The Founding Fathers and their Dysfunctional Families: The American Revolution on the silver screen

Why are Hollywood movies about the American Revolution consistently terrible? Why has this signal event, the formative moment in United States history, yielded no great works of the cinema? Around the globe, wars and revolutions have been the subject of many of our most remarkable films; think of silent classics such as Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* and Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, or think of Jean Renoir's *Grand Illusion* and Gillo Pontecorvo's *The Battle of Algiers* from the sound era. Momentous events or transformative periods in American history—the Civil War, the Great Depression, World War II, the Cold War—have generated profound and influential films, from *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind* to *Modern Times* and *Dr. Strangelove*. And this is not to mention an entire genre, the "Western," a mainstay of the cinema for decades, with many terrible but some terrific films (*Stagecoach*, *High Noon*, *Rio Bravo*, *Shane*, *McCabe and Mrs. Miller*, *Little Big Man*, *Unforgiven*, and I could go on) constructed around our collective fantasies of an American historical era.

By contrast, just try to conjure up a successful movie, or even a pretty good movie, about the American Revolution.

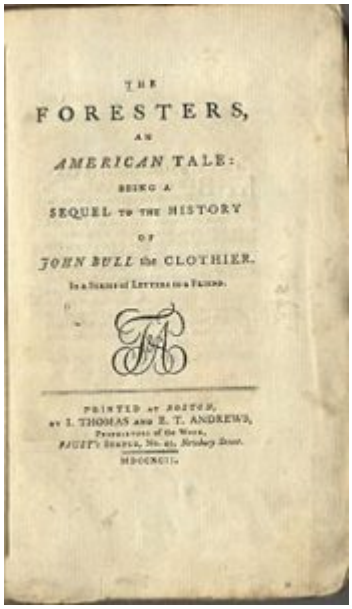
I'll give you a minute …

… thought of any yet?

Admittedly, the pickings are slim. Some of the choices include Mel Gibson as that rare South Carolina plantation owner for whom free blacks labor voluntarily, in the pornographically violent *The Patriot* (2000); Al Pacino as an upstate New York boatman and fur trapper, sounding oddly like a mafia don from the Lower East Side, fighting redcoats along the cliffs (?!) of Yorktown in *Revolution* (1985); the singing John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Benjamin Franklin writing the Declaration of Independence in *1776* (1972); and Cary Grant as a deerskin-clad backwoods buddy of Tom Jefferson, yearning for the wilds of Kentucky in *The Howards of Virginia* (1940). Perhaps it needn't be said that Oscars failed to rain down on these rhinestones in the rough. None of them has made anybody's "Best Of" or "Top Ten" lists.

In the most recent edition of my American Revolution lecture course, I took a swipe at this question by hosting an evening's screening of excerpts from a series of these movies, and I invited my students to join me in thinking about this puzzle. To prepare myself, I watched all four of the movies listed above in advance, plus two additional titles: *The Devil's Disciple* (1959), starring Kirk Douglas, Burt Lancaster, and Laurence Olivier (as General John Burgoyne), as well as the recent HBO television series, *John Adams* (2008), based on the best-selling biography by David McCulloch and starring Paul Giamatti in the title role. From these six cinematic versions of the American Revolution, I selected comparable scenes for my students to watch. Here are some of the tentative conclusions we reached from this "reading" of our cinematic culture.

First, it seems as though the difficulty of making a good American Revolution movie has something to do with the challenge of finding a plot for the Revolution that can be arranged in the form of a family drama. Hollywood's historical dramas tend to reduce complex processes to a small number of characters who can coherently depict the course of events, often through the intertwined lives of a family or two. The Civil War, of course, is perfect for this—"brother against brother" in a fratricidal family drama. But other historical eras have been readily adapted to this format as well; the collective sufferings of Americans in the Dust Bowl and the Depression were conveyed through the tribulations of the Joad family in John Ford's version of *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940), and even the twisted psychic carnage of the Cold War is grounded in a family drama in John Frankenheimer's *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962).



THE
FORESTERS,
AN
AMERICAN TALE:
BEING A
SEQUEL TO THE HISTORY
OF
JOHN BULL the CLOTHIER.
In a Series of Letters to a Friend.

PRINTED AT BOSTON,
BY I. THOMAS AND E. T. ANDREWS,
Proprietors of the Work,
FAUST'S STATUE, No. 45, Newbury Street.
MDCCXCII.

Title page from Jeremy Belknap, The Foresters: An American Tale (Boston, 1792). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

The problem for this device in depicting the American Revolution lies in American's squeamishness in accepting that the American Revolution was a form of patricide—a revolt against paternalistic government symbolized in the fatherly figure of the king. Other genres of war film (WW II for instance) don't share this problem, for in these cases, the enemy is external to the American family, and whatever tensions families endure as a result of war—as in, for instance, William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946)—are not what the war itself is about, not what caused the war. Hollywood dramas are a very conservative genre, and this is part of what plagues movies about the Revolution. It seems impossible to depict a family drama in which patricide goes unpunished, or indeed, is glorified and rewarded in the founding of a prosperous new nation.

This difficulty, in fact, is not unique to Hollywood or to film as a medium. It goes back to one of the earliest fictional representations of the American Revolution, a quasi-novel called *The Foresters*, written in 1792 by Jeremy Belknap, a Boston clergyman and founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society. In this clumsy allegory, Belknap sets up the plot as a conflict within the household of John Bull, a family that includes Bull's wife (Parliament) and mother (the Church of England). But the causes of trouble, the colonies, are not depicted as the *children* of John Bull but rather as *servants* in his household, with names like Walter Pipeweed (Virginia, of course) and John Codline (Massachusetts). Therefore, when the servants revolt against John Bull and set up their own independent household, nothing more than a contractual relationship has been destroyed, not blood or family ties—no patricide here. And not much drama either. I don't recommend adding *The Foresters* to your syllabi. It remains un-optioned for the movies.

Frontispiece from Jeremy Belknap The Foresters: An American Tale (Boston, 1792). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

After this bad start, American fiction about the Revolution has not improved a great deal. Few of America's canonical authors have taken up the subject or the period as a setting for their work—James Fenimore Cooper's early novel, *The Spy* (1821), is among the few exceptions. Some of the best, and best-loved, fiction about the American Revolution is aimed at children, such as Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain* (1943), which (like much of children's literature) largely avoids the patricide problem by making its protagonist an orphan. In Forbes's plot, Johnny Tremain can be slowly drawn into Boston's rebel cause, defying the Tory family of his maternal uncle but not, of course, his father, a French Huguenot émigré long since dead.

Like most American Revolution fiction, movies about the subject tend to skirt the patricide issue. The only one of the six films I screened that addresses the problem directly, even in a symbolic way, is Al Pacino's *Revolution*, which was (perhaps no accident) made in England. *Revolution* depicts an actual event from the Revolution in its opening scene, the violent destruction of the equestrian statue of George III in New York's Hanover Square. The New York crowd that symbolically murders the monarch seems to be unanimous in its carnivalistic fury, but the scene is utterly bewildering to Pacino's character, Tom Dobb. Dobb is an American Everyman figure, who arrives in his boat at the New York dockside, having sailed down the Hudson with his furs, just in time to see the bronze head of George III tossed into the water and for the crowd to commandeer his boat for the coming conflict. Tom Dobb has nothing against the king, though, or against anybody else for that matter. He just wants to go about his business, raise his son, and stay out of harm's way. He repeatedly insists, "It's not my fight!"

What finally turns the Revolution into Tom Dobb's fight is when authority figures in the British Army start acting like bad fathers. Dandified British officers humiliate Dobb, using him as a kind of human fox-hunt prey. After a

series of confusing reversals, Tom Dobb's own son is pressed into the British Army as a drummer boy, where he encounters a villainous sergeant played by Donald Sutherland. Sutherland has a son of his own in the drummer corps, of whom he is quite protective, but he and a senior officer brutalize Tom Dobb's son, and Dobb is forced to rescue his boy. Now the Revolutionary War is Tom Dobb's fight as well. His own son has been threatened and abused, so the war becomes, for Dobb, an exercise in vengeance, aimed at the sergeant who now stands for the twisted and misguided paternal authority that is British military government. When Dobb's personal vengeance is finally won at Yorktown, the war ends as well, and Dobb and son can get on with their free and independent lives.

I'm leaving out a great deal of subplot in this summary, including a series of remarkably lucky encounters between Pacino and Nastassia Kinski (who plays the fiery rebel daughter of New York Irish loyalists) and an extended quasi-mystical healing sequence among Huron Indians. But as confusing a movie as Pacino's *Revolution* can be, it somehow hits upon the formula that most of these other Revolution movies discover as well, a way to make patricide acceptable in a family drama.

The key is this—an actual father must have his authority challenged and his children harmed by a symbolic authoritarian father figure in the British military or government. The brutal mistreatment of the true son by the false (British) father then allows the real (American) father to demonstrate what true "patriotism" is by fighting against the false fathers to reinstate a rightful form of paternal authority. Through this convoluted plot mechanism, *Revolution* can embrace a form of patricide as a righteous cause without undermining the ultimate validity and sanctity of a father's authority over and duty to his family. Revolutionary and conservative, all at the same time.

Convoluted as it is, some version of this basic plot structure lies at the heart of most other movies that present the Revolution as a family drama. It's pretty obvious in *The Patriot,* where Mel Gibson plays Benjamin Martin, a gussied up version of Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox" of South Carolina's revolutionary history. Gibson's Martin is a patriarch of nearly biblical proportions; a widower with an unaccountably large brood of children, from grown sons to toddlers underfoot, he also presides over a plantation full of devoted African servants—free men and women, of course, not slaves—who are clearly part of Martin's expansive family. As a veteran of the Seven Years' War, Gibson's character has committed too much violence for one lifetime and has sworn off it. As South Carolina prepares for another war, this time against Britain, Benjamin Martin follows Tom Dobb's lead—"it's not my fight"—or rather, "fighting's not right."

But this is a Mel Gibson movie, so the pacifism lasts only for the blink of an eye. The war becomes Benjamin Martin's fight in exactly the same way it did for Tom Dobb, only quicker. His rambunctious grown son Gabriel (Heath Ledger) joins the South Carolina rebels. When the British Army comes past the Martin

plantation, Gabriel is captured. He gives himself up honorably, but when another of Martin's sons (Thomas) tries to rescue the brother, Thomas is brutally murdered by—yes, you guessed it—a sadistic British officer. Utter mayhem ensues, in the form of Mel Gibson's revenge. The film can't end, despite buckets of blood and gore, until Benjamin Martin takes personal vengeance on the sadistic officer, whose reign of terror engulfs not just Martin's son but a whole village at prayer in church, in a scene borrowed from a historic Nazi atrocity in France—actual British atrocities in the Revolutionary War being nowhere near flamboyant enough for today's demanding movie-goer.

Like *Revolution*, *The Patriot* has other weirdnesses too numerous to mention, including a "native" idyll to match the Huron scenes in *Revolution*, namely, a happy coastal Gullah community where Gibson and family rest and recuperate from all the stress of wartime, only a short distance from their backcountry plantation—think "Club Med with knee breeches." There is also a subtle but persistent representation of Gibson's well-known if eccentric Roman Catholic faith. Benjamin Martin and his fellow rebels frequently hide out in a place they call "the old Spanish mission" (in eighteenth-century South Carolina?), which explains why their rosy back-lit swamp gatherings often feature a cross standing mistily nearby. But most of these strange features are carried along and justified by the much deeper oddity at the core of this and other American Revolution films, that the war was fought against bad fathers—tyrants—in order to make good fathers free to be true patriarchs.

A more complex and fully developed version of the family story of the Revolution can be found in *The Howards of Virginia* (1940), directed by Frank Lloyd and starring Cary Grant as Matt Howard. Like Gibson's character in *The Patriot*, Matt Howard's experience of the Revolution was shaped by the Seven Years' War. His father was killed, leaving Matt an orphan, so that the problem of patricide is never directly part of the plot when Revolutionary politics come to Virginia. However, the frontier-loving Howard (here's where you have to imagine Cary Grant in a coonskin cap, relishing the back-slapping company of moonshine-swigging toothless trappers) marries Jane Peyton. Jane's elite and effete tidewater family obviously disapproves of Howard's uncouth manners and backcountry aspirations. (Jane's not too sure about it herself, but who can resist Cary Grant?)

The patricidal aspect of the plot is muted, as the patriarch of the Peyton family, whom Howard must defy, is not the father of Jane Peyton but her older brother Fleetwood (played by Sir Cedric Hardwicke, the distinguished British actor). From their elitist attitudes and snobbish behavior, one expects the Peyton family to be Tories, but they're not. Turns out that *everyone* in Virginia is in favor of independence, it's just that some are less radical and leveling about it than others. Given that the film was made in 1940, I suspect that the international politics made Hollywood squeamish about depicting Britons as out-and-out villains. No one would sign a Lend-Lease Pact with the Nazified British martinets of *The Patriot*. But in this film, we never actually meet any British soldiers or fighting Tories.

To accommodate these constraints, the family plot of *The Howards of Virginia* becomes very strange. Here, the false father figure does no direct damage to the true father's son. Instead, he somehow manages to pass a physical deformity, a kind of family taint, onto the next generation. The chief feature of Fleetwood Peyton, the quality that lets us know he's a bad guy (though not actually a Tory) is that he has a pronounced limp, in a world where everyone else, and especially Cary Grant's Matt Howard, is vigorously able-bodied. The camera dwells lovingly on Grant moving giant boulders with his bare hands, hauling great wagonloads of furniture by himself, and performing other feats of strength and patriotic manliness. But when Grant's first son is born, by some sort of twisted Lamarckian logic, he seems to have inherited Uncle Fleetwood's gimpy foot—the boy limps. Consequently, Cary Grant can barely bring himself to look at the boy and instead dotes on his second son, a strapping and healthy lad like his father.

The climax of the movie comes when the father and sons have headed off to war, and in a moment of crisis, the limping elder son proves to be the military hero for the Continental Army. Thus Grant learns that a lame foot can hide a noble heart and that, in a larger sense, Americans won't be tainted by their English inheritance—a glorious future lies ahead for the Anglo-Saxon race. The limping English father figure need not be killed off after all, just set aside from his position of power and helped along by his vigorous American frontier relations.

By the time (1959) and in the place (London) that our next film, *The Devil's Disciple,* was produced, the burden of finding a plot appropriate for and acceptable by American audiences seemed to be fairly light. In addition, the fact that the movie was based on a play written by George Bernard Shaw in the 1890s seems to free it from these constraints as well. But for all that, *The Devil's Disciple* presents us with yet another family drama. Kirk Douglas stars as the title character, Richard Dudgeon by name, a rebel seemingly without a cause, who owes not a little to Marlon Brando's character in *The Wild One* (1953).

> Female Admirer: "Johnny, what are you rebelling against?"
>
> Brando as Johnny: "Whaddya got?"

In *The Devil's Disciple*, the American rebellion seems like some kind of colossal misunderstanding, a stupid and incompetent blunder, with no specified origin. Unlike the rest of these films, in *The Devil's Disciple*, we hear no crowd noise or stagey debates about "taxation without representation." Kirk Douglas is in rebellion against the hidebound foolishness of the world—repressed New England Puritans on one side, ignorant British soldiers on the other. Douglas's father is hanged as a rebel, but by mistake; he was nothing of the kind, just a farmer who lost his temper at the wrong place and time. Douglas had no love for his father but seeks vengeance as a matter of personal temperament—he steals the body from the gallows for the adventure of

it all and leaves it to the preacher to give it a proper burial.

Burt Lancaster's character, a Puritan minister with the unlikely name of Anthony Anderson (not many Anthonys or Andersons in colonial New England), is initially a pacifist—it's not his fight either. The preacher just wants to avoid trouble. But he gets in trouble by standing up for simple decency and running afoul of the blundering underlings in the British Army. A warrant for Lancaster's arrest goes out, but Kirk Douglas, mistaken for the preacher in yet another British blunder, is taken instead. And so, when an innocent (though not all *that* innocent) man has been wrongly arrested in his place, the Revolution finally becomes Lancaster's fight. He joins the rebels attacking Burgoyne's army in order to win Douglas's release before the soldiers hang him too.

All the while, Laurence Olivier as General Burgoyne looks on with ironic detachment. Burgoyne can't believe the stupidity—from the British high command's poor strategic decisions to the incompetent soldiers who serve under him—that has gotten him into this dreadful place from which there is no way out. In the end, the film suggests, no one is really in charge. There is no father figure worth obeying or defying, nor any patriarchal morality to enforce. But in a rudderless world, it's still best to do the decent and honorable thing. Lancaster takes up Douglas's cause, essentially a personal cause, because Douglas has brains and wit and spirit and vitality, and these are worth fighting for.

The fact that the story is so far removed from the constraints that hobble the Hollywood Am-Rev films makes *The Devil's Disciple* the best of the lot. It has the capacity to surprise and to draw the audience into moral dilemmas and dramatic situations without obvious and inevitable resolutions. It's the Revolution movie most worth putting in your Netflix queue, perhaps because it cares the least about getting the American Revolution story "right" in a way that an American audience will accept.

All the movies I've discussed so far are fictional dramas, attempting to tell an American Revolution story largely through the actions of invented characters, interspersed with real events and actual figures in the traditional fashion of historical fiction. But film has often been used to dramatize real events in the lives of historical figures, with varying degrees of success. I'm not talking about Ken Burns-style documentaries, with talking-head historians, cameras swirling around still pictures or artifacts, and moving quotations from authentic sources read by professional actors over tinkly piano music. I mean films in which professional actors are cast to play historical figures like, well, John Adams. And Benjamin Franklin. And Thomas Jefferson. As in the HBO series, *John Adams*, or in the musical *1776*.

The HBO series, with a large budget and many hours in which to tell its story, employs historical consultants, specialists in colonial American clothing, food, speech, architecture, music, wigs, warfare, and every other aspect of life that film can capture, in striving for authenticity. The musical *1776* did

little of this sort of thing. The stage set reproduction of Independence Hall in *1776* wasn't bad, and the costumes look about right, if a bit too clean. But really, if you're going to have Richard Henry Lee sitting backwards on a horse and singing himself off to Virginia to get approval for a resolution for "Independency Immediate-Lee!," then you're already throwing historical authenticity overboard into such deep water that no one cares if the wigs are authentic.

Then why is it that I like *1776* better? And more to the point, why do I think it does a better, more compelling, and more economical job than HBO's *John Adams* of teaching audiences some of the most fundamental aspects of the American Revolution?

First, let it be noted that, for all its vaunted authenticity, there are features that HBO's *John Adams* shares with *1776*. One is the similar way in which John Dickinson, the highly important delegate from Pennsylvania to the Continental Congress, is depicted. Though a major figure in the resistance movement (his *Letters from a Pennsylvania Farmer* [1768] outlined the rationale for the non-importation movement, and he wrote the final draft of the *Declaration of the Causes for Taking Up Arms* [1775]), Dickinson's strategic opposition to the movement in the Continental Congress to declare independence in July 1776 made him the perfect foil for both these films.

Since the dramatic design of both films requires that they stick close to the protagonists (and especially to John Adams), the presence of Dickinson in the Continental Congress and his opposition to Adams's plan makes it possible to use Dickinson as a stand-in for Tories and Loyalists in general. Not only are the arguments of Tories put into the mouth of Dickinson, making it easy for the heroic Adams to swat them down, but the character of Dickinson is made to appear effete, cowardly, feminized, precious, dependent—everything that the rough-and-ready, tempestuous Adams is not. Both films make a point of showing the wives and families of Adams and Jefferson—but not of Dickinson. In short, for both of these films, the stylized musical as well as the authentic docu-drama, conflict within the Revolution must be between good and evil—or at least between the right sort and the wrong sort of men—and they must not dwell on matters as complex as conflicting strategies between equally well-intentioned antagonists. Although these films are not inventing fictional main characters, they are both still beholden to fairly stereotypical plot expectations in the way they choose to depict real historical figures.

In that light, I prefer the obviously stylized *1776* to the sneakily inauthentic *John Adams*. I'm often asked by students and auditors in my American Revolution class if I've seen *John Adams*, and if so, didn't I love it? I suspect this is because the HBO filmmakers were trying to create the illusion that you were watching something that looked pretty much like the way it actually happened—movie-making after the Rankean fashion, *wie es eigentlich gewesen war* (how it really happened). But throughout the *John Adams* series, the demands of cinematic engagement require a curious kind of inauthenticity. To show

historical motivations on film seems to require that the protagonists experience all relevant events directly. *John Adams* opens with the Boston Massacre as an event, not that Adams hears about after the fact or reads about in the newspapers, but that he stumbles upon only seconds after the shots have been fired, so that he can touch the bleeding wounds of the dying townsmen. When war breaks out at Lexington and Concord, the battle wounded and dying are strewn about on the road in front of the Adams's farmstead in Braintree so that Abigail and the children can witness their sacrifice, despite the fact that this is miles and miles from Lexington and Concord, in the opposite direction from Boston.

Without this eyewitness, immediate experience, the film can't trust the audience to believe that Adams's defense of the British soldiers in the massacre trial or his movement to become a champion of independence has an adequate motivation. Similarly, when the dramatic moment of the massacre trial comes, the critical testimony is put in the mouth of an African American in Boston, as if it required a person discriminated against for his color to testify that white Boston workingmen were lying about the role of Captain Preston in the massacre. And as the Boston "tea party" is about to happen, Adams witnesses a man being tarred and feathered near the docks. Although plenty of mob brutality went on during the resistance movement, the so-called tea party was deliberately free of this sort of spontaneous crowd violence. East India Company tea, and that alone, was the target of destruction, making it patently clear that this was an organized act of protest and not a random crowd action.

The problem with *John Adams* is that the filmmakers are trying too hard to insert the work of professional historians into the script, to take the historical knowledge that scholars have created—like the role of African Americans in colonial urban life or the emotional impact of violence on politics—and depict it through live action. In narrative film, it's not enough to *tell* an audience some piece of information, the way a talking-head might do in a documentary. Movies have to *show*, not tell. But that's not what historians mostly do. Much of the time, perhaps most of the time, we tell. When I stand before my class to give a lecture on the cost and aftermath of the Seven Years' War or when I write an article about Phillis Wheatley and the American Revolution in Boston, I am not trying to create the illusion that my students or readers are actually watching history. I am using my stylized bag of historian's tools—numbers and graphs, archival images, quotations from some sources, summaries gleaned from others, comparative analysis, etc., to encourage readers or listeners to think about the past in the way that I'm thinking about it. I don't for a minute pretend that they're "seeing" or "reliving" the past, and they don't think they are either.

That's why I like *1776*. As soon as John Adams starts singing in the bell tower of Independence Hall in the opening scene or conducting an imagined duet with Abigail debating the importance of saltpeter and pins, we know we're in the presence of a stylized genre, with all the conventions of movie

musicals—different from but akin to the stylized conventions of academic history or the classroom lecture. No one imagines that Edmund Rutledge actually jumped up on the desks in Independence Hall and sang a dramatic song about New England's trade while acting out the selling of slaves on an auction block. But when the actor playing Rutledge, John Cullum, sings "Molasses to Rum to Slaves" in *1776* it leaves an indelible impression on anyone who sees it, and it *tells* them that slavery was a major issue in the Continental Congress's deliberations on independence, without leaving them thinking that they know, that they have *seen*, just what happened. Judging by the enthusiasm of some of my students, who were born long after the making of *1776*, this stylized telling of the American Revolution opens a curiosity about what actually happened, and how, and why. *John Adams,* by contrast, tends to cut off curiosity by leaving the audience thinking that they already know *wie es eigentlich gewesen war*, because they've seen it. And it leaves them open to an odd kind of disappointment when they learn that for all its vaunted authenticity, *John Adams* is just another costume drama.

Let's face it—our books and our lectures are actually better than movies at depicting and explaining what we can know about the past, because as a genre, they are better aligned with the limits of our knowledge about the past. When scholars write about the events of 1776, we don't say what color suit Thomas Jefferson wore when he wrote the Declaration or what Franklin said to Adams at dinner unless we actually know these things. If we don't know, nothing in the genre compels us to speculate, to make something up. But movies have to show this sort of thing and therefore have to invent it—in a movie, Jefferson's clothes cannot be colorless, and no one would believe a silent Franklin. For this reason, historical movies are better when, as in *1776* or *The Devil's Disciple*, they call attention to their own stylized qualities—to the fact that they are inventing and dramatizing in just the way that movies do, in a thoughtful and coherent way—rather than pretend, as *John Adams* does, that they are not. Now, if we can only come up with a good patricide plot, and some shady incompetent Patriots, and a kind-hearted and noble Tory or two …

Further Viewing:

The following YouTube links will allow readers to view for themselves some of the scenes described above. In this first clip, watch the sadistic British officer (Tavington) in *The Patriot* murder Mel Gibson's son. Literally, within seconds of the boy's dying in his arms, Gibson is up plotting his revenge.

Video clips of Pacino's *Revolution* are harder to find—the movie was not, shall we say, a hit—but you can watch the original theatrical trailer.

In this somewhat lengthy scene from *1776*, you'll see John Cullum's stunning rendition of Edmund Rutledge of South Carolina, making a mockery of New England hypocrisy, in "Molasses to Rum to Slaves."

And here you can find the opening scene of *John Adams*, as our hero witnesses

the immediate aftermath (and I really mean immediate—there's still smoke in the musket barrels) of the Boston Massacre.

And here is a trailer in which the technical authenticity of *John Adams* is explained in loving, if not ecstatic, detail, and Tom Hanks's poor history education is revealed.

Alas, *The Howards of Virginia* and *The Devil's Disciple* seem to have no YouTube presence whatsoever. But, for a riveting account of the massacre in Nazi-occupied France that was inserted into the plot of *The Patriot*, see Sarah Farmer, *Martyred Village: Commemorating the 1944 Massacre at Oradour-sur-Glane* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000).

This article originally appeared in issue 10.1 (October, 2009).

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