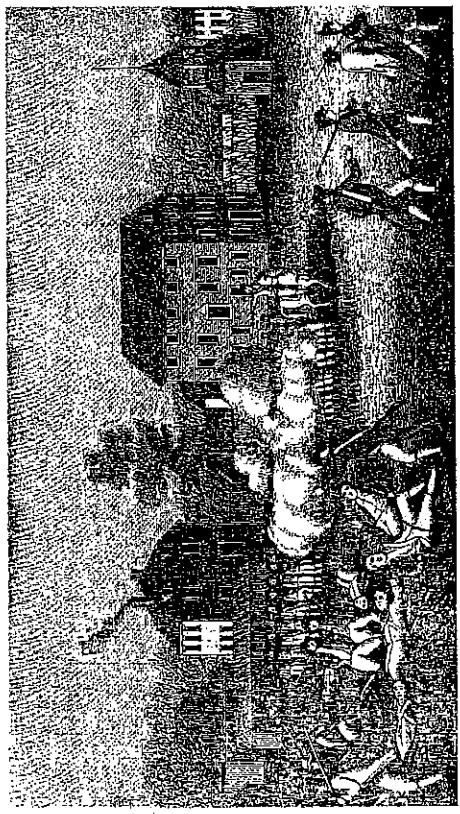


From: *Foundling Myths, Stories That Hide Our Patriotic Past*
by: Ray Raphael

THE SHOT HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD: LEXINGTON AND CONCORD

“British professionals . . . pump[ed] shot into
the backs of fleeing Minute Men.”



The Battle of Lexington. Reduced engraving by Amos Doolittle, 1832, from his original engraving, 1775, based on a sketch by Ralph Earl.

Every year, over one million Americans commemorate “the shot heard ‘round the world” with a patriotic pilgrimage to Minute-man National Historical Park on the outskirts of Concord, Massachusetts. On April 19, the anniversary of the famous event, reenactors dress up as colonial Minutemen and march from nearby towns to Lexington and Concord, where they exchange make-believe musket fire with friends and neighbors dressed as British Redcoats. Throughout the state, and in Maine and Wisconsin as well, “Patriots’ Day” is celebrated as an official holiday.

The story is classic David and Goliath, starring rustic colonials who faced the world’s strongest army. At dawn in Lexington on April 19, 1775, several hundred British Regulars, in full battle formation, opened fire on local militiamen. When the smoke had cleared, eight of the sleepy-eyed farmers who had been roused in the middle of the night lay dead on the town green.

In the wake of the bloodbath, to mobilize popular support, patriots proclaimed far and wide that the Redcoats had fired first. The Massachusetts Provincial Congress collected depositions from participants and firsthand witnesses, then published those accounts that conformed to the official story under the title *A Narrative of the*

Excursion and Ravages of the King's Troops. British authorities countered with their own official version: the Americans had fired first. Not surprisingly, this story received little circulation in the rebellious colonies.

Because of the biases and agendas of the witnesses, we can never know for sure who fired the first shot at Lexington. But we do know that the patriots won the war of words. "The myth of injured innocence," as David Hackett Fischer calls it, became an instant American classic.¹ We have all learned that the British started the American Revolution when they opened fire on outnumbered and outclassed patriot militiamen on the Lexington Green. But this makes no sense. Revolutions, by nature, are proactive—they must be initiated by the revolutionaries themselves. The American Revolution had begun long before the battle at Lexington.

In 1836 the poet and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson coined a catchy phrase that has signified the event ever since: "the shot heard 'round the world." Actually, Emerson's poem "Concord Hymn" commemorated the fighting at the North Bridge in nearby Concord, and his celebrated "shot" was fired by Americans:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood,
And fired the shot heard 'round the world.

Over time, however, Emerson's poem was relocated to Lexington, a site more hospitable to the story we wish to hear. At Lexington the farmers were clearly the victims, while at Concord they were not. The David and Goliath tale, highlighted by the image of bullying British troops mowing down Yankee farmers, has prevailed. Current textbooks routinely refer to "the shot heard 'round the world" at Lexington, not Concord, while popular histories still repeat the story as it was first told by American patriots: "British professionals . . . pumpled] shot into the backs of fleeing Minute Men."²

But what if the roles were reversed? What if American Revolutionaries were actually Goliath, and the British David?

A PEOPLE'S REVOLUTION

In fact, the American Revolution did not begin with "the shot heard 'round the world." It started more than half a year earlier, when tens of thousands of angry patriot militiamen ganged up on a few unarmed officials and overthrew British authority throughout all of Massachusetts outside of Boston. This powerful revolutionary saga, which features Americans as Goliath instead of David, has been bypassed by the standard telling of history. By treating American patriots as innocent victims, we have suppressed their revolutionary might.

To understand why the story of this monumental insurrection is no longer told, we have to go back to the Boston Tea Party. On December 16, 1773, patriots dressed as Indians dumped 342 chests of tea, worth £15,000, into Boston Harbor. Although we take considerable pride in recounting the story today, in the years that followed the event Americans never celebrated it, and they certainly didn't call it a "tea party."³ While some patriots rejoiced at the boldness of the affair, they could hardly capitalize on this act of vandalism in their propaganda. The East India Company could easily be perceived as the victim, not the antagonist, and even many patriots thought the company should be recompensed for destroyed property.

But when the king and Parliament retaliated for the destruction of the tea with four extreme measures labeled "Coercive Acts," the colonists did indeed become oppressed. Renaming the measures the "Intolerable Acts," radical patriots garnered much support for their cause.

The story of the Coercive Acts and the response they triggered can be told two ways. According to the enshrined version, the first and most important of the measures was the Boston Port Bill, which prohibited all commerce to and from Boston. (The other three measures

are sometimes enumerated but rarely discussed.) Parliament intended to isolate Boston and starve its rebellious residents into submission, but this plan backfired when other colonists sprang to the aid of their brothers and sisters. United behind the suffering Bostonians, other colonists heaped aid on their beleaguered friends and braced themselves for a revolution.

Today, this Americanized adaptation of the "Good Samaritan" is repeated in each and every narrative account of the events leading up to the Revolutionary War. But revolutions do not generally stem from acts of charity, and this one was no exception. Our nation came into being because people stood up for themselves and their own best interests.

There is another story, although it has rarely been told in the past hundred and fifty years. According to this version, it was not the Boston Port Bill but one of the "other" coercive measures that turned most Massachusetts citizens into revolutionaries. The Massachusetts Government Act, passed a month after the Port Bill, dictated that people could no longer come together in their town meetings without permission from the Crown-appointed governor, and they could not discuss any items the governor had not approved. The act further stipulated that the people's elected representatives would no longer determine the Council, which comprised the upper house of the legislature, the governor's cabinet, and the administrative arm of provincial government. Also, elected representatives no longer had the power to approve or remove judges, juries, or justices of the peace—the local officials who could put people in jail or take away their property.

After a century and a half of local self-government, citizens of Massachusetts were suddenly deprived of the power of their votes. The Massachusetts Government Act affected not only the 5 percent of the populace who resided in Boston but also the 95 percent who lived in towns and villages clear across the province. Common farmers feared that judges, no longer responsible to the people, might be corrupted and foreclose on land for the slightest debt. The new act elimi-

nated the sovereignty of the people of Massachusetts and threatened their economic solvency.

The people would not allow it. They refused to be disenfranchised.

The Massachusetts Government Act was due to take effect on August 1, 1774. The first court under the new provisions was scheduled to sit in remote Berkshire County, on the western edge of the province, but the court never met. When the Crown-appointed officials showed up for work on August 16, they found themselves shut out of the Great Barrington courthouse by 1,500 committed patriots.⁴

Two weeks later, in Springfield, 3,000–4,000 patriots marched "with staves and musick" and again shut down the court. "Amidst the Crowd in a sandy, sultry place, exposed to the sun," said one observer, the judges were forced to renounce "in the most express terms any commission which should be given out to them under the new arrangement."⁵

In Cambridge, on September 2, 4,000 patriots forced the lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts to resign his seat on the Council. Responding to rumors that the British army had fired at and killed six patriots, an estimated 20,000–60,000 men from throughout the countryside headed toward Boston to confront the Redcoats. In some towns, nearly every male of fighting age participated in the "Powder Alarm," as it was called.⁶

Governor Thomas Gage, who was also commander-in-chief of the British forces in North America, had vowed to make a stand in Worcester, where the court was scheduled to meet the following week. After the Powder Alarm, however, Gage changed his mind and let the judges fend for themselves. On September 6, 4,622 militiamen from 37 surrounding communities gathered in Worcester (a town with fewer than 300 citizens) to depose the Crown-appointed officials. The insurgents lined both sides of Main Street as the officials, in a ritualistic display of humiliation and submission, were forced to walk the gauntlet, hats in hand, reciting their recantations thirty times each so all the people could hear.⁷

As in Great Barrington, Springfield, and Worcester, patriots shut down the governmental apparatus in Salem, Concord, Barnstable, Taunton, and Plymouth—in every county seat outside Boston. From the time the Massachusetts Government Act was supposed to take effect, no county courts, which also functioned as the administrative arms of the local governments, were allowed to conduct any business under British authority. According to merchant John Andrews, rebels in Plymouth were so excited by their victory that they

attempted to remove a Rock (the one on which their fore-fathers first landed, when they came to this country) which lay buried in a wharfe five feet deep, up into the center of the town, near the court house. The way being up hill, they found it impracticable, as after they had dug it up, they found it to weigh ten tons at least.⁸

Meanwhile, all the Crown-appointed Councillors were told by their angry neighbors to resign. The few who refused were driven from their homes and forced to flee to Boston, where they sought protection from the British army.

In direct violation of the new law, the people continued with their town meetings. When Governor Gage arrested seven men in the capital of Salem for calling a town meeting, 3,000 farmers immediately marched on the jail to set the prisoners free. Two companies of British soldiers retreated—and throughout Massachusetts meetings continued to convene. According to one contemporary account,

Notwithstanding all the parade the governor made at Salem on account of their meeting, they had another one directly under his nose at Danvers, and continued it two or three howers longer than was necessary, to see if he would interrupt 'em. He was acquainted with it, but reply'd—“Damn 'em! I won't do any thing about it unless his Majesty sends me more troops.”⁹

By early October 1774, more than half a year before the “shot heard 'round the world” at Lexington, Massachusetts patriots had seized all political and military authority outside Boston.

Throughout the preceding decade, patriots had written petitions, staged boycotts, and burnt effigies—but this was something new. In the late summer and early fall of 1774, patriots did not simply protest government, they *overthrew* it. Then, after dismissing British authority, they assumed political control through their town meetings, county conventions, and a Provincial Congress. One disgruntled Tory from Southampton summed it all up in his diary: “Government has now devolved upon the people, and they seem to be for using it.”¹⁰

When the Boston Port Bill took effect, other colonists passed the hat for relief, held days of prayer and fasting, and called for conferences to talk things over.¹¹ These were common forms of political action in British North America. When the Massachusetts Government Act took effect, the people of Massachusetts shut down the government and prepared for war. This was the stuff of revolution. The people of Massachusetts forcibly overthrew the old regime and began to replace it with their own.¹²

The traditional telling, which states that the “American Revolution” started at Lexington, conceals this momentous and historic transfer of political power. If the “shot heard 'round the world” was the *beginning* of the American Revolution, we have no way of accounting for the revolution that preceded it.

The traditional story masks the people's vibrant dedication to their own political survival. Many years later, Levi Preston, a veteran of the Battle of Concord, explained why he had become a revolutionary:

“Were you not oppressed by the Stamp Act?”

“I never saw one of those stamps, and always understood that Governor Bernard put them all in Castle William. I am certain I never paid a penny for one of them.”

“Well, what then about the tea-tax?”

"Tea-tax! I never drank a drop of the stuff; the boys threw it all overboard."

"Then I suppose you had been reading Harrington or Sidney and Locke about the eternal principles of liberty."

"Never heard of 'em. We read only the Bible, the Catechism, Watts' Psalms and Hymns, and the Almanack."

"Well, then, what was the matter? and what did you mean in going to the fight?"

"Young man, what we meant in going for those Redcoats was this: we always had governed ourselves, and we always meant to. They didn't mean we should."¹³

PREPARING FOR DEFENSE

As they toppled the old order, the people of Massachusetts realized they might have to defend their Revolution against a counterattack by the British army. With limited material means but a great deal of energy and nerve they prepared for war. By subscribing to the "myth of injured innocence"—the image of professional British soldiers mowing down common farmers ill-equipped for battle—we lose sight of the momentous arming and mobilizing that went on throughout the countryside for the better part of a year.

On July 4, 1774, more than nine months before Lexington, the patriotic American Political Society declared "that each, and every, member of our Society, be forth with Provided, with Two Pounds of Gun Powder each 12 Flint and Led Answerable thereunto."¹⁴

In August, eight months before Lexington, a convention of Committees of Correspondence, meeting in Worcester, resolved that patriots should supply their neighbors with powder, and that the committees should "ascertain what number of guns are deficient to arm the people in case of invasion."¹⁵

In September, seven months before Lexington, women as well as men personally participated in arming for war: they rolled cartridges of powder and shot for the tens of thousands of militiamen who

marched toward Boston to confront the British. Also in September, a convention of Committees of Correspondence took it upon themselves to reorganize the Worcester County militia into seven new regiments, each with newly elected officers. They recommended that each town "provide themselves immediately with one or more field pieces, mounted and fitted for use," and they urged the towns "to enlist one third of the men . . . between sixteen and sixty years of age, to be ready to act at a minute's warning."¹⁶ These were the famous "Minutemen," formed half a year before they would respond to the call at Lexington. Thus the story of the Minutemen does not begin at Lexington, where we normally put it; it is part and parcel of the Revolution of 1774.

In October, five months before Lexington, patriots from throughout Massachusetts formed their own representative body, the Provincial Congress, which assumed the basic functions of government. Foremost among its duties were to collect taxes and prepare for war. On October 26 delegates listed exactly what they would need to defend against a British invasion:

16 field pieces, 3 pounders, with carriages, irons, &c.; wheels for ditto, irons, sponges, ladles, &c., @ £30	£480 0 0
4 ditto, 6 pounders, with ditto, @ £38	£152 0 0
Carriages, irons, &c., for 12 battering cannon, @ £30	£360 0 0
4 mortars, and appurtenances, viz: 2 8-inch and 12 13-inch, @ £20	£80 0 0
20 tons grape and round shot, from 3 to 24 lb., @ £15	£300 0 0
10 tons bomb-shells, @ £20	£200 0 0
5 tons lead balls, @ £33	£165 0 0
1,000 barrels of powder, @ £8	£8,000 0 0
5,000 arms and bayonets, @ £2	£10,000 0 0
And 75,000 flints	£100 0 0
Contingent charges	£1,000 0 0
In the whole	£20,837 0 0 ¹⁷

All the political and military maneuvers of the next several months would focus on how to procure these armaments and how to keep what the patriots already possessed out of the hands of the British.

In December, four months before Lexington, patriots in nearby New Hampshire made the first offensive move of the war: four hundred local militiamen stormed Fort William and Mary in Portsmouth, took down the king's colors, and carried away approximately one hundred barrels of the king's gunpowder (some of which was later put to use during the Battle of Bunker Hill). The following day, 1,000 patriots marched again on the fort, this time removing all the muskets and sixteen cannon. This armed attack on a British fortress was an act of war, not merely a prelude to war.¹⁸

Although the offensive against Fort William and Mary was the first frontal military assault, it was not the first time patriots removed British arms and ammunition. Using stealth, cunning, and insider information, patriots had already taken cannon and munitions from British magazines in Boston, Providence, Newport, and New London.¹⁹

In February 1775, two months before Lexington, British intelligence reported that 15,000 "Minute Men" were "all properly armed." The report noted that the patriots had accumulated thirty-eight field pieces in Worcester and a considerable supply of gunpowder in Concord. If the British tried to seize these, however, they were likely to trigger a massive mobilization of angry patriots.

Although General Gage dared not attack Worcester or Concord, he did try to seize patriot stores he thought were more vulnerable. On Sunday, February 26, he ordered 240 soldiers to find and remove eight field pieces and a supply of powder that patriots were hiding at Salem. Local citizens, gathered in church, learned of the invasion in time to remove the arms and ammunition to a safer location. To stop the British advance, they simply raised a drawbridge that lay on the route of the marching troops. (When the British invaded Lexington seven weeks later, they avoided the mistakes they had made in Salem: they marched by night, not on the Sabbath, and they chose a route that did not have a drawbridge.)

On April 2, seventeen days before Lexington, patriots received word that British reinforcements were on their way to suppress the Massachusetts rebellion. With war imminent, the Provincial Congress voted to establish a regular army. The people of Boston, in anticipation of a military conflict, began to evacuate the city.

By April 19, 1775, the patriots were ready to resist an attack, as ready as they could ever expect to be. They were willing partners in this war-in-the-making. They knew the likely consequences, and they were willing to face those consequences.

The early overthrow of British authority and subsequent preparations for military conflict make the narrative of our nation's founding stronger, not weaker. When local Minutemen showed up on Lexington Green on April 19, and when neighboring Minutemen fought the British at Concord later that day, and when 20,000 others answered the call to arms within a week, they were engaging in conscious, considered political acts. These were not just knee-jerk reactions.

British troops marching toward Lexington and Concord that fateful morning amused themselves by singing *Yankee Doodle*, a pejorative little ditty that depicted their opponents as ignorant, provincial farmers. They failed to grasp that these farmers had turned themselves into soldiers to defend the revolution they had staged many months before. Every time we treat American patriots as no more than unsuspecting victims, we repeat the mistake these British soldiers made.

LOST IN HISTORY

The Massachusetts Revolution of 1774 was the most successful popular uprising in the nation's history, the only one to remove existing political authority. Despite its power—or possibly *because* of its power—this momentous event has been virtually lost to history. It is rarely mentioned even in passing, and it is never included in the core narrative of our nation's birth.

Our most triumphant rebellion did not always suffer such neglect.

The British *Annual Register*, written immediately in the wake of the 1774 revolution, gave considerable attention to the forced resignations, court closures, and preparations for war throughout the countryside of Massachusetts.²⁰ Early American historians—William Gordon in 1788, David Ramsay in 1789, and Mercy Otis Warren in 1805—covered the response to the Boston Port Act, but they highlighted the Massachusetts Government Act as the major catalyst leading to the American Revolution. According to Ramsay, the Massachusetts Government Act

excited a greater alarm than the port act. The one effected only the metropolis, the other the whole province. . . . Had the parliament stopped short with the Boston port act, the motives to union and to make a common cause with that metropolis, would have been feeble, perhaps ineffectual to have roused the other provinces; but the arbitrary mutilation of the important privileges . . . by the will of parliament, convinced the most moderate that the cause of Massachusetts was the cause of all the provinces.²¹

Gordon described the popular uprising in considerable and vivid detail. In response to the “obnoxious alteration” dictated by the Massachusetts Government Act, “the people at large” prepared “to defend their rights with the point of a sword,” and even the moderates “became resolute and resentful.”²² Warren went even further, calling the 1774 rebellion “one of the most extraordinary eras in the history of man: the exertions of spirit awakened by the severe hand of power had led to that most alarming experiment of leveling of all ranks, and destroying all subordination.”²³

This was too much of a revolution for conservative historians and schoolbook writers of the next generation, who argued that the “American Revolution” was not really revolutionary and that patriots were not to be construed as “rebels.” Paul Allen, writing in 1819, devoted seventeen pages to the aid sent to Boston, while he assigned less

than a paragraph to the resistance triggered by the Massachusetts Government Act.²⁴ Salma Hale's 1822 school text emphasized the themes of sympathy and solidarity, with nary a word about the overthrow of British authority.²⁵ The following year Charles Goodrich, in his popular *History of the United States of America*, wrote about Virginia's “expression of sympathy” with Boston, while ignoring altogether the people's rebellion in Massachusetts.²⁶

The Good Samaritan approach certainly played better to children. Stories featuring neighbor-helping-neighbor conformed to educational goals, while those showing bullying crowds did not. Richard Snowden's school history, written in biblical style, made the events of 1774 sound like the story of the three wise men at the nativity: “Now it came to pass, when the people of the provinces had heard that their brethren in town were in a great strait, they sent to speak comfortable words unto them, and gave them worldly gifts.”²⁷

By midcentury, the patriotic historian George Bancroft was comfortable enough with the idea of a people's revolution to pay some respect to the uprising of 1774. Although Bancroft spoke of “sympathy” for Boston, he also devoted the better part of three chapters to the dramatic resistance to the Massachusetts Government Act. He did not, however, embrace its democratic character: it was under the direction of Boston's Joseph Warren, he claimed, who was told what to do by an absent Samuel Adams.²⁸ With this imaginary chain of command, Bancroft placed the first overthrow of the British firmly in the hands of America's favorite revolutionary. (See chapter 3.)

In 1865 William Wells followed Bancroft in placing Adams at the forefront of affairs in Boston, even though he was in Philadelphia at the time. But with no credible evidence linking Adams to the revolution in the countryside, Wells simply ignored those events.²⁹ For Wells and most subsequent writers, Samuel Adams had to be the prime mover of all crowd actions—and if Adams was not present, the tale was not told. Historians for the past century and a half have followed the lead of British officials of the time, who simply could not believe that authority had been overturned by “a tumultuous Rabble, without

any Appearance of general Concert, or without any Head to advise, or Leader to Conduct."³⁰

One might think that progressive historians of the early twentieth century—people like John Franklin Jameson, Charles Beard, and Carl Becker—would have been attracted to this popular uprising, but since it did not appear at first glance to be a classic “class struggle,” it eluded their attention. While radical historians failed to pick up on this all-but-forgotten revolution, moderates saw no need to rock the boat. In their monumental, 1,300-page compilation of primary sources published in 1958, Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris failed to document this vital episode. Instead, they included a complete section titled “All America Rallies to the Aid of Beleaguered Boston,” another on the debates within the First Continental Congress, and over thirty pages on Lexington and Concord.³¹

That’s how we stand to this day: “helping beleaguered Boston” and “the shot heard ’round the world” remain firmly anchored in our core narrative, while the actual toppling of the British-controlled government in Massachusetts is neglected entirely, or, at best, reduced to a sentence or two about “crowd actions” or “rural unrest.” In six current elementary and middle school textbooks, there is not one word about the termination of British rule in 1774.³² Eight of ten texts at the secondary and college levels ignore the first transfer of political authority to the Americans.³³ Of the remaining two, one states that “in most colonies . . . revolutionary committees, conventions, and congresses, entirely unauthorized by law, were replacing legal governing bodies,” but it says nothing about the revolt in Massachusetts that deposed the official bodies.³⁴ The other does refer to the “full-scale rebellion” in Massachusetts, but instead of featuring the dramatic acts of the people themselves, it highlights only the formation of a Provincial Congress and the election of John Hancock “to lead it.”³⁵

Popular historians either neglect the Revolution of 1774 or misread its nature. In *Patriots: The Men Who Started the American Revolution*, A. J. Langguth makes no mention of it, while he includes an entire chapter on how other colonists helped the Bostonians.³⁶ In *Liberty!*

Thomas Fleming places Samuel Adams solidly in control of all crucial events; Adams allegedly “convened” the Provincial Congress, even though he was hundreds of miles away.³⁷ Benson Bobrick, in *Angel in the Whirlwind*, reduces the 1774 revolution to a single document, the Suffolk Resolves, which he attributes to the leadership of Joseph Warren.³⁸ No current popularization of the American Revolution treats the overthrow of British authority in rural Massachusetts as the work of an aroused populace, acting in accordance with democratic traditions and principles.³⁹

Why has the story of the dramatic revolution in Massachusetts been abandoned? Why do we think that helping Boston was of greater consequence than shutting down a government, and that the revolutionaries were no more than unsuspecting victims? Why, indeed, have we denied our powerful revolutionary heritage?

There are several overlapping reasons, deeply rooted in our national self-image and the nature of storytelling.

The very strengths of the Revolution of 1774 have insured its anonymity. This revolution was democratic by design; the people not only preached popular sovereignty but practiced it. Although the toppling of authority enjoyed unprecedented, widespread support, there were no charismatic, self-promoting leaders to anchor the story and serve as its “heroes.” This made for a stronger revolution, but it simultaneously helps explain why we know so little about it.

This revolution involved no bloodshed, for resistance was unthinkable. The *force* of the people was so overwhelming that *violence* became unnecessary. The handful of Crown-appointed officials in Worcester, when confronted by 4,622 angry militiamen, had no choice but to submit. Had opposition been stronger, there might have been violence; that would have made for a bloodier tale but a weaker revolution.

The Massachusetts Revolution of 1774 was ubiquitous, erupting everywhere at once. General Gage had no idea where or when he might oppose it. But a spontaneous uprising is difficult to chronicle; there is no clear storyline leading neatly from A to Z. This revolution

occurred throughout the countryside, while the media of the times were confined to Boston. Again, the very nature of this broad-based revolt led to a stronger revolution but a less compelling tale.

Finally, the Massachusetts Revolution of 1774, like all true revolutions, was a bullying affair. Crowds numbering in the thousands forced a few unarmed officials to cower and submit. This made for a powerful revolution but a scary story. Contrast that to "helping beleaguered Boston," a far gentler tale, or to "the shot heard 'round the world," which features the British, not the Americans, as bullies. Particularly now, when the United States possesses unbridled power, we do not wish our stories to depict patriots as intimidators.

Like the conservatives of the early nineteenth century, we remain fearful of our own revolution. All narratives of early United States history include accounts of an uprising labeled Shays' Rebellion, which was modeled after the Revolution of 1774. In 1786, exactly twelve years after Massachusetts farmers had closed the courts and dismantled the established government, many of the very same people tried to repeat their early triumph. In Great Barrington, Springfield, Worcester—all the same places—disgruntled citizens of rural Massachusetts once again gathered in crowds to topple existing authority. There were two important differences between the uprisings of 1774 and 1786: the latter was much smaller, involving crowds that numbered in the hundreds rather than the thousands, and it failed. In our histories, we have chosen to feature the smaller, failed rebellion in preference to the larger, successful one. Although we like to commemorate the break from Britain, we hesitate to celebrate the raw and rampant power of the people who made this happen.

By shying away, we lose sight of our democratic heritage. Students of history are fond of noting that the United States was founded as a republic, not a democracy, and they accurately point to the views of the Founding Fathers, who feared too much power in the hands of the people. But if we shift our gaze from the Founders to the founders, from gentry in dress suits and wigs to farmers in frocks and mud-caked boots, we find that a very different attitude prevailed. There

could never be too much democracy, these people believed. All decisions, even during their mass street actions, had to be approved by "the body of the people." The representatives they selected to deal with recalcitrant officials served for one day only—the ultimate in term limits. These rebels ran their revolution like a mobilized town meeting, each participant as important as any other. At no time in history have people been more passionate about adhering to democratic processes.

At least in Massachusetts, the roots of American democracy go deeper than most of us have ever imagined. The United States owes its very existence to the premise that all authority resides with the people, yet our standard telling of history does not reflect this fundamental principle. The story of the revolution before the Revolution can remind us of what we are all about.