people of America to form the Memorable Congress of 1774. That Body recommended certain measures to their Constituents, and the event proved their wisdom; yet it is fresh in our memories how soon the Press began to teem with Pamphlets and weekly Papers against those very measures. Not only many of the Officers of Government who obeyed the dictates of personal interest, but others from a mistaken estimate of consequences, or the undue influence of former attachments, or whose ambition aimed at objects which did not correspond with the public good, were indefatigable in their endeavours to persuade the people to reject the advice of that Patriotic Congress. Many indeed were deceived and deluded, but the great majority of the people reasoned and decided judiciously; and happy they are in reflecting that they did so. . . .

It is worthy of remark that not only the first, but every succeeding Congress, as well as the late Convention, have invariably joined with the people in thinking that the prosperity of America depended on its Union. To preserve and perpetuate it, was the great object of the people in forming that Convention, and it is also the great object of the plan which the Convention has advised them to adopt. With what propriety therefore, or for what good purposes, are attempts at this particular period, made by some men, to depreciate the importance of the Union? or why is it suggested that three or four confederacies would be better than one? I am persuaded in my own mind, that the people have always thought right on this subject, and that their universal and uniform attachment to the cause of the Union, rests on great and weighty reasons, which I shall endeavour to develop and explain in some ensuing papers. They who promote the idea of substituting a number of distinct confederacies in the room of the plan of the Convention, seem clearly to foresee that the rejection of it would put the continuance of the Union in the utmost jeopardy. That certainly would be the case, and I sincerely wish that it may be as clearly foreseen by every good Citizen, that whenever the dissolution of the Union arrives, America will have reason to exclaim in the words of the Poet, "FAREWELL, A LONG FAREWELL, TO ALL MY GREATNESS."

PUBLIUS.

From *The Independent Journal*, October 31, 1787. This essay appeared on November 1 in *The Daily Advertiser* and on November 2 in *The New-York Packet*.

1.3 Gordon S. Wood, "Republicanism" (2002)

If liberal individualism was the dominant intellectual strain running from the British Enlightenment of Hobbes, Locke, and Hume to the new world, a competing strain of country party ideology, civic humanism, or republicanism also influenced the revolutionary generation. Gordon S. Wood has chronicled the impact of republicanism on early American history in two classic books, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (1969) and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (1992). The selection below, from *The American Revolution: A History* (2002) provides one of the best available descriptions of the republican political vision.

Wood explains that the Founders saw the American Revolution not just in military (victory) and political (independence) terms, but as a revolution in ideas and culture as well. Republican political ideals decried the hierarchy, opulence, and corruption of European society and praised the democratic and egalitarian virtues of 18th-century American society. Republican political life depended on the virtues of citizen patriots and to the extent that self-interest, greed, and opulence threatened citizen virtue, they threatened the health of the republic as well.

A military victory over Great Britain may have been essential for the success of the Revolution, but for Americans it was scarcely the whole of the Revolution. Although the Revolution had begun as a political crisis within the empire, by 1776 it was no longer merely a colonial rebellion. . . . Americans had come to believe that the Revolution promised nothing less than a massive reordering of their lives—a reordering summed up in the conception of republicanism.

The Need For Virtue

This republicanism was in every way a radical ideology—as radical for the eighteenth century as Marxism was to be for the nineteenth century. It meant more than simply eliminating a king and establishing an elective system of government. It added a moral and idealistic dimension to the political separation from England—a dimension that promised a fundamental shift in values and a change in the very character of American society.

Republicanism intensified the radicalism of the "country" ideology that Americans had borrowed from opposition groups in English society, and linked it with the older and deeper European currents of thought that went back to antiquity. These classical currents of thought—essentially explanations for the decline of the ancient Roman Republic—set forth republican ideals and values—about the good life, citizenship, political health, and social morality—that have had a powerful and lasting effect on Western culture. . . . Reformers everywhere saw this idealized ancient world as an alternative to the sprawling monarchies, with their hierarchies, luxury, and corruption, that they had come to despise in their own time.

In the excitement of the Revolutionary movement, these classical republican values came together with the long-existing European image of Americans as a simple, egalitarian, liberty-loving people to form one of the most coherent and powerful ideologies the Western world had yet seen. Many of the ambiguities Americans had felt about the rustic provincial character of their society were now clarified. What some had seen as the crudities and deficiencies of American life could now be viewed as advantages for republican government. Independent American farmers who owned their own land no longer had to be regarded as primitive folk living on the edges of European civilization and in the backwaters of history. Instead, they could now be seen as equal citizens naturally equipped to realize the republican values intellectuals had espoused for centuries.

Inevitably, the new American states in 1776 became republics. Everyone knew that these new republics with their elective systems had not only political but also moral and social significance. Republicanism struck directly at the ties of blood, kinship, and dependency that lay at the heart of a monarchical society. In a monarchy individuals were joined together as in a family by their common allegiance to the king. Since the king, in the words of the English jurist William Blackstone, was the "pater familias of the nation," to be a subject was in fact to be a kind of child—weak and dependent, sinful and lacking in self-restraint. Yet monarchies, based on the presumption that human beings were corrupt, had persisted almost everywhere for centuries because they offered security and order. Left alone and free, people, it was assumed, would run amuck, each doing what was right in his own eyes. Such a selfish people had to be held together from above, by the power of kings who created trains of dependencies and inequalities, supported by standing armies, strong religious establishments, and a dazzling array of titles, rituals, and ceremonies.

Republicanism challenged all these assumptions and practices of monarchy. By throwing off monarchy and becoming republicans in 1776, Americans offered a different conception of what people were like and new ways of organizing both the state and the society. The Revolutionary leaders were not naïve and they were not utopians—indeed, some of them had grave doubts about the capacities of ordinary people. But by adopting republican governments in 1776 all of them necessarily held to a more magnanimous conception of human nature than did supporters of monarchy.

Republics demanded far more morally from their citizens than monarchies did of their subjects. Republics lacked all the accouterments of patronage and power possessed by monarchies. If republics were to have order, it would have to come from below, from the people themselves, from their consent and their virtue, that is, from their willingness to surrender their personal desires to the public good. Much of the Revolutionary rhetoric was filled with exhortations to the people to act virtuously, telling them, as Samuel Adams did, that "a Citizen owes everything to the Commonwealth." Republicanism thus stressed a morality of social cohesion and devotion to the common welfare, or *res publica.* Several of the states in 1776—Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia—even adopted the name "commonwealth" to express better their identification with the seventeenth-century English revolutionaries and their new dedication to the public good.

Republican citizens, in short, had to be patriots. Patriots were not simply those who loved their country but those who were free of dependent connections. As Jefferson wrote in his *Notes on the State of Virginia,* "dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition." Hence the sturdy independent yeomen, Jefferson's "chosen people of God," were regarded as the most incorruptible and the best citizens for a republic. The celebration of the independent farmer in the years following the Revolution was not a literary conceit but an imperative of republican government.

The individual ownership of property, especially landed property, was essential for a republic, both as a source of independence and as evidence of a permanent attachment to the community. Those who were propertyless and dependent—young men and women—could thus be justifiably denied the vote because, as a convention of Essex County, Massachusetts, declared in 1778, they were "so situated as to have no wills of their own." In Europe, dependency was common because only a few possessed property. But, as one Carolinian wrote in 1777, "the people of America are a people of property; almost every man is a freeholder." Jefferson was so keen on this point that he proposed in 1776 that the new commonwealth of Virginia guarantee at least fifty acres of land for every citizen.

These republican communities of independent citizens presented an inspiring ideal. But history had shown that republics were an especially fragile kind of state, highly susceptible to faction and internal disorder. Because republics were so utterly dependent on the virtue of the people, theorists like Montesquieu concluded that they had to be small in territory and homogeneous in character. The only existing European republican models—the Netherlands, and the Italian and Swiss city-states—were small and compact, not fit models for the sprawling new nation of the United States. According to the best political science of the day, when a large country with many diverse interests attempted to establish a republic, as England had tried in the seventeenth century, the experiment was sure to end in some sort of dictatorship like that of Oliver Cromwell.

It is not surprising therefore that Americans in 1776 embarked on their experiment in republicanism in a spirit of risk and high adventure. Yet most American Revolutionaries were enthusiastic and remarkably confident of success. They believed that they were naturally virtuous and thus ideally suited for republican government. Were not the remarkable displays of popular order in the face of disintegrating royal governments in 1774–75 evidence of the willingness of the American people to obey their governments without coercion? Did they not possess the same hardy character the ancient republican citizens had? In contrast to England, where most people were tenants or landless workers, most Americans, at least most white adult males, owned their own land. Americans told themselves that they were a young and vigorous people, not yet dissipated by the aristocratic luxuries and indolent pleasures of the Old World. . . .

Unlike liberals of the twenty-first century, the most liberal-minded of the eighteenth century tended to see society as beneficent and government as malevolent. Social honors, social distinctions, perquisites of office, business contracts, legal privileges and monopolies, even excessive property and wealth of various sorts—indeed, all social inequities and deprivations—seemed to flow from connections to government, in the end from connections to monarchical government. "Society," said Paine in a brilliant summary of this liberal view, "is produced by our wants and government by our wickedness." Society "promotes our happiness *positively* by uniting our affections," government "*negatively* by restraining our vices." Society "encourages intercourse," government "creates distinctions." The emerging liberal Jeffersonian view that the least government was the best was based on just such a hopeful belief in the natural harmony of society.

This liberal belief in the capacity of affection and benevolence to hold republican societies together may have been as unrealistic and as contrary to human nature as the traditional belief in austere classical virtue. Certainly hard-nosed skeptics like Alexander Hamilton came to doubt its efficacy. But for a moment in the enthusiasm of revolution, many Americans imagined a new and better world emerging, a world, they said, of "greater perfection and happiness than mankind has yet seen."