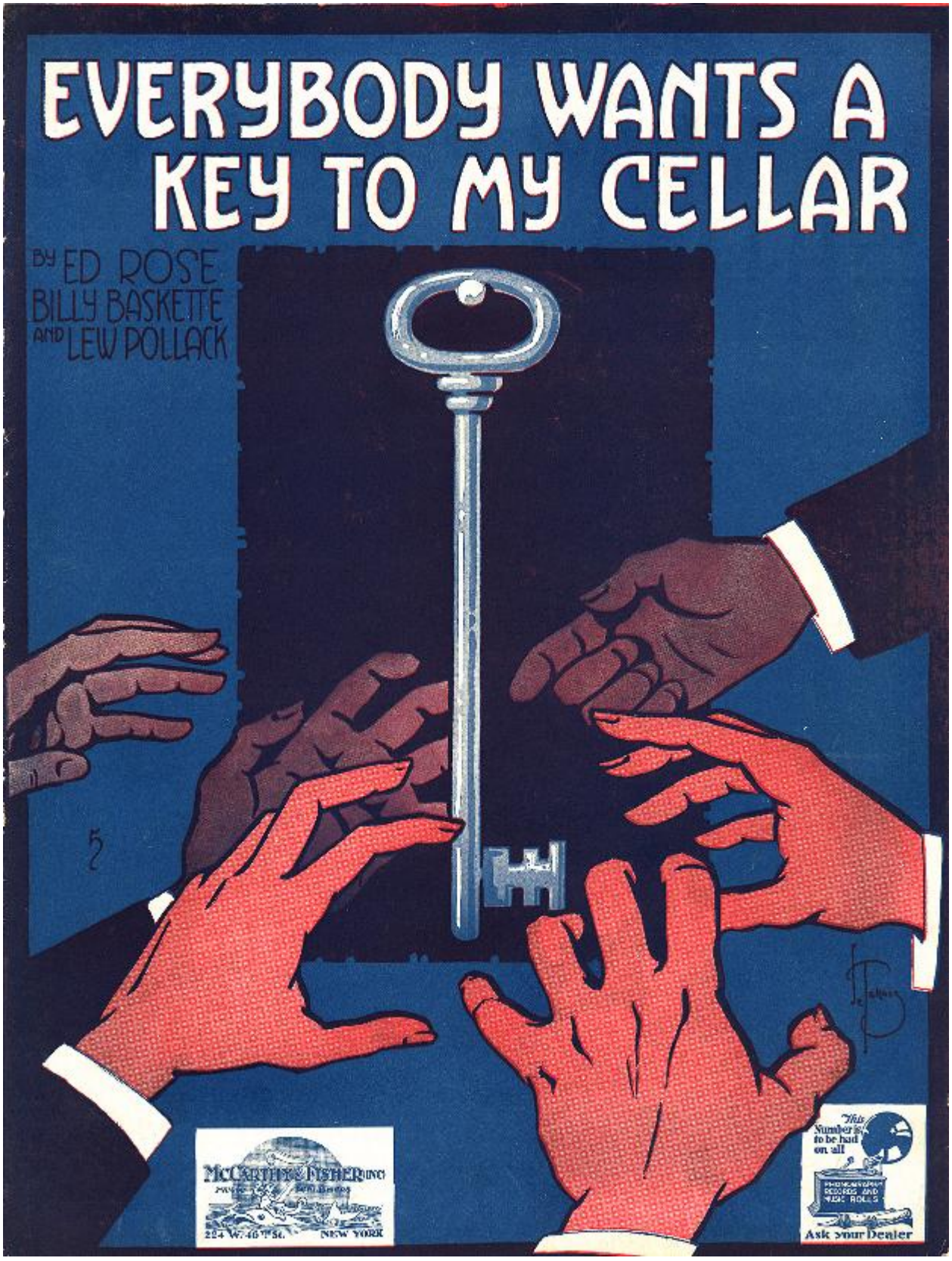
Consuming History?



EBay may be a great resource for avid collectors, but it has also opened up a

world of antiquarian goods that may have never found their way into an archive or museum before now.

Teaching 1492



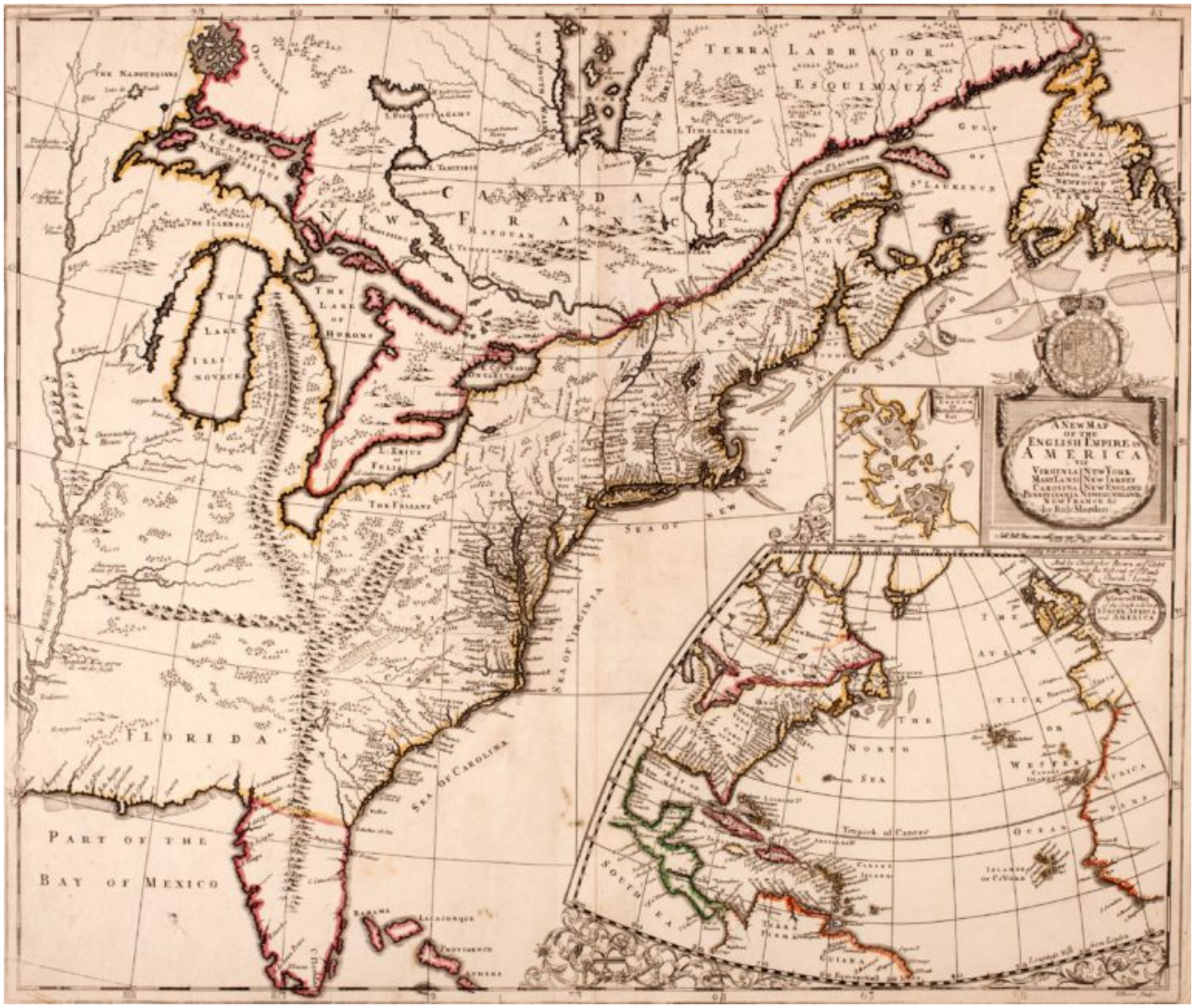
The problem—and the opportunity—as I saw it, was my students' inclination to focus on these societies' differences. My job was to get them to understand their similarities.

Cabin Fever in Frontier House



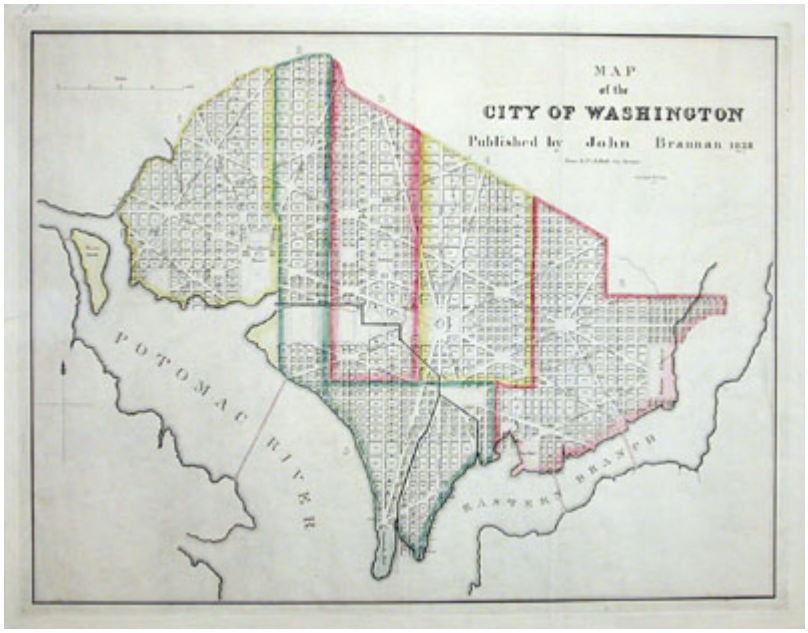
“Why this judgment about whether or not the participants really lived the life of 1883 homesteaders? Is the experiment a success if they feel as though they were homesteading or only if they convince the experts that they’d worked hard enough to survive the winter?”

Not-So-Distant Relations?



Common-place asks Victoria Freeman, author of Distant Relations: How My Ancestors Colonized North America (South Royalton, Vt., forthcoming November 2002), what kinds of responsibility do descendants of dispossessors have to history and to native peoples today?

National Domesticity in the Early Republic: Washington, D.C.



Presented as part of the special issue “Early Cities of the Americas.”

“The fact that everyone in the city helped to build or run the new government led to a new kind of domesticity that was literally shaped by national politics, although in ways L’Enfant and Washington could not have foreseen.”

No More Kings



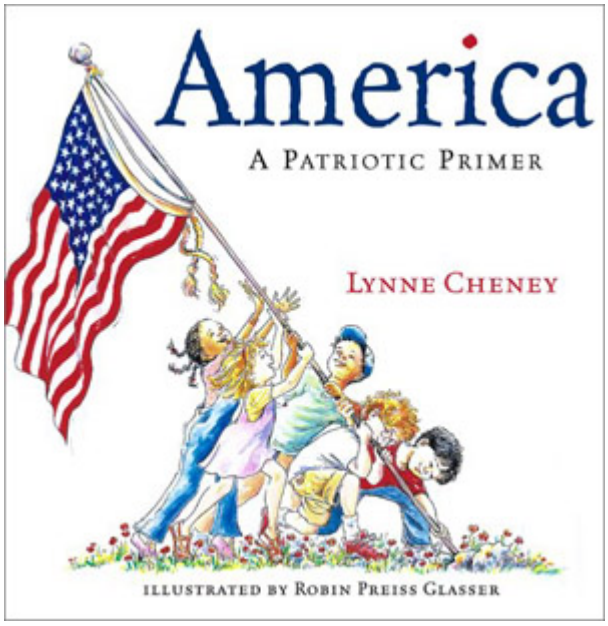
“Stanford historian Jack Rakove, who serves as consultant, confesses, ‘If you ask from a historian’s vantage point, how does this correspond to contemporary scholarship? Well, probably, not that well. But if you ask, what is it that students of this age ought to be introduced to so that they have a rough idea of the Revolution, it’s actually pretty good.”

Dancing across the Color Line



“‘And in what walk of life, or dance of life does man ever get such stimulating applause as thunders about him, when, having danced his partner off her feet, and himself too, he finishes by leaping gloriously on the bar-counter, and calling for something to drink, with the chuckle of a million of counterfeit Jim Crows, in one inimitable sound!'”

The Sandbox of Iwo Jima



My two little boys love the kids' sections of megabookstores, so a trip to Borders to get out of the heat seemed in order during our annual Fourth of July visit to their grandparents. Naturally there was a table full of patriotic books for children, and what should there be in the middle of the display but the latest opus by our Second Lady and longtime professional culture warrior, Lynne Cheney. It's called *America: A Patriotic Primer* (New York, 2001), and it signals its intentions with its cover art: a rainbow coalition of kids hoisting a flag in the style of the Iwo Jima monument. What Cheney offers up here is good old-fashioned Cold War mythology repackaged for today's youth.

Lynne Cheney, *An American Primer*

One's expectations cannot help but be low. The author, after all, is a woman who has made a career out of savaging some of America's most vulnerable institutions—from the NEH to public universities—for cheap political points. Her response to 9/11 was to whip up hatred of pinko professors by sponsoring a collection of rhetoric bites (under the title, *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America*) purporting to show that higher education hated America because some teachers and students actually exercised the rights we are defending and did something other than sing hosannas to El Presidente. The basic procedure was to set poll results and quotations showing the monolithically ecstatic response to the war on terrorism from all other quarters—"Fifty Million George W. Bush Fans Can't Be Wrong!"—against critical but often not especially incendiary remarks coming out of college classrooms

and teach-ins. As she has in the past, Cheney was waging war on the very thing that makes academia most valuable to our society: its ability to provide dissenting or speculative voices at the times when they are most needed. But so what? Lynne Cheney was only following the Dick Cheney administration playbook in using one of the worst tragedies in American history to advance her preexisting agenda.

Not content simply to target universities, though, *Defending Civilization* also signaled Cheney's intention to go after our kids—and our history: "At a time of national crisis . . . [o]ur children and grandchildren—indeed, all of us—need to know the ideas and ideals on which our nation has been built. We need to understand how fortunate we are to live in freedom." Fine sentiments on their face, if Cheney had any respect for histories that told of times when the U.S. had to be forced to live up to its own values or even change them.

What version of American history does Cheney serve up with her ABC's? As the Cheney *oeuvre* goes, the *Patriotic Primer* is a fair-minded and moderate production. A bland Bushian multiculturalism is in evidence throughout—indeed, the same tokenistic kind displayed by culture-war bêtes noire such as mainstream television and children's books. If nobody has two mommies, wheelchairs in crowd scenes and black female judges are featured, and nary a glowering white Dick Cheneyesque visage can be found. The letter "R" doesn't stand for Franklin Roosevelt, but it doesn't go to Ronald Reagan either. (In fact, Ronnie is only mentioned once as far as I can see, though he does get the last word.)

Of course, mindless patriotism and hero worship abound: "A is for America, the land that we love," "B is for the Birthday of this nation of ours," "F is for Freedom and the Flag that we fly," "H is for Heroes," "P is for Patriotism that fills our hearts with pride," "Q is for America's Quest for the new, the far, and the very best," "V is for Valor." J, L, M, and W go to the appropriate presidents, and great leaders are emphasized throughout.

On the other hand, various American values that the current administration does not seem to have uppermost in mind also get letters, including Constitution, Rights, Equality, and Tolerance. There is even the occasional flicker of unintentional humor, such as the moment in Cheney's introduction where she paints a picture of herself and her husband home-schooling the grandkids, presumably at an undisclosed, secure location: "I want my granddaughters . . . to love this country. Their parents want this for them too, and so what they do, and what the Vice President and I do, is teach them about the United States, about its geography and its people and its history." I would definitely pay to see Dick Cheney snarling his way through George Washington and the cherry tree. Or maybe in Dick's version, Washington's dad would congratulate him for having the courage to consume a natural resource?

In sum, the reactionary message of the *Patriotic Primer* is much subtler than it might have been. But it is still there, both in things left out and in those

misplaced. K does go to Martin Luther King Jr., and S does go to women's suffrage. Beyond that, there is almost nothing here to suggest to children that American citizens themselves have or should play much of a role in protecting Freedom other than chanting the alphabet, waving the flag, and serving in the military. D is not for democracy. And though I is for Ideals, most of the pictures evoke great men and militarism: Mount Rushmore, the Alamo, and the Tomb of the Unknowns. The most mischievous image in the "I" section is a little drawing of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, whose featureless black slabs were clearly designed to overwhelm the visitor with the horror of so many dying for so little. Indeed, that was why conservatives attacked the memorial when its design was first publicized.

Similarly, "C is for the Constitution" is illustrated not to evoke constitutional provisions or principles, but with pictures of the document's shrine in the National Archives and other Washington, D.C., monuments. In this way, the Constitution gets converted from a set of rules limiting government power to a sacred relic validating whatever "America" might decide to do.

Cheney has systematically avoided historical situations where fundamental criticisms of American society and government were made, or where mass movements or violence were involved in fighting some American evil. I is not for internment, nor is S for slavery or A for abolitionism. In fact, slavery appears only on the "L" page, where Lincoln is credited with the Emancipation Proclamation, and in a tiny "Equality Time Line" on the E-F pages that references the Thirteenth Amendment (though not the thornier Fourteenth). Significantly, the time line is literally engulfed by a wraparound feature on showing proper respect for the flag. "U" does not stand for unions, the existence of which children will never suspect after reading this book. I guess those presidents and corporate directors just woke up one morning and decided to shorten the working day and week on their own! Oh, and pay people enough to live in nice suburban houses and spend seventeen bucks on a children's book.

The *Patriotic Primer*'s overall philosophy is the soporific one that things have gotten progressively better over the centuries without ordinary Americans doing anything other than going to work, following orders, and rallying around their leaders. "Over the years, more and more of us have been able to enjoy these rights equally," explains Cheney on the "E is for Equality" page, dropping out the parts where her ideological forebears worked against the changes that made the happy multicultural scenes in her book possible. As long as we are good little boys and girls, and do what the authority figures say, she coos, we will all get just as much freedom as we deserve. OK, I agree with that part.

Nevertheless, our boys got a picture book on the Declaration of Independence instead; it actually explains what one of those holy relics says, and even touches on some of the evils from which the Founders wanted to be free. Look, guys, a funny cartoon on civilian control of the military! Of course, they were more interested in playing with the store's train set than in being propagandized by Thomas Jefferson, Lynne Cheney, or me.

Further Reading:

For additional, late-breaking comments on this and other historical-political topics, see "Publick Occurrences Extra."

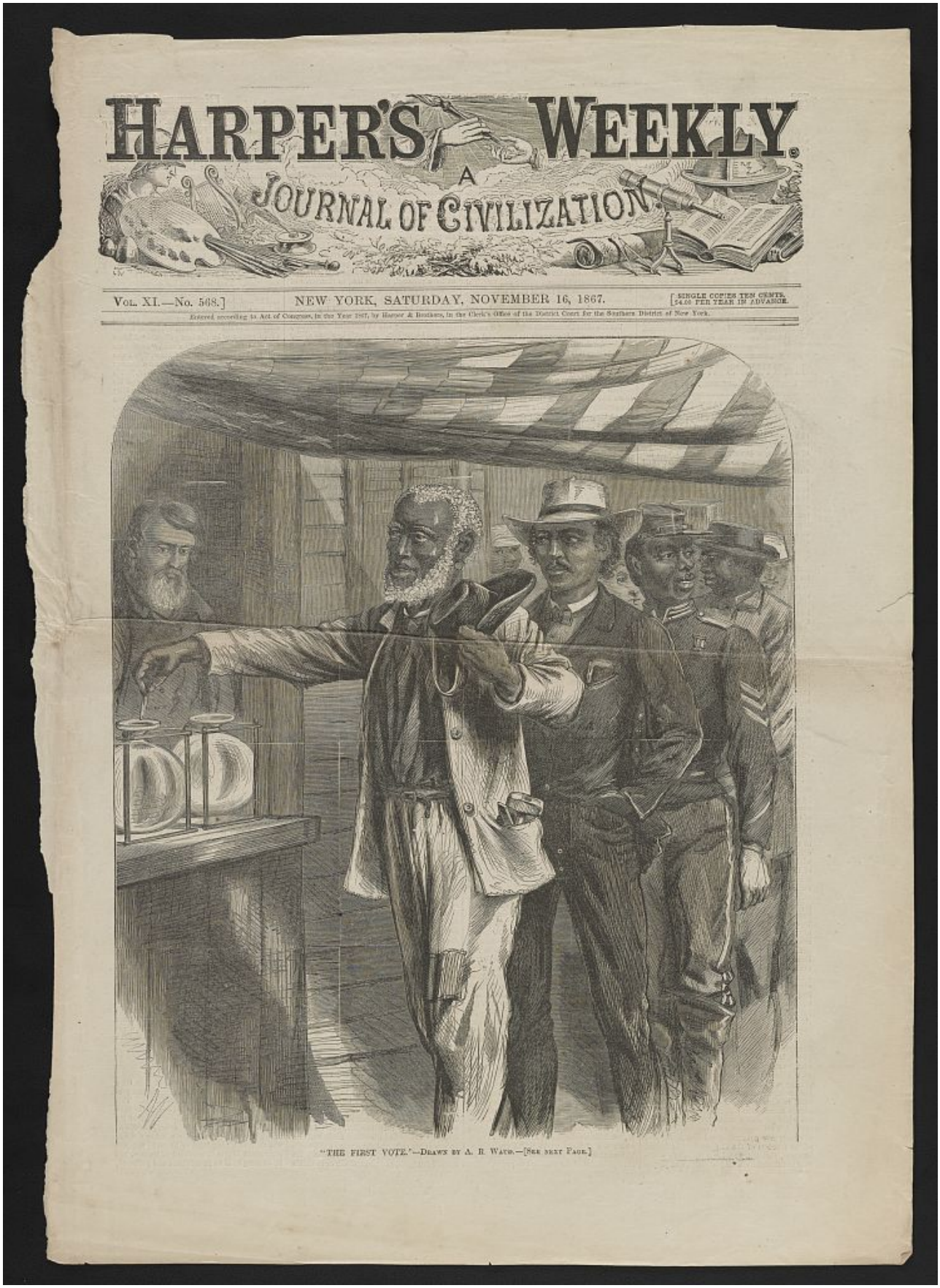
The book we bought is *The Declaration of Independence* by Sam Fink (New York, 2002), which I find cute, informative, and not remotely agenda driven. It breaks down the Declaration phrase by phrase, illustrating the meaning of each with a sometimes comically literal drawing. There is also a chronology of the Revolution up through July 1776 and a glossary of terms.

The origins of the Iwo Jima flag-raising image, and its cultural history as a commemorative motif, are analyzed by Karal Ann Marling and John Wetenhall in *Iwo Jima: Monuments, Memories, and the American Hero* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991). They described the book's culture-war tour of duty in a 1993 article. The controversy revolved around an exaggeration of their claim that the famous photograph captured a restaging of the flag raising done specifically for the cameras.

Lynne Cheney is hardly the only conservative to parlay cultural politics into children's merchandise. William Bennett has been hawking "Book of Virtues" products for years, including the original book and an animated television series that seems to be packaged for educational use. The culture war itself sometimes seems to be at least half a marketing pitch for "alternative" educational materials and entertainment, with the alleged demoralization wrought by public schooling and children's television standing in for halitosis as the invented social ill to be alleviated by the offered nostrum. No doubt years of conservative attacks on liberal bias at PBS had some influence on a Bennett-inspired show making the PBS schedule.

This article originally appeared in issue 2.4 (July, 2002).

The Politics Issue Cometh



Things have not been as active as they might have been around here because we are busy are completing what I think has turned out to be one of the biggest

projects in the history of *Common–Place*, the special Politics Issue. Some server problems have delayed the full release until early next week, so I thought I would offer a preview here on the blog, because the blog is going to be heavily involved. That's right: in addition to a very full slate of regular *Common-Place* articles, there will be ongoing, between-issue content, provided in many cases by writers other than myself. And there will be comment pages here for each article. Change you will believe in!

As to the aforementioned preview: you should see some links at the top of the sidebar on the right. These include a beta release (as we say here in the world of retro-high tech) of my introduction and the full edition of a special bonus article by University of New Mexico legal historian Christian G. Fritz, "America's Unknown Constitutional World." You should also see the comment page and an early snippet of Ray Raphael's "Instructions: The People's Voice in Revolutionary America." Together these two pieces form a mini-package on a topic I find myself increasingly absorbed by, popular constitutionalism.

Look for the rest of the Politics Issue very soon.

This article originally appeared in issue 9.1 (October, 2008).

Jeffrey L. Pasley is associate professor of history at the University of Missouri and the author of *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (2001), along with numerous articles and book chapters, most recently the entry on Philip Freneau in Greil Marcus's forthcoming New Literary History of America. He is currently completing a book on the presidential election of 1796 for the University Press of Kansas and also writes the blog Publick Occurrences 2.0 for some Website called *Common-place*.

Narrative Style and Indian Actors in the Seven Years' War



Crucible of War has nearly as much to teach about form and style as it does about the Seven Years’ War.