



VIOLENCE, RACE, AND THE PAXTON BOYS

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On the morning of 14 December 1763 approximately fifty armed Euro-American men burned down Conestoga Town in Lancaster County and killed six of the Indians living there. Thirteen days later, between fifty and one hundred “Paxton Boys,” as they were called, galloped into the town of Lancaster.¹ There they killed the remaining fourteen Conestoga Indians who had taken refuge in the town’s workhouse in the hopes that local officials would protect them from further attack. The slayings were carried out in a brutal fashion. An eyewitness account by William Henry described the Lancaster workhouse yard as a chaotic, bloody, “horrid sight.” In the yard Henry observed Will Sock, a man the Paxton Boys insisted was a spy, lying on the ground; “across him and [a] squaw lay two children, of about the age of three years, whose heads were split with the tomahawk, and their scalps taken off.” Toward the middle of the yard Henry noticed another man had been shot in the chest; “his legs were chopped with the tomahawk, his hands cut off, and finally a rifle ball discharged in his mouth.” Henry concluded that “In this manner lay the whole of them, men, women and children spread about the prison yard; shot, scalped, hacked and cut to pieces.”²

The brutality of the massacres shocked colonial leaders in Philadelphia. Benjamin Franklin denounced the murders as an “atrocious Fact, in Defi-

ance of the Government, of all Laws human and divine, and to the eternal Disgrace of their Country and Colour.” He castigated the men who perpetrated the violence as “CHRISTIAN WHITE SAVAGES.”³ The indignation of Philadelphians quickly turned to alarm when news arrived that the Paxton Boys planned to march to the city and “remove” 140 Moravian Indians housed on Province Island in the Delaware River. Provincial leaders interpreted the Paxton Boys’ proposed march as a direct threat to the peace of the city and to the authority of the government. Governor John Penn requested that the Assembly grant him “full powers to repel those bold Invaders of Law and Justice, and support the Honor and Dignity of the Government.”⁴ In the minds of the colony’s leaders, the Paxton Boys threatened to bring the violence and disorder associated with the frontier to their orderly city.

The marchers never reached Philadelphia. Instead, the 250 frontiersmen stopped in Germantown, where, on 7 February 1764, they met with a delegation of Philadelphia’s leading men. When the marchers realized that the residents of the city had armed themselves against their arrival, they agreed to return to their homes, leaving two spokesmen to present their case to the provincial government.⁵ A week later, these men, Matthew Smith and James Gibson, presented to the governor and the Assembly a *Declaration* and a *Remonstrance* that sought to justify the actions of the Paxton Boys as legitimate acts against Indians who were “falsly pretended Friends.” The *Declaration* and *Remonstrance* also protested the presents regularly granted to Indians, the insufficient number of troops protecting the frontier, and the inequitable allotment of representatives in the Assembly, while insisting upon the institution of scalp bounties and a return of all captives taken by the Indians during the Seven Years’ War and the ongoing conflict known as Pontiac’s War.⁶ Neither branch of government responded to these entreaties, and a disgruntled Smith and Gibson soon left the city.

The Paxton Boys’ massacre and march represent a crucial turning point in the history of Pennsylvania. For the first time in the province’s history, a group of colonists engaged in an extralegal, large-scale, and organized act of racial violence. Historians have offered a variety of explanations for the Paxton Boys’ significance. Some scholars have ignored the racial component of the massacres and argued that the Paxton Boys were early frontier democrats who acted to reform representation in the Assembly.⁷ Other historians have successfully refuted the contention that the Paxton Boys were nascent democrats, arguing instead that they were foes of democracy

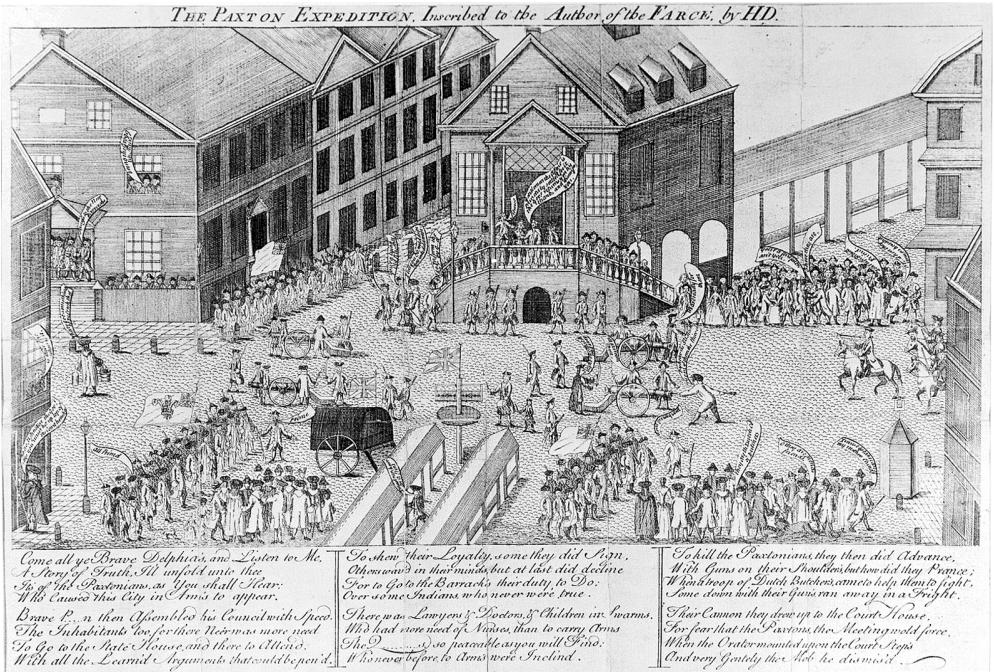


Figure 12 Contemporary satire of Philadelphians' efforts to mobilize against the Paxton Boys march on the capital. Henry Dawkins, *The Paxton Expedition*, 1763. American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

who turned to violence and force when the government failed to meet their expectations.⁸ Similarly, some scholars maintain that the events of 1763 reflected the general disorder and lawlessness of the colonial frontier.⁹ More recently, historians have emphasized the role race played in the massacres. Historian Alden Vaughan, for example, has memorably stated, “the Paxton Boys’ principal legacy was ‘open season’ on the Indian, friend or foe.”¹⁰

Although the Paxton Boys did inaugurate a new era of racial violence, historians do not yet understand how frontier settlers made the transition from peaceful coexistence with Native Americans to bloody racial violence. As previous chapters indicate, William Penn’s “holy experiment” and the long peace it generated had been tenuous and hard won, but it had held for seven decades. Euro-American frontiersmen did not simply pick up their guns and hatchets in December 1763 in a spontaneous fit of rage;



rather, their behavior evolved from symbolic to actual violence against Indians over the preceding nine years. The creation of a racial enemy entailed an evolution in thinking, and it served a specific, gendered purpose for frontier Pennsylvanians. By creating a racial enemy, Euro-American frontiersmen were able to legitimate an act of cowardice—killing unarmed men, women, and children—as an act of male valor.

Exploring the transformation in behavior and the evolution in thinking that took place on the Pennsylvania frontier in the mid-eighteenth century not only illuminates an important moment in the province's experience, it also deepens historians' understanding of a central theme in American history. The Paxton Boys' massacre of the Conestogas was part of a larger pattern of Euro-American violence against Native Americans that had characterized British North America almost from the moment of settlement.¹¹ Pennsylvania's peaceful relations with its Native neighbors made it exceptional among the major colonies until the mid-eighteenth century. The Paxton Boys' massacre marked the culmination of a process that began with the Seven Years' War and that moved Pennsylvania into the mainstream of British North America's racial history. Indeed, the brutality of the Paxton Boys and their subsequent march to Philadelphia were integral in the development of the image of the American frontier as a place where White men expressed their manhood through acts of violence against Native Americans.

The key to explaining the Paxton Boys' behavior lies in examining the experiences of Euro-American frontier settlers during the Seven Years' War, a conflict that began in 1754 when a company of Virginia militiamen under the command of George Washington clashed with French and Indian warriors in what would become western Pennsylvania.¹² The ramifications of this watershed conflict were felt throughout the province, but nowhere more acutely than on the northern and western edges of Euro-American settlement. On Pennsylvania's war-torn frontier, Delaware Indians attacked and burned Euro-American farms, capturing and killing hundreds of settlers.¹³ Thousands more Euro-American frontier families fled their farms in panic, abandoning hundreds of thousands of acres of land that had represented the expansive potential of Pennsylvania's agriculture. The dislocation, fear, and turmoil sparked by the war created a fertile environment in which the racial hatred and regional distrust that had been latent for seven decades could gestate and ultimately explode. In 1758, Major General John Forbes ended the war in Pennsylvania when he

seized the French Fort Duquesne at the forks of the Ohio River, renamed it Fort Pitt, and expelled the French from western Pennsylvania. After three years of war, the Pennsylvania frontier returned to peace and Euro-American settlers again took up their relentless pursuit of prosperity. Five years later, in a conflict called Pontiac's War, a series of Native American assaults on British forts from Fort Detroit to Fort Pitt ushered in a return to war on the Pennsylvania frontier. In the winter following this renewal of hostilities, the Paxton Boys sought a bloody revenge against the Conestogas.

The violence of the war proved transformative for Euro-American frontiersmen. When Delaware Indians attacked farms and families they destabilized Euro-American households and patriarchal identities. The gendered crisis induced by the war prompted Euro-American settlers to hate their Native American attackers and to begin to group all Indians, even friendly neighbors, into the category of racial enemy. The apparent failure of the colony's supreme patriarchs—the government in Philadelphia—to effectively protect the frontier convinced frontiersmen that the residents of Philadelphia required instruction in their new racial philosophy. Provincial leaders did not seem to understand that Euro-Americans in British colonies owed their loyalty and support first and foremost to one another. Further, the experience of witnessing Native attacks and their aftermath instructed Euro-American frontiersmen in the use of violence—a lesson they would put into practice when they murdered the Conestogas and threatened the Moravian Indians in Philadelphia. During the war, gender, race, and violence became inextricably intertwined. The conjunction of these forces produced the Paxton Boys.

The Seven Years' War shattered life along the Pennsylvania frontier and forced everyone living there to adapt to a volatile new environment. The French and Indian offensive that displaced Euro-Americans from their homes ironically led to the consolidation of previously isolated farming families. Whereas before 1755 Euro-American settlers resided on isolated farms separated by a mile or more—and, as the previous chapter shows, often interspersed with Native American villages and homesteads—once the raids commenced, families congregated together for mutual protection and support. Once gathered, frightened Euro-Americans engaged in a variety of collective acts, from petitioning the government in Philadelphia for protection, to fortifying their houses and building forts, to harassing Indians and government representatives, to riding around the countryside in



mobs. In the heated context of war, the collectivity of Euro-American settlers' response provided a venue for the maturation of previously existing tensions on the frontier.

Euro-American frontier settlers projected their anxiety outward in two directions: toward Native Americans and toward provincial officials. As the previous chapter demonstrates, some Euro-Americans and Indians in the early eighteenth century forged personal relationships and loose alliances against the legalistic incursions of the Penn proprietors. The Seven Years' War strained and often severed those bonds, and friends became enemies. Simultaneously, Euro-American settlers grew to distrust colonial officials, who claimed the authority to control the pace of frontier expansion and who had sponsored immigrant settlement as a "cordone of defense" but who refused to aid the Euro-American inhabitants of the region just when they needed it the most.¹⁴ Faced with the apparent betrayals of Native friends and provincial administrators, Euro-American frontiersmen lashed out at any Indian who crossed their path, as well as at any representative of the government who failed to accede to their demands immediately.

The war posed an obvious threat to Euro-American settlers' survival, but it also caused frontiersmen to fear for their status as men. The French and Indian campaigns directly threatened the two pillars of their identity as adult men and as patriarchs: their land and their families. The quest for land—the underpinning of a man's economic independence or what Daniel Vickers calls "competency"—drove men onto the frontier in the first place.¹⁵ Once they had laid claim to a plot of land, men relied on the labor of their wives, children, and perhaps indentured servants and (rarely) slaves to build houses and barns, to raise livestock, and to cultivate crops. When Indian raiding parties swept through a neighborhood, they systematically assaulted the "improvements" of farming families. Raiders burned buildings and crops; they slaughtered or seized cattle; they killed some men, women, and children; they took others captive; and they forced the remaining population to flee. In addition to destroying Euro-American men's basis for economic survival, the violence and terror of the war undermined their ability to perform their patriarchal duty of protecting their wives and children. Not only were women and children killed, they were carried away to an unknown fate. That another man, especially a Native American man, could control the labor of one's family and presumably gain sexual access to his wife must have terrified frontier patriarchs. In

short, French and Indian raiders assaulted the material and emotional foundations of Euro-American men's patriarchal identity and sense of manhood.¹⁶

The interplay between distrust of a distant government, anger toward Native Americans, and an imperiled patriarchy was apparent from the earliest days of the war. A November 1755 "meeting" of angry Euro-American settlers that confronted provincial interpreter and county magistrate Conrad Weiser at Tulpehocken Creek provides a vivid illustration of the panic that coursed through the frontier when Indian warriors threatened, or were thought to threaten, an area. The episode began when a frantic messenger burst into a meeting between Weiser and some visiting Indians, informing them that a group of men was collecting at Tulpehocken in response to a recent raid. The messenger also warned that the Indians should not be sent that way without an escort as "the People were so enraged against all the Indians, and would kill them without Distinction." Weiser decided to go to Tulpehocken to assume command of the men gathering there. For their protection, he brought the Indians at his house along with him.¹⁷

When Weiser's party arrived at Tulpehocken it was greeted by four or five hundred men who lined the road shouting noisily "why must we be killed by the Indians and we not kill them!" After Weiser passed off his Native charges to a six-man escort, he turned his attention to holding a "sort of Counsel of Warr" among the officers who had been selected by the freedmen of the county. When a plan to raise and pay a guard was presented to the gathered mob, they "cried out that so much for an Indian Scalp they would have, (be they Friends or Enemies)." After Weiser informed them he had no power to institute a scalp bounty, he reported, "they begun, some to Curse the Governor; some the assembly; called me a Traitor to the Country who held with the Indians."¹⁸

In one short emotional outburst this collection of men summed up the growing outrage on the frontier: the leaders of the colony—the governor, assembly members, and local magistrates—appeared to favor the Indians above their own settlers. As Weiser struggled to pacify the mob and explain the limitations of his and the government's power, his friends warned him that some among the group intended to shoot him. He was spared this fate when news arrived that Indian warriors were attacking a nearby farm. Although the report proved to be false, the crowd dispersed as people rode or ran off "without any Order or Regulation." A dejected Weiser returned



home where, he vowed, he would defend his farm and family as long as he could in troubled times. He concluded from his experience in Tulpehocken that "there [was] no Doing with the People without a law or Regulation by the Governor and Assembly."¹⁹

The incident at Tulpehocken laid out the roles that the various inhabitants of Pennsylvania frontiers would play for the remainder of the war. Men like Weiser, local officeholders with connections to Philadelphia, worked to institute some sort of order among Euro-Americans. Common male settlers, on the other hand, motivated by patriarchal duty, the desire for self-preservation, and a healthy measure of panic, called for assistance from the government and grew dangerously disgruntled when their requests went unanswered. Meanwhile, Indians neutral in the war or allied with the British moved among the settlers at increasing peril in the face of mobs who lumped all Native people together as the enemy. Until General Forbes captured Fort Duquesne in 1758, Euro-American suspicions continued to fester in response to repeated small, but deadly, Native incursions. It is important to note, however, that organized racial violence was still eight years away. In fall 1755 Euro-American frontiersmen were only beginning to learn the lessons of violence and racial hatred the war would teach them.

Overwhelmed by the real or potential violence of the war, Euro-American settlers sought to protect their dependents and their land by appealing to a higher authority. In so doing, they recognized the hierarchical nature of patriarchy in British North America. They were small patriarchs who farmed modest plots of land in a region distant from the center of economic and political power. Thus, they wrote petitions to the patriarchal head of the colony—the governor—asking for ammunition, forts, guns, and soldiers.²⁰ The failure of the governor and the Assembly to respond to these entreaties and to provide an acceptable level of protection ignited regional animosities and fostered a sense of alienation among frontier settlers that would prompt them to take their message to Philadelphia in person in February 1764.

Through dozens of petitions, Euro-American settlers appealed to the political patriarchs of the colony. Petitioners bowed to convention when they repeatedly began their missives with the phrases "Humble petition" or "Humble Supplication," but further appeals to benevolent paternal authority in the body of many petitions suggests that their conception of how a good patriarch should behave ran much deeper than such ritual lan-

guage. Petitioners sought to elicit the sympathy of the government by focusing on the “naked and Defenceless” state of their “Bleeding Country” and how its inhabitants were “Exposed to the Inhuman Cruelty of Barbarous Savages” and “the Ravages of our Restless, Barbarous, and Merciless Enemy.” They maintained that it was the governor’s duty as the patriarch of the colony to protect them. “Your Honour’s compassion as to a kind and careful Father of whose tender concern for us we are well assured,” they concluded, was their “Only door of Hope (Next to the Divine Goodness).”²¹

For their part, provincial leaders embraced their beneficent patriarchal role. “I shall upon all Occasions be studious to protect the People committed to my charge,” Governor Robert Morris assured the Assembly upon his arrival in the colony in 1754.²² Morris and his compatriots understood that the power of a patriarch, whether a governor or a father, entailed the duty to protect dependents. As Paul Gilje puts it, “the eighteenth-century world was hierarchical; the upper levels of society, in good paternalistic fashion, held that they were the stewards of the community.”²³ By composing petitions to the government of Pennsylvania, frontier patriarchs fulfilled part of their patriarchal duty to enlist assistance from a higher power in a time of emergency. By ignoring the pleas of the petitioners, patriarchs in Philadelphia failed to live up to the petitioners’ ideal—and their own rhetoric.

Petitioners stressed their desperate condition as a way of appealing to the paternal sympathy of the government, but they did not fully relinquish their power when they wrote. Buried within supplicating entreaties was the threat that, if the government did not protect them, Euro-American settlers would abandon the frontier, and the heart of the province would be left open to the enemy. Inhabitants of York County forcefully summed up the situation when they wrote “that[,] as the County of Cumberland [to the west] is mostly evacuated, and part of this become the Frontier, the Enemy may easily enter and take Possession of Provisions sufficient to supply many thousand Men, and be thereby enabled to carry their Hostilities even to the Metropolis.”²⁴ Warnings that the frontier could recede to Philadelphia recurred often in the petitions and letters of Euro-American settlers. Petitioners in Lancaster County reported “Hanover [township] is upon the point of flying and we cannot tarry if they fly, and our flight will open a way into the heart of the Province.”²⁵ Implicit in such images was the specter that, if Philadelphians did not support frontier



defense, the violence and disorder associated with the region would soon visit the city.

Even though authorities in distant Philadelphia appeared to turn a deaf ear to cries for assistance, patriarchs engulfed by war continued to struggle to meet the needs of their dependents. In particular, local officials in frontier towns had to deal with the refugee crisis sparked by wartime attacks. Euro-American frontierfolk clogged backwoods paths as they sped toward the safety of established towns. Many of the refugees were in desperate condition. "It's a very Sorrowful spectacle," Adam Hoops insisted, "to see those that Escaped with their lives [have] not a Mouthful to Eat, or Bed to lie on, or Clothes to Cover their Nakedness, or keep them warm, but all they had consumed in Ashes."²⁶ Hundreds crammed into towns like Bethlehem, Carlisle, Easton, Lancaster, and Reading in hopes of protection. In January 1756, the refugee population at Bethlehem, Friedensthal, and Nazareth peaked with an additional 556 people crowding into those Moravian communities.²⁷ The arrival of so many impoverished refugees placed enormous burdens on "the Charity of the other Inhabitants."²⁸

Recurrent references to families, and especially to women and children, in descriptions of the refugees demonstrated how Euro-American settlers understood the world in familial terms. In November 1755 James Burd declared Shippensburg "full of People, they being all moving in with their Famillys[,] 5 or 6 Famillys in a house."²⁹ John Potter made clear that men in positions of responsibility had obligations to an extended Euro-American frontier family when he described his role as sheriff of Great Cove in patriarchal terms. "Last night," he reported in 1755, "I had a Family of upwards of an hundred of Women and Children who fled for Succor."³⁰

Men who chose to stay on or near their farms despite the danger were preoccupied with the patriarchal task of sheltering their dependents. When Delaware warriors appeared (or were reported to appear) in a given neighborhood, Euro-Americans often "concluded it best for the Neighbors to collect themselves together, as many as They could, in some one House." After Indians began attacking homesteads in Lower Smithfield Township in Northampton County, for example, nine families gathered at Philip Bozart's dwelling, while "a great Number" of others convened at the farms of two other neighbors.³¹ These houses were frequently fortified in some manner and stood as makeshift forts, the main purpose of which was to protect women and children.³² Thus, even after they heard gun shots at a nearby house, the people at Bozart's house "were afraid to venture to go



and see what had happened that Day, as they had many Woman [*sic*] and Children to take Care of, who if they had left might have fallen an easy Prey to the Enemy.”³³

In addition to these makeshift strongholds, Euro-American settlers began constructing new forts, which they envisioned as places where women and children could be lodged for safety. The leading men of Cumberland County resolved to build five strongholds and “that all the Women and Children be deposited in the large forts.”³⁴ Similarly, James Burd declared that Fort Morris at Shippensburg, “in which we intend to throw all the Women and Children,” was being constructed with “great Vigour.”³⁵ The forts erected by the provincial government also served as sanctuaries for displaced family members. Jacob Morgan at Fort Lebanon requested that Governor William Denny increase the number of men under his command in part because “upward of 60 Women and Children” had fled to his fort for protection.³⁶

With their families safely sequestered in forts of one kind or another, Euro-American frontiersmen were free to try to confront their enemy. They did so in many cases by forming into mobs, like that at Tulpehocken, and patrolling their neighborhoods in search of raiding parties.³⁷ Such ad hoc groups produced a good deal of bravado but provided little direct threat to their foes. In the end, they were more successful at scaring off raiders with their noisy approach and at burying corpses than at engaging the enemy in combat. When approximately three hundred men formed a company under Conrad Weiser, for example, they grandly and unanimously agreed “to die together and engage the Enemy wherever they Should meet with them—never to enquire the number, but fight them, and so obstruct their marching further into the Inhabited parts . . . and so save the Lives of our Wives and Children.” Yet despite their brave declaration, group members disbanded quickly and returned to their farms in a disorderly fashion without making their neighborhood notably safer.³⁸

Instead of confronting Indian warriors directly in the early days of the war, many men engaged in a type of symbolic warfare. In late October 1755 around one hundred men collected in Berks County to “oppose the Indians.” William Parsons instructed them to march to a gap in the mountains near Swatara Creek, to build a “Breast work of Trees, and to stay there two or three Days.” Parsons was dismayed when “they went no farther than to the Top of the Mountain, and there those that had amunition, spent most of it in shooting up into the Air, and then returned back again, firing all the



way, to the great Terror of all the Inhabitants thereabout.” Other groups of men engaged in the same type of panicked and apparently counterproductive behavior throughout the county.³⁹

The almost palpable sense of fear coursing through the frontier during the Seven Years' War made the collective and symbolic nature of crowds especially meaningful. Gathering in large numbers reinforced camaraderie among Euro-Americans in a given neighborhood. More important, to assemble with the express purpose of “opposing the Indians” allowed them to feel a moment of mastery in an out-of-control situation. Even the apparently wasteful act of firing guns wildly into the woods had meaning. In so doing, Euro-American frontiersmen engaged in a metonymic style of warfare wherein one action—firing guns—stood in for the act of waging wholesale war against the Indians. This was more than a metaphoric substitution when something external stands in as a substitute for the original object. Metonymic substitution makes an attribute or a part of an object stand for the whole; thus the relation between object and metonym is more intimate than between object and metaphor. As a result, the meaning, and the emotions, associated with the original object adhere much more potently to a metonym than they do to a metaphor. Because firing guns was an integral part of making war, the act of shooting into the woods provided frontiersmen with the cathartic reward of making war to project themselves, their dependents, and their land. Firing guns in the woods did not simply *represent* making war—in the settlers' worldview, it *was* making war.⁴⁰

The Euro-American tendency to blend fears of the Native Americans and trepidation about the woods amplified the metonymic nature of frontier crowd activity. James Merrell has noted that, despite all the emphasis on the fertility and richness of Pennsylvania in promotional writing, the inhabitants of “Penn's Woods” still divided the colony into “the Woods” and “the Inhabited Part of the Country.” The former was constructed as a place of darkness and danger, while the latter was a place of safety and productivity. As Merrell puts it, “wilderness is a state of mind, not a state of nature. . . . That is why transplanted Europeans living in *Penn's Woods*, the (steadily expanding) domain under English control, could talk fearfully of *the Woods*, the Indian countries lying beyond the limits of colonial settlement.” “Penn's Woods” was civilized by its latinate translation into “Pennsylvania,” but the frightening and unknown “woods,” “wilderness,” and “bushes” were equated with the “skulking” and “lurking” Indians

who lived there.⁴¹ When Euro-Americans rode into the woods, they entered what they understood to be the dangerous domain of the Indians. When they fired their guns they effectively made war on the Indians, even if no actual Indians were present. The reward of gathering to shoot weapons at random was psychic rather than military or literal.

The men from Berks County may not have killed any Native people that fall night in 1755, but they did take the first step toward adopting real, large-scale violence against all Indians. In direct contradiction to the Quaker tenet of pacifism that had guided the province for seventy-five years—and in violation of the customs, described in chapter 10, that they had forged with their Native neighbors—they took up their guns and fired them in anger. Further, the combination of metonymic violence and the concentration of excited people encouraged Euro-Americans to act out their suspicions and aggressions in a manner unprecedented in frontier Pennsylvania. In eighteenth-century British North America, crowds provided their participants with a sense of solidarity that legitimated their actions and their viewpoints. Additionally, participation in crowd activity could strengthen an individual's adherence to the message or sentiment of the community.⁴² During the Seven Years' War large gatherings of men provided a venue for Euro-American settlers to express their hostility toward their Native neighbors while simultaneously strengthening their sense of racial solidarity among themselves and their perception of racial difference from Indians.

A variety of circumstances contributed to growing prejudice and prompted settlers to behave aggressively toward any Indians they met. The most important was the violence inflicted by Delaware raiders, but settlers' inability—or unwillingness—to determine which Indians engaged in violence and which eschewed it amplified their anxiety. The Delawares, an already loose conglomeration of people, split into eastern and western factions before the war. Most of those in the Ohio country prosecuted the war in earnest, while those in the east took up arms, remained neutral, or promoted peace depending on local or individual circumstances.⁴³ As the war progressed, embattled Euro-American settlers saw little reason to distinguish the various loyalties and political positions of the Indians in Pennsylvania and the Ohio country. Indeed, many were convinced that members of the various communities of Christian Indians, who publicly professed pacifism and loyalty to the British, were really spies or supporters of those who pursued war against Pennsylvania. Suspicion of Christian



Indians hardened during Pontiac's War. In 1764 the Paxton Boys expressed such hostility when they asserted in their *Remonstrance* that there were "strong grounds, at least to suspect their Friendship, as it is known that they carried on a Correspondence with [our] Enemies" and that there was "undeniable Proof, that, the *Moravian Indians* were in confederacy with our open Enemies." That their evidence—three dead Indians carrying "Blankets, Ammunition and Provisions"—was hardly conclusive failed to deter the Paxton Boys from believing that all Indians were suspect and in league with, if not the same as, their wartime enemies.⁴⁴

Ironically, because diplomatic initiatives brought the people who had waged war against the British into the settled areas of Euro-Pennsylvania, the peace negotiations necessary to end the war compounded confusion over the difference between allied and enemy Indians. Between 1756 and 1758 representatives of the eastern Delawares, the western Delawares, and the Six Nations met with Pennsylvania's governors and Quaker leaders in a series of conferences at Easton.⁴⁵ Although the conferences slowly steered the colony back to the shores of peace, the presence of these Indian delegations added to the turmoil created by the hundreds of displaced Euro-American settlers who poured into Easton and surrounding towns for protection. "We are not sure whether they are Friends or Enemies," Justice of the Peace Timothy Horsfield complained.⁴⁶ But some observers of the treaty negotiations drew more definitive conclusions. Townspeople grew alarmed when they recognized "that the Shirts which the Indian Women had on were made of Dutch Table Cloaths, which, it is supposed they took from the People they murdered on our Frontiers."⁴⁷ The linens may have been purchased legitimately, but it seemed as though the Indians who had come to make peace were mocking the settlers by wearing the spoils of their raids.

In this bewildering situation many Euro-American settlers focused on the perceived differences between themselves and all Native Americans. In Northampton County, where displaced Euro-American settlers, Moravian Indians, colonial officials, and Indians attending conferences collided throughout the mid-1750s, the calls for racial clarity were especially loud. From the opening days of the war, local residents focused their anger on Christian Indians who inundated the towns of Easton and Bethlehem. They issued repeated verbal threats against the peaceful Christian Indians in the towns and in nearby communities. "There is such a Rage in the neighborhood against the said poor Creatures," Moravian leader Augustus

Gottlieb Spangenberg explained, “that I fear they will mob us and them together.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Weiser reported that “The cry of the common People, of which the Town [Bethlehem] was full, was very great against the Indians, and the poor People did not know what to do or what to say, finding all the People so enraged and using such language.”⁴⁹ Like the men who fired their guns in the woods, settlers who verbally harassed peaceful Indians engaged in metonymic substitution. In this case, they assumed that any individual or group of Indians could stand in for all Native Americans.

Weiser and his fellow justices of the peace and magistrates in frontier counties, along with Moravian missionaries and Quaker members of the Friendly Association for Regaining and Preserving Peace with the Indians, worked to protect and support friendly Indians during the war. While frontier officials arrested disorderly settlers and escorted parties of Native Americans through the province, the Euro-Moravians at Bethlehem provided displaced and frightened Christian Indians with shelter and sustenance.⁵⁰ The most influential group concerned with the interests of Native Americans was the Friendly Association. Because of their commitment to pacifism, pious Quakers did not feel they could continue to play an active part in a government engaged in war; consequently, ten Friends resigned their seats in the Assembly in 1756.⁵¹ As an alternative to formal political service, leading Quakers formed the Friendly Association as a vehicle through which they worked to restore peace to the province. The philanthropic organization provided thousands of pounds sterling worth of presents for the Indians attending the peace conferences and also paid for messengers to spread the news of the peace initiative to far-flung peoples. The Friendly Association proved instrumental in helping the Indians in the Ohio country and the Pennsylvania government reach a peace accord in fall 1758. For their efforts, the Quakers earned the undying animosity of Euro-American frontier settlers. Indeed, the Paxton Boys listed Quaker leaders among their enemies when they marched to Philadelphia.⁵²

Working against the efforts of Friendly Association and other groups and individuals sympathetic to the Indians was the metonymic logic of Euro-American frontier settlers. As the war progressed, the behavior apparent in the opening days of the war moved toward its logical extreme—racial violence. Although there wasn’t a linear progression from settlers careening through the woods firing their guns to threatening and harassing small groups of friendly Indians, both actions were ways in which Euro-American men went about defending their dependents and their patriar-



chal rights. The metonymic logic inherent in those acts was more sinister than simple symbolic substitution. Where metaphoric or symbolic substitution entailed attacking a representation of the true object of hostility, metonymic acts involved attacking an actual part of the hated object. Further, metonymic violence against a few Indians presumed the existence of a unified and essential Native identity. Both facets of the logic were necessary for racism: a monolithic racial identity and the willingness to attack any Indian as a metonym for the race. Thus, the racism apparent in the actions of the Paxton Boys in 1763–64 was an extension of the actions of earlier Euro-American frontier crowds.⁵³

Striking out against a racialized enemy became a means of reasserting authority at a time when the violence and dislocation of the war destabilized patriarchal identities: settlers could justify an attack on any Indian as the necessary action of men defending their families and ways of life. The logic of a racialized enemy meant that an action that might otherwise be seen as an act of male cowardice—murdering a community of defenseless Native Americans, for instance—became an act of masculine valor. Racialization was also a way for Euro-American frontier settlers to assert their supposed superiority over the Indians. Finally, it enabled Euro-American settlers to demand support from provincial and imperial officials. If Native Americans formed a naturally coherent group, then all White people constituted a similarly cohesive unit. The conclusion of such logic was that White patriarchs in Philadelphia owed their loyalty and support first and foremost to their fellow White patriarchs on the frontier and not to the Indians who also resided there.

Euro-American settlers needed to assert racial unity because of the gaping regional divide between themselves and provincial leaders in Philadelphia. The overlap between regional and racial issues in settlers' minds was apparent as early as the incident at Tulpehocken in 1755. In many ways Weiser was an obvious target for settlers upset with the disruption of the war because he embodied what settlers interpreted as the divided loyalty of the provincial government. On one hand, he held political office, had been elected to command the men organized to defend the country, and exerted himself to bring order and peace to the frontier. All of these factors reflected the respected position he held in the colony. On the other hand, his work as the colony's primary Indian interpreter meant he had close relations with various Native leaders and groups and often represented their interests in public. Euro-American settlers wondered if Weiser was

dedicated to the defense of the colony or if he was loyal to the Native Americans with whom he treated and negotiated. The same question could be asked of a colonial government that made ineffective efforts at defense while simultaneously struggling to maintain, reaffirm, and extend relations with the Indians, as evidenced by the repeated conferences at Easton.

Contradictory attitudes toward Native Americans arose because provincial and British imperial leaders recognized differences among Native Americans who fought with the French, those who allied themselves with the British, and those who remained neutral. Unlike many frontier settlers, imperial officials understood that Native Americans had a role to play in the British Empire. Indians were valuable allies whose familiarity with the territory made them ideal scouts and warriors. Drawing on transatlantic Whig ideas, British officials admired the “heroic” Indian warriors as far better defenders of the empire than the ineffective and “corrupted” colonials.⁵⁴ And, of course, any Indian allied with the British, or who declared neutrality, was one less warrior fighting for the French. For these reasons, colonial officials took active steps to protect peaceful Indians in Pennsylvania, in opposition to both the frontier understanding of patriarchal duty and the growing metonymic logic that led to racism.

Provincial leaders attempted to protect Christian Indians out of patriarchal regard for the men and women who had converted to Christianity and who lived among Euro-Americans on the frontier. Some of these groups had decades-long relations with Pennsylvania. The Conestogas, for example, had been allied with Pennsylvania since the beginning of the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ Accordingly, in 1756, Governor Morris ordered John Ross “to take the [Conestoga] Indians now in Town into Your Charge, and Care and Conduct them to the Manor of Conestogo.” Morris explicitly instructed Ross to guard the safety of the Indians as they traveled because “the minds of the Inhabitants are not a little disturbed at the Murders committed by the Enemy Indians, and the People living on the Road . . . may not be well disposed towards them.” Once at Conestoga, Ross was to build shelters for the Indians and see to their basic comfort. In addition to providing Ross with £50 to see to the Conestogas’ immediate needs, Morris also made arrangements for their long-term maintenance.⁵⁶

When the Paxton Boys killed this same group of people seven years later, they expressed not only their hatred of the Indians, but also their displeasure with an official policy designed to support a Native community. The willingness of provincial leaders to subsidize a group of Indians



and their concurrent unwillingness to comply with Euro-American settlers' demands for protection heightened regional tensions within the province. Frontier inhabitants felt as though their petitions were going unheeded and that Philadelphia leaders had abandoned them to a "merciless Enemy." From Paxton Township in 1755, an exasperated Reverend John Elder protested that, "Tho we are careful to transmit them [reports of attacks] to Philadelphia and remonstrate and Petition time after time, yet [it is] to no purpose."⁵⁷ Two years later he put his point more succinctly: "It's well known that Representations from the back Inhabitants have but little weight with the Gentlemen in power, they looking on us either as incapable of forming just notions of things, or as biassed by Selfish Views."⁵⁸ Here Elder pinpointed a central lesson of the war: provincial officials comfortably ensconced in cosmopolitan Philadelphia looked down upon frontier settlers and adopted an agenda that did not prioritize frontier defense.

Tensions between the frontier and Philadelphia subsided when peace returned to Pennsylvania in late 1758 and the need for direct support dissipated. The interlude of peace and regional harmony, however, proved to be uneasy and short-lived. Soon after General Forbes's success at Fort Duquesne, Euro-Americans moved to reclaim the lands from which Indians had evicted them. When he traveled through Cumberland County, the westernmost extreme of provincial settlement, the Reverend Thomas Barton found "the People are returning everywhere to the places they had abandoned and within the last 18 months the number of Houses and Inhabitants in Carlisle are doubled."⁵⁹ In 1763, just eleven years after it had been laid out, the town of Reading in Berks County boasted 1,300 residents. As Anglican minister Alexander Murray exclaimed, "the Country for Miles round" was "thick peopled."⁶⁰

The rapid expansion of Euro-American settlement, however, only served to reinforce the concerns over land that had prompted Native Americans to wage war in 1755. Indeed, several ominous incidents between 1760 and the outbreak of Pontiac's War in 1763 exposed the animosity that simmered while Euro-Americans resumed their farming enterprise. In February 1760, Governor James Hamilton issued a reward for the capture and conviction of the people responsible for the Christmastime murder of a Native family near Carlisle. The bodies of a man and a boy had been found scalped, but a woman and another child were still missing. Hamilton rushed to reassure the Indians in the area "that the Perpetrators of this

horrid Crime, when discovered and convicted, shall suffer Death the same manner as if they had killed an Englishman.”⁶¹ His assurances were in vain; the murderers were never caught.

In spite of the governor's efforts to reassure the Indians and to foster peace on the frontier, the settlers continued to display hostility toward the Indians they encountered. In fall 1762, when Captain Patterson discovered evidence of forty to fifty Indian warriors in Lancaster County, he led his men into battle against them. Four of Patterson's men died in the engagement, and eight Indians were killed.⁶² This incident came months before the beginning of Pontiac's War and likely involved Indians going on a hunt or traveling through the province. Most ominously, in July 1763, Thomas McKee, a magistrate in Paxton Township, complained that he had “a good deal of Difficulty By the Inhabitants” who openly threatened to shoot Indians and collect their scalps for the bounty. McKee feared that the men would take out revenge for their sufferings “[per]haps on Some Innocent [Indian] family.”⁶³ Five months later, the racial animosity in Pennsylvania that had matured during the Seven Years' War reached its climax when the Paxton Boys attacked the Conestogas.

In the end, the legacy of the Paxton Boys was not simply “‘open season’ on the Indian.” The Paxton Boys bequeathed the legacy of a frontier associated with the violent defense of White patriarchy against a racialized Native American enemy. In a tangible sense, the Paxton Boys emerged from the particular gendered, regional, and racial environment of the Euro-American frontier during the Seven Years' War. To be sure, racial animosity was not universal after the Paxton Boys retreated from Philadelphia. Some Euro-American frontier farmers continued to form friendly and cooperative relationships with their Native neighbors, and leaders within the Native and Euro-American communities persisted in advocating a peaceful coexistence in the province. Nonetheless, when the Paxton Boys crossed the line from metonymic to real violence, they signaled a new era in Pennsylvania's history. William Penn's vision of peace and tolerance was abandoned by many in favor of the violent removal of all Indians from Penn's Woods.

Just eleven short years before the American Revolution, the Paxton Boys marched to the city where the Declaration of Independence would be signed, not on behalf of democracy, but in the name of racial solidarity. One of the hallmarks of the new nation would be its relentless expansion



westward to the Pacific. Fueling this expansion was the racial and gendered construction of the frontier expressed by the Paxton Boys. During the nineteenth century, figures as diverse as Davey Crockett and Francis Parkman built upon the experience of people like the Paxton Boys to construct a popular image of the frontier and the trans-Mississippi west as a place where White men expressed their manhood through violence against nature and against Native Americans. In his almanacs and his autobiography, Crockett created a caricature of himself and of the frontier that appealed to the popular reading masses. In the more scholarly context of a Boston Brahmin's journey west, Parkman's *The Oregon Trail* replicated the popular image of the frontier as a place where White men could find their masculine identities in opposition to Native Americans and to nature.⁶⁴ The roots of these and other nineteenth-century constructions of the frontier lay in eighteenth-century experience. The march toward the Paxton Boys during the Seven Years' War was one starting point for the progress of Manifest Destiny across the continent.