



The War for Independence

In 1780, at the Continental army headquarters in New York state, a young Connecticut chaplain penned an execution sermon. Yale college graduate Abraham Baldwin had joined the regular American army fighting the British the year before, some four summers after the first shots had rung out at Lexington and Concord. The sermon was to be read to the condemned and the assembled army before the death sentence was carried out. It dwelled on standard patriot fare—the importance of the rule of law, the just defense of the unalienable rights of men—and lingered over the support of Providence for the American cause. Patriot America, the Continental army, and its chief were as one, a kind of national trinity, under an affirming and protective God: “Our Country, our Commander, and our Army are the special care of that holy Providence. Happy! thrice happy that people whose God is the Lord!” At the place of execution, the chaplain would juxtapose “lively sensibility” with the stark requirements of military principle. And he would explain that the design of the sermon was “to arrange our minds properly.”¹

Of course. Sensibility and war were manifestly incompatible. The sentimental prose pieces that marked the *Pennsylvania Packet* from its founding in 1771—“The Affecting History of Stryangeus and Zarina,” extracts from Henry Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling*, contributions by “Yorick Ameri-

1. Patrick J. Furlong, ed., “An Execution Sermon for Major John André,” *New York History*, LI (1970), 63–69 (quotations on 66, 68–69).

canus”—had ceded to fierce political debates and transcriptions of public oratory. As John Jay, the president of the Continental Congress, the national assembly that had declared independence, lectured to an old friend in 1779, the struggle for American independence was no time for relaxed nerves and the indulgences of sentimental life: “Rural Scenes, domestic Bliss, and the charming Group of Pleasures found in the Train of Peace, fly at the approach of War.” Jay might admire his friend’s sensibility—he told him so—but these were “rugged” times. Consumer boycotts, political crisis, and violent conflict dried out and overtook sentimental print culture; the personal pleasures of sensibility were cut short and made distinctly superfluous by more urgent demands on time and temperament.²

And both sides understood, as the Connecticut chaplain made unusually explicit, that it mattered to arrange minds. The American war would be resolved in what we can term culture wars as much as by military arms. This was, after all, not a straightforward war over territory. It was different from the Seven Years’ War at midcentury, which pitted French and British empires in a contest for Canadian ground, or the unremitting war in the backcountry over native American land. In an anticolonial contest and civil conflict in which a variety of ideologies and affiliations were at stake, rituals such as public executions, like symbols and speeches, had to be cautiously calibrated and carefully interpreted. As those involved picked their way through the oppositional terms of monarchy and republic, mercantilism and free trade, privilege and right, empire and nation and as more immediately they negotiated the sharp fracturing of social relations, the arranging of minds was critically important.

As it happens, this was no ordinary execution. Baldwin’s unhappy prompt was John André, the aide to British commander Henry Clinton who had abetted Benedict Arnold’s breathtaking attempt to hand over a key American garrison. The story is well known. After two years of confidence in imminent British withdrawal, the summer of 1780 had seen a series of military reverses—the fall of Charleston in May, the rout of the army in South Carolina in August. On the heels of these British successes in the South, the disaffected American general and ambitious British major conspired to betray American forces and to surrender West Point.

2. *Pennsylvania Packet; and the General Advertiser* (Philadelphia), Jan. 27, Dec. 14, 1772, Aug. 16, 1773; John Jay to Robert R. Livingston, Feb. 16, 1779, in Paul H. Smith, ed., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774–1789*, 25 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1976–1998) (hereafter cited as *LDC*), XII, 80.

The scheme would likely have ended the war and brought glory on both conspirators. Returning from a final encounter with Arnold, André was waylaid and captured—in civilian dress and with maps of American defenses tucked in his boots—by three American militiamen. Arnold fled the American camp and, safe behind British lines, was made brigadier general. André was left a prisoner of his horrified American enemy at Camp Tappan, New York. As one of Baldwin's fellow New Englanders, Samuel Shaw, wrote home, the story of Arnold and André "make your ears to tingle." His hint was perhaps broader than strictly necessary: among military orders, letters, and poetry about the treason, Shaw's account was immediately given an anonymous newspaper hearing.³

This was also, of necessity, a Philadelphia story. Most high revolutionary dramas led back or wound through the city; they had to, of course, when the Continental Congress was in session. But on this occasion it was personal and immediate. Benedict Arnold, New Englander and hero of

3. Samuel Shaw to John Eliot, Sept. 27, 1780, in Josiah Quincy, ed., *The Journals of Major Samuel Shaw, the First American Consul at Canton, with a Life of the Author* (Boston, 1847), 77; *Continental Journal, and Weekly Advertiser* (Boston), Oct. 12, 1780. Accounts of these events and their interpretation include Sarah Knott, "Sensibility and the American War for Independence," *American Historical Review*, CLIX (2004), 19–40; Michael Meranze, "Major André's Exhumation," in Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein, eds., *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2003), 123–135; Linda Colley, *Captives* (London, 2002), 203–208; Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia, 2002), 90–105; Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven, Conn., 2001), 1–15; Andy Trees, "Benedict Arnold, John André, and His Three Yeoman Captors: A Sentimental Journey of American Virtue Defined," *Early American Literature*, XXXV (2000), 246–273; Robert E. Cray, Jr., "Major John André and the Three Captors: Class Dynamics and Revolutionary Memory Wars in the Early Republic, 1780–1831," *Journal of the Early Republic*, XVII (1997), 371–397; Clare Brandt, *The Man in the Mirror: A Life of Benedict Arnold* (New York, 1994); Larry J. Reynolds, "Patriot and Criminals, Criminal and Patriots: Representations of the Case of Major André," *South Central Review*, IX, no. 1 (Spring 1992), 57–84; Robert McConnell Hatch, *Major John André: A Gallant in Spy's Clothing* (Boston, 1986); Charles Royster, "'The Nature of Treason': Revolutionary Virtue and American Reactions to Benedict Arnold," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXVI (1979), 163–193; Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution: Painting, Music, Literature, and the Theatre in the Colonies and the United States from the Treaty of Paris to the Inauguration of George Washington, 1763–1789* (New York, 1976), 377–382; Robert D. Arner, "The Death of Major André: Some Eighteenth Century Views," *EAL*, XI (1976), 52–67; J. E. Morpurgo, *Treason at West Point: The Arnold-André Conspiracy* (New York, 1975); James Thomas Flexner, *The Traitor and the Spy: Benedict Arnold and John André* (New York, 1953).

Saratoga, had been seconded as military governor in the city in 1778. He left under a cloud, having fended off charges of financial corruption and offended radical whigs with his soft attitude toward loyalists. The softness stung, for the city had been recovering from almost a year of British military occupation. During that occupation, Major André had been thoroughly conspicuous: a member of the British theatrical troupe that performed more than a dozen plays and a key player at the lavish imperial fete, dubbed the “Meschianza,” which marked the retirement of British commander William Howe. Shortly after the news of the treason reached Philadelphia, a militiaman noted, “In the Evening a thing representing Arnold, Lucifer, the Spy etc. was taken through the Town by a vast number of respectable Inhabitants.” The “very curious thing” was an effigy contrived by a local artist. The devil presided over the treasonous general with a bag of gold in one hand and a pitchfork prodding him into hell in the other. A long inscription on the front of the cart detailed Arnold’s wrongs, but close scrutiny was not required. The visual point was made large and satirical: as Quaker diarist Elizabeth Drinker reported, Arnold cut a “ridiculous figure” with “two faces.” If the inhabitants of other cities followed in parading suit, Philadelphia residents knew this betrayal was of and about themselves.⁴

As it happens, too, Baldwin’s sermon was never delivered. Why is not precisely known. But the Continental officers’ response to André suggests that the chaplain’s concerns of “lively sensibility” were entirely prescient. André’s guard, the twenty-six-year-old Benjamin Tallmadge, confessed to a colonel that he was obliged to leave the field “in a flood of Tears” before André died. He added in a second letter that there was “a tear from almost every spectator.” Richard Meade, a youthful officer of higher rank, agreed that the British officer roused “the compassion of every man of feeling and sentiment”: André’s execution did not happen “without a tear” on his part. Such responses are surely surprising, for these were seasoned officers regarding an enemy, and early modern tradition dictated that executions should secure an ignoble and ignominious end. Hanging was a criminal punishment typically used against the poor and marginalized,

4. Flexner, *The Traitor and the Spy*, 221–226; John W. Jackson, *With the British Army in Philadelphia, 1777–1778* (San Rafael, Calif., 1979); Diary of George Nelson, Sept. 30, 1780, HSP; Elaine Forman Crane, ed., *The Diary of Elizabeth Drinker*, 3 vols. (Boston, 1991), Oct. 4, 1780, I, 376; Benjamin Irvin, “The Streets of Philadelphia: Crowds, Congress, and the Political Culture of the Revolution, 1774–1783,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, CXXIX (2005), 7–44.

and as a military punishment it was routinely meted out to the rank and file. (That year, there were twenty-five such cases within the American army alone.) André's end seems to have effected a momentary collective consensus very much of the wrong kind—and a consensus among sympathetic men of “feeling and sentiment” at that.⁵

André's peculiar and disruptive appeal reveals the deep logic of sensibility in the American War of Independence. With John Jay, sensibility and war could be presumed to be incompatible. Or, indeed, with loyalist critic Charles Inglis, the officers' response could be cast as “crocodile” tears. But sensibility was pulled into some of the most pressing issues to face revolutionary patriots during the eight years of armed conflict: generating and sustaining a cohesive army and supportive citizenry, forming communal bonds, knowing friend from foe. Its logic can be traced in the 1780 case through a series of actors and audiences: the Continental army corps, American civilians, the imperial metropole. Sensibility mattered in and across both the regular army and civilian life. In André's very disruptiveness are clues to what sensibility offered, clues to its potent place in the culture wars.⁶

Both John Jay and Charles Inglis turn out to have had something right. If sensibility and war were not wholly incompatible, certainly sensibility was changed in the undertow of its wartime use. And, if the officers' tears were not shrewd performances of fake sentiment, manufactured knowingly for the benefit of a critical watching world, there was nonetheless a tangible instrumentality in sensibility's wartime logic. This is what happens in violent political turmoil: familiar ideas and habits of being are necessarily made anew. Natural rights discourse provides one obvious example. Whigs turned the sturdy imperial rhetoric of the rights of free-born Englishmen into that of unalienable natural rights—witness Abra-

5. Benjamin Tallmadge to Colonel Wadsworth, Oct. 4, 1780, in Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Correspondence and Journals of Samuel Blachley Webb*, 2 vols. (New York, 1969), II, 294; Richard K. Meade to Theodorick Bland, Jr., Oct. 3, 1780, Tallmadge to William Heath, Oct. 10, 1780, both in Henry B. Dawson, ed., *Papers concerning the Capture and Detention of Major John André* (Yonkers, N.Y., 1866), 108, 195. On hanging, see Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2004), 109–113; Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776–1865* (New York, 1989); V. A. C. Gatrell, *The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People, 1770–1868* (Oxford, 1994), esp. 6–8.

6. [Charles Inglis], *The Case of Major John Andre, Adjutant-General to the British Army, Who Was Put to Death by the Rebels, October 2, 1780* (New York, 1780), 23–24.

ham Baldwin—thus enabling claims for local self-determination. Or, leaving aside the patriot fodder of the chaplain, take the family metaphor. The relationship between metropole (or king) and colonies had long been imagined in static terms of the family: the mother country (or father) expecting filial affection, the colonies deserving a possessively protective parent, Britons and colonists bound close and fond in familial embrace. But the metaphor could be matured: the ideal parent releases a child into adulthood and independence; the grown child owes no parental debt. American patriots had the advantage of cultural innovation, if not that of military might. The Revolution was driven forward by such energetic adaptations.⁷

I

John André died on the scaffold on October 2, 1780, because of the decision of the Board of Officers that George Washington appointed to consider his case. The British major hoped to be exchanged for American officers taken at Charleston's fall, and Henry Clinton, the head of the British army in North America, made some efforts to save him. But, given that André's confession came from behind American lines without the sanction of a flag, their prisoner was, the Board determined, "a Spy from the enemy." As the army knew well, military convention held out a singular punishment for espionage: execution by hanging.⁸

Why was John André so undoubtedly appealing to the wrong side? At least nine other British officers were executed for espionage by the Ameri-

7. The concept of natural rights was not, of course, original to American revolutionaries, but its political reach most certainly was. For brief histories, see Lynn Hunt, "The Paradoxical Origins of Human Rights," in Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom, Lynn Hunt, and Marilyn B. Young, *Human Rights and Revolutions* (Lanham, Md., 2000), 3–17; Daniel T. Rodgers, "Natural Rights," in *Contested Truths: Keywords in American Politics since Independence* (New York, 1987), 45–79. On the family metaphor, see Melvin Yazawa, *From Colonies to Commonwealth: Familial Ideology and the Beginnings of the American Republic* (Baltimore, 1985), esp. 95–96; Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750–1800* (Cambridge, 1982), esp. 93–105; Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, "The American Revolution: The Ideology and Psychology of National Liberation," *Perspectives in American History*, VI (1972), 165–306.

8. *Proceedings of a Board of General Officers, Held by Order of His Excellency Gen. Washington . . . respecting Major John André, Adjutant General of the British Army, September 29, 1780* (Philadelphia, 1780), 20.

can army during the war, and none other cut such a dash. Certainly, he was a compelling counterimage to the traitorous Arnold who, as one historian observes, seemed “repulsive and renegade, the Judas Iscariot of a great revolution.” The sheer bravery André performed on the execution ground at Tappan is one obvious answer. Tallmadge reported: “He met death with a smile, cheerfully marching to the place of execution. . . . I cannot say enough of his fortitude.” So his fellow officers continued: he had “the appearance of Philosophy and heroism,” no “person [met] his fate with more fortitude and equal conduct,” “he received his fate with greater apparent fortitude than others saw it.” It was courage André insisted upon: his witnesses recorded the commanding last words, “You will all bear witness that I met my fate like a brave man”; “He hoped they would all bear witness that he died a brave man.”⁹

Another answer is the officer’s comportment during confinement between capture and that courageous death. André had disastrously failed to allay the suspicions of his three lower-sort captors, but with his candid disclosure of identity, slight and handsome person, and confiding elocution in adversity—“he has unbosomed his heart to me,” wrote Tallmadge—he seems thoroughly to have charmed their Continental army superiors. The charm rested on an elite ideal of masculine gentility: propriety, elegance of manners, social ease. In his carefully controlled conduct during imprisonment, André’s American witnesses found him the irresistible epitome of the genteel, even, recalling the well-known aristocratic advocate of polite manners, the “Chesterfield of the day.” The night before his death, a pen-and-ink self-portrait doubly immortalized André’s gentility:

9. On executions for espionage, see Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution* (Columbia, S.C., 1996), 38–39; Winthrop Sargent, *The Life and Career of Major John André, Adjutant-General of the British Army in America* (Boston, 1861), 355; Charles Patrick Neimeyer, *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army* (New York, 1996), esp. 144; Colley, *Captives*, 205; Trees, “Benedict Arnold, John André, and His Three Yeoman Captors,” *EAL*, XXXV (2000), 246–273; Tallmadge to Wadsworth, Oct. 4, 1780, in Ford, ed., *Correspondence and Journals of Webb*, II, 294; Joel Barlow to Ruth Baldwin, Oct. 2, 1780, quoted in Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution*, 380; “Extract of a Letter from Camp, Tappan, October 2,” *Pa. Packet*, Oct. 10, 1780 (also printed in *Pennsylvania Gazette, and Weekly Advertiser* [Philadelphia], Oct. 11, 1780, *New-Jersey Gazette* [Burlington], Oct. 18, 1780, *Continental Jour.*, Oct. 26, 1780); William B. Weeden, ed., “Diary of Enos Hitchcock, D.D., a Chaplain in the Revolutionary Army; with a Memoir” [1777–1780], Rhode Island Historical Society, *Publications*, VII (1899), 227–228.

its subject with careful yet easy posture, upright back and half-bent elbow, casually elegant clothes and tied hair, and the drawing itself proof of his mastery of a notably genteel accomplishment.¹⁰

These genteel charms and insistently heroic end go some way toward explaining André's appeal to enemy officers. His was masculinity the old-fashioned way, the kind of polite manliness that Joseph Addison and Richard Steele would have approved and a fixture of manners in the British Empire. But George Washington's aide Alexander Hamilton, for one, saw something newer during André's military trial: a "becoming sensibility" demonstrated in his behavior toward American officers and, surely, in the touching tears for his commanding officer, Henry Clinton. (British commentators saw the same in André's communications with the American leader—letters that stood out as "fraught with all the feelings of a man of sentiment" among the published trial proceedings' otherwise terse details of the crossing of lines and the donning of clothes.) Gentility and heroism do not explain the exact manner in which American admiration gave vent—half-hidden, half-declared tears (Tallmadge), the "compassion of every man of feeling and sentiment" (Meade on the throng)—but André's demonstration of sensibility manifestly does. That is, the American officers recognized and mourned André as a man of sensibility exquisitely like themselves. The lengthiest account by Hamilton was aptly described by a British commentator as "rather the elegant eulogium of a warm friend, than the narrative of an enemy." The vexed dynamic of sentimental identification across enemy lines was the essence of André's disruptiveness.¹¹

To pursue the clues of this disruptiveness requires lingering over the rushed terms and behaviors in such evidence about the scaffold, to consider what was at stake for the American officer as a man of "feeling and sentiment." This takes us from familiar territory—sentimental friendship

10. Tallmadge to Samuel Blachley Webb, Sept. 30, 1780, in Ford, ed., *Correspondence and Journals of Webb*, II, 293; anonymous account published in 1780, reprinted in Charles J. Biddle, "The Case of Major André; with a Review of the Statement of It in Lord Mahon's History of England," HSP, *Memoirs*, VI (1858), 372. André's sketch is reproduced in Stanley J. Idzerda, ed., *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution: Selected Letters and Papers, 1776–1790*, 5 vols. (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977–1983), III, 183.

11. Alexander Hamilton to John Laurens, Oct. 11, 1780, in Harold C. Syrett et al., eds., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 27 vols. (New York, 1961–1987), II, 466–467; *Reading Mercury and Oxford Gazette*, Nov. 20, 1780; *The Annual Register; or, A View of the History, Politics, and Literature for the Year 1781* (London, 1781), 45–46.

—to less familiar ground, from the warm incentives of cohesion and fraternalism among the Continental officer corps to tight imperatives of competition over honor, rank, and reputation.

“TO ASSERT THAT I feel as sensibly whatever affects your health as you do yourself were too extravagant to gain belief, but that I feel whatever the sympathetic heart of a sincere friend can suffer from the distresses of one to whom it is powerfully attached I will not hesitate to assert, and much less blush to own.” Without the blushing and the cagey limitation on how one man’s health can affect another, this could be a letter from John Mifflin to Isaac Norris or James Gibson. But, in place of an address to a Castalio or a Lorenzo, the letter opens, “My Dear General”: lieutenant Ephraim Douglass was writing to his fellow Pennsylvanian James Irvine in the summer of 1782. The correspondence of Nathanael Greene likewise invoked the offering of sentimental friendship. For this Rhode Island general, it was cemented in conversation: a letter of August 1779 told his wife of the “mutual sympathy and mixed melancholy” shared with Jeremiah Wadsworth, a Connecticut colonel, on a walk away from the wider company of the army tent.¹²

When the Continental army was founded and remodeled in 1775–1776, colonial governments and Congress expended considerable energy determining the appointment of the highest-ranking officers, the relative seniority of different branches of the army, the handling of commissions, the terms of service and pay, new legal codes, and the creation of hospital and supply systems. All these considerations were essential prerequisites for an efficient and effective fighting force. Sentimental friendship spoke to a different but no less important concern for military success: fraternal cohesion among the officer corps. This was, of course, a social group only called into existence by the war effort. The American colonies hardly had a standing army on which to draw; there were no well-established regiments like those of the British, with their elaborate social and dining rituals. The letters of men like Douglass and Greene suggest military fraternalism was a need unfulfilled by existing forms of clubbability such

12. Ephraim Douglass to James Irvine, July 26, 1782, in “Pittsburg and Uniontown, Pennsylvania, in 1782–83: Letters from Ephraim Douglass to Gen. James Irvine,” *PMHB*, I (1877), 44; Nathanael Greene to Catharine Greene, Aug. 16, 1779, in R. K. Showman et al., eds., *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, 13 vols. to date (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1976–), IV, 324.

as the polite rituals of freemasonry or the wine and company of the tavern. Certainly, it went uncatered to by army chaplains who focused mainly on the soldiery. Young men in the main, from elite and sometimes middling backgrounds, Continental officers drew directly on their generational culture to form social bonds. They made sentimental friends of one another.¹³

It was precisely this mode of homosociability that the Continentals' most senior officers drew upon to imagine the unity of the army itself. Robert Howe's final address to his troops pictured an army held together by sensibility. The North Carolina general discoursed that, although the moment of separation was welcome to him as a patriot, "yet to his feelings as a man, it is an awful point in time." In the army, he elaborated, "sympathies have been excited, affections impressed, and friendships established in his mind, which time, absence or accident shall never wipe away." The closing sentence of the speech called on "those of similar feelings [to] imagine" his anxiety, his "sensibility upon this occasion" being "too big for utterance." Washington's final leave-taking of the principal officers of the army ran likewise, as did the response. The American commander's words "produced extreme sensibility on both sides," held one typical report; "they were answered by warm expressions, and fervent wishes, from the Gentlemen of the Army."¹⁴

Robert Howe sketched the experience of sentimental friendship in 1783, at the end of the war and in the broad and complacent brushstrokes of victory, but Douglass's and Greene's letters hint that these friendships were not straightforward transactions. Where Douglass blushed, Greene made his conversation a "secret relief" that allowed both men to return to the bigger company in better spirits. Sentimental friendship worked best on a small scale, in twos and threes, in intimate numbers. Moreover, Greene's secrecy and Howe's distinction between his military role and his

13. Cox, *Proper Sense of Honor*, 1–35; E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984); Peter Thompson, *Rum Punch and Revolution: Taverngoing and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1999); David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997), esp. 55–98, 175–208; Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996), esp. 121–132.

14. For Howe, see *Pa. Gaz.*, July 23, 1783. For Washington, see *Rivington's New-York Gazette, and Universal Advertiser*, Dec. 6, 1783; *Pa. Packet*, Dec. 12, 1783; *Pa. Gaz.*, Dec. 17, 1783.

response “as a man” suggest that participants held onto the sense that they were drawing on something outside and preceding the army, the practices of sentimental friends, and that sensibility remained located in manly selves rather than rooted in military culture. Sentimental friendship was about the amity of small internal groups—the aides in Washington’s military family, for example—within the larger fold. It might integrate men on the make like Hamilton, a former merchant’s clerk, with the well born, like John Laurens, son of a prominent South Carolina politician, or the Harrow-educated Virginian Richard Meade. The hesitancy, the repeated insistence on manliness, suggests the novelty of making sensibility, rather than the play of wit or the wine bottle, a form of homosocial bond. Missing Laurens (the archetypal man of feeling, according to one biographer), Hamilton was half-teasing when he upbraided, “You should not have taken advantage of my sensibility to steal into my affections without my consent.” André had done so, too.¹⁵

As a mode of fraternal friendship, sensibility served as one of the key grounds for loyalty and a reason why men fought for one another. Alongside the work of sensibility in friendship was a second dynamic: competition over rank and honor. On receiving a letter from his commanding officer, Pennsylvania captain John Lacey penned, “This was a Thunder Bolt . . . an Electricity that Vibrated through every nerve.” The news of June 1776? It was not a distant victory or defeat or, indeed, treason, but the loss of his company to another officer. A Congressman wrote to John Trumbull, a northern deputy adjutant general who in March 1777 had refused a newly offered commission he believed had been properly made two years before: “Though I approve of the Manly Sensibility which govern’d you on the late Occasion, yet I am sorry that any Accident should have given you this particular Occasion of shewing yourself a Man of Spirited Honor.” The secretary to Congress in November 1778 reflected upon the captured and paroled general William Thompson, who had exchanged high words with a delegate in a Philadelphia coffeehouse and had insulted Congress, all in fury at the exchange of Governor Franklin over himself: “His sensibility was . . . deeply wounded by reflecting on the person preferred to him.” These remarks were not about military cohe-

15. Nathanael Greene to Catharine Greene, Aug. 16, 1779, in Showman et al., eds., *Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, IV, 324; Gregory D. Massey, *John Laurens and the American Revolution* (Columbia, S.C., 2000); Richard Brookhiser, *Alexander Hamilton, American* (New York, 1999), 41.

sion; they were about competition. In all these exchanges and across the length of the war, patriots bound sensibility narrowly to rank and more broadly to honor.¹⁶

Was this development a travesty? Honor was not an important term for Quaker gentleman John Mifflin, although his journal did reference “noble Honor,” by which he seemed to mean gentlemanly integrity, in its appraisal of his friend James Gibson’s merits—“He never yet deceived me.” In this small and negative sense, honor was a precondition for the intimacies of sentimental friendship. But early modern historians have long known that honor could imply something far more pungent than honesty, elite-inflected: a set of rigid principles by which men of property ordered and defended their personal reputations; a form of individual credit as important as material possessions; a component of gender difference and an instrument of power in gender relations. Calcified, wearing long tradition on its sleeve, concerned with abstract principles before all else, honor was a peculiar counterpart for sensibility.¹⁷

Yet transatlantic literary sensibility, if not the local practices observed here, did offer precedent. Indeed, a dictionary entry for “sensibility” took this very cluster of issues as its proper usage: “To have a great sensibility for glory. His sensibility concerning honor, concerning everything about reputation, is extreme. To be of a great sensibility to the least insults.” The possessor of sensibility, the implication ran, was alert to a world fraught with tiny slights, on the one hand, and the possibility of fame and greatness, on the other. Sensibility spelled an absolute preoccupation with personal reputation. Such men might be expected in the South—away from Quakerish Philadelphia—where cultures of honor flourished conspicuously into the nineteenth century.¹⁸

16. John Lacey, “Memoirs of Brigadier General John Lacey, of Pennsylvania,” *PMHB*, XXV (1901), 195; James Lovell to John Trumball, Mar. 16, 1777, *LDC*, VI, 450; Charles Thomson, “Notes of Proceedings in Congress,” Nov. 23, 1778, *LDC*, XI, 242–250 (quotation on 248).

17. Journal of John Fishbourne Mifflin, I (May 12, 1786–Nov. 11, 1786), Aug. 12, 1786, reproduction of original (see Chapter 3, above, note 1); Mervyn James, *Society, Politics, and Culture: Studies in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1986), 308–415.

18. *Dictionnaire de L’Académie Française*, new ed., 2 vols. (Paris, 1772), II, 494; Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery . . .* (Princeton, N.J., 1996); Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore, 1987), esp. 5–49; Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York, 1982).