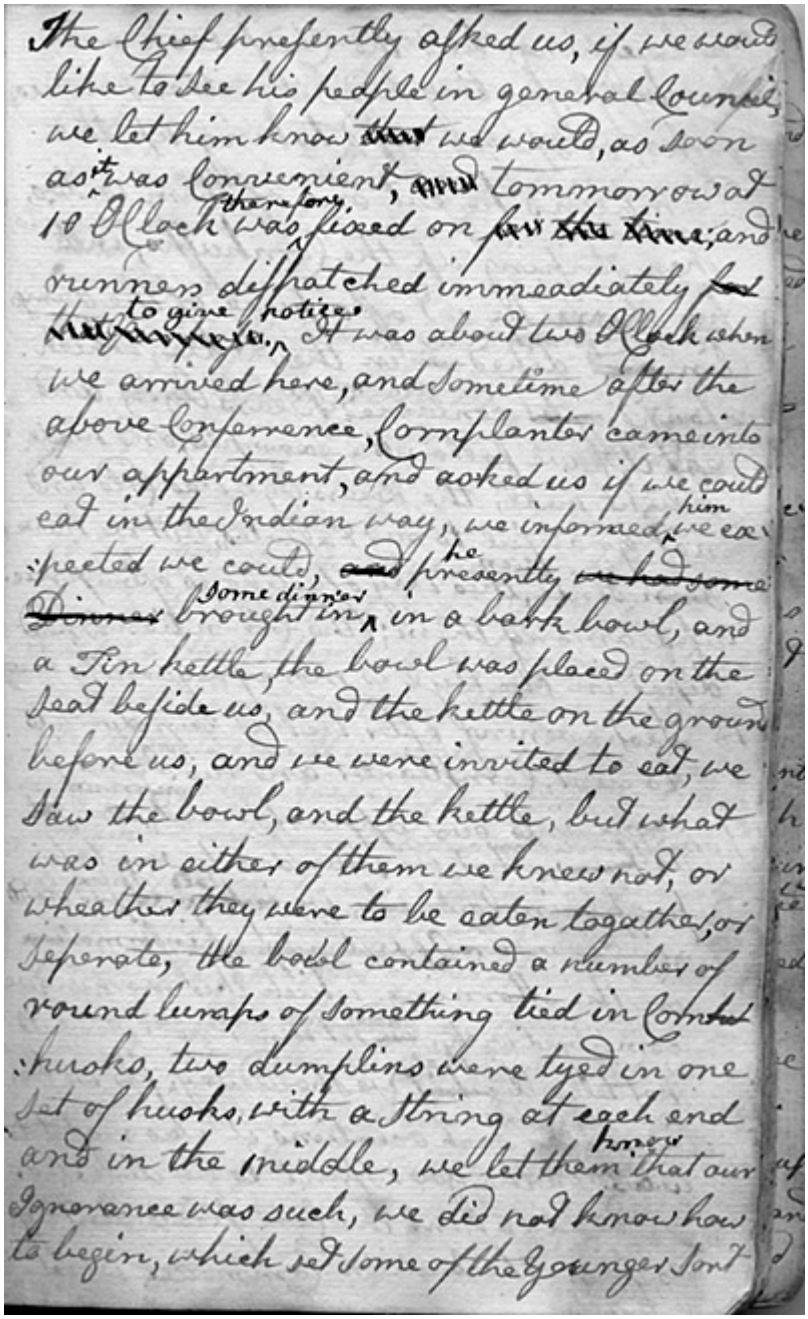
The Right to Be a Freemason: Secret Societies and the Power of the Law in the Early Republic

Freemasonry and these notions of public and private, legality and illegality, justice and injustice, have crossed paths more than a few times.

Undergraduates in Early American Archives: Transcribing Quaker Scribal Texts


The Chief presently asked us, if we would like to see his people in general Council, we let him know that we would, as soon as it was convenient, and tommorow at 10 Oclock was therefore fixed on for the time; and runners dispatched immeadiately to give notice. It was about two Oclock when we arrived here, and sometime after the above Conference, Cornplanter came into our appartment, and asked us if we could eat in the Indian way, we informed him we expected we could, and he presently had some Dinner some dinners brought in, in a bark bowl, and a Tin kettle, the bowl was placed on the seat beside us, and the kettle on the ground before us, and we were invited to eat, we saw the bowl, and the kettle, but what was in either of them we knew not, or whether they were to be eaten togather, or seperate, the bowl contained a number of round lumps of something tied in Corn husks, two dumplins were tyed in one set of husks, with a string at each end and in the middle, we let them know that our Ignorance was such, we did not know how to begin, which set some of the younger Sort

Matters related to the history, production, and evolution of a text as a text did not have to be prompted by the professor but figured seamlessly into class discussion and student papers.

[The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery]

Society's Weekly Contribution Box

Cardboard collection box showing an image of a slave, 8 x 6 x 4.5 cm (1839). Courtesy of the Trustees of the Boston Library/Rare Books, Boston, Massachusetts. Click on image for slideshow of box views.

This coin box was created by the Board of Managers of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society (MASS) in late 1839 to accompany their fundraising scheme, the "Weekly Contribution Plan." Modeled on the American Anti-Slavery Society's (AASS) cent-a-week societies which began in 1838, the MASS's weekly contribution plan sought to raise money for the cause through the collection of small donations at regular weekly intervals sent to the society monthly. Contributing, according to their ability, one, two, or six cents a week in the box, the grassroots members of the movement could raise vast amounts of money with little seeming labor or sacrifice. At a moment when the general financial pressure of the nation had forced large contributors to withdraw their donations from the cause and when the AASS was on the verge of dissolution, the weekly contribution plan sought to provide the MASS's treasury the funds to sustain itself. By distributing across *all abolitionists* the responsibility of keeping the state treasury "constantly supplied" with money to support lecturers and produce print, the plan's penny capitalism attempted to manage market fluctuations while increasing its members' personal investment in the cause. A miniature of the treasury to which it is dedicated—"TO THE MASS. A.S. SOCIETY"—the box serves as a sign of the treasury's larger plenitude and transforms its contributors into stakeholders every time they deposit a coin in its slot. The box compounds its cent. It produces money for the cause as well as interest in it.


JULY

THE

MONTHLY OFFERING

VOL. I NO. 1

BY JOHN A. COLLINS.

BOSTON:
PUBLISHED AT 25 CORNHILL.
1840.

Cover/title page of The Monthly Offering, Vol. I, No. 1 (July, 1840). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts.

In addition to a treasury, the box also serves as tract. Issued as an "*edition*" for six and a quarter cents or seventy-five cents for a dozen, the box, according to *The Liberator*, is "as useful as a tract, as it is convenient as a treasury." Furnished with "appropriate devices and inscriptions," the box is covered on every side, as well as the top, with print. The front depicts the kneeling slave framed by rays of light that, in melting the chains of slavery

on the Corinthian columns in the foreground, promise her release. Emanating from an arc with the words “Remember Your Weekly Pledge,” the light derives its power from its contributors’ steadfast donations. On one side is a poem titled “A Sabbath Morning Hymn,” by Maria Weston Chapman, which consecrates each contribution as a gift to freedom. On the other are biblical injunctions that remind readers of their duty to deliver the slave from oppression while showing her mercy and compassion. On the top are more quotations from the Bible, which focus on transforming faith into good works. The back lays out the objectives of the weekly contribution plan along with step-by-step directions for how to conduct it. Like most antislavery artifacts, the coin box speaks in several registers: sentimental and religious as well as organizational and instructional. The front image seeks to generate sympathy for the oppressed; the Sabbath hymn and quotations from scripture further increase that sympathy and tie it explicitly to religious duty; and the back explains how good works for the slave are best performed through systematic donations to the antislavery cause. The box’s coordinated message teaches its contributors to turn their sympathy into cents. Through the gathering of cents, abstract feeling is turned into concrete action and sympathy is made to speak.

The alchemy of this artifact—its ability to convert feelings into money—is augmented by its companion tract, *The Monthly Offering*. Edited by J. A. Collins, General Agent of the MASS, and published monthly (with some irregularity) from July 1840 until October 1842, *The Monthly Offering* served as the weekly contribution plan’s official organ. Contributors were asked to buy the box as well as subscribe to the tract for thirty-seven and a half cents a year. The synergy between the box and its companion text is evident in the tract’s title, which transforms contributions into a religious offering and reinforces the plan’s monthly collection schedule. The tract is also a visual replica of the box: it not only duplicates the box’s image on its cover but also, in framing that picture with an ornate border, depicts itself as a box. But rather than being full of money, the tract is packed with print that calls to readers to fill their boxes. Designed to “aid and encourage” contributors in their work of “love and mercy,” *The Monthly Offering* works like the box to “enlist sympathy for the cause, by holding up to view the suffering and benighted slave” and to remind contributors through its regular arrival to be punctual in their payments. Tales within the tract, such as Maria Weston Chapman’s “Pinda,” do both. Pinda, a fugitive slave, not only gains the reader’s admiration for her loyal affection to her husband and industrious self-sufficiency once in freedom, but also models how to convert that sympathy into antislavery action. At the climax of the tale, just before Pinda, finally free, flees with her fugitive husband from Boston, she becomes a subscriber to the weekly contribution plan. Paying in advance, she offers such a large donation that the box must be opened since her Mexican dollar will not fit in its small slot. “[R]ich in the possession of liberty” though poor in funds, Pinda donates her only savings to extend freedom to others with an “effusion of heart, so lovely and so rare.” Like Pinda, contributors too can express their inner feelings and perform their own freedom by giving money to the slave on the coin box. *The Monthly Offering* supplements the box in several key ways. It

reinforces the box's message that sympathy is most properly expressed through cents. Moreover, its regular monthly arrival prompts the collection of cents and aids their increase by producing more compassion for the slave. Finally, the tract serves as a concrete emblem of what those cents are meant to fund—more print. The box and its tract, then, enact the larger circuit of sentiment, cents, and print that the antislavery movement more broadly propelled: print creating sympathy, sympathy generating cents, and cents producing more print.

Besides serving as a treasury and a tract, a depository for the cause and a stimulator of antislavery sympathy, the box, described as "beautiful," also functions as a decorative domestic object. Designed to be placed on a chimney mantle or table in the most public room of the house, the box translates antislavery principles into household knowledge and attaches them to middle-class values. Located in (and physically over) the hearth of the home and placed alongside the parlor's other ornaments, the box reflects and augments the ideals of middle-class domesticity and benevolence that surround it. Visually, the box's burning rays of truth extend the warming light of the domestic hearth upward, turning the parlor mantle into an altar to freedom. Discursively, the box speaks the middle-class values of sympathy and savings. It espouses piety and charity as well as punctuality and thrift. As a savings bank, the box instills the habit of self-denial even as it emblematizes economic prosperity. The box teaches contributors to perform "generous thrift"—to save in order to give. As a religious shrine, "a little treasury of the Lord," whose ritual donation occurs every Sabbath morning, the box sanctifies its cents by transforming them into a gift for the slave. Moreover, by displaying the power of benevolence—its ability to turn pennies into freedom—the box makes an accounting of its contributors' moral virtue and magnifies its meaningfulness. As a parlor decoration, the box reflects its contributors' refinement and accentuates their social status. Made for display, the box serves as the external sign of its contributors' interior states—their "right" feelings of sincerity and compassion. The box's hymn, which tells of "swelling hearts" and "gracious deeds," along with the sentimental prose and poetry in its accompanying tract, which is advertised as including the movement's "best writers," are signs of the contributors' culture and refined taste. Serving as a conversation piece, the box encourages sociability along with proper social affiliation. As a sign of its contributors' economic capital, spiritual goodness, and cultural refinement, the box further compounds its cents by constructing a class consciousness for its contributors.

The box, then, provides in miniature a glimpse into the antislavery movement's larger workings: its systematized fundraising and centralized structure, its production and circulation of innovative cultural artifacts, and its consolidation of middle-class values. By capitalizing on new modes of consumerism and organization and by utilizing an array of discourses and cultural forms, the antislavery movement installed itself at the heart of antebellum culture and middle-class consciousness. Antislavery succeeded not because it stood outside of an emerging mass consumer culture but because, like

the coin box, it compounded its growth.

Further Reading:

Information on the weekly contribution plan can be found in *The Liberator* for the following dates: December 20, 1839; December 27, 1839; January 31, 1840; February 7, 1840, and March 6, 1840. Descriptions of the box are available in *The Emancipator*, October 1, 1840, and *The Monthly Offering* (July 1840): 7. *The Monthly Offering* was collected in two volumes that were published in 1841 and 1842 in Boston by the Anti-Slavery Office.

For more on the organization of the AASS and its role in the middle-class culture industry, see Trish Loughran, *The Republic in Print: Print Culture in the Age of U.S. Nation Building, 1770-1870* (New York, 2007); for the place of reform more broadly and abolition in specific in the formation of middle-class identity, see Chris Castiglia, *Interior States: Institutional Consciousness and the Inner Life of Democracy in the Antebellum United States* (Durham, N.C., 2008).

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Teresa A. Goddu is associate professor of English and American Studies at Vanderbilt University. She is the author of *Gothic America: Narrative, History, and Nation* (1997) and is completing a book on the antislavery movement's role in the rise of mass culture in the antebellum U.S.

Overcoming Nausea: The Brothers Hesselius and the American Mystery

Presented as part of the special issue: “A Cabinet of Curiosities”

“When he first met them, Hesselius found Indians repulsive.”

Silver, Science, and Routes to the West

Presented as part of the Special Issue: Pacific Routes

The value of silver for individual Europeans was obvious and longstanding: it meant wealth. For governments, it meant not just wealth, but also power.

Hayden’s Gaze

Everything seemed blasted by a new, blank enormity. The world was too big to be beautiful.

Types of Mankind: Visualizing Kinship in Afro-Native America

Seeing Lewis’s image I was immediately reminded of the importance of the visual—both for present-day scholars of African American life and culture and for those nineteenth-century freedom fighters who knew the visual field was a key site of struggle for representing the race.

Poems

To Find You III

[O’Keeffe’s Abiquiu House, Abiquiu, NM; present day]

Bushes of mulberry, rosemary, cherry;
trees of filbert, plum, and peach. Beside
the ladder leading to the roof, blue
and yellow columbine; a head-high
stalk of hollyhock, the unblossomed
buds like pursed green stars.

In the back, the view unobstructed
is somehow less than the same view
framed by your studio window.

A bush of the sage that ranges
ragged across these basins is,
in your patio, trimmed like bonsai,
tame as a housecat. How did you see
into this once-ruin of adobe and mud,
used by villagers as a sty for their pigs,
and know—both the vision
of what it could be and that your will
could make it so? You hired local women

to daub and smooth, every surface
leveled by a woman’s hands. I stand
in the shadow of your patio door,
breathe its new coat of acrid shellac,
dust eddying up in the afternoon light.

To Find You IV (Georgia O’Keeffe Museum Research Center)

[Santa Fe, NM; present day]

Just beyond the windows, sprinklers arc steady intervals between the trees, which are all in full leaf. It does not feel like desert. The archive’s air is cold and dry, each of its three large tables covered in brown leather, topped with two lamps. Small brown moths flutter through the room. One lands on my foot.

In low gray rows with small white labels, the drawers are glass-topped, heavy. Regulations require I ask a security guard to pull each out for me, drawer by drawer.

G1: Source Materials/Animal Bones

Teeth sprout from the jaw like desert coral, the old bone fissured to woodgrain. Vertebrae like spongiform model airplanes, most no bigger than the large moth skating across the drawer’s glass. It is so quiet I can hear the flap-tapping of its wings.

G2: Source Materials/Animal Bones

A photo of O’Keeffe in the back of a car, a fragment of pelvis held to her eye like a monocle. That section of pelvis is in the center of the drawer. A card reads, “O’Keeffe used bones to explore the combination of near and far.” Propped next to it, a tiny replica of her painting *Pelvis IV*—giant foregrounded pelvis framing a tiny faraway moon.

Outside, a crow plucks grubs from the trunk of a catalpa tree, its leaves broad as a man’s palm. They shake in the breeze. A thousand hallelujah hands flushed through with light.

Polaroids, mostly, taken by O’Keeffe, blurred with chemical peel and streak.

“Skull and Chair:” A cow skull hung on the wall above a straight-backed wooden chair. Written on verso, “This is at the end of the Portal—beyond the ladder. That chair I paid ninety-eight cents for 22 years ago. One thing I have that is worth its price. It isn’t antique. It is from Montgomery Ward. G”

In Box 6, photos of the same chair. She set her paintings in the dirt, propped against its seat, to photograph them for Alfred.

One year of Stieglitz/O'Keeffe original correspondence—1944—in seven ringed archival boxes. Foxed and tea-colored in their acid-free sleeves, I can feel their corners through the plastic.

But the pages of three letters are too long, folded over in their sleeves. The archivist removes them—three sheets of onion skin on the large empty table. She held these. He held these. My breath flutters their edges. I have the urge to put the corner of one in my mouth. I resist this.

Her "I" whorls like an ear, making the letters so distinctly hers she didn't need to sign them. Two black moths stutter against the white window frame. I notice her abstract sculpture on the lawn outside—the same lopsided spiral. How can I care so much for people I have never met?

To Find You

[Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, Santa Fe, NM; present day]

In the great hall: your
navy canvas shoes, jeans, long-sleeved shirt,
polka-dotted kerchief. Your voice
from the screening room. *On this knife I might*

fall off on either side. But I'd walk it again.
I'd rather be doing something I really wanted.
Here is your resurrected campsite: canvas-wrapped
canteen, Sterno stove, miniature cast—

iron fry pan. Your tent roofed by a rough tarp,
walls of gray-black oilcloth. Your biography
broods the air. A tour guide mock-corrects himself,
"As Georgia, I mean, *Ms. O'Keeffe* always said …"

From the gift shop, two middle-aged men wear
monogrammed chambray shirts "just like the ones *she*
wore." An elderly woman cries in the corner
before the swirl of *White Rose*. Just this morning,

I had to explain, again, to a friend, that your paintings
are more than postcards writ large; that you
both are and are greater than your biography.
I'm tired. How did you make the choice

to be alone for your art? They've curated
a corner of the tent up. What would I produce

from such loneliness? There is the edge
of your sleeping bag, brown and tan. How

desperately I want to crawl in, to rest for a while
in your temporary bed, breathing in what you left.

To Find You II

[On Photography: A Questionnaire]

Georgia:

What is it like to be photographed?
To be dressed, posed, forced to move or be still?
Is your pose meant to convey a message?
If so, is it yours or one that Alfred has given you?
In photos of you with another person, whom do you see first?
Describe what it's like to look at photos of yourself
—right after they were taken.
—years later.

Alfred:

When you meet someone new, how long before you reach for your camera?
Describe
—the act of taking a picture.
—developing it, her face swimming up through the chemical waters.
When looking at a photo you've taken
—do you recall what happened before or after?
—can you remember past the frame of the shot?
When shooting, how cut-off or connected do you feel to your subject?
How does a moment change when you begin taking pictures?
How does a person?

To Find You

In silence, grow
transparent as an old-world

photographer's glass plate.
My edges going

hazy as the noon desert, salted
as a body beneath that zenith

sun—until I am prepared
to slot into the coal black

hold of a moonless night.
Naked in the barrens

until morning, ready
for what images

come with such
exposure.

…And Now For Something Completely Similar

Since the doleful events of September 11, one of the points made by almost everyone, from the president to television commentators to the freshmen in my survey class, has been the radical newness of the era in which we now find ourselves. “Four Days That Transformed a President, a Presidency and a Nation, for All Time,” ran one *New York Times* headline, by no means the most hyperbolic of the past two weeks. There is no denying that we all have been changed to some degree by what one hopes will stand for a long, long time as the deadliest single day for Americans outside of a battlefield. And few American

battlefields have ever come close. Though most other nations have had their cities attacked in the twentieth century—if not destroyed, invaded, or occupied—the United States has seen nothing like this since the Civil War. If foreign attack is the standard, then the last occasion can be pushed back to the Battle of New Orleans in January 1815, in which we lost exactly eight men. Perhaps most importantly, all the close rivals of September 11 in our history involved solder and sailors, who at least knew that they faced death, not office workers and airline passengers in peacetime who by rights should have been more concerned with where they were going to have lunch than whether they would survive the day.

The recent events are new to us, then, if not to the people of London or Paris or Berlin or Tel Aviv or Hiroshima. The last decade has been an era when many people seemed to feel that nothing "real" had ever happened to them, nothing that tested their limits and characters. Suffused with a somewhat facile sense of the insubstantiality of modern life (and politics), middle-class people seemed to yearn for experiences more intense than what their suburban lives provided. Bourgeois anomie is an old story, but it seemed particularly virulent in the 1990s. Vast audiences sought out extreme experiences as entertainment—from slasher movies, to first-person-shooter video games, to thrill rides, to so-called "reality" television, to popular military history. Until last month, there was even a transportation disaster-themed restaurant, The Crash Café, being planned for Baltimore's Inner Harbor. At the same time, there was a bull market not just on Wall Street, but in evangelical religion and other forms of spirituality and self-help, all promising to connect believers to a realer reality than anything we have down here.

In a bewildering variety of ways, Americans sought to find and identify with something authentic and serious in their own personal histories, from a childhood trauma to a psychological syndrome to an ethnic heritage to a record of wartime heroism and 1960s activism. Occasionally these bits of personal reality were invented or exaggerated, sometimes by historians, but even the scrupulously honest among authenticity-free Americans had the vicarious option. So baby boomers and their children embraced a burgeoning cult of their World War II era forbears, a cult that was just gearing up for another round of Greatness, related to the HBO series "Band of Brothers," when the terrorists struck. And for political guidance, at least during this past summer when David McCullough pushed crotchety little John Adams to the top of the charts and Joseph Ellis continued to attract huge audiences for tales of the founding fraternity, we were supposed to look all the way back to the "Even Greater Generation," the Founders.

Now something real really has happened, not to one of the great generations, but to us. And it is almost unbearable. With a political language devalued by decades of politicians declaring "wars" on every problem of the moment except those requiring military action, there is no available hyperbole that can contain our feelings in the face of such a tragedy, though most of them have been tried. But has September 11 really changed us forever? Has the nation set

off down a fundamentally new and different path?

Many early indications suggest not. While President Bush's spokesmen have mercifully eschewed the bombing-only tactics pioneered by Nixon and Kissinger (and pursued so frequently by Bush *père* and Clinton), their "new war" sounds suspiciously like most of the other ones since World War II: premised on vague but expansive abdications of congressional authority to the executive branch, and launched with little suggestion that the populace will be required to mobilize or sacrifice for the cause. The new war may go on for years, the administration says, and we might not be told much about it, and it will sometimes be dirty, but we can count on its not affecting us too much, since it will be conducted mostly through precision strikes, "special operations," and commando raids. Ironically, "war" seems to be the chosen term this time around, not because war will actually be declared or a fundamentally new approach taken, but because all the older euphemisms ("police action," "conflict," etc.) lost their magic in previous postwar stalemates and defeats. The American people are aware of the quagmires and disappointments that this nonwar warpath has led us into before—and in the Cold War conflicts we at least had the benefit of knowing pretty clearly who and how we were to fight.

Nor is the same old "new war" plan the only depressingly familiar aspect of the present situation. The warnings that began on the very day of the attack—injunctions that Americans would have to give up some of their freedoms and forgo some democratic niceties in order to combat the threat—have an American history predating the United States itself. Faced with unruly Boston tax protesters in 1768, Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson advised his superiors that there would have to be "an abridgement of what is called English liberty" if the colonies were to remain part of the British Empire. Thirty years later, it was the prospect of war with France—and fear of revolutionists and French sympathizers at home—that had influential figures not just calling for but actually achieving such abridgements, in the form of the Alien and Sedition Acts. (The French Jacobins were the very first modern "terrorists," of course, though they favored the state-sponsored variety. And while Robespierre probably could have given Osama bin Laden a run for his money, Vice President Thomas Jefferson was considered the likely American terrorist mastermind of that era.) Mobs did most of the wartime liberty abridging during the nineteenth century, but the early decades of the twentieth proved to be something of a golden age for the official variety in America. Faced with seemingly diabolical threats like communism, anarchism, and the Hun, the U.S. government engaged in periodic spasms of trampling on the rights of citizens and immigrants in the name of internal security, beginning with the post-World War I Red Scare that led to mass arrests and deportations and the creation of the FBI. In asking for broader powers to detain suspected terrorists without trial and to conduct electronic surveillance, John Ashcroft's Justice Department is only returning to the original mission behind its twentieth-century expansion. (Luckily for the country, the usual southern conservative base for crackdowns on the civil liberties of radicals and immigrants seems to be crumbling in Congress this time around.)

Figure 1: Jefferson’s “Terrorist” Plans Exposed: The Providential Detection. Political cartoon by unknown artists, ca. 1800.

Though always presented as clear-eyed wisdom borne of hard experience, calls for the restriction of civil liberties and the unleashing of government police powers have tended to come almost automatically from people with profound and preexisting doubts about whether liberal democracy and widespread individual freedom can survive in a world of hatred, war, and power politics. Alexander Hamilton, John Adams, and other Federalists, for example, had made their doubts about the staying power of the U.S. Constitution, as written, perfectly clear even before the French crisis of the late 1790s. On this and many later occasions, these doubts have arisen from an apparent distaste for debate, compromise, and individualism per se, with military crisis providing a golden opportunity to command greater political conformity and a more authoritarian style of governance. Over the past century, in fact, these retrenchments have been more easily accepted by the public and the political system than they were earlier in American history. The exposure of Hutchinson’s advice created a scandal that pushed the colonies toward revolution, while the Sedition Act inspired the expansion of the opposition press it was meant to suppress. But just over a century later, Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer, who oversaw the World War I Red Scare, became a serious presidential contender for his trouble, while his protégé J. Edgar Hoover remained a popular hero for a half century afterwards. In the 1950s, government repression of radical political groups was the stuff of popular books and films like *I Was a Communist for the FBI*, a hit in both media.

Figure 2: Poster for I Was A Communist for the F.B.I. (1951)

If answering terror by repressing civil liberties promises to take us back to the future, still another sadly familiar development can be detected in the present national mood. A certain note of grim self-congratulation has crept into many of the public commentaries and remembrances, a sense that a crisis like this might actually be rather healthy, a kind of exercise regimen for the body politic that will purge it of doubts and decadence and bring us back to more authentic values. "I didn't think this country could come together like it has. I thought we were too cynical," said the morning DJ on my car radio the week after the attacks, echoing the ecstatic paeans to national unity that began to issue from the media within hours of the World Trade Center's collapse. Overnight, two of the roughest media images going, those of New York City and its mayor, were transfigured to the point of sainthood, while all former political questions were declared to be petty disputes when compared to the coming struggle. A less benign side of the new era of good feelings was found by a *Seattle Times* reporter at a Colorado gun shop. While stocking up on ammunition in order to meet the present crisis, the regulars were debating whether Hitler or the Founding Fathers had said that "A country needs a war every 15 years to get united." They approved the sentiment, wherever it originated.

This is only the most recent occasion when war and crisis have been welcomed as opportunities for moral regeneration. Samuel Adams hoped that the Revolution would make Boston into the "Christian Sparta" that he imagined existed in the time of his Puritan forefathers. The Revolutionary War, and most of those that followed, opened with a sometimes brief but always fierce celebration of the nation's redemption from partisan division and weakness of character. This effect skipped the little-ballyhooed Vietnam conflict, but that omission was more than made up for by the orgy of unanimity around the previous President Bush during the highly debatable Persian Gulf War.

It remains to be seen whether the present mood will mature into a Revolutionary-style "*rage militaire*," as the Bush administration initially seemed to hope, or whether the self-centered habits of the Clinton age will reassert themselves. As of this writing, my money is on the latter. The administration has shifted over to assuring people that something will be done to Osama and the Taliban someday, while encouraging the American people to do their patriotic duty the new economy way, by getting out there and consuming for the common good. Perhaps this time we'll use shopping bags instead of carpet bombs. That might be something new after all, though probably no more effective as foreign policy.

Further Reading:

For two important works on the origins of the war-as-moral-regeneration theme in American history, see Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, 1979) and Ann Fairfax Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Virtue and the Formation of American Republics* (New York, 1991). For its presence even in the U.S.A.'s least successful conflict, the War of 1812, see Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore, 1987) and Roger H. Brown, *The Republic in Peril: 1812* (New York, 1964).

For further evidence on the new era's lack of newness, and other political commentary, see "Publick Occurrences Extra," a new Weblog on the author's personal site.

This article originally appeared in issue 2.1 (October, 2001).

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Common-place injects a new issue into the political campaign as the 2016 presidential race enters its final stage.