



Editorial

YESTERDAY I stole time away from my desk to watch the inauguration of the forty-fourth president of the United States. In his speech, Barack Obama touched on a host of challenges facing the nation. Dominating our current view, as it does this issue of *NEQ*, is the economy.

New England's early seventeenth-century immigrants confronted a resistant, unforgiving environment out of which they arduously fashioned a subsistence. By swapping goods and services, tallying accounts as they went, families sustained their rural communities. In the process, as James McWilliams shows, they built a network that, by mid-century, would serve merchant entrepreneurs whose successes were grounded in the labors of women as much as of men. A century later, as Jacqueline Carr details, almost two thousand women emerged from the shadows in post-Revolutionary War Boston (1780–1830) to make their mark on its burgeoning economy. Exploiting techniques familiar to their male counterparts—apprenticeships, mentoring, advertising, family connections, legal instruments—the women stamped their enterprises with a special appreciation for the value of gentility.

While certain single women and widows were achieving or maintaining a middling status in Boston, a class of young men who had gathered to support the demands of a swelling urban prosperity were growing nostalgic for the countryside they had abandoned. Speaking to their complaints and constraints, pioneering architects proposed modest suburban dwellings, accessible by train, as an alternative to the city's lodging houses. Intervening in that conversation, Maura D'Amore argues, Henry David Thoreau envisioned an expansive mindscape that would mediate between urban realities and country dreams, thus restoring meaning to a nation disoriented by material desire. George Perkins Marsh had no truck with Thoreau's spiritual approach to practical problems. A government bureaucrat, he did not believe that man and nature were equal partners in a grand plan; in his view, "Adam" had been granted dominion over the

environment, which he had all too often exerted for the benefit of short-sighted economic gain to the detriment of the common good. Marsh's recommendation: informed and responsible regulation.

Returning to the post-Revolutionary era, Robert Gross reconsiders Shays's Rebellion, or the Regulation. As the nation struggled to pay for the war it had won, the fundamentals of an emergent democracy were at stake: idealism, equity, balance, self-interest, loyalty, community, government's role. Keenly felt were the effects of burdensome taxes, foreclosures, grassroots protests, rapacious speculators, untried leaders, and an international credit crisis as well as a raft of unrelated factors. The March issue concludes with two rare and remarkable mid-seventeenth-century religious autobiographies, not hitherto published. William and Elisabeth Adams's narratives dramatically reveal their conviction that success in the material world is of no value if one disregards God's bounty: that he "gives poor Sinners liberty to plead for y^r Lives" in this world and in the next.



Returning to the economy of our own day, we at *NEQ* have cause to celebrate. Your generosity has resulted in our most successful annual appeal ever, and this in quite difficult economic times. We are honored by your commitment and thank you for it.

—LINDA SMITH RHOADS