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A Riot of Devils: Indian Imagery and Popular Protest in the Northeastern Backcountry, 1760-1845

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A RIOT OF DEVILS:
INDIAN IMAGERY AND POPULAR PROTEST IN THE NORTHEASTERN BACKCOUNTRY, 1760-1845.

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Paul B. Moyer
1994
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The use of "Indian" disguise by Northern backcountry rioters between 1760 and 1845 was a product of European popular culture and its adaptation to the unique conditions of early America. This study of "Indian" disguise examines the development of its symbolic meanings and describes its visual evolution. First, it uncovers what the antecedents of "Indian" protest-imagery were. Next, it looks at how particular historical events and conditions in colonial America impacted the development of "Indian" disguise. Finally, it demonstrates how both culture and history help to explain why riotous Indian imagery evolved as it did, where it did, and when it did.

The use of Indian imagery in riots and rebellions, rather than being a single, unwavering tradition, was a process of change in which underlying assumptions and active functions constantly shifted. Disguised protest was deeply rooted in popular European traditions of celebration, recreation, and riot; European popular culture provided the foundations for disguised rioting in the American colonies and supplied a precedent for disgruntled colonists' appropriation of "Indian" costumes. At first, "Indian" costume and imagery were used by rioters to terrify their victims. But with the use of the Indian as a symbol of American rebellion during the Revolution, a political dimension was added to the symbology of Indian imagery. "Indian" disguise proliferated among the backcountry protest movements that followed independence, as popular and patriotic versions of Indian imagery mingled to produce a powerful tool of protest and resistance. Finally, it was among the Yankees of the New England backcountry that protest's "Indian" masquerade found its most sophisticated development and most strident use. This region's cultural heritage and historical experience provided "Indian" protest with its most pliant host.
A RIOT OF DEVILS:
INDIAN IMAGERY AND POPULAR PROTEST IN THE NORTHEASTERN BACKCOUNTRY, 1760–1845.
Introduction

"God deliver us from such a banditti of Devils."

"One side of the face blazed an intense red, while the other was black as midnight." This was the grotesque image revealed to Robin as a muffled stranger uncovered his face. It was late in the evening, but enough moonlight filtered through the narrow streets of Boston to illuminate the being's fantastic features. The red and black face was divided along "the broad bridge of the nose; and a mouth which seemed to extend from ear to ear was black and red, in contrast to the color of the cheek." Robin, a young man from the backwoods of New England, had arrived in the city this same evening to find his kinsman. He wanted to make his own way in the world, but first had to seek the patronage of a wealthy relation. What should have been the simple task of finding him became a frustrating mystery: no one was able, or willing, to tell Robin where his kinsman lived. As dusk led into night, the despondent youth wandered the dark streets of an alien world--the press of buildings around him mute testament to the raucous bustle of the city now so strangely absent. Becoming enraged with his situation, Robin decided to stop and interrogate--with the aid of his stout
oaken cudgel if need be—the next figure who passed him by.

It was in this state of mind that Robin encountered the muffled stranger, and like a thief in the night boldly made him halt, only to reveal the dumbfounding sight of a man possessed by "two individual devils, a fiend of fire and a fiend of darkness." As unexpected as the stranger's "infernal visage" was his willingness to inform Robin that, if he stayed where he was, his kinsman would soon pass by. Robin, at wits' end, waited.

Soon after, the silence of the city was broken by distant "sounds of a trumpet . . . frequent bursts from many instruments of discord, and a wild and confused laughter." To this ruckus, Boston awoke around Robin; people gathered in the streets and poked their heads out of windows in expectation. What they awaited soon came into view.

The devilish being Robin met earlier now rode a horse and held a drawn sword; "in his train were wild figures in the Indian dress, and many fantastical shapes without a model." The raucous procession had "a visionary air, as if a dream had broken forth from some feverish brain, and were sweeping visibly through the midnight streets." This vision was made still more mysterious and dream-like by the flickering torches that lit its way. Exhausted and disoriented, Robin at last saw that a man borne in a cart was the object of this disorderly parade. Firelight and moonlight revealed that covered "in tar and feathery
dignity, sat his kinsman, Major Molineux!" The anxiety building in Robin all evening poured out; joining his voice with that of the crowd, he laughed.¹

Literature often brings us closer to the past than does history, revealing an emotional world of thoughts and sensations that facts cannot capture. Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote the story "My Kinsman, Major Molineux" as a metaphor of the American Revolution. The transforming experience of Robin, from searching out his kinsman’s patronage to joining in his ridicule, symbolized America’s rebellion against Britain’s authority. The setting of the story was pre-revolutionary Boston; the event it described was an act of popular protest. Grotesque costumes, discordant music, torch-lit processions, and tarring-and-feathering were all elements of such an event.

Ritual disguise that masked individual identities and suspended social norms, riotous processions replete with punishments both symbolic and real, and an accompaniment of brash instrumentation and pot-banging functioned together to voice grievances, demand redress, and enforce norms of behavior.² Hawthorne’s story is fiction, but it illustrates the process and emotional impact of popular protest. It conveys the atmosphere of these premeditated riots—the mental state of those watching or participating in them, and of those suffering their attentions. The story juxtaposes its rude comedy and terror, its combination of the carnival
and the savage.

The "wild figures in the Indian dress" that Robin observed refers to the most singular aspect of popular protest's evolution in America: the employment of "Indian" imagery and disguise. In 1808, Pitt Dillingham had an experience that, like Robin's, involved rioters dressed as "Indians." On this occasion, the encounter occurred not in the press of the city, but among the forests and hills of the frontier. Dillingham, a deputy sheriff of Kennebec County, Maine, set off one morning from his home in Augusta to negotiate with the disgruntled backcountry settlers of Fairfax. He rode out of the steep-banked Kennebec River valley, onto the road leading northeast through Maine's hill-country. The deputy wound his way along a road still hemmed in by woodlands; the encounter occurred where the narrow road led by a tavern in a clearing.

Deputy Dillingham was met by seventy-four of Maine's White Indians, all wearing the "Indian" disguise that marked their persona. Their "caps and masks were decorated with the most uncouth images imaginable. The masks were some of bearskin, some sheepskin, some stuck over with hog's bristles." Like the riotous crowd in Boston, Dillingham was struck by their fantastic dress, their hostile deportment, and their alien aspect. He believed that "to give a true description of them is impossible . . . the frantic imagination of a lunatic in the depth of desparation could
not conceive of more horrid or ghastly specters." Pitt Dillingham stressed, in words that resemble Hawthorne’s prose, the irrational atmosphere of his White Indian encounter, but his collected observations contradicted this impression. Dillingham noted the White Indians’ discipline, their organization, their ability to negotiate peacefully with him, and the parting songs they sang "relative to the hardness of the times." These rioters in savage costume were not lunatics, but members of an articulate resistance.³

Rioters’ "Indian" disguise was a product of European popular culture and its adaptation to the unique conditions of early America; it was a feature of a cultural frontier’s encounter and exchange. This frontier had three dimensions—three streams of experience that influenced one another. The first was culture, in particular, European popular culture’s traditions of protest. The second was the experience of frontier life, its instability, violence, and encounters with Indians. The third was America’s revolution and its impact upon ideas and political ideology, upon frontier protest and rebellion.⁴ Much has been written about the moral economy of the colonial American crowd, less about the meaning behind its rituals of riot. What has been written about the latter deals mostly with urban crowds, yet the use of Indian protest imagery was very much a phenomenon of the backcountry.⁵

The attempt to determine what process surrounded the
development of "Indian" costume involves many of the
difficulties encountered by Robin and Pitt. Like the torch-
light procession witnessed by Robin, forms of popular
protest are shrouded in the darkness of historical
obscurity; their social functions are distorted by the
flickering illumination of second-hand descriptions; and
details of their imagery are overwhelmed by their
sensationalism. Beyond these obstacles, another significant
factor hinders the analysis of America's riotous "Indians"--
their identities were most often hidden. With Pitt
Dillingham's encounter with Maine's masked "Indians," he
failed to discover the rioters' true identity, and instead
carcatured them by stressing their savagery. History has
done much the same thing--masking the complexity of "Indian"
disguise by placing it under the general rubric of America's
revolutionary experience. In actuality, the "Indian-ness" of
such disguise was as much in the mind of the beholder as in
the disguise itself; it had both physical and psychological
dimensions.

The symbolic act of employing "Indian" disguise had to be
understood by both actor and audience in order to succeed
and to be recognized by history. In spite of these
difficulties, an understanding of "Indian" costume's
historical evolution is possible once certain questions are
answered. First, what were the antecedents of popular
protest imagery, and what expectations did these antecedents
place upon the use of Indian disguise? Second, what were the conditions in Britain's colonies that encouraged masquerading as American natives? Third, what were the political, social, and geographical patterns of Indian disguise? Finally, how are the answers to each of these questions related to an understanding of "why" riotous Indian imagery evolved as it did, where it did, and when it did? This study of Indian disguise examines the development of its imagery's meanings, to those on both sides of its mask, and describes its visual evolution.

The use of Indian imagery in riots and rebellions, rather than being a single, unwavering tradition, was a process of change in which underlying assumptions and active functions constantly shifted. Disguised protest was deeply rooted in popular European traditions of celebration, recreation, and protest; European popular culture provided the foundations for disguised rioting in the American colonies and supplied a precedent for disgruntled colonists' appropriation of "Indian". At first, "Indian" costume and imagery were used by rioters to terrify their victims. But with the use of the Indian as a symbol of American rebellion during the Revolution, a political dimension was added to the symbology of Indian imagery. "Indian" disguise proliferated among the backcountry protest movements that followed independence, as popular and patriotic versions of Indian imagery mingled to produce a powerful tool of protest
and resistance. Finally, it was among the Yankees of the New England backcountry that protest's "Indian" masquerade found its most sophisticated development and most strident use. This region's culture and experience provided such imagery with its most pliant host.
Chapter One
A Violent Mummery

In 1753, Duncan Oguillon and John Collier were driven from their homes by "divers Persons unknown, to the number of Twelve or more, being all disguised, having their Faces besmear'd with Blacking." These dozen "Cursing, Swearing, and Threatening" rioters "did Assault, Beat, and Wound" their victims. These violent evictions did not comprise an isolated act by a mob of shouting, flailing lunatics, but were the first of many. New Jersey’s Governor, William Crosby, reported that there were at least twenty-three incidents of collective violence across six counties between 1745 and 1754. These incidents were part of a long-standing movement by New Jersey settlers, who had purchased land from Indians, to resist the encroachments of proprietary landowners whose overlapping patents were granted from the Crown. Across northern New Jersey, men formed bands of agrarian regulators. These vigilantes dispossessed those who held proprietors’ deeds, disrupted courts, attacked officials issuing writs and eviction notices, and broke open jails to free compatriots.6

The regulators were often disguised. One night in 1749, "a number of persons unknown" broke open the Essex County
jail and freed prisoners who had been arrested for their participation in the riots. The half-dozen men who broke in "were so disguised by blacking their faces, having old Cloathes, and Straw on their heads" that witnesses could not identify them. The farcial image of scarecrows storming the county jail contrasted sharply with their actions that night. New Jersey's disguised rioters struck in the dead of night, terrorized their victims with loud threats, and willingly used their clubs to crack open skulls or knock out teeth.7

Rioters in blackface, jail-breaking scarecrows, and violent, nocturnal raids all drew upon deep undercurrents of popular culture. Europe's plebeian forms of celebration and protest that came to America with wave upon wave of migration were the antecedents of disguised rioting. In particular, the rituals of mumming, the direct action of skimmingtons, the practice of rough music, and the brutal violence of lower-class sport all served as points of continuity between forms of American riot and European popular culture.8

The ritual of mummery was crucial to the development of disguised protest in America. During his voyage to Newfoundland in 1583, Sir Humphrey Gilbert recorded that "for the solace of our people, and allurement of the savages, we were provided with music in good variety; not omitting the least toys, as morris dancerns, hobby horse,
and Maylike conciets." Despite such examples of popular culture’s transfer to the Americas, popular traditions more often crossed the Atlantic in people’s minds than in the holds of ships. Yet Gilbert’s relation points out an important aspect of migration: Europe’s popular culture, as with its people and technology, was put to new uses in the colonies. In this case, the functions of mummery and morris dancing were transformed from ritual modes of intracultural expression to an intercultural form of communication with "which to delight the savage people." The earliest forms of Indian masquerade emerged out of this transformation of popular culture in America.

Understanding the coexistence of continuity and change in America’s employment of European folk traditions is necessary to comprehend the meanings behind the use of Indian disguise. Crucial to popular protest’s employment of Indian imagery in the colonies was the precedent of ritual masquerading’s social role in Britain. In 1839, J.B. Jukes, a geologist from Cambridge surveying the minerals of Newfoundland, took time away from his work to observe the Christmas and New Year’s celebrations of its inhabitants. "During Christmas, they amused themselves by what seemed the relics of an old English custom, which, I believe, was imported from the West of England, where it still lingers." Jukes described the ties between Newfoundland’s lower classes and a traditional mumming ritual featuring "men,
dressed in all kinds of fantastic disguises, and some in women's clothing, with gaudy colors and painted faces."

Disguise was central to the festivities; participants hid their identities, took part in rude dances, and practiced role reversal as they "paraded the streets . . . playing pracitcle jokes on each other or on passers by" and kept busy "soliciting money or grog." The mummers' disguise was what enabled them to temporarily abrogate social norms.\textsuperscript{10}

The ritual form and social function of mummery were practiced throughout the English colonies. Mummery's traditions came primarily from Britain, but other rituals arrived from continental Europe. In Pennsylvania, a German mumming tradition known as belsnickling survived. Literally meaning "hairy Saint Nicholas," belsnickling involved a Christmas visitation by a person dressed in black clothing or skins, carrying a switch, who would question children about their behavior. The tradition's frightening imagery and its sense of otherworldly judgement uncovers old Saint Nick's connection to Newfoundland's mummers, Boston's "Anticks," and New York's "Fantasticals."\textsuperscript{11}

Both the forms and social functions of British festivals of misrule were transplanted to America. In the fifteenth century, John Hadman of Norfolk, England described a "crowned King of Christmas accompanied by numbers in various grotesque dresses . . . some clothed in armour, others, dressed as devils . . . others wearing skin dresses,
and counterfiting bears, wolves, [and] lions." Hadman's value is that he recorded what the mummers wore, and described the mummers' success in "alarming the cowardly and appalling the stoutest hearts." Images of devils and wild beasts provided the facades behind which mummers engaged in raucous and threatening behavior intended to frighten their audience. By the early modern period, European mumming rituals had most likely lost much of their ancient religious and spiritual meanings, but had adopted new social functions within popular culture. By cloaking identity and providing a respite from inhibitions, mumming play allowed members of the lower classes to invade the social and cultural realm of elites.

Mumming allowed its participants to cross the barriers of class and to impose, for a time, the imperatives of popular culture. Samuel Beck, a Bostonian of the late eighteenth century, described an episode of mummery where social orders clashed. He told of "Anticks a set of the lowest blackguards, who disguised in filthy clothes and offtimes with masked faces, went from house to house in large companies obtruding themselves everywhere." These practices were those of traditional mumming: disguise, traveling processions, and visitation. But mumming also had a social function, that of protest. Beck described a band of mummers who invaded "the rooms that were occupied by parties of ladies and gentlemen . . . with great insolence," and how
this genteel gathering’s game of cards was interrupted when the "Anticks" took "possession of a table, seat[ed] themselves on rich furniture, and proceed to handle the cards." The social impact of mumming’s emotional atmosphere—its role-reversal, mockery, and festival misrule—was at work. Of course, as tradition dictated, the "Anticks" staged their play. However, tradition included extortion, for the mummers would neither perform nor leave until they were given money, food, or drink. This ritual robbery was mumming’s imposition of lower class privilege and a coercive redistribution of wealth.13

Masked rituals of ridicule and extortion were important to the evolution of American popular protest movements. Besides providing a disguise to evade authority, mumming gave protesters an ideology of misrule.14 The violence and judicial process that existed just beneath folk ritual provided a useful method of resistance during episodes of social protest. The "Rebecca" and "Scotch Cattle" riots were movements that crossed the boundaries of ritual disguise and social protest. England’s Luddites and "Forest Blacks" were other examples of rioters "nearly all disguised, some having their faces simply blackened and others wearing masks to conceal their features effectively . . . a few actually dressed themselves partly in woman’s apparel." In America, as in Britain, articulate protest movements repeatedly took on the imagery and underlying social messages of mummery.15
Popular culture's masquerades provided American colonists with the necessary tools to adopt Indian imagery as a form of protest disguise. Mummers' festivities did not exist in a timeless vacuum of popular culture; they were dynamic, creative social expressions that were altered to fit America's unique conditions. The plot and ritual of the mummers' play maintained significant continuity; those of Newfoundland in the nineteenth, England in the fifteenth, and Boston in the eighteenth century were essentially the same hero-combat dramatization. What changed was the characters in the plays and the images they evoked. Mummers' plays continually added and dropped characters from their casts: St. George, St. Patrick, Sir Guy, the Turkish Knight, Hercules, and Beelzebub hobnobbed with the likes of Oliver Cromwell, Jack Tar, and Dan Donnelly, a famous Dublin boxer of the late eighteenth century. Out of early America's protest movements emerged another character— that of the Indian.16

Masking traditions provided for popular protest's adoption of an Indian "character," and served as a framework for this character's role, but another venue of popular culture, the skimmington, provided Indian masquerade's stage. The skimmington was a form of popular protest aimed at enforcing behavior. It possessed a rich imagery and riotous process rooted in European plebeian culture, but gained a distinctly American character, especially along the
In its essential form, the skimmington was a mob procession replete with outrageous costumes and pointed effigies. They were usually held at night, illuminated by torch-light, and accompanied by a noxious mixture of instrumentation, pot-banging, and shouting known as "rough music." Skimmington crowds "serenaded" the homes of people guilty of what was deemed inappropriate behavior. Wife beaters, husband beaters, adulterers, and widows who remarried too soon were the most common victims of skimmingtons. Deviants were ritually mocked and threatened with punishment; their "crimes" were represented in effigies that usually ended atop a bonfire.18

In the skimmington, popular ritual and American protest movements had their most significant encounter. As in Europe, skimmingtons sought to enforce community values, but along the American frontier these riots became more violent and less ritualized, and expanded their targets beyond the traditional ones of the wife beater, unfaithful spouse, and sexual deviant. Tradition persisted in the ritualized skimmington of Pope's Day processions in New England and New York, and in New Jersey, where rioters, "near a Dozen of them, who dress themselves in Women's Cloaths, and painting their Faces, go in the Evening to the Houses of such as are reported to beat their Wives." But this New Jersey skimmington mob diverged from tradition when it proceeded to seize "the Delinquent . . . Strip him, turn
up hisPosteriors, andflog him with Rods most severely." In 
Europe, skimmington punishments were almost always symbolic; 
in America, physical punishment was the rule.19

It was the violence of frontier skimmingtons that 
marked the most extreme divergence from tradition. Methods 
ofenforcing community norms were adapted to a frontier 
environment where community was often transitory and where 
agreement regarding social norms was even more ephemeral. 
Yet even this divergence had its own cultural context. 
Popular traditions of protest, celebration, and recreation 
had a brutal strain that preceded the frontier’s 
violence. Scattered through the festivals and holidays of 
plebeian culture were many examples of game-like violence. 
On both sides of the Atlantic, people spent their leisure 
time at cockfights, dogfights, and bull-baitings. 
Backsticks, cudgelling, and singlesticks referred to a 
popular sport which involved drawing "an inch" of blood from 
an opponent’s head. In the vernacular of eighteenth-century 
popular culture, saying "Let’s go break some heads" was 
synonymous with "Anyone for tennis?"20

Backcountry protest’s physical manifestations, its 
targets, and its social and emotional function can be traced 
to the traditions of mumming, rough music, and skimmingtons, 
but these closely related aspects of popular culture explain 
only part of what occurred throughout the American
backcountry. The harsh conditions of life in the hinterlands provided a constant source of grievance for settlers and a setting where violence, with a unique character and intensity, became the response. Backcountry settlers’ peculiar forms of popular protest were further molded by their proximity to the frontier, where they often intermingled with Indians.

Frontier conditions altered the dialogue of popular protest rituals. The instability, weak social structure, and violence of life on the fringe rescripted the use of disguised protest, changing it from a comedy of misrule or a riotous morality play to a brutal tragedy acted out in "Indian" costume. Popular culture’s dimension of violence was not relegated to recreation and blood sport; it changed with society. The conditions of the American frontier produced such intense change, magnifying and intensifying a devilish, dark side of the popular psyche. This psyche had a reality in the minds of frontiersmen--an alien reality dwelling in the forest. The Indians, their culture, and their struggles against European settlement encouraged the frontier’s resort to brutality. On many occasions this mentality of violence exploded, as it did along the Pennsylvania frontier in the aftermath of the Seven Years’ War.

It was a cold December day in 1763, and the icy streets of Lancaster, Pennsylvania were quiet as the town’s
inhabitants stayed indoors to escape the chill. The silence was suddenly punctured by echoing hoof-beats as a group of bundled figures, fifty to sixty in number, rode into town. Grimly dressed in a mixture of European garments and buckskins—and well armed with rifles, tomahawks, and knives—the horsemen made straight for the county jail. Some of the band remained mounted and kept watch while the majority battered down the door and stormed the prison; from within the stone building gun shots, screams, and curses pierced the cold air. A quarter of an hour later, the riders were back on their horses and galloping away.

William Henry, an inhabitant of Lancaster, rushed toward the jail where his eyes met a scene of butchery. "Near the back door of the prison lay an old Indian and his squaw . . . across him and squaw lay two children, of about the age of three years whose heads were split with the tomahawk, and their scalps taken off." But this was only the beginning; once inside, Henry saw the carnage of a brutal massacre. He gazed "towards the middle of the jail yard" where there "lay a stout Indian" whom Henry noticed had "been shot in his breast; his legs . . . chopped with the tomahawk, [and] his hands cut off." Finally, a rifle ball had been "discharged in his mouth, so that his head was blown to atoms, and the brains . . . splashed against and yet hanging to the wall, for three or four feet around."  

William Henry was only one of many who were sickened by
the sight of "men, women and children spread about the prison yard; shot, scalped, hacked, and cut to pieces." Like a shock wave, news of the massacre of fourteen Conestoga Indians at Lancaster spread throughout the province. But who perpetrated such an act? It was well known at the time that the guilty crew was "a number of . . . armed demi-savages of Paxtang and Donnegal." The culprits of this infamous act of frontier violence were men from the townships of upper Lancaster County. This was not the only killing they were guilty of. Just over a week before, they had ridden into an Indian settlement of Conestoga Manor and killed and scalped six of its inhabitants. Ironically, the Conestoga Indians killed at Lancaster had been gathered for their collective protection following the first attack. 22

Beyond its brutality, this episode revealed the deep cultural rifts developing between East and West, between a stable region and a region infested by fear and anxiety. These murders precipitated a crisis in Pennsylvania. By late January, reports were filtering into Philadelphia that fifteen hundred "Paxton Boys" were going to march on the city to seek vengeance from the provincial Assembly they blamed for the poor state of frontier defenses, and to kill 140 Christian Indians being sheltered in the city. The march occurred, but only a few hundred backwoodsmen came to Philadelphia's outskirts, and they were diverted by promises of redress and the presence of a hastily assembled city
militia. A military confrontation was narrowly avoided, but a cultural one was just beginning to develop.

The Paxton Boys' march was one of many eruptions of violent protest that plagued the backcountry regions of British North America. During the spring and summer of 1765, the Pennsylvania frontier experienced another outburst of violent protest, again by disguised groups of rioters. In June, teamsters hired by the British army "were attacked by about thirty . . . Rioters in disguise, with their faces blacked." These men, who became known as the "Black Boys," bound their prisoners, "flogged them severely, killed five of their horses, wounded two more, and burnt all their saddles." The Black Boys' riotous behavior had begun in March when they attacked a pack-train laden with Indian trade goods, destroyed 63 out of 81 horse loads, and stole a supply of whiskey for themselves. For a long time, Pennsylvania's frontiersmen had protested that traders were supplying the Indians with weapons that could be used against them. Their protests went unheeded, and so they acted on their own behalf. Soldiers from the Forty-second Highlanders, stationed at Fort Loudon near Carlisle, captured some of the rioters and imprisoned them. In retaliation the Black Boys, led by magistrate James Smith, laid an intermittent siege to the fort, attacking those who strayed from its protective palisade. The commander of the fort himself was shot at, unhorsed, and threatened by five
The Black Boys' riots provide an opportunity to see the psychology and culture of frontier protest. The rioters suspended local institutions of law and order and exerted their own forms of authority through regulator militia units. Travelers were expected to register with this militia so that they could be searched for Indian trade goods, and received passes for their safe conduct. The Black Boys posted advertisements "to give notice to all our loyal Voluntiers, to those that has not yet enlisted, you are to come to our Town and come to our Tavern and fill your Belly's with Liquor and your mouth with swearing, and you will have your pass, but if not, your Back must [be] whipt & your mouth be gagged." Here, as elsewhere along the frontier, law and order often became the preserve of disguised, backwoods vigilantes, and just another currency of violence.

Beyond usurping institutions of law and order, the rioters articulated elements of an abrogant frontier culture. The Black Boys aggressively asserted their licentious liberty by displaying a "free toleration for drinking, swearing, sabbath breaking, and any outrage what we have a mind to do, to let those strangers know their place." To symbolize their autonomy, the rioters renamed a town they occupied: "it was first Posses, Black's Town, and we move it to Squire Smith's Town, and now I think I have a
A central feature of easterners' caricatures and condemnations of westerners' violent, rebellious behavior was to compare them to Indians. These comparisons portrayed a violent, savage image of the Indian forged out of the experience of recent warfare along the frontier. Eastern Pennsylvanians' descriptions of the Paxton Boys, in either eyewitness accounts or partisan broadsides, demonstrated the perception that a distinct and deranged culture had emerged in the backcountry. Benjamin Franklin, one of the most vehement anti-Paxton Boys pamphleteers, was convinced that the murdered Indians "would have been safe in any Part of the known world--except in the Neighborhood of the CHRISTIAN WHITE SAVAGES of Peckstang and Donegall!" He wondered aloud if men came "to America to learn and practise the Manners of Barbarians?" It is both significant and ironic that Franklin painted the Paxton Boys as criminals by linking them to the "Barbarians" and "SAVAGES" they had murdered. The Paxton Boys and their Indian victims were considered two sides of the same coin."

Backwoods rioters such as the Paxton Boys revealed the earliest functional usage of Indian dress and imagery. Their march on Philadelphia literally brought frontier culture out of the hinterlands and placed it under the scrutiny of the eastern establishment. The Paxton Boys were witnessed by
David Rittenhouse as they passed through Germantown. He described them "frightening women, by running the muzzels of their guns through windows, swearing and hallooing; attacking men without the least provocation; dragging them by their hair to the ground, and pretending to scalp them." His remarks betrayed a fear of frontier culture's violence, license, and savagery. They also illustrated how backwoodsmen mocked Indian behavior in order to terrorize people and to express their grievances. Like many others, Rittenhouse likened the Paxton Boys' behavior to that of Indians, and, in his case, found the whites' "ten times more savage and brutal than theirs." As with their actions, the Paxton Boys' appearance--"dressed in blanket coats and moccasins"--was seen by easterners as distinctly Indian-like. Here the vast gulf between the frontcountry and the backcountry became apparent--the "Indian" garb and behavior of the Paxton Boys was an expression of the frontier's isolation from the sensibilities of the seaboard. Some of the backwoodsmens' "Indian-ness" was only a figment of easterners' fears, but it was also the product of their adoption of Indian imagery.30

The first conscious links between frontier riot and Indian imagery were at work in another episode of criminal protest committed by Pennsylvania's backwoods "Blacks." Tax collector Philip Jenkins was at home one evening in the summer of 1784 enjoying the company of friends and family
when "there suddenly Rush'd in at the door . . . three men each having in one hand a Pistol in the other a Club." One of the invaders "was a Tall man with a Hunting shirt on, another was of middle size, [and] had on a hunting shirt and Trousers, and [the] other was a less sized man with a Hunting shirt and Trowsers on." The three men, dressed in frontier buckskins, had their faces "streaked with Black." They terrorized Jenkins's family and took Jenkins aside to demand his money and collector's records. When Jenkins hesitated, one of the intruders warned "Dont stand to prate" and clubbed Jenkins on the head. The three black-faced men spent the next hours searching the house for money, "both public and private," and Jenkins's tax collection papers; they found both. Before the three escaped into the night, one of them added, "you Damn son of a bitch . . . if you do go Collecting and more and Distressing for the tax you will be a Dead man."

This criminal act was covered with a veneer of political protest. The rioters who attacked Philip Jenkins were no Robin Hoods. They warned him not to "distress" people by collecting their taxes, but were quite ready to steal the people's "public" tax money. This was only one of many crimes perpetrated by disguised rioters. Border disputes, tax resistance, and outright banditry were so rank in Pennsylvania's colonial and post-colonial backcountry that one observer stated that "scare two days pass that some
outrage is not committed in one part or other of this Country."

Besides a thin mantle of political protest, frontier bandits wore a veil of Indian imagery to cover their identities. Their clothing resembled the deerskin garb worn by Indians, but this was only coincidental; frontiersmen wore such dress every day. The rioters consciously borrowed from Indians, however, in their use of blackface. Two witnesses to the assault on Jenkins noted that his attackers' faces were "streaked with Black." That is, their features were obscured by black stripes, imitating the color and perhaps the pattern of face paint worn by warring Indians. This disguise was a product of parallels between rioters' traditional disguise of blackface and Indian uses of face paint. Not only were the forms the same, so were their underlying functions. Indians used war paint to create a fierce visage "by clothing it in a blackness that makes terrible those who are painted with it." Indians, like mummers and rioters, sought to produce fright and submerge individual identities while carrying out acts not a part of everyday society, such as war or riot.

When rioters put on the "streaked" blacking of an Indian, they took on a demonic persona. Such a covering evoked a bloody history of Indian-European violence and played upon deep psychological fears. To Europeans, black was the color of evil, the hue of the devil. Blackfaced
mummers used this powerful mental equation to suspend the social order and to impose its own realm of behavior. To backcountry protestors, who traditionally depended upon mumming imagery, the Indian provided a more potent vision of terror. To one observer, blacked Indian warriors attacked "like an army of Demons, with Hellish yells and frightful cries." Indians' use of blacking, and their violent European stereotype, made them real devils in the minds of colonists.35

Pennsylvania's riots were only part of the proliferation of backcountry protest that occurred by the mid-eighteenth century. Woven into the social and economic grievances that these movements sought to redress was an ever-present thread of popular protest--its traditions of the skimmington and mummers' play and its innovation of Indian disguise. New York's backcountry constantly seethed with riot and rebellion. At the northern reaches of the Connecticut River, frontier settlers rebelled against New York's authority in the 1770s when they sought land patents under the auspices of the Hampshire Grants.36

This backcountry confrontation pitted Yorkers against rebellious New England immigrants. The rebels' cultural traits were crucial to the development of Indian disguise. Unlike others, rioting Yankees employed Indian costume as an element of popular protest rather than in perpetrating violent crime. Their garb became more complex, expanding
from blackface to the wearing of "Indian" blankets. As in New Jersey's land riots of the 1740s and 1750s, agrarian protestors known as the Green Mountain Boys employed the tactics of forced eviction and collective interference with the law. Samuel Gardiner, a New York claimant of Wallumsock Patent, felt the fury of this popular protest. He found the Hampshire claimant Ichabod Cross living on his land and used the courts to drive him off. In retaliation, Gardiner was subjected to a campaign of nocturnal harassment, often waking to find his fences pulled down and his crops damaged by wandering cattle. Gardiner was warned that his home would be burned and he beaten or killed if he did not relinquish his title.37

One summer evening in 1771, the unrelenting Gardiner was surrounded by eleven men "some of them disguised in Blankets like indians, others with Handkerchiefs, and others with Women's caps on their Heads, some of them with black Working Frocks." This array of assailants displayed several traditions of popular protest. The rioters' female garb harked back to the conventions of mumming and skimmingtons, while Indian disguise represented an innovation of frontier life. Mob-cap and blanket-bedecked rioters evoked a grim humor and confronted their victims with a terrifying irrationality. They told Gardiner that when they finished with him "it should be such a day to him as he never seen since he was born." Rioters' Indian disguise was significant
in the campaign of terror, for such disguise evoked an image of pagan savagery and tortuous death attached to Indians by frontiersmen. The costume—blacking and a blanket—were available to any settler; this availability and the terror such a masquerade produced in its victims made it extremely attractive.38

Samuel Gardiner still refused to abandon his land; his stubbornness led to a riot that combined popular tradition with the hue of frontier violence. While Gardiner was away, his wife, children, and brother were subjected to a nighttime raid. Rioters "to the number of One Hundred, some of who disfigured with Black; others with wigs and Horse tails, and Women's caps and other Disguises," ransacked Gardiner's home and threatened that Gardiner, when found, "would be cropt, gelt, and whipped . . . tied up to a Tree with a Gag in his Mouth, and so starved to Death."39

The same threats were being made across the thirteen colonies, not against men struggling to carve out a farm along the frontier like Samuel Gardiner, but against stamp agents, provincial officials, and officers of the crown. Those making the threats were not rioting backwoods agrarians, but patriot mobs and shadowy "Sons of Liberty." A charged political movement of the heartland fed protest along the frontier; the meat and drink of revolution was heady stuff, and it was not long before the backcountry had its fill. But this exchange was not a one-way street:
America's frontier contributed the Indian as a symbol of rebellion.

Yet, more often than not, such exchanges were made between a backcountry protest and revolutionary agenda which looked past, not into, one another. The Boston Tea Party and other acts of patriotic protest acted out in Indian costume not only pushed the colonies further towards revolution, but also cast backcountry rebellion in a revolutionary mold. Frontier rebels did not digest the whole of the revolution's ideological implications, but instead viewed its ideas through a prism of frontier experience. The products of this refracted gaze were the short-term legitimization of backcountry protest and a long-term conflict between the future republic's core and peripheries.
Chapter 2
"Rally Mohawks"

Backcountry rebels usurped the politics of revolution in order to justify their actions and to legitimize their protest. The Green Mountain Boys' capture of Fort Ticonderoga in 1775 was but one instance of a make-shift alliance that developed between frontier rebels and American patriots. America's independence movement mobilized people by tapping into popular culture's rituals of protest. In so doing, radical Whig leaders sent conflicting messages to the populace. Although they sanctioned riots that promoted American independence, they disapproved of the misrule that underlay these protests and considered riotous collective action antithetical to republican government. This conflict between revolutionary means and ends—between elite and popular cultures—prompted post-revolutionary use of the Indian as a symbol of protest.

On the evening of December 17, 1773, Bostonians attending their town meeting waited to hear what would be done with the three shiploads of excised tea moored in Boston harbor. As darkness fell, yells and commotion were heard outside the meetinghouse when "a number of persons,
supposed to be the aboriginal natives . . . gave the war-whoop," and then headed off to Griffin's Wharf where the tea ships lay. The climax of this well-known incident came when a crowd gathered by the docks and watched the "Indians" board tea-laden ships and dump their contents into the harbor. Along the waterfront "everything was as light as day, by the means of lamps and torches" for this was no clandestine raid, but an open act of rebellion against imperial authority. Those participating in the tea's destruction appeared to be "Indians from Narragansett . . . clothed in blankets, with their heads muffled . . . their jargon unintelligible to all but themselves." Within a few hours, Boston's harbor was steeped in tea. Within a few years, the American colonies were steeped in revolution.

The "Indian" disguise employed by the Tea Party's participants is most commonly misconceived as an invention of the American Revolution. This erroneous assumption obscures the real roots of "Indian" protest imagery and fails to provide a logical explanation for its post-revolutionary character. The premise that dressing like an Indian was a symbolic act supporting a whiggish notion of liberty is both anachronistic and ahistorical. Such a view ignores the venues of popular protest that served as the precedent for the use of "Indian" costume. Such a masquerade owed its development to the traditions and innovations of popular protest, not to the ideology of America's
independence movement. The key to a meaningful analysis of Indian disguise is to uncover its genuine context in popular culture.

The American revolution solidified frontier protest's Indian imagery by attaching it to the independence movement's powerful political forces. Disguise for the purpose of avoiding identification was one reason Boston's protestors dressed as Indians. Another, however, involved the use of the Indian as a symbol for America during the colonies' anti-imperial campaigns of the 1760s and 70s.\(^4\) The destruction of tea by men dressed as Indians represented America's rebellion; it signaled that the colonies were beyond Britain's control. This symbolic use of the Indian coexisted with another competing image. Along the frontier, colonists connected Indians with violence, savagery, and licentiousness; it was this mental picture that backcountry rebels evoked in their protest.

Different forms of "Indian" costume reflected the divisions of class and culture present among the Boston Tea Party's participants. One form looked overtly "Indian" and was worn by gentlemen whigs who took part in the tea's destruction. Another sort of disguise, more akin to mummers' garb, was worn by the city's lower classes who filled up the majority of the "Indian" ranks. Among other participants from Boston's laboring classes, Robert Sessions "was not one of those... who disguised themselves as Indians, but was
a volunteer; the disguised men being largely men of family and position in Boston." The Boston Tea Party was not solely carried out by a well-disguised party who had planned their raid in advance, but also included numerous laborers and artisans who joined in at the last moment, disguising themselves as best they could or not at all. Joshua Wyeth, a journeyman blacksmith, was one of these volunteers. Wyeth described how he prepared his disguise by daubing his "face and hands with coal dust," then fell "in with men who were dressed, equipped and painted as I was." Perhaps as few as thirty men out of two hundred had prepared their costumes in advance. How did the rest manage to create their "Indian" persona so quickly?42

Volunteer "Indians" drawn from Boston’s laboring classes rallied rapidly because they were familiar with the demands of the night’s events. The Tea Party’s imagery and process drew heavily on Pope’s Day festivities, as did its organizers upon the festival’s mobs. The traditions of Pope’s Day--ritualized brawls, street theater, blackfaced mummers, and effigy-burning--had all been tapped into by the patriot movement as forms of protest since the 1760s. The Boston Tea Party, "so comic in its character, and yet so strikingly marked with something of the marvellous" continued this use of popular imagery. One Tea Party account described how plebeian participants "agreed to wear ragged cloaths and disfigure" themselves, "dressing to resemble
Indians as much as possible, smearing [their] faces with grease and lamp black or soot." These men drew heavily on mumming traditions; their costume owed its form not so much to the patriot movement as to older traditions of ritual disguise. They "resembled devils from the bottomless pit" of a mummer's play as much as they resembled Indians. Some men dispensed with Indian imagery altogether and wore such venerable disguises as "old frocks, red woolen caps or gowns." 43

The message that upper-class participants wanted to convey dictated the kind of "Indian" dress that they employed. They used the Indian as a symbol of America, as a rebellious persona separate from their identity as patriots. More important, such symbolism indicated that an effort was being made to distinguish between the extra-legality of patriotic riots needed to resist Britain's authority and the long-term need for political stability.

The Indian disguise used by Boston's gentlemen tea-rioters was more complex than that of the "lower" sorts, looked more "Indian," and was not so closely linked to popular traditions of masking. Their costume's details were described by participant George Twelves Hewes. He thought that he recognized Boston merchant John Hancock "from under the disguise which pretty thoroughly covered him. Neither his paint . . . nor his loosened club of hair behind wholly concealed" Hancock among the Tea Party's "Indians." This
description suggests the image of a costume which covered street clothes and of a layer of war paint which hid the face more effectively than blacking. The gentlemen's disguises did not rely on clothing turned inside-out, female dress, or mummer's blackface, but on the colored face paint and blankets of contemporary Indians."

Accounts of the Boston Tea Party provide glimpses of traditional forms of popular protest parading beneath the guise of a patriotic demonstration. The Tea Party's atmosphere made one observer feel that "the spirit of the furies might well be supposed to have been invoked on the occasion." The "furies" alluded to may well have been an air of misrule that inevitably surrounded acts of popular protest, including the most famous "Indian" masquarade in America history. After the tea had been disposed of, a tory yelled out of a window to a group of homeward-bound protestors. "Well, boys," he said, "you have had a fine, pleasant evening for your Indian caper, haven't you? But mind, you have to pay the fiddler yet!" A rioter replied, "Oh, never mind! never mind, squire! Just come out here, if you please, and we'll settle the bill." A fife began to play and a shout went up--the tory jerked his head inside and slammed the window shut. He knew the role such rough music played; a lively tune in the dead of night was a sure sign that a mob was being gathered to enforce the popular will. Lines from a song that celebrated the Tea Party further
illustrate the coexistence of popular culture and an elite political agenda:

Rally Mohawks bring out your axes,
And tell King George We’ll Pay no taxes
Our country’s "braves" and firm defenders
Shall ne’er be left by true North-Enders.

The song was laced with patriotism and evoked the Indian as a symbol of American rebellion; yet the heroes of this song, the "true North-Enders," were a lower-class Pope’s Day gang.\(^4\)\(^5\) A close look at the events which constituted the Boston Tea Party reveals a conflict which shaped post-revolutionary protest and rebellion; its two sorts of "Indian" disguise reflect the gulf that existed between popular culture and whig ideology.

A series of attacks on the property and person of Scarborough merchant Richard King demonstrates how backcountry violence and patriotic rhetoric maintained an uneasy coexistence. On the night of March 19, 1768, King’s home was attacked by "a Number of Persons in Disguise with axes [and] Clubbs." King’s home was plundered, and over the course of the following months, his spacious barn was burned, his livestock killed, and his fences pulled down. A posted notice threatened King with the further destruction of his property as well as his own murder. The note was signed in the name of the Sons of Liberty. It was rumored that King supported the Stamp Act and was a candidate for
the position of Scarborough's stamp excise collector, but most of the rancor toward King resulted from the fact that many of his fellow townsmen were in debt to him. King may have been on the wrong side of the stamp issue, but it was his "sins" against the community that caused Scarborough's citizens "to have a frolic with him."46

John Adams, King's lawyer, clearly expressed the distaste with which he and his fellow whigs regarded popular protest. In a letter to his wife Abigail, he complained: "These private Mobs, I do and will detest . . . these Tarrings and Featherings, these breaking open Houses by rude and insolent Rabbles . . . must be discountenanced." Adams, like his fellow Bostonian Beck, complained of the people's traditional forms of social protest--their mumming-like visitations, jesting punishments, ritual misrule. Such activities were not be "excused upon any Principle which can be entertained by a good Citizen - a worthy Member of Society." To Adams, participants in popular acts of protest were guilty of a grievous political sin, as he considered their disorder, license, and violence to be detrimental to the development of an enlightened citizenry. Adams' case notes condemned the backcountry's employment of Indian protest imagery. King's assailants were pictured as "an armed Banditti of Felons, Thieves, Robbers, and Burglers . . . Like Savages from the Wilderness, or like Legions from the Blackness of Darkness." Here and elsewhere, Adams vented his
disgust at what he saw as the backcountry's overabundant popular license.47

At the same time that Adams was condemning the evils of popular protest, whig politicians were using its rich imagery--its "Savages from the Wilderness"--to their own ends. Men like Adams considered the Indian image to have limited utility as a symbol of American rebellion. For the people of the backcountry however, the image of the Indian was much more central to their lives. It was an image that had broad applications and an image that would become a central symbol of their political protest.

A dialogue of conflict and legitimization was carried on between whig political ideology and the traditions of popular protest; it was a dialogue muddled with misunderstanding and hindered by different vocabularies; and it was a dialogue whose impact would spread beyond the settled regions of colonial America and into its hinterlands. The Boston Tea Party was but one transaction in an exchange of ideas and symbols between metropolitan elites of the seaboard and backcountry settlers. Anti-imperial organizations such as the Sons of Liberty inadvertently supplied backcountry rioters with a veneer of political respectability. For example, in 1766 agrarian rebels marched on New York. Their leader, William Prendergast, warned that if any dared "offend us ... the Sons of Liberty ... we
should take them to a white oak tree, and there whip them. . . and thence take them out of the country and there kick their Arses as long as we think fit." Predergast may have called his followers the Sons of Liberty, but his rhetoric betrayed the rowdy violence of the backcountry. The New York Sons of Liberty were not fooled; these urban whigs supported the use of military force in crushing the insurrection.48

The framework of post-revolutionary backcountry protest changed little after the revolution; the important difference was the expanding political function this protest played. The Revolution was a national act of violence and a radical reaffirmation of direct collective action readily internalized by backwoodsmen.49 But this transmission of ideology between different cultures, classes, and regions was not a simple act of legitimization and replication; ideas of republican virtue and of a natural aristocracy, so central to whig political culture, were discarded or modified to fit the realities of backcountry life. One idea that flourished was popular sovereignty: the right of the people as a collective unit to decide national issues. Of course, such an interpretation of revolutionary ideology conflicted with a republican aristocracy of virtue touted by elites. In 1789, Dr. Benjamin Rush epitomized elite fears of a seemingly irrational democratic ethos emerging in the hinterlands when he added a category of mental illness to the medical profession. He called it Anarchia: "the masses'
excess of the passion for liberty, inflamed by the successful issue of the war."

Frontiersmen had much to be passionate about after the Revolution; discontent resulted from issues such as debt, land disputes, Indian wars, and navigation rights to the Mississippi. Disturbances flared up all along the young nation's western fringe in the years following America's war for independence. Pennsylvania's frontier became the setting for many bouts of backwoods' misbehavior starting in the mid-1780s.

William Graham's encounter with "Satan" and his minions was an experience he would not soon forget. He was the victim of backcountry protest's increased politicization—a casualty of the explosive combination of frontier culture and the ideological fallout of the American Revolution. In 1786, at a tavern in Washington, Pennsylvania, "a man in disguise, supported by several others, called him [Graham] to the door of his chamber, and attempted to pull him out, telling him that he was Belzebub, and would deliver him to a number of other devils who waited for him without."

Brandishing a brace of pistols, Graham managed to fend off the hellish crowd. The following evening he was not so lucky; the previous night's mob caught Graham and in the flickering firelight of their torches carried out a grotesquely comic skimmington. Graham's pistols "which he carried before him [were] taken and broke to pieces . . .
his Commission and all his papers relating to his Office tore and thrown in the mud, and he forced, or made to stamp on them."51

The crowd destroyed items that symbolized the hated position Graham held as a tax collector of Pennsylvania's despised whiskey excise. Still, they were not satisfied. Once the tax man was done with his jig, the disguised rioters continued to liberally apply acts of devilry. They "cut off one half of his hair, cued the other half on the side of this Head, cut off the Cock of his Hat, and made him wear it in a form to render his Cue the most Conspicuous." Graham's horse received similar treatment when the mob dressed its "mane and tail in such a manner as to disfigure him." Horse and rider, now properly attired for a night's entertainment, embarked upon a twenty-mile forced march. The freakish procession toured the countryside "caling at the Still Houses in their way where they were Treated Gratis." Graham, by now brimming with the strongest spirits the frontier had to offer, was exposed "to every Insult, and mockery that their [the rioters'] Invention could contrive." On this occasion, the crowd's collective imagination was particularly active.52

Pennsylvania's backcountry rioters possessed a host of stock characters and plots with which to carry out their humiliation of Graham. Mummery's tradition of disguise included Beelzebub among other horrid characters, while the
skimmington's punishing mockery and unruly procession were
the other ingredients of this riot. Demonstrated that night
in 1786 was popular protest's post-revolutionary survival,
its continuity with cultural traditions, and its emergence
as the preeminent form of political action along the
frontier.

By 1791, Pennsylvania's frontier was again beset by
civil disturbances, this time over the issue of the Federal
excise on whiskey. Robert Johnson, a federal excise
collector for western Pennsylvania, was attacked one
September night when "a party of men armed and disguised
way-laid him . . . seized tarred and feathered him, cut off
his hair and deprived him of his horse." With the loss of
his mount, Johnson's cruel treatment was compounded by the
fact that he was obliged "to travel on foot a considerable
distance" in his "mortifying and painful situation." As with
the 1786 attack upon Graham, this act of protest against a
whiskey excise officer had all the trappings of a
traditional skimmington, even down to the rioters' use of
women's clothing as a form of disguise. The violence that
was so much a part of America's frontier life had a
revolutionary ancestry that was also apparent in the attack
upon Johnson: the painful cover of tar and feathers he
received had been perfected by patriot mobs in the 1760s.53

This was but one of many violent skimmingtons meted out
to federal excise officers in Pennsylvania between 1791 and
1794. Captain William Faulkner was accosted by a group of men who "drew a knife on him, threatened to scalp him, [and] tar & feather him." Some time later, Faulkner's home was surrounded and then searched by "about thirty men, armed and blacked" like Indians; luckily for Faulkner he was not home that night. In the summer of 1793, excise officer John Lynn was assaulted in his home by "about twelve persons, armed and painted black" who "threatened to hang him; took him to a retired spot . . . and there, after cutting off his hair, tarring, and feathering . . . bound him naked to a tree." On one occasion, the victim was not even an excise officer but a deranged individual named Robert Wilson who believed he was a federal official--his delusion cost him dearly. He was captured by a party of disguised men, taken "to a smith's shop, stripped of his cloaths . . . inhumanly burnt in several places with a heated iron, was tarred and feathered and about day-light dismissed."54

These attacks upon federal tax collectors reveal rioters, blacked and behaving like Indians on the warpath, using forms of crowd violence perfected during the American Revolution. All together these instances of backcountry protest created a pattern of popular protest produced by the frontier's history of violence and the revolution's reinforcement of this legacy. The use of blackface straddled the realms of popular tradition and frontier experience. Being blacked like an Indian was an appropriate and logical
symbol of protest growing out of European culture’s encounters with Indians and the stereotype of the Indian as savage, violent, and uncontrollable these encounters encouraged. Backcountry protest movements used this image as a weapon of terror. At the same time, the Indian remained a symbol of the American independence movement, an aspect of "Indian" imagery that was especially useful to protestors fighting for what they considered to be their rightful spoils of national independence.

The emerging political agendas of backcountry protest were another direct result of America’s independence movement. The Whiskey Rebellion emerged from opposition to the government’s levying "internal" taxes. This change reflected the increased sophistication of backcountry popular protest; the center of their rage was no longer individuals who had broken local rules of behavior but evil government policies. The sophistication of these backcountry rebellions can also be seen in their appropriation of complex protest motifs. As with the Captain Swing, Luddite, and Rebecca riots in Britain, frontiersmen employed the fiction of a mystical figure leading their protest. "Tom the Tinker" became an ever-present, all-knowing force to "people who were active in some of the masked riots" as he voiced directives and warnings through posted notices and newspaper articles signed in his name. For example, a "Tom the Tinker" notice published in the Pittsburgh Gazette warned
Pennsylvanians that, in surveying his troops Tom found "there were a great many deliquents." The notice went on to state "that I, Tom the Tinker, will not suffer any certain class or set of men to be excluded from the service of this my district" and that those who did not rally to the insurgency would "be deemed as enemies . . . and shall receive punishment."

As 7,000 insurgents, labeled "White Indians" by the press, gathered at Braddock's Field outside of Pittsburgh in 1794, a lone rider sped through the streets of the town. With a tomahawk raised over his head, he cried, "this is not all that I want; it is not the excise law only that must go down; your district and associate judges must go down; your high offices and salaries-- a great deal must be done." This declaration by one frontier rebel illustrated the Whiskey Rebellion's political agenda and its potential for violence. For the Republic's young government this frontier insurrection was a nightmare that demanded stern action. When the forces of order responded to the challenge with an army of over 12,000 militia, the Whiskey Rebellion's cause disintegrated under the thumb of the military occupation that followed. Backcountry rebels had hung their liberty caps on a vision of the American Revolution that never existed and paid for their misunderstanding with defeat.

Like Pittsburgh's tomahawk-wielding revolutionary, backcountry popular culture co-opted the revolution's
politically-charged image of the Indian, using it as a
vehicle of protest and a durable symbol of discontent. Lines
from a poem celebrating the Boston Tea Party illustrate the
foundations of this emerging clash of cultures:

Though you were Indians, come from distant shores,
Like Men you acted---not like savage Moors.
Let us with hearts of steel not stand the task,
Throw off all darksome ways, nor wear a Mask.

Once the break with Britain was established, the people were
to "with hearts of steel now stand the task" of fighting a
war for independence and creating a republican order. When
the need for fighting was done, they were to "throw off all
darksome ways" of revolutionary violence. But many people
were not so enamored with the new nation’s revolutionary
order. In the decades following the Revolution, America’s
backcountry embarked upon an intermittent but pervasive
campaign of protest—a violent mummery in "Indian"
disguise.57
Chapter Three
An "Indian" Resistance

On January 28, 1808, a lone man rode out beyond the pale of the familiar into an alien world barren of sophistication and seething with frustrations, a world where violence, perhaps even sudden death, lurked in the woods. During his ride along Maine's icy roads toward Fairfax, Deputy Sheriff Pitt Dillingham's thoughts were most likely occupied by the appointment he had to keep. As Pitt traveled deeper into the hinterland, he may have wondered if he would come out alive.

The rendezvous was to occur at Broad's Tavern, where a clearing interrupted a narrow track that wound its way toward Fairfax. Deputy Dillingham reached the tavern—a rustic abode that served as a clearing house for news, stores, and rum, the frontier's ubiquitous cordial—and waited. Soon after, out of the woods filed seventy-four "Indians." Armed with muskets and bearing "an elegant standard," they maneuvered with military precision from a column into a line of battle and then fired a volley into the air. Dillingham was witness to a strange juxtaposition: the military demeanor of civilized soldiery carried out by
individuals dressed in grotesque, savage costumes. Wrapped in blankets, and masked by long conical hoods made from both cloth and animal hides, a band of Maine's White Indians surrounded Dillingham. These seventy-four "horrid visages" gave the deputy a start; as he later confessed, they "shook every fibre of my frame." It was not only the white Indians' savage imagery that produced this effect, but also their mute stillness—a brooding lunatic violence.58

Between 1790 and 1845, "Indian" protest reached its climax and witnessed its ultimate decline. Between 1790 and 1820 in central Maine, and from 1840 to 1845 along the Hudson and Mohawk river valleys of New York, backcountry settlers rebelled against economic insecurity and social change. In both cases, hard-pressed backwoodsmen hid their identities behind a rioting "Indian" persona. Maine and New York's savage protest drew upon a culmination of historical experience, popular tradition, and revolutionary rhetoric. Yet the difference between these backcountry rebellions and the ones directly following the Revolution was that the latter did not purport to be the harbingers of the future; if anything, they represented an inward-looking reactionism.59

During and after the Revolutionary War, land-hungry farmers from New England emigrated to the district of Maine and "settled on . . . land, which to be sure was not their own" having "reason to believe it belonged to the state."
New England's northeastern frontier had been plagued for over half a century by overlapping land grants and the sale of the same piece of property to multiple buyers. The revolutionary confiscation of loyalist-held lands in Maine was but one more act in this comedy of errors. Massachusetts' confiscations drew poor patriots north.60

Trouble began when the General Court sold large tracts of land in Maine to would-be proprietors to help pay off the state's war debt instead of parcelling out land to war veterans. Squatters who "had spent their best years on the land" now found it claimed by gentlemen who demanded payment. Worse still, the proprietors' claims were often vague, overlapping, and rested on flimsy legalities. Settlers complained that "persons had frequently come amongst them pretending to be proprietors . . . but a short time would elapse before another proprietor would bring an action of ejectment." And when genuine proprietors did appear, they gave "nothing more than a Quit-Claim Deed"--a document that would not hold up in court--in return for payment.61

With frustrations mounting, settlers responded to this intolerable situation by agreeing "to support each other in opposition to the proprietors" by collectively resisting all proprietary fees and claims. Maine's settlers prevented "any Surveyor or any agent of the proprietors from going on the land," thereby suspending mapping needed to press legal
claims. Those who sought to serve writs of ejectment and other papers obnoxious to the settlers found themselves turned away from their targets, or worse. Ephram Ballard was one such unfortunate. He "was assaulted about the middle of the night" in November 1795 "by a number of Ruffians armed & all in disguise." They threatened him "with immediate Death" and robbed him of his "compass & some other Instruments" necessary to carry out his survey. Rebellious backwoodsmen cordoned off their communities and resorted to threats and violence to protect their interests. They maintained this enforced isolation for over thirty years, won concessions, and created a sophisticated culture of resistance.62

As on the Maine frontier, the "Indian" resistance of New York was rooted in ownership of the land. In New York, disturbances spread across the Catskill hill-country and along the Mohawk and Hudson river valleys as tenant farmers sought to overturn the lingering remnants of the state's patroonships. The death of patroon Stephen Rensselaer in 1839 set off the rebellion when the legal division of his estate precipitated the collection of back rents. Tenants living on Rensselaer property resisted payment, not so much to avoid onerous fees, but to break the rent system altogether. New York's farmers, living in a society that increasingly upheld both the qualities of egalitarianism and the equation of personal worth with material wealth, rebelled against the economic insecurity and social
inequality of tenancy.\textsuperscript{63}

First, tenant farmers resisted rent payments, as well as those who sought to serve the eviction notices that soon followed. Rent opposition became an organized resistance bent on enforcing nonpayment and shielding rebellious neighborhoods from legal authorities. By 1841, rioters donned "Indian" costumes to carry out these objectives. New York's Anti-rent Indians held together for only half a decade. Their resistance was spirited but lacked the control and determined popular support necessary to endure. By the middle of the nineteenth century, political and social change had undercut traditional forms of popular protest; some were discarded, others changed. Disguised rioting was one of the casualties. Set adrift in a sea of cultural transformation, New York's "Indians" collapsed into a downward spiral of confusion, violence, and arrests.\textsuperscript{64}

On a cold December evening in 1807 in Maine, a group of "Indian"-disguised men armed "with guns and bayonets" surrounded Lincoln County's deputy sheriff, Hugh Mulloy, and demanded the writs he had been serving. After Mulloy obstinately refused, his captors pushed him out into the road "with the muzzles of their guns." His wife tried to intervene, but white Indians "pointed their bayonets at her" and said she could only "come any nigher . . . on the peril of her life." Once the rioters had the stubborn deputy
alone, they "talked broken english like Indians" among themselves, then told Mulloy that if he did not give up his papers he would have to "go with them back to their wigwaum." Finally, three of the "Indians" went to Mulloy's barn from where Hugh soon "heard three guns fired." The three came back and "cried out 'horse horse me horse,'" the "Indians'" way of telling their compatriots that they had punished the deputy by shooting his horse.65

As with popular protest in the backcountry since the 1760s, Maine's and New York's "Indians" employed the advantages of disguise. False identities protected rioters from discovery and transformed them into a powerful emotional force. At first, "Indians" were "men painted black;" only later did these "sons of darkness" develop more complex motifs. Both movements tapped into mumming's suspension of social order, submersion of familiar identities, and surrender of social inhibitions. "Indian"-costumed rioters "appeared to be . . . Lost to all Sense of Decency, Order, and Good Government." Their "railing and reviling" produced fear by evoking a sensationalized vision of violence, savagery, and death distilled from America's frontier experience.66

Costume was not the only imagery rioters dabbled in. Like the Whiskey Rebellion's "Tom the Tinker," Welsh rioters' "Rebecca," England's "Ned Ludd" or "Captain Swing," and Irish miners' "Molly Maguire," Maine's and New York's
"Indian" resistance fashioned mystical personae to lead their insurrections. New England's White Indians wrote and spoke of their "Indian King," a powerful native monarch who lived deep in the wilds of Maine. From his sylvan seat, he witnessed poor settlers suffering from a "plan of pollicy and rogurey in great men," the proprietors. Out of pity and for the sake of justice, the "king" fought for squatters' rights through the efforts of his White Indian warriors. New York's Anti-rent Indians also understood the power of mythical patronage; they sent Judge John S. Edmunds a threatening letter signed "Swing," "Molly Maguire," and "Rebecca." Along with effigy burnings, crude glyphs, and the odd open coffin left on a potential victim's doorstep, the imagery of mystical leaders demonstrated that traditions of popular protest in the Northeast sustained continuity with the past. But the substance of disguised rioting was not all smoke and mirrors; violent direct action was another point of continuity.

In 1806, John Harvey of Fairfax, Maine, gained first-hand knowledge of the backcountry's continued use of protest violence. He was placed "naked astride a rail and . . . forcibly carried along the highway for . . . three miles." This punishment, known as "riding the stang," demonstrated that skimmingtons survived beyond the colonial era as a part of backwoods rioting. The skimmington continued to be a ritualized, communal act of punishment. Humiliation and
ridicule were the primary tools through which communities sought to alter the behavior of their members. Harvey's crime was his unwavering support of proprietary prerogatives. Yet it is not hard to believe that Harvey's rough ride combined his humiliating punishment with pain and injury. When the ride was over, the mob threw Harvey to "the ground and besmired his naked body with dirt and filth" exposing him "to contempt and derision" as they played out a foul version of America's own skimmington tradition of tar-and-feathering.  

The attack upon Harvey was only one act in a string of skimmington-like episodes that blended into Maine's "Indian" resistance. Another such "frolic" occurred when Isaac Prince of New Milford mobilized the rituals of misrule to carry out an attack upon proprietary supporter John Truman. Prince gathered his neighbors together at his home over a bowl of rum punch where they put on old clothes and blackface. In this mumming gear they grabbed Truman and ceremoniously stripped him, except for a stocking left on one leg and a sleeve on one arm. Next, he was beaten with sticks, then had his ears cut with a penknife.

Decades later, the case was much the same in New York where skimmingtons' raucous humor was interwoven into an "Indian" resistance. Near Rensselaerville, New York's anti-rent protestors trailed Albany County deputy Amos Adams to an inn where he meant to stay the night. "Indians"
noisily surrounded the inn, allowing the anxious Adams little sleep as he listened to the commotion outside and hoped rioters would not come for him. Morning revealed that the "Indians" had cropped the mane and tail of Adams's horse, the animal serving as proxy for ridicule aimed at the deputy. Other officials were not so lucky. Thomas Whittaker, a deputy of Otsego County, "was encountered by a party of men disguised as Indians." The band "stopped and searched" the lawman, then "presented a pistol" at his head. Whittaker lost his dignity, but not his life. His captors "rode [the deputy] on a rail," "tarred" his head, and had "his boots filled [with tar] and drawn on." In August 1844, Rensselaer County deputy Jacob Lewis was captured at home by a group of Indian-costumed rioters. Papers pertaining to his office were burned while he received a covering of tar and feathers. As a warning to Lewis's neighbors he was forced to run up and down the streets of Nassau, then around the village pump.72

"Indians'" frequent resort to tar-and-feathers, a punishment first used against stamp agents in the 1760s, demonstrates how Maine's and New York's resistance movements operated in the shadow of the American independence movement. Before the character of Maine's White Indians was fully developed, rioting settlers called themselves "Liberty Men" or "Sons of Liberty"--linking themselves to the anti-imperial protests of the 1760s. One supporter of the anti-
rent protest in New York favorably compared the patriotism of the Boston Tea Party "Indians" with those of the Anti-rent movement in a letter signed "The Ghost of Franklin." Backcountry rioters legitimized their actions, maintained their protest's coherency, and won public sympathy and support by placing themselves in the favorable light of revolutionary patriotism.\textsuperscript{73}

Indian disguise, committees of communication, minutemen, and tory persecution served as revolutionary-era antecedents of "Indian" protest. Maine's rebellious towns formed elected committees who organized resistance and enforced local order. Committees mustered local White Indian bands, gathered stores and ammunition for their support, and even levied taxes. The companies they mustered were not gangs of bandits, but a rebel militia who possessed "every appearance of military discipline & subordination." New York's anti-rent protest was also framed by the experience of the independence movement, and organized along similar pseudo-patriotic lines. Anti-rent associations and town committees were formed to coordinate local "Indian" militias. When these community-sanctioned soldiers "disguised like Indians" gathered in companies "fifty in a party . . . at the sound of horns," they evoked the memory of the Revolution's minutemen.\textsuperscript{74}

Ties to America's revolutionary experience were not only visual and symbolic, they were also ideological.
"Indians" sought to help "every man to his right and privilidges and libertys," and warned that those who did not support them would "be Lookt upon as an enimy to the Cause of Justice." Backcountry protest latched onto an egalitarian, rights-conscious ethos, a world view that mingled popular values with a radically distilled vision of the American Revolution. It was an ideology that promoted resistance and spoke directly to the needs of hardscrabble, backwoods farmers.75

A republican notion of liberty was juxtaposed against an older agrarian one in which "labour [was] the soul parrent of all property" and property, in turn, was the sole parent of liberty. Under the rubric of agrarian ideology, liberty was defined in material terms; it was a state of independence grounded on an individual’s ability to possess land and to subsist without being dependent on a patron. In the backcountry Northeast, the Revolution’s support of everyman’s right to liberty was implicitly interpreted as support for everyman’s right to land. Popular agrarianism held that the only legitimate political order was a communal one of free-holders where "laws [were] made judged & executed according to the will & interest of a majority of the hole people and not by the craft cunning & arts of the few."76

Two creeds anchored this popular brand of republicanism. First, a government of the "few" would
"always bring the many Into destress & compel them into a state of dependency." And second, "no person can posess property without laboring, unless he git it by force or craft, fraud or fortun out of the earnings of others." This was the political outlook that framed resistance movements in Maine and New York. Proprietors and patroons were painted as the "cunning" few who had usurped the powers of "free Government" in making personal fortunes that robbed the many of their labors. The backcountry's response to this perceived conspiracy was to stall engines of the state that had fallen into enemy hands."

This popular political reaction added up to Shays' Rebellion. Western Massachusetts's simmering post-revolutionary protest erupted into open rebellion in 1786 when debt-ridden, club-wielding farmers forcefully "regulated" county courts. This rebellion arose from friction between New England's emerging commercial culture and an older corporate culture of subsistence farmers in western Massachusetts's hill-country. By 1787, three well-placed cannon shots fired at Springfield, Massachusetts, started the speedy disintegration of the uprising. In a way very similar to the Whiskey Rebellion, the Massachusetts's Regulation failed. But its causes remained unaddressed. Many of the insurgents fled into New York or northern New England, planting the seed of troubles to come."
The use of "Indian" disguise was a common feature of uprisings in Maine and New York, yet the two movements were markedly different. Maine's White Indians orchestrated one of the most successful resistance movements in the history of the American backcountry. It was well-organized, durable, and, in the long-run, gained many concessions. In Maine, anxious backwoodsmen "drew a cultural line" between themselves and the outside world—between their values and the values of an emerging nation. Down East Maine was the setting for a continuing confrontation of a "commercial" social order and New England's "Yankee" traditions of corporate politics, subsistence agriculture, and militant Protestantism. It was a rebellion that played out its "social drama" through a ritualized resistance drawing power not only from its effective organization, but also from its "irrationality." This rebellion along the nation's geographical and cultural fringe was a clash of cultures as much as a political confrontation. It was a battle between old and new in which "Indian"-disguised rioters manned a venerable social order's forlorn hope, and a battle in which blood would be spilt.

Paul Chadwick was one casualty of the war. His execution took place on September 8, 1809, in Malta, Maine. The storm of threats, fear, and controversy that surrounded his murder became known as the "Malta War." Chadwick had accepted one hundred acres from Kennebec proprietors in
return for his support of their legal rights over the land. While surveying tracts of land being given out in a number of such deals, Chadwick and his associates saw nine White Indians come out of the woods. They wore caps "of different colors with veils over their faces" and "blankets." All of them had guns, except for one or two who "were armed . . . with a staff with a piece of scythe in one end." Three of the "Indians" made their way straight for Chadwick, one of them asking him, "damn you, how came you here?" then adding,"this is good enough for you!" The three raised their muskets and fired them into Chadwick's chest at pointblank range. 81

The murder of Paul Chadwick shocked the community. Many felt resistance had gone too far; "Indians" present at Chadwick’s killing were either arrested or gave themselves up. A trial ensued in which those in custody faced the gallows. When White Indians threatened to break the prisoners out of jail, the militia was mobilized and Augusta's courthouse became an armed camp. In the end, evidence collected against those arrested was not enough to find them guilty and the confrontation passed. 82

The trial revealed much about the organization and activities of Maine’s White Indians, uncovering a protest movement steeped in symbolism, ritual, and superstition. Testimony brought to light the fact that Chadwick himself had once been a member of Malta’s White Indian band. An
unsubstantiated story circulated that he had bound himself to his compatriots in "an oath written and singed with blood," and that his breaking this oath had led to his violent end. It does seem plausible that Chadwick’s death that September day was an execution. Their question "how came you here?" queried Chadwick as to why he had betrayed the resistance by siding with proprietors, while the two "Indians" bearing staves with "a piece of scythe in one end" symbolized the grim reaper and foreshadowed the deadly judgment that had been brought down upon Chadwick’s head.83

Maine’s White Indians made the most sophisticated use of "Indian" imagery’s vocabulary of terror, as seen by the innovative complexity of their "Indian" costume. Like many backcountry rioters before them, White Indians wore moccasins, leggings, and a blanket wrap—frontier-style clothing that was associated with Indians. Masks were the most distinctive element of Maine’s "Indian" costume. They were made from hides or cloth and constructed "conelike to a peak and descending about the neck, with a veil over the face, [and] perforated for the eyes and mouth." Where blacking once sufficed, now the face was completely hidden by a grotesque mask. But the disguise went beyond this visual aspect, deceiving the ear as well. Maine’s White Indians not only looked like "Indians," but took to "assuming the character and dialect of Indians." Rioters’ distorted speech was a pidgin English, aided by placing a
wood chip in the mouth. Through all of these means, the human identity of rioters was shrouded by a violent, ferocious "Indian" persona.84

New York’s Anti-rent "Indians" thoroughly blended several traditions of protest disguise. They, like Maine’s White Indians, went about their business "disguised in skin and other grotesque dresses" with their faces covered by masks fashioned from cloth and animal hides. But this "Indian" element of disguise coexisted with another, older protest costume. On December 11, 1844, Columbia Country Sheriff Henry Miller was intercepted by "an army" of three hundred anti-rent "Natives" armed with "guns, pistols, swords, tomahawks, knives, and spears." Those Miller encountered were "disguised in calico dresses" and wore "masks so as to completely conceal their faces from observation." New York’s Anti-rent Indians wore women’s calico dresses over their clothing, continuing the traditional use of women’s dress as an element of protest costume.85

Pitt Dillingham traveled to Broad’s Tavern in January 1808 to open up negotiations with White Indians; he was charged with coming to some sort of arrangement that would avoid the bloody encounters that increasingly occurred between officers of the law and disguised settlers. Rioters had only months earlier fired upon deputy sheriff Henry Johnson, wounding him twice and killing his horse. Johnson
had been serving eviction writs around Beaver Hill when he was ambushed by Indians "disguised in a most heidious garb." Out of the dozen or so balls fired at Johnson that evening, two passed "very near his body," four tore through his coat, five struck his horse, one passed through his left calf, and another lodged in his right foot. The attackers menaced the wounded deputy with threats and oaths disguised "in the Indian dialect," but allowed the riddled lawman to drag himself three miles to a house where he received aid. Johnson's ordeal was only part of a general increase in the use of deadly force by protesting "Indians."

Maine's struggle between settlers and proprietors dragged on into the nineteenth century, resulting in a deepened resistance, social polarization, and White Indians' increased use of violence. As officers of the law made inroads deeper into anti-proprietary strongholds, musketballs became resistance. In August 1800, a survey team was fired upon by several unknown "persons blacked and disguised." Broadstreet Whiggins received a shoulder wound, Peter Smith caught a ball in his thigh, his brother Nathan nearly died of his wound, while the unscathed Abel Wheeler "found that there were two holes through" his shirt. Sheriff Moses Robinson received equally rough treatment when riding through "Indian" territory in 1809. A group of White Indians opened fire on him, shot "a brace of balls through his horse," then fired another brace "through one of his horses
legs" while Robinson "was intangled under [the horse's] dead 
body." Robinson was pulled free, stripped naked, and then 
"beaten and bruised in a merciless manner, with sticks 
prepared for that purpose" by his attackers."  

"Indian" attacks did not always take place on lonely 
roads or in isolated wilds. Disguised rioters also struck in 
the midst of communities. On an August evening in 1810, 
David Sewall of Hallowell "was most violently assaulted . . . 
by a number of men in disguise." Sewall was kidnapped, had 
"his clothes entirely torn off," and was beaten. One "blow 
was received on the head . . . and a deep cut made in his 
face." Neighbors who witnessed the horror tried to rescue 
Sewall, only to be prevented by rioters who had surrounded 
his house."  

In New York, Anti-rent Indians more rapidly resorted to 
armed ambushes and outright murder. The ritualized, 
ridicule-oriented punishments of skimmingtons, once the 
stock and trade of disguised rioters, were increasingly 
replaced by more virulent forms of violence. "Indians" put 
tradition aside when they employed brutal tactics 
accomplished outside community consent, in a spirit more 
akin to guerrilla warfare than to protest. Resistance in New 
York drew a straighter bead on its victims than did their 
forbearers in Maine. New York protestors shot and killed 
people on several occasions. Elijah Smith met his end at the 
hand of an Anti-rent "Indian" who threatened "to blow him
through." When the rioter did fire, his pistol was so close to Smith's body that its ball "penetrated so deeply that the examining physician could not extract it" and that "his shirt . . . was burned to a tinder" two inches around the entry-wound. Another victim of violence, Columbia County Undersheriff Osman Steele, fell dead when he was shot from his horse after an "Indian" leader yelled for his followers to "shoot the horses! shoot the horses!"\(^8^9\)

Why "Indian" resistance developed its peculiar character--its visual imagery, organization, and collective behavior--can best be understood as a process of culture. Disguise, violence--even the borrowing of revolutionary-era ideas and institutions--were all linked by a framework of popular culture pervading the backcountry Northeast. This framework of behavior was a "Yankee" culture; a progeny of English popular culture that migrated to New England in the seventeenth century. It valued community consensus above individual freedom, held to an agrarian notion of property, was shaped by militant Protestantism, and colored by a belief in the supernatural. These features shaped the means and ends of Maine's and, to a lesser extent, New York's "Indian" resistance.\(^9^0\) The final ingredient of the Northeast's resistance culture was geography.

"Indian" resistance sprang up in regions of Maine and New York sharing two traits: their backcountry character and
their people's cultural heritage. Central Maine and the Hudson and Mohawk river valleys of New York were backcountries, not frontiers. Frontiers were places of opportunity that the backcountry Northeast lacked. The areas of Maine and New York that saw "Indian" activity were backwaters, places "composed chiefly of rough and barren hills" left behind by the young republic's driving economic development. Outsiders saw in the northern backcountry's "abject and vicious" conditions the "wreck and ruin of the commercial state." 

Maine's and New York's hinterlands were places of shrinking possibilities and growing discontent, places where houses were "ill repaired," and where "idling and drinking" inhabitants were "rude in appearance and clownish in the manners." Poverty caused families to live three months of the year without any "animal food," depending instead upon a meager diet of "milk, potatoes and rum." Their "lean" soil, "unthrifty" forests, "miserable" dwellings, and "wretched" cultivation were all part and parcel of an economic stagnation that plagued the northeastern backcountry. Poverty, in turn, was seen as nurturing "habits of idleness, intemperance and dishonesty" as well as those of the "outlaw and desperado." 

The cultural perspective of people who populated these marginal regions shaped their responses to social, political, and economic stress and served as the crucial
catalyst in producing "Indian" protest. Both Maine and central New York were populated by New England emigrants. In Maine, the majority of inhabitants were Yankees looking for opportunities to the north, while a significant number of people in the Hudson and Mohawk valleys had made their way west from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and the Hampshire grants. With their traditions of communal action and popular protest, New Englanders were fertile ground for the growth of "Indian" forms of resistance. This cultural impetus was much stronger in Maine, where a geographically isolated Yankee population offered far more potential for the development of sophisticated forms of popular protest than in the culturally mixed region of central New York.93

Throughout Maine's White Indian resistance, backwoodsmen bore the brunt of proprietary hostility by laagering themselves behind a cultural barricade of communalism, militant Protestantism, and "supernatural" warfare. Settlers' alienation from the proprietors' world evolved not only from political differences and geographic isolation, but also out of a much deeper conceptual rift. From Down East Maine to Lake Champlain, New England's "backcountry farmers increasingly defined a distinct social group" and "developed a regional counterculture" in reaction to stress. In Maine, and previously during Shay's rebellion, deeply held patterns of "Yankee" life conflicted with "an increasingly complex and impersonal political and economic
system." In a fashion similar to western Massachusetts's regulators, Maine's settlers responded to threats with community actions rehearsed during the Revolution. Unlike their rebellious brethren, the White Indians delved deeper into their cultural repertoire, resorting to modes of protest uncorrupted by the agendas and values of whiggish patriotism or Federalist republicanism. As resistance stiffened, it sank further into the irrational.

White Indians meant "to Cut Down all pooper [sic] and kill the Devil"—a seemingly odd agenda for a protest movement aimed at resisting proprietary jurisdiction. Yet this language reveals that rioters envisioned their resistance as part of a larger cosmic battle of good versus evil. The biblical dimensions of Maine's "Indian" resistance were rooted in a Puritan cosmology where God and Satan fought over a human battlefield. It was a spiritualism of the here and now, a struggle for human souls waged, not in a realm of spiritual niceties, but in a ritual world where demonic possession, magic, and witch hunts were grand tactics of cosmic warfare. An officially sanctioned Congregational church kept radical interpretations of Puritan spiritualism in check. This bulwark of religious orthodoxy never took hold in backcountry Maine, allowing people who settled there unprecedented latitude in interpreting spiritual life in ways useful to their needs. The absence of an orthodox consensus also allowed those who
differed in their notions of "grace, free will or faith and works" the license to bicker, argue, and occasionally "throw dead dogs and cats" into the yards of their religious opponents. 97

The religion and rituals of backcountry protesters and their Puritan ancestors possessed common ground. To each, they were "a means of dealing with the dangers they encountered, and of reaffirming certain social values." Through this point of continuity, White Indians molded militant Protestantism, no matter what its denominational titles, into a resistance cosmology that mingled the spiritual with the supernatural.98

The ritual terror of White Indian disguise was just one aspect of an insurgency that probed deeply into the irrational. The rhetoric, curses, and oaths White Indians belabored their victims with functioned as more than insults. They operated in a spiritually charged world in which words really could place a curse."99 Oaths were just one facet of Maine’s protest mysticism, a practice pointing to a broader application of supernatural power. Rioting settlers turned to magic for several reasons. First, it was a concept "embedded in their cultural heritage" with which they were familiar and comfortable. Second, magic was useful; its manipulation of supernatural forces gave those who practiced it a sense of control in the midst of events that had spun out of control. Finally, in the supernatural
world only popular culture dared to tread. By the late eighteenth century, belief in magic and supernatural agency had fallen from grace among authoritative, elite circles. This left those along New England’s geographic and cultural margins free reign over the imagery and powers of an unseen world free of corruption.100

White Indian protest and the practice of magic were cut from the same cloth: both were social responses embedded in New England’s popular culture. In Maine’s backcountry, a belief in the supernatural traveled in tandem or crossed paths with "Indian" protest. Magic of the written word was used by communities to muster White Indian bands. Supernatural treasure-hunting existed independent of "Indian" resistance, but paralleled disguised rioting’s efforts to cope with social and economic stress.

The role backwoods mystics played in organizing settler resistance was the third way White Indian protest’s supernatural means met the political ends of agrarian resistance. The insecure economic, social, and religious conditions of the Northeast frontier provided an environment where people experienced miraculous sensations of grace or prophetic dreams. One such "religious maniac" was imprisoned after committing arson and murder "in consequence of a command received in a dream." Yet seers, far from being on the margins of backcountry society, were often able to gather a following. At times, religious mystics "born under
a certain planetary aspect" and "endowed with various and extraordinary powers," served as White Indian leaders; Nathan Barlow, William Jones, and James Shurtleff were a few. Supernatural abilities, not wealth or education, legitimized an individual's political influence in Maine's hinterlands. The prophetic visions of these "Indian" mystics often took a political turn, explaining in cosmological terms the meanings behind settlers' struggles against proprietors. In exact continuity with New England's popular religious heritage, the conflict was portrayed in black and white terms where godly settlers resisted the temptations of evil landlords and where, as one mystic's verse explained, "human rights, as urg'd by the squatter, Makes my [Satan's] kingdom and hell's foundations to totter."101

White Indians' use of the black arts, as with their costume, was a product of alienation. Both masquerade and magic were systems of ritual that served to separate those initiated into "Indian" resistance from those who were not. The ties that held white Indians together had a magical facet to them. The rumor that Paul Chadwick's murder was motivated by his breaking "an oath written and signed with blood" demonstrated the power of such bonds. Contracts penned in blood were the dark alter-ego of Puritan New England's religious covenants. White Indian militias were formed through a mystical act of indenture that drew its power from a popular belief in the power of blood and the
Curses were conveyed both orally and in writing. Proprietary land purchaser Ruel Williams found this out when he received an anonymous letter "containing ferocious threats, and indicating by rudely drawn characters the terrible thing they would do to him." Some time later, Williams received another threat, this time written with blood. In it, "Indians" wrote that they were "bound by an oath to execute their threats or perish in the attempt." It was not easy to dismiss such notices as idle threats, especially in light of what had happened to Paul Chadwick.

In the midst of Maine's resistance movement, common people sought legendary treasure-troves hidden by pirates and conquistadors of old. Such hunts were carried out in a supernatural world where men "of an approved horoscope," armed with divining rods of witch-hazel cut in "a certain quarter of the moon," sought to outwit ghosts and devils who protected buried fortunes. Treasure seeking was bound up in a tradition of popular "superstition" whose procedures revealed vestiges of an oral culture's magical rites. Stories of supernatural treasure hunting often end with a chest of gold being struck, only to disappear in a flash of smoke and light after someone uttered an exclamation of surprise or cried out in pain upon striking their foot with a spade in the midst of frenzied digging. In the realm of popular magic, words were a powerful medium; uttering them
at the wrong moment could result in magical failure. This rather eccentric practice was one of the many ways people in the backcountry sought to make sense of America's emerging liberal social order. Treasure-seeking was a way to cope with a "commercial" culture that made life in the backcountry seem inadequate--the increasing identification of personal worth with material worth.105
Epilogue
Beat the Devil?

The murder of Paul Chadwick shattered Malta’s White Indian resistance. By 1810, many of Maine’s backcountry settlers were fed up with violent White Indian tactics; harassing surveyors and proprietors was one thing, but shooting down the local constabulary was quite another. In a report to Governor James Sullivan, one of Maine’s lawmen assured him that "many people [who] once countenanced the opposition" realized that they were "not safe amongst themselves" and predicted that soon the settlers would "aid in securing the [White Indian] offenders." The decline of Malta’s resistance was just one instance of an overall erosion of "Indian" protest. Disguised rioters lost community support and were increasingly unable to shield the backcountry from surveyors, sheriffs, and proprietors.106

"Indian" protest in New York did not decline--it collapsed. In 1844, the Anti-rent Indians of the Mohawk and Hudson river valleys were riding the crest of a wave of bloodshed; the murders of Elijah Smith, Osman Steele, and others made many believe the "Indians" were beyond control. Yet by 1845, calico-clad Indians had nearly disappeared from the stage of Anti-rent protest. The press helped to create a
broad-based backlash against collective resistance as they reported on "Indian" violence in gory detail. The public was exposed throughout 1844 and 1845 to a barrage of graphic reports. The murder of Elijah Smith generated an article that described in a shrill tone how a band of men "dressed in Indian disguise . . . took him [Smith] from his wagon and wantonly shot him!"107

The reasons behind the breakdown of "Indian" protest in the Northeast backcountry were not only related to popular intolerance of violence; "Indian" protest declined because the underlying values that supported it were diluted by social, political, and economic change. The increased violence of disguised rioters was a symptom of this deeper evolution. As the cultural meaning of popular protest went out of focus, those who practiced it became more desperate and more inclined toward bloodshed. Backcountry protestors had always depended on community consensus for their effectiveness and ability to evade prosecution, rather than violent intimidation. Increasingly, "Indians" spent their energy and threats upon members of their own communities. As the value of popular protest became less apparent, backcountry settlements chafed under the burden of an enforced consensus. But once voluntary consensus was lost, no amount of coercion could replace it.108

What sapped "Indian" resistance of its meaning and value were broad trends of social change, economic
development, and political reform. In Maine, economic growth created fissures in the social fabric of backcountry society. People who once lived a common existence, with common goals and common interests, were increasingly divided by social status, material wealth, and politics as they entered the nineteenth century. Communities of struggling settlers were replaced by settlements of millers, merchants, and farmers. With this diversity of interests it was difficult to find the unity of opinion crucial to fostering "Indian" resistance.109

Political change was another nail in the coffin of Maine’s backcountry protest. Under the auspices of the Betterment Act of 1808, politicians of a Jeffersonian Democrat stripe sought to divide and conquer Maine’s backcountry resistance through compromise. The act provided for proprietors to receive payment upon lands occupied by squatters. Yet in calculating payment, land was to be assessed at its unimproved rate; valuable "improvements" that settlers had labored to create, such as homes, cleared fields, and fences, were excluded from land fees. The Betterment Act was just one instance of a broader political shift that saw the Federalists, stalwart supporters of the proprietary interest, replaced by Jeffersonian Democrats who dealt with Maine’s backwoodsmen on a more equitable, albeit self-serving, basis.110

All of these changes should not be seen in terms of
White Indian failures. Disguised protest and a reliance on the values of popular culture had provided Maine’s settlers with the time they needed to develop a strong bargaining position. Economic developments may have divided people in the hinterlands, but they also provided material benefits. The only reason Maine’s "squatters" were around to witness economic improvement was the persistence of their resistance. White Indians gave poor farmers the breathing space they needed to establish themselves on the land. When resistance finally did collapse, settlers were able to pay proprietary fees without financial ruin. Better still, the Betterment Act’s compromised proprietary fees made legal title to the land available at bargain prices. Settlers were able to reap the benefits of this legislation because the endurance and effectiveness of their resistance made them a visible political issue worthy of Jeffersonian politicians’ courtship.¹¹¹

In New York, where the cultural ingredients of "Indian" resistance were not as plentiful, nor as judiciously blended, Anti-rent Indians were far more "political," and ultimately less successful. As their political utility waned, so did their activities. New York’s backcountry of the 1840s was a far cry from Maine’s frontier of the early 1800s. The hinterlands of New York were everywhere more accessible to outside economic and social influences and its people more firmly rooted to the dictates of mainstream
culture. Anti-rent Indians suffered from a lack of consensus caused by social change, but the Anti-rent movement as a whole benefitted from the era's emergent political culture.

New York's rent resistance operated in a post-Jacksonian world where popular action became a legitimate part of national political life; Anti-rent newspapers and Anti-rent associations existed side by side with Anti-rent Indians. The protest movement's methods had a foot in both traditional popular protest and popular political innovations. In the end, the latter undercut the former; support for the violence and chaos of disguised rioting quickly evaporated when non-violent political options were available.112

Social change fueled a process in which popular access to politics was legitimized and popular culture was institutionalized. The "people" may have made inroads into the political realm, but the world they found themselves in was an elite one not of their own making. Where once popular culture provided a number of forms with which to influence political life, now such access was relegated to election day.113 People in the backcountry carved out a place for themselves in the political life of their nation, but in so doing they lost many richly crafted rituals of protest and the initiative to use them.

"By Christ off with your shirt; if you don't you shall
go dead!" commanded a "knight" of the Ku Klux Klan. But Lewis, a black tenant farmer who was surrounded by a number of robed Klansmen, refused, knowing he would be whipped if he did. Again a Klansman demanded that he strip, warning, "We come from Manassas grave-yard; and by Christ we want to get back . . . and cover up before day, by Christ!" Finally, the Klansmen's victim obeyed and received thirty lashes.114

In the aftermath of the American Civil War, the South was beset by bands of disguised vigilantes who carried on many of the visual and emotional traditions of "Indian" protest. Political democratization and popular culture's institutionalization did not spell the end of disguised rioting; during periods of strife, venues of popular protest reappeared. Amid the instability of the post-Civil War South, whites of various social standings sought to rid themselves of their troubles by resorting to a campaign of disguised vigilantism. The movement was not carried out by rustically costumed "Indians," but by white-clad "knights" of the Ku Klux Klan.

In their costume, rhetoric, and mindset, the men who rode with the Klan in the 1860s and '70s were similar to the "Indians" who rioted in Maine and New York. Even before coalescing into the Ku Klux Klan, the South's disguised vigilantes took to wearing the white robes that would become their infamous trademark. Their costume--its "long gown with loose flowing sleeves" and conical hood containing
"apertures for the eyes, nose, and mouth"—possessed parallels with Maine's "Indian" garb. Similarities in disguise went beyond dress. Like Maine's White Indians and Boston's Tea Party "natives," Klansmen disguised their speech by masking their "natural tone of voice" with "a mystical style of language."

Language was not the only mystical aspect of the Ku Klux Klan. In another parallel with the Northeast's "Indian" rioters, southern vigilantes immersed themselves in mysticism and magic. They did so not only to frighten their victims by creating the impression that they were "ghosts" of fallen Confederate soldiers, but also to reinforce in their members that "their mysteriousness and secrecy, the high sounding titles of the offices, the grotesque dress of the members, and the formidable obligation, all meant more than mere sport." With the aid of removable heads, skeleton hands, the ability to drink bucketful after bucketful of water, and other magic tricks, Klansmen were able to keep white victims off balance and, at times, terrify blacks whose own folk traditions made them particularly vulnerable to the klan's ghost imagery. Under a mystical leadership of "Grand Wizards," "Genii," and "Grand Dragons," the Klan enforced its will through the supernatural.

The vigilantes' activities were supported by a mental outlook strikingly similar to that of "Indian" resistance. Like the poor settlers of the backcountry Northeast,
Southerners believed they were "the most grossly wronged and outraged people on the face of the earth." There was widespread sentiment in the post-war South that the region had fallen victim to the "tyrannical usurpation" of their political rights by "bad government and corrupt and incompetent officials." These beliefs match those of agrarian protestors in the North who often fought against the "usurpation" of their land by "corrupt" officials and proprietors. Southern whites' fears of free blacks, backwoods bandits, and land-grabbing carpet-baggers evoked those of eighteenth-century frontiersmen who took the law into their own hands when the government seemed unable or unwilling to impose order. All in all, both Klansmen and "Indians" possessed a mindset that alienated and isolated them from the nation's wider society. It was an ideology of desperation that mixed patriotic zeal, religious fervor, and extreme violence—an ideology that exhorted its partakers to "drink thy tea of distilled hell, stirred with the lightning of heaven, and sweetened with the gall of thine enemies!"\[117\]

But why this look into the post-bellum South? Why take note of a late nineteenth-century Southern vigilante movement? The answer lies in the fact that Reconstruction's Ku Klux Klan illustrates the continuation of disguised rioting's tactics, motives, and ideology. Its emergence after the Civil War demonstrates that popular culture may
have been coopted and institutionalized, but never fully tamed. The relationship between popular and elite culture was never a one-way street; each framework of belief transmitted and internalized values of the other. Elite culture never dominated popular culture. If anything, early America witnessed elite culture’s divorce from what had been widely held social values. In isolation, elite culture was able to become distinct, maybe even predominant, but it never was alone. The truth of this can be seen in the political reforms and social changes that undercut popular protest. Political democratization in the United States did rechannel traditional methods of expressing grass-roots grievances, but elite political traditions were simultaneously altered. Throughout the eighteenth century, deference ruled the political roost, but the nineteenth century ushered in an era where political candidates no longer "sat" for their offices, but "ran" for election. Parades, carnival-like rallies, and imagery heavily laden with symbols came to shape the republic’s political life. In all of these trends can be seen the ghost of popular protest’s rituals, imagery, and misrule. Elite culture was able to dominate popular culture only as far as it was willing to accommodate it.

Glimpsing the Ku Klux Klan also serves as a warning. Popular culture should not be romanticized. Historians are often guilty of viewing popular traditions through rose-
tinted lenses, seeing it as "holistic," "organic," and comfortably "traditional." There is some truth to these descriptions, but they are neither an accurate nor a complete picture. Disguised rioting was a broad tradition of popular protest with roots deep in European society. It was a mode of protest widely accepted, effective, and at times necessary, but all of this did not make it necessarily good.

Early America's "Indian" rioters terrorized, beat, and on occasion even killed people. Their victims, be they a poor farmer, deputy sheriff, or rich proprietor, were just that--victims. It is best to keep in mind that disguised agrarian rebels, Boston's patriot "Indians," and the Ku Klux Klan were all offspring of the same mother of desperation. Popular disturbances were not only products of oppression, self-preservation, and genuine grievances, but could also be generated by hate, ignorance, and discrimination. When looking at the reasons why "Indian" protest disappeared--beyond particular issues and events, beyond cultural change--one finds the possibility that it faded away because most people wanted it that way. In the long run, other options for redress might have seemed more attractive once they were available. The terrible mask of "Indian" protest was a powerful tool melded of popular culture, frontier experience, and revolutionary ideology, but it was also a disturbing mask, as easily gazed through as upon.
Notes

Introduction.


Chapter 1.


[Notes to pages 18-24]


20. Malcolmson, Popular Recreations, 43-44.


28. Ibid., 271.
29. Benjamin Kendall deposition, Jan. 28, 1764, Colonial Records of Pa., vol. 9, 126; Benjamin Franklin, "A Narrative of the Late Massacres in Lancaster County of a Number of Indians, Friends of this Province, By Persons Unknown With Some Observations on the Same," in The Paxton Papers, ed. Dunbar, 71-72.

30. The Paxton Papers, ed. Dunbar, 44.


35. Ibid., vol. 49, 231.


38. Ibid., 725-726.

39. Ibid., 728.
[Notes to pages 33-41]

Chapter 2.


43. Shaw, Rituals of Revolution, 204-217; James Hawkes, A Retrospect of the Boston Tea-Party With a Memoir of George R.T. Hewes (New York: S.S. Bliss, 1834), 54; Tea Leaves, ed. Drake, LXXI, LXXIII.

44. Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes,": 267.

45. Hawke, A Retrospect, 54; Tea Leaves, ed. Drake, LXXIV, LLXXVI; Shaw, Rituals of Revolution, 220.


[Notes to pages 41-48]


52. Ibid., 757; Findley, History of the Insurrection, 33.


57. "Tea Destroyed By Indians" (Boston, 1773).
Chapter 3.


60. Sheriff John Chandler to the Massachusetts General Court, Feb. 6, 1809, Unpassed House File 6385, MSA; James W. North, *The History of Augusta* (Augusta: Clapp and North, 1870), 350.


70. Taylor, Liberty Men, 115; for other examples of white Indians' skimmington violence see Ibid., 269, 273.


73. Taylor, "Rogues and Deceivers": 93-94; Pendleton, "Anti-Rent Controversy," 162.

74. Taylor, "Rogues and Deceivers": 93; Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, 232, 246; Chandler to Gen. Court, Feb. 6, 1809.


78. For an overview of a cultural conflict model of Shay's Rebellion see David P. Szatmary, Shay's Rebellion - The Makings of an Agrarian Insurrection (Amherst: The Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1980), Ch. 1 "The Two Worlds of New
[Notes to pages 61-67]

England," 1-18;  for the encounter at Springfield see Ibid., 101-03;  and for a discussion of the spread of Shaysites' into Vermont, New York, and Maine see Ibid., 107-14.


81. Taylor, Liberty Men, 202-03; North, History of Augusta, 374.

82. Ibid., 376-78, 381-82.

83. Ibid., 380.

84. Ibid., 374; "Resolve Granting $400 to Henry Johnson to Relieve him under his suffering a wound while on Duty as a Deputy Sheriff," March 11, 1808, Mass. Court Acts, 1807, Ch. 154, MSA; Taylor, "Rougues and Deceivers":94. .

85. Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, 242, 248; Albany Argus, March 12, 1841, and Dec. 27, 1844.

86. Taylor, Liberty Men, 185, 200; Resolve Granting $400 to Henry Johnson," March, 11, 1808.


89. Pendleton, "Anti-Rent Controversy," 117; Albany Argus, Dec 23, 1844; Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, 265.

90. Taylor, "Rogues and Deceivers": 99; Young, "English Plebeian Culture": 185-86; Countryman, "Out of the Bounds of the Law": 51-52.
[Notes to pages 68-74]


[Notes to pages 74-82]

103. North, History of Augusta, 358.


Epilogue.


112. Ellis, Landlords and Farmers, 246.


[Notes to pages 82-84]


118. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), 58-63--it is not the particulars of Burke's analysis which are of importance to this discussion, but the process he outlines.
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