

Macaulay (1731–91), *History of England*\* (8 vols., London, 1763–83), the civic humanist tradition was increasingly thereafter integrated with mainstream liberal Whig ideology. Some midcentury works such as *An Essay on the Balance of Civil Power in England* (London, 1748) and *An Enquiry into the Foundation of the English Constitution* (London, 1745) by Samuel Squire (1713–66) could both praise the idea of a balanced constitution and emphasize the extent to which the ministerial use of patronage among members of Parliament was, far from being corrupt, actually necessary to preserve that balance. Others, such as Thomas Pownall (1722–1805), *Principles of Polity, Being the Grounds and Reasons of Civil Empire* (London, 1752), could employ civic humanist ideas while stressing not the antagonism but the beneficial mutual reinforcement between commerce and virtue.

What was true of these mainstream writers in the 1740s and 1750s was also true of most British opposition writers between 1760 and 1790. They denounced not just the administration but also the monopolization of power and privilege by the landed classes and the hierarchical notions they used to justify their dominance. The most prominent radical polemical works of the era—Joseph Priestley (1733–1804), *Essay on the First Principles of Government*\* (London, 1768); James Burgh (1714–75), *Political Disquisitions*\* (London, 1774–75), which was immediately reprinted in Philadelphia in 1775; Richard Price (1723–91), *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*\* (London, 1776), and *Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution* (London, 1784); and John Cartwright (1740–1824), *The Legislative Rights of the Commonalty Vindicated, Or, Take Your Choice* (London, 1776)—regularly combined civic humanist worries about power and corruption with a liberal Lockean emphasis upon individualism, private rights, and natural rights. Filtered through these works, civic humanism lost much of its anticommercialism at the same time that virtue was redefined in its more modern sense as industry and frugality practiced by individuals in self-centered economic productivity. Like Defoe a half-century earlier, these exponents of a meritocracy of talent were, as one historian has put it, “as uninterested in a republican order of civic virtue as they were in an aristocratic order of deference and privilege.”

A similar emphasis was evident in the reception and use of the civic humanist tradition in America during the Revolutionary era. Especially during the 1760s and 1770s, the colonial opposition to Britain was deeply tinged with the ideas of civic humanism, the traditional language of the excluded and the powerless in Britain for

the previous century. In their attempts to explain why Parliament had suddenly thrown its support behind efforts—hitherto always associated with prerogative—to subvert colonial liberty, Americans turned instinctively to the opposition concept of corruption. Throughout the years from 1764 to 1776, they fretted about the corrosive effects of power and patronage upon the British constitution and saw themselves as the victims of a malign conspiracy of power on the part of the ministry to destroy liberty in both the colonies and Britain. The language of conspiracy, corruption, power, and virtue also infused political struggles within the United States after 1776. But, although many American leaders continued to worry about the corrosive effects of prosperity upon American virtue and to call for greater exertions of public spirit in behalf of the common good, the virtue about which they were concerned was, more often than not, the private virtue of striving and hard work emphasized by Defoe and the most celebrated American of the colonial period, Benjamin Franklin, rather than the civic virtue of Machiavelli. Appropriately for a people with such a long and intimate involvement with commercial activities and such a long reputation for individualistic behavior, the American use of civic humanist thought displayed very little indeed of the anticommercialism and anti-individualism so evident among British civic humanist writers earlier in the century.