of the lowland oligarchs).

While the Congress did bring the other five nations together, it was as an alliance of treaty partners, not as a prelude to national unity. When the meeting adjourned in late October 1774, the diplomats had agreed to a joint boycott of British goods and to impose an export moratorium if London failed to back down by mid-1775. They endorsed a petition to the king in which they acknowledged his authority and begged him for redress of their grievances. The delegates returned home, waiting anxiously for the British response. "We wait to know," a South Carolinian planter wrote that winter. "God knows we have little power to resist by arms."¹⁹

But the British ruling class had no intention of backing down to the colonials. By the time the export ban went into effect, the cemeteries of New England were already filling up with the bodies of Yankee and British war dead. The American wars of liberation had begun.

CHAPTER 11

Six Wars of Liberation

In *Albion's Seed* (1989), historian David Hackett Fischer makes the case for there having been not one American War of Independence but four: a popular insurrection in New England, a professional "gentleman's war" in the South, a savage civil war in the backcountry, and a "non-violent economic and diplomatic struggle" spearheaded by the elites of what I call the Midlands. The four wars, he argues, were fought sequentially and waged in different ways and for different goals.

What we call the American Revolution did indeed play out very differently in the various nations of the Atlantic seaboard. But there weren't four neat struggles, one unfolding as the previous one concluded; rather, there were six very different liberation wars, one for each affected nation. Some occurred simultaneously and two involved invasions by one American nation into another. Despite the presence of a nominally continental army, most of the fighting was done by militia forces and guerrilla bands with local loyalties, and many bloody battles occurred in the complete absence of British forces. Wars of colonial liberation are often ugly, combining resistance to imperial forces with a civil war between rival factions hoping to seize control. Ethnic minorities and indigenous elites often side with the colonial power for fear of what might happen to them in the new order. The American wars of liberation were no exception.

Recognizing what each nation was fighting for—and how it did so—is essential to understanding what the "revolution" was all about and the limits it placed on the strange confederation to which it gave birth.

The first of the wars broke out in Yankeeedom, where it took the form of a mass uprising against the British effort to dismantle the region's self-governance and key cultural institutions. Nowhere in British America was rebellion more universally supported than in New England and the parts of New York and Pennsylvania settled by New Englanders. By 1775

Yankees had already organized a clandestine intelligence and communication systems, a shadow government of "public safety committees," and a network of community-based military units ready to turn out at a minute's notice. Yankees fought not for the universal rights of man, freedom of religion, or the liberties of their ruling class, but in defense of the way they'd always lived their lives and regulated their affairs. They were defending local control by elected representatives (where local usually meant town governments, not provincial ones), the primacy of the Congregational (i.e., Puritan) Church, and their Anglo-Saxon birthright of freedom from tyranny. God's "chosen people" would not give up their divinely ordained ways easily.

In true Yankee fashion, the war was largely fought by citizen militias organized at the local level and led by elected officers. In founding the new units, townspeople literally drew up their own "covenants" spelling out how each would function. Fiercely independent, the Yankee minutemen regarded their commanders as public servants rather than superiors, and in the early stages of the war often challenged their decisions; since Yankees were fighting to not be given orders, they were hardly going to passively accept them on the battlefield.

This egalitarian streak frustrated and alarmed Continental Army officers from other regions. When General Washington arrived to take command of the Yankee forces besieging occupied Boston in the summer of 1775, he was amazed at their ragtag appearance, insubordinate attitude, and insistence on serving in units made up of and led by their own neighbors. Only when outside commanders learned to explain their reasons for giving a particular order did they begin to earn the trust of their Yankee subordinates. Washington denounced them as "nasty people" in his private letters, even as he publicly pleaded "that all distinctions of colonies will be laid aside" among "troops of the United Provinces of North America." When a few companies of Tidewater sharpshooters joined the siege a few weeks later, Virginians expressed horror that ex-slaves were serving alongside whites in the New England militia.¹

Open warfare broke out on April 19, 1775, when a column of British soldiers was sent out from Boston to seize gunpowder stockpiled in Concord, Massachusetts. Fighting erupted when citizen militia confronted them on the town green of Lexington, and again at Concord Bridge, where

local militiamen forced a British retreat. Imperial troops suffered heavy casualties during their withdrawal as militia from surrounding towns attacked them from the roadsides. Narrowly escaping across the water to Boston, the British found themselves besieged by thousands of Yankee minutemen. Meanwhile, word of the fighting spread to the other colonies with explosive effect.

Ultimately, the British were unable to break the siege of Boston, retreating eleven months later to Nova Scotia, itself threatened by sea-borne raids organized by Yankees in eastern Maine. In effect, Yankeeedom had won its independence in March 1776. From that point forward, New England would serve as the primary stronghold for liberation forces in the other nations, providing the lion's share of food, supplies, money, and troops to Washington's Continental Army. Coastal settlements would face occasional British raids, and for more than a year Yankees had reason to fear a British attack from the west, but by 1778, George III had given up hope of forcing New England back into the empire. Overall, American independence was still very much in doubt, but the Yankee war of liberation was complete.

If Yankeeedom was the stronghold of the rebellion, New Netherland was its antithesis: the capital of loyalist North America and the nexus of British military power on the continent. It was to here that loyalist refugees from the other nations fled, and from here that the Royal Navy and British Army organized in their campaigns of reconquest. Under the uninterupted control of British forces from September 1776 onward, Greater New York City became a thriving, self-sufficient city-state with a near-monopoly on imperial trade.

New Netherlanders were generally suspicious of the rebel cause for three reasons. Unlike the nations around them, they didn't feel the need to defend their sovereignty because they never truly had it, given that the Dutch West India Company, the Duke of York, and crown governors had all ruled the place without reference to local opinion. The Dutch, who still comprised about a fifth of the population, were by no means certain that their tradition of cultural and religious tolerance would be safe in an independent province of New York, which would likely be dominated by Yankees (who already controlled much of the province's interior). For New

Netherland elites of all ethnicities, liberation could not be expected to bring either freedom or independence. When the Second Continental Congress convened in early 1775, the provincial assembly voted two to one against sending delegates, and even those appointed by a rebel committee were not given the authority to vote on independence.

Nonetheless, when news of Lexington reached Manhattan, a rebel minority seized power by forming gangs that terrorized the authorities and their supporters. The royal governor fled to the *Duchess of Gordon*, a Royal Navy frigate stationed in the harbor, where he lived for months, holding council meetings and issuing impotent decrees. Other prominent residents departed for England, while many of those who stayed behind were beaten, taunted, jailed, or "carried and hauled" through the city by angry mobs. In February 1776 Washington's Yankee-dominated army occupied the city, but it was not universally welcomed. "Hundreds in this colony are active against us," a New York City patriot wrote John Adams. "Tories openly express their sentiments in favor of the enemy and live unpunished."²

New Netherland's patriot uprising met with sudden and complete defeat in the summer of 1776 following the arrival of a British armada of 30 warships, 400 transports, and 24,000 soldiers. This invasion force scattered General Washington's army, retook the city, and by the end of September occupied an area conforming almost exactly to the boundaries of the New Netherland nation. The rebels dispersed and ecstatic townspeople carried British soldiers around on their shoulders. "A Universal joy," a German-born minister reported, "spread over all countenances." Loyalist refugees came to the city in droves, first from hiding places in the surrounding countryside, then from Boston, the Midlands, Norfolk, Charleston, and Savannah. Secure behind British lines, New York City's population swelled from 22,000 to 33,000 during the course of the war, the newcomers joining loyalist military units or rebuilding transatlantic commerce. Civil government was restored; theaters, taverns, and coffeehouses prospered; and propagandist John Rivington returned from exile to edit the most influential loyalist newspaper on the continent, the *Royal Gazette*. Thousands of loyalists joined militias and provincial forces in the New Netherland zone and regularly foraged in Connecticut and New Jersey, skirmishing with Yankee counterparts throughout the war.³

As the headquarters of both Admiral Richard Howe's fleet and his brother General William Howe's North American military command, New Netherland was the primary staging area for both the ultimately disastrous counteroffensive against Yankeeedom and the initially successful occupation of the neutral Midlands. Both strategies were based on the Howes' recognition of regional cultural differences in British North America. The first campaign correctly identified Yankeeedom as the source of the rebellion and sought to quarantine the region by a two-pronged invasion of the Hudson River Valley; once the Yankee-settled interior of New York was pacified, New England proper could be simultaneously invaded from three sides. The Midlands strategy correctly assumed that most people in that region wished to settle imperial differences without resorting to open warfare. The Howe brothers realized that victory in the Midlands depended on winning hearts and minds, not on unleashing total military power upon its inhabitants. They accordingly moved gingerly against Washington's army after it withdrew to upper Manhattan, herding it out of New Netherland with obvious flanking maneuvers in an effort to avoid civilian casualties while still demonstrating the invincibility of British forces. They even hosted a dinner for rebel leaders aboard a warship in the harbor in an unsuccessful effort to convince them to stand down peaceably.⁴

Unfortunately for the Howes, the first part of their strategy collapsed with the defeat and surrender of their northern army at Saratoga, New York, in October 1777 to an essentially Yankee army from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and upstate New York. The victory was a decisive turning point in the war, not only because it preserved Yankeeedom's independence but because it convinced France to join the conflict, radically altering the balance of power. The fate of the Howes' second strategy will be described momentarily, but neither it nor subsequent British efforts would save Britain's North American empire.

Even after the ultimate British surrender at Yorktown in 1782, many New Netherlanders held out hope that the crown would keep control of the region as a condition of the peace treaty they were negotiating with a weak new confederation calling itself "the United States." When news came in 1783 that no part of the thirteen colonies would be retained, some 30,000 civilians—perhaps half the area's wartime population—fled

Greater New York City for Britain, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. New Netherland had fought a war *against* liberation and had lost badly.⁵

The pacifist Midlands did its best to remain neutral in a conflict which most of its inhabitants had wanted no part in. Even after Lexington and Concord, leading figures such as James Wilson and John Dickinson opposed independence, and their political allies were the big winners in the Pennsylvania assembly elections of May 1776. The region wouldn't have rebelled at all if a majority of the states attending the Second Continental Congress hadn't voted to "totally suppress" Pennsylvania's government. In effect, representatives of Yankeeedom, Tidewater, and the Deep South intervened in Midlands affairs, sanctioning a coup d'état against their legitimate, but cautious, government.

The result, in mid-1776, was the assumption of power in Pennsylvania by a vocal patriot minority backed by the Appalachian half of the colony and entirely dependent on the Congress for validity. With little local support, this patriot government and its Delaware counterpart arrested anyone who opposed the war and searched the homes of any who hadn't "manifested their attachment to the American cause." Pennsylvania Quaker leaders were rounded up in 1777, denied habeas corpus, and deported to the Appalachian section of Virginia for imprisonment, further alienating the sect's followers. New Jersey simply fell into anarchy. "The state is totally deranged [and] without government," a Continental Army general observed before the British moved in. "Many [officials] have gone to the enemy for protection, others are out of the state, and the few that remain are mostly indecisive in their conduct."⁶

Shortly after occupying New York, General Howe sent troops into the Midlands to bring the region under British control and encourage its inhabitants to stand with the empire. After skirmishing with Washington's weakening army in the winter of 1776-1777, British forces invaded the Midlands sections of Maryland, Delaware, and Pennsylvania by sea. Encountering little resistance, they captured Philadelphia in September 1777, sending the Continental Congress into exile in the Appalachian backcountry. Greeted enthusiastically by the city's inhabitants, Howe's army swatted back a counterstrike by Washington's Yankee-and-Borderlander-dominated army at Germantown and settled into warm

and comfortable urban quarters for the winter. Washington's forces bivouacked in Valley Forge, twenty miles to the north, and soon discovered that Midlands farmers preferred to supply the British because they paid in hard currency. Some German pacifists offered support to the rebel army in the form of medical care or humanitarian supplies but shunned direct participation in the war on either side. Meanwhile, former congressional delegate Joseph Galloway assumed leadership of the civil administration and organized a corps of loyalist troops in Philadelphia that raided rebel supply lines to Valley Forge. Galloway did his best to make Philadelphia a showplace for the merits of benevolent royal administration in the hopes of negotiating a peace based on his previous plan for an "American Assembly." But while the city's social life bloomed with balls, concerts, and theater performances, the British defeat at Saratoga doomed Galloway's scheme. Fearing a French naval attack, the British abandoned the Midlands in the summer of 1778, transferring their forces to New York and the West Indies.⁷

With the British withdrawal, the Midlands were subjected to a Continental Army occupation spearheaded by Pennsylvania's Appalachian residents. Pennsylvania's rebel assembly, which had operated in exile in Lancaster, enforced laws that made it illegal to speak or write in opposition to any of its decisions. Ordinary citizens were given the power to jail without trial anyone they considered to be an "enemy to the American cause." The executive organ of the revolutionary government, the revolutionary Supreme Executive Council, was controlled by Borderlanders from the backcountry who were by design grossly overrepresented in the body; they had the power to have anyone accused of disloyalty stripped of his possessions or simply executed. The law was used against opponents and pacifists alike, with a number of Mennonite farmers being left destitute after all their property was taken from them for refusing, on religious grounds, to take an oath of loyalty. For the duration of the war, the tolerance and pluralism of the Midlands was suppressed by occupation forces from neighboring nations.⁸

Until the Battle of Lexington, the Deep South's all-powerful ruling class was ambivalent about fighting a war of liberation. This was not surprising, given that the region's identity was based on hierarchy, deference,

inherited privilege, and aristocratic rule—all in perfect accord with the aims of the British ruling classes. There was no pressure from below to take up arms against Britain, as members of the white underclass weren't allowed to participate in politics and were dependent on planters as landlords, buyers of their products, and judges of their legal disputes. The planters regarded their slaves as an excellent argument for not doing anything that might create instability and provoke another uprising. Ironically, they would soon conclude that the only way to protect their status quo was to free themselves from British rule.

The news of Lexington horrified the Deep Southern slave lords, changing their attitudes almost overnight. The white inhabitants, congressional delegate Henry Laurens wrote, were swept into "a delirium" of "Fear & Zeal." They had supported the Continental Congress's boycotts, fully expecting Britain to back down. Their bluff called, the planters saw their world turned upside down, and many began imagining conspiracies everywhere. Rumors circulated that the British were smuggling arms to the slaves in preparation for a mass uprising. The region's newspaper published reports that ships had been sent from England carrying 78,000 bayonet-equipped guns to distribute to blacks, "Roman Catholics, the Indians, and Canadians" to "subdue" the colonies. "His Majesty's ministers and other servants," the surgeon to the royal garrison in Charleston reported, were imagined to be organizing "slaves to rebel against their masters and to cut their throats." Residents were advised to bring arms and ammunition with them to Sunday church services, in case there was a rebellion. Slaves were rounded up on the slightest suspicion and executed in public in slow, horrible ways. The royal governor, Archibald Campbell, tried to pardon one obviously innocent slave but was warned that if he did so, vigilantes would hang the condemned man at the governor's door and then "raise a flame [that] all the water in the Cooper River could not extinguish." The frightened governor backed down and would soon go into hiding himself.⁹

In this most reactionary of rebellions, the Deep Southern leadership didn't try to overthrow a royal government it distrusted but simply isolated and ignored it. As soon as the slave conspiracy rumors reached the planters, they organized military resistance through their Provincial Congress and a newly formed Council of Safety, which in June 1775 raised

militia troops to meet the threat. In effect, they seized power without contemplation, debate, or combat. Governor Campbell's presence was tolerated so long as he posed no threat, but when he began making contact with the planters' opponents in Greater Appalachia, the planters considered arresting him. Campbell, seeing the game was up, fled to the sloop-of-war *HMS Tamor* in September. In February 1776 he was forced from the harbor when South Carolina militia seized a strategic island. Even then the colony's planters stopped short of declaring independence, announcing their government to be in force only during "the present dispute between Great Britain and the colonies." Their provisional constitution was a near-carbon copy of the colonial one. Planter William Henry Drayton, not one for introspection, would later claim that the British had left them with a stark choice: "Slavery or Independence." In reality, the planters had been forced into independence in order to preserve slavery.¹⁰

The situation in lowland Georgia was much the same, except that the planters there were even more reluctant to sever ties with Britain. Loyalist sentiment was so strong that, after refusing to participate in the First Continental Congress, the colony sent only one delegate to the Second Congress: a Yankee transplant living in a Congregationalist enclave. Another Georgian "founding father," James Wood, became so frustrated with the planters' early failure to support the war that he returned to his native Pennsylvania and joined the militia there. A later delegate to the Continental Congress, John Zubly, expressed the Deep Southern point of view to that body in no uncertain terms: "A republican government is little better than a government of devils." Rumors of a British-backed slave rebellion played a part in changing prevailing attitudes, with royal governor James Wright himself predicting they would have "an exceeding bad effect." But in the end, the governor later concluded, the planters of Georgia had simply followed "the voice and opinions of men of overheated ideas" in South Carolina.¹¹

The British easily recaptured the Deep South at the end of 1778 when they executed their "Southern Strategy." Having accepted the loss of Yankeeedom, London focused on reclaiming Georgia and the Carolinas, rightly judging the Deep Southerners to be tepid revolutionaries. If things went well, Virginia might be squeezed from both sides, creating a rump British North America stretching from Greater New York to Florida

(a sparsely populated territory then under British control).¹² In January 1779 a small invasion force of 3,500 recaptured Savannah without firing a shot and in a few weeks had complete control of lowland Georgia. (Docile Georgia would be the only rebel colony to be formally reabsorbed into the empire, where it would remain for the rest of the war.) Charleston successfully resisted an initial 1779 siege but surrendered to a second one in early 1780. Leading "patriots" like Henry Middleton pledged loyalty to the crown to avoid having their property seized, while others were shot and killed by their numerous loyalist neighbors. The Deep South was pacified. Had the British not also had to deal with the Appalachian sections of Georgia and the Carolinas, their Southern strategy would almost certainly have succeeded.¹³

If so much of British North America was ambivalent toward or hostile to independence, how is it that the non-Yankee colonies managed to liberate themselves from the empire? There are two reasons: the firm commitment of the Tidewater gentry to their personal independence, and the presence of an Appalachian majority in Pennsylvania, the Carolinas, and Georgia, a people willing to fight anyone who tried to lord it over them.

Greater Appalachia—poor, isolated, and not in control of a single colonial government—had the most complicated involvement in the wars of liberation. The Borderlanders seized on the pretext of the "revolution" to assert their independence from outside control, but, as previously mentioned, this took different forms in each region, sometimes in each community.

In Pennsylvania the Borderlanders were the shock troops of the revolution, which provided them an opportunity to usurp power in the province from the Midlander elite in Philadelphia. Here the Scots-Irish so dominated the rebel armies that one British officer called them the "line of Ireland." In London King George III referred to the entire conflict as "a Presbyterian War," while Horace Walpole told Parliament: "Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson!" The army that famously shivered at Valley Forge was made up almost entirely of Yankees and Borderlanders, and it was the Scots-Irish backcountry leadership that drafted Pennsylvania's 1776 Constitution, granting the Appalachian districts effective control over the colony. By war's end they had liberated themselves from the Midlanders and British alike.¹⁴

In the Tidewater-controlled colonies of Maryland and Virginia, the Scots-Irish-led Borderlanders saw the British as the greatest threat to their freedom. Eager to expand over the mountains, they found common cause with the Tidewater gentry who had given them reasonably fair government representation. What loyalist forces there were tended to be from German communities—Midlander cultural enclaves lost in a forest of patriots.

By contrast, most Borderlanders in North Carolina identified the Tidewater elite as their primary oppressors and took up arms against them to avenge the suppression of the Regulator movement a few years before. The colony's backcountry settlers, John Adams would later observe, had "such a hatred toward the rest of other fellow citizens that in 1775, when the war broke out, they would not join them." Backed by a sympathetic royal governor, they fought an unsuccessful campaign against the gentry-led rebel army in 1776. Meanwhile, other backcountry communities were fighting the British, carrying the banner of Scotland into battle, to which some Borderlanders added the Scottish motto: *Nemo me impune lacessit*, loosely translated as "Don't Tread on Me." When the British Army under Cornwallis arrived in the area in 1780, the Borderlanders turned on one another, plunging the colony into a civil war with horrors worthy of the conflicts their ancestors had fought on the British borderlands. Loyalist forces raped young girls in front of their parents, while patriots whipped and tortured suspected enemy collaborators. Many armed gangs had no loyalties whatsoever and simply preyed on whomever they wished, kidnapping children for ransom, looting homes, and assassinating rivals.¹⁵

The South Carolina and Georgia backcountry also descended into civil war, albeit for different reasons. Here the Deep Southern oligarchs who controlled the colonial governments were especially resistant to sharing power with the rabble. In South Carolina the backcountry made up three-quarters of the colony's white population but had only two of forty-eight seats in the provincial assembly; this arrangement led one agitator to denounce the planters for keeping "half their subjects in a state of slavery," by whom he meant not blacks but Borderlanders like himself. Here few "loyalists" cared about Britain, but they aligned themselves with the king simply because he was fighting their lowland enemies. In some communities,

Borderlanders regarded the British as their greatest oppressors, creating the ingredients for a backcountry civil war in addition to the struggle with the lowlanders. Once it started, the fighting became exceedingly ugly, a guerrilla war marked by ambushes, the execution of prisoners, and the torture, rape, and plunder of noncombatants. One British officer said the Carolina backcountrymen were "more savage than the Indians," while a Continental Army officer, Robert E. Lee's father, Henry, observed that those in Georgia "exceeded the Goths and Vandals in their schemes of plunder, murder, and iniquity."¹⁶

The situation became even worse during the British reconquest of the Deep South when Lord Cornwallis made the unwise decision to send zealous subordinates to "pacify" the backcountry. Leading mixed legions of British troops, Hessian mercenaries, New Netherlander volunteers, and backcountry militiamen, these commanders adopted the Borderlanders' tactics, hacking prisoners to death with swords and burning homes. Patriot Borderlanders returned in kind, unleashing an orgy of barbarism that laid waste the countryside. By exacerbating a bloody civil war, loyalist sympathizer Francis Kinloch told a former royal governor, the British had lost the war for hearts and minds in South Carolina. "The lower sort of people, who were in many parts . . . originally attached to the British government, have suffered so severely and been so frequently deceived, that Great Britain has now a hundred enemies where it had one before."¹⁷

By the end of the war, South Carolina was completely devastated. "Every field, every plantation showed marks of ruin and devastation [and] not a person was to be met with in the roads," a traveler in the lowlands reported. "Not the vestiges of horses, cattle, hogs, or deer, &c. was to be found [and] the squirrels and birds of every kind were totally destroyed," another said of the backcountry. "No living creature was to be seen, except now and then a few [vultures] picking the bones of some unfortunate fellows who had been shot or cut down and left in the woods above ground."¹⁸

Dispersed over a thousand miles of difficult terrain and without government of their own, Appalachia's people did not act in political unison, but their conduct was similar. Faced with external threats to their freedom, individual neighborhood communities did not hesitate to take up arms and fight using any means at their disposal. Those in the northern

parts of the region quickly vanquished their enemies and captured political power, not only in Pennsylvania, but in what would become Kentucky and West Virginia. But in the less-developed southern half of the region, victory was elusive, reducing the area to a condition much resembling the British borderlands from which their parents had fled. Here, a war of liberation had been fought and lost.

Tidewater was largely spared from the fighting until the final phases of the war, but it committed large numbers of officers and troops to fight on other fronts. The gentry, accustomed to giving orders and having them followed, assumed they would dominate the Continental Army's officer class, especially as Yankeeedom and Appalachia had so few well-bred people. But while the commander in chief, George Washington, was a Tidewater gentleman, most of the Continental Army's generals were Yankees—including a number of very successful common-born men such as Henry Knox, John Stark, and William Heath—reflecting the fact that most of its enlisted men also came from New England. The Tidewater gentry did organize some of their subjects into units like the Virginia Sharpshooters and led them in campaigns from Boston to Georgia, but in general, Chesapeake Country contributed few enlisted men to the conflict. In battle the Tidewater officer class usually adhered to the gentlemanly codes of eighteenth-century warfare, with honor and decorum paramount.

Tidewater liberated itself very early on and with relatively little bloodshed. In Virginia, royal governor John Murray did himself few favors by threatening to arm slaves to defend royal authority. Driven from Williamsburg in June 1775, he, too, found himself hiding on a Royal Navy frigate in the Chesapeake. A few months later he called on loyalists everywhere to rally to him there and issued a proclamation offering slaves their freedom if they took up arms for the king, a proposition that turned Tidewater against him. Hundreds of slaves rallied to Governor Murray and some would die fighting the Tidewater militia at the Battle of Great Bridge, near Norfolk, where Murray was defeated and forced to abandon the Chesapeake, taking some of his "black loyalists" with him.¹⁹

When the British returned to the Virginia Tidewater in 1780, some 10,000 slaves fled their masters to join them, forming the region's largest

loyalist force. "Slaves flock to them from every quarter," one planter lamented. Unfortunately for the slaves, Cornwallis's forces became pinned down between a French fleet and the Continental Army in the little tobacco port of Yorktown and surrendered in October 1781. The event ended the war, confirmed Tidewater's liberation, and ended any hope of freedom for its quarter-million slaves.²⁰

Though confronted by a common threat, the nations had not been united in the conflict. Each fought its own war of liberation, but most in New Netherland, the Midlands, and southern Appalachia fought on the losing side and were vanquished in 1781. The victors—Yankeeedom, Tidewater, the Deep South, and northern Appalachia—would fight over the spoils, including the terms under which they would try to cement their wartime alliance.

CHAPTER 12

Independence or Revolution?

By the end of the American wars of liberation, the six nations of the eastern seaboard had forged closer connections to one another than they had ever had before. Forced into a military alliance, the dominant nations had successfully fought off threats to their identities and practices and vanquished pacifist Midlanders and loyalist-minded New Netherlanders. But the effort to preserve their separate cultures had produced two unexpected side effects: a loose political alliance with some characteristics of statehood, and a popular movement demanding "democracy," a prospect the national leaders found quite alarming. In the immediate postwar period, the nations confronted both developments and each had its own take on how to deal with them. The compromises they negotiated or imposed profoundly shaped the American experience.

When the wars began, the only structure the colonies shared was a diplomatic body, the Continental Congress. The Congress was essentially an international treaty group whose member states passed resolutions by a majority vote. If one party didn't stand by its obligations, there wasn't much the other members could do to address the problem, short of imposing their will by military force. To have the ability to achieve the latter, and to better fight off the British threat, the treaty parties created a joint military command, much as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization did a century and a half later. They called this the Continental Army and, with much inter-national bickering, it was placed under a supreme commander, George Washington.

During the wars it became clear that the treaty group needed more powers if it was to provide for the alliance's military needs and, more important, maintain peaceful relations among the member states. In July 1776 John Dickinson of (Midland) Pennsylvania feared New England would part ways with the other colonies, causing a collapse in the alliance. Such a breakdown, he once warned, would unleash "a multitude of