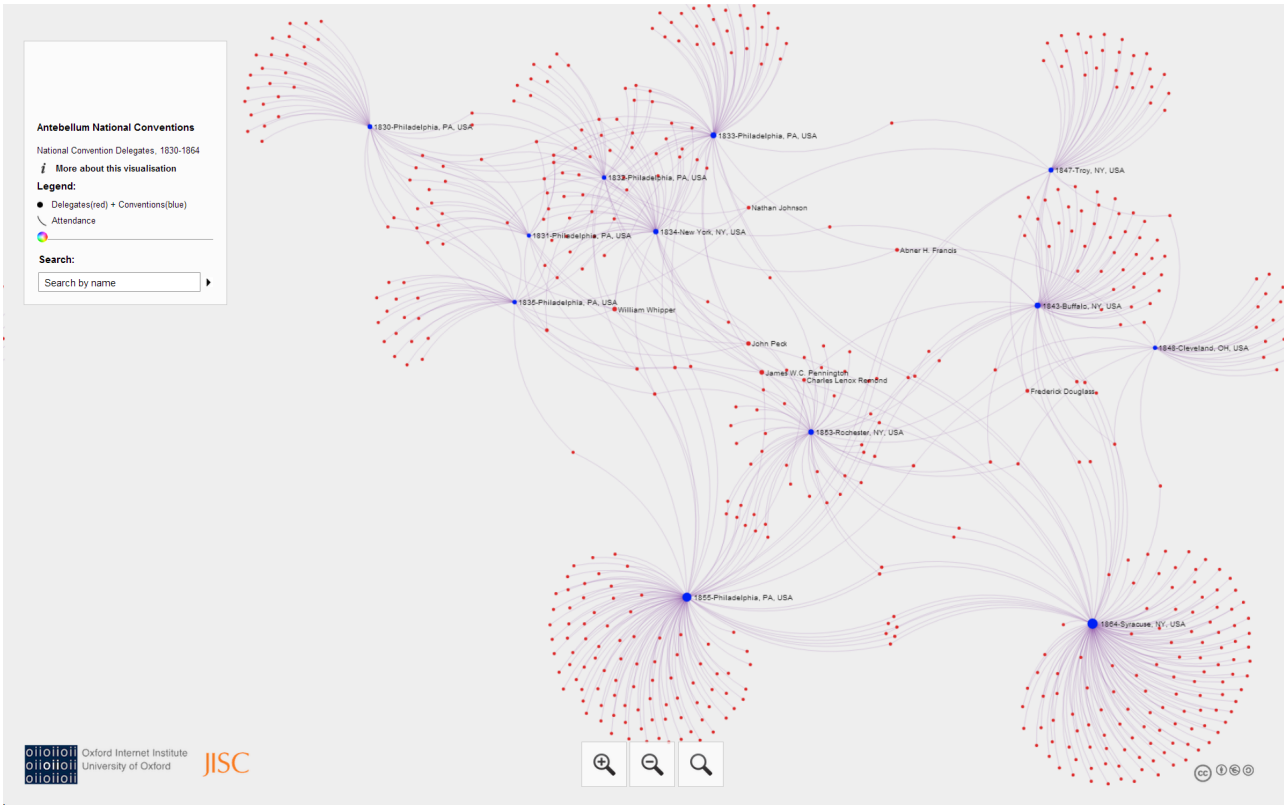
Convention Minutes and Unconventional Proceedings



This project narrates the Colored Conventions Project's work to transcribe, catalogue, and visualize the minutes of the nineteenth-century Colored Conventions.

Interracial Roads to American Freedom

GATEWAY TO FREEDOM

THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF THE UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

ERIC FONER

Pulitzer Prize–winning author of THE FIERY TRIAL



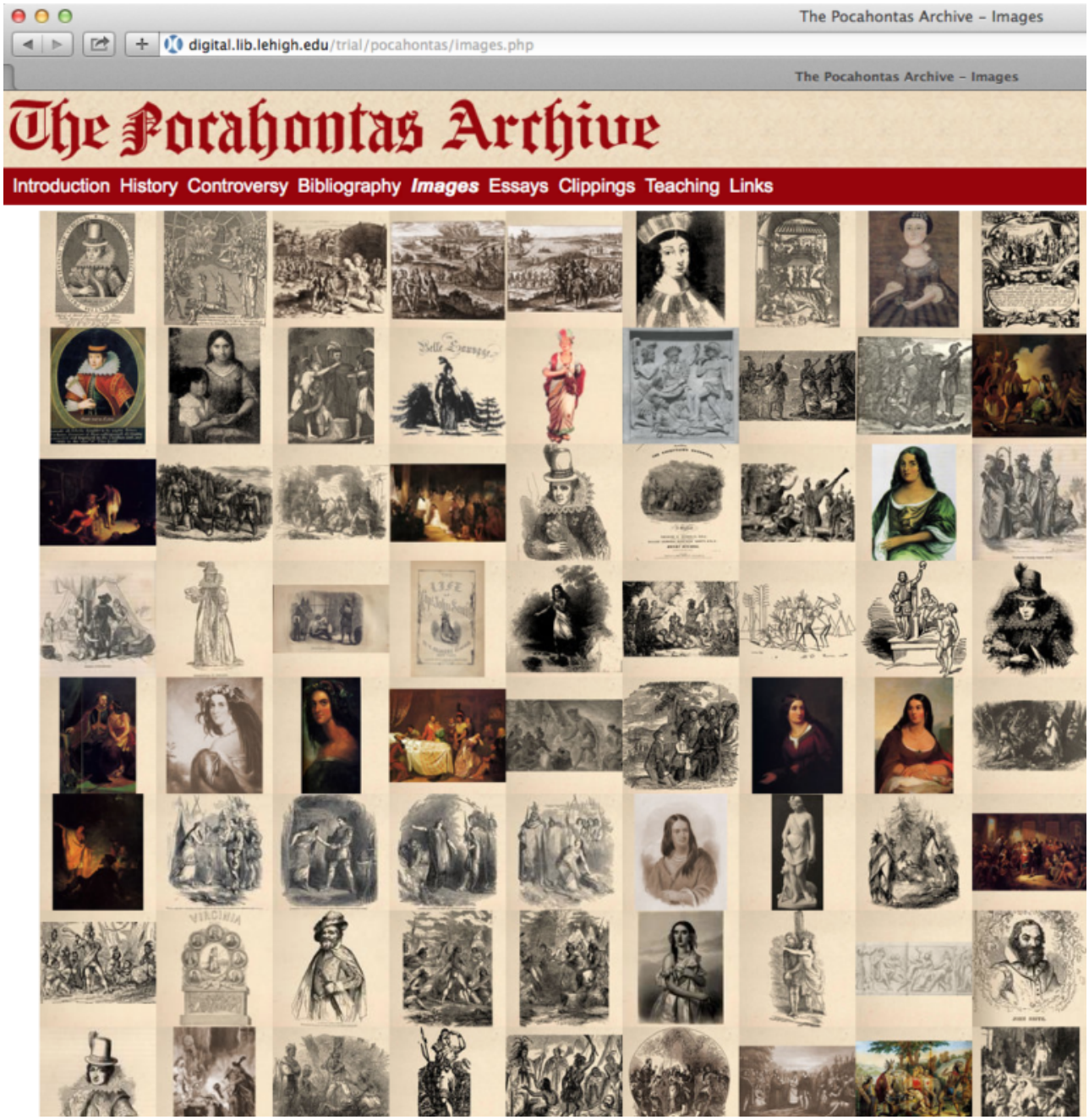
Freedom occupies a permanent place in our national consciousness.

Liberating History: Reflections on Rights, Rituals and the Colored Conventions Project



Working with publishers, libraries, and archives, digital humanities projects can work to liberate African American history.

The Pocahontas Archive



History on Trial is the product of collaborations among graduate students, Lehigh faculty, librarians, technical staff, students, high school teachers, and early Americanists nationally.

The Colored Conventions Movement in Print and Beyond

THE

Anglo-African Magazine.

VOL. I. OCTOBER, 1859. NO. 10.

The First Colored Convention.

On the fifteenth day of September, 1830, there was held at Bethel Church, in the city of Philadelphia, the first Convention of the colored people of these United States. It was an event of historical importance; and, whether we regard the times or the men of whom this assemblage was composed, we find matter for interesting and profitable consideration.

Emancipation had just taken place in New York, and had just been arrested in Virginia by the Nat Turner rebellion and Walker's pamphlet. Secret sessions of the legislatures of the several Southern States had been held to deliberate upon the production of a colored man who had coolly recommended to his fellow blacks the only solution to the slave question, which, after twenty-five years of arduous labor of the most hopeful and noble-hearted of the abolitionists,* seems the forlorn hope of freedom to-day—insurrection and bloodshed. Great Britain was in the midst of that bloodless revolution which, two years afterwards, culminated in the passage of the Reform Bill, and thus prepared the joyous and generous state of the British heart which dictated the West India Emancipation Act. France was rejoicing in the not bloodless *trois jours de Juliet*. Indeed, the whole world seemed stirred up with a universal excitement, which, when contrasted with the universal panics of 1837 and 1857, leads one to regard as more than a philosophical speculation the doctrine of those who hold the life of mankind from the creation as but one life, beating with one heart, animated with one soul, tending to one destiny, although made up of millions upon millions of molecular lives, gifted with their infinite variety of attractions and repulsions, which regulate, or crystallize them into evanescent substructures or organizations, which we call nationalities and empires and peoples and tribes, whose minute actions and reactions on each other are the histories which absorb our attention, whilst the grand universal life moves on beyond our ken, or only guessed at, as the astronomers shadow out movements of our solar system around or towards some distant unknown centre of attraction.

If the times of 1830 were eventful, there were among our people, as well as among other peoples, men equal to the occasion. We had giants in those days! There were Bishop Allen, the founder of the great

* See letter of Hon. Gerrit Smith to Convention of Jerry Rescuers, dated Sept. 3, 1859.

The minutes of Colored Conventions constitute one of the most important bodies of primary sources in African American history. The Colored Conventions Project website has brought together a large number of these documents for the first time ever. The necessary work of locating, scanning, uploading, cataloging, and transcribing builds upon the complex print history of the movement. This article offers an overview of the ways in which convention proceedings came into print in the nineteenth century, with the ultimate goal of demonstrating why the work of the Colored Conventions Project is vitally important for historians and for the rest of us.

The Importance of Print to the Movement

A resolution from the 1855 Colored Men's State Convention in Troy, New York, proclaims, "This Convention strongly recommend(s) to the colored citizens to withhold their support directly and indirectly from all public journals that make it a point to misrepresent us as a people and the world but to use all means in their power to aid on the circulating of such papers as are ready and willing to do us justice." The last part of this quote points to the well-known technological innovations that multiplied the production of newspapers and ephemeral documents in the nineteenth century. Scholars have shown how African Americans took full advantage of this democratizing trend for their own purposes. The Colored Conventions movement is an important example of this development. However, this fascinating quote also lays bare a surprising counter-strategy, involving a withdrawal from or refusal of certain kinds of print. The published record of the Colored Conventions movement unfolded in a violently contentious space of representation where the stakes were quite high. Print was to be used to further the movement, but it needed to be used in the proper fashion.

Derrick R. Spires writes that the conventions "began and ended in print, producing and circulating documents at each juncture in a way that kept their civic claims constantly in the public eye." Print technologies offered a means of preparing the public for the debates and decisions that would take place at conventions, and for disseminating and commenting on those actions after the fact. Delegates knew that influencing Black and white public opinion was essential to the success of their political project. As weapons against racial oppression, the words of conventioneers were meant to be "heard" far beyond the walls in which they were pronounced. The print medium made this happen. Today, the Colored Conventions Project is using digital technologies to carry those voices even further. Individuals around the world are accessing the texts of convention minutes. The result is a growing understanding of the true importance of this massive movement.

Circumstances of Printing

With regard to the question of print, convention meetings were exercises in Black organizational autonomy. Printing committees were established alongside executive committees, business committees, and others. Delegates approved plans

for the printing and distribution of hundreds or thousands of copies of the proceedings, and decided on the means of funding. In some cases, the title pages of the resulting pamphlets reveal the names of the printers involved. Printed copies of minutes were often given to attendees, who were expected to distribute or sell them, thus helping support the movement financially.


Title page, “Minutes and Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the People of Colour” (Philadelphia, 1831). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

An exhibition on coloredconventions.org features interactive maps offering information about how national conventions planned for the printing of proceedings (“The Print Life of Colored Conventions Proceedings, 1830-1865 “). Drawing this information out of the minutes and placing it within maps allows viewers to easily absorb material that is spread throughout the minutes, while also providing a visual sense of the important regional dimension of the movement.

One section of the exhibit quotes plans to publish 1,000 copies of an address that had been delivered at the 1843 Buffalo, New York, convention. The speech in question was Henry Highland Garnet’s famous address to the slaves, which Sarah Patterson has discussed in an earlier essay. Frederick Douglass led the opposition to the adoption of Garnet’s speech, which invoked violent resistance as a path to freedom for enslaved Blacks. Based on another passage from the minutes, the exhibit also reveals that both Garnet and Douglass were named to the committee that was to oversee the publication of convention proceedings. The fact that both men sat on this committee suggests cooperation that cut across the lines of a disagreement that is the defining feature of the 1843 convention. However one is to interpret such details, their presence underlies the importance of the minutes as historical sources.

Newspapers

Before a convention took place, the publication of newspaper announcements (“calls”) was a necessary act of publicity that set the tone for the convention to come. Sarah Patterson’s essay explains the events surrounding the call that preceded the 1843 National Convention. Ten years later, the call for the 1853 Colored National Convention decried the recent passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, evoked other examples of discrimination, and announced the idea of a National Council, a permanent organization devoted to civil equality for Blacks. Championed by Douglass, this last idea was a direct response to the growing emigration movement, which Douglass opposed. The first significant document of the published proceedings of the 1853 convention elaborates on the topics announced in the call. In a lengthy address, Douglass again denounces

the Fugitive Slave Act, calls for full citizenship rights for men of color, and gives details for the establishment of the National Council of the Colored People, which was envisioned as an expression of the democratic ideals that underpinned Douglass's entire speech: the council was to be composed of free Blacks elected from each state, this at a time when the right to vote was non-existent for Blacks living in many of those states. The call had been used to announce the central feature of the coming convention.


Screenshot from exhibition "The Print Life of Colored Conventions Proceedings, 1830-1865" (2015). Courtesy of the Colored Conventions Project.

In many instances newspapers published daily synopses of convention activities and reprinted the minutes afterward. Publications such as *The Colored American*, *The Liberator*, *The National Anti-Slavery Standard*, *The Aliened American, The North Star*, and *The New Orleans Tribune* are the only known sources for certain sets of proceedings. Although white-owned abolitionist periodicals such as *The Liberator* published minutes, many conventioneers aimed for autonomy of representation. The creation and support of Black newspapers became important goals, just as Black antislavery thinking began to diverge seriously from the Garrisonian approach, with its emphasis on moral suasion rather than voting and political activism. By the mid-1840s there was serious discussion of the need for a Black national print organ. At the 1847 National Convention in Troy, New York, "The Report of the Committee on a National Press" suggested:

> Let there be, then, in these United States, a Printing Press, a copious supply of type, a full and complete establishment, wholly controled by colored men; let the thinking writing-man, the compositors, the pressmen, the printers' help, all, all be men of color;-then let there come from said establishment a weekly periodical and a quarterly periodical, edited as well as printed by colored men; let this establishment be so well endowed as to be beyond the chances of temporary patronage; and then there will be a fixed fact, a rallying point, towards which the strong and the weak amongst us would look with confidence and hope …

The printing committee foresaw the financial difficulties of sustaining a newspaper such as this, which, they predicted, would require 2,000 regular subscribers. As an alternative, the committee recommended designating an existing paper to play the envisioned role. One year later, at the Colored National Convention of 1848 in Cleveland, Frederick Douglass's recently established *North Star* was identified as serving the function of a national Black newspaper.


"The First Colored Convention," Anglo-African Magazine, p. 1, Vol. 1, No. 10

(October, 1859). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

Between 1830 and the end of the nineteenth century, scores of proceedings were printed in newspapers and as pamphlets, and even as handbills around the country. The strategy worked to publicize the meetings as they were happening, but made it difficult for historians to get a full sense of the published minutes as a body of texts. The print record of the movement was characterized by dispersal. Some sets of proceedings made their way into the collections of historical societies, archives, and libraries. The lack of centralized records reflected the absence of an anchoring, permanent central organization. (The national organization that had been envisioned by Douglass in 1853 never came into being.) Rather, the absence of central records was a result of separate, though often related, decisions to call national, state, or regional conventions in response to events as they unfolded. A researcher working during the pre-digital era had to cover a lot of territory to consult all the minutes that were extant, and even the most intrepid researcher would have been unable to locate many. This situation prevented a comprehensive assessment of the movement by historians. This is the gap that the Colored Conventions Project seeks to fill.

Twentieth-Century Developments

Several volumes of collected minutes appeared during the second half of the last century. In 1969, Howard Holman Bell's *Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Negro Conventions* brought together proceedings from the twelve national conventions that took place between 1831 and 1864. For some reason, Bell does not indicate the archival sources of his facsimiles, with one exception, thus leaving readers in the dark as to where he had located the facsimiles that constituted the book.

He gives a fuller accounting in his doctoral dissertation, *A Survey of The Negro Conventions Movement* (1953), published as a book in 1969. Like so many other scholars doing research on African Americans during the 1940s and 1950s, Bell acknowledges the contributions of influential Howard University librarian Dorothy Porter Wesley to his project. He names Howard as one of the repositories with the best collections of pamphlets, along with Yale.

Bell notes that the pamphlet reports are official accounts of the conventions, but that in some instances they lack pertinent information or become clear "only when supplemented by newspaper reports" (iii). However, he affirms the importance of printed minutes as sources of information. Minutes provide lists of attendees as well as committee rosters. They lay out plans that were outlined at the meetings and speeches attendees made for or against these plans. Even in the absence of other information, these details are invaluable to researchers and students of the movement. Often the minutes are the only source of information regarding the identities of those involved in the movement, as well as the principle strategies and debates. Bell's observation

about the suppression of certain details in the published minutes might be illuminated by an observation made by Spires, who explains that conventions sometimes refrained from providing full details of heated debates, for example, lest there be accusations of disunity in the ranks.

In the introduction to one of their two volumes of proceedings from state conventions (1840-1865), Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker lament Bell's failure to indicate the sources of the minutes he republished. Foner's and Walker's volumes were published in 1979 and 1980 (the two scholars co-authored both volumes). They assemble transcriptions of 45 conventions from fifteen states. In 1986, the two also edited the first of a projected three-volume collection of proceedings of national and state conventions that took place between 1865 and 1900. Fortunately, all three volumes indicate the newspaper or other source of each set of proceedings. These details have been vital to the Colored Conventions Project, which has drawn from these sources, and gone on to offer a much larger number of minutes, which can be searched using keywords.

While the volumes produced by Bell and by Foner and Walker were valuable tools for scholars of African American history during the decades after their appearance, they are now out of print and hard to find. Also, even these capacious resources omit many sets of proceedings, particularly from the state conventions. The Colored Conventions Project drew on the published collections for the first scans that made their way onto coloredconventions.org. Since then, the site has added scores of conventions from archival or online sources. Many had been rarely cited, and some had never been cited at all. New sets of proceedings are being discovered and added continually by the faculty director of the program, as well as by the graduate students, undergraduates, and librarians who make up the project team. And there are more discoveries all the time. At the recent Colored Conventions Symposium in Delaware, scholars pointed us toward groups of proceedings from Texas conventions. We are in the processing of obtaining images of those documents in order to make them available. These minutes should allow researchers to get a sense of the distinctive features and concerns of the Texas conventions movement.

Reflecting on "Hybrid" Texts

Project co-coordinator Jim Casey and other scholars often point to the hybrid nature of the convention proceedings. As seen above, the conversation created by this archive includes preliminary announcements, minutes in newspaper or pamphlet form, and post-facto commentaries in the form of letters or newspaper articles. In some cases they also include resolutions and petitions such as the one that delegates from the 1840 New York State Convention sent to the legislature to protest the exclusion of Black men from the voting process. Bell's remarks about the importance of the minutes as historical documents show that juxtaposing these linked, heterogeneous sources is necessary to historical reflection on the topic. Not only is the Colored Conventions Project disseminating the constellation of documents that come out of individual conventions, the project is also allowing researchers to read all the available

minutes together, or to search across them for names or themes. This tool has the potential to revolutionize understanding of the conventions movement. Reactions from our 2015 symposium suggest that scholars strongly agree. One attendee proclaimed on social media that his research agenda was changing before his eyes.

The Next Phase

In her introduction to the online exhibit documenting the printing of convention proceedings, curator and CCP co-coordinator Sarah Patterson points out that a full publishing history of the Colored Conventions movement remains to be written. By assembling the largest collection of minutes in the world and making them searchable in new ways, the Colored Conventions Project is already contributing to the writing of that history.

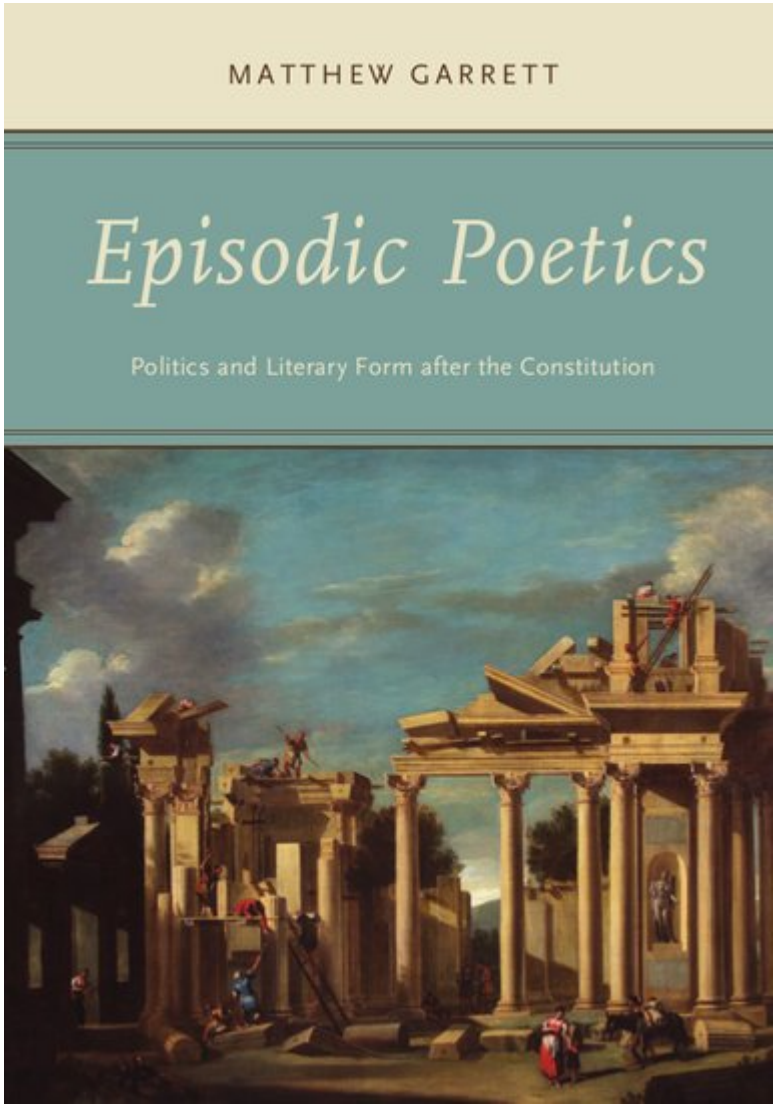
Further Reading:

The Colored Conventions Project Website has an extensive bibliography of sources relating to the Colored Conventions movement and nineteenth-century African American political advocacy. Derrick R. Spires's "Imagining a State of Fellow Citizens: Early African American Politics of Publicity in Black State Conventions," from the book Early African American Print Culture, was particularly helpful for the writing of this article.

This article originally appeared in issue 16.1 (Fall, 2015).

Curtis Small is a special collections librarian at the University of Delaware. Most recently he has been assisting the Colored Conventions Project with obtaining permissions and with tracking down and acquiring new sets of proceedings. Working with the project has inspired his interest in the print history of the Colored Conventions movement and in African American print history more generally.

The Constitution, the Great Recession, and the Politics of Literary Form



Matthew Garrett, *Episodic Poetics: Politics and Literary Form after the Constitution.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 256 pp., $65.

Matthew Garrett's extraordinary *Episodic Poetics: Politics and Literary Form After the Constitution* explores the complex textures that resulted when the post-constitutional moment's consolidating energies found verbal expression in the fragmentary form of the period's literary production. The book is a "microstructural or subgeneric literary history" (88). It follows the

episode—an "*integral*, but also *extractable* unit of any narrative" across a range of genres: political essay, memoir, novel, and miscellany (3). As Garrett argues in his lucid introduction, the episode is a dialectical form, "a part that exists as such only in relation to a real or implied whole" (4). This mediating between the one and the many makes the episode an especially rich site for analyzing the politics of form in the early nation. This episodic writing is, Garrett argues, commodified, albeit imperfectly—reproducible but not mimetic, indexical but not iconic. "It is the episode," Garrett writes, "in its flexibility and diaphanous quality—part gesturing toward whole, whole gesturing back—that does the literary work of this emergent bourgeois culture" (21). The representative texts of Garrett's four genres, via their respective logics of contagion, error, hesitation, and volubility helped delineate the contours of the political. *Episodic Poetics*' investigation of these dynamics is as theoretically sophisticated as it is elegantly constructed, and in what follows I can only gesture at the readerly pleasures that attend following the involutions of its nuanced argument.


These fascinating formal rereadings of such canonical texts speak to our own political moment.

In chapter 1, "The Poetics of Constitutional Consolidation," *The Federalist's* episodic fragmentation—eighty-five essays split between three authors united under a single pseudonym, Publius—emerges as key to understanding how, in Hamilton and Madison's hands, the American *unum* was to emerge from the chaotic *pluribus.*Garrett reads the dialectic between Hamiltonian binarism and Madisonian fragmentation as an essential element of the text's politics. *The Federalist* nationalizes, in part, by using metaphors of contagion and disease to pathologize antifederal opposition. Garrett argues that the repressed vehicle of such figures is debt, and that everything about *The Federalist*, from its narrative grammar to its physical presentation, works to make elite politics synonymous with national politics (28).

Chapter 2, "The Life in Episodes," explores how Benjamin Franklin's manipulation of the *Autobiography*'s episodes registers and manages the same threatening "social multiplicity" (61). When Franklin corrects his famous errata, he averts conflict by symbolically or literally repaying his debts. Vernon, a friend of the Franklin family, who inadvertently loans Franklin money, is repaid with interest; Franklin's abandonment of Deborah Franklin is rectified by their marriage (64). Other scholars have seen the *Autobiography* projecting revolutionary politics inward. Garrett sees Franklin's deft manipulation of the relationship between parts and whole, major and minor events, and mistakes and corrections as a paradigm for how to defuse conflict without actually relieving its underlying causes.

These fascinating formal rereadings of such canonical texts speak to our own political moment. The threats—multiplicity, plurality, and their near-synonyms—to which Franklin and the authors of *The Federalist* respond are stand-ins for something akin to "class conflict," a phrase Garrett employs only once, in a note. "Income inequality" does not appear at all, but then the period was characterized by far more dire forms of oppression. Nevertheless, when Garrett employs the Barthesian concept of "bourgeois," "owning class," or "ruling-class ex-nomination"—that is, the naturalization of capitalist ideology—the reverberations with the Great Recession of 2008 are clear. Publius binds essays and Franklin collects parts; both further the implicit claim that the "propertied class" is "the only available force for gathering together the social whole" (115). They are too big to fail, and we have inherited the fruits of their success.

Chapters 3 and 4 explore the career of the episode in the evolving literary marketplace of the 1780s and 1790s. "The Fiction of Hesitation" argues that the dilated, meandering plots of the anonymous *Story of Constantius and Pulchera* (1789), Susanna Rowson's *Trials of the Human Heart* (1795), and Charles Brockden Brown's *Ormond; or, The Secret Witness* (1799) translate Publius and Franklin's strategies of dispersal into forms suitable to a nascent literary market economy. Finding the first two texts especially well adapted to both intensive and extensive reading, Garrett argues that their formal alternation between a static domesticity in which not much happens and the duels, shipwrecks, and reunions that comprise the episodic plots provided a range of gratifying possibilities for readers. (In so doing, fiction also unsettled religious tract literature's reliance upon many of the same formal techniques.)

Ormond professes to be "the history of Constantia Dudley," but this description does not do justice to what Garrett rightly calls the novel's "distended" plot (97). After Constantia's father, Stephen, is betrayed and bankrupted by his former partner, the forger Thomas Craig, the Dudley family moves to Philadelphia, where they encounter the 1793 yellow fever epidemic. True to her name, Constantia remains in the city caring for the victims and resisting both rape and marriage. Ormond, the book's villain, attempts first to reason and later to force the resolute heroine out of her virtue; in the end she kills him with a penknife. The pull between the aptly named Constantia as the force for narrative diffusion and Ormond as an apostle of fatal closure creates another dialectic of plot and episodic interruption. This play between digression and story recalls the analogous strategies employed by Publius and Franklin, only operating in a different register. That dialectic is Brown's narrative solution to the problem of plotting, and it is the only vehicle for change in *Ormond*. It also represents "Brown's aesthetic solution to the problem of revolution," since the questions of how to order a story and how to order a polity are versions of each other (113).

Chapter 4, "Miscellany and the Structure of Style," "anatomizes *Salamagundi*'s episodic whims as a form of commodity writing" (116). The collaborative effort of James Kirke Paulding and William and Washington

Irving, *Salamagundi* (1807-08) is in many ways the "anti-*Federalist*": its narrative authority is aggressively dispersed among a number of fictional contributors, its material form is ephemeral, and it claims no moral, rational, or political authority (124). What remains is style, which emerges, in Garrett's analysis, as "a brilliant compromise in that … it enables a hegemonic articulation of class power" (143). By couching its whimsical episodic form in a gentlemanly or aristocratic style, "the 'Federalist' form of subjective self-assertion returns as its dialectical opposite, the 'Republican' volubility of an episodic commodity literature" (144). Unlike its predecessors, *Salamagundi* is "fully saturated by the market," meaning it can embrace the episodic in ways that the previous chapter's novels were forced to hold in suspension (121).

A decade after Jonathan Loesberg's *A Return to Aesthetics*, literary studies' aesthetic turn has—happily—lost some of its controversy along with its novelty. Nevertheless, when Garrett claims that *Episodic Poetic*'s "modest methodological injunction … is this: literary history is better understood *as an integral part of history* if we understand literary texts at multiple levels of scale and abstraction," his modesty is misleading (145). Garrett's theoretical interlocutors range from Aristotle to Zizek, but they are, nevertheless, carefully chosen. Garrett follows Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* and Lukacs' "Megjegyzések az irodalomtörténet elméletéhez" ("Remarks on the Theory of Literature") among many others in claiming that literary form registers the sociopolitical antagonisms of its time and place more acutely than literature's thematic content. Formal readings, then, become the site for a politically engaged literary criticism of the kind *Episodic Poetics* pursues: "the *social* problem is … a *formal* problem of writing" (25). Garrett's take on these social problems is characteristic of the new formalists' tendency to favor the Marxist/Hegelian of the Frankfurt School over the Russian Formalists—though Bakhtin is a touchstone, and Lotman and Shklovsky appear in chapter 3. Nevertheless, his repeated invocation of Aristotle suggests a commitment to reconciling the approaches Marjorie Levinson dubbed "activist" and "normative formalism" in her 2008 *PMLA* article. In chapter 3, as if to literalize this goal, Garrett invokes Aristotle via the eighteenth-century rhetoricians Lord Kames and Hugh Blair, adducing the classic instance of normative aesthetic judgment by filtering it through an account of its reception. Garrett maintains the activist's interest in a historicized politics of form without abandoning normative belief in aesthetic accomplishment. Thus, as he writes with regard to *The Federalist,* "I take this rush to abstraction … to be both a cornerstone of *The Federalist*'s formal achievement *and* the most unmediated aspect of its connection to the mercantile situation from which it emerges" (45). Conversely, Charles Brockden Brown's "transparently 'bad' plotting is interesting in the *specific ways* it manifests its 'badness'" (110). Garrett's scare quotes distance him from the aesthetic judgment leveled against Brown's plots, but they do not totally disavow it. Indeed, Garrett wants to recuperate aesthetic judgment as "the means of engaging with the very history that the judgment 'bad' would appear to have denied" (115).

For both its theoretical commitment to form and its literary analysis, *Episodic Poetics* is an important addition to a growing body of aesthetically oriented literary criticism. The book exemplifies Richard Strier's "indexical formalism"—an investment in form as historical because deictic—but also what Ed Cahill calls "archival formalism"—the "wide-angle perspective" that reveals the pervasiveness of "deep form." Cahill sees archival formalism as a defense against the complaint that the objects of formalist analysis are not themselves representative, an observation Garrett echoes in his "Conclusion" and elsewhere. At its best, sensitivity to these text's material forms adds nuance to these arguments. The ephemerality of *Salamagundi*, for example, is crucial to Garrett's analysis. Elsewhere in *Episodic Poetics*, however, the history of these texts' production and dissemination functions only analogically. For instance, Garrett argues plausibly enough that the fine and common copies of *The Federalist* materialize the social vision of its principal authors. He continues, "Volume 1 of the typical thick paper copy [of John and Archibald M'Lean's 1788 first edition of *The Federalist*] contains thirty-six (or so) blank leaves, filler that was needed to balance the width of the spines, to enable symmetry in the ornamental tooling" (58). It is possible that extra paper was included to preserve the volumes' Georgian balance, but if so the effort was unsuccessful—the two volumes remain quite unequal in length. But this elevation of the aesthetic seems unlikely. The Huntington Library copy, still in its publisher's binding, has 25 blank leaves—the remainder of the book's final signature plus a sheet and a half of extra paper. While it may strike the modern viewer as "obscenely gorgeous," surely such a judgment should be no less suspect than calling *Ormond*'s plotting "bad" (58). The tooled binding, as William Loring Andrews observed a century ago, is extremely well executed, but its speckled calf remains a far cry from gleaming morocco.

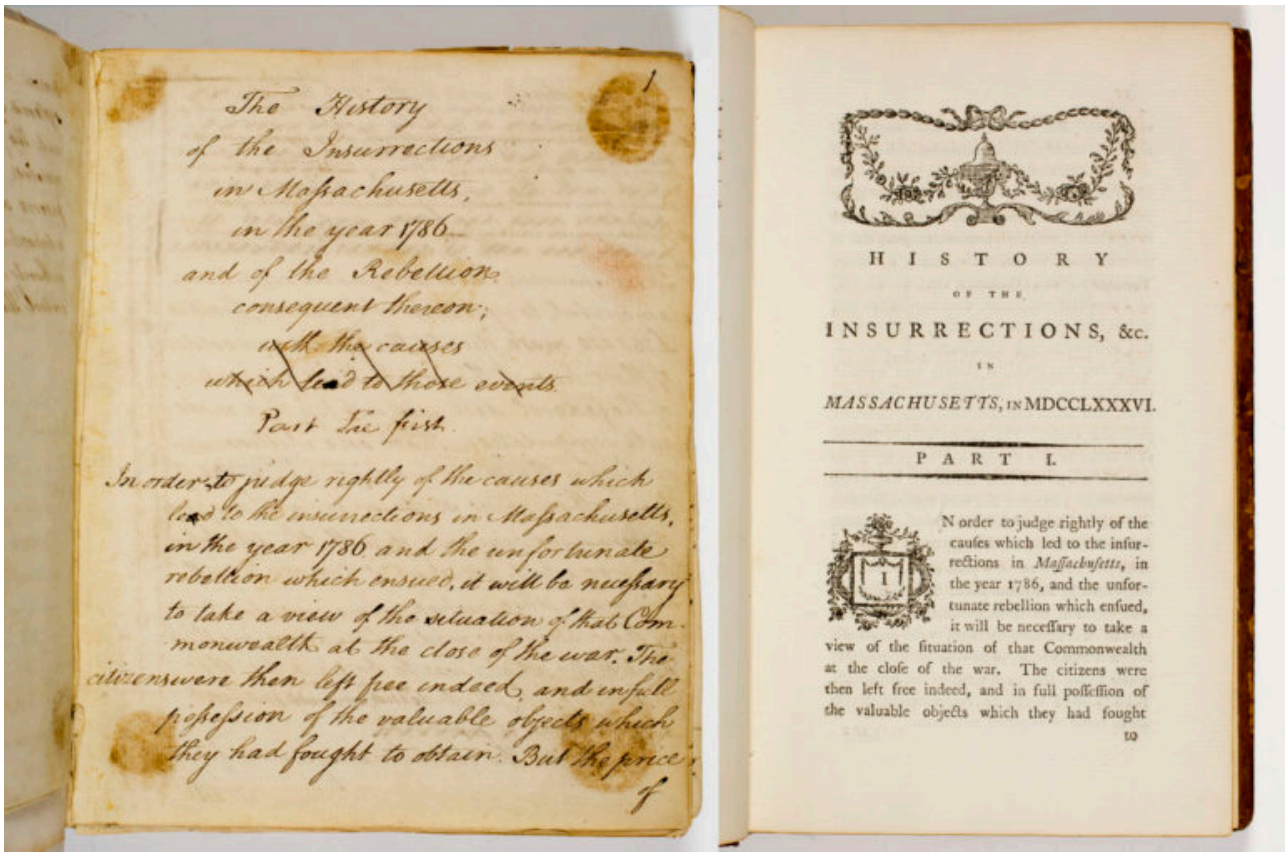
This is a quibble, to be sure, yet even such a minor aesthetic reappraisal might in turn prompt us to search for other explanations for these blank leaves. They might have been added for utilitarian rather than artistic reasons. Hamilton hoped the Federalist elite in Virginia would use their copies as a "debater's handbook" at the Richmond convention (31). The blank pages do not make the fine copies "*unreadable*," but they might well have made them more useful in the very specific context of Virginia and New York's ratification battles (58). Deciding between these two readings would require a wider-ranging bibliographical analysis than I have been able to perform, but such work has the potential to reveal a great deal about the historical connections between Federalist politics and the physical production of material texts. As John Bidwell pointed out in *American Paper Mills, 1690-1832*, Whatman, Patch, and other English papermakers supplied the "superfine royal writing paper" that distinguishes the fine copies of The Federalist, paper that drew its name from the royal emblems used as watermarks (xxvi.) The common copies, on the other hand, apparently used paper from a new domestic source: Delaware's Brandywine Mill. Because Garrett takes form to be more discursive than material, it is not clear how these elements of *The Federalist*'s production speak to the politics of its literary form. But it is a testimony to the book's ambition and success that *Episodic Poetics* provides a fascinating framework capable of investing

such antiquarian details with new significance.

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Chris Hunter is an assistant professor of English at Caltech. He studies the histories of books, readers, and genres.

The Business of Building Books



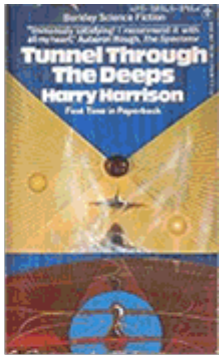
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Thinking about books as objects that were processed, stored, and packaged by industrialists (I use the term advisedly, instead of “printer”) like Isaiah Thomas helps re-orient the way we think about literature in early America.

If the British Won …











Living as I do in Williamsburg, Virginia, I am surrounded by the American Revolution. Here are the buildings where the Revolution was to some considerable extent conceived and here through the programs of Colonial Williamsburg it is reenacted every day. This may explain why I found myself wondering about a world without an American Revolution and why I took it upon myself to read alternate histories (or counterfactuals, as historians tend to call them) in which that was the case.

This was not nearly as formidable as taking on alternate histories in which the South won the Civil War. Those fill many more shelves, and it's easy to see why. There are still plenty of people who find the Confederacy's Lost Cause a romantic one and who relish the idea of a triumphant Robert E. Lee. Alternate histories of World War II also abound, presumably not because a Nazi-ruled America is appealing but because it's irresistibly scary. A British America, in contrast, conjures up little more than a visit from Queen Elizabeth II: a bit of pomp, comfortably familiar and not very exciting.

Historians generally have held this kind of "what-if" history in disdain. In 1961, E. H. Carr called it a "parlor game" and insisted "history is … a record of what people did, not of what they failed to do." Since then, it's become a bit more respectable. Historian Gavriel Rosenfeld lists among the reasons the rise of postmodernism in the humanities, with its blurring of the line between fact and fiction; of chaos theory in the sciences, with its emphasis on how

small changes can have big results; and of online virtual realities, making historians, like everyone else, more comfortable with the idea of alternate outcomes. And the decline of ideologies such as Marxism, which saw historical trends as predetermined and inevitable, has led to a greater appreciation of how the decisions and actions of individuals, and how sometimes pure chance, can change the course of history.

Still, though historians have played with the genre, alternate history is more often the work of science fiction writers. The genre has also appealed to some mainstream and literary novelists, like Stephen King and Michael Chabon and Philip Roth, and to plenty of readers. The website uchronia.net lists more than 2,000 printed works in the genre. The discussion forum at alternatehistory.comhas more than seven million posts. General anthologies of alternate history, such as Robert Cowley's *What If?* series, have been bestsellers.

As for alternate histories of the Revolution, they held enough surprises to keep me reading.

How the British won

Judging from many works in the genre, the easiest way for the British to have won the Revolution would have been never to have fought. A bit more farsightedness on the part of the king's ministers might have averted the whole nasty business. Roger Thompson's story, "If I Had Been the Earl of Shelburne," plays out this scenario. Shelburne's plan here is simple: take away the colonists' rallying cry—No taxation without representation—by not taxing them and by giving them seats in Parliament. Among the colonists, too, moderates might have prevailed, as in Edmond Wright's story, "If I Had Been Benjamin Franklin in the Early 1770s." Wright's Franklin mollifies the British by promising Congress will pay for the tea dumped in Boston's harbor.

Unlike most of the other writers whose work this essay surveys, Thompson and Wright are both historians. This perhaps accounts for their focus on the moments when history might have changed rather than on the long-term results of those changes. Both teach American history in England, which perhaps accounts for their eagerness to see the American "problem" handled, as Wright puts it, "with more delicacy and discretion."

Once begun, the Revolution's success was anything but inevitable. Indeed, this is a war that cries out for alternate histories. The actual military history is simply too improbable: an undermanned, underarmed, underfed rabble defeating the world's most powerful empire. The patriot cause, historian Thomas Fleming wrote, experienced "almost too many moments … on the brink of disaster," again and again "to be retrieved by the most unlikely accidents or coincidences or choices made by harried men in the heat of conflict."

Disaster certainly seemed imminent in September 1775. General William Howe's troops, having defeated Washington's on Long Island, crossed the East River to Kip's Bay on Manhattan's east side, and again routed the Americans. Fortunately for Washington, Howe was satisfied to have secured New York City, and Washington and his army escaped to the north.

In Paul Seabury's story, "What If George Washington Had Been Captured by General Howe?" Howe gets his man, though he deserves no credit. Seabury presents us with the diary of a Mrs. Murray, who owns an orchard on Murray Hill, not far from Kip's Bay. Mrs. Murray is mostly worried about the troops ruining her crops. She sees both Washington and Howe on her hill. The latter is more interested in having a drink, but Mrs. Murray takes charge, refusing Howe even a cup of water until he brings back Washington—which, as a result of her prodding, he finally does.

Seabury concludes his story with Howe's biographer reading the diary, then dismissing Mrs. Murray as a washerwoman and a strumpet and offering to buy the diary, clearly intending to keep its contents secret. This may not qualify Seabury, a political scientist, as a champion of women's history, and alternate historians of the Revolution have focused on dead white men no less than actual historians—witness the centrality to so many stories of Washington being captured or killed. But Seabury certainly enjoys poking fun at historians who glorify the great men of history, be they Howe or Washington.

Washington is again captured in New York in Gary Blackwood's novel for teens, *Year of the Hangman*. The novel's plot turns on the efforts of its fifteen-year-old hero to save Washington from being hanged. It does not bode well that it is set largely in 1777, a year that began with the hanging of various rebel leaders and in which the three 7s, as Blackwood notes, have shapes distressingly similar to that of gallows.

Washington is also captured in "Washington Shall Hang," a play that is an alternate history of the Revolution. In Robert Wallace Russell's story, Washington is put on trial for treason and defended, improbably, by the British colonel, Banastre Tarleton, best known for his bloody cavalry raids and his defeat at the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina. Here Tarleton redeems himself by outwitting the prosecutors, who have to resort to perjury (from Benedict's wife, Peggy Arnold) to make sure Washington is found guilty.

Washington's capture or death is so common in alternate histories of the Revolution that you might wonder why so many writers found it necessary to get rid of Washington in order for the British to prevail. After all, Washington's successes depended heavily on the flaws of British generals, such as Howe's hesitation. Washington was no military genius. He was, however, opportunistic, dogged, and inspiring. For a revolution that depended less on defeating the British than on persuading them that America wasn't worth the trouble of a continuing war, what Washington had to offer was just what was needed. He kept going and he kept his troops going when others would have despaired. He was, as

Henry Lee said after Washington's actual death in 1799, "first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen."

Had the Revolution been lost, how would the world be different?

For starters, Indians would have been a lot better off. In *The Two Georges*, a novel by Harry Turtledove and Richard Dreyfuss, the union between Britain and her colonies has lasted into the late twentieth century in which the novel is set, and a few independent Indian nations remain intact in parts of North America.

Native Americans' fate is more ambiguous in Marc Laidlaw's short story, "His Powder'd Wig, His Crown of Thornes." The story appears in an anthology devoted to the question of whether individuals, even "great men," can truly change the course of history. Here Washington's death (after being betrayed by Benedict Arnold) leads to the demise of the Revolution, but also to the rise of a secret Indian religion. Grant Innes, a modern-day British trader in Native art, stumbles upon a figure of Washington on the cross. Tracking it through the literally underground world of the American capital (Arnoldsburg, District of Cornwallis), Innes finds a painting much like da Vinci's *Last Supper* but with Washington as Christ and his various generals—Knox, Greene, Lee, Lafayette, Rochambeau—as disciples. In the place of Judas is, of course, Arnold.

Innes learns that the Indians blame themselves for Washington's death and for the world's subsequent imbalance. As British allies, they scalped his wig and pierced his body with thorns. This, they believe, led to an America that bore factories instead of fruit. "Let no man forget His death," one of their biblical-sounding books reads. "Forget not his sacrifice, His powder'd wig, His crown of thornes."

Powerful though the Indians' faith is in Laidlaw's story, it seems misplaced. Given the actual history of Native Americans under Washington's successors, it seems likely that, had the Revolution failed, Indians would generally have been better off.

Blacks, too, would have been better off without the Revolution, at least as portrayed in alternate histories. Turtledove and Dreyfuss assume the abolition of slavery in America would have followed logically from its abolition elsewhere in the British Empire during the 1830s. In the North American Union of *The Two Georges*, where civil rights were established well before the 1950s and 1960s, the governor general is Sir Martin Luther King.

The fate of blacks is less clear in Charles Coleman Finlay's story, "We Come Not to Praise Washington." Finlay's stories range from alternate history to Arthuriana, sword and sorcery, and horror. Here Washington died in 1793 and the

military, led by Alexander Hamilton, has taken over. The cause of freedom for blacks and whites ends up in the hands of an escaped slave named Gabriel, who in actual history organized a failed slave rebellion in 1800.

Overall, alternate historians seem confident the world—and not just Native Americans and African Americans—would have been better off under the British. The combined American and British forces are, for example, unbeatable in "The Charge of Lee's Brigade," a story by S. M. Stirling, author of numerous works of alternate history. It's no coincidence that Stirling's title conjures up that of Tennyson's poem, "Charge of the Light Brigade." In 1854 Brigadier General Lee of the Royal North American Army finds himself fighting for the British in the Crimean War and ordered to lead what seemed likely to be a suicidal charge on the Russian position. Is there a way to seize the Russian guns without condemning half the brigade? If anyone can figure out how to do it, it is Lee, for in a world without a Revolution and thus without a Civil War, this is none other than Robert E. Lee. Students of military history will find this story especially intriguing.

One of the most fully drawn portraits of a modern world in which America is still part of the British Empire is *The Two Georges* (which must be the only book ever co-authored by a Hugo winner and an Oscar winner). The world Turtledove and Dreyfuss imagine is, however, not fully modern: absent American independence and inventiveness, its steampunk technology is behind ours, with slow-moving though luxurious whale-shaped airships instead of planes and long-distance calls that require operators and patience.

There is much to be said for this world. With the British in control, the world is at peace, despite threats from the Russians and a combined French and Spanish empire. America, too, is a more peaceful place: it's rare that a member of the Royal American Mounted Police encounters an armed criminal. When a painting is stolen prior to the opening of its tour in Los Angeles—oops, New Liverpool—it is up to Colonel Thomas Bushell of the Mounties to get it back. The painting, which is called "The Two Georges," portrays George Washington bowing before George III, and it is a symbol of the continuing union between Britain and America. The prime suspects are the Sons of Liberty, extremists who want a free America. These semi-fascist Sons would also like to free the continent of Negroes and Indians.

Dreyfuss and Turtledove draw heavily on and acknowledge the influence of Harry Harrison's *Tunnel Through the Deeps* (published in England and in some later American editions as *A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!*), In Harrison's novel, the failure of the American Revolution has again resulted in a modern world that's vaguely Victorian in its technology and manners. This world, too, is somewhat more civilized than our own, a pleasant Tory fantasy of luxury airships and class distinctions. The book will, as the flap copy on the British edition proclaims, "warm the heart of every Englishman … on whom the sun has ever set."

A few refreshing dystopias

All these worlds where everything works out seem a harsh verdict on a Revolution dedicated to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Granted, the words of the Declaration of Independence obviously did not apply to blacks and Indians—or women, for that matter. Still, would we really want July 4 to be just another day on our British calendars?

For a refreshingly dystopian change, there is S. M. Stirling's three-volume series, *The Domination*. In Stirling's history, Americans win the Revolution but belatedly and with much more bitterness on the part of those loyal to England. Instead of going to Canada, as many loyalists actually did, they settle in South Africa and found the colony of Drakia (named after Francis Drake). Later joined by European aristocrats and Southern Confederates, these losers of our history hold a grudge. They turn Drakia into an empire known as the Domination of the Draka, an empire that fulfilled the dreams of apartheid's most avid supporters. A common greeting: "Glory to the Race." The Draka are not only racist but also extraordinarily violent, turning conquered peoples into serfs and soldiers to fuel further conquests.

The first of the trilogy, *Marching Through Georgia*, is set during World War II, or as it was known in Stirling's world, the Eurasian War. Having already seized Africa and Asia, the Draka roll over the Nazis and then Western Europe. The second book, *Under the Yoke*, chronicles the early years of a Cold War between America and the Domination. The third book, *The Stone Dogs*, carries the Cold War into space, giving the Draka control of earth and exiling the remnants of America to distant corners of the universe.

Stirling provides a great deal of military detail, and the first two parts appeal in particular to fans of military history. By the third book, he has moved into a world that is more fully science fiction, i.e. the focus is on fictionalized science rather than fictionalized history.

Much of the trilogy is written from the perspective of Draka characters, but this in no ways blinds us to the fact that this was a world that would have been better off with our version of the American Revolution. Only a white supremacist would choose the Domination over America. Stirling, however, ought not to be thought of as entirely uncritical of America; after all, the Domination was founded and built by loyalists from the Revolution and Confederates from the Civil War—Americans all. In any case, *The Domination* is actually less a commentary on the American Revolution than on the Cold War. The question Stirling's work raises is the one faced by Americans after World War II: How do you fight an empire that is undeniably evil but has weapons that could destroy the world?

For want of a nail

Robert Sobel's *For Want of a Nail …* is a comprehensive 450-page history of North America written entirely in the style of an actual history, complete with tables and charts, economic and political analysis, footnotes, bibliography, and acknowledgments. All entirely made up.

Well, not entirely … the opening thirty pages are real history. That takes us to the Battle of Saratoga, often cited as a turning point in the war, since it was this American victory that convinced the French to lend their support. Here the American general Horatio Gates hesitates at a crucial moment, the British general Henry Clinton arrives in time with reinforcements, and the British army of General Johnny Burgoyne deals another blow to the Americans. In the absence of an American victory, the French back away from the Americans, Congress loses faith in Washington and replaces him with a nonentity named Artemas Ward, and moderates led by Pennsylvania's John Dickinson seize control of Congress from Adams and Jefferson. Franklin opens negotiations with the British, and in 1778 the British agree to generous peace terms. Most rebels are granted amnesty, though a few of the most radical leaders are executed, among them John and Samuel Adams, John Hancock, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, Richard Henry Lee, and Tom Paine. Washington is sentenced to life in prison.

Next, the British create the Confederation of North America, making the capital Fort Pitt, which in our world became Pittsburgh, and renaming it Burgoyne. Some of the remaining rebels are unwilling to submit to any form of British rule. Led by, among others, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and Benedict Arnold, they head west on what comes to be called "the Wilderness Walk." In Spanish territory, they found the city of Jefferson, which eventually becomes the capital of a new nation, also known as Jefferson.

The nation of Jefferson pushes south and west in its version of manifest destiny (which Jeffersonians call continental destiny). Taking advantage of Spain's problems in Europe, Andrew Jackson leads a Jefferson army on a conquest of Mexico. Jackson becomes president of what comes to be called the United States of Mexico, which eventually stretches through Arizona and California.

All this is sort of familiar, or at least figures like Jefferson and Jackson act much like themselves, albeit in different circumstances. As Sobel pushes further into the nineteenth century, however, the story focuses on entirely fictional characters. Unlike science fiction writers whose main interest is to portray some alternate world whose history is generally given in flashbacks and often just in passing, Sobel gives us detailed portraits of Jackson's successors as president of the USM, of the series of wars between the USM and the Confederation, of various depressions and elections, inventions, riots, scandals, genocides, and everything else you'd expect in a history.

Sobel's adherence to the forms of historical writing extends to including a

highly critical review of his work, as might be found in an academic journal. The reviewer—another fictional character—criticizes Sobel's anti-Mexican bias and suggests as a corrective that the reader refer to various other histories, also fictional. The review makes one wonder whether Sobel's whole point is to parody the conventions of history writing. *For Want of a Nail* also reminds us how easy it is for historians to sound authoritative, even if they're making it all up.

Sobel's work has inspired a cult following. At the website, "For All Nails," contributors have submitted hundreds of possible extensions of Sobel's history up to the present, and some reinterpretations of its past (though the site's rules prohibit changing any of Sobel's facts). In its scope, Sobel's world can legitimately be compared to Tolkien's or George Lucas's.

Yet Sobel's exhaustive approach can also be exhausting. One of the pleasures of great history and great fiction is the originality of the language, and by so fully conforming to the conventions of academic writing, Sobel denies us that. Reading Sobel is like reading a textbook. You can admire it, but you're not likely to be swept away by it.

In contrast, the best alternate histories make for entertaining reading. You should not expect literary masterpieces, nor should you expect a radically new understanding of the Revolution. You will not learn what the founders really believed about guns or God. But the masters of the genre—and these include Turtledove and Stirling and Harrison—portray vivid and plausible worlds, all emerging from a change of course somewhere in the past.

Like any alternate history, *For Want of a Nail* demonstrates the power of contingency: a seemingly small tweak, in this case Gates hesitating at Saratoga, changes the course of history. Sobel's title refers to another such moment: Richard III's unhorsing at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. This is the moment at which Shakespeare's Richard offers "my kingdom for a horse." It is also the moment commemorated in a seventeenth-century poem most often attributed to George Herbert:

For want of a nail the shoe is lost,
For want of a shoe the horse is lost,
For want of a horse the rider is lost,
For want of a rider the message is lost,
For want of a message the battle is lost,
For want of the battle the war is lost,
For want of the war the nation is lost,
All for the want of a horseshoe nail.

Further Reading

The alternative histories of the Revolution that I have referred to in this essay are the following:

Gary Blackwood, *The Year of the Hangman* (New York, 2002); Richard Dreyfuss and Harry Turtledove, *The Two Georges* (New York, 1996); Harry Harrison, *Tunnel Through the Deeps* (New York, 1972); Charles Coleman Finlay, "We Come Not to Praise Washington," *Wild Things* (Burton, Mich., 2005); Marc Laidlaw, "His Powder'd Wig, His Crown of Thornes," *What Might Have Been,* Vol. 2, eds. Gregory Benford and Martin H. Greenberg (New York, 1989); Robert Wallace Russell, *Washington Shall Hang* (New York, 1976); Paul Seabury, "What If George Washington Had Been Captured by General Howe? Mrs. Murray's War," *What If? Explorations in Social Science Fiction,* ed. Nelson W. Polsby (Lexington, Mass., 1982); Robert Sobel, *For Want of a Nail: If Burgoyne Had Won at Saratoga* (New York, 1973); S. M. Stirling, "The Charge of Lee's Brigade" *Ice, Iron and Gold* (San Francisco, 2007); S. M. Stirling, *The Domination* (Riverdale, N.Y., 1999); Roger Thompson, "If I had been the Earl of Shelburne in 1762-5," *If I Had Been …* ed. Daniel Snowman (Totowa, N.J., 1979); Edmond Wright, "If I had been Benjamin Franklin in the Early 1770s," *If I Had Been …* ed. Daniel Snowman (Totowa, N.J., 1979).

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What the Artist Saw and What the Editors Ignored: Charles Willson Peale's Wartime Journal and the Perils of Historical Editing



Historical editors can never fully anticipate the needs of future historians, but hopefully with a growing respect for the full documentary record, including material that might, to some, be considered unimportant, editors will begin to add accounts, images, and other addenda and make them searchable, as the editors of the George Washington papers have done.

Pigeons: And Their Cuisine



Pigeons—like some other breeds of birds—were easy to hunt, indeed, so easy that the hunt couldn’t be sustainable.