CHAPTER 5

Toasting Rebellion

Toasts and Songs in Revolutionary America


In May 1766, the inhabitants of Philadelphia celebrated the repeal of the much despised Stamp Act in grand fashion. Shortly after the ship Minerva arrived from England with a copy of the official act of repeal, a local resident “instantly proclaimed the News” by reading the act “aloud at the London Coffee House,” a popular haunt of Philadelphia’s merchants. The crowd that gathered for this performance expressed its approval by raising “three loud Huzzas [cheers]” and sending a “Deputation from their Number” to escort the captain of the Minerva back to the coffeehouse, where a “large Bowl of Punch” awaited them. The crowd and the captain raised their glasses in toasting “Prosperity to America,” and then the appreciative colonists presented the captain with a gold-laced hat “for having brought the first certain Account of the Stamp Act being totally repealed.”

The celebration was far from over. Philadelphia’s leading citizens “appointed the next Evening to illuminate the City,” a popular form of civic celebration in which residents placed lighted candles in their windows. According to the newspaper report of this event, the “Ladies” of the city were especially creative in “the different Manner of Placing Lights, Devices, etc.” in their homes, adding to the beauty of the event. That same evening, the city’s inhabitants enjoyed a bonfire and consumed “many Barrels of Beer,” yet no “Riot or Mob” disturbed the peace.

A few days later, Philadelphia’s celebration culminated when the “principal Inhabitants” of the city attended “an elegant Entertainment at the State House.” Among the three hundred guests were Pennsylvania’s governor, military and naval officers, and the city’s mayor and aldermen, all of whom conducted themselves with the “greatest Elegance and Decorum.” These same guests drank twenty-one toasts, each one punctuated by a cannon salute. The first four toasts honored the king, the queen, and other members of the royal family; most of the
remaining ones honored Parliament, the king’s ministry, or the British Empire. The seventeenth toast was typical in its patriotic sentiments: “May the interest of Great Britain and her Colonies be always united.” The evening concluded with more bonfires, bell-ringing, and “Strong Beer to the Populace.”

Seventeen years later, in 1783, Philadelphia witnessed another grand celebration, this one in honor of the Continental Army. Once again, the city’s most prominent citizens attended a dinner with government officials and military officers. After dinner, Pennsylvania’s governor (now styled the “President of the State” according to its new constitution) led the crowd in thirteen toasts, the first several of which honored the United States Congress, the new nation’s allies France and Holland, and George Washington and the Continental Army, in that order. Between each toast, a military band played music and soldiers fired salutes. According to the newspaper report of this celebration, all those present conducted themselves “with the utmost order, good honour, and good breeding,” and even though the company included people from “every State in the union,” they all regarded one another “like members of one great and happy family.”

Although separated by seventeen years of political upheaval and revolution, these two events shared elements common to festive culture in eighteenth-century America. Celebration was a full sensory experience. Illuminations and bonfires created spectacles of sight, cannon salutes loudly announced the occasion to all within earshot, the smell and taste of food delighted noses and filled stomachs, and alcohol flowed freely. Although reports from both celebrations emphasized widespread participation, distinctions of gender and social rank determined where and how people experienced these events. Prominent male citizens and their guests occupied center stage, attending dinners in taverns or other public buildings. Elite women appeared at public celebrations only fleetingly or in their own homes, where the “Ladies” of the city illuminated their windows. The rest of the populace celebrated out-of-doors, in the streets and at bonfires.

Two important features of this festive culture were drink and music. Eighteenth-century Americans—regardless of their race, gender, or class—consumed alcohol regularly and considered it part of a healthy diet. Public drinking, however, followed certain culturally sanctioned patterns that defined who could participate and in what ways. Generally, only free adult white men joined in the communal drinking that occurred at such civic celebrations. Elite women might raise glasses of wine at a toast made during a ball or dinner, but the rules of social decorum would not allow them to indulge in rounds of toasting or public consumption of barrels of beer. Laws passed by local and colonial governments regulated the consumption of alcohol by servants, slaves, Indians, and apprentices, limiting the amount of time they could spend in taverns and the size of the groups in which they could gather for social drinking.

To indulge in drink publicly, in other words, was one way free white men in eighteenth-century America expressed their shared identity and set themselves apart from others. Taverns and coffeehouses provided their male customers with social centers and an arena for exchanging news and discussing politics. When the Minerva arrived in Philadelphia with word of the Stamp Act’s repeal, a crowd of colonists immediately took the captain to the London Coffee House to share
the news. In a busy commercial seaport like Philadelphia, such establishments served as a kind of emergency broadcast network, the easiest way to reach an audience as quickly as possible. Likewise, by reading or listening to someone read the newspapers kept at coffeehouses and taverns, patrons could acquaint themselves with the issues of the day.

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Music and song also filled the air at coffeehouses, taverns, and public festivities. Colonial Americans brought a rich musical heritage with them from Europe, and, of course, Africans and Indians had their own traditions of music, song, and dance associated with communal celebration. Drinking songs were a part of the folk music tradition in the colonies, and anyone with a knack for rhyming and satire might compose one, often by grafting new lyrics onto a familiar tune. "Yankee Doodle," regarded by subsequent generations as the quintessential patriot song, actually originated in the British army and was sung by redcoats marching toward Lexington, Massachusetts, on the fateful morning of April 19, 1775. It became an American standard only after a parody of it satirizing the British retreat from Lexington and Concord appeared.

Figure 5.1 Sign for Gordon's Inn, c. 1790–1830 Tavern and inn signs in early America announced their businesses to potential customers on busy streets and offered visual cues to what went on inside their doors. This sign, from an inn of unknown location, reveals much about the social significance of drinking in Revolutionary America. The verses read:

Gentlemen you are welcome
sit down at your ease
Pay what you call for &
drink what you please

The bowl and glass suggest plenty of good drink and companionship, but the figure and verses limit that invitation to indulgence to only well-to-do males.

When using toasts and songs as a source, you must be attentive not only to the words used and the people who spoke or sang them, but also to the way in which the words were arranged to express the drinkers' and singers' notions of solidarity, allegiance, and social order. Calls to resistance against the king or Parliament were inflammatory, and many eighteenth-century Americans defined political rebellion as a sin, a violation of the biblical commandment to honor your father and mother. Therefore, words and actions taken against Britain's controversial tax policies in the 1760s had to be distanced from outright rebellion by professions of loyalty to the Crown and empire. Notice how the toasts and song lyrics in the two examples below engage in this balancing act.

As recounted in a colonial newspaper, these toasts were made with “flowing glasses” at the Philadelphia dinner in celebration of the repeal of the Stamp Act. As you read them, pay careful attention to the sequence in which they were made.

1. The King
2. The Queen
3. Prince of Wales, and Royal Family
4. May the Illustrious House of Hanover preside over the United British Empire, to the End of Time
5. The House of Lords
6. The House of Commons
7. The present Worthy Ministry
8. The Glorious and immortal Mr. Pitt
9. That Lover and Supporter of Justice, Lord Camden
10. The London Committee of Merchants
11. America's Friends in Great Britain
12. The Virginia Assembly
13. All other Assemblies on the Continent, actuated by the like Zeal for the Liberties of their Country
14. Prosperity to the Spirited Inhabitants of St. Christophers
15. The Navy and Army
16. Daniel Dulany, Esquire
17. May the Interest of Great Britain and her Colonies be always United
18. Trade and Navigation
19. America's Friends in Ireland
20. Prosperity to the Province of Pennsylvania
21. The Liberty of the Press in America

Source: Pennsylvania Gazette, May 26, 1766.

Like the toasts you just read, the following song lyrics delicately balance the colonists' assertion of their rights with professions of their loyalty as subjects. They are excerpted from "The Liberty Song," written by Pennsylvania patriot John Dickinson. Dickinson wrote this song to rally support for nonimportation, a boycott movement in which patriots refused to buy goods they thought were unjustly taxed by Parliament.

Come join hand in hand, brave Americans all,
And rouse your bold hearts at fair Liberty's call;
No tyrannous acts, shall suppress your just claims,
Or stain with dishonor America's name.
In freedom we're born, and in freedom we'll live;
Our purses are ready,
Steady, Friends, steady,
Not as slaves, but as freemen our money we'll give . . . .

Swarms of placemen and pensioners¹ soon will appear,
Like locusts deforming the charms of the year:
Suns vainly will rise, showers vainly descend,
If we are to drudge² for what others shall spend.

¹ "Placemen" and "pensioners" were derogatory terms for customs officials, military officers, and other officeholders who profited from royal appointments in the colonies.
² Labor.
Charlestown, South Carolina, 1777

After the Second Continental Congress declared independence, the American patriots abandoned a calendar of British civic holidays, such as the monarch’s birthday and royal weddings. Instead, the new nation created its own civic holidays, aimed at celebrating the break from Britain. The following newspaper item reports on a public celebration of the first anniversary of American independence in Charlestown (Charleston), South Carolina.

Charlestown, July 19.—Friday last being the first anniversary of the glorious formation of the American Empire, when Thirteen Colonies, driven by necessity, threw off the yoke, and rejected the tyranny of Great Britain, by declaring themselves Free, Independent and Sovereign States, the same was commemorated by every demonstration of joy.

Ringing of bells ushered in the day. At sunrise, American colours were displayed from all the forts and batteries and vessels in the harbour. The Charlestown regiment of militia, commanded by the Hon. Col. Charles Pinckney, and the Charlestown Artillery Company, commanded by Capt. Thomas Grimball, were assembled upon the Parade, and reviewed by his Excellency the President, who was attended, upon this occasion, by his Honour the Vice-President, and the Hon. Members of the Privy Council.1 At one o’clock the several forts, beginning at Fort Moultrie on Sullivan Island, discharged 76 pieces of cannon, alluding to the glorious year 1776, and the militia and artillery fired three general volleys.

His Excellency the President then gave a most elegant entertainment in the Council Chamber, at which were present all the members of the Legislature then in town, all the public officers, civil and military; the clergy and many strangers of note, to the amount of more than double the number that ever observed the birthday of the present misguided and unfortunate King of Great Britain. After dinner the following toasts were drank, viz.

1. The Free, Independent and Sovereign States of America. 2. The Great Council2 of America—may wisdom preside in all its deliberations. 3. General Washington. 4. The American army and navy—may they be victorious and invincible. 5. The nations in friendship or alliance with America. 6. The American Ambassadors at foreign courts. 7. The 4th of July, 1776. 8. The memory of the officers and soldiers who have bravely fallen in defence of America. 9. South Carolina. 10. May only those Americans enjoy Freedom, who are ready to die for its defence. 11. Liberty triumphant. 12. Confusion, shame and disgrace to our enemies—may the foes to America (slaves to tyranny) humble and

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1 References to the governor, lieutenant governor, and council of the state of South Carolina.
2 Second Continental Congress.

Source: Pennsylvania Gazette, July 30, 1777.
fall before her. 13. May the rising States of America reach the summit of human power and grandeur, and enjoy every blessing.

Each toast being succeeded by a salute of 13 guns, which were fired by Capt. Grimball's company from their two field pieces with admirable regularity. The day having been spent in festivity and the most conspicuous joy and harmony; the evening was concluded with illuminations, &c. far exceeding any that had ever been exhibited before.

Annapolis, Maryland, 1788

The battle over ratifying the Constitution threatened to split the new nation apart. In an effort to mobilize public opinion behind the Constitution, supporters sponsored public celebrations of ratification as it occurred in each state. The following news item reports on one such celebration in Maryland.

ANAPOLIS, April 30.—Monday the 28th instant being the day appointed by the honorable convention of this State, for the ratification of the Federal Government, that solemn, and happy event accordingly took place at Three o'clock in the afternoon.

The Members present at this ceremony amounted to seventy-four, of which number the names of sixty-three were subscribed to the instrument of ratification. The great and important business being completed, the members, preceded by the honorable the President of that body, in consequence of an invitation from the citizens of Annapolis, retired to Mr. Mann's Tavern, where an elegant entertainment was provided, at which were also present many strangers of distinction, and several respectable inhabitants of the city. The company consisted of nearly Two Hundred Persons. The cordiality, and festivity that appeared in the countenance, and conduct of each guest, were the strongest testimonies of the general satisfaction felt on this happy occasion.

After dinner the following Toasts, with a discharge of Thirteen Cannon to each, were given:

1. The United States and Congress.
2. Louis the XVI King of France, and the friendly powers in Europe.
3. The State of Maryland and the present Convention.
4. The late Federal Convention.¹
5. General Washington.
6. Marquis La Fayette.²

¹ The Convention that had drafted the Constitution in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787.
² A French officer and close associate of George Washington who joined the patriot cause.

Source: Pennsylvania Gazette, May 14, 1788.
7. To the memory of the brave officers and soldiers who fell defending America during the late war.
8. May Agriculture, Manufactures and Commerce flourish in the United States.
9. Success to useful Learning and the Arts and Sciences.
10. The late American Army and Navy.
12. May our public councils ever be actuated by wisdom and patriotism.
13. May all the States of America join heartily in adopting and making effectual the proposed Federal Government.

When the fifth toast was proclaimed by the President, a portrait of the Hero, in respect, and in honor to whom that toast was announced, and which had been artfully concealed behind a curtain at the head of the room, was suddenly displayed. The powers of the pen, or the pencil, are inadequate to the description of those feelings that animated the hearts, and glowed in the countenances of the spectators. A general burst of applause testified at once the strong remembrance of past services, and an ardent gratitude for present endeavours and patriotic perseverance.

The entertainment was concluded with a ball at the Assembly-Room, at which the Ladies appeared to partake of the general joy in an equal proportion with the Gentlemen. In a word, all classes of people gave the strongest proofs of their satisfaction on this joyful event.

3 Commander of French troops at the Battle of Yorktown.

SONGS

To the Ladies

This song appeared in several New England newspapers between 1767 and 1769. It rallied support for the nonimportation movement aimed at overturning the Townshend Duties, a series of taxes imposed by Parliament on colonial imports in 1767. Its tune was borrowed from "Advice to the Ladies," a popular comic song offering advice on what kinds of men women should avoid marrying.

Young ladies in our town, and those that live round,
Let a friend at this season advise you;
Since money's so scarce, and times are growing worse,
Strange things may soon hap and surprise you.

First, then, throw aside your topknots\(^1\) of pride;
Wear none but your own country linen;
Of economy boast, let your pride be the most
To show clothes of your own make and spinning.

What if homespun they say is not quite so gay
As brocades, yet be not in a passion,
For when once it is known this is much worn in town,
One and all will cry out—'Tis the fashion!

And, as one, all agree, that you'll not married be
To such as will wear London factory,
But at first sight refuse, tell 'em such you will choose
As encourage our own manufactory.

No more ribbons wear, nor in rich silks appear;
Love your country much better than fine things;
Begin without passion, 'twill soon be the fashion
To grace your smooth lock with a twine of string.

Throw aside your Bohea, and your Green Hyson\(^2\) tea,
And all things with a new-fashion duty;
Procure a good store of the choice Labrador,\(^3\)
For there'll soon be enough here to suit you.

These do without fear, and to all you'll appear,
Fair, charming, true, lovely and clever;
Though the times remain darkish; young men may be sparkish,
And love you much stronger than ever.

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\(^{1}\) Fancy headdresses worn by women of fashion.
\(^{2}\) Bohea and Green Hyson were types of tea imported into the colonies.
\(^{3}\) An alternative to foreign tea, made from the red-root bush native to New England.
Recruitment was a constant problem for the Continental Army after the disastrous campaign of 1776. Drink and song helped facilitate the process, especially when recruiters appeared at taverns or other public places. It is easy to imagine this song being sung on such an occasion. Like other popular songs, recruitment songs appeared in countless variations. The lyrics below were printed under the title "The New Recruit, or the Gallant Volunteer, A New Song" in a colonial newspaper; the recorded version uses the title "Fare Thee Well, Ye Sweethearts" and has fewer stanzas.

Come on my hearts of tempered steel,
And leave your girls and farms,
Your sports and plays and holidays,
And hark, away to arms!
And to conquest we will go, will go, will go,
And to conquest we will go.

A Soldier is a gentleman,
His honour is his life,
And he that won't stand to his post,
Will never stand by his wife,
And to conquest we will go, &c.

For love and honour are the same,
Or else so near an ally,
That neither can exist alone,
But flourish side by side.
And to conquest we will go, &c.

So fare you well sweethearts a while,
You smiling girls adieu;
And when we drub the dogs away,¹
We kiss it out with you.
And to conquest we will go, &c.

The spring is up, the winter flies,
The hills are green and gay,
And all inviting honour calls,
Away, my boys, away.
And to conquest we will go, &c.

¹ Send the redcoats retreating.

Source: Pennsylvania Packet, April 8, 1778, and The Committee of Correspondence, Songs and Ballads of Colonial and Revolutionary America, audio recording (New York: Smithsonian Folkways No. FH 5274, 1976).
In shady tents, by cooling streams,
With hearts all firm and free,
We chase the cares of life away,
In songs of liberty.
And to conquest we will go, &c.

No foreign slaves shall give us law,
No British tyrants reign;
'Tis Independence made us free;
And freedom we maintain.
And to conquest we will go, &c.

We charge the foe from post to post,
Attack their works and lines,
Or by some well laid stratagem,
We make them all Burgoynes.²
And to conquest we will go, &c.

And when the war is over, boys,
Then down we sit at ease,
And plow and sow and reap and mow,
And live just as we please.
When from conquest we shall go, &c.

Each hearty lad shall take his lass,
And beaming like a star,
And in her softer arms forget,
The dangers of the war.
When to conquest we did go, &c.

The rising world shall sing of us,
A thousand years to come,
And to their children's children tell,
The Wonders we have done.
When to conquest we did go, &c.

So my honest fellows here's my hand,
My heart, my very soul,
With all the joys of Liberty,
Good fortune and a bowl.³
And to conquest we will go, &c.

² British general John Burgoyne suffered a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777.
³ A punch bowl.
How Stands the Glass Around

This soldiers' drinking song first appeared in print in 1729 and was popular among British and American soldiers during the French and Indian and Revolutionary wars. It presents a much different view of military life than the recruiting songs sung at the time of enlistment.

How stands the glass around,
For shame ye take no care, my boys,
How stands the glass around,
Let mirth and wine abound,
The trumpets sound,
The colors they are flying, boys.
To fight, kill, or wound,
May we still be found,
Content with our hard fate, my boys,
On the cold ground.

Why, soldiers, why,
Should we be melancholy, boys?
Why, soldiers, why,
Whose business 'tis to die!
What, sighing, fie! ¹
Damn fear, drink on, be jolly, boys,
'Tis he, you, or I!
Cold, hot, wet, or dry,
We're always bound to follow, boys,
And scorn to fly!

'Tis but in vain,
I mean not to upbraid you, boys,
'Tis but in vain,
For soldiers to complain.
Should next campaign,
Send us to him who made us, boys,
We're free from pain!
but if we remain,
A bottle and a kind landlady
Cure all again.

¹ An exclamation of disgust.

Source: The Committee of Correspondence, Songs and Ballads of Colonial and Revolutionary America, audio recording (New York: Smithsonian Folkways Plos, FH 5274, 1976).
The Epilogue

Loyalists also used toasts and songs to express their political opinions, as this song attests. It appeared in October 1778 on ballad sheets published in British-occupied Philadelphia and New York. Its title suggests that the songwriter thought the war almost over and decided in the British favor. The tune is borrowed from the popular British song “Derry Down.”

The farce is now finish’d, your sport’s at an end,
But ere you depart, let the voice of a friend
By way of a chorus, the evening crown
With a song to the tune of a hey derry down,

CHORUS: Derry down, down, hey derry down . . .

Old Shakespeare, a poet who should not be spit on,
Although he was born in the island called Britain,
Hath said that mankind are all players at best,
A truth we’ll admit of, for the sake of the jest.

CHORUS

On this puny stage, we have strutted our hour,
And acted our parts to the best of our power,
That the farce hath concluded not perfectly well,
Was surely the fault of the devil in Hell.

CHORUS

The devil, you know, out of spleen\(^1\) for the church,
Will often abandon his friends in the lurch,
And turn them adrift in the midst of their joy,
’Tis a difficult matter to cheat the old boy.

CHORUS

Our great Independence we give to the wind,
And pray that Great Britain may once more be kind.
In this jovial song all hostility ends,
And Britons and we will for ever be friends.

CHORUS

Once more, here’s a health\(^2\) to the King and the Queen!
Confusion to him, who on rancor and spleen,
Refuses to drink with an English good friend,
 Immutable amity to the world’s end.

\(^1\) Ill temper.
\(^2\) A toast.