

## Colonial precursors of Hamilton

*The following selections are taken from the writings of some of the principal American precursors of the Hamiltonian system of economics, assembled by H. Graham Lowry.*

### **John Winthrop, 'Reasons to Be Considered for Justifying the Plantation in New England' (1629)**

*Winthrop's policy statement, circulated as an organizing tract for the great 1630 migration to found the Massachusetts Bay Colony, is the earliest formulation of the principles and goals of Christian economy for the project of forging a republic in the New World. The excerpts below highlight the rejection of the oligarchical system, and the commitment to a continental republic, which later flourished under "the American System."*

This land [of England] grows weary of her inhabitants, so as man who is the most precious of all creatures is here more vile and base than the earth we tread upon, and of less price among us, than a horse or a sheep, masters are forced by authority to entertain servants, parents are forced to maintain their own children, all towns complain of the burden of their poor though we have taken up many unnecessary, yea unlawful trades to maintain them. And we use the authority of the law to hinder the increase of people as urging the execution of the state against cottages and inmates and thus it is come to pass that children, servants and neighbors (especially if they be poor) are counted the greatest burden which if things were right would be the chiefest earthly blessing.

The whole earth is the Lord's Garden and he hath given it to the sons of men, with a general condition, Gen: 1.28. Increase and multiply, replenish the earth and subdue it, which was again renewed to Noah, the end is double, moral and natural, that man might enjoy the fruits of the earth and God might have his due glory from the creature, why then should we stand here striving for places of habitation (many men spending much labor and cost to recover or keep sometimes an Acre or two of land as would procure them many hundred as good or better in another country), and in the mean time suffer a whole Continent, as fruitful and convenient for the use of man, to lie waste without any improvement.

### **Cotton Mather, 'Some Considerations on Bills of Credit' (1691)**

*Following Charles II's revocation of the Massachusetts Bay Charter in 1684, the colony no longer had sovereign powers*



*John Winthrop*

*to mint its own currency, issue subsidies for the development of mining and manufacturing, regulate its trade, and enforce its prohibitions against usury. All of these measures had been integral to the impressive rates of economic growth in republican Massachusetts. The overthrow of royal Gov. Edmund Andros in 1689 was followed by renewed assertions of Massachusetts' authority to promote its economic development, including a pamphlet by Increase Mather, Cotton's father, who was negotiating a new charter in London.*

*The elder Mather's "New England Vindicated from Unjust Aspersions" argued that Massachusetts must have authority to control its own currency and credit, and direct its own capital into the development of mining and manufacturing.*

*Cotton Mather's 1691 pamphlet was designed to rally support in Massachusetts for the issuance of paper currency in the form of public bills of credit, and attacked "the great indiscretion of our Countrymen" who refused to accept them.*

Now what is the Security of your Paper-money less than the Credit of the whole Country? . . . Certainly, Sir, were not people's heads idly bewhizled with conceits that we have no magistrates, no government, which we can call our own, I say if such foolish conceits were not entertained, there would not be the least scruple in accepting your bills as current pay. . . .

[Otherwise], we are reduced to *Hobbes* his state of Nature.

### **Benjamin Franklin, 'A Proposal for Promoting Useful Knowledge Among the British Plantations in America' (1743)**

*With renewed hostilities between Britain and France during the War of Austrian Succession, America's republicans geared up for a rare opportunity to break the joint Anglo-French containment of any efforts to develop the continental interior. In the guise of promoting Britain's interests in her colonies, Franklin's call to arms led to the founding of the American Philosophical Association in 1744, as a nation-building scientific conspiracy in the tradition of Leibniz.*

*Two of the association's leading founders, James Alexander and Robert Hunter Morris, were protégés of Robert Hunter, former colonial governor of New York (1710-19) and close friend of Jonathan Swift, Leibniz's major political ally in the English-speaking world. The sons of Alexander and Morris played major roles in America's battle for independence; and John Stevens, one of Alexander's grandsons, became the most distinguished inventor of the young American republic.*

The first drudgery of settling new colonies, which confines the attention of people to mere necessities, are now pretty well over; and there are many in every province in circumstances that set them at ease, and afford leisure to cultivate the finer arts and improve the common stock of knowledge. To such of these who are men of speculation, many hints must from time to time arise, many observations occur, which if well examined, pursued, and improved, might produce discoveries to the advantage of some or all of the British plantations, or to the benefit of mankind in general.

But as from the extent of the country such persons are widely separated, and seldom can see and converse or be acquainted with each other, so that many useful particulars remain uncommunicated, die with the discoverers, and are lost to mankind; it is, to remedy this inconvenience for the future, proposed,

That one society be formed of *virtuosi* or ingenious men, residing in the several colonies, to be called *The American Philosophical Society*, who are to maintain a constant correspondence.

That Philadelphia, being the city nearest the centre of the continent colonies, communicating with all of them northward and southward by post, and with all the islands by sea, and having the advantage of a good growing library, be the centre of the Society. . . .

That these members meet once a month, or oftener, at their own expense, to communicate to each other their observations and experiments. . . .

That the subjects of the correspondence be . . . new and useful improvements in any branch of mathematics; new discoveries in chemistry, such as improvements in distilla-

tion, brewing, and assaying of ores; new mechanical inventions for saving labor, as mills and carriages, and for raising and conveying of water, draining of meadows, &c., all new arts, trades, and manufactures, that may be proposed or thought of; surveys, maps and charts of particular parts of the seacoast or inland countries; course and junction of rivers and great roads, situation of lakes and mountains, nature of the soil and productions; new methods of improving the breed of useful animals; introducing other sorts from foreign countries; new improvements in planting, gardening, and clearing land; and all philosophical experiments that let light into the nature of things, tend to increase the power of man over matter, and multiply the pleasures and conveniences of life.

### **Nathaniel Ames, 'A Thought Upon the Past, Present, and Future State of North America' (1757)**

*The topical essay for Ames's Almanack for the year 1758, published in Massachusetts at the end of 1757, when Britain's forced involvement on the side of the American colonies during the French and Indian War put the issue of westward development irrevocably on the table. Ames offered an inspiring vision of America's future course.*

Our numbers will not avail until the Colonies are united. . . . If we do not join Heart and Hand in the common Cause against our exulting Foes, but fall to disputing among ourselves, it may really happen as the Governour of *Pennsylvania* told his Assembly, "We shall have no Priviledge to dispute about, nor Country to dispute in."

. . . Here we find a vast Stock of proper Materials for the Art and Ingenuity of Man to work upon. . . . So Arts and Sciences will change the Face of Nature in the Tour from hence over the Appalachian Mountains to the Western Ocean . . . —the Rocks will disclose their hidden Gems,—and the inestimable Treasures of Gold and Silver be broken up. Huge Mountains of Iron Ore are already discovered; and vast Stores are reserved for future Generations: This Metal more useful than Gold and Silver, will employ millions of hands, not only to form the martial Sword, and peaceful Share, alternately; but an Infinity of Utensils improved in the Exercise of Art, and Handicraft amongst Men. Nature thro' all her Works has stamp'd Authority on this Law, namely, "That all fit Matter shall be improved to its best Purposes."—Shall not then those vast Quarries, that teem with mechanic Stone,—those for Structure be piled into great Cities,—and those for Sculpture into Statues to perpetuate the honor of renowned Heroes; even those who shall now save their Country.

*O! Ye unborn inhabitants of America! Should this Page escape its destin'd Conflagration at the Year's End, and these Alphabetical Letters remain legible,—when your Eyes behold the Sun after he has rolled the Seasons round for two or three Centuries more, you will know that in Anno Domini 1758, we dream'd of your Times.*