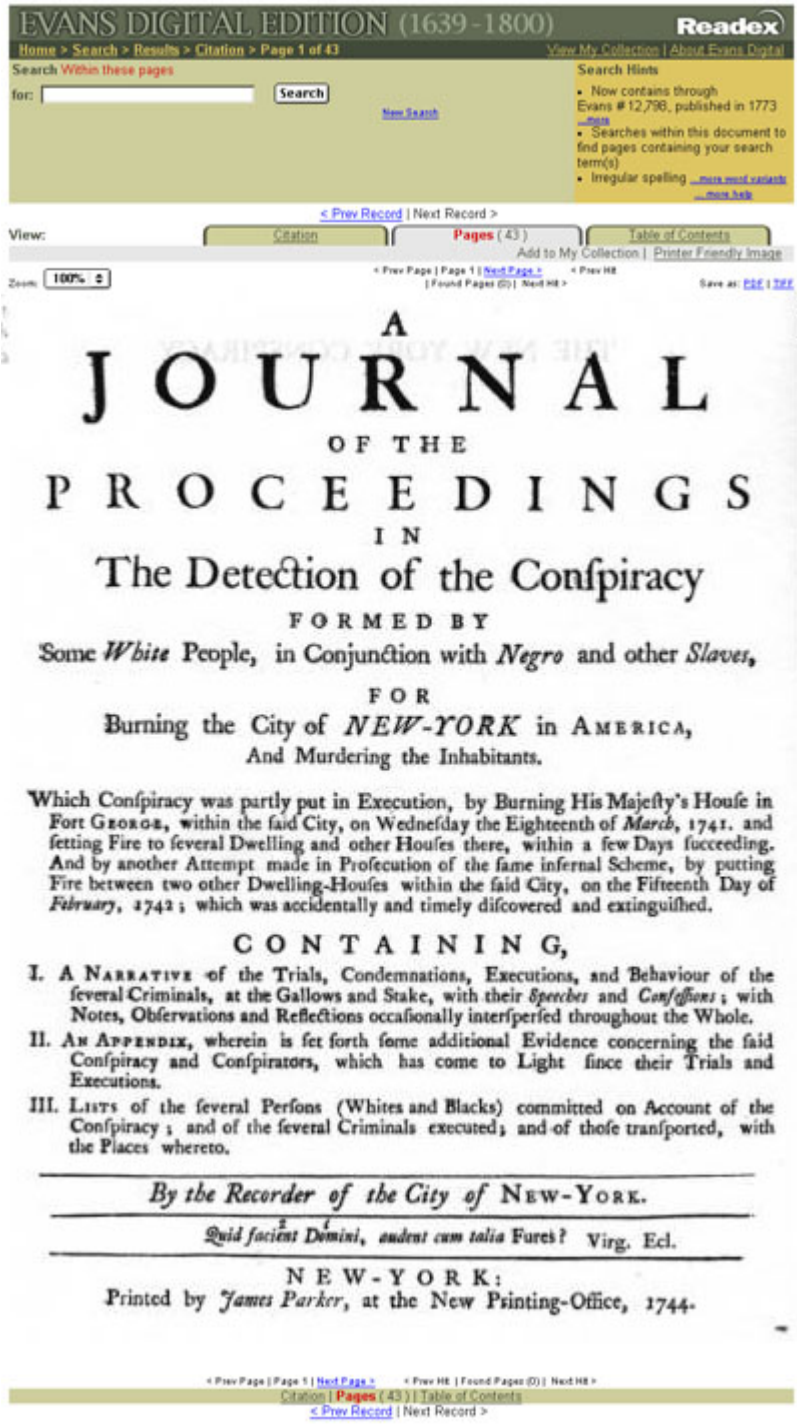
From Movable Type to Searchable Text



"People expect to find in American Memory every kind of historical documentation possible on every aspect of American history, and they communicate their surprise at discovering otherwise."

Early American History



During the early twentieth century, Charles McLean Andrews (1863-1943), the most influential early American historian of his time, spent several years in British archives making detailed calendars of documents relating to the British colonies. (The Carnegie Institution sponsored this research.) These documents were then unknown in the United States. His “organized attack” on British archives resulted in the publication of three thick volumes (in 1908 and 1912), which listed hundreds of archival collections. The books covered not only the most obvious repositories—the Public Record Office and the British Library—but local repositories as well.

While teaching as a Fulbright lecturer at Nankai University, Tianjin, China, this past academic year, I engaged in a similar quest, for much the same reason—to introduce and make primary sources available to a new audience: in my case, Chinese scholars and students of early American history. Nankai University is a fabulous place for an American historian: it has a good library, excellent Web resources (“JSTOR,” “Early American Imprints,” and “Early American Newspapers” among them), and seven U.S. historians on staff! But Nankai is nearly unique among Chinese universities in this regard. Soon after arriving in Tianjin, I attended a conference on American history that Nankai sponsored. Talking to Chinese colleagues, I discovered that their universities have few printed primary sources on early America, much less subscriptions to expensive online collections. Many do not even subscribe to “JSTOR,” that critical online collection of journals. The databases Nankai does have barely served the interests of the graduate students in my classes.

The Internet contains everything from newspapers and magazines to travel accounts, from maps to sheet music, from woodcuts to oil paintings, from novels to critical essays, from the proceedings of governmental bodies to the intimate details of family life.

To help students and faculty at Nankai and elsewhere in China, I began to compile a list of free, Web-based primary sources on early America (generously

extended to 1877). I wrote short descriptions of each Website, analogous to the essays Andrews composed in his archive bibliographies. Since I thought the key resources were relatively few, I believed the project would take a day or two—but after several months I had compiled a list of more than 1300 free sites containing tens of thousands of digitized primary sources, most of which I had had no idea could be found online. Early America is, verily, free and on the Web!

The list is being prepared for the Web and will be hosted by *Common-place*; you should be able to use it within the next year. It will be valuable to anyone interested in our early past, from university professors writing books to high-school students searching for materials for term papers to *Common-place* readers who want to explore old or new historical interests. It covers every discipline in American studies: history, literature, law, art, music, science, medicine, politics, religion, economics, anthropology, sociology, demography.

What did I find? The Internet contains everything from newspapers and magazines to travel accounts, from maps to sheet music, from woodcuts to oil paintings, from novels to critical essays, from the proceedings of governmental bodies to the intimate details of family life. Searchers can find materials on every imaginable topic: Civil War hospitals; the Salem witchcraft trials; Revolutionary and Civil War battles; proceedings of the Continental Congress, the Constitutional Convention, and the U.S. Congress; slave resistance; Indian battles; the abolition and proslavery movements; the beliefs and religious practices of Evangelicals and Unitarians; the Lewis and Clark expedition; westward migration; economic development and immigration; and the writings of Cotton Mather and Walt Whitman, to name but a few. In sum, there are far more primary sources on the Web than in public libraries (except the greatest) and community college libraries, though many fewer than in the libraries of research universities.

Hercule Poirot Searches the Internet

My Web bibliography grew as I gained proficiency in finding sources in obscure (and not-so-obscure) places. I began by looking at sites known by most U.S. historians—the Library of Congress's American Memory sites; the Making of America site; Yale Law School's Avalon Project site; and the Websites at universities noted for their commitment to digitizing U.S. history (Cornell, Michigan, Virginia, and Northern Illinois) and organizations whose digital databases I had used (Colonial Williamsburg, Maryland Archives). I went on to look at major cultural institutions like the Smithsonian Institution or Harvard, knowing that they had probably digitized something of interest. Google searches were trickier since Google looks for words, not concepts: putting *primary sources* in a search returns sites with those words but not necessarily sites with primary sources. Nonetheless, when all else failed, I tried Google searches. The sites these searches uncovered often contained primary sources or pointed the way (linked) to other sites and to detailed Web

bibliographies (like Voice of the Shuttle or compilations of home pages of history museums). Following these links to additional linked sites, my list began to grow exponentially.



The Web is a vast puzzle that would trip up Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot. I had to use all my historical skills to think like the folks who put digital materials on the Web. Many times I searched for sources I thought must be on the Web but came up empty. No obvious place proved fruitful. I often found what I was looking for when looking for something else. For example, I searched repeatedly for digital versions of *Pennsylvania Archives*, a multivolume collection of printed primary sources published from the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. But it appeared to be missing. I finally found a link to a free version of the *Pennsylvania Archives* when searching for Revolutionary War pension records at "footnote.com" (a subscription service geared to genealogists).

Other times, I had to find the right search terms. I knew, from a student paper completed for my Revolutionary-era course, that many Revolutionary War pension records had been digitized, mostly by genealogists. Because the veteran had to prove his service, the records often contained memories of enlistment, battles, camp life, and geographic movement after the war; widows who applied sometimes included thick social history details to prove their marriages. But repeated searches came up empty. Then, I changed the search terms from *revolutionary war pension records* to *revolutionary war pension applications*. That search reached a few digitized records. When I went to the root directory of those records, I discovered the USGenWeb Archives Pension Project: Revolutionary War, a collaborative genealogical project, which, as of this writing, contains transcripts (some just summaries) of over 1700 pension applications from all the states.



More often I figured out a strategy to uncover resources. After discovering that art museums often digitized their collections, I searched Websites of such institutions as the Metropolitan Museum of Art or the National Gallery; when I found an online index of art museums, I looked at all the listed institutions. I proceeded similarly when searching for documents about early universities. I had found several early university charters, records of boards of trustees, and catalogues. I figured that many others must be available on the Web. But I did not have a list of early colleges, particularly those begun in the post-Revolutionary decades. I discovered a 1962 article by Walter Eells from the *History of Education Quarterly* in "JSTOR" that reprinted a list the *Connecticut Journal* published in 1817, complete with founding dates of colleges. From there, I searched the libraries and archives of every listed institution (and their successor bodies) and discovered primary sources on

fourteen of the thirty-five schools, including all but one college (Columbia University) founded in the colonial era.

Perseverance sometimes paid off. Much searching had uncovered few digital primary sources on the early history of Jews in the United States. Surely the "people of the book" wanted to document, on the Web, their historical presence (however small) in early America. Granted, several Jewish history museums digitized pictures of liturgical implements—but I could find few texts. I searched all the obvious places, including the archives of the three major Jewish theological seminaries (Hebrew Union, Jewish Theological, and Yeshiva). One last try uncovered the right search terms at the Jewish Theological Seminary, whose library has digitized a large collection of early newspaper clippings and one hundred pamphlets, a third published by 1870. Since I first accessed this database, the Jewish Theological Seminary has redesigned their Website and has not yet assigned a URL to these databases. Such are the perils of anyone constructing a Web bibliography!

The *Common-place* Web bibliography will always be a work in progress. Since broken links like those for the Jewish Theological Seminary site abound, users will be able to report them on the Website. I know, moreover, that I missed much good material. Web calendars of archival collections demonstrate, for instance, the existence of many local Roman Catholic materials, but I found none digitized. Neither online compilations of New England town records nor transcripts of Quaker meeting records appear to be on the Web, despite the vast numbers that survive. They may be hiding in cyberspace, waiting to be found. Users will be invited to send in URLs and short descriptions of new sites and to write reviews of any of the listed sites. That way, the bibliography will become a vital, living, and growing resource.

What Digitized Primary Sources Tell Us about History and Memory

I learned a great deal about history and memory in contemporary America while looking for Websites. I would like to share some of my discoveries with readers of *Common-place*. When one looks at the list as a whole, one sees a vision of the history of North America from the colonial era through Reconstruction similar to that of college-level survey text books. But the Web is not a place where resources float in ether; they grow from the concerted efforts of hundreds of institutions and thousands of individuals. Putting materials on the Web is a time-consuming process: they must be discovered, digitized, indexed, and uploaded. Historians, archivists, librarians, curators, genealogists, and institutions like the Library of Congress all put historical sources on the Web. These individuals and institutions have competing interests and hold widely contrasting views of American history. As one looks in detail at Web primary sources, one senses great conflict and contests over the meaning of our past, over the historical memories they wish to sustain or suppress. Who holds

the keys to our history—historians, archivists, preachers, politicians, ordinary citizens?

I did not begin my search with preconceived ideas about the type of history I would seek, and I looked in many areas (like history of science) about which I knew little. Nonetheless, the list in its totality resembles the agenda historians (particularly those influenced by the "new social history") have followed over the past several decades. Web resources emphasize the social and cultural experience of ordinary people: their life stories, values, beliefs, politics, family relations. For instance, there are numerous writings on the Web by and about African Americans, Indians, and free white women. The proliferation of such sites reflects the urge (in the phrase of the 1960s) to do history "from the bottom up," which, in turn, grew out of historians' support of the civil rights and women's movements. Other subfields of social history are also well represented: histories of urban places, popular culture, warfare, religious practice, popular politics (particularly political campaigns), and social reforms (abolition and the women's movement).

Historians have increasingly turned to images—paintings, popular art, woodcuts, objects, maps, photographs—to explain the worldview, daily life, and beliefs of the country's rulers, ordinary folk, and subservient groups. (See, for instance, "Revolution in Print: Graphics in Nineteenth-Century America," the April 2007 issue of *Common-place*.) The Web is crammed with images. Not only can users find digital copies of works by Copley, Stuart, Audubon, and the Hudson River School, but they can also find popular Currier and Ives prints as well as George Caleb Bingham's political genre paintings. Thousands of early maps, starting in the sixteenth century, have been digitized. Searchers can find numerous photographs of Indian ceremonial objects and of African religious statues. Early photographs, particularly of the Civil War, are extraordinarily plentiful, including portraits, battle scenes, and cityscapes.

The "new social history," so widely practiced by American historians, followed the interests of the French Annales school more than those of the British "people's history" school, with its stress on class struggle. In its quest for the sources of social conflict, the latter tended to study workers, farm laborers, deviants (like criminals), and the poor. There are many fewer online primary sources about American farmers, deviants, and the poor (of whatever race) than about Indians or African Americans. British historians and archivists have placed far more primary materials about poverty and deviance on the Web than their American colleagues. Tellingly, materials on the Salem witches, the one thoroughly documented group of colonial deviants, provide rich materials about free women.

But surely one of the primary determinants of what ends up on the Web is less ideology than simply academic fashion. For example, quantifiable materials (probate inventories, population census manuscripts) are scarce. One can find

samples of censuses and transcripts from Plymouth Colony and probate inventories from Virginia but few other local examples. Such absence can be traced to the decline of quantitative history. Several decades ago, historians published many studies using probate inventories and censuses, but, by and large, the historical guild abandoned quantification a decade or more before the rise of the Internet.

Similarly, much of what does end up on the Web does so less out of any sense of civic obligation or educational engagement than out of the specific needs of specific researchers. My own labors demonstrate this. I needed Peter Force's voluminous and ill-indexed nine-volume set of documents from the pivotal years 1774-1776, called *American Archives*, for my work on farmers in the American Revolution. Since it is a set of great value to anyone studying the coming of the Revolutionary War, my colleagues at Northern Illinois University libraries and I were able to persuade the NEH to fund its digitization. These documents are now available at the American ArchivesWebsite.



Historians of science and medicine have placed extensive research materials on the Web. One can find medical texts (both European and American) and most of the works of world-famous scientists like Newton, Boyle, and Darwin on the Web. Early American scientists (though less well known than their European contemporaries) are well represented; works by Louis Agassiz and by Joseph Henry, for instance, have been digitized. Sites devoted to the social history of science and especially of medicine are more accessible to a general public: several sites examine Civil War hospitals and medicine or women doctors; those who want to learn about the work of a country physician can consult Patients' Voices in Early Nineteenth Century Virginia, which includes letters to two Fredericksburg doctors, 1816-1830.

Many others, with interests and politics far different than those of most academic historians, have placed primary sources on the Web. Genealogists and social historians are often interested in the same records (census records, land records, tax lists, military records) but for different reasons: genealogists search for particular individuals; historians seek patterns and data. Many genealogists (or organized groups like ancestry.com) and the state archives where genealogists work have Websites indexing the names on those records. But these sites often have little original data and can rarely be used to compile numerical estimates (age of soldiers, fertility rates, or similar measures).

Evangelical Protestants, seeking to nurture believers and attract converts, have digitized Protestant Bibles and Reformation classics, including works by Luther, Calvin, and other reformers, in English translation (Christian Classics: Ethereal Library, for instance). Seeking a return to the purity of their colonial forefathers, orthodox Calvinists have placed many Puritan texts on the Web, with such titles as "Fire and Ice". They have placed sermons of

prominent early American preachers such as George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, Isaac Backus, Charles Finney, and Barton Stone and Thomas Campbell on the Web. Almost as if in response, mainline and liberal denominations have digitized their canonical texts (the Book of Common Prayer, Quaker testimonies, classic Unitarian and Universalist texts).



Ideological conservatives and libertarians, who believe history should emphasize the great achievements of great men, have placed the voluminous writings of the founding generation on the Web. The Liberty Fund, a libertarian group, has been particularly active; their Library of Libertyincludes hundreds of works of political philosophy, political theory, economics, and religion, with heavy coverage of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including a big collection on the American Revolution. Ideologically similar Internet libraries (at American Colonists' Library and founding.com) collect digital versions of books the founders read, from antiquity to their own time.

Americans of all political views consider the political thought and activities of the founding generation of great significance. Just as conservatives seek to preserve our revolutionary heritage and liberal historians seek to have the fullest possible historical record, ordinary Americans buy popular biographies of the founders by the hundreds of thousands. Understanding the popularity of the founders, the Library of Congress, through its "American Memory" collections, has invested heavily in creating digital versions of their works. That huge site includes digitized versions of manuscripts from Washington (and see also the Fitzpatrick edition of printed letters), Jefferson (and see also the Thomas Jefferson digital archive), and Madison in facsimile and sometimes typescript. (There are extensive collections of Franklin, John Adams, Hamilton, and Jay papers elsewhere). "American Memory" also includes digital editions of Max Farrand's authoritative edition of the proceedings of the Constitutional Convention, Elliot's debates on state ratification, and one of many online versions of the Federalist Papers.

What do digitized primary sources, as a whole, tell us about public interest and historical memory? A few individuals and social movements have garnered overwhelming support, across the social and political spectrum. Abraham Lincoln is the most popular earlier American denizen of the Web. Countless sites reprint his correspondence and speeches, reproduce digital images of his portrait, or document his life, assassination, and times. These sites come from a wide variety of places: the Lincoln papers at the Library of Congress; an edition of the Basler edition of Lincoln's writings; Abraham Lincoln Net, with documents, images, and sounds concerning Lincoln's Illinois years (including the Lincoln-Douglass debates); and an extraordinary number of portraits, political cartoons, and other images, many made possible by the spread of photographic technology (see, for instance, the Indiana Historical Society's Lincoln collections.)

Both historians and the general public seek information about the most dramatic events in American history, no matter its historical significance. A site with primary sources on famous trials includes such high drama as the Salem witchcraft trial, the Burr conspiracy, the Amistad trials, the John Brown uprising at Harper's Ferry, and the Andrew Johnson impeachment trial. Multiple sites cover the Salem trials, the Lewis and Clarke expedition, the overland trails, and the California gold rush.

It is also worth noting the heavy representation of amateur historians on the Web, particularly among sites devoted the Civil War. Many families still have Civil War records in their attics, and some of them (particularly those working on genealogies) transcribe letters and diaries and put them on the Web. Libraries and archives know that the Civil War fascinates their users, and institutions from coast to coast, from Duke to Bowling Green State to the University of Washington have digitized parts of their Civil War collections. Reenactors are more interested in the details of war and battles; they not only have their own sites but can find a complete digital set of the *War of the Rebellion* at Cornell's Making of America site (go to browse monographs at bottom of page) along with innumerable muster rolls on the Web (three volumes from Maryland are digitized).



No longer can high school students (or their teachers), much less those in colleges here and abroad, complain about a lack of original sources on the first two and a half centuries of our history. Send students to the Web and watch term papers improve! Instead of bemoaning ordinary Americans' ignorance of their past, members of Congress and their conservative allies should get busy and tell their constituents about Websites that preserve our heritage. *Common-place* is doing its part by sponsoring the Web bibliography, an announcement of which will appear in your in-box soon! The ball is now in your court!

This essay is dedicated to the memory of my Northern Illinois University colleague (and Common-place*coauthor) Tara Dirst, whose technical direction of the "Abraham Lincoln" and "American Archives" Websites have enriched all users of the Web, and to my Chinese colleagues (especially Zhang Juguo) and students (especially Dong Yu and Ye Fanmei) at Nankai University, without whom I would neither have conceived nor compiled my Web bibliography.*

Further Reading:

Charles Andrews would feel right at home in the world of Web bibliographies. See his two books, *Guide to the manuscript materials for the history of the United States to 1783* (Washington, D.C., 1908) and *Guide to the materials for American history, to 1783,* 2 vol. (Washington, D.C., 1912-14).

Readers can trace some of my detective work by following the Web searches I describe. The Eells article mentioned in the text is Walter Crosby Eells, "First Directory of American Colleges," *History of Education Quarterly* 2 (Dec., 1962) and is available to those with access to "JSTOR."

There is a great need for teaching and research guides to large Websites that highlight the most important resources contained in them. For examples of what can be done see the lesson plans at Northern Illinois University's Lincoln/net. *Common-place*'s own "Tales from the Vault" occasionally highlights Web resources. See, for instance, Tara Dirst and Allan Kulikoff, "Was Dr. Benjamin Church a Traitor? A new way to find out," in the October 2005 issue, and Mary Beth Norton, "Salem Witchcraft in the Classroom: With bewitching results," in the January 2006 issue.

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A Note on the Common-place Redesign



When I was asked to design *Common-place* back in 1999, the editors requested that it "look like a broadsheet." Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century broadsheets—large sheets set in an unvariegated sea of tiny columns of text—were in many ways the opposite of Web pages. Broadsheet design reflected movable type's strengths and weaknesses: the sheer amount of labor required in locking up a page of text and the costs involved in paper and ink meant that every pressing counted. On the other hand, the medium of Web pages is virtually inexhaustible, although the individual pages are confined to the size and resolution of the computer monitor.

There will probably be growing pains involved.

The look upon which we settled used what techniques were available in Web design five years ago. HTML (Hypertext Markup Language), the formatting language of the Web, was never intended to be a flexible layout tool, but designers for the medium discovered that through a careful use of tables and graphics it was possible to imitate some of the look of a printed page, and this was the technique I chose. However, these techniques are labor-intensive, prone to error and variation on different machines, and less accessible to

special-needs visitors, such as blind surfers using Braille browsers.

The last few years have seen the rise of new coding methods and practices for the Web. There has been a call for accessibility and standardization: pages should be readable by a variety of devices, including Web browsers, PDAs, cell phones, television browsers, and should be searchable and easily indexed by automatic systems. To achieve these ends, designers and developers are turning away from traditional HTML using table layouts to the new markup language XHTML (eXtensible Hypertext Markup Language) using CSS (Cascading Style Sheets).

The basic idea behind all this technical stuff is to separate the content of a page (that is, the text, images, and other information) from the page's format (columns, fonts, colors, etc.). If later the same content is reused in a different venue than a Web page—say, a printable version of the page—no new coding is necessary to reformat the content. If a redesign is required, changing the style sheet is all that is necessary to change the look of the entire site. These are some of the practical reasons that I have switched to XHTML/CSS in the design of the *Common-place*.

But beyond utility, I have also used this redesign as an opportunity to rethink the way the site looks and to tweak it visually. While the overall look is very much of a whole with earlier editions of *Common-place*, the new page design reflects more closely the way people use the site.

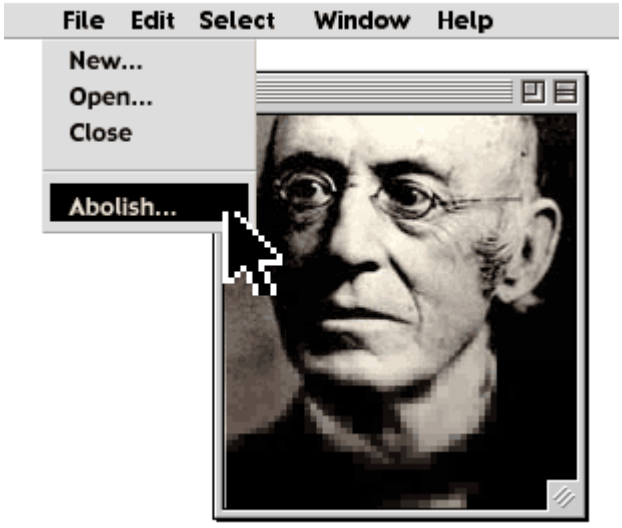
There will probably be growing pains involved. Older browsers don't understand CSS in full or in part. Netscape 4.x will not render correctly (and I apologize to the few of you still using it); Internet Explorer 5 for Windows renders with a few oddities. Other visitors with older browsers will probably find the design working in unexpected ways, but traditional HTML also had cross-browser issues. I suggest that you use this as an opportunity to upgrade to the latest version of Explorer, Netscape, Safari, Opera, or whatever your favorite browser may be.

In coming issues, I will continue working to make the new XHTML/CSS design more attractive and easy to use. I hope to format the printed version of the pages so that visitors who prefer to read the text in hard copy will be able to have a well-organized version without the "furniture" (navigational links, decorative graphics, etc.) of the online version. I also want to re-examine the applications such as the search function and the bulletin board to make them more attractive and easier to use.

I'm looking forward to, and hope you will enjoy, these changes.

This article originally appeared in issue 4.3 (April, 2004).

E-Abolitionists



Look at you: sitting there at your computer checking the weather reports, studying *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode guides, and reading online history magazines when you could be doing something worthwhile. “You can use the Internet to set people free,” reads the message across the bottom border of my browser. “And it takes only two minutes a week to help.”

The site that promises these powerful surfing opportunities is iAbolish.org, an “Anti-Slavery Web Portal” set up by the American Anti-Slavery Group. Founded by management consultant Charles Jacobs in 1993, the group has spearheaded a self-styled “new abolitionist” movement that claims to have freed tens of thousands of mostly African slaves, and has begun to get some traction in Congress and on college campuses. The immigration laws have already been modified at the new movement’s behest, and someday you may need to check candy bars and chocolate syrup bottles for a “slave-free” label that the group is pushing in its drive to call attention to forced child labor on the cocoa farms of West Africa. On its primary issue, the capture and enslavement of southern Sudanese by raiders from the dominant north, the group has generated enough publicity to push Sudan toward a pariah status similar to South Africa’s in the 1980s.

While the people it champions clearly are in dire need of help, historically minded Web surfers may find iAbolish.org rather jarring in its combination of Internet-era jargon with familiar terms and strategies from the nineteenth-century antislavery movement. The site has all the bells, whistles, and spending opportunities that netizens have come to expect: animated Flash presentations, on-demand multimedia content, interactive maps, and an online

store where one can load up on antislavery books, t-shirts, posters, and videos.



Yet the substance of all this postmodernity would be quite familiar to William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. There are personal narratives of freed slaves, horrifying accounts of the conditions that slaves endure with much emphasis on threats to women and children, prefabricated messages to send to elected officials, and inspiring stories of slaves who escaped from bondage. And then there are the constant references to the creators and users of the site as "abolitionists," a usage boldly appropriating the name of perhaps the most radical reform movement in American history that actually achieved its stated goal.

Almost inevitably this borrowing leads iAbolish to the wince-worthy coinage "e-abolitionist," which one can become by signing up. Along with that term goes a strong dose of the techno-messianism that has so infected recent American culture: "The Internet has changed your life," the site announces. "Now, you can use the Internet to help liberate millions in bondage."

There are many reasons why the people behind iAbolish.org seem justified in claiming the abolitionist mantle. The harnessing of cutting-edge persuasive techniques to a moral crusade was, of course, a hallmark of the old abolitionists. They and their colleagues in the other Jacksonian-era religious reform movements have been called the inventors of mass media politics (back when mass media meant newspapers, books, and pamphlets), and pioneered the use of direct mail solicitations. (In South Carolina, the slaveholders rioted to stop these abolitionist mass mailings.) One can easily see an analogy between Charles Jacobs and Lewis and Arthur Tappan, the dry-goods magnates who helped bankroll the original American abolitionist movement. In both cases, commercial sensibilities blend seamlessly with reforming zeal. Even if the new abolitionists were to go Hollywood and recruit some rock stars or commission a TV miniseries, they would only be following in the footsteps of the old abolitionists, whose arsenal included the popular Hutchinson Family Singers and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in multiple formats (including the best-selling novel, sheet music, and a special effects-laden theatrical production).

The new antislavery movement also represents a remarkable resurgence of the great nineteenth-century alliance of evangelical Christianity and social reform, the very nexus in which radical abolitionism once thrived. This alliance seems to have gone into hibernation somewhere around the time of the Scopes trial, and in my own lifetime politicized evangelical Christians have typically regarded liberals and radicals as godless communists and secular humanists, people they would no more team up with than Satan himself. So it's

interesting to see a movement that counts both Jesses—Helms and Jackson—among its supporters, and can get Johnnie Cochran and Ken Starr on the same side of a law case. Its biggest legislative success to date, the Victims of Trafficking Protection Act of 2000, was cosponsored by arguably the most liberal man in the Senate, Minnesota's Paul Wellstone, and one of the most conservative, Sam Brownback of Kansas. (Brownback was a leader of the Christian Right takeover of Kansas Republican politics that has made the Alf Landons and Bob Doles of Kansas history look distinctly left wing.) It is almost unbelievable that a movement could be popular in the aggressively secular environs of Cambridge, Massachusetts, where the coffee shops are a lot more crowded on Sunday mornings than the local churches, yet have an educational director who publicly wished that God would add "another star" to Jesse Helms's "crown." Just this summer, the new abolitionists have gotten Republican fans of President Ronald "Constructive Engagement" Reagan to call for U.S. disinvestment in Sudan, a strategy most of them opposed regarding South Africa in the 1980s.

Startling as these feats are, there are other ways in which the new abolitionists fall far short of their role models. The most radical nineteenth-century abolitionists were stern critics of their own culture, ready to extirpate the evil of slavery "root and branch," even if that meant destroying the Union and revolutionizing American society. They were up against an institution of basic importance to the American economy, South and North (as Yale University has recently discovered), one with strong defenders in the political structure of their times. William Lloyd Garrison came to believe that the Constitution itself was a "covenant with death and an agreement with Hell," and famously burned it at a public meeting.

By contrast, the new abolitionists direct most of their outrage against foreign countries and certain immigrant cultures within the U.S. The most conspicuous villains in the new abolitionist literature are Arabs and other Muslims, one of the last remaining groups that American popular culture still freely demonizes. It is not insignificant for the movement's appeal to conservatives that many of the enslaved peoples are Christians.

At the same time, the new abolitionists' proposed policy solutions take the distinctly modern form of mostly cost-free miniproposals, like the cocoa labeling initiative and their new cause, a "Sudan Peace Act" that would have oil companies doing business in Sudan barred from the New York Stock Exchange. The foundations of the American economy will not be threatened by these blows—though the industries involved are still lobbying against them—and doubtless the new Republican abolitionists fully understand that.

Leaving aside the root and branch reformation of American race and labor policies, the new abolitionists seem to devote most of their money and energy to the controversial practice of "redeeming" slaves in Sudan. These redemptions involve paying armed men to take enslaved people away from their masters and deliver them to visiting foreigners for transport back to their villages or out of the country. Critics have argued that this practice actually creates a

market in slaves. And while the new abolitionists take steps to avoid this result, they clearly are plugging into, rather than challenging, the existing cultures of raiding and captive taking that victimized the rescued people in the first place.

The new abolitionists have also identified a much more amorphous form of slavery to abolish than did the old. The “slavery” the e-abolitionists target is less a basic domestic institution than a disparate collection of bad social and economic situations: from debt peonage, to kidnapping, to child labor, to prostitution, to a few cases of outright chattel slavery. The miscellaneous nature of modern slavery does not make the situations iAbolish details any less evil or worthy of condemnation. But it does raise the question of whether “slavery” is the most appropriate label for dealing with them.

What do all these situations have in common with each other, and with antebellum American slavery? For one, almost all represent the social and political consequences of economic globalization, something that has been going on for centuries but clearly sped up during the 1990s. Forced labor is one of the things that can happen when very wealthy societies with highly developed market economies and power on the world stage get connected with much poorer, weaker societies that have things they need. Desire for the wealth to be gained overwhelms the fragile institutions protecting human rights in the poorer countries, as existing forms of conflict and oppression become tools for supplying what the world economy demands. So the fading, guilty-minded institution of slavery in the southern U.S. mushroomed and grew belligerent in response to the rise of northern and European textile manufacturing, and so the less lovely features of many poverty-stricken, starkly inegalitarian societies in Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Asia have been mobilized to supply the world’s wealthier nations with cheaply manufactured goods or scarce resources. Sometimes the new abolitionists apply the term “slavery” to the results, as with West African cocoa. And sometimes they don’t, as with the rush for coltan (an element used in the manufacture of advanced electronic devices such as portable phones and computers) that has fueled many of the horrors during Congo’s civil war. Either way, it sucks to be a poor person caught up in the ruthless efforts of local elites, militias, and “entrepreneurs” to get their cut of that foreign wealth.

Some new abolitionists may want to deny this. The iAbolish FAQ Page claims that slavery in Sudan is “not economic,” and while this may be true in terms of the labor that Sudanese slaves do, it leaves out the chief reason for fighting over southern Sudan or terrorizing the populace there, its oil resources.

The new abolitionism represents a rare effort to make the United States—or, rather, individual citizens—take some responsibility for a few of these problems, but it does so in a way that may not adequately acknowledge the complicity of our whole way of life in spawning them. Americans have always been against slavery, since the days of the Revolution when the term in politics usually referred not to human bondage but to a propertied white man

being taxed by a government that did not allow him effective representation. With such absolutist notions of liberty, slavery eventually came to seem an intolerable evil to most Americans in whatever forms they found it.

The problem is, we find slavery such a uniquely monstrous evil that we have in the past forgotten to clean up after the monster is killed, much less to inquire into how it came into being. It was much easier for Civil War-era Americans to abolish the institution of slavery than face the egregious economic inequalities of Southern society, and so the poverty of Southern blacks and the ruthlessness of Southern white property owners combined quickly to create a new, less formal type of servitude, one that the self-congratulatory North left largely unmolested for a century.

Will labeling the many forms of exploitation and cruelty that are so prevalent around the world "slavery" prevent such an outcome? Or will it merely postpone our much needed reckoning with the brutal inequalities that make our discount shopping possible? I hope the answer is the former, but I fear it may be the latter. Our track record on pursuing the economic underpinnings of moral evils is not good. And now it is not a regional legal institution that needs abolition, but our whole manner of dealing with the rest of the world.

Further Reading:

On the old abolitionists as cutting-edge media politicians, see David Paul Nord, "The Evangelical Origins of Mass Media in America, 1815-1835," *Journalism Monographs* 88 (1984): 1-30; and Richard R. John, *Spreading the News: The American Postal System From Franklin to Morse* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995). For visual examples of, and links to, some of their productions, see these sections of the Library of Congress online exhibits The African-American Odyssey and The African-American Mosaic.

For additional, late-breaking comments on this and other historical-political topics, visit "the Historical Punditry Page".

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Grow Up, America: Choose Our Better History



I have long thought that now-President Obama’s reputation as an orator was little inflated, more by a media and public starved for a leader who could

speak in complete sentences and cogent thoughts than by the man himself. That is an observation, not a criticism. My short speech-writing period left me with a very lively sense of how hard and ill-advised it is for a real modern human being to write or speak like a JFK film clip. Lots of Democratic politicians have hurt themselves rhetorically by trying to channel JFK. When they try MLK, it is generally even worse.

Today's inaugural address was much like Obama's convention acceptance speech in wisely avoiding Sorensenian flights of inspirational rhetoric and preacherly flourishes, but instead presenting liberal values and a post-imperial world view in forms that Americans raised on decades of Reaganism might be able to accept. Here is a passage that struck me:

We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things. The time has come to reaffirm our enduring spirit; to choose our better history; to carry forward that precious gift, that noble idea, passed on from generation to generation: the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness.

In reaffirming the greatness of our nation, we understand that greatness is never a given. It must be earned. Our journey has never been one of short-cuts or settling for less. It has not been the path for the faint-hearted – for those who prefer leisure over work, or seek only the pleasures of riches and fame. Rather, it has been the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things – some celebrated but more often men and women obscure in their labor, who have carried us up the long, rugged path towards prosperity and freedom.

Nothing special there rhetorically – even the nice "better history" line turns out to be recycled from Obama's late campaign stump speech. Yet what he was saying what rather noteworthy, coming from a U.S. president. Here and in other parts of the speech, the infantile exceptionalism that has become nearly our national creed was quietly but firmly rejected. Our freedom, wealth, and power relative to other nations do not exempt us from the exigencies of history or the rules of morality, Obama declared. Quite the contrary. We are not authorized to "do as we please" just because we are America; our activities have an impact on other peoples that must be taken into account, and that accounting must modify our behavior. Poverty, injustice, fear, evil, and incompetence all exist in modern America and as part of our tradition. We can and must choose our "better history," and also choose not to dwell on the worst, but the worst is still there, some it of sitting on the inaugural dais, in a wheelchair.

As in the convention speech, there was also a distinctly liberal economic message in Obama's inaugural address, but delivered in so mild and sensible a fashion as to be almost impossible for all but the most hardened ideologues to disagree with. The free market is a powerful tool for generating wealth, but it cannot work properly without the "watchful eye" of government. Otherwise the

market will “spin out of control.” The last line quoted above, about “the risk-takers, the doers, the makers of things” was one that many listeners (including Fox’s Brit Hume) probably heard as a shout-out to capitalist entrepreneurs. What it really was, or perhaps simultaneously acted as, was a little restatement of the labor theory of value that can be linked back to the producerism that has been the heart of so many past radical movements in American history. True wealth was not created by amassing “riches,” Obama argued, but instead by making things through our labors.

I make no claim that there is anything radical about Obama, or even Populist, and I worry about the Wall Street/Ivy League establishmentarians he has guiding his economic policy here at the outset. Yet he does represent and express the better part of our historical political tradition. I am happy that we chose it and look forward to the day when it does not take a national crisis to bring some of those better angels out.

This article originally appeared in issue 9.2 (January, 2009).

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Whose Great War for Empire? British America and the Problem of Imperial Agency



the Seven Years' War was actually a war for several different empires—each shaped as much by provincial conditions as by metropolitan goals—with the one that culminated in the independence of the United States being only the most conspicuous.

The Louisiana Purchase



“Plantation slavery was in decline in Louisiana when it was purchased. Thereafter, Arkansas and Missouri only came into the Union as slave states by bare majorities. Thomas Jefferson’s Lost Cause, a republic of free and independent yeoman farmers, was lost in a series of insufficiently contested choices.”

What Changed During the American Revolution?



Time and again between the earliest period of colonization and the Civil War, North American people waged ferocious war over what kind of place "their" America ought to be. The Revolutionary era was one such time. The Civil War was another. Yet though Founding Father narratives abound, serious study of the Revolution seems at a low ebb. Where are its passion, fear, hope, triumph, transformation, gain, loss, and tragedy? Borrowing from Lenin, this Revolution might as well be just a Tea Party.

The Seneca leader Chainbearer knew better when it was over and his people had lost. So, somewhat later, did Washington Irving (in "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"), Nathaniel Hawthorne (in "My Kinsman, Major Molineux"), Frederick Douglass, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The Revolution's course of human events overwhelmed existing institutions, beliefs, and practices. It provoked enormous creativity and it brought huge loss. All successful revolutions may ultimately be alike, in that they overthrow one order and institute another. But each successful revolution is successful in its own way. What, then, of the colonial order from which the American Revolution emerged? What did the Revolution transform? What did it leave unchanged? What did it render problematic that previously had been mere fact?

> Throughout the hemisphere, colonized America differed strikingly from Europe. Slavery—which did not exist in Britain, the Netherlands, and France, and which was of minor direct importance in Spain and Portugal—spread wherever colonizers went, engulfing both Native people and Africans.

To comprehend such questions we need to reach beyond the British colonies and early United States. Colonial settlements the length and breadth of the hemisphere were neo-Europes, enmeshed in ocean-spanning imperial structures. From their own viewpoint, Scotland, the Pays d'Oc, and Vizcaya were peripheral in relation to London, Paris, and Madrid. But though distant from their

capitals, such places were parts of metropolitan cores. New France, New England, and New Spain were otherwise. In the British case, that fact underpinned the ultimately irresolvable problem that the attempted reforms of the 1760s and 1770s provoked: What did it mean to "belong" to Britain outside the central British realm? The Revolution ended that whole problem with the entry of the United States into Europe's Westphalian state system, able now to do all the "acts and things that independent states may of right do." It would be sovereign in the same sense as Britain or Spain, dealing with them as a juridical equal, defining its boundaries, setting its terms of belonging, freedom, and obligation, and, internally, answering to no power higher than itself. Its new order was republican rather than monarchical, but Europe's great theorists of sovereignty—Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, and Emer de Vattel—had allowed for that possibility. In this sense, the American Revolution transformed a set of incomplete colonial neo-European polities into a single full participant in the European order, calling itself the United States.

Throughout the hemisphere, however, colonized America differed strikingly from Europe. Slavery—which did not exist in Britain, the Netherlands, and France, and which was of minor direct importance in Spain and Portugal—spread wherever colonizers went, engulfing both Native people and Africans. George Washington's Mount Vernon only looked like an English gentleman's estate; its enslaved labor force made it fundamentally different. Slaves did not do the productive work of London, Bordeaux, Amsterdam, Oporto, and Seville as they did of New York City, Cap Haitien, Willemstad, Recife, and Havana. Africans came to the Americas as captives, but in plantation quarters, on back streets of colonial towns, and in free "maroon" settlements from Virginia's Dismal Swamp through Jamaica's Blue Mountains to Brazil's *Quilombos*, they created neo-African communities as well as they could.

Fredrika Teute and Ed Countryman discuss the Haitian Revolution and the American people.

Sticking just to the northern continent, "colonial" America reached far beyond the Neo-Europes and Neo-Africas, to wherever European power, diplomacy, war, trade, and non-human species could be felt. Unlike anywhere in Europe, colonial areas were contested rather than defined. Guillaume de L'Isle's 1702 map of "La Floride" splashed color to distinguish British, French, and Spanish zones all across North America. But beneath his tints, in small print, were inscribed the names of the native peoples who actually were in control. Two decades later, a Chickasaw map comprehended much the same space, depicting Native communities from the Red River to the upper Ohio, without any recognition of European claims. John Mitchell's supposedly definitive 1755 map of British America showed Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia stretching toward the Pacific. French and Spanish cartographers would have disagreed, and so would Cherokees

and Creeks in the southern Appalachians, Choctaws, Chickasaws, Osage, and Quapaws in the Mississippi Valley, and Comanches on the High Plains.

Consider one late-colonial artifact. In 1771 cartographer Guy Johnson published a map “of the Country of the VI Nations [Iroquois].” Johnson rendered Iroquoia as beginning at a line that ran southward from just east of Oneida Lake to the Pennsylvania border and as including the whole northern country between Lake Champlain and Lake Ontario, “the boundary of New York not being closed.” Within the Six Nations he drew only three of the Finger Lakes; the remainder could not “be laid down with certainty.” The Iroquois guarded knowledge of what was theirs, even from Johnson, whom they knew well. They had bargained hard at the great Fort Stanwix treaty conference of 1768 for the line that separated them from New York. Mohawk country was already lost, and they wanted this new boundary to last. But playing the game of cartographic boasting as ruthlessly as any statesman, speculator, or settler, they also gave away a vast area that was not theirs at all. Delawares, Shawnees, and Cherokees were furious.

New York Governor William Tryon, the dedicatee of Johnson’s map, thought entirely differently from both the Iroquois and Johnson, reporting to the Lords of Trade in 1774 that New York extended all the way to Detroit. Iroquoia belonged to his province, not to its people. But provincial authorities had nothing to do with the boundary line on Johnson’s map. It had been drawn by Iroquois negotiators and Sir William Johnson, Guy’s uncle and Britain’s Superintendent of Northern Indian Affairs, who was the Crown’s direct agent. His power fitted with what colonials were coming to see as a London plan to control them “in all cases whatsoever.” Sir William lived as befitted a marcher lord, in neo-European gentlemanly style at Johnson Hall, a few dozen miles down the Mohawk River from Fort Stanwix. His life there, however, with his Mohawk wife Molly Brant and enough slaves to run a southern plantation, was entirely colonial American. Taken together, Guy Johnson’s map, the Fort Stanwix Treaty, and Sir William Johnson’s power and way of life brought all the themes of the colonial order into focus: contested space, imperial power, neo-European mimesis, and the prevalence of slavery.

“Six Nations Map,” by Guy Johnson (1771), engraving, page 1090 (vol. IV) from The Documentary History of the State of New-York, by E.B. O’Callaghan (Albany, 1851). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts. Click image to enlarge in new window.

Running through all these dimensions were the political problems of authority, power, and belonging on which the British Empire broke. Colonial settlers believed they had grown up and could run their world. Beginning in 1763, imperial reformers set out to teach them otherwise. Colonials wanted Indian land, but Indians knew how to defend themselves. Far from being the plantation south’s “peculiar institution,” slavery was everywhere, in both law and fact. In the midst of it all, only one power seemed absolute—that of masters over

their slaves. Here, as unplanned, incoherent, and vibrant as Europe's Ancien Régime, was the colonial old order.

The Revolution's creation of a sovereign American People and of that People's instruments of power resolved the imperial problem. With remarkable speed, it also settled the colonial era's fundamental contestation about American space. Drawing the modern borders of the eastern states and creating the American system of western territories that could become states in their own right were part of the resolution, ending the problem of supposed settler inferiority. Just as important, if not more so, is that the new, self-conscious, empowered American People took rapid possession of all the land it could grasp, entirely on its own terms, achieving in mere decades what centuries of European empire builders had failed to do. Meanwhile, the colonial era's other great legacy, slavery, changed from an unchallenged universal fact into the South's "peculiar institution." The problem that destroyed the colonial order emerged from a combination of contested imperial power and contested American space. The problem that nearly destroyed the United States emerged from contested national power over freedom and slavery, within space that the Republic called its own.

From the beginning, Europe's children in America connected themselves with both Native people and Africans. The mature colonial order presented one set of such connections, turning ultimately on space; the young Republic presented another set, turning ultimately on slavery. Neither was a European problem at all. The Revolution replaced a colonial-era landscape of contested spaces with triumphalist notions about an Empire of Liberty, Manifest Destiny, and the Moving Frontier, in which Native people became mere "Indians Not Taxed" and, later, "domestic dependent nations." It also turned slavery from an accepted, universal fact into a pressing issue, opening a breach into which Black Americans stepped, and raising the question of whether, should slavery end, they would belong to the Republic as citizens or, like Indians, be excluded from it. Appreciating such continuities and disruptions, such gains and losses, transformations and consequences of the Revolutionary era, may offer a way to bring the American Revolution back to life as a subject of compelling and deeply human interest.

Further reading:

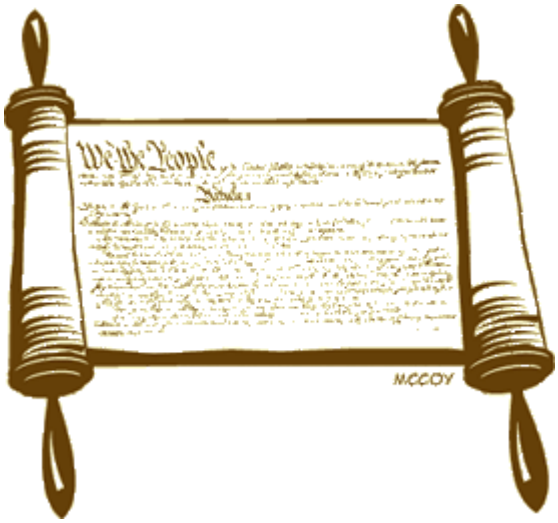
The thirteen essays collected in Juliana Barr and Edward Countryman, eds., *Contested Spaces of Early America* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) reach well beyond the American Revolution both in geographical and chronological terms. But taken as a whole they bring out important differences between the colonial/imperial order that began to take shape with the Columbian encounter, developed and flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and was radically transformed during the hemispheric era of national revolutions and state formation. Both Eliga Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2012) and Leonard J. Sadosky, *Revolutionary Negotiations: Indians,*

Empires, and Diplomats in the Founding of America (Charlottesville, Va., 2009) continue that theme, Gould in the sense of the United States joining Europe's Westphalian state system and Sadosky showing how a colonial order structured around Native-European diplomacy gave way to a post-revolutionary order structured around national sovereignty for international purposes and state sovereignty for internal purposes. Finally, Edward Countryman, *Enjoy the Same Liberty: Black Americans and the Revolutionary Era* (Lanham, Md., 2012), addresses what its subjects did with the opportunities and the partial liberation of the Revolutionary era and how the problem of an American nation divided between slavery and freedom emerged from that era.

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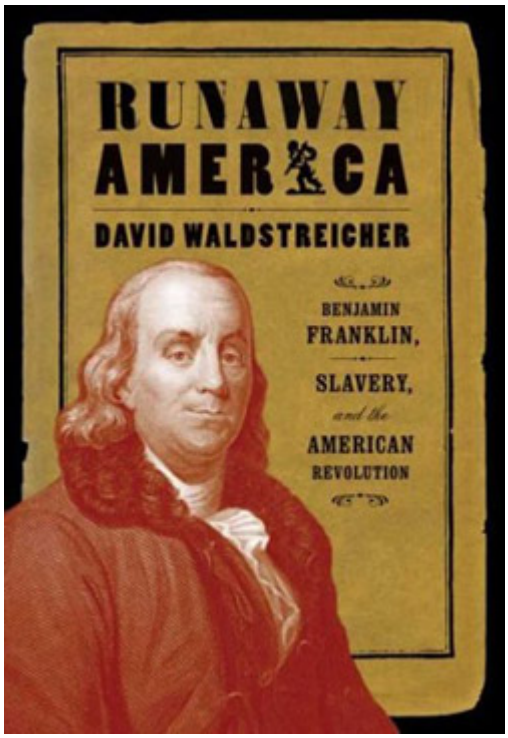
Edward Countryman is University Distinguished Professor of History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

American Midrash



"Yes, the Constitution is often publicly praised. But it is more often debated and argued about."

Benjamin Franklin, Slavery, and the Founders: On the dangers of reading backwards



Common-place asks David Waldstreicher whether Franklin deserves his reputation as the nation’s antislavery founder.