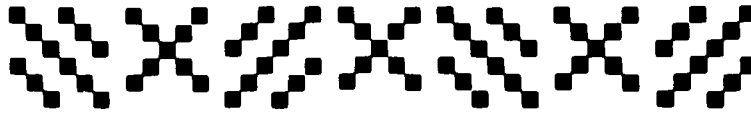


“The Famous Hair Buyer General”:
Henry Hamilton, George Rogers Clark,
and the American Indian

*Bernard W. Sheehan**



It would be difficult to find two more dissimilar characters of the revolutionary generation than Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark. The Anglo-Irish gentleman and the Virginia Indian fighter seemed destined to clash when they met on the Illinois frontier. Hamilton had already become infamous as the promoter of Indian attacks on the American settlements and the supposed buyer of white scalps. Not even Simon Girty,¹ the “white savage,” could equal the iniquity that attached to Hamilton’s reputation; indeed, not until recent times have historians managed to restore a semblance of balance to the memory of his career in America.² In contrast, Clark emerged a hero from the Revolution, and his renown has remained high since.

The issue between Hamilton and Clark in the 1770s was the American Indian. To be sure, for the outcome of the war and the establishment of independence, both men were minor characters. The conflict in the West gained significance only in hindsight. George Washington won the war east of the mountains, employing an army of conventional design and training, with no more than grudging attention to the unseemly conflict that occupied the frontier regions. The western hostilities were important, however, because they brought into the fray the

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¹ See Consul Wilshire Butterfield, *History of the Girtys . . .* (Cincinnati, 1890).

² John D. Barnhart, “A New Evaluation of Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark,” *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXVII (March, 1951), 643-52; Nelson Vance Russell, “The Indian Policy of Henry Hamilton: A Revaluation,” *Canadian Historical Review*, XI (March, 1930), 20-37.

Indian tribes that weighed heavily in the thinking of Americans about themselves. As the behavior of both Hamilton and Clark testifies, Americans and Englishmen were deeply torn over the problem of the Indian. At the same time that they scorned the native way of life as the savage antithesis of civility, they felt strangely attracted to it. In addition, the Americans came to believe that the alliance between the British and the "merciless Indian savages," to use Jefferson's phrasing from the Declaration of Independence, united the foes of liberty with the enemies of civilization. Thus the Hamilton-Clark conflict touched the deepest strains of American commitment during its revolutionary trial.

The question of employing the native warriors in the War for Independence arose at the outset of the conflict, but after the emission of much pious rhetoric from both sides most of the Indians joined the crown. At first the Continental Congress seemed inclined to promote Indian neutrality, perhaps on the assumption that the natives were more likely to support the British, but local American commanders had already recruited warriors. Besides, rumor had it that the British ministry had formed a plan to unite the tribes against the rebellion. By 1776, on grounds that their involvement was inevitable, the Congress abandoned attempts to keep the Indians neutral and tried with little success to engage them on the American side. British policy had originally been negative, designed to keep the warriors from joining the Americans, but by 1777 military necessity and the prevalent conviction that the Americans had taken the first steps led to the systematic promotion of Indian attacks on the frontier.³

The piety exuded by both sides over the misbehavior of their enemies in allying themselves with the "savage" Indians was more than partisan propaganda. There had been a long history of native participation in the American extensions of European wars, hence much experience of native warfare. There had been time for the development of deep feelings. In the end, no doubt, most Englishmen and Americans would have agreed that since the Indians would be fighting "for somebody . . . they may better be fighting for us than against

³ Jack M. Sosin, "The Use of Indians in the War of the American Revolution: A Re-Assessment of Responsibility," *Canadian Historical Review*, XLVI (June, 1965), 101-21; Jack M. Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763-1783* (New York, 1967), 87; Andrew McFarland Davis, "The Employment of Indian Auxiliaries in the American War," *English Historical Review*, II (October, 1887), 709-28.



LIEUTENANT-COLONEL HENRY HAMILTON, FROM A MINIATURE IN THE HOUGHTON LIBRARY, HARVARD UNIVERSITY



GEORGE ROGERS CLARK, FROM A PAINTING BY MATTHEW JOUETT, IN POSSESSION OF THE FILSON CLUB OF LOUISVILLE

Reproduced from Frederick Palmer, *Clark of the Ohio: A Life of George Rogers Clark* (New York, 1930), frontispiece, facing 318.

us.”⁴ All agreed, however, that the very presence of the Indians in the conflict tainted the cause of those allied with them and presented the other side with the necessity of fighting for the very survival of civilization.

Hamilton attained his position of ignominy largely because, from 1775 until his capture by Clark at Vincennes in 1779, he served as lieutenant-governor of the British post at Detroit. As a consequence, during the early years of the revolutionary struggle he was the principal British agent in contact with the native groupings of the Old Northwest who threatened the Ohio and Kentucky frontiers. The Indians depended on Detroit for supplies, and the British after 1777 looked to them as important instruments of royal policy. Unfortunately for the British, and the Americans who suffered as a consequence, the Indians attacked the frontier mainly to defend their way of life rather than to further the interests of King George. They fought, therefore, in their own manner and made it inevitable that Hamilton, who initiated and sustained their efforts for his own purposes, should have been accused of throwing in his lot with the Indians and supporting the continued existence of “savage” ways.

Hamilton had known Indians before the outbreak of the Revolution. He had been born in Ireland, probably in 1734, of an important provincial family. His grandfather held the title Viscount Boyne in the Irish peerage, and his father, a younger son, sat in the Irish parliament for Donegal and held the collectorships of the ports of Dublin and Cork. At the age of twenty-one Hamilton joined an Irish regiment and eventually made a modest career as a colonial administrator, serving in the Northwest, Canada, Bermuda, and the Caribbean. He arrived in the New World in 1758 during the Seven Years’ War and learned in that conflict about the role of native auxiliaries. His papers testify that he developed a serious interest in the continent and in native culture.⁵

Hamilton showed the influence of the romantic vision of nature prevalent in the late eighteenth century. He had been brought up in County Cork in the midst of a landscape of power

⁴ Quoted in Sosin, “Use of Indians,” 121.

⁵ On Hamilton’s early years see Orville John Jaebker, “Henry Hamilton: British Soldier and Colonial Governor” (Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1954), chapter 1.

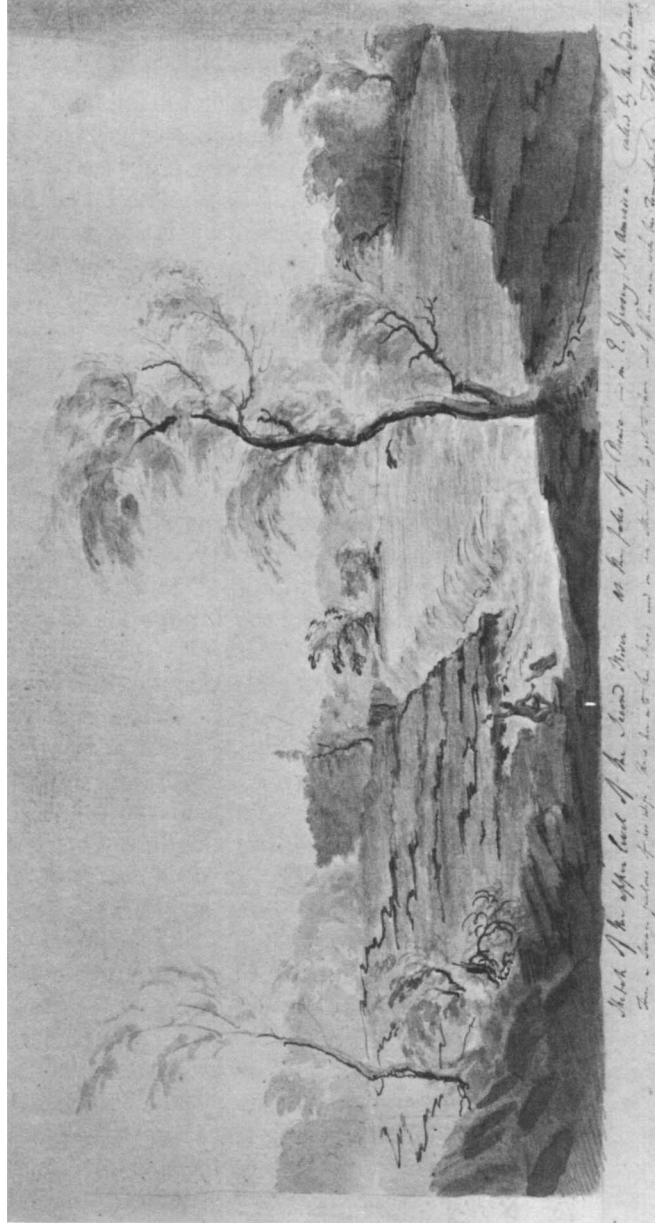
and terrible beauty; thus, as he said of north Wales, he recognized "Nature . . . in his rude and awful Majesty."⁶ While in America he found time to indulge an artistic bent and left a small cache of line drawings of Indians and scenes that obviously struck his imagination. He seemed particularly affected by waterfalls, of which four drawings remain: two of Niagara and one each of the falls of the Passaic and the Falls of Chaudiere on the Ottawa. In each, great rushes of water plunge with vast energy throwing up clouds of spume and spray and conveying an image of tremendous potency. Along the shore foliage and broken trees in forbidding confusion complete an impression of almost Gothic menace. In one Niagara picture the infinitesimal human figures clash with the sweep and strength of the surrounding scene. Hamilton's landscape art reveals an avid observer who held a certain awe for the force of nature.⁷

The native people entered into Hamilton's drawings in dissimilar ways. The nine extant Indian portraits disclose a genuine concern for native personality. Faces are vividly drawn, some stolid, others more animated, but all are depicted with strength of character. One has the impression that Hamilton found inner resources in these native people and that his renderings strove to give them concrete and tactile realization. In contrast, the native figures that appear in Hamilton's landscapes are overwhelmed by the settings. The two minute Indian hunters who lounge on the edge of a high, precipitous cliff serve mainly to heighten the sheer force of the scene. Others are no more than minimal shapes, human no doubt, but with no function other than to magnify the power of the natural surroundings. In his view of the falls of the Passaic River, however, Hamilton attributes to the native figures a violence of their own entirely compatible with the surrounding turmoil. Two Indians (the figures are unclothed and hence seem to be Indian) appear at the base of the falls, one in the pool and the other on shore, in the midst of a violent altercation. Hamilton's caption reads: "Here a Savage jealous of his wife, threw her into the River, and in her attempting to get to shore cut off her arm with his Tomahawk."⁸

⁶ Henry Hamilton, "Reminiscences," Henry Hamilton Papers (Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.), 6.

⁷ A portion of Hamilton's artistic production can be viewed in the Hamilton Papers.

⁸ *Ibid.*



LINE DRAWING BY HENRY HAMILTON ENTITLED "Here a Savage jealous of his wife, threw her into the River, and in her attempting to get to shore cut off her arm with his Tomahawk."

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Hamilton was plainly ambivalent about the native peoples that he saw and drew in the years before the Revolution. In a face-to-face encounter he found the Indian personality worthy of sensitive and intimate portrayal. The visages that he sketched revealed strong and vital personalities, curiously accoutered but with a hint of usual human virtues and foibles. In another setting, however, surrounded by the tumult and splendor of the American wilderness, their personalities seemed utterly overwhelmed by the savage confusion of the background, though in one vivid instance he showed them behaving in a manner befitting the brutal ferment of the world they inhabited.

Hamilton may have been no James Adair or David Zeisberger, important eighteenth-century students of Indian ethnology—or even Thomas Jefferson—but he did show a certain academic interest in the Indian people. His *Journal* in particular contains a number of detailed and reasonably objective disquisitions on aspects of native life. In addition, he apparently established a close relationship with at least one Indian, a young Ottawa brave named Mahingan. For all his sympathy and sensitivity to native ways, however, the Indians remained for Hamilton, as they did for virtually all white men who did not see them simply as bloody “savages,” “poor ignorant but well meaning creatures.”⁹

Hamilton's real interests in the Indians extended beyond the academic. At first Whitehall had instructed him to keep the warriors out of the American orbit; later he was told to promote and support their attacks on the frontier. To further these policies Hamilton became a skillful Indian negotiator. Whether his success can be attributed more to the convergence of interest between the British and the northwestern tribes than to his ability as a manipulator of the tribal leadership can only be guessed. It is clear, however, that he brought to his dealings with the Indians the considerable knowledge that he had acquired of native culture and a real though grudging sympathy. He showed none of the disdain and aloofness that hampered much British diplomacy with the American tribes. Soon after

⁹ John D. Barnhart, ed., *Henry Hamilton and George Rogers Clark in the American Revolution with the Unpublished Journal of Lieut. Gov. Henry Hamilton* (Crawfordsville, Ind., 1951), 108, 109-10, 227n, 164; for an example of Hamilton's scientific interest see Hamilton to Frederick Haldimand, November 1, 1778, in H.W. Beckwith, ed., *Letters from Canadian Archives (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. I; Springfield, Ill., 1903)*, 361-62.



LINE DRAWING BY HENRY HAMILTON OF PACANNÉ, A PROMINENT MIAMI CHIEF WHO ACCOMPANIED HAMILTON'S EXPEDITION FROM DETROIT TO VINCENNES

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entering on his responsibilities, for example, he discerned the importance of ceremonial gift-giving. By holding frequent conferences with the Indians and keeping them well supplied with provisions, he managed to retain their loyalty until defeat undermined his system. Nor was he above plying the tribesmen with an abundant supply of liquor. Frederick Haldimand, governor of Canada, thought the 17,520 gallons consumed at Detroit in a year "astonishing."¹⁰

Hamilton went beyond these time-honored methods of gaining native allegiance. He took a lesson from the French experience and resolved to prove to the warriors that the English understood their ways and would do the Indians the honor of participating in them. On no less than a half dozen occasions Hamilton and his officers joined in the native war dance and intoned the appropriate song. Perhaps the most publicized of these events occurred in the summer of 1777 when the lieutenant-governor put into effect his orders to unleash the Indians against the frontier. With the warriors arrayed in two lines, an ox was beheaded and a tomahawk sunk into its skull, after which Hamilton danced and sang the war song. The animal represented the Viriginans against whom the Indians were about to fight. (In a later instance a bear played the symbolic role, and Hamilton himself wielded the tomahawk.) According to the account given by John Montour to Zeisberger, Hamilton was painted and dressed like an Indian for the occasion. Montour's information may have been designed for the expectations of his listener, but there can be no doubt that Hamilton had been willing to accommodate himself to the ceremonial "savagery" of his allies.¹¹

The case against the lieutenant-governor rested precisely on the easy alliance that he had established with what virtually every white man interpreted as savagery. It is possible that Hamilton had himself solicited the instructions from Lord George Germain that in 1777 commissioned British officers in America to lead native raiding parties against the frontier. The

¹⁰ Haldimand to Richard B. Lernoult, July 23, 1779, *Haldimand Papers* (Michigan Pioneer and Historical Society *Historical Collections*, Vol. I; Lansing, Mich., 1908), 408.

¹¹ Council at Detroit, June 18, 1777, in Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds., *Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778* (Madison, 1912), 9; David Zeisberger to George Morgan, July 7, 1777, *ibid.*, 18-19; Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 111, 113, 115, 117; Hamilton to Haldimand, October 2, 1778, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 482; Silas Farmer, *History of Detroit and Wayne County and Early Michigan* (2 vols., Detroit, 1890), I, 246.

year before, when the warriors had shown an eagerness to support the British cause and attack their enemies on the Ohio and in Kentucky, Hamilton reluctantly refused aid, saying that he had not yet received orders.¹² Once instructions arrived from Whitehall, he proceeded with much industry and a great deal of success to exploit the alliances he had made with the nearby tribes. By September, 1777, Hamilton informed Germain, there were already approximately 1,150 warriors out against the frontier. From 1777 on, the line of western settlements was under almost constant assault by white-led raiding parties that had originated at Detroit.¹³

Indeed, Hamilton envisioned a far wider Indian alliance than even the formidable grouping with access to Detroit. He communicated with John Stuart, the superintendent of Indian affairs south of the Ohio, who already had orders on the matter, in the hope of bringing the full force of native population east of the Mississippi against the rebels. Agents were sent south, and Hamilton expected representatives of the major southern tribes to concert with the northwest Indians to cripple American power in the West. In addition, he expected the Iroquois and Shawnees, who were already engaged in intermittent attacks on the white settlements, to synchronize their efforts with the other Indian peoples. Before Clark cut short his career, Hamilton had proved himself a man of large strategic designs in which the Indians played an integral part. He was not merely a low-ranked officer performing an unpleasant duty prescribed by his superiors.¹⁴

¹² Lord George Germain to Guy Carleton, March 26, 1777, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 346-47; Carleton to Hamilton, May 21, 1777, *ibid.*; Hamilton to Lord Dartmouth, August 29, September 2, 1776, *ibid.*, X, 268. The argument that Hamilton solicited his orders rests on the assertion of Germain in his March 26 letter to Carleton, though no letter from Hamilton to Germain proposing that the Indians be sent against the frontier is extant. Barnhart, "New Evaluation," 650, doubts that Hamilton was culpable.

¹³ Consul Wilshire Butterfield, *History of George Rogers Clark's Conquest of the Illinois and Wabash Towns, 1778 and 1779* (Columbus, Ohio, 1904), 46.

¹⁴ Haldimand to Hamilton, August 26, 1778, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 403; Hamilton to Haldimand, July 6, 1781, *ibid.*, 497; Hamilton to Haldimand, January 24, 1779, in Beckwith, *Letters from Canadian Archives*, I, 289-93; Conference with the Indians, Vincennes, January 26, 1779, *ibid.*, 394-97; Hamilton to the People of Illinois, December 29, 1778, in James Alton James, ed., *George Rogers Clark Papers, 1771-1781 (Collections of the Illinois State Historical Library, Vol. VIII; Springfield, Ill., 1912)*, 96-97; Richard B. Lernout to Hamilton, February 9, 1779, *ibid.*, 108. For Jefferson's fear that Hamilton might be successful see Jefferson to Richard Henry Lee, June 17, 1779, in Julian P. Boyd, ed., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (19 vols. to date, Princeton, 1950-), III, 298.

Nevertheless, Hamilton did often find the duty of encouraging Indian raids on American settlements unpleasant. In time, of course, after his capture and in response to the obloquy heaped on his name by the Americans, he made a point of stressing the great scruples with which he engaged in frontier war, but one does not have to appeal to these later exculpations. The letters he wrote at the time and the instructions he delivered to visiting tribesmen bear witness to his concern over the nature of Indian hostilities. Despite the allure of the Indians, he shared the widely entertained conviction that the warfare practiced by the warriors constituted a vestige of savagery from which civilization had long since rescued the white man.

From his experience in the Seven Years' War Hamilton had learned how "deplorable" Indian fighting could be.¹⁵ The British, especially, remembered the debacle after the capture of Fort William Henry. When Hamilton fell into French hands at the battle of Sainte Foy in April, 1760, he asked to be taken to the officer in charge. That gentleman, perceiving the danger, exchanged coats with Hamilton so that the scarlet trim on his British uniform would not be seen by the Indians. "Shortly after this," Hamilton later recorded, "we prisoners were marched ostentatiously thro the Indian encampment, not without a very unpleasant feeling, the Savages employed some in scraping and dressing Englishmen's scalps, others whetting their knives and Tomahawks—" Hamilton knew that the Indians had already scalped many of his colleagues who had been wounded. He also suspected that not all French officers could be depended upon to protect British prisoners. Rumor had it that the French turned over many prisoners to their "savage" allies who then tortured and killed them.¹⁶

Although Hamilton later tried to moderate the brutality of Indian behavior, he sensed that the task was hopeless. Thus on the eve of dispatching the warriors he pleaded rhetorically, "Would to God this storm which is ready to fall on the Frontiers could be directed upon the guilty heads of those wretches who have raised it, and pass by the miserable many who must feel its fatal effects." The truth was that he believed Indians to

¹⁵ Hamilton to Dartmouth, August 29, September 2, 1776, *Haldimand Papers*, X, 268.

¹⁶ Henry Hamilton, "Reminiscences," 92, 94-95; John Knox, *An Historical Journal . . .*, ed. Arthur G. Doughty (*Publications of the Champlain Society*, Vol. IX; Toronto, 1914), 427-28.

have a "natural propensity . . . for blood." Furthermore, he found "their superstitions too strong to be combatted" and was deeply apprehensive of any event that might rouse their ferocity. Even by his own reckoning, therefore, he had assumed an extraordinarily difficult role in his determination to change the character of native warfare.¹⁷

Hamilton claimed that above all he wished to keep the warriors from killing women, children, and unarmed men. He affirmed this principle in reports to his superiors, and time after time he exhorted the Indians to confine their attacks to those who bore arms and opposed the king. You should not, he told the warriors, "redden your axe with the blood of Women and Children or innocent men. I know that men, kill men and not children. I speak to you who are men." If the Indians wished "to lose the name of Barbarians, they must cease to act as Wolves."¹⁸ To insure the enforcement of his policy, war parties left Detroit under the direction of white officers and usually mixed with a sizable contingent of French militia. In fact, Hamilton protested to Quebec that as lieutenant-governor rather than commandant of Detroit he lacked adequate control over the composition of the parties. He wanted more troops to curb the Indian propensity for indiscriminate warfare.¹⁹ Despite this limitation he argued that his policy had been a success. He had the assurance of the Indians themselves that "Our intention is never to act against children, but against men," and he later told the Earl of Shelburne that his influence over the Indians was sufficient to effect "that change in their manner of carrying on . . . which was rather to be wished than expected."²⁰

From the story of his career on the frontier Hamilton emerges as a man deeply troubled by the problem of the American Indian. He found the native people both fascinating and

¹⁷ Quotations, in order, from Hamilton to Germain, June, 1777, quoted in Russell, "Indian Policy of Henry Hamilton," 25; Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 122, 146; see also Hamilton to Haldimand, July 6, 1781, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 494.

¹⁸ Quotations, in order, from *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 456; Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 155-56; see also Hamilton to Lord Shelburne, April 9, 1782, typescript in the Burton Collection (Detroit Public Library); *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 454, 457; Thwaites and Kellogg, *Frontier Defense*, 11, 12, 13.

¹⁹ Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 31, 35.

²⁰ Quotations, in order, from *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 457; Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 36; see also Hamilton to Shelburne, April 9, 1782, Burton Collection; Hamilton to Carleton, April 25, 1778, in Thwaites and Kellogg, *Frontier Defense*, 284; Jaebker, "Henry Hamilton," 141.

distressing, a handy ally in defending the empire against rebellion and at the same time an acute threat to the survival of civil ways. He described their social character in writing and their visages and artifacts in pencil sketches with sympathy, but he never doubted that their lives were both squalid and savage. Although he abhorred the native habit of killing non-combatants, he eagerly dispatched war parties to attack the frontier settlements, assuaging his conscience with the caveat that he had counseled adherence to European rules. The Americans, of course, thought him insincere. He may have been, though his life as a whole belies it. On one level, no doubt, Hamilton simply had difficulty reconciling his need for native auxiliaries with his feelings about their behavior. That he thought he had been successful in changing their methods, however, betrays either a monumental naiveté or a startling capacity for self-delusion. It reveals in fact the depth of his ambivalence on the subject. So intensely did he dread the consequences of his actions that only self-delusion would answer the case that most Americans believed to be true.

In its popular form the case against Hamilton rested on accusations that he encouraged the Indians to bring in scalps and rewarded them for these grisly totems of their success. Most of the evidence derived from rumor and hearsay. Some was plainly fraudulent, as, for example, the testimony of John Dodge, but there were eyewitnesses who told believable stories of what they had seen at Detroit. Daniel Sullivan and John Leith had both visited the fort and had brought back vivid accounts of Hamilton's dealings with the Indians. Leith's story in particular portrayed the misery of the Indians' prisoners and the importance that the British and Indians attached to scalps in the war against the frontier, but neither Leith nor Sullivan had actually seen Hamilton pay for the scalps. That accusation had no more than rumor for support, though it remained virtually universal.²¹

In fact, the popular contentions were not far from the mark. Hamilton accepted scalps from the Indians without, it would appear, very close scrutiny as to their origins. If he did not actually pay for them with a formal bounty, he certainly

²¹ John Dodge, "A Narrative of the Capture and Treatment of John Dodge by the English at Detroit," *The Remembrancer*, VIII (1779), 74, 77; "Daniel Sullivan's Deposition," in Thwaites and Kellogg, *Frontier Defense*, 231-32; C.W. Butterfield, ed., *Leith's Narrative* (Cincinnati, 1883; orig. pub., Lancaster, Ohio, 1831), 28-30. See also "Deposition of James Ballinger," in James, *Clark Papers*, VII, 582; *The Remembrancer*, VIII (1779), 83.

did reward the natives for their services and success against the frontier settlements. His own commissary inventory listed scalping knives as an item of trade.²² Moreover, he left a fragmentary but suggestive record of the numbers of scalps received from the returning warriors: at one time 129, at another 81, and at yet others 15 and 9.²³ At the least Hamilton's public reception of scalps meant that he had agreed to engage in the game of wilderness war on the Indians' terms, but his complicity went even deeper. By his own admission he behaved in such a way as to sanction the use of scalps as a valuable instrument in cementing the relationship between the British and their Indian allies. Perhaps the most incriminating evidence may be found in his account of a council held with the Indians at Detroit on June 2, 1778. "Some Delawares," he reported, "are this day arrived who are desirous of showing their intention of joining their brethren & have presented me two pieces of dried meat (scalps) one of which I have given the Chippoways, another to the Miamis, that they may show in their villages the disposition of the Delawares."²⁴ The choice of language ("dried meat") may have been merely a callous slip, but there can be no doubt that Hamilton had become more than a detached and reluctant agent of British imperial interests forced by circumstances to deal with allies who had odious manners. On the contrary, his actions lent to the Indian practice a legitimacy that contrasted sharply with his frequent protestations of innocence.

Hamilton's principal antagonist in the West, George Rogers Clark, faced a different sort of problem in his dealings with the native people. Unless he managed to take Detroit and sweep the British from the Northwest, Clark stood little chance of gaining the Indians' loyalty; thus, his attitudes toward them diverged in many ways from Hamilton's. For him the natives were not potential allies but implacable enemies who tormented his brethren in the frontier settlements. In addition, Clark was free of that eighteenth-century scientific attraction to the natives that informed Hamilton's thinking about them.

²² *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 471. Normand MacLeod, who led the advance party on the British expedition to Vincennes, told the Miami chiefs that he hoped they would bring in more Virginia scalps. See William A. Evans and Elizabeth S. Sklar, eds., *Detroit to Fort Sackville, 1778-1779: The Journal of Normand MacLeod* (Detroit, 1978), 33.

²³ Hamilton to Haldimand, January 15, 1778, September, 1778, September 16, 1778, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 431, 464-65, 477.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 446.

(And, it might be added, that played so prominent a part in the musings of Clark's mentor, Jefferson, and in the later career of his younger brother, William.) Clark was far more the coarse-grained frontiersman, intelligent but ill-educated, extraordinarily resourceful but ultimately dependent on drink, an Indian fighter who despised his enemy but who often imitated native ways. In this last sense the contrast with Hamilton breaks down. For Clark, the Indian could not have been an intellectual issue; nevertheless, he struggled, as did so many in the border settlements, with the lure of native habits. All the more ironic, then, that he should have seen in Hamilton's relations with the Indians evidence of the lieutenant-governor's betrayal of civil order.

Clark's mind was on the Indians from the early years of his experience in the West. He served in a Virginia contingent in Dunmore's War and soon after became prominent in defense of the Kentucky settlements against the native warriors.²⁵ When Clark went east to Williamsburg in 1777 to sell Governor Patrick Henry on his western strategy, Indians remained prominent in his thinking. By his own assertion he wished to relieve Kentucky by first driving the British from Illinois and then taking Detroit. Without supplies furnished by the crown and the initiative of British officers, the northwest tribes would be neutralized and the Kentucky and Ohio frontiers free of the Indian danger.²⁶ The problem with Clark's plan was that it never worked because it was ill-conceived from the beginning.²⁷ Clark managed, of course, to clear the British from Illinois, but he could not hold it long for the Americans. By 1781 Virginia troops were forced to abandon the Wabash and Mississippi forts for want of provisions. Clark never did capture Detroit, despite support from Washington and Jefferson. Even if he had been successful, it can be doubted whether the frontier people would have been much aided. The occupation of Illinois did little for them, nor did Clark's nearer establishment at the falls of the Ohio. If Detroit had fallen, some of the tribes dependent on that fort might have been neutralized for a time, but, in fact, the warriors did not require the stimulation of the Detroit garrison

²⁵ The best biography of Clark remains James Alton James, *The Life of George Rogers Clark* (Chicago, 1928).

²⁶ James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 30-32; Patrick Henry to Virginia Delegates in Congress, November 16, 1778, *ibid.*, 72-74; George Wythe, George Mason, Thomas Jefferson to George Rogers Clark, January 3, 1778, *ibid.*, 37-38; Boyd, *Papers of Jefferson*, II, 246.

²⁷ Sosin, *Revolutionary Frontier*, 117.

to incite them against Kentucky and Ohio settlements. They had their own reasons for attempting to keep the white man out of Kentucky and east of the upper Ohio. One might suppose, then, that Clark had other intentions in proposing his plan to the Virginia governor, perhaps a hankering after new lands farther west than the imaginations of most Virginians had yet reached, or it may be that his geopolitical foresight was more refined than seems likely and that he understood the importance to peace negotiations of an outpost on the Mississippi. Certainly land was in his mind. He eventually reaped a landed reward for his exploits. And Jefferson, if not Clark, perceived the importance of holding a portion of the great river. Clark, if his own writings are to be believed, thought mainly about Indians. He was a man of the frontier, and he became famous defending it against its "savage" enemies.

By 1777, when Clark formulated his plan to subdue the northwest Indians, the issue of native participation had been settled. Most of the tribes had already come in on the British side or were likely to do so soon. Hence the American reaction could be expected. The native people had chosen the wrong side in a struggle that for the Americans was certain to determine the future of mankind. People like Henry and Jefferson, the two Virginia governors with whom Clark dealt, counseled the severest treatment of the tribes who opposed American interests. They could only be a treacherous and dangerous people. They "must be managed," wrote Henry, "by working on their Fears," a sentiment echoed by Jefferson to the effect that if the Indians could not be taught to keep faith, they must be taught to fear. Later in the conflict Jefferson recommended to Clark the "total suppression of Savage Insolence and Cruelties," by which he no doubt meant the "extermination" or removal of tribes who persisted in resistance.²⁸

Clark's own formula for treating with Indians fully conformed to the governors' sentiments. He proposed to discard the notion "that soft speeches was best for Indians." It had, he thought, caused untold mischief. He preferred what he called the French and Spanish method, harsh speech and the threat of immediate action. Elaborate festivities with much ceremonial talk and expensive gifts (more the French and Spanish than

²⁸ Henry to Edward Hand, July 27, 1777, in Thwaites and Kellogg, *Frontier Defense*, 30; Jefferson to Clark, January 1, 1780, in Boyd, *Papers of Jefferson*, III, 259; Jefferson to Clark, September 29, 1780, *ibid.*, 670.

the English usage) only fostered illusions in the Indians' minds and led to greater demands and ultimately to another outbreak of conflict. Blunt language and speedy retribution would keep the peace. He told one native group that if they continued to support the British "they would see their great father as they called him given to the Dogs to eat." The Indians, he believed, must be convinced that "we are always able to crush them at pleasure, and determined to do it when Ever they misbehave." So long as the Indians believed that he could make good on his threats (he never really had the force), the method worked. But not always. Old Tobacco, a Piankashaw chief, reacted boldly. Clark was in the habit of offering the Indians two belts simultaneously, one signifying war and the other peace. They were to make their choice and abide the consequences. For Old Tobacco this procedure defied ancient custom. One could not at a conference "present good and evil at one and the same time." "He kicked the belts from him." Old Tobacco, at least, understood that Clark's bravado anticipated an end to the time when the white man would concede the legitimacy of Indian usages.²⁹

It should be noted that Clark's practice did not always conform to his principles. He did, for example, adopt the traditional manner of speaking to Indians, which demanded a heavily allusive mode of speech and the kind of simple vocabulary thought to be suitable for primitive people. In conference with Black Bird, a Chippewa chief, Clark delivered his usual account of the establishment of English settlements in America and the reasons for the Revolution. Black Bird, in turn, "assumed the Airs of a Polite Gen" . . . and attempted to speak as much in the European manner as possible." Thus the discussion occupied the better part of the day with Clark doing his best to avoid the "Similes"³⁰ he used with other Indians. Black Bird, it appears, accepted the new dispensation that Clark attempted to introduce into Indian-white relations. Most other Indians did not, in which case Clark adopted the traditional forms of speech that white men assumed were compatible with the Indian manner.

²⁹ Quotations, in order, from George Rogers Clark, *Col. George Rogers Clark's Sketch of His Campaign in the Illinois in 1778-79* (Cincinnati, 1869), 38; Clark to Benjamin Harrison, May 22, 1783, in James, *Clark Papers*, XIX, 236-39. See also "Memoir," in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 243, 298; Evans and Sklar, *Detroit to Fort Sackville*, 17.

³⁰ "Memoir," in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 252-55.

The truth of the matter was that Clark made a conscious effort at imitating the Indians. It was not merely that he led frontiersmen whom a contemporary observer described as "a wild, ungovernable race, little less savage than their tawny neighbours," men who in fact engaged in "similar barbarities." Clark cultivated the image. He argued that the only way to fight Indians was "to excell them in barbarity." The French inhabitants of Kaskaskia had gotten the message. They were convinced that Clark and his followers "ment to strip the women and children or take the Bread out of ther mouths or . . . make war on the women and Children or the Church." Clark finally reassured them but not before recording his pleasure that the French should entertain "a most horrid Idea of the Barbarity of the Rebels," that they should believe them "more savage than their Neighbours the Indians."³¹

Clark and his men followed the frontier habit of dressing in a partial imitation of the Indians. Governor Fernando de Leyba of St. Louis described their entrance into town. "The commanding colonel arrived . . . in a hunting shirt and breechcloth, naked of foot and limb and with his bed, food, and gun on his shoulder. The troops had no other equipment than breechcloth, powder horn, gun, and knapsack." They were, as Leyba noted, "bandits in appearance." The reason was clear. When Clark and his little army reached the falls of the Ohio on their way to attack Kaskaskia in 1778, they abandoned their baggage "except as much as would equip us in the Indean [*sic*] mode." In 1780 on his trip east to lead an attack against the Shawnees, Clark and his men disguised themselves as Indians in order to make their way safely through the wilderness; and, of course, most of the men who followed him into Ohio for that campaign dressed in "hunting shirts and breech clouts, some linen & others buckskin."³²

Clark's penchant for ersatz Indianness served him well in surviving the arduous expedition to Vincennes in the winter of 1779. When the men resisted yet another plunge into the frigid waters, he recounted that he "Viewed their confution for about one minute[,] Whispered to those near me to [do] as I did—amediatey took some water in my hand[,] poured on Powder[,]

³¹ James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, xlvi; "Memoir," *ibid.*, 226, 229-31, 298.

³² Fernando de Leyba to Bernardo de Galvez, July 11, 21, 1778, in Lawrence Kinnaird, ed., "Clark-Leyba Papers," *American Historical Review*, XLI (October, 1935), 95, 98; "Memoir," in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 224; Henry Wilson, "Account of the Campaign against the Shawnee Indians," *ibid.*, 476; "Introduction," *ibid.*, cxxxvii-cxxxviii.

Blackened my face[,] gave the war hoop[,] and marched into the water without saying a word[.]” In order to keep the band’s spirits from flagging, he allowed the men to shoot game and to “feast on them like Indian war Dances each company by Turns Inviting the other to their feasts.” It appears that they did actually dance in the native manner. For Clark, play-act Indianness had its uses.³³

Later, the frontiersmen’s imitation of the Indians proved to be a minor embarrassment. After his brilliant success in Illinois, Clark established himself at Fort Jefferson on the falls of the Ohio and waited for the march against Detroit. It never came. Confined to their stockade with short supplies, the garrison became restless. In the summer of 1782 the French inhabitants of Vincennes found some of their horses missing and assumed that Clark’s men from the falls were responsible. A party of Indians was sent in pursuit. They came on the culprits after trailing them for three days, retook the horses, and killed one thief. As one of Clark’s correspondents from Vincennes reported: “They knew them to be white people, though disguis’d, and painted as the barbarians, he that was kill’d was undoubtedly a white man and painted.” The party had been actually a mixed group of whites and Indians, the whites, performing the native role of horse stealing, appropriately dressed and decorated as Indians.³⁴

For white men the quintessential native trait was scalping. They feared and abhorred it as a sign of savagery and regularly engaged in it when they fought the Indians. Whether Clark himself ever raised a scalp cannot be said with assurance. (Hamilton thought he had, though in the instance he cited he was probably wrong.) Clark surely had, however, traveled with men who made scalping a common practice, and the soldiers under his command did the same. It was said during Pontiac’s Uprising that David Owens, with whom Clark descended the Ohio in 1772, scalped his Indian wife and four children to claim the Pennsylvania bounty. That later on Clark ordered scalps taken seems likely. When rumor reached Kaskaskia that Hamilton had captured Vincennes, Clark informed Leyba: “I expect a true Information Every Hour as I have Several small

³³ “Memoir,” in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 269, 274.

³⁴ J. M. P. Legras to Clark, August 1, 1782, in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 84-85; William Fleming to Benjamin Harrison, September 26, 1782, *ibid.*, 117-18; John Bowman to Harrison, August 30, 1782, *ibid.*, XIX, 100-101.

parties gone to O Post [Vincennes] for scalps and prisoners." In the campaign against the Shawnees seventy-three scalps were virtually the only tokens of victory.³⁵

Perhaps the most revealing and controversial incident in Clark's career occurred at Vincennes the day before Hamilton surrendered the fort. Clark was about to meet Hamilton for a second time to discuss the capitulation when news arrived that a party of Indians, dispatched by Hamilton some weeks before to cut communications on the Ohio, was making its way toward Vincennes. Without knowledge of the situation, the Indians and their white leaders approached the town in the usual mood of celebration, emptying their muskets in the air. The contingent Clark sent to intercept them gained the surprise. Two of the party were killed on the spot (and scalped), and six were taken prisoner. Two of these were Frenchmen who, after being vouched for by a townswoman and one of Clark's French followers, were released. That left four Indians held captive. They were manhandled to the plaza before the fort gate, forced to sit in a circle, and tomahawked. The bodies were scalped, then dragged to the river and thrown in, though some of the victims may still have been alive. The deed done, Clark went to meet Hamilton on the esplanade where they continued negotiations.

Clark offered various accounts of the incident, all of them quite matter-of-fact. He seemed to consider the atrocity fully warranted; certainly he expressed no regret over it. As justification he argued that it had been necessary to show the native warriors who remained in the town that they could no longer depend on the British for support. It is more likely that instead of tactical necessity his motivations drew on a deep well of resentment and passion. He had already informed Hamilton that he only sought an excuse to put all the Indians and, as he called their white leaders, partisans to death. Moreover, at the sight of one of these captured partisans, painted and regaled like an Indian, he was filled with "indignation" and ordered that he should be executed. By his own admission he was even more violent in his anger at the whites, who had betrayed their obligations to civil behavior, than he was at the Indians, who were, after all, in his mind savages. He ordered the murders as

³⁵ Clark to Leyba, January 23, 1779, in Kinnaird, "Clark-Leyba Papers," 105; Dale Van Every, *A Company of Heroes: The American Frontier, 1775-1783* (New York, 1962), 49; James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 7, 21, 557, XIX, 157; Wilson, "Account of the Shawnee Campaign," *ibid.*, VIII, 481, 483.

an act of vengeance against those who had slaughtered his frontier compatriots and as a vindication of civilization.³⁶

Told in its bare detail the incident was sufficiently macabre, but embellished by Clark's British enemies it became even more sanguinary. Both Hamilton and his aide, Lieutenant Jacob Schieffelin, believed that Clark had himself wielded the tomahawk. According to the lieutenant, Clark "took a tomahawk, and in cold blood knocked their brains out, dipping his hands in their blood, rubbing it several times on his cheeks, yelping as a Savage" One of the Indians, having been struck in the head once without decisive effect, dislodged the tomahawk himself and handed it to his assailant, who delivered two more blows before the warrior was cast into the river apparently still alive. Hamilton described Clark's arrival at the esplanade minutes after, "reeking with blood," where "He spoke with rapture of his late achievement, while he washed of [*sic*] the blood from his hands stain'd in this inhuman sacrifice." The scalps were later displayed outside Hamilton's quarters. Neither Hamilton nor Schieffelin witnessed the incident. Hamilton's information came from the owner of the house where he was held after the surrender who claimed to have been present. Of course the British officers had reason to put Clark in a bad light. Both were under attack for their alleged responsibility for similar "savage" behavior and might profit from making a case against Clark. More important was the ease with which both sides resorted to accusations of savagery.³⁷

The second atrocity of the day concerned the treatment of Francis Maisonville, one of the leaders of Hamilton's French militia. Maisonville had been away with a scouting party and had returned after Clark and his men had entered the town. According to Hamilton, one of the townsmen betrayed him to the Americans. He was threatened with hanging, a halter placed about his neck, if he did not reveal the location of his companions. This method having failed, Clark ordered him scalped in retaliation for his partisan activities. With some reluctance (Clark had to repeat the order) one of the Americans raised two small portions of skin from his head before abandoning the effort. In Schieffelin's account Maisonville lost his whole scalp. Once again one of Clark's French followers inter-

³⁶ "Journal," February 24, 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 167; "Memoir," *ibid.*, 288; Clark to Henry, April 29, 1779, *ibid.*, 171; Clark, *Sketch*, 73-74.

³⁷ Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 182-83, 188; Hamilton to Haldimand, July 6, 1781, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 501-502; Hamilton to Shelburne, April 9, 1782, Burton Collection; Jacob Schieffelin, "Narrative of Gov. Henry Hamilton," *Magazine of American History*, I (March, 1877), 191-92.

ceded, and Maisonville was saved for the present.³⁸ Clark told a different story. Two of his "lads," he wrote, captured Maisonville, "a famous Indian partisan," tied him to a post before the stockade and kept up a fire from behind him. An officer cut short their "amusement" and ordered Maisonville taken to the guardhouse. On the way, Clark admitted, "they were so inhuman as to take part of his scalp." Later, after being sent to Williamsburg with Hamilton and his officers, Maisonville committed suicide. Hamilton saw the episode as further evidence of Clark's inhumanity and descent into a "savage" condition. Clark recorded the incident without comment, though with perhaps a touch of irony, and apparently without misgivings over the retribution due a white man who fought alongside Indians.³⁹

Hamilton's decision to give up Vincennes on February 24, 1779, presented Clark with an opportunity to visit a proper vengeance on the enemies of civilization. Hamilton remained the arch-criminal. Though Clark had probably not invented the phrase, his reference to the lieutenant-governor as "The Famous Hair Buyer General" established the moral justification and the propaganda theme for his western strategy. Actually the description had been used a year earlier in a letter to Clark from James Willing, the notorious filibusterer. Willing's reference, however, was to Phillipe de Rocheblave, the British representative at Kaskaskia who had learned the art of frontier fighting from Charles Langlade during the French and Indian War. Clark knew Rocheblave's reputation, and upon entering Kaskaskia he promptly loaded the gentleman with irons, confiscated his property, and locked him in a hog pen. Rocheblave was soon released from his shackles, and Governor Henry later directed that his property should be returned, but not before Clark had made his views clear and offered a preview of his behavior once the principal villain fell into his hands.⁴⁰

When Hamilton realized the futility of continued fighting and asked Clark in the traditional manner for terms, he received an unexpected response. In Clark's mind he deserved no terms at all. One does not offer terms to the allies of savages

³⁸ Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 182; Hamilton to Shelburne, April 9, 1782, Burton Collection; Hamilton to Haldimand, July 6, 1781, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 501-502; Schieffelin, "Narrative," 188.

³⁹ "Memoir," in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 283.

⁴⁰ Clark to Henry, February 3, 1779, in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 97; "Bowman's Journal," *ibid.*, 159; James Willing to Clark, September 1, 1778, *ibid.*, 67.

who have forsaken the rules of civilization. In reply to Hamilton's request for an explanation, Clark spoke frankly: now that he had within his grasp the greatest part of the Indian partisans from Detroit, he "wanted an excuse to put them to Death or other ways treat them as I thought proper that the Cries of the Widows and Fatherless on the Frontiers that they had occasioned now Required their Blood from my Hands" Hamilton tried a feeble defense, but Clark was not listening. He ended the conversation with a burst of passion: "my blood glows within my veins to think on the crueltys your Indian parties have committed" ⁴¹ Of course Clark was often unrestrained in his speech. He acted and spoke boldly, and one can assume that he did not always mean all that he said. He did finally offer Hamilton and his men terms, very broad ones it is true, but terms nonetheless; yet, there would seem no reason not to take him at his word. Circumstances led him to make concessions, even to moderate his views of Hamilton, but he never ceased to think of him as the "Hair Buyer" or to believe that Indian warfare, abetted by the British, constituted a breach of civil order.

How deeply Clark felt became evident after Hamilton's surrender. He first permitted the British and French captives who had taken no part in Indian depredations to leave for Detroit; then, despite the formal capitulation, Clark ordered all the prisoners who had accompanied Indians on their raids to be put in irons—neck, hands, and feet. Only after a vigorous protest by Hamilton was the order left unexecuted. Without the intervention of the townspeople, a number of the French partisans would have been hanged. Hamilton believed that his own life had been threatened, and on one occasion he fled from his quarters. In time Clark softened. Hamilton's gentlemanly bearing and apparent rectitude led Clark to grant him and his men the freedom of the fort, but he did not change his views on Hamilton's ultimate guilt. Consequently, on March 8, 1779, the lieutenant-governor and twenty-six of his followers were dispatched under guard to Williamsburg to face the wrath of the Kentucky frontier posts on the way and, at the end of their journey, the stern justice of Thomas Jefferson. ⁴²

⁴¹ Quotations, in order, from "Memoir," in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 287; "Journal," February 24, 1779, *ibid.*, 167-68; see also "Bowman's Journal," *ibid.*, 160; Clark, *Sketch*, 72.

⁴² Barnhart, *Henry Hamilton*, 187-88, 190-91; "Memoir," in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 289; Hamilton to Haldimand, July 6, 1781, *Haldimand Papers*, IX, 505.

In the meantime Clark continued to press his strategy against Detroit. He believed the reduction of that post necessary for the success of the revolutionary cause in the West, but, more importantly, he argued that Hamilton's policies were being continued by his successors. If anything, the situation had become worse. Now, when Indians arrived with prisoners or scalps, the fort magazines were thrown open for them to choose their own rewards. Hamilton's defeat and capture had merely raised "the price now given for the Blood of the Innocent women & Children on our Frontiers." Clark had turned the "Hair Buyer" over to higher authority, but he continued to struggle with the menace of "savagery."⁴³

Hamilton's ordeal began at Chesterfield, Virginia, when an order arrived from Jefferson directing that the lieutenant-governor and the Indian partisan William La Mothe should be confined in chains. Two days later, June 16, 1779, they reached Williamsburg, wet, hungry, and tired, and were forced to wait in the rain in front of the governor's palace while the officer in charge reported. They were then deposited in the common jail. Here Hamilton and La Mothe found Philip DeJean, the Detroit justice of the peace, who had reached Williamsburg some days before. The following day the prisoners were adorned with full sets of irons. Hamilton claimed that his weighed over eighteen pounds. He remained fettered for two months until his gout flared and forced the jailer to replace the irons with handcuffs. At the end of August the prisoners were joined by Jehu Hay, a deputy Indian agent, and four other officers. Early in October the irons were removed completely and the prisoners offered parole to Hanover Courthouse. La Mothe and DeJean accepted, but the others declined and remained in the Williamsburg jail. Early in the spring of 1780 Schieffelin and Rocheblave managed to escape, and in June Maisonville took his own life. The last two prisoners, Hamilton and Hay, were sent in August to Chesterfield where their confinement was less onerous. After refusing two paroles, they accepted the third in October, 1780, and made their way to New York.⁴⁴

Jefferson, the newly elected governor of Virginia, accepted the popular view of Hamilton's role in the frontier conflict and as a consequence refused to grant the lieutenant-governor the

⁴³ Clark to Jonathan Clark, January 16, 1780, in James, *Clark Papers*, VIII, 383.

⁴⁴ The fullest account of Hamilton's confinement can be found in Jaebker, "Henry Hamilton," chapter VII.

treatment commonly accorded a prisoner of war. Despite his formal capitulation to Clark, Hamilton suffered even more severely than a common criminal. In time, his confinement became less stringent, and he gained his freedom ultimately in keeping with the eighteenth-century procedures governing prisoner exchange. In the face of circumstances, prudent advice, and a British threat of retaliation, Jefferson had relented, but he continued to believe that Hamilton's behavior merited in strict justice the humiliation of heavy irons and close confinement. He recorded his views in an order issued by the Virginia Council; in an exchange of letters with General William Phillips, the officer in charge of British prisoners residing in the Charlottesville area; and in the comments that formed a prominent part in his correspondence during the time of Hamilton's imprisonment.

On the day that Hamilton reached Williamsburg, the Virginia Council, in an order written probably by Jefferson, made public its determination concerning the treatment that the lieutenant-governor and his aide might expect. The council accused Hamilton of "inciting the Indians to perpetuate their accustomed cruelties" and of offering "standing rewards for scalps, but . . . none for prisoners." To implement his policy, he had called a great Indian council to gather at the mouth of the Tennessee River. The Americans found substantiation for their case in one of Hamilton's proclamations left by the warriors with the bodies of frontier patriots after one of their raids. In addition, the council accused DeJean and La Mothe of aiding Hamilton in inciting this frontier crime wave. After listing the usual British and Indian atrocities against the western settlements, Jefferson took the occasion to expand his indictment to cover the British handling of prisoners. On this issue "the conduct of the British officers, civil and military, has in its general tenor, through the whole course of this war been savage and unprecedented among civilized nations."⁴⁵ In making his case, of course, Jefferson seized upon every possible item to put the British in the worst light. In stretching the argument to include the "general tenor" of British attitudes, he had done a great deal more. He had, in fact, revealed how profound he believed the argument between Britain and America had become. Hamilton symbolized this contest between liberty and tyranny, civilization and savagery.

⁴⁵ "Order of the Virginia Council Placing Henry Hamilton and Others in Irons," June 16, 1779, in Boyd, *Papers of Jefferson*, III, 292-94.

In his discussion with General Phillips, Jefferson became enmeshed in the issue of Hamilton's capitulation. Believing, as did Jefferson, that Hamilton had placed himself beyond the law, Clark had demanded unconditional surrender, but he had not possessed sufficient force to insist. As a result, Hamilton had obtained terms and had marched out of Vincennes with military honors. The terms, however, did not touch upon the later treatment of the prisoners, nor did they prohibit confinement in the common jail or the wearing of irons. Jefferson interpreted this absence of specific limitations as a license to impose the kind of punishment he believed Hamilton richly deserved. Phillips argued Hamilton's innocence of the charges and maintained that in any case he could not, because of the formal submission with terms, be dealt with so severely. Opinion at the Continental Congress supported Jefferson's view. So also on first consideration did General Washington, but Washington sought professional advice and found that Jefferson's cogent reasoning flew in the face of international usage and would very likely provoke British retaliation. Hence Jefferson changed his policy but not his opinions.⁴⁶

After his early statement in the council's order, Jefferson dropped any reference to scalp buying. Apparently he lost confidence in the testimony of John Dodge, upon whom the council had relied heavily and who had in great measure been responsible for spreading misinformation about Hamilton's activities. Without Dodge, the scalp-buying accusation rested on thin evidence; consequently, Jefferson stressed Hamilton's guilt for mistreating prisoners and inciting the Indians to "savage" war.

Jefferson made his point with stark simplicity. By instigating the warriors' rage to kill, Hamilton himself became a murderer, in fact little different from a "savage." Because Jefferson identified a just society with nature, the issue involved not only the integrity of civil order but the very sanctity of nature. It was not simply the cruelty and brutality of native warfare that

⁴⁶ William Phillips to Jefferson, July 5, 1779, in Boyd, *Papers of Jefferson*, III, 25-28; Washington to Jefferson, July 10, August 6, November 23, 1779, *ibid.*, 30, 61, 198-99; Jefferson to Washington, July 17, October 2, 1779, *ibid.*, 40-42, 99-100; Jefferson to Phillips, July 22, October 2, 1779, *ibid.*, 44-49, 97-99; Washington to Robert Howe, September 22, 1779, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *Writings of George Washington* . . . (39 vols., Washington, 1931-1944), XVI, 319. Charles Lee, a professional soldier, was one of the few Americans to register an objection to Jefferson's interpretation; see *The Lee Papers, 1782-1811* (*Collections of the New York Historical Society*, Vol. VII; New York, 1875), 75-77.

repelled him, it was that the "savages" in their manner of fighting sought "to extinguish human nature." In response to this threat, he felt no obligation to adhere to the hallowed usages of eighteenth-century war. He had, in effect, reduced the conflict between Britain and America to metaphysics, an insight far removed from the world of politics and prudent policy. In justification for this act of reductionism, he might, with consistency, have appealed to the revolutionary ideology that formed such an important part of American thinking and feeling in the 1770s and 1780s. Jefferson's own expression of that position had not only condensed the principles of political order to a few simple maxims but had couched them in terms of almost ethereal abstraction. If one could believe Jefferson's Declaration, Americans were engaged in recreating the human polity on a scale never attempted in the past, an effort so delicate and fraught with danger as to incite widespread fear of conspiracy. When the principal conspirators, the British, brought in the native warriors, Jefferson's fears were confirmed. The British attacked American liberty and sought the establishment of an unnatural despotism in the New World. The Indians represented nature denied, an unenlightened and "savage" condition of life that rejected the fulfillment of human existence for which the Americans struggled so manfully. Allied, those two forces constituted for Jefferson an intolerable menace to civilization. Thus he felt fully justified in his unorthodox treatment of Hamilton.⁴⁷ But Jefferson's tendency to reduce issues to their common denominator obscured the ambivalence in the careers of Hamilton and Clark over the question of the Indian.

In the deepest sense, of course, Hamilton and Jefferson held identical views of the native people. Both believed that Indians were "savages," that their mode of life was the antithesis of civilization. Hamilton's nagging anxieties over his complicity in the attacks on the frontier, his repeated and futile efforts to conform native warfare to British standards, disclosed the importance he attached to the differentiation between civilization and "savagery." His anxieties dissolved at least partially, however, when he confronted real Indians. True enough, the romantic strain in his approach to the continent and its inhabitants led to an emphasis on the violence inherent

⁴⁷ Jefferson to Theodorick Bland, June 8, 1779, in Boyd, *Papers of Jefferson*, II, 287; Jefferson to Phillips, July 22, 1779, *ibid.*, III, 46.

in "savagery," but his portraits of individual Indians transcended that generalization. They revealed a genuine interest and even sympathy for the native people. One should not be surprised, therefore, that Hamilton became an adept practitioner of forest diplomacy and so readily donned native costume or joined the war dance. The American continent had made its mark on Hamilton and left him deeply divided in his loyalties.

Not so George Rogers Clark. He never doubted where his loyalties lay. They resided with the revolutionary cause and the frontier people he strove so mightily to defend. And he knew his enemies. These were the "savage" Indians and the conscienceless British who aided their bloody assaults on the white settlements. How then can one explain his curious affinity for native ways? Was it merely that he suffered the fate of all Indian-haters: he became what he despised? This is very likely true, though in Jeffersonian terms the process might have been described differently. An account of Clark's career in the West read like living proof of Jefferson's perception that civilization and "savagery" constituted opposite images of each other. As the frontiersman plunged into the wilderness and left civil ways behind, he risked transformation into the "savage" who opposed him. In defense of civility he became a "savage." Jefferson saw the first point, the defense of civility, but missed the second; hence, he failed to recognize that his friend Clark might have been an even more dangerous enemy of human nature than the "Famous Hair Buyer General."