JOSEPH PLUMB MARTIN AND THE AMERICAN IMAGINATION

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ABSTRACT

The personal narrative of ordinary Continental Army private Joseph Plumb Martin has long provided corroborating evidence for battlefield accounts of the American Revolution and has never been out of print, albeit usually in abridged form, since its discovery in the mid-twentieth century. Yet, the memoir was written in 1830, fifty years after the events Martin narrated. Its romantic literary style, its populist sensibility, its racism, its empiricism, all reflect nineteenth-century values. The memoir has value in epitomizing the solidification of American nationalism and the populist rhetoric that became associated with it.

Chapter one attempts to understand Martin’s rhetoric in terms of the literary influences on his writing, which include some works of the nineteenth century, but most from earlier times. Particularly evident is a modeling of behavior and outlook on the popular “Jonathan” character emerging from the works of post-Revolutionary American playwright Royall Tyler and others coupled with the romantic low-born outdoorsmen protagonists of nineteenth century rural poet Robert Bloomfield.

Chapter two argues that Martin’s populism and distrust of authority which positions him in the Jacksonian era, had experiential roots in his years of service during the Revolution, particularly with regard to the relationship between the rank and file and their commanders: a contractual, negotiated environment based on competency and personal liberty.
Chapter three demonstrates the racism that influenced Martin’s narrative and which stemmed from a growing antagonism between white and African-American laborers in the nineteenth century which rationalized white supremacy through the concept of competence.

Chapter four discusses Martin’s and by extension the early republic’s view of the practice of medicine in context of competence and the rise of anti-intellectual empiricism in the creation of knowledge, with a focus on the medical advances of Martin’s lifetime.

Chapter five presents a behavioral view of a Revolutionary War veteran who has imposed a nineteenth century populist sensibility on the meaning behind his service in the Continental Army. This is a dramatic recreation of Martin’s testimony before county officials in petition for a veteran’s pension offered in 1828.

It is hoped that this work will help create an understanding of how certain anti-authoritarian individualistic ideas realized in the early nineteenth century acted upon interpretations of the meaning behind the American War of Independence and American nationalism, a meaning that has colored our understanding of the nation’s founding and has influenced ideas of what it means to be an American.
DEDICATION

To my wife, Sandra Manos, “My Dearest Friend.”
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION:
FANFARE FOR THE COMMON MAN

In 1830, as Americans looked back at a half century of existence, they found meaning in the changes that were happening around them in the narratives they made of the American Revolution. In the years from independence to the ascension of Andrew Jackson to the White House (1829), increased social and economic mobility brought a political voice to America’s underclass and with it an anti-elitist rhetoric that shaped a meaning of democracy that was not necessarily envisioned by the original founding fathers. Thus, new heroes emerged and traditional heroes’ biographies altered to accentuate the concept that the American Revolution was a common effort by ordinary Americans that succeeded because of national consensus built upon moral integrity and competence. The spotlight fell on ordinary soldiers and leaders from humble backgrounds or with characteristics that appealed to ordinary citizens. A published narrative of war time experiences, penned with ostensible but in reality calculated artlessness, by an ordinary soldier of Washington’s Continental Army, reflected the populist mood of the 1830s even as it purported to give an immediate eye-witness account to the American Revolution.
Ex-Continental Army private Joseph Plumb Martin’s life spanned both the Revolutionary War period and the first half of the nineteenth century. He published his remembrances of the war, anonymously, in 1830, under the cumbersome title *A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier; Interspersed with Anecdotes of Incidents that Occurred Within his Own Observation Written by Himself*. Martin was seventy years of age in 1830 and was by his own admission a farm laborer, but also had held posts as justice of the peace and selectman in the seaside community of Prospect (now Stockton Springs) in the decade-old state of Maine. Born in 1760 in Massachusetts, Martin was fifteen when he ran away from his grandsire’s farm near New Haven, Connecticut to serve in the Connecticut militia in 1776. He was a soldier in the militia and then in the newly formed Continental Army until 1783 and his narrative provided eyewitness accounts of numerous battles including Long Island, White Plains, Fort Mifflin, Monmouth, and Yorktown. When first published, Martin’s narrative excited little notice except locally and to a mixed reception at that. A reviewer from Belfast, Maine opined half a century later: “It is to be regretted that before sending this book to the press he had not placed it in the hands of some judicious friend for revisal.” Historian James Kirby Martin concurs with this assessment: “Martin had a natural ability to express himself clearly in vigorous prose. What he needed was an editor to help him overcome his lack of training in the fundamental rules of grammar and punctuation. Apparently he did not have access to one.”

Aesthetic and literary shortcomings notwithstanding, Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative has been in print steadily, in many different incarnations, since 1962, when it was discovered by historian George Scheer. It has been liberally quoted in children’s
books and in documentaries as well as in standard histories of the War for Independence ever since. Martin’s narrative, since its rediscovery, has been used primarily as a source of corroborating evidence for various battlefield accounts of the war, giving a rare grunt’s eye-view of revolutionary war era combat and camp life a truthful, if perhaps artless, witness to happenings of larger historical import. He was there at the scene, his accounts corroborate other accounts, and his writing has an immediacy that has led many historians to assume it was composed soon after the events described, not a half century later. Some historians have portrayed Martin’s narrative as a diary. Gary Nash, for one, describes the narrative in exactly those terms: “In plain spoken but penetrating prose, inscribed in a diary kept through several enlistments, the seventeen-year-old Martin… showed what the common soldier faced.”

The immediate emotional flavor of Martin’s observations have had an impact on our understanding of the American Revolution. Martin’s mention of “Molly Pitcher” at the Battle of Monmouth has spawned much extra literature about this fighting female patriot. His evocative descriptions of the cold and starving life of a soldier surrounding (but not including) the legendary winter at Valley Forge have helped enshrine the event as a symbol of patriotic sacrifice. Martin’s presence as a sapper and miner at the Siege of Yorktown provided a, literally, ground-level view of one of the most celebrated victories in American history. His eye-witness accounts of George Washington added to the general’s appeal as a man of the people who interacted with ordinary soldiers without condescension. The narrative’s depictions of loyalist insurgents accentuated their perfidy and, by implication, discredited the Tory movement altogether. Likewise his depictions of African Americans and Native Americans marginalized their participation
in the struggle for American independence. African Americans often come across as
British sympathizers or actively engaged as antagonists against the patriotic cause, as will
be discussed in Chapter Four of this study.

Part of the reason Martin’s influential biases have slipped under the radar of historians is that the bulk of his narrative has been glossed over. Little use has been found for his expostulations on what the wartime events he participated in meant to him, other than in accentuating the suffering soldiers encountered during the war. In some reprints of his narrative many passages have been truncated or excised completely. James Kirby Martin, for one, rationalizes these abridgements to “maintain a crisp pacing to assure an engaging presentation of his many adventures.” Historians have not seemed to know what to do with Martin’s literary flourishes, his references to biblical scripture or Anglo-American poetry and drama, or his use of mythological metaphor. Yet these allusions provide the paper trail to his point of view and therefore deserve our attention, not only in exposing his biases but also in pointing away from the immediacy of his “eye-witness” evidence. More importantly, what Martin read helped in the construction of his own particular brand of American nationalism by providing the reference points he used to derive meaning from his endeavors and observations.

It is easy to understand why many historians have found Martin’s asides to be of less historical value than his blow-by-blow descriptions of important battles. A superficial study of the full narrative, including Martin’s numerous digressions, reveals a sensibility echoing the revolutionary spirit of Thomas Paine and other revolutionary era writers, but not nearly as eloquently. His literary allusions, likewise, seem to date mostly from the Revolutionary War period or earlier, not from the 1830s. Martin's narrative is a
puzzlement in other ways as well. Published anonymously, its authorship never came to light in his lifetime. The narrative does not appear to have any overt agenda, aside from an appeal of respect for regular army soldiers and a belief that Continental Army veterans deserve approbation and a pension from the American people. Indeed, Martin’s narrative has the feel of an off-the-cuff war reminiscence, concerned as much with the daily business of getting food as with the fighting of British and Hessians. We are left to wonder why Martin wrote a history of his participation in the Revolution when he did and he provided no overt reason except to indicate that the nearly 300-page opus was done merely because, as he explained, “my friends, and especially my juvenile friends have often urged me to do so.”

Martin’s reliability as an eye witness has rarely been questioned or examined in terms of the date of publication. His rough style seems authentic, unadulterated by literary artifice, evoking a combination of the green teenager who ran off to war to escape work on his Connecticut grandsire’s farm in 1776, and that of the seasoned veteran who dug trenches at Yorktown half a decade later. However, if one endeavors to unpack Martin’s allusions and commentary on the actions of other soldiers, from privates to generals, rather than simply lifting de-contextualized descriptions from his narrative to plug into a work about an event at which he was present, one begins to recognize a rhetoric shaped by nineteenth-century perspectives.

Indeed, analysis of the narrative as a product of the early nineteenth century shows that Martin’s anti-elitist, anti-heroic story belongs as much if not more to the world he inhabited in 1830 than that of the “Revolutionary” era struggle he described: a solidification of an ordinary American’s view of himself and his country that may have
had its roots in 1776 but was not fully realized until more than a half century later. Here is
the voice of an aged raconteur, witness not just to early battles but to the growth and
changes of the country in the intervening years between his military service and the
writing of it. Martin embodied and articulated a definition of American nationalism
formulated in the early nineteenth century which colored his perspective on the events
witnessed and participated in fifty years earlier. The battlefield facts are precise and
verifiable, but they should not blind us to Martin’s interpretation of them as seen through
the tumultuous years of the early republic. To use Martin’s narrative to understand the
mindset of ordinary Americans in 1776 creates distortions which can only be partially
identified by examining the political situation in the decade prior to the narrative’s
publication.

In 1830, American national unity was in jeopardy over the issue of slavery. John
C. Calhoun's ideas of "nullification" captured the imaginations of many in the southern
states, some of whom agitated for a new revolution in which a northern tyranny of
punishing tariffs and abolitionist sentiments might be wiped away by the creation of a
new southern nation independent of the north. As Calhoun wrote in 1830: “if there be no
protective power in the reserved rights of the States, they must in the end be forced to
rebel, or submit to have their permanent interests sacrificed [sic], their domestick [sic]
institutions subverted by Colonization and other schemes, and themselves & children
reduced to wretchedness.”13 Regarding the slavery debate, so divisive in 1830, Martin
seemed to wish to jettison the issue in the interests of national unity. His narrative
reflected a racism influenced by the black stereotypes found in the literature and theatre
of the early 1800s. Martin depicted slaves and Africans in general as incompetent and
childlike, sometimes comically so, implicitly deserving of their bondage under enlightened white American supervision. Martin also made pains to demonstrate that slaves siding with the British during the conflict came to a bad end. Furthermore, for all Martin’s pride in his New England upbringing, his narrative stressed the unity of disparate white Americans in a common struggle against a tyrannical foreign enemy. The narrative anachronistically invoked allusions of War of 1812 vintage, such as Uncle Sam and The Star Spangled Banner. Tories were characterized as an aberrant minority, their numbers small, not what many historians now argue to be a large percentage of the American population during the revolution.

1830 was a ripe time for the emergence of a “common man’s” view of history. The authority of an elite class to rule the country was called into question. Andrew Jackson’s star was on the rise, a purported outsider from politics as usual in a corrupt and elitist Washington. The hero of New Orleans was of humble origin with military credentials to rival George Washington’s and a vocal populist base that supported him as he battled the permanent establishment of a national bank and its implied center of hegemony for the business class.

One striking aspect of Martin’s narrative is the depiction of certain high born officers in the Continental Army as misguided, irrational, and even buffoonish. He also revealed a sense of his own importance and that of ordinary Americans as agents of change, an argument in favor of an American republic driven by the popular will rather than by a class of privileged elites.

But Jackson’s credentials as a commoner were not ironclad. In the northeast, a growing distrust of a power elite manifested itself in the rise of the Anti-Mason party after William Morgan disappeared in upstate New York and was presumed murdered for
exposing Freemason rites and rituals. Many influential political and judicial offices were held by members of this secret society, including President Andrew Jackson. To complicate matters, Jackson’s main political opponent, the well-connected New Englander John Quincy Adams, came out pointedly against the Freemasons. The secret society was seen by some as an ossified shadow of its former self, to be rebelled against in the same way Thomas Paine argued rebellion against George III in his Common Sense a half century earlier. The secret society whose members, it was perceived, controlled all aspects of government, had become corrupt. “We may now… look no longer to Masonry as our guide and conductor; it has nothing in it now valuable that is not known to every inquiring mind. It contains… no useful truth, no necessary knowledge…” wrote the publisher of Morgan’s Freemasonry Exposed. Although a New Englander, and therefore perhaps sympathetic to Adams and the Anti-Masons, Martin made no overt mention of his political leanings. However, many of the Revolutionary War era officers and commanders against whom Martin directed some of his harshest criticism were Freemasons, including Benedict Arnold and Israel Putnam.

Another Freemason not mentioned in Martin’s narrative, who may have had much to do with Martin’s antipathy for officers, was General Henry Knox. Knox, Alan Taylor reports, was the proprietor of the land Martin claimed in Prospect, Maine, after the war. Martin lost much of his holdings, probably in the Panic of 1819, and therefore, one presumes, a great deal of his livelihood, when he could not make payments to Knox. To add insult to injury, Knox turned a deaf ear to Martin’s desperate but respectful entreaty for some remission of payments. The connection between Anti-Masons and Martin has its limits, however. Washington, the most famous Freemason of the war, comes across
sympathetically in the narrative, as do President James Monroe, who instituted the Veterans’ Pension Act of 1818, and the Marquis de Lafayette under whom Martin served briefly before Yorktown. Martin did not just criticize poor leadership according to a distrust of those with social pedigree. Between its pages, Martin’s narrative revealed a distrust of authority and of those who sought to exercise it without demonstrating acceptable levels of competence and morality.

Martin’s assessment of leaders based upon competence may have been a natural consequence of a social system that had little in common with the one existing a half century earlier. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing at the same time as Martin, observed unprecedented social mobility existed in the early republic: “As the rules of social hierarchy are less strictly observed, as great ones fall and the humble rise, as poverty as well as wealth ceases to be hereditary, the distance separating master from workman daily diminishes both in fact and in men’s minds.” The most popular literature of the 1820s satisfied a growing need for central characters of competence and moral rectitude independent of social status. Washington Irving and James Fenimore Cooper made protagonists of ordinary people, often with endearing simplicity and humorous foibles, but innately noble and largely competent when it counted. The British literature favored in America included Robert Bloomfield’s verses of a farm laborer over the arch aristocratic jibes of Lord Byron, though Martin evidently was familiar with both. Martin’s narrative shared with the popular literature of his period a repudiation of the “great man” view of history at a time when even Parson Weems felt a need to democratize the spirit behind his hagiography of the “Father of Our Country” by proclaiming that “every youth may become a Washington.” In the environment of American nationalism and fluidity
of social status in which Martin wrote, the prevailing rhetoric reinforced the role of the
common man in world events. Whatever anti-elitism was quashed in the Shays’ and
Whiskey Rebellions reemerged stronger than ever in the decades that followed. “Great
men” needed a common touch to remain great in American eyes by 1830.

Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative constructs American nationalism according to a
belief in the importance of popular sovereignty not fully developed in 1776 but the center
of the American imagination by 1830, a thesis I confess I did not believe when I started
my research. I set out to try to understand how the emergence of a nationalist identity
among ordinary Americans was forged by the experience of the American Revolution.
Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative spanned most of the War for Independence, had been
extensively quoted by historians, and seemed to be in the authentic voice of a young
soldier fighting for a new kind of government in a world filled of monarchies. As I
probed deeper into the narrative, a pattern emerged that I had not considered before, that
the narrative was not merely an eye-witness account of the American Revolution, but also
documentation of the attitudinal shift in perspective from the time of the war to Martin’s
time of writing. It had as much to do with how 1830’s Americans saw the Revolution, as
it did the particulars of the war itself. To be sure American nationalism circa 1830 is not
the same as our own today, though elements linger. Martin’s nationalism reinforced ideas
of racism, greater adherence to principles of empiricism and anti-authoritarianism than
perhaps we do today. To argue that Martin’s world view came exclusively from his
military service (though once again, elements were present there) was to discount the bulk
of his life and experience in shaping it.
Joseph Plumb Martin started his life as a subject of the British Crown and ended it looking forward to Henry David Thoreau in his staunch individualism as well as backward to Nathan Hale in his stress of self-sacrifice as the highest good a patriot could offer to his country. To be sure, the narrative made clear that the defining time of Martin’s life was the Revolution. Martin chose to depict himself as a common foot soldier in the struggle for liberty. But the meaning of “liberty” evolved between 1776 and 1830. Freedom from royal and aristocratic constraints had been achieved in 1783. The achievement of freedom from the tyranny of the privileged and well connected was an ongoing struggle. Martin’s narrative made a case for the ordinary citizen’s right to his own agency, provided he displayed competence both of character and of achievements. To be boastful was to go against a mature and competent character, so the narrative contains much humor at the narrator’s own expense, enumerating his own follies, all, however, in the interest of building his credibility as a truthful and modest raconteur.

This study is at bottom a behavioral examination of the American nationalistic imagination as it was manifest in the early republic by an ordinary citizen. As such, an emphasis is placed on those factors which shaped this imagination, and how it was subsequently applied. It is the culmination of my education as a graduate student at the University of Akron, an education around a central point that had not been a major part of my consciousness as a historian before coming to Akron: Ideas create history. Thus, to understand how ideas are made is to understand the historical narratives we weave for ourselves: in this instance I attempt to illuminate those ideas in the American imagination that acted upon Martin’s historical narrative and colored his perspective of the events he
witnessed in order to identify some bricks in the foundation of the American ideological home we inhabit today.

Chapter one examines the literary influences Martin digested and transformed for use in his revolutionary rhetoric. There was a morality in Martin’s narrative that looked as much forward as backward when one examines how he utilized literature to reinforce his point of view. Martin deployed literary allusions on almost every page and drew from Shakespeare, mythology, the Bible, and in some instances from more recent writers, subtly making the case for his own competence by slyly peppering his narrative with evidence of erudition which he put in quotation marks but to which he did not give attribution, as if their sources were well known to his audience, as perhaps they were. The growth of literacy among ordinary citizens, especially in Martin’s New England, meant that there was an audience like him to read his narrative, the same audience that read and related to Natty Bumppo and Rip Van Winkle. Martin’s narrative looked forward to the anti-heroic narratives that are still central to the American imagination like Nathanial Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, and Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*: stories where the dispossessed struggled to negotiate life under circumstances which oppressed them. Martin’s narrative foreshadows the populist sensibilities of a Walt Whitman and Henry David Thoreau in which the ordinary individual is more important than any controlling force such as government or religious orthodoxy. To be admirable was to be endearingly imperfect, humble, of the people, yet competent as measured by tangible achievement: the rail splitter that teaches himself the law and becomes a U.S. president; the “Virginian boy” who saved Braddock’s army and later gave
birth to a nation and whose fame has been risen “to the uttermost confines of Christendom.”

Chapter two examines Martin’s narrative to understand the shift in American attitudes toward authority in early America. The idea that leadership must be earned through competence and moral maturity was at the very heart of Martin’s world in 1830 but not during the Revolution when privilege according to class implied competence at the very outset. Yet factors were in place even before the revolution that had bearing upon the eventual rise of the consent of the governed over authority in American life. The maritime culture that created the British Atlantic world also created a negotiation between officers and men on board ship that ultimately favored labor. This negotiation between leaders and followers was later adapted by the American militia in the Seven Years War and the Continental Army in the American Revolution. But it was the social mobility and anti-elitist climate of the early nineteenth century that brought about the solidification of the idea that individual liberty trumped a controlling order, a view that served to reinterpret the American Revolution in terms of a struggle against privilege. The encroachments of a moneyed class on Martin’s own freedoms in Maine in the early nineteenth century colored his attitudes toward authority as much as anything he encountered in the Revolution.

Chapter three examines a downside of Martin’s competence-driven populism: racism. His narrative showed a distinctly nineteenth-century bias against African Americans that he may not have felt as strongly during the revolution but which became a vivid aspect of his Revolutionary War narrative nonetheless; a bias borne of the strains that slavery placed upon American national unity in the early republic and on the agency
of ordinary white Americans over the economically and politically powerful. By the time of Martin’s writing in the 1830s, the delicate negotiation between labor and management was upset by the prospect of cheap labor entering the workforce in the form of free blacks. Martin’s narrative reflected a need to show a European-American’s competence as superior to an African-American’s as well as a rationalization for continuing slavery in America. Thus, while Martin urged his readers to appreciate the need for the liberty of the individual, the anecdotes in his narrative demonstrated a contempt for African Americans and therefore a repudiation of any idea that they should share in such freedom. Martin also professed a contempt for Native Americans, though he relates few encounters with them in his narrative. One may surmise that while Martin may have entertained prejudice against Indians in 1776, his views only darkened and deepened in the subsequent years of constant conflict with tribes as Americans moved westward and when northern New England farmers like himself who contested proprietors’ land claims were given the derogatory term “white Indians.”

Chapter four examines how Martin’s anti-elitist views extended to anti-intellectualism as represented in his narrative, which had bearing upon the creation of scientific knowledge in the new republic, especially with regard to medicine. Martin’s insistence that individualism reigned even in the evaluation of ideas and their application meant that he served his health and sometimes destroyed it in equal measure and that ironically, the one area of medicine he had no control over, smallpox inoculation, may have contributed to his long life. Competence as measured by what Sarah Knott calls “sentimental empiricism” drove a fiercely egalitarian commercialized American medical field where doctors and patients were collaborators in the gathering, analysis and
application of knowledge, often with mixed results.\textsuperscript{24} The retreat of medical regulation and the distrust of the academic scientific elite in Martin’s time bolstered his very American confidence in his own ability to draw a scientific conclusion through keen observation and common sense alone, without entertaining prior learning on the subject.

Finally, chapter five gives flesh to Joseph Plumb Martin himself as an example of the anti-authoritarianism that existed among ordinary Americans in the early 1800s and how his interpretation of the revolution was informed by his belief in the power of ordinary Americans to bring about change. The one act, one person play, PLUMB, is a dramatic re-creation of Martin’s hearing for a veteran’s pension in 1820 in which an aging Martin must demonstrate service in the Continental Army in the War for Independence by relating his experiences to a judge and other officers of the court. Martin cannot resist reinforcing his populist views which puts him in conflict with his elitist inquisitors. An ordinary American who had invested in the struggle for American patriotism must tread the fine line between deference to authority and his own sense of free will and entitlement based upon competence, moral worth, and the rising populist climate in nineteenth-century America from which he draws strength. It is hoped that after the chapters discussing the elements that shaped his world view, his telling of his experiences and his behavior toward the government dignitaries he is beholden to for his pension will shed a more tangible light on how this American imagination created the kind of reality that is still very much with us today.
ABOUT “PLUMB,” A ONE CHARACTER PLAY

These are the times that try historians’ souls. Historians still instinctively try to report what happened in history with Rankean objectivity only to be thwarted at every turn by accusations of bias. The beauty of deconstruction and its dense cousins dehierarchization, denaturalization and demystification, to use Berkhofer’s labels, is that they are able to gain respect through illuminating that which is wrong with the historical narrative without the added responsibility of finding ways to make it objective in a satisfying way. If Foucault has taught us to follow where the power emanates to understand the bias of an argument, Derrida and the deconstructionists have become the “party of ‘no’” and have used their power to transform the arena of historiography into a crash derby. Yet history cannot be written on the shards created by anything beginning with “de-”. Decisions need to be made about what really happened without being stymied by the kind of self-reflection that would replace illumination of the facts with fractious navel-gazing.

The dilemma created when the authority of every historical voice must undergo rigorous textual examination for bias, only to accentuate how arbitrary the criteria behind every piece of “logic” employed to determine what the truth really is, mirrors the political dilemma that America faced in the time of the early republic when those in authority could only maintain their hold on power by exhibiting behaviors that hid or gave the lie to their own hegemony. “In politics,” writes Robert Berkhofer, “dehierarchization once again implies antiprivilege and antielitism; to resist authority is to oppose the standard ways of looking at things as well as the standard ways of governing people.”25 The American democratic experiment, then, like Peter Novick’s edifice of history, is never
finished because the viability of all elements are under constant reevaluation. The result is both chaotic and rich: never satisfying, but, to paraphrase Churchill’s quip about democracy, far better than the more certain alternatives.

What emerged in the early American republic to deal with the power vacuum created with the overthrow of the monarchy was a distrust of authority and an impulse to confer power based upon competence using the only tools at the disposal of a people compelled to improvise a nation: empiricism analyzed according to “horse sense” logic and Christian-based morality. As Berkhofer characterizes the historiography of the postmodern revolution, scholars felt similar imperatives. “Historians sought in their writing and teaching to combine intuitive insights with rigorous empiricism, generalizations and abstractions with concrete and specific facts, argument and analysis with story-telling, interpretive understanding with logical explanation, creative organization with objective reporting, impartiality and detachment with moral judgement [sic] and advocacy.”26 In both instances there have been refinements in the methods but not in the goal: to attain or maintain power by assumption of anti-authoritarian credentials; that is, to assume a healthy attitude of humility before launching into an admittedly ego-feeding endeavor, be it in pursuit of political agency or of scholarly respect.

The present work *Joseph Plumb Martin and the American Imagination* attempts to illuminate the ideas that shaped American nationalism between the War for Independence and the composition and publication of a narrative of the war completed fifty years later. To do this each chapter attacks the issue from a different angle but all seek to confirm the essential premise: that American nationalism was based on the
constant reevaluation of authority through the definition of competence. Chapter one does so by unpacking the literary sources that have acted upon Martin’s nationalistic imagination to arrive at a rhetoric of competence that justifies his own agency in the destiny of the nation. Literature is treated as historical documentation of the ideas that shaped an American nationalist rhetoric. The boundaries between “history” and “literature” must needs be reevaluated along with everything else, but for very important reasons. If history is the study of what really happened and a function of literature is the attempt to illuminate human imagination, then if one believes that ideas create history the study of the human imagination becomes the study of what really happened, at least in the sense of what people thought they were doing when they enacted change. History can embrace bias rather than fight it by looking for the basis of the received wisdom that forms the foundation for ideas and therefore of action. The fact that ideas change over time can enrich the value of examining them, for the ways ideas change mark an evolution that coincides with historical change. The evolution of the American imagination is part of the evolution of the nation as a whole. The young Joseph Plumb Martin who fought in 1776 might have had an unshaken trust in authority during the war that eroded by 1830, but Martin’s understanding of what happened in 1776 was influenced by his attitude in 1830. It is important for us to attempt to see how a narrative is constructed by ideas and biases; otherwise bias passes under the radar as fact, or as bias that existed in 1776, not created in 1830 and then imposed upon the earlier time by the illusion of presenting an eye-witness narrative.

Martin’s narrative is used primarily as corroborating evidence by Revolutionary War era historians without regard as to how his biases might distort the historical record.
It is therefore important to make his biases a part of his history rather than a distortion of the overall historical narrative of the Revolution. One might be able to reveal his biases by constructing an imaginative depiction of his behavior in an adversarial setting where his true opinions are forced to the surface. In a play Martin could speak for himself not just in context of his memory but in confronting the forces in his own day that act upon his memory. Memory is selective and the meanings we derive from memory are colored by more than the memories themselves. In reenacting a Joseph Plumb Martin, who narrates as well as evaluates the meaning of that which he narrates, can any semblance of understanding be realized. My interpolations based upon a careful reading of the narrative attempt to create an immediate organic depiction of the act of reconstructing the past combined with the act of deriving meaning at the exact same moment: something Hayden White contends a historian does in his or her own arbitrary way anyhow behind the illusion of being objective and scientific. His solution is to surrender a false veneer of objectivity for literary imagination. “History has lost sight of its origins in the literary imagination. In the interest of appearing scientific and objective, it has repressed and denied to itself its own greatest source of strength and renewal… an intimate connection with its literary basis…”

This point is not to say that I am ready to crash the very important goal of objective enquiry into shards as White would have us do. The object here is not to negate the importance of the more orthodox presentations derived from historical enquiry, merely to add a different dimension. The paradox here is that most history is delivered to the layman in dramatic form, with all its distortions, because the immediacy of a reenactment seems to capture the imagination in a different way than book prose. We
derive most of our experience from witnessing rather than reading. Drama provides this artificial venue of experience. I was in the audience when the playwright Edward Albee was once asked why he does not write plays to please an audience but rather to disturb them. Was this his definition of art? Albee contended his plays were entertainment, not art. He believed the term “art” to be pretentious and unnecessary when applied to plays—which after all are called “plays” not “works”. That said he defined “entertainment” as “that which is entertained.” Success in injecting our sensibility into the imaginations of others often means choosing the right medium. Gordon Wood and William Shakespeare have their methods according to what they wish to say and how they wish to say it. I do not propose to replace Wood with Shakespeare, merely to let apples and oranges lie in the same bowl so that there is more than one taste to consume and let us leave aside the evaluation of which is better for us.

My journey with the personal narrative of Joseph Plumb Martin began with a desire to understand the American Revolution from inside, in the thoughts and feelings of those who were there. A book-length first person account by an ordinary Revolutionary War soldier seemed to have the raw material I needed to illuminate a psychological dimension to the creation of the United States of America. Martin was an eyewitness to the nation’s birth from 1776 until 1783, and his rough plain spoken style provided an immediacy that projected the emotions behind historical events. His narrative also represented the point of view of an ordinary American, not one of the anointed patrician founding fathers, an accessible, off-the-cuff style that humanized the writer and made him intelligible to me, another self-styled “ordinary” American. Also, at least among Revolutionary War scholars, the narrative of Joseph Plumb Martin was one of the most
quotable, providing corroborating evidence or extra color to the description of a given battle. He was at many of the most important battles of the war: Yorktown, Monmouth, Long Island and White Plains.

In order to get inside Martin, to understand his personality and his psyche, I realized I had to read his memoir out loud. I spent hours putting on a dreadful New England accent and speaking into a tape recorder every word of the narrative, in as expressive and naturalistic a way as possible, as if this crusty Connecticut rifleman had just stepped into the room for a dram of rum. Then, after the whole thing was recorded I spent hours listening to it: while driving, while jogging, while waiting to have a tooth pulled. As time went on I began to notice references and allusions within the narrative that seemed anachronistic for a Revolutionary War account. There were references to “Uncle Sam” and “The Star Spangled Banner.” Also Martin alluded to writers such as Robert Bloomfield who did not publish poems until the early nineteenth century. There were demure portrayals of women that seemed straight out of nineteenth-century melodrama and broad stereotypical views of African Americans that smacked of antebellum minstrelsy. There was also an inelegant but emotional turn of phrase that bespoke a more romantic sensibility, the sort of thing one would read in a letter by Thoreau rather than by Benjamin Franklin. I found less outpouring of emotion in the diaries, letters and histories of other revolutionary era soldiers such as Jeremiah Greenman or William Feltman composed closer to the time of the Revolution. The only other account matching Martin’s emotional tone was James Thacher’s Military Journal, which I suspect was really composed in the 1820s when it was published. John Adams
often wrote with more demonstrative feeling than many of his contemporaries, though Adams’s fiercest emotions tended toward vitriol.

I knew that the narrative was published in 1830, though this was hardly unusual, given that the fiftieth anniversary of Yorktown was a year later. There were other prints and reprints of earlier Revolutionary War memoirs and histories that were put out during this period. Something about Martin’s account was different. His facts were largely correct and his anecdotes were no doubt true, but his voice seemed far too mature to be that of a teenager: not a real life Johnny Tremain but a crusty aged Natty Bumppo, perhaps, an old raconteur who had been around a while and certainly seemed to understand more of life than his Continental Army soldier former self could have done, and who could embroider the meaning of an experience with a quote from scripture or literature not gleaned during impatient youth but in probing old age.

There was a reason why the account of an ordinary soldier appeared in 1830 and not in 1780. Times had changed; voices of the common man were heard more frequently. America’s democracy and the meaning behind it had shifted with the ascension of low-born backwoodsman Andrew Jackson to the White House. The shift was documented by de Tocqueville and other observers. Populism had invaded the core of American nationalism. Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative was a Jacksonian era populist work, every page made a case for the viability of an ordinary citizen as an agent of change, every individual judged according to his own competence and moral rectitude regardless of station (except for women, African Americans and Native Americans who were held to a different, lower standard).
In a seminar at the University of Akron, professor Elizabeth Mancke discussed how history happens because of ideas, a notion I initially had doubts about. I had been taught that history happens also by external forces: demographic shifts, availability of food and other essential resources, economic struggles, class struggles. But I soon felt the force of her argument. What motivates us to act are, well, motives. If Joseph Plumb Martin went to war in 1776 and did not write about it until 1830, what motivated him to wait so long? Perhaps he felt ready to express his point of view in print only by 1830 when the history of America was more aligned with the story of the common man rising to meet the demands of a democratic nation. Perhaps he felt ready to help define the American Revolution as the triumph of persons who could demonstrate self sacrifice and competence regardless of social station over those enjoying privilege because of their class.

If history is built upon actions motivated by ideas, then a display of the behaviors that launched the ideas might be a viable contribution to historical presentation. If the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves is part of the historical record, then the stories told by an eye witness to history, interwoven with the meanings he derives from them, based on the imperatives of the time he is telling them in, might serve a historical function as well because it may help illustrate the evolution of the American imagination from the time of the Revolution to the time of the early republic. Let an aging revolutionary stumble into a room where he needs something from someone in authority and see what kinds of rumbling and stumbling he makes in trying to get it. The human mind often grasps concepts best when couched in conflict. The final chapter, therefore, is a one man play, because the American imagination as it was dreamed up in the days of
the early republic had to be conveyed, I feel, by an early American made flesh and forced by adversity to reveal all.
Charles Royster argues that the Continental Army soldiers and officers were central to the discussions that defined American nationalism during the early republic. Royster cites Martin’s narrative on a number of occasions. Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 142, 168, 300-301.

Caroline Cox shows how Revolutionary War service accentuated class differences between soldiers and officers but also offered mechanisms for social mobility and negotiation of power between enlisted men and their leaders. Implied is that Continental Army service provided a blueprint for the rise of ordinary citizens of low birth and station to a place of agency in American society. Cox cites Martin’s narrative quite a bit to bolster her point of view, though she acknowledges he wrote his memoir “years later,” Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 13. Sarah Purcell shows how American nationalism between 1776 and 1825 was shaped through military memory. Purcell believes commemorations of the war in the subsequent decades increasingly accentuated the role of ordinary soldiers as time went on in what she calls the “democratization of memory” so that even as these commemorations solidified cohesion they empowered ordinary citizens, Sarah Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 2, 52.


5 The narrative is currently still in print, Joseph Plumb Martin, *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier: Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of Joseph Plumb Martin*, ed. Thomas Fleming (New York: Signet, 2001), which is also the most accurate reproduction of the original, which was published anonymously as *A Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary...*


7 Nash, Unknown Revolution, 221. There are indications that Martin may have been working from memory alone. He tried to name British ships that were menacing the Americans in New York and qualified his list with “I think.” On another occasion he could not identify a ship- “the name of which I have forgotten.” At the end of his narrative he stated: “when I began this narrative, I thought a very few pages would contain it, but as occurrences returned to my memory, and one thing brought another to mind, another would step up and ask for admittance,” Martin, Narrative, 18, 29, 252.


A good example is James Kirby Martin, Ordinary Courage, which reduces the narrative by about 100 pages, excising many of these asides and much of his literary allusions.

Martin, Narrative, 2.


Martin, Narrative, 49-50, for instance.

See Martin, Narrative, 120, for an example of his anti-Tory views. Many influential studies show Tory numbers to be a substantial segment of the American population during the Revolution. Wallace Brown, The King's Friends: The Composition and Motives of the American Loyalist Claimants (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965), 77-78; Alexander Flick looked at Tory claims for reparation after the war, Alexander Flick, Loyalism in New York (New York: Columbia University thesis, 1909), 22; Wallace Brown notes that certain groups, for instance Quakers and a majority of Americans of Scottish descent, were less than sympathetic to the Patriot cause, if not outright loyalists, Wallace Brown, The Good Americans: The Loyalists in the American Revolution (New York: Morrow, 1969), 244. Edward Countryman and Joseph Tiedmann eloquently make the case that loyalty to the crown transcended classes and that a large percentage of farmers as well as tradesmen were Tories, Edward Countryman, A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 148; Joseph Tiedmann, “A Revolution Foiled: Queens County, NY 1775-1776,” Journal of American History 75 (1988): 418. Nor did most loyalists necessarily flee these shores after the war. Edward Countryman also makes a case that, at least in urban centers, former Tories were players in the thriving transatlantic economy that survived the war largely intact, and therefore were also still a force politically, Edward Countryman, “Uses of Capital in Revolutionary America: The Case of the New York Loyalist Merchants,” William and Mary Quarterly 3rd ser. 49 (1992): 7. The large number of loyalists was not a secret of academics. Popular histories accentuate this point. See Bruce Catton, “Introduction,” The American Heritage Book of the Revolution (New York: American Heritage, 1958), 6. Nor does the patriot side always have the moral high ground in popular American fiction, Esther Forbes and Howard Fast notwithstanding. Kenneth Roberts, Oliver Wiswell (New York: Doubleday, 1940), quite popular in a time when many Americans viewed Britain as a close ally in the looming conflict against Nazi Germany, accentuated the ordinary decency of the Tories and painted the Patriot mobs as irresponsible anarchists and criminals.


Knox also lost his holdings, probably as a result of panics like the one in 1819. Alan Taylor, Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820 (Chapel Hill: U. of N.C. Press, 1990), 247-249, 47.

Martin, Narrative. Monroe is commended on 251, Lafayette 104-105, Washington on many occasions, especially 110-111, 156, 199, 247.


26 Berkhofer, *Beyond the Great Story*, 11-12.

CHAPTER II

MARC ANTONY MEETS GILES:

TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC RHETORIC THROUGH HUMILITY

IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC

Joseph Plumb Martin’s nationalism was constructed on what he read. From the
time of his service in the Revolution until he wrote his narration of the war fifty years
later the meaning of the events in 1776 was shaped by the drama, literature and scripture
he digested in the intervening years. He alluded to plays, poems and biblical phrases in
his narrative and it may be argued he did so to bolster his own competence as an active
voice in the conversation that aligned American nationalism with popular sovereignty (at
least insofar as it extended to males of European descent). In the 1830s, nationalism in
the United States was strongly associated with the innate nobility of ordinary Americans.
Honor was measured by an individual’s degree of self-sacrifice for the common good
combined with an unassuming humility that negated suspicions of self-serving intentions.
Daniel Webster touted “the people’s government, made for the people, made by the
people, and answerable to the people,” and Andrew Jackson railed against “the rich and
powerful” who “bend the acts of government in favor to their selfish purposes” and
promoted instead the agency of “farmers, mechanics and laborers.” ¹ In this decade
historian George Bancroft declared “it is the confession of an enemy to Democracy, that
‘ALL THE GREAT AND NOBLE INSTITUTIONS OF THE WORLD HAVE COME FROM POPULAR EFFORTS [his emphasis],’” and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow put the ordinary working man on a heroic pedestal with his poem “The Village Blacksmith.” James Kirke Paulding proudly personified the nation with the grit of a working man:

“…arrogant, self-sufficient, bundling, gouging, guessing, drinking, dirking, spitting, chewing, pig-stealing, impious genius of democracy.”

These 1830s invocations of the country’s founding likewise contained a romantic populism and disdain of privilege that might have seemed foreign to the elites aspiring to a more rational self-determination when they met in Philadelphia in 1776 and 1787. Mason Weems’s hagiography of Washington, in print after thirty years and still selling briskly, proclaimed, “Happily for America, George Washington was not born with ‘a silver spoon in his mouth [his emphasis].’” Nathaniel Hawthorne’s favor-seeking protagonist in pre-Revolution Boston saw his aristocratic uncle tarred and feathered by a mob, and then was advised: “‘…you are a shrewd youth, you may rise in the world without the help of your kinsman Major Molineux.’” Jared Sparks credited “the New England yeomanry” with the first armed initiative against British tyranny. Ralph Waldo Emerson encapsulated the Revolution in the phrase “Here once the embattled farmers stood/ And fired the shot heard round the world.” The early 1800s witnessed the rise of “Brother Jonathan” as a symbol of America: a low-born plebeian revolutionary soldier or frontiersman who fights against the forces of privilege and immorality with courage and common sense. He was seen in James Fenimore Cooper’s scout Natty Bumppo, the memorable protagonist in the *Leatherstocking Saga* novels set on the pre-Revolution American frontier. The protagonist of James Kirke Paulding’s epic poem *The*
Backwoodsman, the wildly popular ersatz Davy Crockett character in Lion of the West, as well as his later Old Continental, which Paulding hinted was composed at this time, were all modeled after Brother Jonathan.9

Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative voice contains something of the persona of Brother Jonathan as well: earthy, honest and resilient. The ideas conveyed by art inform historical thought. Through the study of the literary antecedents from which Martin quoted liberally to punctuate his narrative, a pattern emerges that both serves and is served by his rhetoric celebrating the competence and moral worthiness of the common man. While his sources largely date from the eighteenth century and earlier, they are reinterpreted for an early nineteenth-century sensibility more related to the romantic American writers of his time than the society of Revolutionary founding fathers, into which he, on his own terms, aspired membership.

Martin’s narrative strove to qualify the elitist “great man, founding father” rhetoric of Revolutionary America in important ways. While subscribing to the same Enlightenment idea that it is within the power of humans to control their own destiny through self-knowledge, the driving element of this control, competence, was placed in entirely different contexts.10 English competence was defined in terms of wit, learning and parentage.11 A definition of American competence in Martin’s terms would replace parentage with honesty and would quantify the wit and learning by examining the effectiveness of it through pragmatic application. “Honesty” in the “American” sense had pragmatic undertones, conveying not so much the simple act of telling the truth, but steadfastness toward a worthy cause, loyalty, and lack of hypocrisy. Certainly, Martin described himself being deceitful on more than one occasion, but always in the service of
a logical and largely harmless expedience—need for food, for instance, or in dealing with others who appeared to be acting irrationally, including at times his own superiors.

Dishonesty could be worthy and expected if it was used in the solving of a larger problem that served the cause of “liberty.” Conversely, hypocrisy and falsehood for personal advancement were great sins; as was disrespect and mistreatment of (“worthy”) women.

Martin believed it was in the power of humanity to win liberty from a controlling tyranny through competence, demonstrated not merely by success, but also by evidence of a valorous and, at bottom, moral character— a character that could be paradoxically self-serving at the same time it served others. Implied here is that those who are competent are therefore entitled to be rewarded with liberty. Those who are not competent, do not deserve freedom. Thus, this American ideal of self-actualization was a double-edged sword. It celebrated human resourcefulness and cunning. It also rationalized slavery and the oppression of Native Americans. The quotient of class nobility was erased. Nobility was completely measured by the content of individual character regardless of station and material gain. Indeed, the morally bankrupt were most likely in Martin’s view to be of the upper echelon rather than the lower. Nobility was measured in terms of suffering, endurance and steadfastness in an endeavor that benefited the common good. Martin’s heroes, therefore, were those who generated empathy through suffering and did not display a superior, arrogant or supercilious attitude.

“ALAS, POOR HESSION”

One of the most striking areas of the memoir comes as an afterthought, and imbedded in it is the inherent lesson of Martin’s entire work: the consequence of a world
where privilege and birthright rule at the expense of competence is tragedy. In 1778, Joseph Plumb Martin and a few comrades revisited the battle site at White Plains where two years earlier they had “made a stand” against British and Hessian forces. A macabre reminder of the battle was still visible: “Hessian sculls as thick as a bomb shell” where they had been dug up and fed upon by dogs or hogs. Writing about it a half century later, Martin used the incident to reflect upon the evils of a society bereft of popular sovereignty:

…poor fellows! They were left unburied in a foreign land;—they had, perhaps, as near and dear friends to lament their sad destiny as the Americans who lay buried near them. But they should have kept at home, we should then never have gone after them to kill them in their own country. But, the reader will say, they were forced to come and be killed here; forced by their rulers who have absolute power of life and death over their subjects. Well then, reader, bless a kind Providence that has made such a distinction between your condition and theirs. And be careful too that you do not allow yourself ever to be brought to such an abject, servile and debased condition.13

Thus, and for one of a few times in his narrative, Martin drew an overt political lesson from his experiences fighting the American War for Independence. Yet, from beginning to end Martin’s interlude among Hessian bones had a style and tone that bespeak a very specific mindset, one self-consciously tuned to what it meant to be a citizen of a democratic society driven by the exertions of ordinary citizens. Formed initially from the moralistic center of his New England upbringing, but further shaped by his war experiences and his wide reading of English and Anglo-American literature, Martin’s rhetorical sensibility nevertheless compared most readily with other works of the 1830s, in which certain writers ruminated on or demonstrated the evils brought about by authoritarian tyranny.
In James Kirke Paulding’s comic *Jonathan’s Visit to the Celestial Empire* (1834) an ordinary Yankee traveled to China where he made a fortune through his superior resourcefulness. Finally, having enough of the repressive society he found there, Jonathan bid adieu to a Chinese friend, declaring:

“I never saw such a tarnal place. It beats every thing, I swow. Why, squire Fat-qua, I'll tell you what—if you'll only come to our parts, you may go jist where you please--do jist as you please--and talk to the gals as much as you please. I'll be choked if it isn't True, by the living hokey."

"Hi yah! Missee Joe Notting,; replied Fat qua, "she must be some very fine place, dat Merrykey."

"There you are right, squire. But, good by; I finally conclude it's best to cut stick. They're plaugy slippery fellows here; if they aint, may I be licked by a chap under size."

This self-congratulatory patriotism was so prevalent in the first half of the nineteenth century that it left at least one visitor, Alexis de Tocqueville, exasperated:

I tell an American that he lives in a beautiful country; he answers: “That is true. There is none like it in the world.” I praise the freedom enjoyed by the inhabitants, and he answers: “Freedom is a precious gift, but very few peoples are worthy to enjoy it.” I note the chastity of morals prevailing in the United States, and he replies: “I suppose that a stranger, struck by the immorality apparent in other nations, must be astonished at this sight.” Finally I leave him to his self-contemplation, but he returns to the charge and will not stop till he has made me repeat everything I have said. One cannot imagine a more obnoxious or boastful form of patriotism. Even admirers are bored.

While Martin could brag about his country, he could not brag about himself, and herein lay the dialectic of his populist rhetoric. Built into the telling as well as the tale of Martin’s story is a studied didacticism that depicted humility and self-sacrifice as the highest qualities of the human character and disloyalty, hypocrisy and selfishness as the lowest. Martin shied away from self-aggrandizement and the vainglory of the self-serving as if from an infection, distrusted authority in general and exhibited a self-conscious pride of low station, appreciating its innate nobility in contrast to the persons above him who he
believed to be easily corrupted. Read in this way, Martin’s narrative was not just what it appeared to be on the surface: a stream-of-consciousness telling of past events, but a blueprint of what he considered to be the best behaviors exhibited by ordinary Americans, essential in the continued growth and survival of the democratic experiment Martin regarded himself as so much a part of in his brave new world of 1830.

There was much art, and artifice, surrounding the transformation of the British North American colonies into an independent polity. But if art imitates life, so too are thoughts and actions shaped by art. The American Revolution and the solidification of the American identity were not without their debts to English literature. The plays, poems and essays that captured the imaginations and shaped the thoughts of early Americans helped them navigate a new political and social landscape and make sense of the struggles and changes wrought by the conflict with King George III. Americans created villains, heroes and heroines who were often an extension of those found in British luminaries such as William Shakespeare, Joseph Addison, and George Farquhar, playwrights whom Americans read, and whose plays they watched and performed. George Washington was often a patron of plays. Mercy Otis Warren chose to shape her most trenchant anti-Tory commentary in dramatic form. Appreciation of other literature and cultural expressions were primarily an elitist affair in the 1700s even after the Revolution.

Ordinary soldier Joseph Plumb Martin also knew his Shakespeare, other lights from British literature and their American imitators, and he used their examples to draw lessons from the struggle toward American self-determination. He may, however, have received his literary education long after the years of the war. There is little reason to
believe that Martin ever saw a play. His memoir describes camp life extensively, and one would presume that if camp theatricals were a part of camp life he would have mentioned it. Plays were banned in New England during Revolutionary times, and even in the decades afterward, they could only be performed in many areas as “moral lectures.”

Martin may have been involved in private read-aloud presentations of plays in bookseller shops or taverns. He may also have witnessed traveling theatrical companies, common in the 1800s. He certainly was reading the plays and so were many ordinary Americans by 1830. De Tocqueville remarked that “There is hardly a pioneer’s hut which does not contain a few odd volumes of Shakespeare.”

Martin’s sensibility certainly has a performance-based aspect which bespeaks knowledge of the theatrical and poetic literature of the Revolutionary War era and of the early republic that came after it. His writing has the quality of talking on paper, which contributes to the erroneous sense that he wrote it as a diary. He structured sections as monologues, mimicking his speech pattern. He alluded to properties associated with the enactment of action rather than its description and seemed to see himself as a performer for his “reader.” At times, he framed events overtly in terms of theatricals. “Now comes the catastrophe of the play,” he proclaimed in narrating his falling out with his “Grandsire.” “The British played their parts well,” he commented in describing the battle of Kips Bay. He prefaced each chapter with a short verse couplet, a convention adopted by many novelists in England and America, and often in the mock-heroic “hudibrastic” style originated by seventeenth-century poet Samuel Butler and made famous in America through *M’Fingal* by John Trumbull. The couplet form was likewise a common stage verse convention, which, when constructed deftly with simplicity and elegance, was easy
for a listening audience to digest. Most popular song lyrics of the period were also constructed in this way and there is every reason to believe Martin understood, recognized, and utilized these literary forms as much as did his British counterparts in their coffee houses, salons and theatres.

Martin’s allusions to Shakespeare and other British and American writers, combined with references to the Bible, reinforced his own competence even as he strove on the surface to depict himself as the simple anti-hero of his own dramatic comedy. His morality was colored by the politicizing force of war, but also by the rhetoric of democratic ideals, itself colored by a populist sensibility. Unlike elitist authors of the Enlightenment such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson or even humorists like Hopkinson and Trumbull, Martin’s voice was more egalitarian. He wished not to be above his reader, but rather on the same level, and yet still able to compel attention. Thus, it was in showing ordinary competence in the service of humility- empathy for ordinary people, subservience to country and ideals, self-sacrifice for the common good that Martin shaped the literary and scriptural sources at his disposal.

“A TIP-TOE”

“He that outlives this day, and comes safe home, Will stand a tip-toe when the day is named…” Shakespeare, Henry V

Shakespeare’s Henry V ennobles monarchy and country through war. Americans searching to create a nationalistic identity took this principle and reapplied it to American history. Joseph Plumb Martin was no exception. Martin’s narrative of Yorktown, for instance, has the feel of Shakespeare’s heroic and momentous portrayal of the battle of
Agincourt in *Henry V*. The French were on his left as he lay in the trenches he had helped to dig. Ninety-two cannons, mortars and howitzers were assembled and aimed at the city where Cornwallis was bottled up and the great rebellion was destined to end. Martin implied that it was the dawn of a new day:

> The batteries were to be opened; all were upon the tip-toe of expectation and impatience to see the signal given to open the whole line of batteries, which was to be the hoisting of the American flag... About noon the much wished for signal went up. I confess I felt a secret pride swell my heart when I saw the "star spangled banner" waving majestically in the very faces of our implacable adversaries; it appeared like an omen of success to our enterprize [sic], and so it proved in reality. A simultaneous discharge of all the guns in the line followed; the French troops accompanying it with "Huzza for the Americans!"  

While an early American stars and stripes banner may or may not have been waving over the American troops at Yorktown, Martin's reference is almost certainly from Francis Scott Key's poem about the bombardment of Fort McHenry thirty years later during the War of 1812. Key’s poem was set to a tune that evidently had been written and published in 1782 as an anthem for the Anacreon Society, a London men's club dedicated to fostering music and conviviality. The tune had many incarnations, including being set to several drinking songs and English parodies, before becoming more than one of the patriotic anthems published and sung in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries such as "Adams and Liberty" (also called "Ye Sons of Columbia"), a political campaign song that appeared in the 1790s.  

"The Star Spangled Banner," whether as a tune or a poem, or together as a song, was part of American popular culture long before Herbert Hoover made it the national anthem. As a nickname for the American flag, “star spangled banner” does not seem to appear before the War of 1812. While the stars and stripes design for the American flag appears to date from 1777 and there are records of its use in
certain later revolutionary battles, such as Cowpens and Guilford Courthouse, as well as
in use by the American navy, there is no evidence to suggest the term “star spangled
banner” predated Francis Scott Key’s song. It is therefore probable that Martin’s use of it
is anachronistic.22

Martin’s knowledge of Shakespeare is more obvious elsewhere in the memoir. His
“tip-toe of expectation” may or may not bespeak a direct knowledge of Henry V and those
who would “stand a-tip-toe” reminiscing about their part at the battle of Agincourt in
1415. But Martin’s Yorktown has other Agincourt-like resonances besides this one. In
Henry V, act IV, scene I, on the eve of battle, Shakespeare has King Henry walk incognito
among his men, as the Chorus describes it:

His liberal eye doth give to every one,
Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all
Behold, as may unworthiness define,
A little touch of Harry in the night.23

Martin and other “Sappers and Miners” “eat no ‘idle bread,” toiling at night digging
trenches and building works to prepare for an attack on the British fortifications at
Yorktown, when

…there came a man alone to us, having on a surtout, as we conjectured,
(it being exceeding dark,) and inquired… what troops we were; talked familiarly
with us for a few minutes… we [later] discovered it was Gen. Washington. Had
we dared, we might have cautioned him for exposing himself so carelessly to
danger at such a time, and doubtless he would have taken it in good part if we
had.24

Martin’s use of “eat no ‘idle bread’” may have been deliberate, even though the
expression was common at the time.25 Henry V, in the soliloquy which ends Act IV,
scene 1 of Shakespeare’s play, ruminates on the worries of a leader which keep him up
nights while a citizen under his protection:
Who, with a body fill’d and vacant mind,
Gets him to rest, cram’d with distressful [well-earned] bread,
Never sees horrid night…  

Henry V is not the only English military hero to be cast in disguise among his people. Various plays, pageants and drawings depict a legendary tale of Alfred the Great appearing disguised as a “harper” to gain intelligence “and discovering himself to his desponding Countrymen.” Concealment of identity to reveal one’s true worth independent of station was a popular literary and theatrical device. Shakespeare used it frequently. In Measure for Measure, King Lear, As You Like It and Twelfth Night high-born characters play at being lowly menials and servants only to demonstrate their innate nobility and grace through their behavior. In Winter’s Tale, high-born children taken away and raised as peasants still display their nobility and grace when they reach maturity as if their earthy upbringing has no effect on their high-born birthright. Thus was the myth perpetuated that individuals in the ruling class deserve their status regardless of the outward manifestations of rank. Martin used this device but substituted the competent for the high-born.

General John Burgoyne, when he wasn’t losing battles, was a playwright who often used such devices in his derivative but largely well-received plays, which were produced in England sporadically throughout the late 1700s. In his operetta The Maid of The Oaks (1774) the rich uncle of the male love interest comes across Maria, the heroine, who is heiress of a great estate, dressed simply and acting with modesty and self-effacement to such a degree that the uncle remarks that his nephew should marry this simple peasant-like girl rather than his high-born betrothed who the uncle has never met but has taken a dislike to in his imagination. In Burgoyne’s The Heiress (1786) the hero,
Lord Gayville, affects a less high-blown identity to woo his lady, remarking: “My ambition has been to be loved for my own sake.” The object of his love also poses as a simple serving woman but nevertheless wins his heart when she “…through the simplicity of a Quaker shew’d all we cou’d conceive of a Goddess.” Finally, in his *Richard Coeur de Lion* (1786), Queen Matilda disguises herself as a poor wandering blind minstrel to find her king who has been imprisoned by enemies and reveals herself at the climax of the play: “Yes, Matilda- a fugitive from all she ow’d her station and a father’s love- but tell them peerless Richard was the cause.” Her noble initiative frees the king, who has learned a humbling lesson from her example, and perhaps metaphorically so has the playwright as he reinforces the capability of a king to rule with justice in a changing world:

**RICHARD**

And when to my native England I return, so may I prosper in my subjects’ love, as I cherish in the memory of my sufferings here- a lesson to improve my reign-compassion should be a monarch’s nature- I have learn’d what ’tis to need it. The poorest peasant in my land, when misery presses, in his *King* shall find a friend.²⁹

Americans were self-conscious about their separation from a system of monarchy even as they studied and admired royal heroes like Henry V. An American love of great English kings outlived the revolution. Alexis de Tocqueville in his jaunts through the wilds of 1830s noted “The literary genius of Great Britain still shines its rays into the depths of the New World’s forests. There is hardly a pioneer hut in which the odd volume of Shakespeare cannot be found. I remember reading the feudal drama *Henry V* for the first time in a log cabin.”³⁰ Martin’s cabin in the forests of Maine was likely one such repository for such “feudal” dramas.
Perhaps it was in equating Henry’s desperate military endeavors with those of the American military leaders in the Revolution that Shakespeare’s hagiographic depiction of Henry resonated with those fighting for independence. Certainly Martin was not the only American to associate *Henry V* with the struggle. Patriot playwright and poet Hugh Brackenridge seemed to pay tribute to the famous opening of *Henry V*, Act I, sc. 1 lines 26-27:

Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them
Printing their proud hooves in the receiving earth;

when he wrote in the prologue of his 1776 drama *The Death of Montgomery*:

Now think you see, three thousand moving,
Up the brow of Bunker’s-Hill.

Stylistically he seemed to have been consciously echoing Henry’s furiously martial speech (Act III, sc. 1) that begins: “Once more unto the breach, dear friends/ or close the wall up with our English dead” in the following:

Once more WARREN midst this terror,
Charge brave soldiers charge again,
Many an expert vet’ran warrior
Of the enemy is slain,
Level well your charged pieces,
In direction to the town;
They shake, they shake, their light’ning ceases
That shot brought six standards down.”

Other authors were more overt in their allusions to the play. In 1777 a rebel sympathizer mocked a failed British attempt to take Sullivan’s Island by equating them with the two great vainglorious cowards of the Henry V saga:

I came firm as Falstaff or Pistol,
But the Yankees, ’od rot ’em
I could not get at ’em.
In February 1781, eight months before Yorktown, General Nathanael Greene wrote to Baron von Steuben: “O that we had in the field as Henry the Fifth said, Some few of the Many Thousands that are Idle at Home.”33

There are limits to the idea that Martin made a conscious or even unconscious connection between *Henry V* on the eve of Agincourt and Washington on the eve of Yorktown. After all, Henry fought the French who were American allies at Yorktown. Furthermore, the play has a deeper history in igniting British nationalism than it does as a symbolic literary stand-in for Washington and the struggle for independence. *Henry V* was revived often in England to muster public support for war. Prominent in the years after Yorktown was John Philip Kemble’s London revival of *Henry V* in the wake of growing English concern for new hostilities with France as the French Revolution was revolving back toward conflict with her most constant foreign enemy. Kemble subtitled the production *The Conquest of France*.34

In one sense Martin’s memoir actually negated Henry’s triumph over the French. At the British capitulation at Yorktown, as Cornwallis’s men marched out to lay down their arms, “The British paid the Americans, seemingly, but little attention as they passed them but eyed the French with considerable malice in their countenances.” Even more telling is an episode earlier in the siege:

There were two British soldiers hanging in chains here; I was standing near them with some others of our men, when two French officers rode up and inquired whether they were Americans or English; we told them they were English; upon which one of the officers laid his cane several times across one of the bodies, making the dry bones rattle, at the same time exclaiming, “Forte d’Anglaise.” A bold action! Says the reader.35
National specifics aside, Henry V and other British heroes with common sympathies present a paradigm for leadership that could be transplanted quite easily to George Washington in Martin’s eyes. The fearless, fierce and yet gentlemanly Henry V is certainly evoked in Martin’s description of Washington at the Battle of Monmouth, and especially in contrast to lesser lights, such as General Charles Lee:

…we received orders to retreat, as all the left wing of the army (that part being under the command of Gen. Lee) were retreating. Grating as this order was to our feelings, we were obliged to comply… in a few minutes the Commander-in-chief and suit crossed the road just where we were sitting. I heard him ask our officers “by whose order the troops were retreating,” and being answered, “by Gen. Lee’s;” he said something, but as he was moving forward all the time this was passing, he was too far off for me to hear it distinctly; those that were nearer to him, said that his words were- “d---n him;” whether he did thus express himself or not I do not know, it was certainly very unlike him, but he seemed at the instant to be in a great passion, his looks if not his words seemed to indicate as much. After passing us, he rode on to the plain field and took an observation of the advancing enemy; he remained there sometime upon his old English charger, while shot from the British Artillery were rending up the earth all around him. After he had taken a view of the enemy, he returned and ordered the two Connecticut Brigades to make a stand at a fence…

Such a combination of fierceness and valor echo Shakespeare’s greatest hero:

KING HENRY

I was not angry since I came to France
Until this instant. Take a trumpet, herald,
Ride thou unto the horsemen on yond hill.
If they will fight with us, bid them come down,
Or void the field; they do offend our sight.
If they’ll do neither, we will come to them,
And make them skirr away.

Martin may have seen this exchange between Lee and Washington but others before and after him reported on it. James Thacher, whose *Military Journal of the American Revolution* came out in 1823 and perhaps should also be examined as a nineteenth-
Major-General Lee was ordered, by the command-in-chief, to advance and attack the enemy’s rear, so soon as a proper opportunity should offer. Having approached very near, instead of engaging, he suffered his troops to retreat in some confusion. On learning this, his excellency was exceedingly mortified and astonished. Coming up to General Lee, and meeting part of his corps in their flight, he with some warmth, inquired the cause of his retreat, and addressed General Lee in language which implied censure. The high-spirited Lee could not brook the slightest appearance of disapprobation, and replied with an air of disrespect. He, however, requested of his excellency fresh orders for the conduct of his corps, and these he promptly obeyed, and discovered no want of bravery in the field.  

Others such as Mason Weems and the later Washington Irving took much poetic license with this encounter, but all in some degree accentuated Washington’s competence and nobility. Weems, with whose work Martin may have been familiar, depicted the scene thusly:

General Lee, with 5000 men, was ordered to begin the attack; Washington moving on briskly to support him. But, as he advanced, to his infinite astonishment he met Lee retreating, and the enemy pursuing. “For God’s sake, General Lee,” said Washington with great warmth, “what’s the cause of this ill-tim’d prudence.” “No man, sir,” replied Lee, quite convulsed with rage, “can boast a larger portion of that rascally virtue than your Excellency!!” Dashing along by the madman, Washington rode up to his troops who at sight of him rent the air with “God save great Washington!” “My brave fellows,” said he, “can you fight?” They answered with 3 cheers! “Then face about, my heroes, and charge.” This order was executed with infinite spirit. The enemy, finding themselves now warmly opposed in front, made an attempt to turn his left flank, but were gallantly attacked and driven back.  

Not only Charles Lee suffered in comparison to the “Commander-in-chief.” One is struck with the contrast in character of Washington compared to most other leaders in Martin’s narrative. The soon-to-be-traitor General Benedict Arnold appeared in the memoirs as a disagreeable character, haughty in one instance, conniving in another.
General Israel Putnam came across as a blowhard, not unlike Falstaff. He appeared in the narrative twice: first ineffectually bawling out Martin and other soldiers for stealing wine from a New York merchant on the eve of the Battle of Brooklyn Heights, and later imperiously ordering Martin to open a gate for him and cursing and waving his pistol when Martin merely ran off into the woods instead. Later Martin called into question Putnam’s intelligence and implicitly blamed the general for his cavalier treatment of the men under him. Martin and his unit were about to settle in for winter quarters at the end of 1778 when

Gen. Putnam… heard, or fancied he heard that a party of the enemy were out somewhere- “down below”; we were alarmed about midnight, and as cold as night as need be, and marched off to find the enemy (if he could be found.) We marched all the remaining part of the night and all the forenoon of the next day, and when we came where they were, they were not there at all… We now had nothing more to do but to return as we came. We marched back to Bedford, near the encamping ground I had just left. We were conducted into our bedroom, a large wood, by our landlords, the officers, and left to our repose, while the officers stowed themselves away snugly in the houses of the village.

Without food, and with a cold rain falling on them all through the night, Martin related he and the other enlisted men were near mutiny against Putnam and his officers. By contrast, under Washington at Yorktown, when it started to rain at night, Martin and his comrades were ordered to take shelter in tents erected for them.41 “All his sense have but human conditions. His ceremonies laid by, in his nakedness he appears but a man” says Shakespeare’s Henry V of a king like himself, “and though his affections are higher mounted than ours [ordinary soldiers]… yet when they stoop, they stoop with the like wing.”42 “I have been the constant companion and witness of your Distresses,”

Washington told the Continental Army at their dismissal in 1783 at the end of the war, “and not among the last to feel, and acknowledge your Merits.” “We few. We happy few.
We band of Brothers,” says Henry of his army; “…one patriotic band of Brothers,” says Washington of his.43

If Washington is Martin’s Henry V, Benedict Arnold is surely his Iago. While Martin’s admiration of Washington is implied, his loathing of Arnold is overt: “Had I possessed the power of foreknowledge [of Arnold’s treachery], I might have twice put Arnold asleep without any one knowing it and saved the life of, perhaps, a better man, and my country much trouble and disgrace.” Martin’s debt to Shakespeare, likewise, is more overt in his encounter with the man thought to be America’s greatest traitor. In one incident Arnold puts Martin and his comrades out of a barn so the General could have it to himself. “I was upon a guard. ‘There are men,’ says Shakespear, ‘who, in their sleep mutter all their conceits.’ Such a one was Arnold, and therefore afraid to sleep near any one lest he should ‘babble his conceits’ in his sleep. He ordered me and my guard out of the barn, that he might have his bed upon the floor.”44 Martin’s reference is imperfect, but is from Othello, Act III, scene 3 and he is in fact quoting Shakespeare’s greatest traitor, Iago, who (falsely) implicates the virtuous Cassio in Othello’s jealousy by saying he confessed his love for Othello’s wife in his sleep:

There are a kind of men, so loose of soul,
That in their sleeps will mutter their affairs;
One of this kind is Cassio,
In sleep I heard him say, “Sweet Desdemona,
Let us be wary, let us hide our loves.”45

And earlier in the scene Iago makes the pronouncement that

Dangerous conceits are in their natures poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,
But with a little act upon the blood
Burn like the mines of sulphur.46
This passage may have been in Martin’s mind because of the association between burning
“sulphur” and Satan in describing his second encounter with Arnold. Here too other
things emerge from the narrative. Informed perhaps by hindsight, Martin appeared to
indulge in a bit of stealthy self-aggrandizing, showing how even before Arnold’s
treachery, Martin suspected something was afoot. In one case, he and the famous traitor
were almost face to face and “a virtuous strike,” were Martin party beforehand to
Arnold’s true nature, might have helped the American cause immeasurably, at least in
Martin’s estimation. Rarely did Martin overtly burnish his own heroic image, yet here his
passions perhaps got the better of his Yankee modesty. He even predated his dislike of
Arnold back to boyhood days:

[It was] but three or four days before his desertion; I met him upon the road a little
distance from Dobb’s ferry, he was then taking his observations and examining
the roads, I thought he was upon some devilry; we met at a notch of the roads and
I observed he stopped, and sitting upon his horse, seemed minutely to examine
each road. I could not help taking notice of him and thought it strange to see him
quite alone in such a lone place. He looked guilty, and well he might, for Satan
was in as full possession of him at that instant as ever he was of Judas; it only
wanted a musket ball to have driven him out. I had been acquainted with Arnold
from my childhood and never had too good an opinion of him.  

Martin, of course, was jumping on an overcrowded bandwagon. “Treason of the blackest
dye” Nathanael Greene wrote of Arnold’s actions. A song of 1780 put it this way:

Arnold! Thy name, as heretofore,
Shall now be Benedict no more;
Since, instigated by the devil,
Thy ways are turn’d from good to evil.

Arnold’s perfidy, far from forgotten, actually solidified and grew over time. Two decades
after Arnold’s treachery he seemed a counterweight to Washington’s heroic virtue: “his
name will now be transmitted to posterity with marks of infamy, and the pages of our
history will be tarnished by the record of crimes of the most atrocious character by a
native of our land” wrote James Thacher of Arnold. Mason Weems called Arnold “both
in principle and purse, hollow as an exhausted receiver, and very willing to be filled up
with English guineas… Oh! Shocking to humanity!” Jared Sparks, writing at the same
time as Martin, described Arnold as “Arrogant, fond of display, and extravagant in his
style of living.”

* * * *

Though Martin, for the most part, cultivated a plebeian persona through his
memoir, on at least one occasion he indulged in provincial snobbery, articulated with a
debt to Shakespeare. In his recollection of the campaign of 1780, Martin watched
Washington’s army pass in front of him as he awaited his unit’s baggage train to catch up
with him and there saw the baggage train of the soldiers of the “middle states”:

…it was truly amusing to see the number and habiliments of those attending it; of
all specimens of human beings, this group capped the whole; a carravan of wild
beasts could bear no comparison with it. There was “Tag, Rag, and Bobtail;”
“some in rags and some in jags,” but none “in velvet gowns.” Some with two
eyes, some with one, and some, I believe, with none at all. They “beggared all
description;” and their dialect, too, was as confused as their bodily appearance
was odd and disgusting; there was the Irish and Scotch brogue, murdered English,
that insipid Dutch and some lingo which would puzzle a philosopher to tell
whether they belonged to this world or some “undiscovered country.” I was glad
to see the tail end of the train…

Martin’s readers would have been familiar with the English nursery rhyme he referenced:

Hark hark the dogs do bark
The beggars are coming to town
Some in rags and some in jags
And one in a velvet gown.

Though the rhyme dates at least from the thirteenth century, Martin was possibly aware of
one of its more recent iterations. One use of this rhyme was to lampoon the coming to the
English throne of the Dutch prince, William of Orange (the one in a velvet gown) and his interloping Dutch entourage in 1688. Martin may also have recalled the use of “bobtail” in Shakespeare’s play on the line “Hark Hark the dogs do bark” in *King Lear*, Act III, scene 6, in which dogs are barking at the ragged and beggarly Lear recently dispossessed by his daughters and made mad by it. He is protected from the dogs by a similarly dispossessed Edgar, masquerading as Tom’o’Bedlam, another beggarly madman who says:

> Hound or spaniel, brach or lym,
> Or bobtail tike or trundle-tail,
> Tom will make him weep and wail,

More overt are Martin’s other references to Shakespeare: “It beggar’d all description,” from *Antony and Cleopatra* and “undiscovered country” from *Hamlet*.

Martin may also have drawn from the romantic poet Lord Byron, whose 1821 *A Literary Eclogue* contains this satiric description of a literary group of women or “Blues”-short for “Bluestockings”:

> But to hear a vile jargon which addles my brains;
> A smatter and chatter, glean’d out of reviews,
> By the rag, tag, and bobtail, of those they call “Blues;”-
> A rabble who know not…

There is another layer to Martin’s use of clever literary allusion. He implied a measure of his intellectual competence by peppering his memoir with evidence of erudition which he put in quotation marks while omitting attribution. To walk a fine line between ordinary laborer at the bottom rung of the social ladder and scholar of literary art associated with the upper echelon is a tricky business but he seems largely to succeed in doing it most of the time. One example of this rhetorical slight-of-hand appears near the
end of the narrative in making his case for the common American Continental soldier:

“The poor soldiers had hardships enough to endure… ‘The labourer is worthy of his meat’ at least… How many times have I had to lie down like a dumb animal in the field and hear ‘the pelting of the pitiless storm…’”

Martin might have assumed his readers would recognize the allusions and the context in which they appear, thereby bolstering his argument. “The labourer is worthy of his meat” refers to Matthew 10:10 of the New Testament where Christ directs his apostles to go forth in poverty to help and succor the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” “The pelting of the pitiless storm” is from Shakespeare’s King Lear, when Lear, pauperized by his ungrateful daughters is reduced to waiting out a rainstorm among beggars in a hovel, and finds new empathy for the dispossessed of the world:

    Poor naked wretches, wheresoe’er you are,
    That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
    How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
    Your loop’d and window’d raggedness, defend you
    From seasons such as these? O, I have taken
    Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp,
    Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
    That thou mayst shake the super flux to them,
    And show the heavens more just.

Just as Martin shied away from overt pedantry while hinting at his worthiness to dispute with what Lear would call a “good Athenian” he refused to sing his own praises as a hero, content to hint at any bravery or nobility behind much self-mockery. In this he seems to have found inspiration in English satire and some of its American imitators of his time.
One might argue that the greatest gift British literature bequeathed to Revolutionary America, especially of the New England variety, was sarcastic humor. English letters had turned the skewering of bloated heroics and their attendant hypocrisies into an art form, from at least the time of Shakespeare when in *Hamlet* actors are told not to overact and ministers not to over orate. Especially mocked is Polonius’s bombast; “less art and more matter,” Queen Gertrude admonishes him at one point. Americans appear to have learned how to burlesque the high and mighty by reading a plethora of authors from across “the pond.” There was Swift’s diminutive tyrant the Lilliputian Emperor in *Gulliver’s Travels*, Alexander Pope’s catalogue of self-important miscreants among London society in his *Dunciad*, and Byron’s more recent mockeries of high society, to name a few examples.

It was Samuel Butler, disgusted with the hypocrisies that he witnessed serving with Cromwell’s Roundheads in the English Civil War, who produced the most influential anti-epic poem, *Hudibras*, in the middle of the seventeenth century. Indeed, it has given us the term “hudibrastics” to describe a literary form that matches *Hudibras*: tetrameter or octo-syllabic lines in rhyming couplets, often showcasing wit in improbable or surprising rhymes and of humorous anti-epic style, used to satirize some political movement or event. Allusions are made to classical and medieval literature and to notable contemporary figures. The octo-syllabic rhyming couplet seems to have been borrowed from French medieval heroic epics and was popular with Chaucer and later Milton. It has
a marching grandeur that served to energize idylls as well as epics:

And pomp, and feast, and revelry
With mask and antique pageantry,
Such sights as youthful poets dream
On summer eves by haunted stream.60

Hudibrastic poetry takes this grandiose form and makes it part of the joke even as the mock epic hero is burlesqued, often by thinly depicting his shortcomings as if they were noble virtues, as Butler does here of his anti-hero Sir Hudibras:

We grant, although he had much wit,
H’ was very shy of using it;
As being loth to wear it out,
And therefore bore it not about…

or puncturing his high martial image with earthy juxtapositions:

His puissant sword unto his side,
Near his undaunted heart, was ty’d;
With basket-hilt, that wou’d hold broth…
And serve for fight and dinner both… 61

The object is to use ridicule to shape opinion, or so it was used by most of the Hudibrastic poets who came after Butler. Although Butler’s poem did much to denigrate the Puritans and their supporters during the English Civil War, it seems less prescriptive than many of its imitators. Butler knew what he disliked but apparently spent very little time looking for remedies, according to some critics.62

Butler owes a debt, which he acknowledges, to Don Quixote. Like the “Knight of De La Mancha,” Butler’s hero is a self-important but deluded fool of a nobleman with a tenuous grasp on reality. His squire, if not more intelligent, is at least sometimes more alert than his master. Sir Honduras’s “Sancho” is an ex-tailor named Ralph, or “Ralpho.” For a “more stately tone” the author reserves the right to call him “Ralph” or “Ralpho”
depending upon the needs of his rhyme and meter.\textsuperscript{63} This is no empty equivocation. The hudibrastic form of strict eight syllables and rhyming couplets is difficult to sustain without becoming monotonous. The remedy is to shy away from conventional rhymes and to keep the dramatic narrative either moving forward or the wit and humor biting and surprising enough to keep the reader interested. It is not always achievable and many imitators of Samuel Butler failed in this challenge.\textsuperscript{64} The difficulty of the form is precisely what effectively showcased its successful imitators, from Pope with his \textit{Dunciad} to many a Byronic diatribe.

Joseph Plumb Martin knew \textit{Hudibras} for he quoted it at one point, using the satiric work for another aspect of its caution: how those in purported authority and nobility can be cowardly as well as dense. Early in his memoir, Martin described his disgust with an officer before a battle who was “sniveling and blubbering” in fear: “A fine soldier you are, I thought, a fine officer, an exemplary man for young soldiers! I would have then suffered any thing short of death rather than have made such an exhibition of myself; but, as the poet says,

\begin{quote}
 ‘Fear does things so like a witch,
 ‘Tis hard to distinguish which is which.’\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

More importantly, Martin knew the work of Butler’s greatest American imitator, John Trumbull, whose \textit{M’Fingal} was written in 1775 and then added to in 1782. The poem made an eloquent case for revolution and in its day rivaled in popularity the writings of Jefferson and Paine. Trumbull’s blowhard of an antihero is a minor Scottish nobleman Squire M’Fingal, a self-styled prophet, who champions the Tory cause in a debate with a Whig named Honorius before he is unceremoniously beaten about the
backside with a shovel (“The fatal spade discharged a blow/ Tremendous on his rear below”- Canto III), tarred and feathered, and perched on a Liberty Pole after a mock-epic tussle in which the Whig forces soundly defeat the Tories. Later M’Fingal ruefullycatalogues Tory defeats and American victories including the following from Canto IV:

I look’d far in southern skies
Saw Greene, their second hope arise,
And with his small, but gallant, band
Invade the Carolinian land.

And at another point from the same Canto:

I saw our vet’ran thousands yield
And pile their muskets on the field.66

Martin prefaced his chapter on the campaign of 1781, the year he was involved in the battle of Yorktown, with his own hudibrastic verse that showed a debt to Trumbull:

I saw the plundering British bands,
Invade the fair Virginian lands…
I saw the haughty Britons yield,
And stack their muskets on the field.67

Martin referred to M’Fingal directly in his chapter on the campaign of 1778, specifically following the battle of Monmouth in New Jersey, when the British troops slipped away unnoticed in the night under the noses of the supposedly watchful Americans: “If my readers wish to know how they escaped so slyly without our knowledge, after such precautions being used to prevent it, I must tell them I know nothing about it. But if they will take the trouble to call upon John Trumbull, Esq. perhaps he will satisfy their curiosity. If he should chance to be out of the way, (and ten chances to one if he is not,) apply to McFingal, Canto 4th.”68
Trumbull accentuated the cowardice of the British in his mock epic by implying in the first three lines of the following stanza that they were staging a great night attack only to show at the fourth they were running away while the Americans slept:

Scarce visible, in dusky night
Advancing red-coats rose in sight;
The lengthening train in gleaming rows
Stole silent from their slumb’ring foes.

In shunning self-aggrandizement in his memoir, Martin may have been avoiding the vainglorious example of British general, (and playwright) John Burgoyne who figures prominently in Canto IV of Trumbull’s satiric poem, as M’Fingal ruefully describes him:

Behold that martial Macaroni
Compound of Phoebus and Bellona,
Equipped alike for feast or fray,
With warlike song and singsong lay,
Where equal wit and valour join!
This- this he, the famed Burgoyne!
Who pawn’d his honor and commission,
To coax the patriots to submission…
Then raise thy daring thoughts sublime,
And dip thy conq’ring pen in rhyme,
And change war for puns and jokes,
Write new Blockades and Maids of Oaks.69

Burgoyne’s burlesque called The Blockade of Boston (now largely lost) ridiculed the valor of rebel soldiers and made light of the plight of the British when Washington’s troops lay siege to the town in 1776. It was in turn lampooned by a popular satire attributed to Mercy Otis Warren, The Blockheads, which Trumbull (and possibly Martin) might have know about.70 “Macaroni” was a British taunt for the “Yankee Doodle Dandy” who was so poorly dressed next to the fine red-coated king’s soldiers that he had to be content with sticking a feather in his cap to call himself a “macaroni.” Trumbull makes deeper use of the term with regard to Burgoyne, who in his 1774 operetta The
Maid of the Oaks, has his more likable characters scoff at the foppish fool Dupeley and his shortcomings as a man of wit:

SIR HARRY
He is but half a maccaroni.

LADY BAB LARDOON
And very possibly the worst half.71

Burgoyne was a prominent butt of American satire during the war in many quarters. A good example is the much-quoted satiric reply to the British General’s proclamation of 1777 ordering the rebel armies to surrender, which is attributed to Francis Hopkinson.72 Burgoyne combined grandiosity with dramatic flourish much in keeping with his avocation as a playwright:

By John Burgoyne Esq’r; Lieut Gen’l of His Majesties Armies in America, Col. of the Queens Reg’t of Lt. Dragoons, Governor of Fort William in North Britain, one of the Representatives of the Commons of Great Britain in Parliament, and Commanding an Army and Fleet employed on an expedition from Canada &c &c &c. The forces entrusted to my command are designed to act in concert, and upon a common principle, with the numerous Armies and Fleets which already display in every quarter of America, the power, the justice, and when properly sought the mercy of the King… [if the American] …phrenzy of hostility shou’d remain, I trust I shall stand acquitted in the Eyes of God & Men in denouncing and executing the vengeance of the state against the wilful outcasts.

Hopkinson mocked Burgoyne’s self-importance with hyperbole:

Most high, most mighty, most puissant and sublime General!… words cannot express the plenitude of our horror when the Colonel of the Queen’s regiment of light dragoons advanced toward Ticonderoga. The mountains shook before thee, and the trees of the forest bowed their lofty heads- the vast lakes of the North were chilled at thy presence, and the mighty cataracts stopped their tremendous carreer and were suspended in awe at thy approach.73

Burgoyne was often a whipping boy in American lampoons. A satirical song appeared in 1777 entitled The Proclamation which used the Don Quixote metaphor, as well as
making a mockery of the foppish British speaking through Burgoyne:

I, the great knight of de la Mancha,  
Without ‘Squire Carlton, my Sancho,  
…In front of troops a spruce as beaux  
…I swear by George and by St. Paul  
I will exterminate you all.  
Subscrib’d with my manual sign  
To test these presents, John Burgoyne.

When the British capitulated at Yorktown a song soon appeared entitled “Cornwallis Burgoyned.”

At the time of Martin’s narrative, British vainglory was still a favorite butt of American satire. James Kirke Paulding’s *John Bull in America* (1825) carries on the hudibrastic tradition as British traveler “John Bull” assumes that his distorted views of America are true, regardless of contrary evidence, and narrates a journey of mishaps that he refuses to believe are caused by his own pig-headedness. At the start of his journey, for instance, he relates

> Being fully aware of the superiority of British ships and British sailors, I declined the advice of certain merchants at Liverpool, to embark in one of the line of American packets, and took passage on board the British brig Wellington, for Boston, as my business was principally in New-Orleans, and I wished to arrive at the nearest port. I did, being apprehensive of the yellow-fever, which rages there all the year round, with such virulence that the people all die off there regularly once in two years. Our passage was long and tedious, so much so that the Packet in which I was advised to sail from Liverpool, arrived at Boston four weeks before the Wellington. But this I am assured was owing more to good fortune than to any superiority either in the ship or sailors, over those of the mistress of the seas.

Some Americans developed a distaste for self-aggrandizement among their own. John Adams warned of the danger of interpreting the Revolution in superficial ways that stress “the gloriole of individual gentlemen.” As he complained to Benjamin Rush in 1790:

> The History of our Revolution will be one continued lye [sic] from one end to the other. The essence of the whole will be that Dr. Franklin’s electric rod smote the
earth and out sprang General Washington. Then Franklin electrified him... and thence forward those two conducted all the Policy, Negotiations, Legislations, and War.  

Martin also appreciated the power of “great men” on history. He wrote how the defense of Fort Mifflin on Mud Island in 1777, touted even by Thomas Paine, was overlooked in the histories because of the absence of “great” men: “as hard and fatiguing a job, for the time it lasted, as occurred during the revolutionary war... But there has been but little notice taken of it; the reason of which is, there was no Washington, Putnam or Wayne there. Had there been, the affair would have been extolled to the skies.” Though Martin had high regard for Washington and attempted to emulate him, he also appreciated some of the artificial elements inherent in puffing up even this leader’s image as he remarks in describing the start of the siege of Yorktown in 1781: “The troops of the line were there ready with entrenching tools and began to entrench, after General Washington had struck a few blows with a pickaxe, a mere ceremony, that it might be said ‘Gen. Washington with his own hands first broke the ground at the siege of Yorktown.’”  

Martin may be alluding to Weems’s melodramatic depiction of the young Washington saving his forces after Braddock’s debacle during the French and Indian War by investing Fort Necessity against an imminent attack by casting the first dirt with his own hands: “Soon as the lines of the entrenchments were marked off, and the men about to fall to work, Washington, seizing the hand of the first that was lifting his space, cried out “stop, my brave fellow! my hand must heave the first earth that is thrown up in defence of this country!”  

Nowhere in his narrative did Martin seem more didactic than on the point of touting the contribution of ordinary soldiers. He was even willing to take the Bible to task for ignoring the rank and file: “troops generally get but little notice taken of them, do
what they will. Great men get great praise, little men, nothing. But it always was so and always will be; said the officers in king David’s army, when going out against rebel Absolem, ‘thou shalt not go out with us- for if half of us die they will not care for us. But now thou art worth ten thousand of us.’ And this has been the burden of the song ever since, and I presume ever will be.” Even more overtly in his introduction Martin urged a reconsideration of history in favor of the ordinary fighting man: “what could officers do without such men? Nothing at all. Alexander never could have conquered the world without private soldiers.” 80

Martin was not alone in his time in burnishing the image of the ordinary soldier by invoking scripture. James Kirke Paulding in his story The Old Continental includes this dialogue:

"Alas!"; said Jane, "what can you raw country boys do against the red coats?"; "Whatever stout hearts and strong arms can do, Jane,"; rejoined the other. "Don't you remember that blessed little David, the peasant-boy after God's own heart? how, just as if to humble the pride of the proud invader, Providence armed him with a sling and a stone, to overcome Goliath? The destinies of empires, Jane, is always in the hands of a brave and virtuous people, let them be ever so poor. Our cause is that of the lowly against the exalted, and it is for poor men to maintain it."81

There were certainly hagiographies aplenty to bolster the images of major leaders, the most famous (or infamous) being Mason Weems’s often fictitious adulation The Life of Washington, which became one of the first best sellers in American history when it appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Indeed, as if to confirm Martin’s observations, Weems gave the impression that the victory at Yorktown was due to a clever ruse by Washington:

Washington continued the war against the British till ‘81; when Cornwallis pushed into York-Town. But the eye of Washington was upon him; and with an
address, which, the British historians say, was never equaled, he concerted a plan that ended in his total destruction. He artfully wrote letters to Greene, informing, that, “in order to relieve Virginia, he was determined immediately to attack New-York.” These letters were so disposed as to fall into the right hands. Clinton took the alarm. But while Clinton was in daily expectation of a visit from him, Washington and his army, now across the Delaware, were in full stretch to the south, darkening the day with their clouds of rolling dust. Cornwallis saw the day of his fall was at hand… On the last of September, Washington sat down before York, with 100 pieces of heavy artillery. On the 7th of October this dreadful train began to thunder; and the British works sunk before them.82

Hugh Henry Brackenridge made tragic figures in the classical vein of General Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold (not-as-yet a turncoat) in his 1776 drama of the failed siege of Quebec, The Death of Montgomery. Brackenridge lived to see later events bring irony to a heroic speech he gave Arnold in The Death of Montgomery:

I shun no combat, and I know no fear,
But count the honour a full recompense,
For ev’ry peril in this furious war,
If men in after times, shall say of me,
“Here Arnold lies, who with Montgomery fought,
Stemming the torrent of tyrannic sway.”

Brackenridge and Weems do acknowledge, if unconvincingly, the role of ordinary American citizens in the birth of the republic. Although no ordinary soldier appears in The Death of Montgomery, Brackenridge gives Montgomery this tribute to his men:

I... revere their worth
Who swiftly roused, at their country’s call,
And nobly resolute, have brav’d all pain…
O gallant souls! A sacrifice more rich,
If all should fall, was never offer’d up.83

Though Weems’s Washington is a paragon of virtue and talent idealized beyond realistic reach he exhorts his readers that “every youth may become a Washington.” Furthermore, Weems sows the seeds of the idea of the noble subordinate over the incompetent leader in his praise of Washington during the French and Indian war: “To a man of his uncommon
military mind, and skill in the arts of Indian warfare, the pride and precipitance of general Braddock must have been excessively disgusting and disheartening. But we hear nothing of his threatening either to leave or supplant Braddock. On the contrary, he nobly brooked his rude manners, gallantly obeyed his rash orders, and, as far as in him lay, endeavoured to correct their fatal tendencies.”84 The story of Washington as a more competent underling than his high born superior is echoed by James Fenimore Cooper two decades later in pointing up Braddock’s incompetence whose army was “only saved from annihilation by the coolness and spirit of a Virginian boy,” a deed without any credit from the “mother country.”85

The common man as hero was in the ascendant in the early republic. By Martin’s time, Jared Sparks gave the ordinary assailants at Yorktown their due as they “entered the redoubts with the bayonet, in a brave and spirited manner, under a heavy fire from the enemy.”86 In 1818 James Kirke Paulding began his epic poem *The Backwoodsman*:

> My humble theme is of a hardy swain,  
> The lowliest of the lowly rural train.87

The most popular theatrical work in America, even as late as the 1820s, was John O’Keefe’s operetta *The Poor Soldier* in which a commanding officer renounces the hand of the heroine when he realizes that his rival for her love is a common soldier in his company. This Pat, (or sometimes Darby), the “poor soldier,” is the title character of the play and the true love of the heroine. Pat, it is revealed, was the man who had saved the officer’s life in battle. His nobility transcends his rank, as the officer declares: “Let the embroider’d epaulet distinguish the officer: Let him take a lesson from this man. There is
more merit to be found, perhaps, under the worsted lace, than under gold or silver tassels."

In Royall Tyler’s popular play *The Contrast*, the honest, plain-spoken war veteran, Colonel Manly turns the English comedy of manners on its head by making the eloquent but duplicitous social wits, the heroes in Restoration works and after, seem shallow, corrupt and, well, unmanly. Much of the play’s popularity came from the simple rugged virtue and courage of Manly’s “waiter” Jonathan who springs to the Colonel’s aid against the foppish womanizing villain at the play’s climax, declaring inarticulately but endearingly: “I’d shew him Yankee boys play, pretty quick.- Don’t you see you have frightened the young woman into *hystrikes*?”

Tyler’s play, in turn, owes a debt to the Anglo-Irish playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan, especially *The School for Scandal*, which Tyler apparently saw produced in New York, for he referenced it in *The Contrast*. Simple Jonathan takes foppish and morally bankrupt New York society to task when he describes trying to get his money back from a theatre manager when he blunders into a performance of Sheridan’s play: “I paid my money to see sights, and the dogs a bit of a sight have I seen, unless you call listening to people’s private business a sight. Why, says he, it is the School for Scandalization.- The School for Scandalization!- Oh! Ho! No wonder you New-York folks are so cute at it, when you go to school to learn it.”

Martin may have read Sheridan’s play, which was published in America after 1790 and had several performances. It certainly meshed with his sensibility in its demonstration of hypocrisy dressed in an exterior of finery. Sheridan’s anti-hero was Joseph Surface whose outward show of moral rectitude and tasteful dress hid a selfish
and rapacious character, while his outwardly dissipated ne’er-do-well brother who enjoyed the earthly pleasures of drink and good companionship actually displayed the virtues of selflessness and charity.

Mercy Otis Warren, one of the most articulate of revolutionary playwrights, condemned the entire British governmental system for raising such types as Sheridan’s Joseph Surface. In Act I of her diatribe against colonial rule, *The Group*, Warren had her character Lord Chief Justice Hazelrod tell how he rose in rank after he “banished conscience” from his heart:

> I mounted high in justice’s sacred sea  
> With flowing robes and head equipped without,  
> A heart unfeeling and a stubborn soul…  
> I sold my country for a splendid bribe.  

A public figure certainly in part responsible for equating credibility, moral character and competence with modesty in American rhetoric was George Washington, who, in a much-quoted address, stated the following when appointed Commander-in-Chief of the American army in 1775: “Though I am truly sensible of the high honor done me in this appointment, yet I feel great distress from a consciousness that my abilities and military experience may not be equal to the extensive and important trust. But lest some unlucky event should happen, unfavorable to my reputation, I beg it may be remembered, by every gentleman in this room, that I, this day, declare with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the command I am honored with.” A letter to Martha at the same time confirmed his sincerity: “You may believe me my dear Patsy, when I assure you in the most solemn manner, that, so far from seeking this appointment, I have used every endeavor in my power to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and
the Family, but from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my capacity.”

John Adams, who, as we have seen, was not one to mince words about the shortcomings of his contemporaries, called Washington “modest and virtuous,… amiable, generous and brave.”

More importantly, for many Americans, Washington’s actions spoke louder than his words. He famously renounced power and returned to his farm and private life, thus providing a model for simple modest American virtue antithetical to ambition and its attendant self-aggrandizement. As one admirer described Washington’s “abdication”:

A letter was handed to Washington containing the demand of some for a monarchy, and himself the king. Less worthy men would have hailed the opening of such an era to himself, but it excited sensations in his breast, that he declared to be more painful than he had ever before experienced. Far different was his ambition- far otherwise the bent of his efforts… Quietly taking his glasses from his pocket he remarked with thrilling effect, “I have grown grey in your service, and now I am growing blind”… He resigned his commission, and turned his willing feet toward Mt. Vernon, and we venture to say no more pleasant emotion ever entered his breast than upon this occasion, when he crossed the threshold [sic] of his home, and met the warm welcome of his family.

The selflessness of the act captured the popular imagination, grew into legend, and was invoked in eulogies at the time of Washington’s death: “Former heroes were stimulated to deeds of civil enterprise or exploits of martial achievement by ambitious designs of personal aggrandizement or the lawless lust of power. But he accepted command with reluctance; exercised it with moderation; voluntarily resigned it… How matchless this conduct! How unrivaled does Washington appear!”

Civic selflessness was part of the popular culture. In a 1789 addition to John O’Keefe’s popular operetta The Poor Soldier entitled Darby’s Return by William Dunlap, the Irish farmer Darby, having seen the world as a soldier, describes his experiences in
America to the members of his Irish village:

Then too I saw another show;
A man who’d fought to free the land from woe,
Like me had left his farm a soldiering to go;
But having gain’d his point, he had, like me,
Return’d his own potatoe ground to seed…
…he’s not a great man, sure,
For poor men love him, just as he was poor!97

Nearer to the date Martin wrote his memoirs was the appearance of Natty Bumppo, nicknamed “Hawkeye,” ordinary white woodsman hero, schooled in the lore of the wood and in Indian ways, and far wiser and more capable than the high-born and high ranking officers above him. Appearing first in James Fenimore Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans in 1826 and then in subsequent novels, he was immensely popular in the 1820s. Martin was possibly reading Cooper’s novels, and indeed, it might have been Hawkeye’s (and Cooper’s) disapproval of more boastful memoirs, that drove Martin to write what he hoped was an honest and unembellished account of the war. As Hawkeye observes in chapter two of The Last of the Mohicans: “I am willing to own that my people have many ways, of which, as an honest man, I can’t approve. It is one of their customs to write in books what they have done and seen, instead of telling them in their villages, where the lie can be given to the face of a cowardly boaster, and the brave soldier can call on his comrades to witness for the truth of his words. In consequence of this bad fashion, a man… May never hear of the [true] deeds of his fathers…”98 Martin implied in his preface that others would read his account with sympathy and acceptance if he exercised studied modesty and self-deprecation and shied away from embellishing the truth:

I shall… inform the reader that my intention is to give a succinct account of some of my adventures, dangers and sufferings during my several campaigns in the revolutionary army. My readers… must not expect any great transactions to be
exhibited to their notice. “No alpine wonders thunder through my tale,” but they are here, once for all, requested to bear it in mind, that they are not the achievements of an officer of high grade which they are perusing, but the common transactions of one of the lowest in station in any army, a private soldier.

More telling, however, is Martin’s studied refusal to embellish the details in order to make a hero’s narrative: “I wish to have a better opinion of my readers, whoever they may be, than even to think that any of them would wish me to stretch the truth to furnish them with wonders that I never saw, or acts and deeds I never performed.”

Martin was as good as his word: his memoir chronicled follies more than noble deeds. Hudibrastically, he combined tales of the “puissant sword” with those of a “basket hilt to hold broth.” He stole food or wine when opportunities presented themselves. Heroic battle scenes were punctured by forays into houses for a commandeered dram of rum. Expeditions after deserters ended in feasts at civilian dwelling, all thoughts of the original missions forgotten. Danger came from indigestion or youthful indiscretion as often as from British or Hessian force of arms. Nor did Martin offer a Weemsian example to the young of America. He shirked duty and disobeyed orders when it suited him, justified misdeeds and deceptions practiced on the self-important, the fatuous, and the greedy. He bore witness to soldier mutinies, as well as battles, defeats, debacles, and victories. Most importantly, he found fault with himself as well as with others he felt acted with selfishness, cowardice or foolishness. Martin’s entrance into the army happened soon after he escaped the wrath of his “grandsire” for shirking work he had been responsible for: “the blame was quickly laid to my account, and justly too, for I was the only culprit.” Although Martin was as honest as Parson Weems’s Washington was “with his little hatchet,” Martin’s grandsire hardly embraced him for his honesty but
“came at me, hammer and tongs, with his six feet cartwhip. Ah, thought I to myself, good legs, do your duty now, if ever; I houghed the gravel, or rather the marsh, in good earnest.”

The eighteenth-century English convention of beginning a narrative with a short, self-serving family history, common in autobiographies and first-person novels, was skewered by Martin. A standard example of the convention might be found in the opening of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* from 1719: “I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull. He got a good estate by merchandise, and leaving off his trade, lived afterwards at York, from whence he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson, a very good family in that country.”

Americans also celebrated their families in the opening lines of their memoirs. Benjamin Franklin in his 1757 autobiography, addressed to his son, is even more exhaustive in explaining the family history, reaching back generations:

Thomas was bred a smith under his father; but, being ingenious, and encouraged in learning (as all my brothers were) by an Esquire Palmer, then the principal gentleman in that parish, he qualified himself for the business of scrivener; became a considerable man in the county; was a chief mover of all public-spirited undertakings for the county or town of Northampton, and his own village, of which many instances were related of him; and much taken notice of and patronized by the then Lord Halifax.

Martin, in contrast, lampooned the convention in the opening paragraph of his first chapter:

The heroes of all Histories, Narratives, Adventures, Novels and Romances, have, or are supposed to have ancestors, or some root from which they sprang. I conclude, then, that it is not altogether inconsistent to suppose that I had parents too. I shall not undertake to trace my pedigree (like the Welsh) some thousand years beyond the creation; but just to observe that my father was the son of a
“substantial New-England farmer,” (as we Yankees say,) in the then Colony but now state of Connecticut, and county of Windham. When my father arrived at puberty he found his constitution too feeble to endure manual labour, he therefore directed his views to gaining a livelihood by some other means.¹⁰³

Martin not only skewered self-important tracings of family lineages in other works, “some thousand years beyond creation,” but even made a dig at his own father as a boy, “too feeble” to do farm work. He qualified “substantial New-England farmer” with quotation marks and the parenthetical “as we Yankees say,” giving the phrase the flavor of a meaningless cliché rather than a boast. This sensibility has a healthy survival into the present day. One can follow its progress in Melville’s rootless Moby Dick narrator “Ishmael” or Thoreau’s gloriously simple-living self in Walden, through Mark Twain’s naïvely innocent Huck Finn to the humor-filled mishaps of the imperfect and poor childhood selves described in the twentieth-century memoirs of Russell Baker or Frank McCourt. This sensibility was solidly grafted onto the American imagination in the political world at the time of Martin’s narrative. Whatever the reality, Jackson and other politicians owed their popularity to their simple origins or populist sympathies. Lincoln’s “Man of the People” image helped his political rise, burnished by a self-deprecating wit that is still appreciated and emulated by politicians today regardless of affiliation.¹⁰⁴

Martin also punctured the heroic by turning didactic allusion on its head. He noted that he carried a pocket Bible and he appeared to have some sport with certain biblical or Bible-inspired sayings and passages, especially in the decidedly unheroic pursuit of food and drink. In describing one 1777 battle he seemed to allude to I Kings 17:1 when God shelters Elijah and reassures him of his survival, saying “thou shalt drink of the brook” to quench his thirst, although he was hungry. Martin noted: “‘I could drink of the brook,’ but
I could not ‘bite at the bank.’” He may have alluded to seventeenth-century Anglican theologian Jeremy Taylor’s *Holy Living* where in his chapter on fasting he writes “[I] refuse a… delicious draught with a tacit remembrance of sin.” Martin related the story of how a soldier treated his fellows to a “delicious draught” of stolen wine. On the march to join a regiment on the eve of battle, Martin stopped to drink buttermilk from the churn of an indulging housewife, with a relish borne of hunger, quoting (without citing) Proverbs 27:7- “A full belly loatheth a honeycomb: but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet.” He invoked 1 Corinthians to help him ingest a substandard camp meal: “I asked no questions, for conscience’s sake,” but fell to and helped myself to a feast of this raw beef, without bread or salt.” Nor was Martin the only person in his narrative to turn scripture on its head where food was concerned. In 1779 soldiers were on the brink of mutiny for want of provisions. A rebellious sergeant at the head of his men “on parade” to protest the dearth of food answered his major with a reference to *Ecclesiastes*:

“Well, sergeant, you have got a larger regiment than we had this evening at roll-call, but I should think it would be more agreeable for the men to be asleep in their huts this cold night, than to be standing here on the parade, for I remember that they were very impatient at roll-call on account of the cold.” “Yes, sir,” said the sergeant, “Solomon says that ‘the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep;’ and we find that the abundance of poverty will not suffer us to sleep.”

Martin used heroic allusions from myths and legends, but mostly for comic effect. He made use of epic battle poetry, possibly from a *Robin Hood* ballad, to cap a description of the behavior of drunken army officers:

…some of our gentlemen officers happening to stop at a tavern… took such a seasoning, that two or three of them became “quite frisky,” as the old Indian said of his young squaw. They kept running and chasing each other backward and forward by the troops, as they walked along the road, acting ridiculously. They soon, however, broke up the sport, for two of them at last, got by the ears, to no small diversion of the soldiers (for nothing could please them better than to see
the officers quarrel amongst themselves.) One of the officers used his sword in the scabbard, the other a cane, and as the song says:

“At every stroke their jackets did smoke
As though they had been all on fire.”

An old woman reluctantly let Martin spend the night to escape the winter cold after much cajoling on his part. Referencing Homeric lore, he noted: “She needn’t have feared me, and had she been a virgin, and as beautiful as Hellen [sic], I should have had no inclination to soil her chastity that night.” Also drawing from Greek epics, he couched a reference to Achilles’ mindless lackeys with humorous understatement: “The Arm of British power in America being dislocated by the capture of lord Cornwallis and his myrmidons, we had not much to disturb us on account of the enemy.”

Martin mingled allusions, usually for self-deprecation, as in this description of dodging his own patrol in the dark after carelessly staying in the woods away from camp to wash his clothes in a nearby brook: “I knew if I was brought before our hotspur of a Colonel I would ‘buy the rabbit’ … I now sprang to it for dear life, and I was in those days tolerable ‘light of foot.’” He also made a sly use of satirists like Jonathan Swift against himself. In the course of looking for Tory marauders in a dairy barn, “we found no enemies in this place, but we found a friend indeed, because a friend in need. Here was plenty of good bread, milk, and butter; we were as hungry as Indians, and immediately ‘fell to and spared not.’”

With a nod to both Hudibras and Roman mythology, at the end of his narrative Martin evoked “Bellona,” observing “…we [the army] should have saved ourselves a world of trouble in having our constitutions broken down, and our joints dislocated by trotting after Belona’s car.”
Popular in Martin’s day (and still well-known today) was Washington Irving, whose lively and humorous fiction often rewarded lowly and good-humored underlings and punished haughty, self-important “tyrants.” His Rip Van Winkle, a “simple, good-natured” ne’er-do-well with a heart of gold, is conjured to sleep for years by the magical forces up in the Catskill Mountains, coming back to find he has outlived his “termagant wife” who had “hen-pecked” him, even as the country had thrown off George III, to live out an old age free of the “despotism under which he had long groaned- that of petticoat government. Happily that was at an end; he had got his neck out of the yoke of matrimony.” Irving’s self-important and greedy schoolmaster and “pedagogue” given to whipping his pupils, Ichabod Crane, is scared away from his post by a prankster and rival in the guise of a “headless horseman”, the supposed ghost of a Hessian soldier from the late Revolution.

Known more intimately in Martin’s time than our own was Washington Irving’s celebration of strength-through-humor. As Irving wrote in his 1824 “A Practical Philosopher,” “I have always had a great relish for the conversation of practical philosophers… who have profited by the ‘sweet uses’ of adversity without imbibing its bitterness; who have learnt to estimate the world rightly, yet good-humouredly; and who, why they perceive the truth of the saying, that ‘all is vanity,’ are yet able to do so without vexation of spirit.” 112 Martin’s narrative was peppered with a good-humored resolve not to be bitter. Even at the end he couldn’t resist a joke against himself: “Whoever has the patience to follow me to the end of this rhapsody, I will confess that I think he must have almost as great a share of perseverance in reading it as I had to go through the hardships and dangers it records.”
A critical clue to the real inspiration for Martin’s humble, good natured literary persona appeared on page one of his memoir, in his preface when he warned: “My reader (who, by the by, I will, I hope, none of them be beyond the pale of my own neighbourhood,) must not expect any great transactions to be exhibited to their notice, ‘no alpine wonders thunder through my tale.’”

This last is a quote from *The Farmer’s Boy*, an 1800 book by Robert Bloomfield, a laborer turned poet, in which the simple rural life of a sheep herder named Giles is tracked through the four seasons. Considered an early romantic work celebrating nature and man’s humble place within it, rather than above it as Enlightenment authors might regard the equation, it looks forward to Cooper’s heroic woodsman Hawkeye, as well as to nature-inspired philosophers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Indeed Thoreau’s *Walden* seems to supremely follow the example of this earlier poet of the simple rural life. On the first page of *The Farmer’s Boy* Bloomfield wrote:

No deeds of arms my humble lines rehearse
No *Alpine* wonders thunder through my verse.  

Like Bloomfield, Martin made pains at the outset to shun the heroic bombast of Weems, Brackenridge and others. He was proud to be simple, humble, low-born with an articulate wisdom that, in the scheme of things, might be greater than the wisdom embodied by self-important men. Martin gave Robert Bloomfield an uncharacteristic attribution, (yet, more characteristically, the quote is about food): “I found and ate a considerable quantity of chestnuts, which are, as Bloomfield says of his acorns, ‘Hot thirsty food.’” In keeping with Martin’s self-deprecating humor, the passage from Bloomfield he quoted referred to acorns not as food for men but for pigs:
No more the fields with scatter’d grain supply
The restless wand’ring tenants of the sty;
From oak to oak they run with eager haste,
And wrangling share the first delicious taste
Of fallen Acorns; yet but thinly found
Till strong gale have shook them to the ground…
And o’er their heads, loud lash’d by furious squalls
Bright from their cups the rattling treasure falls;
Hot thirsty food…

Certainly Martin felt he had more in common with Giles than with Washington, Putnam, Wayne and others. Born and died in poverty, Bloomfield seems to have been something of a working-class hero as well as one of the first authors of what could be considered romantic literature. Bloomfield’s poems in *The Farmer’s Boy* were imbued with emotion and love of nature, given to rhapsodizing even over the simplest things like an acorn torn from a tree, but also at peace and even affectionate toward his low subservient station, like his orphan farm boy alter-ego:

‘Twas thus with Giles; meek, fatherless, and poor;
Labour his portion, but he felt no more;
No stripes, no tyranny his steps pursu’d;
His life was constant, cheerful servitude,
The Fields his study, Nature was his book;
And, as revolving Seasons chang’d the scene
From heat to cold, tempestuous to serene,
Though every change still varied his employ,
Yet each new duty brought its share of joy.116

While it might not be said that Martin found joy in his duty, here at least is a character more heroic than the vainglorious officers Martin disparaged, as shall be discussed in the next chapter. Certainly Martin’s strategy is to distance himself from “Martial Macaronis” as much as possible. As an author, however, he wore his own untutored humility with paradoxical pride:

And now, dear reader, if any such should be found, I will come to a close and
trespass on your time no longer, time that may, doubtless, be spent to more advantage than reading the “Adventures and Sufferings” of a private soldier. But if you have been really desirous to hear a part, and a part only, of the hardships of some of that army that achieved our Independence, I can say I am sorry you have not had an abler pen than mine to give you the requisite information.  

“MY SHAFTS OF RHETORIC”

Given Martin’s love of playful literary allusion and his use of art to lighten and enrich a tale, it is instructive to examine the part of the memoir where these rhetorical forms are largely absent in his descriptions: of conflicts with American loyalists or “cowboys” and “refugees” as he terms them. One can only speculate the reasons, but as indicated elsewhere, Martin may have been conscious of a new civil war between Americans looming in the fractious political world of 1830. When a “smart looking negro man” attempted to argue with Martin about his disloyalty to Britain, Martin wrote “I had no inclination to waste the shafts of my rhetoric upon a negro slave.” Indeed, nothing brought out Martin’s vitriol more than in describing Tory fighters. These “villains,” with implied cowardice, fired on American sentries “when they thought they could do it with impunity.” “Shooting gentry,” he called them sarcastically. They were “notorious rascals” or “murderous villains.” Animal imagery, real and imagined, now takes the place of Shakespearean flourish: “…they [the Tories] lay in a loft over the hogsty. We soon found their nest but the birds had flown… however we found their skulking place and took them both… the vermin.” Martin referred to a part of the country as “infested by Tories.” In one of the most detailed and vivid parts of the memoir, he pointed up the inhumanity and blood lust of the Tory “refugees” as they first dispatched with psychotic ferocity a sentry posted outside a patriot house and then exacted further vengeance inside it:
...the enemy coming up thrust a bayonet through him, they inflicted twelve more wounds upon him with bayonets, and rushed on for the house, to massacre the remainder of the guard, but they had taken the alarm and left the house. The Refugees (for such they were) entered the house, one of which secreted herself in a closet and remained throughout the whole transaction undiscovered; the other they caught and compelled to light a candle, and attend them about the house in search of the Rebels, but without finding any, or offering any other abuse to the young lady, (which was indeed a wonder.) When they could find none to wreak their vengeance upon, they cut open the knapsacks of the guard, and strewed the Indian meal about the floor, laughing at the poverty of the Yankee soldiery, who had nothing but hog’s fodder, as they termed it, to eat; after they had done all the mischief they could in the house, they proceeded to the barn and drove off five or six head of Mr. Holstead’s young cattle, took them down upon the point and killed them, and went off in their boats, that had come across from the island for that purpose, to their den among the British.

Martin described the death of a friend or comrade here and there, but only once in the entire narrative did he actually name one: the sentry mentioned above was stabbed twelve times by the Refugees: “...poor Twist,... Unfortunate young man! I could not restrain my tears, when I saw him next day, with his breast like a sieve, caused by his wounds... massacred by his own countrymen, who ought to have been fighting in the common cause of the country, instead of murdering him.” This occasion was the only time Martin spoke of shedding a tear: “I have been more particular in relating this circumstance, that the reader might be informed what people there were in the times of the revolution.” From here he related a story of a resident caught and hanged “by these miscreants” for being a captain of militia.119

Martin implied that Americans siding with the British were social deviants, terrorists, not of the mainstream in the country and, if not small in number, certainly a minority. Most importantly, Martin’s playfulness is completely absent. One is left to wonder whether he truly believed the Tory movement was a small illegitimate aspect of the war or whether he felt the need to emphasize the importance of American unity some
three decades before Americans would once again take up arms against each other.

Martin was not alone in his disdain of loyalists. Jared Sparks wrote: “Such was the condition of the Tories. They were either criminal as enemies, tolerated as neutrals, or obliged to act as friends. At the beginning of the contest, the first class was much the most numerous, and there can be no controversy as to the kind of treatment demanded in their case.”

“TRY MEN’S SOULS”

In December 1776 Thomas Paine, in *The Crisis*, penned an eloquent plea to Americans to support the troops:

> These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: it is dearness only that gives every thing its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be highly rated.

Martin at the end of his memoir acknowledges Paine in his praise of Monroe’s Pension Act: “President Monroe was the first of all our Presidents, except President Washington, who ever uttered a syllable in the ‘old soldier’s’ favour. President Washington urged the country to do something for them and not to forget their hard services, but President Monroe told them how to act; he had been a soldier himself in the darkest period of the war, that point of it that emphatically ‘tried men’s souls;’ was wounded, and knew what soldiers suffered.” In his own life he had seen himself cheated of farmland in Maine by one of the luminaries of the Revolution and an important leader of the early republic,
General Henry Knox, and implied he was also snookered out of land he might have once held in Ohio. He applied for a veteran’s pension as a laborer too ill to work, with an ailing wife and a son who evidently had a mental disorder. Yet in his memoir he devoted few words to his own complaints, and this absence is perhaps the true meaning of his meanderings from one resolutely antiheroic event to the next: competence all too often is corrupted by self-interest at the expense of others. The remedy was to minimize pride, accentuate faults, refuse to bear grudges, find that which is upright in quiet sacrifice.

Thus George Washington was the paradigm of quiet competence accentuated by empathy and at least implied modesty. Benedict Arnold was the anti-Washington, Israel Putnam a Falstaffian in-between. John Burgoyne and his “macaroni” army were ostentatious *Hudibrastic* vainglory at its worst. For all his book learning and ability to quote scripture, classical and Anglo-American literature with ease, Martin affected the simple good, if rough persona, of a “Jonathan,” a “Giles,” perhaps a “Natty Bumppo” or “Rip Van Winkle,” a person who could laugh at himself, embrace a simple life, look after others more than himself, and hate tyranny and hypocrisy. He looks forward to the diamond in the rough heroes of Herman Melville and Mark Twain and away from the innately well-bred rising above straitened circumstances of characters such as Henry Fielding’s Tom Jones, Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver, or Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe. He looks forward to the humble inclusion-leaning spirit of Walt Whitman, and away from the arch superiority of an Alexander Pope. He anticipates Abe Lincoln.

By 1830 American competence was increasingly measured in the doing. If Joseph Plumb Martin had an object to his memoir, it was to show that the “summer soldier” had no good place in the very worthy task of ensuring the American experiment survived and
prospered. His “eye-witness” account of the Revolution had biases more linked to the age of Jackson. He criminalized and marginalized Tories and denigrated African Americans and Indians. But mostly he celebrated the quiet, humble heroism of the lowly soldier and citizen over the privileged upper class leaders of the war. His was a liberty won by the will of the masses over that of any one great man.

Martin’s own simple and unremarkable verse prefaced each chapter and spoke with the intention of a man of the people, embarrassed by grandiose airs and given to puncturing them with a bit of homespun. He began his entire memoir at first seeming to paraphrase Marc Antony’s “lend me your ears” plea, but instead of great declamatory speeches of heroic import, he introduced a more mundane, informal phrase:

Have patience just to hear me out
And I’ll tell you what I’ve been about.  

Thus does the little man in a house in the woods supplant the decorated general on a rearing charger at the center of the American imagination.

Just as the rhetoric of American nationalism evolved from 1776 to 1830, so did the view of Americans toward leadership, as will be discussed in the next chapter.


5 “The inexcusable rashness of General Gage, in sending troops into the country on an errand of plunder and bloodshed, had roused the indignation of the inhabitants; and the yeomanry of New England were flying to their arms and rallying around the standard of American Liberty,’’ Jared Sparks, Life of Washington (Boston: American Stationer’s Co., 1837), 136.


7 First depicted in Royall Tyler’s 1787 play The Contrast, Brother Jonathan became a centerpiece of American popular culture through American incarnations of John O’Keeffe’s Irish operetta The Poor Soldier. James Kirke Paulding’s War of 1812 satire, The Diverting History of John Bull and Brother Jonathan, showed how the character of Jonathan had insinuated himself in the American imagination as the republic’s symbol before Uncle Sam overshadowed the ornery Revolutionary foot soldier.

8 James Fenimore Cooper developed into an imperfect populist, as Patrick Chura has pointed out. His 1840s The Chainbearer is an apologist for privilege in terms of property and wealth, Patrick Chura, Thoreau the Surveyor (Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 2010), 9. Cooper’s entire “Anti-Rent” trilogy of the 1840s, which was especially aimed at the encroachment of New England squatters onto holdings of the New York elite, and his legal battles against those who tried to co-opt his family lands for public use, as well as his sneers against the “genteel vulgar,” painted him as no friend to the ordinary workingman and farmer, Gordon Wood, Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 711. Nevertheless, it was the noble backwoodsman, Natty Bumppo, of earlier decades, who became Cooper’s most famous and enduring character. Last of the Mohicans was by far his most popular work, followed by the other novels in the “Leatherstocking Saga” of the late 1820s, all of which featured Bumppo. In the 1830s Cooper professed great admiration for Jefferson and Lafayette and interested himself in revolutionary movements in Belgium, Italy, and particularly Poland, whose struggle with Russia he supported actively. See Blake Nevius’ end notes to James Fenimore Cooper, The Leatherstocking Tales (New York: Library of America, 1985), 1: 1323-1324.


10 “Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbst verschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der Entschließung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Mut dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.” “Enlightenment” is one’s departure from self-imposed (intellectual, philosophical and spiritual) immaturity.

80
This immaturity can be defined as the inability to use one’s own intellect without the direction of another. It is self-imposed if its cause is not the lack of intelligence or education, but lack of determination and courage to think without the direction of another. ‘Sapere aude! Have the courage to use your own intellect!’ is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment.” Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” Berlin Monthly (1784), Trans. N. Megowan, (2004): http://www.wordiq.com/definition/What_Is_Enlightenment%3F (accessed 3/3/11).

11 The often revived Restoration comedies of William Wycherley, George Etheridge, and William Congreve pitted wits against fops with no moral difference between the two. Nicholas Rowe’s popular dramas depicted the high-born put in straightened circumstances to illustrate how innate nobility could be, the prince in disguise theatrical device survived well into the nineteenth century, lampooned by Oscar Wilde and W.S. Gilbert, among others.

12 Perhaps Martin was forthcoming about such things because he was in good company, even with veterans from other wars. Chester Harding in his remembrance as a soldier in the War of 1812 commented “We committed many depredations on our way, such as stealing chickens, or on rare occasions, a pig.” Joyce Appleby, ed. Recollections of the Early Republic (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1997), 134.


14 James Kirke Paulding, Jonathan's Visit to the Celestial Empire (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834), microfiche, 32.


16 There is evidence that plays were read and performed privately, often in student theatricals in colleges like Harvard and Yale; the latter was near where Martin grew up and his father graduated from there. Martin, Narrative, 5; Jason Shaffer, Performing Patriotism: National Identity in the Colonial and Revolutionary American Theater (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press:, 2007), 138-140; Max Savelle, Seeds of Liberty: The Genesis of the American Mind (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1948), 38; Jeffrey H. Richards, Mercy Otis Warren (New York: Twayne Publishing: 1995), 85.

17 Gordon Wood, Empire of Liberty, 562.

18 de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, 438.

19 Martin, Narrative, 12, 31.

20 Martin, Narrative, 200-201.


22 The 1777 Flag Act may have been geared more toward identifying America’s navy than as a banner for Washington’s land forces. A Dutch watercolor dating from 1779 shows the U.S.S. Alliance flying two thirteen-star flags as part of John Paul Jones’ squadron; Bruce Catton, ed., American Heritage Book of The Revolution (New York: American Heritage, 1958), 289. Martin also makes liberal use of the term “Uncle Sam,” the personification of the American government, and usually a poor provider of the army: “Uncle Sam was always careful to supply us with these articles [guns and ammunition], even if he could not give us anything to eat, drink or wear;” “But while I stay’d at Uncle Sam’s I’d nought to eat but ‘faith and claims [probably a self-consciously humorous bastardization or colloquial mispronunciation of the word “claims”].’” Martin, Narrative, 55, 15. Many, including the U.S. Congress, who made it official in an Act of
1961, believe Uncle Sam was originally an “Uncle” Samuel Wilson who supplied American troops during the War of 1812, his meat packed in barrels with “U.S.” labeled on them. In this regard, though anachronistic, Martin at least seems to acknowledge the connection to Uncle Sam concerns foodstuffs, or the lack thereof.


25 An 1837 letter by a farm woman includes the lines “You may depend she does not eat much idle bread”; quoted in Joan M. Jensen, “Mid-Atlantic Farm Women and Their Historians,” *Agricultural History*, 61, (1987): 29. The saying is from Prophets 31:27, “She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.”


32 Frank Moore, ed. *Songs and Ballads of the American Revolution* (1856), rpt (New York: Arno Press, 1969), 136. Falstaff does not appear in *Henry V* but was Henry’s disreputable influence when the king was the young Prince Hal in Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, parts 1 and 2. He also makes an appearance in the earlier *Henry VI* as a cowardly knight. This pompous, drunkard, battle-shy “fat knight” was reputedly Queen Elizabeth’s favorite Shakespearean character. G. Evans Blakemore, ed., Anne Barton, “The Merry Wives of Windsor,” *The Riverside Shakespeare* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 286. Pistol, a Falstaff crony, is the dishonest rogue and coward looting more than fighting in Henry’s army in *Henry V*. The disguised King Henry mockingly observes to Pistol when they meet that his name “sorts well with your fierceness” Act IV, sc. 1 line 63.

33 Nathanael Greene, *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, eds. Richard K. Showman, Margaret Cobb, et. al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 11: 91. To be fair, Greene misquotes in more ways than one. It is Westmoreland, not King Henry who in Act IV, scene iii of the play says “O, that we now had here But one ten thousand of those men in England That do no work to-day.” Henry, in fact, contradicts Westmoreland with his famous “St. Crispin” speech, which may be where Martin’s “Stand-a-tip-toe” (line 41) allusion is from.

34 Russell, *Theatres of War*, 67. Nearer to our own time, Laurence Olivier’s 1944 movie version of the play was inspired by Britain’s struggles in World War II. The movie was partly funded by the British government, evidently as propaganda, Laurence Olivier, *On Acting* (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1986), 268-269.


38 Thacher indicated he was not present at the battle: “Intelligence has reached us that the royal army under the command of General Sir Henry Clinton, has evacuated Philadelphia, and while marching through Jersey to New York, General Washington attacked them near Monmouth court-house, on the 28th of June, and a warm engagement ensued,” Thacher, *Journal*, 138-139.


40 Martin, *Narrative*, 176.


44 Martin, *Narrative*, 176.

45 William Shakespeare, *Othello*, Act III, sc. 3, lines 416-420. Americans picked up on the idea common in Shakespeare’s plays: that villains suffered from a troubled sleep. Abraham Lincoln for one, after reading from *Macbeth* (he was fond of reading Shakespeare’s plays aloud) remarked upon Macbeth’s lines “Duncan is in his grave; After life’s fitful fever he sleeps well” that “the dark deed achieved, its tortured perpetrator came to envy the sleep of his victim.” Quoted in Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 723.


49 Frank Moore, ed., *Songs and Ballads*, 333.


52 Sparks, *Life of Washington*, 339.


56 Enobarbus, Antony’s lieutenant, uses the phrase in describing Cleopatra’s appearance when she met Antony; Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Act II, sc. 2 line 198. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, from the famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy- “death, the undiscovered country,” Act III, sc. 1, lines 77-78.


65 Martin, *Narrative*, 23. Martin paraphrases slightly, perhaps indicating he is quoting from memory. The line is from Butler’s *Hudibras*, Canto III: “Fear does things so like a witch/’Tis hard t’unriddle which is which.”

66 John Trumbull, *M’Fingal*, Part 2, 1782, Canto IV.


69 Trumbull, *M’Fingal*, Canto IV.

70 *The Blockheads* has been popularly attributed to Mercy Otis Warren. Jeffrey H. Richards makes the case that it may be derivative of her work in *The Adulators* but not her own. The vulgarity, juvenile humor and colloquial prose are not consistent with Warren’s blank verse and more sophisticated turns of phrase. See


72 Hopkinson, based upon his writings, is believed to have written it, but the authorship of the piece, submitted by “A New Jerseyan” is still debated. See Alan Axelrod, *The Real History of the American Revolution* (New York: Sterling, 2007), 197.

73 Francis Hopkinson, “To John Burgoyne” 10 July 1777 in Paul M. Zall, ed. *Comical Spirit of Seventy-six: The Humor of Francis Hopkinson*, (San Marino: Huntington Library, 1976), 93. This satire had more subsequent bite than the author could have realized at the time. Burgoyne’s army’s movements were slowed by natural barriers to his progress when he insisted on building a road for his troops through the wilderness of New York. In the intervening time, American forces were able to reinforce and re-supply which may have contributed to Burgoyne’s encirclement and surrender in the fall of 1777 at Saratoga. Axelrod, *Real History of American Revolution*, 202.


78 Martin, *Narrative*, 82-83,199.


80 Martin, 83, 1. Martin is referring to II Samuel 2-4: “and the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also. But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city. And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.”


82 Weems, *Life of Washington*, ix, 91. Weems’ work survives today largely through the constant lampooning of his apocryphal cherry tree story.


88 John O’Keefe, *The Poor Soldier*, 1784, microfiche, Act II.

89 Royall Tyler, *The Contrast*, 1787, Act V, sc. 2; I am indebted to the analysis of Jeffrey H. Richards in his

90 Tyler, The Contrast, Act III, sc. 1.


94 John Adams to Abigail Adams JUNE 17, 1775. “Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 1 AUGUST 1774 - AUGUST 1775”, 498, http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/hlaw:@field(DOCID+@lit(dg001439)).

95 Thacher, Military Journal, 509-510.

96 Quoted in Francois Furstenberg, In the Name of the Father (New York: Penguin, 2007), 65.


99 Martin, Narrative, 1, 2.

100 Martin, Narrative, 1, 2, 13.


103 Martin, Narrative, 5. There are other satires of this convention, such as Laurence Sterne’s comic novel Tristam Shandy, (1759) with which Martin might have been familiar.


105 Martin, Narrative, 17, 64.

106 Martin, Narrative, 17, 64, 20, 59, 39, 132. “If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake.” 1 Corinthians 10:27. “Sergeant ____” evidently disagrees with Ecclesiastes 5:12 “The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.”

107 I have not found Martin’s exact reference but surmise he knew a ballad related to it. Francis Child
compiled early English ballads in the late 1800s which features this description of a fight between Robin Hood and another forester with quarterstaffs in *Child Ballad 131*: “Robin Hood and the Ranger): “Bold Robin he gave him very hard blows,/ The other returned them as fast:/ At every stroke their jackets did smoke,/ Three hours the combat did last.”


109 “Hotspur” refers to the hotheaded Shakespearean character Lord Henry Percy aka “Hotspur” in *Richard II* and even more prominently as one of the main antagonists in *Henry IV* part 1. “Buy the rabbit” is a British colloquialism dating perhaps from medieval times and meaning getting the worst end of the bargain. “Light of foot” is biblical, describing a man of David’s army heroically who pursued Abner, general of Saul’s defeated army- *II Samuel* 2: 18: “As-a-hel was as light of foot as a wild roe.” Martin seems especially fond of the story of King David and Abner. Elsewhere in commenting on a soldier who dies while playing around with a bayonet he writes “Thus a poor fellow, who had braved the hardships and perils of war, till the very close of it ‘died as a fool dieth’ which is from 2:Samuel 3:33 “And the king lamented over Abner and said ‘Died Abner as a fool dieth.’” To be fair, Martin’s use of the bible is not always arch. For instance he remembered fondly an anonymous “widow woman” who furnished food to him when he was sick. “She will be rewarded, where it will be said to her, ‘I was hungry and you gave me meat; I was sick and you visited me,’” a paraphrase of Matthew 25:35 “For I was an hungered and ye gave me meat,” Martin, *Narrative*, 220.

110 Jonathan Swift’s religious parody *A Tale of a Tub* in which in Section IV, line 96 in a burlesque of the debate about communion, Peter [Saint Peter representing Catholicism] believes a loaf of bread is mutton while his brothers Jack [John Calvin] and Martin [Luther] are less certain of this as Peter exhorts them to “fall to and spare not.”

111 Martin, *Narrative*, 250.


113 Martin, *Narrative*, 252, 1.


118 Martin, *Narrative*, 49, 120, 155, 156, 121, 224.


CHAPTER III
FROM BROOMSTICK TO OLD HICKORY:
THE NEW NATURE OF AUTHORITY IN THE RECOLLECTIONS OF AN OLD
REVOLUTIONARY

In 1777 George Washington, sensitive to the difficulties involved in maintaining
military discipline, insisted to a fellow Virginian picking officers for his regiment to “take
none but Gentlemen” because when soldiers saw an officer as an equal they would
“regard him no more than a broomstick.”¹ By the War of 1812, Andrew Jackson
positioned himself as an equal to his men: “I led them into the field and I will, at all
hazard and risk, lead them out. I will bring on the sick, or be with them- it shall never be
said… they have been abandoned by their general.” Jackson declared: “I shall march
them… or bury them with the honors of war. Should I die I know they would bury me.”
Indeed, he did march on foot among his men into Nashville in 1813. Washington was
“His Excellency” or “The Commander in Chief” to his followers. Jackson was homely,
tough and gnarled, rather like a broomstick, but an object of affection for all that. “Old
Hickory” inspired a loyalty in his men, of which few other officers, perhaps even
Washington, could boast.² Jackson’s example forced other politicians of his era to either
manufacture a humble past, as William Henry Harrison did with his “log cabin”
presidential campaign, or at least explore, in Daniel Webster’s words, “the kindred ties”
Joseph Martin might just as well have been describing Jackson as Washington in his *Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier* when he wrote of the “Commander-in-chief” spurning his own safety to mingle with his men, such as in the trenches at Yorktown, or redirecting the front lines at Monmouth. “Had we dared,” wrote Martin of Washington at Yorktown, “we might have cautioned him for exposing himself to danger at such a time, and no doubt he would have taken it in good part if we did.”

Martin depicted other generals less favorably: Israel Putnam was inept and vainglorious; Charles Lee was incompetent and also insubordinate to Washington; Benedict Arnold, even before his treachery, was unkind to common soldiers and shifty in nature. Ironically, among the commanders other than Washington, only two foreigners, the Marquis de Lafayette and Baron Friedrich von Steuben, came across sympathetically in Martin’s narrative. Below the generals there were captains and lieutenants who displayed either cowardice or pomposity under Martin’s contemptuous pen.

Joseph Plumb Martin used the stories of his experiences with officers and discipline in the army during the American Revolution to illustrate the arbitrary practices and abuse by many in authority. An appreciation of the nobility of ordinary soldiers and citizens by virtue of their lack of authority had become an integral part of the political climate of 1830. This attitude was not true of most accounts of the war dating closer to the time of the Revolution. Ordinary soldier Jeremiah Greenman left an extensive diary of his service during the Revolution. In contrast to Martin’s work of a half century later, Greenman accentuated the need for adherence to authority and respect for rank. Patriotic songs published at the time of the American Revolution were more likely to tout the humble virtues of American leaders and the haughty villainy of British and Tory leaders.
rather than single out the role of ordinary fighting men or citizens in the struggle for independence. Mercy Otis Warren’s history of the war, started even as hostilities were drawing to a close, was rich with accounts of generals and political leaders with very little focus on the ordinary fighting men. Mason Weems’s biography of George Washington, published soon after the first president’s death, argued that independence would have been impossible without the great man’s virtuous character and talented leadership.

The ordinary soldier came into his own in the nineteenth century. War of 1812 songs sometimes sang the praises of private soldiers and vilified the decisions of their commanders. One very popular ballad in this vein was “The Mournful Tragedy of James Bird” (1814) about a heroic private, wounded at the battle of Lake Erie, who was wrongfully executed for desertion. Other songs focused on units more than their leaders, such as “The Yankee Volunteers” or “The Hunters of Kentucky.” Some dispensed with the names of leaders altogether, accentuating the collective effort, such as Francis Scott Key’s “The Defense of Fort McHenry” (now more famously known as “The Star Spangled Banner”), or “Patriotic Diggers,” which even has a verse devoted solely to naming the trades of the men involved:

Plumbers, Founders, Dyers, Tinmen, Turners, Shavers, Sweepers, Clerks, and Criers, Jewelers, Engravers, Clothiers, Drapers, Players, Cartmen, Hatters, Tailors, Gaugers, Sealers, Weighers, Carpenters and Sailors.\(^5\)

Popular fiction and drama of the early nineteenth century featured plebeian characters such as Jonathan, Natty Bumppo and Rip Van Winkle who were honest and good hearted but largely respectful of authority. Rip Van Winkle fell asleep for twenty years to find to his relief that his oppressively bossy wife had met her demise in the meantime (she had burst a blood vessel chewing out a journeyman), but to his horror that
King George III and British hegemony in America had been overthrown. The strong willed ordinary folk who emerge as the great literary characters of the mid-nineteenth century were more resistant to the pressures of society and authority they deemed oppressive, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne and Mark Twain’s Huck Finn. Herman Melville constantly evaluated the relationship between authority and individual freedom in his fiction. Bartleby, Ishmael and Billy Budd all suffered under authority in different ways and with different results. Billy Budd and Ishmael were subjected to evil minded or emotionally unstable leadership while Bartleby destroyed himself in his jealous need for personal freedom that made him unable to compromise with any authority however benevolent. It is important to note that the focus in most nineteenth-century American literature continued to be on ordinary people and their relationship with authority and with the moral authority that was in themselves. The transition of the low born protagonist from follower to rebel to master of his or her own destiny in nineteenth-century American literature was accompanied by a growing sense that the agency of the individual must be accompanied by responsibility to a morality centered around selflessness and social benevolence. “If I devote myself to other pursuits and contemplations,” wrote Henry David Thoreau, “I must first see, at least, that I do not pursue them sitting upon another man’s shoulders.” “A man is a bundle of relations,” wrote Ralph Waldo Emerson, “a knot of roots, whose flower and fruitage is the world.”

Historical narratives of Martin’s time made room for persons other than great figureheads and redefined the Revolution in the process. The ever quotable John Adams was sensitive to the power that ideas played among the collective population in shaping history. He wrote in a letter to Jefferson in 1815:
What do we mean by the Revolution? The war? That was no part of the revolution; it was only an effect and consequence of it. The revolution was in the minds of the people, and this was effected from 1760–1775, in the course of fifteen years, before a drop of blood was shed at Lexington. Adams was half right. The Revolution and its meaning as a democratizing force would solidify in the “minds of the people” in the decades after the war as well as before or during it and in a way Adams himself disapproved of. He wrote complaining in 1811 that a “corruption of history” had taken place which discounted the role of founding fathers in the creation of the nation and put in its place, according to historian Michael Kammen, forces accentuating the nation’s “pluralism (a diverse society that shared a future but not a common history)” instead.

There is evidence that the mercantile culture of the Atlantic world in the eighteenth century laid the foundation for antiauthoritarianism in America. Cheryl Fury, Marcus Rediker and Michael Jarvis have demonstrated eloquently how distance from centers of authority empowered first sailors on board ships and later North American settlers. Fury in *Tides in the Affairs of Men: The Social History of Elizabethan Seamen 1580-1603* argues that the “unique work environment” in which sailors and their leaders worked allowed for negotiation of authority based on individual competence, often regardless of rank and station. Rediker in his *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World 1700-1750* believes that labor relations aboard ship fostered constant negotiation as ships’ officers needed other incentives beside the support of the metropole to maintain authority. Jarvis in his article “Maritime Masters and Seafaring Slaves in Bermuda, 1680-1783” shows how in one instance at least the unique environment of negotiation between leaders and crew on
board ship led some slaves to feel themselves empowered enough to elect to remain in bondage as sailors instead of accepting freedom on land. Stephen Hornsby’s *British Atlantic, American Frontier: Spaces of Power in Early Modern British America* shows how parts of British North America developed differently according to distance from the metropole; areas furthest from the reach of authority enjoyed more autonomy which fostered a culture of independence antithetical to British control. Jennifer Anderson, in her article “Nature’s Currency: The Atlantic Mahogany Trade and the Commodification of Nature in the Eighteenth Century,” shows convincingly how even slaves found themselves empowered and comparatively independent in the hunt for mahogany in colonial Central America and the Caribbean because of a combination of skills, demand for mahogany and distance from the controlling governmental entities that benefited from their work. Fred Anderson in *A People’s Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years’ War* argues that colonial New England settlements kept connections with the sea trade which fostered the view that labor was a commodity that could be exchanged as currency: negotiable according to demand. Independent minded New England militiamen viewed their military service in the same negotiable way as their laboring civilian counterparts, often to the exasperation of their British superiors.  

There has been debate about how instrumental the American Revolution really was in promoting popular sovereignty. Gary Nash in *The Unknown American Revolution* argues that populist revolts were common in colonial American and merely reached a higher level of efficacy in achieving lower class empowerment through the Revolution. John Resch aligns the growth in status of ordinary soldiers, particularly of Continental Army veterans, with the growth of the view of the Revolution as a “people’s war” and the
perceived agency of ordinary Americans in civic matters, an evolution, he contends, that changed American society only by the mid 1820s.¹¹ Sarah Purcell in *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* argues that during the Revolution the “democratic consequences of the actions of average citizens remained veiled” and that only during later decades did the equation between American nationalism and populist democracy become thoroughly aligned.¹²

Most historians agree that the conversation shifted away from elite to popular rule at least in terms of the political rhetoric of the early republic, but the debate over the extent to which populist sentiment reflected actual popular sovereignty continues without satisfying resolution. Carolyn Cox presents the notion that the shift from elite rule to populist agency may have been more illusion than fact as political entities such as the Tammany Society appropriated the commemoration of the service of common soldiers in the Revolution to further their own fortunes.¹³ Gordon Wood and Sean Wilentz see major struggles in the early republic based upon the growing questioning of the viability of established leadership. As many political and social entities forced a definition of where authority must come from in order to serve society best, the young United States struggled with its unruly components to achieve solidarity and order. Adherence to authority was key to the nation’s survival even as beliefs in who should lead was changing. Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Sean Wilentz argue that by 1830 and the rise of supposed commoner Andrew Jackson certain elements emerged that promoted a shift toward popular sovereignty. Liberalization of white male suffrage gave a voice to the lower classes in society. The expansion of the wage economy which tied power to the accumulation of material wealth, made class distinctions such as family pedigree and
educational refinement irrelevant. Increasing migration and resettlement broke down ties to regional power centers and the systems of control. Edward Pessen and Daniel Walker Howe acknowledge that the rhetoric of American nationalism touted the role of the common man in politics but discount its factual basis, especially with regard to Jackson who Pessen believes was no more than an elitist opportunist who did not necessarily have the political backing of ordinary American workers at all and who aligned himself with the supposedly more elitist Federalists on many issues.14 Whatever Jackson’s true motives, his political rise appeared to coincide with the emergence of distrust of authority of any stripe in the American imagination. William Gilmore discusses how the emergence of the novel in the early nineteenth century was decried because it “fostered alternatives to the wisdom of the ages” in the minds of readers.15 Among the fiercely independent settlers in a crude frontier inn who appeared to bow to nothing but hard work, Washington Irving scrawled graffiti over the fireplace which read “Here Sovereign Dirt erects her sable throne.”16 Jackson himself refused to enact initiatives urged by religious authorities because they would disturb “the security which religion now enjoys in this country in its complete separation from the political concerns of the General Government.”17 Jackson and his followers believed bankers and business leaders comprised “a corrupt and abandoned aristocracy,” while Daniel Webster accused Jackson of “pure despotism” akin to King Louis XIV of France who announced “I am the State.”18 Even the hagiographer of great men, Mason Weems, admonished his readers on the first page of his Life of Washington: “A public character is often an artificial one.”19
“LEGISLATION OF CONFUSION”

Jeremiah Greenman, Joseph Plumb Martin’s contemporary and fellow New Englander, was an ordinary soldier, though over time he rose higher in rank than Martin, and, like Martin, applied successfully for a veteran’s pension later in life by pleading poverty. He actually did keep a diary during his time in the war and it reflected a different outlook toward authority than Martin’s narrative. Seventeen-year-old Jeremiah Greenman of Rhode Island enlisted in 1775, a year earlier than Martin, and by the time he was discharged in 1784 he had been promoted four times from private to ensign to lieutenant, (Martin had been promoted to corporal by Yorktown) and finally to captain by war’s end. Greenman had been part of the disastrous 1775 attack on Quebec that had seen Richard Montgomery, one of his commanders, killed and by which he had been taken prisoner and not for the last time.  

Greenman also suffered starvation and hardship in the service of his country. The winter’s encampment at the siege of Quebec, as described by Greenman, was worse than the deprivations Martin related. In the miserable conditions of snow and ice, Greenman reported that troops were forced to eat “Supe” that consisted of dog “with the head of a Squirll with a parsol of Candill wicks boyled up to gether” and that wounded men had to be left behind in the woods “to the mercy of wild beast.” Greenman recorded British atrocities, such as when “ye enemy keep a continual fire all day/ Set a number of housan on fire/ killed a french woman.”

As a prisoner of war, Greenman’s patriotism was severely tested. As he related years later, a Loyalist sea captain who had known Greenman’s father attempted to bribe Greenman into going over to the King’s side, which he refused. He was punished for
planning an escape and also for refusing to swear allegiance to the King. He eventually signed a petition promising never to take up arms against the King and to remain “Peacefull and Quiet” ever after. He broke this promise the following year, but apparently he did so because he felt the British were not acting in good faith. He reported that other parolees escaped British custody right after signing for fear General William Howe would not honor his fellow officer General Guy Carlton’s parole of the prisoners when they were shipped from Quebec to New York.  

John Joseph Henry, who also took part in the Quebec campaign and was taken prisoner, reported that American soldiers escaped because they did not trust the British. Henry noted that Washington disapproved of the escapees’ actions because the general believed such conduct dishonorable. Greenman might have been aware of Washington’s attitude. In 1781 he was taken prisoner by Tories and after some months in a New York jail was paroled, signed a promise not to aid in the rebellion, and this time refused to break his word, even when an American soldier asked for his assistance. Greenman remained in the army and apparently did not need to test his promise further as hostilities wound down.

Like Martin, Greenman had trouble finding his way after the war. In April 1784, having been discharged from the Continental Army, Greenman tried to go into business with another soldier from his regiment. He wrote in his diary: “Went to Providence where continued a day, and entered into a contract with Mr. Masury (formerly an officer of the Regt.) to put our Small Interest togeth[er] (which we had been fighting, bleeding, and all most dying for,- for the Space of 8 long years in the Army of the United States,) in order for to trade and try for a livelyhood.” A “livelyhood” was not forthcoming. In September
of that year when “business grow’d very dull” Greenman tried to be a merchant and finally took to sea as a sailor. He remained in the “nauticall line” for most of the remainder of his life. This work was not lucrative either, and he moved his family to Marietta, Ohio in 1806 and took up farming. In 1821, he applied for a veteran’s pension, pointing up his patriotism, especially in refusing to renounce the cause when he was a prisoner of war after the Quebec campaign. “I had entered the cause of my Country and meant to Continue in it untill our rights was declar’d,” he wrote in a letter in petition for his pension.26 Even his tombstone of 1828, carved by his children in Ohio, pointed up his service in “that army which bid defiance to britons [sic] power and established the Independence of the United States.”27

For all his defiance of “britons power,” Greenman clearly felt the laws of his new government worthy of his support, though he also knew that he would need to work diligently within the system to get what was due to him. The government initially rejected his petition for a pension on the grounds he did not appear to be destitute, even though in his court statement he argued indigence because of ill health, an ailing wife, the “reopening of old war wounds, an inability to file as an invalid earlier because of his occupation at sea prevented him filing the necessary papers, and the fact that he had not desent Cloathing.” The ensuing tussle with the War Department lasted three years but eventually Greenman got his pension. His obituary indicated that he later was elected as justice of the peace for his township and later a magistrate (Martin also had served as justice of the peace and selectman for his county and town in Maine, respectively). Greenman was a Freemason and a member of the Order of Cincinnatus, like many of the better connected Revolutionary War veterans, as well as a Federalist and a supporter of
John Quincy Adams over Andrew Jackson in the presidential election of 1828. In the middle of November 1828, Greenman died and by all accounts was eulogized as a man of importance by his community. Certainly his obituary was much longer than the vast majority of notices that appeared in the newspapers of the time.\textsuperscript{28}

Greenman was more apt than Martin to doubt the capabilities of his fellow soldiers over their officers. His immediate commander during the Quebec debacle was Benedict Arnold, who, as mentioned before, Martin claimed to have viewed with suspicion and dislike even before he learned of his treachery.\textsuperscript{29} Greenman’s diary portrayed his commanding officer in a positive light during the Quebec campaign, and noted that Arnold quickly sent troops to help French inhabitants prevent burning and looting by the British when so entreated.\textsuperscript{30} Greenman implied that only after Arnold was wounded did the Americans abandon their assault on Quebec. He did not seem to think much about the courage of his comrades-in-arms after the death of their commander:

Genl: Mountgomery being killed all the men retreated and left us to fight for our Selvs. Then thay sent a flag to us to give up/ our Colo A[rnold] wounded Colo Green took Command/ then the officers held a Counsel/ agreed to give [up]\textsuperscript{31}

Greenman’s diary often chronicled misbehavior among the troops:

In the after noon a man belonging to Capt. Goodri[ch’s] company, James Mcarn being [in] liquor shot Serj’t Bishop belonging to Capt. Williams Company/ he was set upon [the gallows (?)] 10 minits then was taken down to Cambrige to have another tryal.\textsuperscript{32}

In 1778 Greenman was appointed as guard attendant upon courts martial and therefore was witness to all kinds of malefaction and punishment. He was an officer when a mutiny developed among the “New Jersey line” in 1781 and seemed to show satisfaction that it was quickly “quelled” and some of the instigators punished severely.\textsuperscript{33}
Gordon Wood concludes that 1790s politics as a whole had an elitist eighteenth-century character based on reputation, connections and intrigue, often out of the public eye. Leaders distrusted the lower orders and quelled their aspirations to have a voice in the government. Hugh Henry Brackenridge in his 1790 novel *Modern Chivalry* scoffed at the idea of an ordinary artisan, in this case a weaver, being elected to the legislature: “There is no analogy between knoting threads and framing laws. It would be a reversion of the order of things.” Mercy Otis Warren characterized Shays’ Rebellion as the product of the “ignorance” of an “incendiary and turbulent set of people” who had “neither the information nor the sagacity” to distinguish between monarchical despotism and their own enlightened government. Mason Weems’s narrative of the army’s mutiny attributed a childlike quality to the troops Washington confronted:

Instead, therefore, of tamely yielding to the wishes of his army to their own ruin, he bravely opposes them to their true good: and instead of drinking in, with traitorous smile, the hosannas that would make him King, he darkens his brow of Parental displeasure at their impiety. He flies to extinguish their rising rebellion; he addressed letters to the officers of army, desiring them to meet him at an appointed time and place. Happily for America, the voice of Washington still sounded in their ear as the voice of a father.

“Influence is no government,” George Washington declared in response to Shays’ Rebellion. His condemnation of the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794 was even stronger, which he sent the army to quash. He derided as “extraconstitutional” the Democratic-Republican clubs that had initially supported the rebellion. So great was Washington’s popularity, according to historian Sean Wilentz, that many Democratic-Republicans jumped on the political bandwagon condemning and in some cases assisting in the quashing of the rebellion.
The violent excesses of the French Revolution soured many Americans on the idea of popular sovereignty. Mercy Otis Warren wrote:

These sudden eruptions of the passions of the multitude, spread, like the lava of a volcano, throughout all France, nor could men of correct judgment, who aimed only at the reform of abuses and a renovation in all the departments, check the fury of the torrent.⁴⁰

The fear that the anti-religiousness of the French Jacobin government would spread to North America provoked preachers to warn against “too much democracy.”⁴¹ Increasing college student protests of everything from board increases to the retention of unpopular professors were blamed by some clergy and administrators on “French revolutionary principles of Jacobinism and atheism,” according to Gordon Wood.⁴² It was surmised by one Virginia Federalist that the consequences of Fries’s Rebellion of 1799 would be “[no]thing short of DISUNION, and the heads of JOHN ADAMS and ALEXANDER HAMILTON; & some others perhaps.”⁴³ Populist leaders in support of the poor and disenfranchised were compared to Robespierre.⁴⁴ Thomas Paine once struck a chord with Americans when he articulately argued against the “great quantity of patronage copied from England” that had made a mockery of the “new system of government in which the rights of all men should be preserved to give value to independence.”⁴⁵ Paine lost his credibility for many who had once supported his views when he participated in the French Revolution. Mercy Otis Warren wrote that he “betrayed his weakness and want of principle, in blasphemous scurrilities and impious raillery, that at once sunk his character, and disgusted every rational and sober mind.”⁴⁶ Edmund Randolph articulated a pronounced antipathy for popular “democracy:” “The general object was to produce a cure for the evils under which the United States labored; that in tracing these evils to their
origins, every man had found it in the turbulence and follies of democracy.”

John Adams in 1790 preferred the hegemony of an enlightened ruling class in maintaining a well-ordered government. Instead of following any foreign example, to return to the legislation of confusion, contemplate the means of restoring decency, honesty, and order in society, by preserving and completing, if any thing should be found necessary to complete the balance of your government. In a well-balanced government, reason, conscience, truth, and virtue, must be respected by all parties, and exerted for the public good.

TOWARD CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

By the 1820s, rhetoric promoting popular sovereignty and distrust of authority was on the rise. Fault lines appeared because of the War of 1812, one of the most politically controversial wars in American history, which created conflict between Federalists and Democratic-Republicans, and between many persons in the north who were against the war and persons in the south who were for it. President Madison accused New Englanders of clogging “the wheels of war,” thereby encouraging the British “to withhold any pacific advances otherwise likely to be made.” Julia Anne Hieronymous Tevis, a resident of Washington at the time, recalled decades later: “the political animosity existing between the two parties, Federalists and Democrats, was bitter beyond expression; even the children caught fire in the general conflagration.” A mob in Baltimore attacked a Federalist press that was printing articles against the war, dubbing all Federalists “tories” including, ironically, Revolutionary War veterans and heroes who were defending it. Tevis wrote:

Brave General Lingan was killed by an infuriated mob, though he begged so piteously that his life might be spared for the sake of his wife and children. He besought them to remember how manfully he had fought for his country in the “old war,” but his voice was scarcely heard amid the roar of the wild beasts, who
almost tore him to pieces. General Lee (Light Horse Harry) and several other Revolutionary patriots were so injured by the same mob that they died soon after. They were opposed to the war.\textsuperscript{52}

Though in large part vindicated by Jackson’s victory at New Orleans and Oliver Perry’s on Lake Erie, the War of 1812 exposed lapses in leadership that did not go unnoticed. “Instead of having an energetic commander, we have a weak old man,” said one subordinate of the Madison appointee William Hull. Hull was a Republican politician with Revolutionary War experience who suffered an ignominious defeat at British hands at Fort Detroit in 1812.\textsuperscript{53} Historian John Elting remarks that Madison’s military appointments were bad, except for William Henry Harrison. The 1814 temporary capture and burning of Washington, D.C., by a British force much outnumbered by the American troops sent against it, accentuated the incompetence of the U.S. generals.\textsuperscript{54} “Our President has not… those commanding talents, which are necessary to control those about him,” complained John C. Calhoun. “The whole administration is blamed for the late disastrous occurrences at Washington,” declared one Virginia Republican, while an Ohio senator complained in his diary: “Our affairs is [in] a miserable way[,] the war not managed at all.” “Without money, without soldiers & without courage, the President and his Cabinet are the objects of very general execration,” wrote Rufus King.\textsuperscript{55}

The reputation of the national government did not improve in the years after the War of 1812. Tevis recalled: “Statesmen of prestige, and of the highest ability, plunged into an excess of dissipation that would have disgraced heathendom… even to the eye of the uninitiated many of our legislators were utterly unfit to be intrusted with the important duties that devolved around them.”\textsuperscript{56} But neither did the reputation of the Federalists improve, who had opposed renewed war with Britain in 1812, and whose agenda for a
more centralized government was in retreat. \textsuperscript{57} “Our government is now so firmly put on its republican tack,” Thomas Jefferson boasted in 1818, “that it will not be easily monarchised by forms.” \textsuperscript{58} It was a tack that would lead to ruin, however, as Jefferson’s ideas would be distorted to rationalize secession over the slavery question by the middle of the century. \textsuperscript{59} And Jefferson himself would bemoan wage-earning mob rule which he considered to be taking over urban areas of the country. “The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do the strength of the human body.” \textsuperscript{60}

Economic pressures eroded faith in the established order. Bank panics starting in 1819 jeopardized the financial stability of the new republic, reducing the spirits of many Americans to suicidal levels. \textsuperscript{61} President James Monroe’s perceived lack of leadership during the panic did not damage him in the short term, for he won re-election virtually unopposed in 1820, but the dynasty of Democratic-Republican Virginians in the White House was at an end. James Madison by 1811 had killed the Bank of the United States, that engine of Hamiltonian centrality, and as a result the War of 1812 became almost disastrously under-funded, according to Gordon Wood. \textsuperscript{62} The Bank of the United States was reestablished in 1816 and took a good part of the blame for the 1819 economic downturn, even by regional bankers, not unjustly, according to Wilentz, given the character of the bank’s directors. But it was a blow to any ideas of centralizing the nation’s economic authority. \textsuperscript{63}

The population of the country was exploding in ways that alarmed American elites. The ranks of the American underclass were bolstered by a great influx of immigrants from Europe, mostly comprised of persons who were, as Philip Hone
complained to his diary in 1832,

destitute and friendless. They have brought the cholera this year, and they will always bring wretchedness and want. The boast that our country is the asylum for the oppressed in other parts of the world is very philanthropic and sentimental, but I fear that we shall, before long, derive little comfort from being made the almshouse and place of refuge for the poor of other countries.\textsuperscript{64}

Immigrants would find friends and a promised means out of destitution through membership in Democratic societies such as Tammany Hall, putting political might in the hands of public masses.\textsuperscript{65} James Fenimore Cooper wrote in 1838:

The great immigration of foreigners into the country, and the practice of remaining, or of assembling, in the large towns, renders universal suffrage doubly oppressive to the citizens of the latter. The natives of other countries bring with them the prejudices of another and an antagonist state of society; or what is still worse, their reaction; and it is a painful and humiliating fact, that several of the principal places of this country, are, virtually, under the control of men of this class.\textsuperscript{66}

Westward migration of another sort also contributed to the erosion of privilege, contributing to pressures to liberalize voting rights among white males without extensive material assets. As the New York \textit{Columbian} wrote in 1817 in favor of allowing less propertied classes to vote: “By rendering it the interest and happiness of our population to stay at home is the only way to check the rage [to emigrate west].”\textsuperscript{67} But the act of emigrating westward was in full swing and created a climate of distrust for the status quo. Alexis de Tocqueville wrote:

These men left their first fatherland to better themselves. They leave the second to do better still; they find prosperity almost everywhere, but not happiness. For them desire for well-being has become a restless, burning passion which increases with satisfaction… To start with, emigration was a necessity for them; now it is a sort of gamble, and they enjoy the sensations as much as the profit.\textsuperscript{68}

Such was the competition between political factions for the hearts and minds of ordinary citizens that caused privilege to become a great evil in the American
imagination. Britons Harriet Martineau and Thomas Hamilton were two of many observers who remarked upon the American bias against an elite class. Martineau expressed concern that “the poorer will heavily tax the richer members of society” in such a system where “the majority is right.” Hamilton wrote:

> The ascendancy of numbers, in opposition to that of property and intelligence, had been firmly established; the people, in the widest sense of the term, had been recognised as the only source of power and of honour; and the government, instead of being enabled to control and regulate the passions and prejudices of the multitude, were forced to adopt them as the guide and standard of their policy. They were compelled, in short, to propose the measures, and profess the principles most palatable to the people, instead of those which wider knowledge and keener sagacity might indicate as most for their advantage.

Political hay could be made by implying elite manipulation of the government. Whisperings of cabals and oligarchies manipulating policy to suit their own ends culminated after 1830 in the rise of the Anti-Masons and other populist movements, while increasing suspicion of threats within and without the new republic gave rise to anti-immigrant movements and secessionist impulses on the question of slavery. Political role models, untainted by real and imagined defamations of character by an increasingly virulent partisan press, were in short supply. The revolutionary paragons, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died on July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of official American Independence. Emerging to preeminence in their wake was Andrew Jackson, who Jefferson had once reputedly called “a dangerous man,” and of whom Philip Hone wrote: “This iron-willed man has done more mischief than any man alive.”

Though his detractors were many, Andrew Jackson was the dominating figure in this climate of antiauthoritarianism. The hero of the Battle of New Orleans was the first United States president of perceived humble origins and a politician who truly derived his
power from popular opinion and therefore courted it even among the lower classes.  

Philip Hone understood the change in attitude toward authority represented by the ascension of Jackson to the presidency. On June 13, 1833 he wrote in his diary:

The President is certainly the most popular man we have ever known. Washington was not so much so. His acts were popular, because all descriptions of men were ready to acknowledge him the father of his Country; but he was superior to the homage of the populace,—too dignified, too grave for their liking; and men could not approach him with familiarity. Here is a man who suits them exactly. He has a kind expression for each,—the same to all, no doubt, but each thinks it intended for himself. His manners are certainly good, and he makes the most of them. He is a gourmand of adulation, and by the assistance of the populace has persuaded himself that no man ever living in the country to whom the country was so much indebted. Talk of him as the second Washington! It won’t do now. Washington was only the first Jackson. Poor Adams used to visit New York during his presidency. The papers, to be sure, announced his arrival; but he was welcomed by no shouts, no crowd thronged around his portals, no huzzas rent the air when he made his appearance, and yet posterity, more just than ourselves, will acknowledge him to have been, in all the qualifications which constitute his fitness to fill the office of a ruler of this great Republic, twenty times superior to Jackson. He wanted tact… Adams is the wisest man, the best scholar, the most accomplished statesman; but Jackson has the most tact. So, huzza for Jackson!

Distrust of authority would culminate in the defining philosophy of the age, written by Henry David Thoreau one year before Martin’s death:

The authority of government, even such as I am willing to submit to— for I will cheerfully obey those who know and can do better than I, and in many things even those who neither know nor can do so well — is still an impure one: to be strictly just, it must have the sanction and consent of the governed. It can have no pure right over my person and property but what I concede to it. The progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual. Even the Chinese philosopher was wise enough to regard the individual as the basis of the empire. Is a democracy, such as we know it, the last improvement possible in government? Is it not possible to take a step further towards recognizing and organizing the rights of man? There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived, and treats him accordingly.

Alexis de Tocqueville, writing just a few years before Thoreau, observed the American
government’s subservience to the popular will:

The people take part in the making of the laws by choosing the lawgivers, and they share in their application by electing the agents of the executive power; one might say they govern themselves, so feeble and restricted is the part left to the administration, so vividly is that administration aware of its popular origin, and so obedient is it to the fount of power. The people reign over the American political world as God rules over the universe. It is the cause and the end of all things; everything rises out of it and is absorbed back into it.77

Others, particularly several articulate visitors from Britain, were not sanguine about a system where authority depended so completely on the opinion of the masses. Frederick Marryat writing in the late 1830s, saw more tyranny than freedom in popular rule: “It is clear if the people not only legislate, but, when in a state of irritation or excitement, they defy even legislation, that they are not to be compared to restricted sovereigns but to despots, whose will and caprice are law.”78 Thomas Hamilton went even further, seeing a vicious circle in which public discourse was fed by newspapers that did not inform and advise but flatter and coddle its most plebeian, least intellectually enlightened readers:

Newspapers are so cheap in the United States, that the generality even of the lowest order can afford to purchase them. They therefore depend for support on the most ignorant class of the people. Every thing they contain most be accommodated to the taste and apprehension of men who labour daily for their bread, and are of course indifferent to refinement either of language and reasoning.79

Clearly the country got the political leader it deserved: Andrew Jackson, “a barbarian who could not write a sentence of grammar and hardly could spell his own name,” as John Quincy Adams described him.80

Some elites were bemused by this breakdown of reverence for authority, even in areas having nothing to do with politics. Samuel Goodrich complained in 1830 that in his youth of the late 1700s, “Even the young approached a book with reverence, and a
newspaper with awe. How the world has changed!" More than one American remarked in 1830 that cunning, which “gilds over many a swindle and gross breach of trust,” was often revered over respect for the law and the healthy cultivation of honest business relationships. Philip Hone railed in his diary against “the spirit of riot and insubordination to the laws which lately prevailed.”

Despite detractors, the idea of popular rule in America had articulate proponents who set the stage for a bottom-up view of political and therefore historical agency. George Bancroft, writing eight years after Martin’s death, characterized the start of the American Revolution in such terms: “… with no treasury but the good will of the people… no visible centre of authority; and no distinguished general officer to take command of the provincial troops. Anarchy must prevail, unless there lives in the heart of the people an invisible, resistless, formative principle, that can organize and guide.”

Bancroft believed in that “invisible principle” in the heart of ordinary Americans and in its ability to “organize and guide” the country:

The moral of the great events of those days is this: that the people can discern right, and will make their way to a knowledge of right; that the whole human mind, and therefore with it the mind of the nation, has a continuous, ever improving existence; that the appeal from the unjust legislation of to-day must be made quietly, earnestly, perseveringly, to the more enlightened collective reason of to-morrow; that submission is due to the popular will, in the confidence that the people, when in error, will amend their doings; that in a popular government, injustice is neither to be established by force, nor to be resisted by force; in a word, that the Union which is constituted by consent, must be preserved by love.

Such a “formative principle” Ralph Waldo Emerson found living in the “embattled farmers” who “fired the shot heard ‘round the world” in his 1837 commemoration of the battle of Lexington and Concord. Jackson, at his 1829 inauguration as president of the United States, walked up Capitol Hill with Revolutionary War and Battle of New Orleans
veterans, “not a ragged mob, but well dressed and well behaved, respectable and worthy citizens,” wrote one observer, Margaret Bayard Smith. Jackson wore no hat—“the Servant in presence of his Sovereign, the People,” Smith remarked. A year later would appear Martin’s narrative of an ordinary foot soldier of the Revolution and his comrades who voluntarily, not “forced by their rulers who have absolute power of life or death over their subjects,” “ventured their lives in battle, faced poverty, disease and death for their country, to gain and maintain that Independence and Liberty in the sunny beams of which” all in the nation enjoyed.

“ILL MANNERS”

To be sure, feelings of entitlement existed among the rank and file in America after the Revolution and it soon spread to the population at large. At the end of 1795, New England midwife Martha Ballard complained to her diary: “I am determined not to pay girls for any more ill manners.” After the close of the War for Independence, Ballard’s troubles with her hired help escalated. One servant stole money out of her husband’s desk, another contested her poor wages, a third simply walked out one day, only returning to collect her “duds,” and a fourth was ill-mannered to her mistress, talking back to her when ordered or reprimanded. A fifth and sixth servant also walked out without notice. Ballard was not the only one complaining about the hired help. The overthrow of British governance and the severing of the imperial tie apparently unleashed a rash of “ill manners” by underlings to figures in authority. Proprietors buying acreage in northern New England were annoyed that tenant farmers hired to work their lands behaved “not in a manner appropriate to their class;” they were “indolent” instead of
industrious, unwilling to improve the land and thus its value, speculated on cash crops, and indulged in private trade rather than working for the good of the community, often by-passing the proprietors’ middlemen. They used the profits to buy up more land than they could cultivate, muscling in on the profits of their benefactors even as they ostensibly lived “only for self-gratification” and not for the good of the settlement.  

John Adams wrote in 1776 that “our Struggle has loosened the bands of Government every where. Children and Apprentices were disobedient… schools and Colledges [sic] were grown turbulent… Indians slighted their Guardians and Negroes grew insolent to their masters.”  

There was nothing remarkable or new about servants and slaves defying their masters and feeding their own self-gratification. Shakespeare, Jonson, Plautus and Moliere peopled their plays with wily and rebellious underlings. What was new by the time of the early republic was that in America a laborer was empowered by far more options that precluded servitude to a domineering master, and this transformed what was at first considered “ill manners” into a national attitude by the 1830s. Servants might thumb their noses at Martha Ballard in 1795, but in 1830 they actively fought the status of servitude as demeaning.  

Thomas Hamilton wrote in 1833: “Domestic service in the United States is considered as degrading… domestic service is only a temporary expedient. The moment he [a laborer] contrives to scrape together a little money, he bids his master good-morning.”  

Royall Tyler’s Jonathan, in the post-Revolution play The Contrast, refused to be called a servant and instead insisted on being termed a waiter. In the Jacksonian era violence could result from the smallest perceived slight to a person’s reputation and character. In 1830 certain work was deemed fit only for colored folk, yet when such jobs were taken by them, whites often threatened and abused them.  

Women
might be proud and uppity as servants, but were tyrannized and overworked by their men when they became wives. Through all these upheavals, a status of equality among white men was fiercely promoted. Frances Trollope wrote:

The woodcutter’s son will rank with any other member of congress, not of courtesy, but of right, and the idea that his origin is a disadvantage, will never occur to the imagination of the most exalted of his fellow-citizens. This is the only feature in American society that I recognize as indicative of the equality they profess. Any man’s son may become the equal of any other man’s son, and the consciousness of this is certainly a spur to exertion; on the other hand, it is also a spur to that coarse familiarity, untempered by any shadow of respect, which is assumed by the grossest and the lowest in their intercourse with the highest and most refined.

This environment of equality was long in coming. A shortage of labor empowered ordinary workers and farmers. Martha Ballard for all her bravado had to suffer the ill manners of her servants or she would be relegated to doing all the work herself. Great proprietors, men such as Henry Knox, found their influence over the small homesteaders who occupied their lands had its limits, labeling their tenants and numerous squatters “white Indians” for their disregard of the law. These “white Indians” intimidated surveyors and proprietary agents. Small farmers fought to keep the profits they made from working the land rather than sharing them with those who claimed to own the land.

Even in earlier times the colonial American worker had value because of the scarcity of labor, and he knew it. Because of his ability to generate wealth, a laborer demanded and obtained certain rights which trumped the power of those above him. Otherwise he could “strike;” a nautical term only as old as 1768, Marcus Rediker writes, in which sailors decided to strike their sails so they couldn’t move until their labor needs were met. The Anglo-American Jack Tar, among others, taught Americans that men behaving badly can and will get what they want, given the right conditions.
MARITIME LABOR

Customary rights of sailors on English ships changed the legal landscape of the western world by the eve of the American Revolution. The English Laws of Oleron (or at least as English as Eleanor of Aquitaine who supposedly promulgated them in 1194 A.D.) gave legal protection to the customary right of ordinary seamen to their own property onboard ship.\textsuperscript{101} Elizabeth Mancke has shown how the English government made use of traditional right of passage custom to protest Spanish and Portuguese hegemony on the high seas. Spain and Portugal, in complicity with the Pope, had limited oceanic navigation in their favor in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In negotiating the 1604 Anglo-Spanish Treaty of London, English diplomats asserted the customary rights of passage anywhere in the world, a right which had been assumed by merchants and traders since the beginning of time. The government of King James I of England assiduously promoted the freedom of right of passage.\textsuperscript{102}

In the context of a changing world, a paradigm shift was occurring away from power structures centered around sitting entities of privilege to those that rewarded opportunism. Beyond theoretical declarations, English royal policy favored adventuring and facilitated the growth of trade and its off-shoot: colonization. Liberty as a concept would never be the same. The rights of Englishmen at sea were independent of class or condition. Just as monarchs like Henry VIII and Elizabeth I were elevating butchers and tradesmen of merit at home, so a man with a ship and a little nerve might be elevated by his efforts to “employ himself abroad.” Yet this permissiveness would come back to
haunt the monarchy whenever it strove to curb these rights. Opportunity trumped regulation and circumvented established authority. Liberty of self-employment through liberty of movement caught hold.

Informally, ordinary seaman were empowered to display “ill manners” for years. A uniquely Anglo-American experiment in assumption of natural liberty played out on board merchant ships in the Atlantic world. Cheryl Fury relates how common it was for sailors of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to award cunning over honor and make alliances among themselves to trump authority: they would break contracts, traffic in stolen goods and dictate terms according to skill and connections. The distance of a ship from the metropole’s reach made such behavior possible. As Marcus Rediker writes: “Eighteenth-century Britain and America… experienced the erosion of paternalist forms of labor control and the emergence of a new reality, and hence psychology, of free wage labor. Older social authority, organized around family, the household, and the manorial village, was breaking down, and economic rationalization nibbled through the bonds of paternalistic discipline.” An anti-authoritarian meritocracy, Rediker contends, manifested itself on a mercantile ship. A ship’s captain found his power waned the further he got out to sea so that only one who could command through perceived competence could prevail. Any assertion of authority as it existed on land was folly. Mutinies and strikes were common and effective ways to circumvent a captain’s authority if a climate of respect and mutual trust was not present. Artificial hierarchies of power without earned cooperation would not last, and jealous ideas of egalitarianism were fostered in this environment. Rediker makes links between sailors’ social experiences and their willingness to use violence to protest transgressions against individual rights in other venues. “Jack Tar
participated in almost every port-city riot in England and America in the early modern period.”\textsuperscript{104} John Adams in defending the British soldiers after the Boston Massacre referred to the American mob as containing, among other persons, “outlandish Jack Tarrs,” and sailors including the seafaring runaway slave Crispus Attucks do appear to have been among instigators of the riot that precipitated the massacre. They were also participants in several of the “tea parties” that inspired American protest movements leading up to the Revolution.\textsuperscript{105}

A contractual view of authority was present during the French and Indian War. British commanders encountered much resistance to orders from Americans serving in the war. A New England militiaman felt it was a soldier’s right to resist incompetent or unfair authority, just as Jack Tar felt entitled to resist his captain’s orders if the contractual relationship was violated. The British concluded that the American fighting man was cowardly and immoral when in fact he was merely looking at the relationship between soldier and commander as negotiable. The low opinion the British had of Americans’ martial virtue might have been one reason armed force was used so precipitately to quell the America rebellion. A British officer, familiar with the behavior of American militia, boasted in 1774 that he could take a thousand grenadiers to America “and geld all the males, partly by force and partly by a little coaxing.”\textsuperscript{106}

“BAD BEHAVIOR”

Connecticut farm boy Joseph Plumb Martin joined the rebellion against King George III at the age of fifteen in 1776. He implied fifty years later that his enlistment was an act of defiance against the authority of his “Grandsire.” While Martin obeyed his
officers he also found ways to circumvent even their authority when it suited him. In New York before his first battle, Martin was among a bunch of soldiers bawled out by their general for stealing wine. Martin watched his fellow recruits go right back to their theft the minute the general was out of sight and clearly learned from this episode not to fear authority for he later assisted his fellow soldiers as they employed their skills as sappers and miners on board ship headed to Yorktown by drilling a hole through a wall and into the back of a keg to steal wine from their officers’ private storeroom.107

Martin’s sense of entitlement through skill and cunning probably had maritime roots. “Embezzlement, it must be stressed,” writes Marcus Rediker, “was nearly universal aboard ship… goods procured [in this way] were considered a fundamental part of the social wage.”108 More importantly, it was an integral aspect of the culture of the 1830s, when more than one observer remarked that a thief “passed for an honest man;” “Shrewdness was [one of] the… most striking features in the character of an American,” and a “clever villain’s witty rogueries” were smiled upon.109 Swiss immigrant Johannes Schweizer remarked in the early 1820s that America was an “eternal anarchy” driven by “material self-interest” in which “the laws seem to benefit only scoundrels.”110 Francis Grund was startled to see an American audience applaud Iago during a performance of William Shakespeare’s Othello when the villain expressed admiration for a full purse.111 In this light, Martin’s gleeful retelling of his looting and plundering of food, his hoodwinking of officers, and even his occasional acts of pragmatic cowardice during his war service takes on an 1830s flavor.

In his time in the army Martin encountered officers of variable ability. He was party to plots among enlisted men to avenge certain officers deemed unduly harsh or dull-
witted. He was participant in one full-scale mutiny of the rank and file to protest lack of food and supplies, and was party to many other plans for mutiny that did not reach the boiling point because of compromise and pacification by commanders. He defied the orders of officers if he did not like their attitudes and could get away unmolested, as when he declined to open a gate for General Putnam in spite of the general’s threats.\textsuperscript{112}

Martin did not show complete disrespect for authority, but he did feel authority must be earned. In his memoir he described how he gladly followed certain officers in the field who he deemed competent and honorable as demonstrated by their actions and conduct. Whether seduced by the cult of Washington, which was strong at the time he wrote his narrative, or through his solid esprit de corps, Martin had nothing but admiration for George Washington, who he claimed to have seen on a number of occasions, always in a positive light.\textsuperscript{113} He saw Washington angered at Charles Lee’s order to retreat in the field at Princeton. Martin found the order to retreat “grating to…” our feelings.” He depicted Washington walking among ordinary soldiers, giving encouragement at Yorktown, and mentioned how the general attempted to protect his men from inhumane treatment when captured by the British.

Martin grew to respect command which he felt merited respect. But he also appreciated the “contractual” relationship between soldiers and their commanders. “‘The labourer is worthy of his meat,’” he quoted from a proverb, “‘...and he ought to have it for his employer’s interest, if nothing more.’” He condoned the movements toward mutiny when provisions were not properly supplied rather than “lying here like fools and starving,”\textsuperscript{114} echoing the earlier sentiments of an American militia soldier who wrote this verse in his diary during the French and Indian war:
And now when times are grown so bad,
And our provision done,
Let everyone take up his pack
And make a march for home\textsuperscript{115}

Resentment of authority was even older than the Seven Years War. Anglo-American
seaman John Baltharpe, writing in his shipboard diary a half century before the American
Revolution, had a more extreme solution for his bad or diminished “victuals:”

\begin{verbatim}
Purser, Steward, Mate, all three
I wish them hang’d upon a Tree\textsuperscript{116}
\end{verbatim}

Such bellyaching was not prevalent in the diaries and memoirs of British and
Hessian soldiers from the Revolution, though there were many descriptions of lack of
provisions and other necessaries. “This night I might properly sing, ‘Content with our
hard fate, my boys,’” writes British soldier Anthony Allaire in his diary as he lay on the
cold bare ground in only his coat on a frosty night in March 1780.\textsuperscript{117} Hessian Private
Johann Dohla stoically noted half rations or meager provisions on many occasions
without editorial comment.\textsuperscript{118} Martin constantly described scavenging among neighboring
households and farms for food, taking what they could find, often with the sanction of his
commanders. Dohla merely recorded punishment of some soldiers in the Hessian army
for trying to do the same, such as one who had to run the gauntlet because of “pillaging in
a garden.”\textsuperscript{119}

Martin’s sentiments of contractual relations between officers and men was most
clearly a product of the culture of the mid-nineteenth century when, as Scott Sandage put
it, “freedom and free labor were inseparable in a nation of strivers,” and Walt Whitman
wrote: “Neither a servant nor master am I.”\textsuperscript{120} Said a tailor in the 1830s, glorying in his
ability to dictate his own time off of work: “Pressure is well enough to be sure, as I can
testify when the last dollar is about to be pressed out of me; but vacation is capital. It tickles one’s fancy with the notion of choice. ‘Nothing on compulsion’ is my motto.”

Martin certainly made known what side of the labor-management conflict he was on. At one point he related a story of how General Cornwallis “was a morose, cross man, always quarreling with and beating his servants” to sweeten the narrative of the general’s come-uppance at Yorktown.

Martin’s criticism of those in authority was not a unique point of view among Americans serving in the Continental Army, but it must be emphasized that most criticisms were from memoirs dating from the 1820s or later. Pennsylvania Private John Adlum, whose writings date no later than 1823, wrote in his memoirs: “our officers… with a few exceptions, were a shabby set, that is as to talents.” Lieutenant Isaac Bangs in his diary, which was edited and published by his son Edward, a Massachusetts politician in 1824, related how captains were critical of their colonels’ decisions. This is not to say that criticism of authority was a later addition to the Revolutionary War narrative. The mutinies were quite real, of course. Furthermore, just as mutiny of enlisted men against their officers bubbled beneath the surface of every corps, officers threatened to mutiny against their commanders, Congress, and the nation itself at times and even Washington’s subordinates, such as Charles Lee and most famously Horatio Gates, found fault with his leadership and made steps to have him removed.

While there was little love lost among Britain’s commanders in the war, there did not appear to be a of lack of trust and respect for those in authority in the British and Hessian ranks on a par with that found among the American soldiers. As one British grenadier bragged to John Adlum: unlike American officers, British officers “appear
gentlemen” and “have a proper sense of honor.” A Hessian private remarked that the British officers were “gallant” even though in their arrogance they looked down on persons of other nations, including the Germans. Indeed, Dohla found much to admire in most of his commanders. General William Howe, for instance, was “an intelligent man, daily more highly thought of by the army the more you get to know him… [He] always shows his knowledge of the art of war and, at the same time, his philanthropy.” Dohla even showed admiration for his enemy’s commander-in-chief, George Washington, who was “humane,” “decisive” and “intelligent.”

Respect for authority evidently was still alive and well among British and other non-Americans in the first third of the nineteenth century. Europeans traveling to America in the 1830s were alternately fascinated and repelled by Americans’ lack of respect for the dignity of rank and station. “All freedom enjoyed in America, beyond what is enjoyed in England, is enjoyed solely by the disorderly at the expense of the orderly,” wrote Frances Trollope. Thomas Hamilton found the only criteria for quality and high station to be possession of wealth, remarking after one encounter with American high society: “had I been present to so many money bags of dollars… the ceremony would have been quite as interesting.” Other nationalities in North America did not share this anti-authoritarian attitude. On a tour of “Indian Country,” Frederick Marryat wrote of some French Canadians he encountered: “There is no law here or appeal to law; yet they submit to authority and are managed with very little trouble. They bind themselves for three years, and during that time (little occasional deviations being overlooked) they work diligently and faithfully- ready at all seasons and all hours, and never complaining, although the work is often extremely hard.”
Among British sailors we do find echoes of the American point of view toward their superiors, often when far from the reach of English law. The most famous example is the mutiny on the *H.M.S. Bounty* of 1789 in which the mutineers justified their actions because Captain Bligh was selfish, cruel, uncaring and irrational.\(^{131}\) Marcus Rediker has discovered that most British sea mutinies occurred in peacetime rather than wartime, presumably because pay and conditions were better attended to by the British government in wartime.\(^{132}\) Wartime mutinies also took place. American sailor John Ingersoll talked of coming upon a ship run aground off the coast of New Jersey. “Said ship was an English ship. The crew a few days previous had mutinied.”\(^{133}\)

Mutiny repeatedly threatened the Continental Army, exacerbated by a government that left American forces chronically short of provisions and other necessities. Martin stated that he received no pay between 1777 and 1781, though soldiers had been promised six dollars a month in wages. He told of squalid camp conditions, and lack of clothing and provisions as well. Martin clearly wished his reader to believe that the wonder was not that Americans disrespected their commanders or their cause when they mutinied, but rather that they stayed and fought at all. Mutinies when they came were short-lived and were assuaged with very little loss of life or damage to the army’s ability to fight. Martin was aware at the time of writing his narrative that the Revolutionary War Pension Act and other initiatives helping Continental Army veterans were unpopular:

Many murmur now at the apparent good fortune of the poor soldiers. Many I have myself seen, vile enough to say, that they never deserved such favour from the country. The only wish I would bestow upon such hard-hearted wretches, is, that they might be compelled to go through just such sufferings and privations as that army did; and then if they did not sing a different tune, I should miss my guess.\(^{134}\)
It was also important in the fractious world of nullification and other regional conflicts playing out in 1830 for Martin to make the case that fighting for American independence and unity put him and his colleagues on the right side of history. Some historians estimate that only a third of America’s inhabitants supported the rebellion and only one sixteenth of America’s manpower were in the Continental Army and state militias combined.\textsuperscript{135} Washington and Congress constantly faced recruitment problems.\textsuperscript{136} The imperative by 1830 was to create the impression that the majority of Americans had favored the formation of a new country. Martin’s memoir accentuated the criminality of loyalist “cowboys” and “refugees” as if they were a socially deviant minority in the conflict. Martin had some respect for his British and Hessian adversaries but he was unsparing in his vilification of the “cowboys” or Tory refugees and the families that sheltered and supported them. As mentioned before, Martin was at his most graphic and his most emotional in narrating the atrocities of Americans fighting against the new nation, as for instance in his lament for their butchering of his comrade in arms, Twist.\textsuperscript{137} To be sure, emotions ran high against the loyalists during the war. Isaac Bangs, for one, made several diary entries concerning British and Tory atrocities in his diary.\textsuperscript{138} Policy against Tories was harsh. Merely suspecting a family of Tory leanings could lead to full confiscation or destruction of its property. If a Tory sympathizer was suspected of aiding the enemy in any way, imprisonment or even execution might be the result.\textsuperscript{139} Eloquent voices such as James Rivington and Peter Oliver bewailed the plight of Americans still loyal to the crown during and after the Revolution. By the 1830s and 1840s, however, the
Tories had been transformed from misguided victims to heinous villains who hunted “like beasts of prey,” as Amos Kendall wrote in 1842, “and the savages were outdone in cruelties to the living and indignities on the dead.”

Martin made pains to accentuate the unification achieved by Americans. To read his memoir is to come away believing that service with persons of other regions eroded provincialism and solidified a national identity. Men were thrown together from different regions of the country in a spirit of collaboration against a common enemy. A New Englander, Martin stated that he found his distrust and contempt of soldiers from elsewhere abate the more he served with them. In 1778, a year and a half after first enlisting, he described his first feelings serving in a culturally diverse regiment:

…it was a motly group,- Yankees, Irishmen, Buckskins and what not. The regiment that I belonged to, was made up of about one half New-Englanders and the remainder were chiefly Pennsylvanians,- two setts of people as opposite in manners and customs as light and darkness, consequently there was not much cordialty subsisting between us; for, to tell the sober truth, I had in those days, as lief have been incorporated with a tribe of western Indians, as with any of the southern troops; especially of those which consisted mostly (as Pennsylvanians did,) of foreigners. But I was among them and in the same regiment too… and had to do duty with them; to make a bad matter worse, I was often, when on duty, the only Yankee that happened to be on the same tour for several days together. “The bloody Yankee,” or “the d--d Yankee” was the mildest epithets that they would bestow upon me at such times. It often made me think of home, or at least of my regiment of fellow-Yankees.

Two years later, having been picked for the Sappers and Miners Corps, along with men representing every regiment in the army and therefore from many states, Martin believed his view to be considerably altered: “I had now got among a new set, who were, to a man, entire strangers to me; I had, of course, to form new acquaintances, but I was not long in doing that… I soon found myself at home with them. We were all young men and therefore easy to get acquainted.”
Martin was not merely sensitive to imperatives of his own time in this feeling of national unity. Historians such as James Kirby Martin, John Shy and John Ellis believe this service in the Continental Army created in Americans a “political education” in which a stronger national identity replaced more provincial and parochial attitudes.\textsuperscript{142} Lieutenant Isaac Bangs of Massachusetts reported “Militia from all Parts” coming to New York and attending parties where “the whole Choir of our officers together” celebrated the announcement of the ratification of the Declaration of Independence. Bangs almost exclusively used the term “American” to describe his side in the conflict.\textsuperscript{143} Rhode Islander Jeremiah Greenman, appearing to have shed whatever provincial leanings he may have had from being a prisoner of the British after the failed Quebec campaign, made few provincial distinctions in his diary.\textsuperscript{144} Pennsylvanian William Feltman commanded a guard of North Carolina soldiers and found his associations with southerners “agreeable.”\textsuperscript{145}

One of the most compelling aspects of Martin’s narrative concerned discipline and punishment in the Continental Army. Many observers from the 1830s accentuated the lack of discipline as well as the disrespect for the military by American society at large. Thomas Hamilton wrote:

\begin{quote}
During my stay at Fort Mitchell I saw a good deal of the United States’ troops. The discipline is very lax, and being always separated in small detachments, they have no opportunity of being exercised in field movements. On Sunday there was a dress parade, which I attended. Little was done, but that little in the most slovenly manner. It is only justice to the officers to state, that they are quite aware of the deficiencies of the service to which they belong. “You will laugh,” they said, “at our want of method and discipline, but the fault is not ours; we cannot help it. The service is unpopular, we receive no support from the government, and we have no means of maintaining proper subordination.”\textsuperscript{146}
\end{quote}

Martin himself hinted that standing armies were unpopular at the time he wrote by virtue
of the credit given to the temporary militia for winning the war.¹⁴⁷ Thoreau in “Civil Disobedience” came down hard on the whole idea of military service, calling those who served in the army “machines,” “on the level with wood and earth and stones,” “men of straw or a lump of dirt,” with the “same sort of worth only as horses and dogs.”¹⁴⁸

Visitors to America in 1830 also remarked how lenient Americans were in terms of punishment. Frances Trollope related how a man was to be executed in Cincinnati, only to be spared at the last minute “amidst the shouts, laughter, and ribaldry of the mob. I am not fond of hanging, but there was something in all this that did not look like the decent dignity of wholesome justice.”¹⁴⁹ Marryat also remarked that “leniency towards crime is the grand characteristic of the American legislation.”¹⁵⁰ In light of these attitudes, Martin’s narrative seemed to represent both his age and that of the Revolution that laid the foundation for it.

It is certain that the Continental Army could not afford to punish wayward American soldiers as harshly as did their British and Hessian counterparts. Washington may have tried to instill discipline, indeed, initially he increased penalties for most offenses, but there is good reason to believe ordinary soldiers were not cowed by these efforts.¹⁵¹ Executions for the most serious offenses were rare among the American troops; death sentences were often commuted at the last minute and the number of lashes of whippings for lesser offenses were also reduced or commuted. Jeremiah Greenman, who in his later career as an officer in the regular army took part in disciplinary courts martial, rarely mentioned death sentences actually carried out unless it was hanging of a spy. Most of the disciplinary actions of the courts martial Greenman observed were on the lenient side. His diary entry of August of 1779 in which some mutineers were captured
and returned to camp under sentence of death, is typical: “all pardined and march thru the Colours except one- Geor[g]e Milliman by Name [Milliman was later pardoned as well].”

In another case three men arrested by their commanding officer of “unjentlemanlike behaviour” were put on “tryal” and acquitted, and another man was acquitted of desertion. In another instance, the court gave a sergeant who was arrested for “embisselling” nothing more than a slight reduction in rank. Still another time the court pardoned eleven men sentenced to death for desertion and other crimes. Another case was “adjurn’d for want of witeneses.”

Lieutenant William Feltman of Pennsylvania, who participated in the southern campaign under General Nathaniel Greene, talked of convictions leading to pardons or reduced sentences. In his diary of 1781 he wrote of soldiers convicted of “marauding” and then pardoned, and others convicted of “dueling“ who were simply “discharged the service.” Hessian Private Dohla remarked on Washington’s “kind and forgiving” nature toward army recruits who transgressed discipline. Feltman related how Washington pardoned “all soldiers in confinement to rejoin their respective regiments” after the victory at Yorktown. Private Israel Trask of Massachusetts provided an interesting look at the politics of punishment in Washington’s army. In 1776 in Boston Trask wrote: “the spirit of insubordination broke out in a mutiny.” It was quelled and the ringleaders were tried and two of them were “condemned to be shot,” put in irons, and displayed to the rest of the regiment. Trask recalled:

The door of the prison, by order, was left open during the daytime, with free permission to receive the visit of all, whether drawn by friendship or curiosity. Of the latter nearly the whole army availed themselves of the liberty given. When I visited them, I learned they were… both married men, and their wives, respectable-looking women, had taken up their temporary abode in the same prison with their husbands… the stern purposes of Washington were inflexible to the prayers and supplications of the friends of the criminals. He continued to
receive in silence all solicitations in their favor… He then freely granted the unexpected pardon.\textsuperscript{156}

Joseph Plumb Martin likewise recounted death sentences reprieved at the last minute, often to the relief of near-mutinous soldiers angry to see one of their own punished in this way. The American soldiers administering punishment were often reluctant to do so. Israel Trask related how a drummer boy, the son of a major, was to participate in a public flogging, and unsuccessfully attempted to get out of doing it.\textsuperscript{157} Continental Army soldiers had several ways to lighten the punishment of their comrades. Any soldier found to lay on a blow heavily when ordered to beat a malefactor might be later beaten up “in a bye place.” General Daniel Morgan, who had been whipped himself while an enlisted man in the French and Indian War (499 lashes- he bragged he had cheated the British of one lash), refused to have his men whipped.\textsuperscript{158} Joseph David Ramsay, writing one of the first histories of the war in 1793, appreciated the dilemma.

Even in European states, where long habits have established submission to superiors as a primary duty of the common people, the difficulty of governing recruits… is great; but to exercise discipline over freemen, accustomed to act only from the impulse of their own minds, required not only a knowledge of human nature, but an accommodating spirit, and a degree of patience which is rarely found among officers of regular armies.\textsuperscript{159}

Ramsay may have got things backwards for it appears that the army’s habit of letting discipline go at the last minute increased soldiers’ view that certain behaviors were, if not acceptable, open to negotiation.

Many rights were negotiable in the American army. Officers of an under-manned, under-provisioned army often looked the other way when it came to looting and forgave drunken and disorderly charges. Misbehaviors in the American army, even desertions, were apparently rarely treated as harshly as they were in the British and Hessian ranks.
Hessian Dohla frequently mentioned British executions for desertion and even for resisting orders. In the Hessian army even “disrespect” could lead to harsh penalties. One Hessian private had to run a gauntlet of two hundred men whipping him with their swords eight times “because he had loudly complained about the English pay” and another had to do the same amount for “indebtedness.” Still another soldier ran the gauntlet ten times for “grumbling.” Dolha wrote of a soldier so severely treated on the gauntlet his toes had to be amputated and he was sent back to Germany as an invalid.\textsuperscript{160} Hessian Lieutenant John Charles Philip von Krafft, not without pride, it seems, recorded in his diary that a Hessian private who was captured trying to desert told Krafft he did it on account of Krafft’s severe punishments.\textsuperscript{161} The British regulars were called “lobsterbacks” not merely because of their red coats but also because their backs were literally red and rough as a lobster’s shell from the whippings and beatings of the King’s discipline.\textsuperscript{162}

Joseph Plumb Martin grew to manhood in an environment where individual initiative such as stealing food was rewarded; where punishment had to be meted out with care because soldiers were needed; where officers needed to earn the respect of the men; and where orders were often questioned. Persuasion, not force, governed the American army. Scottish philosopher David Hume wrote: “A force is always on the side of the governed. The governors have nothing to support them but opinion.”\textsuperscript{163}

American soldiers appreciated their rights and freedoms. They also were aware of the alternative world that awaited them under the British and their allies if the rebellion failed. A fair number of British and Hessian deserters enthusiastically joined the ranks of the rebels. Nathanial Greene remarked that ex-British regulars took a perverse delight in firing upon their ex-employers in the Southern army in 1781. Hessian deserters eventually
formed an important part of Washington’s forces. John Adlum used highly competent
British soldiers who had “come over” to the rebel side to help him as leader of the guard
to enforce camp discipline. British Lieutenant Anthony Allaire described two men
lately of the British camp who had deserted to the rebels and in a subsequent battle were
heard to shout “take back your ammunition again” as they shot at their former
comrades. Krafft frequently wrote of Hessians deserting, sometimes “in large numbers”
and sometimes not merely enlisted men, but officers. Many Hessians remained in
America after the war, as did Krafft himself, who married a woman from New York and
became a teacher.

Though British and Hessian troops respected their officers and the chain of
command, they did not enjoy a great deal of unity and fellow feeling for each other.
Krafft repeatedly reported in his diary of incidents of cheating and stealing and even fist
fights between Hessians and British, as well as between English and Tory soldiers. Continental soldier Jonathan Brigham recalled that after the surrender at Saratoga British
and Hessian prisoners refused to be associated with each other and had to be kept
separate. British officer Anthony Allaire found it “disagreeable” that he had to
associate with American Tory militia rather than British army regulars.

Martin accentuated the fact that the American army transcended provincialism and
developed both an American identity and a military identity which set them apart from
other Americans. Hessian Krafft reported an American prisoner declaring himself a
citizen of “The Independent States.” Martin played up American unity even more,
relating how the men of the Continental Army fought together, drank, gamed and slept
together, starved together, even were inoculated for smallpox together. Partners in
adversity, Martin contended that American soldiers formed alliances with each other that crossed provincial lines but also solidified an identity that pitted soldiers against the civilian population at large. Scarcity of food in the ranks made soldiers partners in crime when they plundered the local populace on foraging expeditions. Martin spent the winter of 1778-79 requisitioning food from the farmers of Pennsylvania on behalf of the Quartermaster Corps, but his narrative was rife with incidents of foraging on a less official level, which, if looked at from the civilian point of view, was more akin to plundering than foraging. Washington was known to hint darkly at “the consequences of not feeding the army” to spur local civil authorities to give generously. A gulf was developing between a general populace that regarded the army as thieves and the soldiers themselves who felt their struggles entitled them to more respect and sustenance from the public at large. Soldiers suspected civilians of getting rich off the war while the troops starved. Civilians often looked at the coming of soldiers with dread and hid their valuables.  

Continental Army soldiers came in contact with the works of Revolutionary writers and thinkers and were exposed to many ideas they might not have encountered as civilians. Jeremiah Greenman wrote often of handbills being read aloud to troops describing American victories and other news. Isaac Bangs reported that documents such as the Declaration of Independence were read aloud to the troops. Joseph Plumb Martin quoted Thomas Paine and exhibited a good knowledge of his works. “Paine himself was one of the reasons men kept on fighting,” writes historian Francis Jennings, “…Paine was worth a regiment to Washington.” In spite of various New England initiatives in Congress to ban theatrical spectacle in America, plays were read and
performed in American army camps, particularly at Valley Forge, encouraged by
Washington, who made sure his favorite play, *Cato* by Joseph Addison, was produced
more than once. It is not certain how many ordinary soldiers saw *Cato* but the story
was well known. *Cato*, a committed Republican leader, sacrificed himself rather than
submit to imperial tyranny. The story of the struggle for republican government over
imperial hegemony crossed class and cultural lines; the heroic leader of the Republican
forces is African. It had propagandistic and rhetorical potential which predated Patrick
Henry by half a century. As Cato says in his most famous speech from the play: “It is not
now a time to talk of aught/ But chains or conquest; liberty or death.”

Polemical patriotic plays by Mercy Otis Warren and others were read in drawing rooms and
probably found their way into the camps as well. Indeed, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, the
author of two of the most popular patriotic plays of the time *The Battle of Bunkers-Hill*
(1776) and *The Death of General Montgomery* (1777), became a Continental Army
chaplain and probably took his plays and certainly his polemical temperament with him.

The sentimental plays by Nicholas Rowe which featured noble, self-sacrificing
characters, such as *The Fair Penitent* and *Jane Shore*, were produced and certainly were
popular for audiences in both camps during the war, as was George Farquhar’s comedy
*The Recruiting Officer*, which may have contributed substantially to military *esprit de
corps* for the play depicted military men of different ranks collaborating to take advantage
of civilians who were generally portrayed as less clever than the soldiers. John Gay’s
irreverent *The Beggar’s Opera* and its depiction of a morally bankrupt English society
was performed often in America, its songs sung in American ale houses throughout the
eighteenth century and there is evidence the play was performed and its songs sung in the
American camps. Shakespearean plays were also popular in early America but grew in popularity in the nineteenth century when Martin certainly was exposed to them.\textsuperscript{180}

The prevalence of singing, the telling of stories and the composing of rhymes in American colonial life carried into the army.\textsuperscript{181} Joseph Plumb Martin’s memoirs are replete with rhymes either quoted or of his own concoction. Patriotic songs adapted or co-opted from English sources were sung in the camps, as were songs which on the surface may seem less polemical until examined closely. Songs of drinking and wenching were sung during the Revolution, as they certainly were in other wars, but so were songs that generated a fellow feeling among soldiers such as those of the “jolly beggars” variety, where the singers bragged of sharing both poverty and freedom in equal measure. One song called “The Jovial Beggars” contains this lyric:

\begin{verbatim}
We live as we list and we strive above the laws
For no one but a beggar can judge a beggar’s cause
And a begging we shall go\textsuperscript{182}

This sense of self-serving entitlement did not need to have patriotic and nationalistic overtones to be part of the American psyche. Tory Peter Oliver writing in 1781 quoted the account of one unashamedly self-serving soldier captured after the battle of Bunker Hill as to why he enlisted in the American army:

I was a shoemaker and got my living by my labor. When this Rebellion came on, I saw some of my Neighbors get into Commission, who were no better than my self. I was very ambitious, and did not like to see those Men above me. I was asked to enlist, as a private soldier. My Ambition was too great for so low a Rank; I offered to enlist upon having a Lieutenants Commission; which was granted. I imagined my self now in a way of Promotion; if I was Killed in Battle, there would be an end of me, but if my Captain was Killed, I should rise in Rank and should still have a chance to rise higher. These, Sir! Were the only Motives of my entering into the Service, for as to the Dispute between great Britain and the Colonies I know nothing of it; neither am I capable of judging whether it is right or wrong.\textsuperscript{183}
\end{verbatim}
Oliver pointed to other Americans who shared this self-serving point of view, including known figures such as the generals Richard Montgomery and Benedict Arnold, not to mention Ethan Allen, who, Oliver writes

…openly acknowledged… that it was indifferent to him for whom he fought; whether the King of Great Britain, the King of Spain or for America; they who would give him the best pay should have his service… This man afterwards collected a Number of Adherent, and settled a District to the northward of New York, called Vermont; which he maintained against the Power of Congress.\(^{184}\)

Captain William Bligh, in conjecturing why his crew mutinied in the South Pacific in 1789, believed they were merely following their own baser inclinations (specifically, they lusted for Polynesian women) over respect for higher authority. “The mutineers had assured themselves of a more happy life among the Otaheiteans, than they could possibly have in England… so favourable an opportunity would never offer to them again.”\(^{185}\)

Marcus Rediker found that crime on board ship became easier to get away with the further from England the vessel was. And Jack Tar was certainly integral in the growing practice of smuggling.\(^{186}\) Tory Peter Oliver, in the same decade as Bligh, attributed the American rebellion to the “self-interested criminality:”

The Inhabitants of the Massachusetts Bay were notorious in the smuggling Business, from the Capital Merchant down to the meanest Mechanick. And whereas in England it is dishonorable, to a Merchant of Honor, to be guilty of such base Subterfuges to increase their Estates, it is in New England so far from being reproachfull, that some of the greatest Fortunes there were acquired in this disgracefull trade; the Prop[r]ietors of them boast of the Method of Acquisition.\(^{187}\)

If Joseph Plumb Martin showed that serving in the war often meant foraging for food and helping himself wherever he found it, he also knew that others above him were doing the same and at his expense. Unable to pay the debts on his homestead in Maine, impaired in health, with a sickly wife and five children, including a retarded son, Martin
lost his land to General Henry Knox who was buying up the area with the help of his connections in government. Knox was insensitive to Martin’s pleas from remission of his debt. America did not fulfill her contract to him, Martin ultimately lamented, “she had all the power in her own hands and I had none.”

The new climate of freedom was not necessarily fair, even if at bottom it was a democracy. Henry Knox with his money and political influence had tipped the scales in his favor and at Martin’s expense. Knox’s value was assessed as higher so his entitlement was more easily enforced. Martin, reduced to begging Knox and others to survive, found no social net erected to help him. He was not alone in feeling betrayed by what he thought was the legacy of the Revolution. Slavery was perpetuated and Africans who fought on the side of independence found their condition the same or worse than before. Conflict with Indians, even those aiding the rebel cause continued and indeed escalated in the years after the Treaty of Paris. The participants in Shays’ Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion had taken “the law into their own hands” after they had slipped into penury and dependency, and were put down by the new government which was unsympathetic to their plight, according to Gary Nash. A strong central government and rule of law formed the other side of the negotiation for power, and many in the American army appreciated the need for order over personal freedom: not just high-ranking officers such as Washington and those with political or social connections such as Alexander Hamilton or John Marshall, but men of more humble status like Jeremiah Greenman.
“SING THE HEAVENLY UNION”

John Shy in ruminating over the true legacy of American Independence sees a great debate between Thomas Hobbes who declared that “covenants without swords are but words” and David Hume who said that “force is always on the side of the governed” and that “governors have nothing to support them but opinion.”¹⁹⁰ Neither seems satisfying to apply to an American system where “opinion” was shaped by so many factors and “swords” only had an edge in certain circumstances.

The opinion of the working man mattered in 1830, shaped more by a capitalistic mercantile tradition than by the settlers of Plymouth Plantation or by the classically educated gentlemen farmers of Virginia. The experiences of ordinary Anglo-American seamen and merchants and their labor negotiations translated into a struggle between personal rights and the rule of law. Distance had always been key to throwing off the old order. Private John Adlum repeated a major American strategy of the Revolution: “The language of our soldiers was ‘as soon as we can get them out of reach of their shipping we will beat them.’”¹⁹¹ Stephen Hornsby in his British Atlantic, American Frontier demonstrates how geography dictated American settlement and commercial growth that could side-step imperial controls by virtue of space and distance.

Early Americans often interpreted the American Revolution as a war that achieved the triumph of individual liberty over privileged authority, yet many in the new republic were unwilling to extend freedom to African Americans. It may be argued that many steps made to abolish slavery and promote African American agency during the Revolution were actively suppressed by the 1830s. Slavery grew after the war. The slave population in America increased by 70% between 1790 and 1810.¹⁹² “Societies of men
could not subsist unless there were a subordination of one to another,” wrote a Virginia
lawyer in 1772 in defending slavery.193 Jefferson and Washington may have wrung their
hands about “the peculiar institution” but made little move toward eradicating it.
Jefferson excised the Old Testament, and thus most references to slavery, from his
personal bible, evidently divorcing the slavery question from his ruminations on Christian
morality.194 Frederick Douglass bitterly lamented the double standard of many Americans
who professed themselves Christians yet condoned slavery:

Come, saints and sinners, hear me tell
How pious priests whip Jack and Nell,
And women buy and children sell,
And preach all sinners down to hell,
And sing of heavenly union.195

Though slavery emerged because of lack of labor, racism in the early republic
grew when labor became plentiful and competition for work was fierce, argues Lois
Horton.196 Entitlement to freedom became tied to competence. Benjamin Franklin
remarked in the eighteenth century how his view of the ability of “negroes” to achieve
agency was vastly improved when he encountered educated black freemen at a
Philadelphia school.197 Joseph Plumb Martin in the nineteenth century went out of his
way to prove the mental inferiority of a “smart-looking Negro man, a great politician”
who upbraided him for rebelling against the king and ran off to join the British where
very soon “poor Cuff was laid flat on his back.”198 There were many efforts to educate
African slaves and freemen, as well as Indians in the years before the American
Revolution.199 Efforts at educating nonwhites were curtailed and even made criminal in
parts of the United States after the war as racism fueled a roll-back of the rights of many
African-Americans both free and slave even as Americans expanded educational
opportunities for white citizens. Efforts to portray African Americans as mentally inferior also escalated.\textsuperscript{200} Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative contributed to the view that African Americans and Native Americans were inferior as white American popular agency grew in the 1830s, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

2 Quoted in Jon Meacham, American Lion: Andrew Jackson in the White House (New York: Random House, 2008), 29. To be fair the egalitarian carrot was accompanied by a very harsh Old Hickory stick. In 1814 he punished the attempted desertion of 200 Tennessee militiamen by executing the ring leaders, Donald R. Hickey, The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 213-214.

3 Daniel Webster, Select Speeches of Daniel Webster 1817-1845, ed. A. M. George (Boston: Heath & Co. 1903), 137.


5 Wallace House, The Ballads of the War of 1812 (1791-1836), Folkways record LP #FA 2164.


17 Quoted in Perry Miller, The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War (New


21 Greenman, Diary, 18, 22, 28-32.

22 Greenman Diary, 301.

23 Greenman, Diary, 22, 28-32.


25 Greenman, Diary, 217.

26 Greenman, Diary, 301.


28 Greenman, Diary, 294, 300-301, xxxiii-xxxvi, 196, 305.

29 Martin, Narrative, 176.

30 Greenman, Diary, 20; the entire entry reads: “this day the french inhabita[nts] sent to Colo Arnold for assistance to prevent the kings troops for [from] burning and plundering thair housan/ a Capt & to men sent down to Saint foies.”

31 Greenman, Diary, 23.

32 Greenman, Diary, 13-14.

33 Greenman, Diary, 204.


Quoted in Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 111. The tension between farmers and the land-holding classes who were in control of state legislatures as recounted in Alan Taylor’s *Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 229, sheds ironic light on such statements.


Quoted in Wilentz, *Democracy*, 84


Warren, *Revolution*, 379. No such reservations on Paine are evident in Martin’s *Narrative* though he invokes Paine on more than one occasion.


Quoted in Taylor, *Civil War of 1812*, 162.


Wilentz, *Democracy*,176.
59 Wilentz, *Democracy*, 773.
63 Wilentz, *Democracy*, 206.
64 Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone, 1828-1851* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1889), I, 64.
67 Quoted in Wilentz, *Democracy*, 197.
72 See for instance Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 189-190 in which the “hypocrisy” of Van Buren and Polk are pointed up in the press of the day.
74 “Jackson mirrored a national phenomenon… a man from the bottom rung of society on the rise,” Meacham, *American Lion*, 39.
75 Hone, *Diary*, 1, 76-77.
79 Hamilton, *Men and Manners*, 448. Martin stated his profession as “a laborer” in his sworn statement in

80 Quoted in Meacham, *American Lion*, 18.


82 Quoted in Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 15.

83 Hone, *Diary*, 1, 110.


85 Quoted in Meacham, *American Lion*, 359.


87 Meacham, *American Lion*, 57.


91 Quoted in Ulrich, *Midwife’s Tale*, 224.

92 For good examples of this I refer the reader specifically to Grumio and Tranio in Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*, Jonson’s *Volpone*, Moliere’s *Imaginary Invalid* or to *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* which combines a number of Plautine characters, especially the cunning slave Pseudolus.


95 Pessen, *Jacksonian America*, 12, 19.


101 Rediker, *Devil, etc.*, 130.

103 Fury, Tides, 94-99.

104 Rediker, Between the Devil, 207, 247-248, 249.


106 Anderson, People’s Army, 167, 195.

107 Martin, Narrative, 11-16, 19-21, 192-193.

108 Rediker, Between the Devil, 129-130.

109 Pessen, Jacksonian America, 15.


111 Pessen, Jacksonian America, 25.

112 Martin, Narrative, 41, 35-36, 43-44.

113 A good discussion of this is in Francois Furstenberg, In the Name of the Father: Washington’s Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation (New York: Penguin, 2006), 35-36.


115 Quoted in Anderson, People’s Army, 188.

116 Quoted in Rediker, Between the Devil, 127.


119 Martin, Narrative, 90-101, for example, describes this as his main duty during his brief stint with the Quartermaster Corps, though his memoir is rife with such activity; Dohla, Hessian Diary, 111.

120 Sandage, Born Losers, 116.

121 Quoted in Pessen, Jacksonian America, 120.

122 Martin, Narrative, 218.

123 John Adlum, Memoirs of the life of John Adlum in the Revolutionary War, ed. Howard H. Peckham
(Chicago: Caxton Club, 1968), xi, 15.


128 Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 105-106.


132 Rediker, *Between the Devil, etc.*, 227.


137 Martin, *Narrative*, 120-121, 155.


139 As Chadwick, *American Army*, for instance, describes Gen. Putnam doing when a tavern keeper refuses to sell his wares for army scrip, 138 or John Adlum, *Diary*, seeing such demagoguery at work to tar & feather a German immigrant for his views, 8-10.

140 Quoted in Meacham, *American Lion*, 11.


142 Martin & Lender, *Respectable Army*, 205.

143 Bangs, *Journal*, 55-56, 33, 7, 57, 64.

144 Greenman, *Diary*, 137, 173, 169, for some examples.

147 Martin, *Narrative*, 249.
149 Trollope, *Domestic Manners*, 164-166.
150 Marryat, *Diary in American*, 329.
151 Martin & Lender, *Respectable Army*, 47.
154 Dohla, *Hessian Diary*, 100.
159 Quoted in Martin & Lender, *Respectable Army*, 73-74.
164 Martin & Lender, *Respectable Army*, 92-93.
167 Krafft, *Journal*, 70, 151, iii, 177, 81-82, 90, 103-104.
172 Royster, Revolutionary People, 302, 193.


174 Greenman, Diary, 137, for instance.

175 Bangs, Journal, 57.

176 Martin, Narrative, 82.


181 Wright, Cultural Life, 195.


184 Peter Oliver, Origin etc., 138.


186 Rediker, Devil, etc., 129-130, 36.

187 Oliver, Origin etc., 46.

188 Taylor, Liberty Men, 247-249.

189 Nash, Unknown American Revolution, 448.

190 Shy, People Numerous and Armed, 165.

191 Adlum, Diary, 22.

192 Axelrod, American Revolution, 350.

193 Quoted in Wood, Empire of Liberty, 514.


195 Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass as American Slave, Written by Himself (1845), rpt. (New York: Dell, 1997), 118.


Perhaps the most glaring distortion that Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative made to the historical record of the American Revolution was the marginalization of African Americans and Native Americans. Martin’s racism positioned his narrative in the 1830s with its attendant pressures on a nation divided over slavery, the competition of free black labor in the north, and the conflict with native Americans as the nation expanded westward. Native Americans appeared very briefly in the narrative, which gave the impression they were not agents in the struggle over independence and indeed were largely absent from colonial society. When Indians did appear they were portrayed as wild savages incapable of feeding themselves. African Americans were often portrayed in the narrative but hardly ever favorably.

The authors of a widely used United States history textbook, *The American Journey*, imply that the American Revolution was a catalyst for the eradication of slavery: “Revolutionary principles of liberty and equality and evangelical notions of human fellowship convinced many whites for the first time to challenge black slavery.” Given the way American racism grew and flourished after the war in so many ways, “catalyst”
may be too strong a word. Fifty years after independence, denial of African-American liberty and equality was even more pronounced than in 1776 and affected historical narratives of the nation’s founding.²

To be sure, during the Revolution prominent voices did bemoan the contradiction that a nation fighting for its freedom from the “slavery” of monarchial tyranny excluded the freedom of its own real slaves. Benjamin Rush wrote that he thought it “useless” to resist British enslavement of the American colonies while “we continue to keep our fellow creatures in slavery just because their color is different from ours.”³ “I wish most sincerely there was not a slave in the province,” Abigail Adams wrote, “It always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have.”⁴ Thomas Paine, casting the net of blame widely, declared that Britons, having “enslaved multitudes, and shed much innocent blood in doing it,” were turning on themselves by the 1770s, “and now we are threatened with the same.” “Let us transmit to our descendents, together with our slaves, a pity for their unhappy lot and an abhorrence of slavery,” declared Patrick Henry.⁵ Samuel Hopkins remarked in 1776 that colonial oppression was “light as a feather” compared to slavery.⁶ “We did not say, all white men are Free but all men are free,” declared Abraham Bishop.⁷ One of Benjamin Franklin’s many hats was as president of the Philadelphia Society for the Abolition of Slavery, whose members declared that “we consider it as our indispensable duty to endeavour by all means in our power to alleviate the miseries of those unhappy people who are doomed to taste of the bitter cup of perpetual servitude.”⁸
Many slaveholding patriots, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, may have anguished privately over the issue of slavery but most did not free their slaves. “For if a slave can have a country in this world, it must be any other in preference to that in which he is born to live and labour for another,” wrote Jefferson. Douglas Egerton relates Jefferson’s dilemma concerning his own offspring with the slave Sally Hemings. Jefferson may have been forced to accept the state of Virginia’s more stringent standards of blackness to keep his light-skinned children in bondage, though his own studies of the “science” of skin color had led him to conclude that certain slaves of mixed race deserved liberty. Ultimately he merely let his more Caucasian-featured octoroons “withdraw quietly from the plantation” (escape without pursuit) rather than formally freeing them.

“Washington, on his deathbed, was wrestling with demons of his own making,” writes Francois Furstenberg in describing how the first president altered his will to emancipate his slaves, an act much touted by his admirers, but distorted in reality: “Washington’s will freed fewer than half the slaves working on his plantations- and… freed none of immediately.” John Laurens, son of South Carolina patrician Henry Laurens, argued for the arming of slaves as part of the rebel force:

I confess, indeed, that the minds of this unhappy species must be debased by a servitude, from which they can hope for no relief but death, and that every motive to action but fear, must be nearly extinguished in them. But do you think they are so perfectly moulded to their state as to be insensible that a better exists? Will the galling comparison between themselves and their masters leave them unenlightened in this respect? Can their self love be so totally annihilated as not frequently to induce ardent wishes for a change?… I am tempted to believe that this trampled people have so much human left in them, as to be capable of aspiring to the rights of men by noble exertions, if some friend to mankind would point the road and give them a prospect of success… I hope that my plan for serving my country and the oppressed negro race will… [be]… a laudable sacrifice of private interest, to justice and the public good.
John’s father concurred with his son on the perfidy of slavery even as he himself owned enough slaves to fetch him “twenty thousand pounds” at auction.\(^{13}\)

Some Revolutionary War soldiers from northern areas became more opposed to slavery after seeing it on a larger, “crueler” scale in the south.\(^{14}\) Josiah Atkins, an ordinary soldier from Connecticut similar in background to Martin, pointedly ruminated in his diary on the evils of slavery after passing the plantation of George Washington:

Some men in these parts, they tell me, own 30,000 acres of land for their *patrimony*; & many have two or 300 Negroes to work on it as slaves. Alas! That persons who pretend to stand for the *rights of mankind* for the *liberties of society*, can delight in oppression, & that even of the worst kind! These poor creatures are enslaved: not only so, but likewise deprived of that which nature affords even to the beasts. Many are almost without provision, having very little for support of nature; & many are naked as they came into the world. What pray is this but the strikingly inconsistent character pointed out by the apostle, *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption!*\(^{15}\)

Historian Benjamin Quarles indicates that black slaves who served in the American army, not an inconsequential number, usually found the army less oppressive and prejudiced than the civilian world, especially as there was the tentative promise of freedom after their service.\(^{16}\)

Some articulate African American voices connected American nationalism with equality of race in the Revolutionary era. Black preacher Lemuel Haynes in his 1776 essay “Liberty Further Extended” quoted from the Declaration of Independence on the first page. Poet Phyllis Wheatley in “On the Death of General Wooster” (1777) gave Wooster these words to say before his martyrdom for American independence:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{But how, presumptuous shall we hope to find} \\
\text{Divine acceptance with th’almighty mind-} \\
\text{While yet (O deed ungenerous!) they disgrace} \\
\text{And hold in bondage Afric’s blameless race?}\end{align*}
\]
If an impulse to “challenge black slavery” was present at the time of the Revolution, the rise in the number of free blacks led to a racist impulse to challenge black competence by the early nineteenth century when, as Peter J. Parish writes: “The free society of the infant republic was an even more consciously and explicitly white society than its colonial predecessor.” American nationalism increasingly excluded African Americans and Native Americans. Africans “cannot be American” declared Robert Finley in 1816. Blacks were barred from Fourth of July celebrations by the early 1800s. The American Colonization Society, dedicated to returning blacks to Africa, grew in size and importance by the 1820s. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in 1830, observed:

A natural prejudice leads a man to scorn anybody who has been his inferior, long after he has become his equal; the real inequality, due to fortune or the law, is always followed by an imagined inequality rooted in mores… I plainly see that in some parts of the country [where] the legal barrier between the two races is tending to come down, but not that of mores: I see that slavery is in retreat, but the prejudice from which it arose is immovable… Race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists, and nowhere is it more intolerant than in those states where slavery was never known… As soon as the free worker begins to compete with the slave, the latter’s inferiority begins to be felt.

Historians cite many reasons for the assertion of racial prejudice in the early 1800s. Some like David Waldstreicher, Eugene Genovese and James Brewer Stewart, stress social and political causes. In the north, free black communities became more populous, more cosmopolitan, and more politically active and assertive of their independence, often through black pride celebrations that were under-reported by the white press except in the form of lampoons. In the growing race consciousness of the early republic multi-racial communities were forced to assert their black identity to consolidate their endeavors to achieve respectability and self-determination.
south, black revolutionaries planned slave revolts on days of national celebration. In the wake of the black led war that established the nation of Haiti, followed by plots and riots planned and sometimes executed around nationalist and revolutionary celebrations in July by Denmark Vesey, Nat Turner and others, African American self-determination was a threatening prospect for many white Americans. Slave revolts and disturbances grew in intensity in every state where slavery was legal by the 1830s. Lois Horton, Joyce Appleby and Scott Sandage, among others, argue that racism intensified with the competition between whites and blacks for jobs when, as Horton writes, the nation moved toward its first labor surplus in the 1820s. As economic downturns, such as the panic of 1819, affected the lives of ordinary working Americans, the prospect of emancipation and the attendant flooding of the labor market with more wage earners increased racism. The result of an influx of cheap black labor would lead to “White Slavery!! Or Selling White Men for Debt,” as one 1820s political campaign poster declared. Frederick Douglass’s slave narrative bore witness to the rise of racism among white workers when they perceived their jobs threatened by black workers. Douglass was hired out to work in a Baltimore shipyard around 1835:

Until a very little while after I went there, white and black ship-carpenters worked side by side, and no one seemed to see any impropriety in it. All hands seemed to be very well satisfied. Many of the black carpenters were freemen. Things seemed to be going on very well. All at once, the white carpenters knocked off, and said they would not work with free colored workmen. Their reason for this, as alleged, was, that if free colored carpenters were encouraged, they would soon take the trade into their own hands, and poor white men would be thrown out of employment. They therefore called upon at once to put a stop to it.

Though a slave and not a free carpenter, Douglass suffered from the same racial backlash:

My fellow-apprentices very soon began to feel it degrading to them to work with me. They began to put on airs, and talk about the ‘niggers’ taking the country,
saying we all ought to be killed; and, being encouraged by the journeymen, they commenced making my condition as hard as they could, by hectoring me around, and sometimes striking me.27

The Revolution had devastated the American economy. Continental currency had been so debased as to be virtually worthless and inflation was massive.28 The national debt at the close of hostilities with Britain was a for then titanic $77.1 million.29 Production of America's most profitable cash crop, tobacco, declined during the war. In 1774, American plantations had produced 100 million pounds sterling of tobacco. In 1782 only 1 million pounds sterling were produced.30 Jefferson returned to his home after the war to find "my farms so much deranged that I saw evidently they would be a burden to me instead of a support till I could regenerate them."31

Racial tensions contributed to unrest as the African-American worker population grew. In 1790, the first national census recorded that African Americans in bondage numbered 697,897, 17.8 percent of the population in the United States as a whole. By 1810 the number was 1,191,354, a 70 percent increase even though federal legislation had banned the importation of slaves in 1808.32 By 1830 the number of slaves had nearly doubled. The slave population would grow to nearly four million before slavery's eradication was nationally achieved seven decades later.33 The value of slaves also rose. Over 100,000 slaves escaped bondage during the war and increasing numbers were released after the war, especially in the north. The shortage of slaves meant that the price of a black field hand rose from 40 pounds in 1776 to 210 pounds in 1782.34 But it was black emancipation that concerned northerners like Martin. As the number of free blacks grew, they increasingly entered the labor market and competed for jobs with whites, who resisted, often violently. In Maryland the population of free blacks remained at about 4%
between 1755 and 1776 but grew to 20% by 1810. On the eve of the Civil War 50% of African Americans in Maryland were free. Baltimore was one of the nation’s biggest hot beds for rioting in the early nineteenth century, even as its free black population rose from 2% to 11%. By 1820, New York had 10,088 slaves but 30,000 free blacks and Pennsylvania’s slave population dwindled from 10,000 at the Revolution’s end to 1700 by 1800; both states saw increases in anti-race riots in the early 1800s. Nineteenth-century mobs were often more unrestrained and murderous than their eighteenth-century counterparts, according to Gordon Wood.

Daniel Vickers has traced an underlying idea embedded in the American psyche: competency. Its original meaning referred to the idea that personal achievement of independence was linked to an individual’s diligence, intelligence, and thrift which emerged in the economy of largely agrarian colonial America. “In time,” Vickers writes, “the very term competency would come to denote a degree of skill or capacity (sufficient to survive in an industrializing world)…” Scott Sandage argues that the wage economy transformed the definition of competency to be an essential means to personal liberty and self-worth but also redefined manhood in terms of achievement and material gain. “The Borrower is a Slave to the Lender, and the Debtor to the Creditor,” wrote Benjamin Franklin. “We won’t be their Negroes,” John Adams declared of American subjugation to King and Parliament. “People in slavery were presumed incapable of moral responsibility; such was a white man’s burden,” Sandage concludes. Economic panics like that of 1819 turned many white workers against the concurrent abolition of slavery movement because debts and obligations were turning whites into wage slaves, turning them “negro,” making race sensitivity an economic issue. Blacks posed a threat to white
manhood by posing a threat to white economic agency, taking white jobs and white self-esteem. According to Eric Lott, in the early 1800s the term “blackleg” was used to refer to a strike breaker or scab laborer.41 Joseph Plumb Martin may have been sensitive to a nineteenth-century competition between white and black workers when he denigrated African Americans in his Revolutionary era narrative.

Joseph Plumb Martin often portrayed blacks as incompetent and unintelligent, or as figures of comedy that seemed to have their inspiration in the rising popularity of blackface “Ethiopian” entertainments which emerged in the 1820s and 1830s. Martin’s fortunes appeared to be at a nadir when he identified himself at his 1820 veteran’s pension hearing as a “laborer” with “no real personal estate nor any income whatever,” a condition similar to how he portrayed himself in his narrative written a decade later: “one of the lowest in station in an army, a private soldier.”42 It seems reasonable to assume he had an economic stake in portraying African Americans as inferior to whites in the heated climate of labor competition in which he composed his narrative. A New Englander with no use for slaves (except in one instance) and no demonstrable love of southern plantation owners, Martin nevertheless evinced little empathy for the slaves he depicted in his narrative.

Martin’s contempt for blacks, however, was most pronounced when they had loyalist sympathies:

The man of the house where I was quartered had a smart-looking Negro man, a great politician. I chanced to go into the barn where he was threshing. He quickly began to upbraid me with my opposition to the British. The king of England was a very powerful prince, he said,- a very powerful prince; and it was a great pity that the colonists had fallen out with him; but as we had, we must abide by the consequences. I had no inclination to waste the shafts of my rhetoric upon a negro slave. I concluded he had heard his betters say so. As the old cock crows so crows
the young one; and I thought, as the white cock crows so crows the black one.

Martin reported that the “black crow” would meet his comeuppance for his misguided views: “He ran away from his master, before I left there, and went to Long-Island to assist King George; but it seems the king of terrors was more potent than king George, for his master had certain intelligence that poor Cuff was laid flat on his back.” One presumes “laid flat on his back” means that “Cuff” was made a corpse but there is no doubt Martin reported “Cuff’s” downfall with satisfaction.

Though the use of “Cuff” for the name of a black man dates from much earlier, Martin may have associated it with the black minstrel shows starting to gain popularity in the decades before the Civil War in which “Cuff”, a passive, dim-witted and lazy menial worker or slave, often was featured as a comic protagonist. The origin of the name “Cuff” for a black is obscure. “Cuffee” was the fourth most popular name for a slave in Jamaica in the mid-1700s. A cook named “Cuff” served among the patriot crew of the Rebel warship General Putnam, for instance. In Massachusetts in 1780 blacks led by the “Cuffe Brothers” agitated for suffrage. A “Felix Cuff” of Waltham, Massachusetts led a band of “Maroons” with evident success in gaining their freedom in 1781.

Martin used the term “politician” in conjunction with “Cuff.” Slaves in early America were often given mock-grandiose “politician” names from Roman history such as Pompey, Caesar, and Cato. In addition to "Cuff," Martin referred to a black elsewhere as "Caesar." Martin’s use of the term “politician” for his “Negro” Tory debater might indicate that he was familiar with a play called The Politician Outwitted, a popular 1788 comedy by Samuel Low which was often revived in the nineteenth century and in which the (white) title character was a stubborn supporter of the “Old Constitution” (British
rule), who was out-maneuvered by his rebellious son in a matter of love and romance. In the play a dim-witted slave character named “Cuffy” made his appearance in what may well be one of the first “minstrel show” characters in American popular culture. He almost certainly was portrayed by a white actor in black face, exaggerating stereotypical movements and dialect to comic effect:

(A Street. CHARLES LOVEYET and HUMPHREY with negro [CUFFY] with trunk on head)

CHARLES LOVEYET: Here, Cuffy, go with this gentleman.

HUMPHREY: Why, if I am a gentleman, Mr. Cuffy needn’t give himself the trouble; I can carry it myself [(referring to the trunk on CUFFY’s head)].

CUFFY: Tankee, massa buckaraw; you gi me lilly lif, me bery glad; disa ting damma beby. [He puts down the trunk- probably on his foot, hurting himself, comic business.)] An de debelis crooka tone in a treet more worsa naw pricka pear for poos son a bitch foot; an de cole pinch um so too!

CHARLES LOVEYET: No, no, you shall carry it; your head is harder than his.

Later in the play complications result from Humphrey getting Cuffy drunk, further emphasizing his comic incompetence. Blacks named “Cuff” having “hard heads” seem to have been a common joke in early America. In a ballad about the capture of the British Colonel Prescott by patriot forces, one of the arresting party, a black man named “Cuffee,” uses his hard head to break down the door that leads to the man’s capture:

A Tawney son of Afric’s race
   Them through the ravine led,
And entering then the Overing house,
   They found him [Prescott] in his bed
But to get in they had no means
Except poor Cuffee’s head,
Who beat the door down, then rushed in,
And seized him in his bed.  

By the time Martin wrote his narrative, the black buffoon was a staple of American art, literature and drama. Comic “cuffee” or “aboriginal” burlesques of straight plays appeared as interludes between the acts with white performers indulging in “Ethiope delineation.” Incompetent blackface characters such as T. D. Rice’s dim-witted negro minstrel character “Cuff” were ubiquitous on the stage and in popular literature by 1828. Martin may have also been familiar with a satirical American novel by Hugh Henry Brackenridge entitled Modern Chivalry, published in 1792, in which a simple “Guinea negro” named Cuff is lionized by the American Philosophical Society for finding a petrified moccasin which all believed to be a great scientific discovery. Cuff, posing as the intellectual giant he clearly was not (“You be a filasafa, Cuff, fo’ sartan”), gives a speech before the Society. His thick dialect and cloudy logic are a burlesque of scientific analysis. Putting higher analytical matters in the hands of “poor Cuff” was surely the height of comedy to most white Americans of the period who labored under the assumption that no man of color was capable of such deep thoughts. Martin thus found a way to thoroughly burlesque the Tory position by depicting the pseudo-politico Cuff as its grandiloquently stupid spokesman.

Another more menacing “Cuff” made his appearance later in Martin’s narrative: a “Col. Cuff” heading a detachment of runaway slaves in the service of the British. Martin made his contempt for this Col. Cuff clear. Martin relished the prospect of an uppity black getting a whipping, when he prophesized that one of Col. Cuff’s followers,
"Caesar," would get a "striped jacket [ie: whipping] as part of his uniform suit, to remember Col. Cuff by." Yet, most of the “Cuffs” and “Caesars” of Martin’s story were naïve, simple creatures in need of the paternal guidance of white Americans. Martin’s anecdote about escaped slaves led astray by the British only to be brought to ruin by the time of the Battle of Yorktown neatly made the case for Negro incompetence, British perfidy, and white American superiority and benevolence all at the same time.

During the siege, we saw in the woods herds of negroes which lord Cornwallis, (after he inveigled them from their proprietors,) in love and pity to them, had turned them adrift, with no other recompense for their confidence in his humanity, than the small pox for their bounty and starvation and death for their wages. They might be seen scattered about in every direction, dead and dying, with pieces of ears of burnt Indian corn in the hands and mouths, even of those that were dead. After the siege was ended many of the owners of these deluded creatures, came to our camp and engaged some of our men to take them up, generally offering a guinea a head for them. Some of our Sappers and Miners took up several of them that belonged to a Col. Banister; when he applied for them, they refused to deliver them. He said he had no intention of punishing them, that he did not blame them at all, the blame lay on lord Cornwallis. I saw several of those miserable wretches delivered to their master; they came before him under a very powerful fit of the ague. He told them that he gave them the free choice, either to go with him or remain where they were; that he would not injure a hair of their heads if they returned with him to their duty. Had the poor souls received a reprieve at the gallows, they could not have been more overjoyed than they appeared to be at what he promised them; their ague fit soon left them.  

Other observers writing closer to Martin’s time also used the incident of the dying runaways outside Yorktown to illustrate British perfidy and black naïveté. Sarah Osborn, one of the few women to apply for a veteran’s pension, was at Yorktown and recalled in the 1820s that she “saw a number of dead Negroes lying round… who…the British had driven out of the town and left to starve, or were first starved and then thrown out.”

James Thacher wrote: “The British have sent from Yorktown a large Number of Negroes, sick with the small pox, probably for the purpose of communicating the infection to our
army. Thus our inhuman enemies resort to every method in their Power, however barbarous or cruel, to injure and distress and thus gain an advantage over their oppressors.”

However, Josiah Atkins, writing exactly at the time of the Revolution, saw at least some culpability by Americans in this murderous abuse of the smallpox infected “Negroes” wandering the woods near Yorktown:

Here I must take notice of some vilany. Within these days past, I have marched by 18 or 20 Negroes that lay dead by the way-side, putrifying with the small pox. How such a thing came about, appears to be thus: The Negroes here being much disaffected (arising from their harsh treatment), flock’d in great numbers to Cornwallis, as soon as he came into these parts. This artful general takes a number of them, (several hundreds) inoculates them, & just as they all are growing sick, he sends them out into the country where our troops had to pass & repass. These poor creatures, having no care taken of them, many crawl’d into the bushes about & died, where they lie infecting the air around with intolerable stench & great danger. This is a piece of Cornwallisean cruelty.

These examples are not to imply there was no racism in Revolutionary times. Atkins equated blacks with animals in referring to them as “creatures” who “flock’d” in great numbers, and “crawl’d into the bushes about & died.”

That blacks were regarded as possessions more than human beings is reflected in New Jersey militiaman Thomas Brown’s list of things that Tory marauders robbed from patriot homesteaders, a list which included “Negroes” among the “silver plate, money, clothing, and other articles.”

Martin, like Josiah Atkins, used words such as “herds” and “creatures” to describe Africans as if they were livestock. At one point Martin even owned a slave, or a piece of one, offhandedly relating how he bought a small share in a slave that he later cashed in for a quart of rum. More often than not, however, Martin portrayed blacks as comic figures, seemingly evoking a minstrel comedy more than a historical recollection. Even while he was refraining from debating politics with “poor Cuff” he was bargaining with a
“negress.” “She was as great a doctress as Cuff was a politician, and she wished to be a surgeon.” He traded her a discarded basting syringe for some of her pies, riffing on her curative powers over the “sick men of my ward” (their illness being hunger) in serving them dinner. A simple “boy” of a house “very innocently” tipped Martin off as to the whereabouts of a hideout containing the Tory marauders, for which Martin’s unit was hunting. An old black man comically “diverted” Martin who watched him sliding and falling every few feet in the snow. A five-year-old negro servant standing in attendance by the fire of a homestead was made a figure of fun when one of Martin’s comrades remarked that he thought the lad had been white before the cinders burned him black.

Martin was not the only aged revolutionary who accentuated black incompetence in their recollections. Tories and British using “Old Cuff” to guard prisoners were often disappointed with the result, according to accounts of American veterans who had been prisoners of war. Southern soldier William Gipson related how he and his comrades escaped a British prison ship by tricking a slave into helping them by promising the black man his freedom and then reneging on it. Patriot seaman Christopher Hawkins recalled how he took advantage of being guarded by a “mulatto sentinel” whose flirtation with a “black paramour” kitchen servant distracted him while Hawkins tip-toed to freedom in his stocking feet. Virginia militiaman John Claspy in a deposition for a veteran’s pension related how he was taken prisoner and lodged on the second floor of a Tory house where a Negro man was designated to guard him. Claspy succeeded in bribing the malleable Negro to assist him in his escape through the window using a bed cord to climb down from it. He directed the Negro, for his own exculpation, to “rouse the family
after… [he] escaped, and when he got one or two hundred yards from the house, he had the tremendous pleasure of hearing the noise and bustle which his escape occasioned.”

However much later raconteurs exaggerated black incompetence or duplicity, many during the Revolution regarded the race with mistrust. One exasperated British officer observed that “Negroes who flock to the conquerors… do ten thousand times more mischief than the whole army put together.”

Fighting in General John Sullivan’s expedition against Tories and Indians in the summer of 1779, Major John Burrows related the story of a cowardly and untrustworthy “negro” at the battle of Newtown: “General Hand sent a negro to Head-quarters. Some of his men took him running off… he was separated from his company and almost scared to death.” Many officers gave an account of this “negro,” but in the journal of one less literate soldier, Sergeant Thomas Roberts, the black was referred to as a “Negar”. Perceived black duplicity was suggested by alliances between slaves and Indians who sided with the British during the conflict.

Samuel Riggs on an expedition against British-backed Indians in North Carolina related how one of his commanders was killed in an ambush near an Indian “town” where “several Negroes” were living among the enemy. Throughout the war and indeed throughout the history of American slavery, the dread of slave insurrections poisoned trust in blacks by whites. Janet Schaw, a Scottish traveler to Wilmington, Delaware, observed that patriots believed King George III was “Ordering the tories to murder the whigs and promising every Negro that would murder his Master and family that he should have his Master’s plantation… Every man is in arms and the patroles going thro’ all the town, and searching every Negro’s house, to see they are all at home by nine at night.”
Nowhere was the white distrust of persons of color more evident than in the ironic case of Jehu Grant, a slave who escaped his Tory master after being inspired by the Revolution. “Songs of liberty saluted my ear, thrilled through my heart,” he testified at his veteran’s pension hearing in 1830. “I saw liberty poles and the people all engaged for the support of freedom.” Grant joined a Connecticut militia group to fight as a soldier but was made a teamster and waiter instead, at which he served for ten months until his master reclaimed him. Grant’s pension was denied twice because he was a fugitive slave. Clearly this infraction transcended his contribution to the cause and the political leanings of his master.\textsuperscript{69}

Joyce Appleby has noted that a growing concern of white America in the eighteen hundreds was fear of \textit{mongrelization}. Multi-racial characters were often portrayed as tragic figures in the literature of the time. The climax of James Fenimore Cooper’s \textit{The Last of the Mohicans} has Cora, a white carrier of “negro” blood, plunge over a cliff with Magua, a discredited Huron chief, for instance.\textsuperscript{70} The fear of blacks accosting white women survived the Civil War and expanded into American-settled territories, notes Kevin Adams.\textsuperscript{71} Miscegenation, if often clandestine, was not uncommon in the early republic.\textsuperscript{72} Yet, Martin’s astonishment and disgust were genuine when in Pennsylvania he encountered a white woman married to a black man:

I went to a house, near by, where I was informed they sold liquors; when I entered the house, I saw a young woman in decent morning dishabille; I asked her if I could have any liquor there; she told me that her husband had just stepped out and would be in directly, and very politely desired me to be seated. I had sat but a minute or two when there came in from the back yard, a great potbellied negro man, rigged off in his superfine broadcloth, ruffled shirt, bow-shin and flat foot, and as black and shining as a junk bottle. “My dear,” said the lady, “this soldier wishes for a quart of rum.” I was thunderstruck; had not the man taken my canteen from me and measured me the liquor, I should certainly have forgotten
my errand. I took my canteen hastened off as fast as possible, being fearful that I might hear or see more of their “dearing,” for had I, I am sure it would have given me the ague. However agreeable such “twain’s becoming one flesh,” was in that part of the Union, I was not acquainted with it in that in which I resided.

To be fair, blacks were not the only group Martin disparaged. From time to time he had an unkind word to say about people who were not of his beloved white New England set, especially the “foreigners” he encountered among the Pennsylvanians and other “southern” militia that fought by his side. His view of “middle states” militia was lower still: “of all specimens of human beings, this group capped the whole; a caravan of wild beasts could bear no comparison with it.” He was especially critical of the Irish who he depicted as hot-headed drunken brawlers given to gouging out each other’s eyes.\(^73\)

To co-opt Voltaire’s famous dictum about God, given the early American experience, if there was no racism we would have to invent it. America’s persistent shortage of labor combined with the unbridled ambition of its newest inhabitants made slavery an economic solution few were willing to ignore. What is tantalizing, however, is the fact that initially skin color among those laboring in slavery and servitude was ignored.

The first indentured servants in America were white. Historian Abbott Emerson Smith estimated that between one third and one half of European immigrants to America from the year of the Mayflower Compact to that of the Declaration of Independence came “under indenture.”\(^74\) Servitude regardless of race at least initially appeared to put America on a very different trajectory. James Horn and Philip D. Morgan argue that initially black slaves were more trustworthy and had more status with their masters than white indentured servants. Africans, furthermore, were sometimes used in defense of colonies.
more than white servants: “…because most slaves were the victims of warfare, they probably represented a fairly broad cross-section of their societies. Probably more blacks than whites had a military background, for many captives were soldiers and their auxiliaries; and early settlers in the New World sometimes made use of African slaves for their military prowess.”

Slavery was color blind in the most influential work of fiction in the Anglo-Atlantic world: Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe was a slave holder to be sure. He made profits on slave labor and in fact, it was while on a slaving expedition to Africa that he was shipwrecked. But Crusoe enslaved anybody he felt to be his inferior intellectually and morally, regardless of race. Incidental to Crusoe’s black servant Friday (who Crusoe also had no qualms about arming against his enemies), other seamen—white men—were beholden to him for their rescue from starvation and cannibals, and therefore worked side by side with Friday serving Crusoe as their master. Friday, regardless of his blackness, demonstrated a competence second only to his master’s and more than any other character, white or black, in the story. In the penultimate chapter Friday showed superior skill (as Crusoe remarked) to a European by first rescuing a man from an attacking wolf, and then subduing a bear completely through cunning. Friday also found logical fault with Crusoe’s theological discourses, which Crusoe acknowledged, even if his Christian beliefs remained strong. It was in exchange for Crusoe saving his life from his enemies that Friday followed him as servant, not because of Crusoe’s complexion. If *Robinson Crusoe* reinforced anything, it was the right of the competent, intelligent and industrious to colonize those less competent, for Crusoe single-handedly cultivated a deserted island for his own benefit through personal ingenuity and hard work. While
Defoe clearly believed there were some persons superior to others, skin color was not his yardstick. In *The Family Instructor* (1715), which predated *Robinson Crusoe* by four years, Defoe exhibited his liberal, if scientifically suspect, view of race in a discourse between a father and son. The son asked why some people were black and whether a black person had a soul. The father replied: “Yes, certainly child, for we all come from one original, old Adam… we have natural reasons for it child, such as the violent heat of the climate… If a white man and woman were to go thither, and live by themselves, without mingling with the rest of the natives, yet in time their posterity would be black.”

Some of Defoe’s contemporaries seemed to exhibit race neutrality. As Edmund Morgan writes about seventeenth-century Virginia:

there is more than a little evidence that Virginians during these years were ready to think of Negroes as members or potential members of the community on the same terms as other men and to demand of them the same standards of behavior. Black men and white serving the same master worked, ate, and slept together, and together shared in escapades, escapes, and punishments… There are several cases where masters set up conditions in their wills whereby Negro slaves would become free or could purchase their freedom. And the terms indicate an expectation that they would become regular members of the free community… The success of these early efforts at integration [meant that many blacks]…had learned not only the merits of industry and thrift but also the truculent attitude to authority which so many Englishmen carried wherever they went…

There seems a consensus among scholars that “race” is a social and cultural construct that the Europeans invented in labor-poor but opportunity-rich America. Audrey Smedley writes that race was used as “a new mode of structuring inequality” by the eighteenth century, grounded in the physical differences of populations interacting with one another in the New World, but whose real meaning rested in social and political realities. The term *race* had been used to refer to humans occasionally since the sixteenth century in the English language but was rarely used to refer to populations in the slave
trade. It was a mere classificatory term like *kind*, *type*, or even *breed* or *stock*, and it had no clear meaning until the eighteenth century.\(^8^0\)

Europeans imagined moral inequality in black-skinned persons as well. As the “blackamoor” Aaron in Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* said in contemplation of his own villainy: “Let fools do good, and fair men call for grace, Aaron will have his soul black as his face.”\(^8^1\) Given imperatives generated by the economic conflicts inherent in the settlement of the Americas, the application of darkness and lightness of skin color to achieve an edge among Europeans was a logical, if superficially artificial method of maintaining hegemony, rationalized even further by enforcing an “un-Christian” status on non-whites: “…we could not make a Christian a slave… [nor] a Slave a Christian…, [for] being once a Christian, he could no more account him a Slave, and so lose the hold they had of them as Slaves by making them Christians” declared one colonial plantation owner in refusing to convert blacks.\(^8^2\) Europeans also dehumanized Native Americans along racial lines. European intransigence, Virginia DeJohn Anderson argues, created conflicts such as the 1674-75 King Philip’s War in New England, which started when cultural differences in regard to livestock collided.\(^8^3\)

Several historians see links between economics and racism forged in colonial early America. Walter Hixson points up the economic foundations for European imperial racism: “Euro-Americans thus constructed an identity in the context of accessing land and wealth through violent subjugation of darker people.”\(^8^4\) Historian Theodore Allen argues that racism as an epistemological construction for economic agency was invented in America, and from there it spread across the European-colonized world. It was fabricated and legislated, Allen believes, by Europeans who were driven by profits but perpetuated
with the complicity of low class whites who saw the race distinction as a means to break free from indentured servitude and inferior status, but it did not happen immediately. Many historians find a flashpoint for American imperial racism in Bacon’s Rebellion of 1676, but point up different aspects. Walter Hixson sees class conflict driven by economic imperatives as one of the causes. Disempowered whites, Hixson argues, worked largely in defiance of their own government to wrest lands away from the Indians during Bacon’s rebellion to realize “upward mobility.” Audrey Smedley argues that racial stratification came into its own because of the government’s reaction to the revolt of servants and poor freedmen during Bacon’s Rebellion. The Virginia colonial government’s steps to defuse the rebellion by driving a wedge between those in revolt according to place of origin, favored the white underclass over the black, thus uniting racism with government policy. In 1705, there was a revision of Virginia laws in which an “Act concerning Servants and Slaves” fabricated a racial distinction where none had formally existed before, Allen writes.

Racial distinctions notwithstanding, white hegemony over persons of color had its limits. Richard White believes a middle ground existed on the frontier where Native Americans and whites negotiated power. Several historians have observed that the degree to which African slaves had agency in the Anglo-Atlantic world was driven by economic and geographical factors. Agency of African Americans varied according to circumstances and location, from the southern colonies, to the Chesapeake, and to New England where slavery was less profitable and therefore less prevalent. Jennifer Anderson, for instance, has shown how slaves who were used as “mahogany huntsmen” by British traders and “equipped with valuable natural knowledge, gained some measure
of negotiating power within their own lives.”\textsuperscript{90} Michael J. Jarvis, as discussed in Chapter Two, has shown how slaves working side by side with their masters in the Bermuda seafaring trade were routinely elevated to skilled labor status and even commanded wages, so much so that black slaves serving on Bermuda ships resisted liberation when it was offered to them.\textsuperscript{91} In America proper Philip Morgan has shown how slaves on rice plantations in South Carolina benefited from the “task system” which gave them more control over their own lives compared to slaves in other areas because conditions encouraged landlord and overseer absenteeism.\textsuperscript{92}

Attempts to show their incompetence notwithstanding, slaves and free blacks as skilled laborers and artisans of quality abounded, even on plantations.\textsuperscript{93} Africans in America were employed as “craftspersons, mechanics, gardeners, blacksmiths, carpenters, millers, seamstresses, or general workers.”\textsuperscript{94} The very same scarcity of labor in America that supported the entrenchment of slavery also brought about slave ability to compete with whites for jobs, as Marcus Jernegan points out:

This scarcity of artisans made it almost necessary that the planter should put forth every effort to purchase or train slaves who had skill in handicraft, particularly as he produced staple crops on a large scale, diversified his agriculture, or began to make use of the resources of his land… If at the same time there was a shortage of manufactured goods from abroad, or the price was excessively high, or the planter had no funds for their purchase, or was in debt, these were additional and pressing reasons for the use of slaves in plantation manufactures.\textsuperscript{95}

Some slaves held positions of responsibility such as managers and overseers. As one Josiah Henson (reputedly the model for Stowe’s Uncle Tom in her 1852 novel \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}) recalled: “My situation as overseer I retained, together with the special favor of my master who was not displeased either with saving the expense of a large salary for a white superintendent, or with the superior crops I was able to raise for him.”
Thomas Jefferson evidently made use of the managerial skills of a slave named Jim as an overseer on his plantation. Other plantation owners dispensed with white overseers altogether, getting along quite well merely with a black foreman instead.\(^9^6\)

Joseph Plumb Martin’s narrative gave the impression that blacks were on the periphery of life in America during and after the Revolution: once again a distortion of the record. Blacks rose to prominence in many ways during and after the Revolution. The slave poet Phillis Wheatley, “Afric’s muse,” as she styled herself, was admired by George Washington who stated that she had “great poetical genius.” Black puritan theologian Jupiter Hammon found a wide and respectful audience for his pamphlets. Prince Hall was a prominent black citizen of Boston, and the head of a black Freemason lodge. Olaudah Equiano was an articulate and influential voice for abolition. New Hampshire freeman Wentworth Cheswill served “three times as selectman, four times as assessor; on various other occasions he was moderator, auditor, and coroner. In 1806 he [Cheswill] was the overwhelming choice of the town for state senator… he became a prosperous builder and landowner…” While Jehu Grant was relegated to more servile duties, other blacks fought on the side of the rebels with the same status as whites during the war. Obviously, there was the famous Crispus Attucks, first American casualty, at the Boston Massacre, but he was certainly not alone. Three all black units served in the war and one especially, as part of Colonel Christopher Greene’s First Rhode Island Regiment “distinguished itself for efficiency and gallantry throughout the war.”\(^9^7\) One Jacob Francis wrote an articulate account of his war experiences as a soldier in Massachusetts and New Jersey militias in 1776 and 1777 and achieved an 1836 pension on account of it.\(^9^8\) A black man evidently saved the life of one of George Washington’s relatives at the battle of Cowpens.\(^9^9\) Prince
Easterbrooks, a free black on the rebel side was one of the first patriots wounded at Lexington and Concord. Lemuel Haynes, a literate black farmer, also fought on the rebel side at Lexington and Concord as well as at Bunker Hill before being discharged from the army with typhus. Slaves also participated on the patriot side in many major battles: Prince Whipple helped row Washington across the Delaware before the battle of Trenton; Peter Salem reputedly was responsible for killing British Major John Pitcairn at Lexington and Concord; Salem Poor fought by his master’s side at Bunker Hill, was with Washington at White Plains and Valley Forge, and was admired for his effort in the war so highly that fourteen Massachusetts officers petitioned for his freedom.\textsuperscript{100}

If Martin gave the impression that black participation in the Revolution was peripheral to whites and even antagonistic to the cause of the nation, he marginalized Native Americans even more. “Indians” only appeared a few times in the narrative, most notably as scouts in the campaign of 1778, who joined the whites in a camp amusement of killing bats. Martin’s view of them was faintly favorable: “The Indians were stout looking fellows, and remarkably neat for that race of morals (but they were Indians).”\textsuperscript{101} Martin clearly had deep contempt for Indians, who he described as “wild beasts,” though in another backhanded compliment, he had “as lief have been incorporated with a tribe of western Indians as with any southern troops.”\textsuperscript{102} He perpetuated a common stereotype of the time that Indians were incapable of feeding themselves. He declared himself “as hungry as an Indian” and mentioned that to eat “Indian stile” was to roast meat on a stick so that it was as “black as coal on the outside, and as raw on the inside as if it had not been near the fire.”\textsuperscript{103}
From the first encounter with aboriginal Americans, many European thinkers regarded the Native Americans as primitive, representing, as John Locke put it, how all persons must have lived “in the beginning” and as Adam Smith observed, in “the lowest and rudest state of society.”

The Declaration of Independence referred to “merciless Indian savages” and Thomas Paine dismissed Indian lands in America as “unoccupied.” Racial branding of “red” peoples and “white” peoples was done with Native American complicity, argues Nancy Shoemaker, but the whites ultimately transformed “Red Man” into a derogatory term. As the early republic moved westward, however, perceived Indian incompetence in feeding themselves became a justification for “civilizing” them by imposing white ways on their culture. In 1804 Baltimore Quaker Gerard T. Hopkins and associates on encountering Little Turtle and his Miami tribe at then-western territory outpost Fort Wayne, advised their “Red brethren” that if they would adapt the white “mode of living” they would be better off; the Quakers were “affected with sorrow in believing that Many of the red people suffer much for the want of food, and for the want of Clothing.”

Often, Gordon Wood relates, white denial that Indians did not cultivate the land or the belief that Indians enslaved their womenfolk to do it for them, justified white take over of Indian lands. White imperialists drew from the work of such theorists as the eighteenth-century philosopher Emmerich de Vattel, who maintained that no people had the right to land which they did not farm. By the time of Jackson, Native Americans had been reduced to the President’s “red children,” and his removal of them from their lands was a blow for white superiority, states’ rights and frontier values, according to historian Harry L. Watson. Martin, therefore, it can be
argued, in marginalizing and denigrating Native Americans in his narrative reflected the
Jacksonian equation of American nationalism with white racial self-determination.

Racism in America was certainly not confined to slave owners. The southern
slave-owning concern certainly drove America into the Civil War yet those who did not
own slaves were the vast majority of persons fighting to preserve the “peculiar
institution.” Ordinary soldiers and working men who one would think had more in
common with slaves than with their masters, clearly preferred a world where slavery and
black subservience remained the *status quo*. Political groups and parties espousing racial
separation and removal of black suffrage and agency attracted working-class whites in
overwhelming numbers. Labor groups like the Workingmen’s Party of the early
nineteenth century agitated against the rich and against ethnic groups and races equally.
More than a hundred years later, Neo-Nazi anti-capitalists such as Tom Metzger “wanted
to create a revolutionary white working-class movement that would overthrow the Jew-
dominated white-forsaking, black-embracing system” that “seeks the establishment of a
global factory unhindered by racial and national boundaries.”

In between, at the end of the nineteenth century the groundswell of support for the populist agenda of William
Jennings Bryan came from white southerners and westerners who were resolutely racist
and many of these populist leaders were some of the most virulent voices against the
Civil Rights movement a half century later. Socialist progressives were often violently
racist and segregationist. One, Kate O’Hare, editor of the Socialist journal *Appeal*, was
horrified by how race-blind capitalism was, writing in 1913:

> Where is the Jim Crow law for the factory, workshop, mines or cotton field? A
> negro can’t ride in a white street car in Memphis, but I saw a hundred men
digging in a sewer ditch. Half of them were blacks and half white Democrats;
there was no Jim Crow law there… When the water boy came along with the water pail and one dipper, a ‘nigger’ took a drink and then a white man… and not a politician shouted ‘nigger equality.’ In the laundries of that aristocratic southern city the daughters of white Democrats work side by side with big, black negro men; in the cotton mills, the white children compete with negro children. In the cotton fields the white daughters of white voters drag the cotton sack down the cotton row next to ‘nigger bucks.’

It is not the scope of this study to go into the causes of the resurgence of racism at the start of the twentieth century but it is worth noting that it coincided with a growing political voice and economic agency among African Americans. Scientific “proof” of racial superiority made its appearance in the early 1900s, as did the re-writing of the Civil War in context of states’ rights instead of slavery. More Confederate war monuments were erected in the early twentieth century than ever before, and there was an unprecedented rise in the establishment and participation of white superiority-based organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan (it had a labor arm, by the way,- the “Clan of Toil”). *Plessy v. Ferguson*, Jim Crow laws, an increase in lynching, all these emerged at the same time that Theodore Roosevelt was consulting Booker T. Washington on appointments to the judiciary and the legislature; the NAACP and other black organizations were forming and showing their muscle; and institutions for education of African Americans were emerging all over the country.\(^{111}\) It is interesting to note how interpretation of the American Civil War has evolved in the American imagination, particularly with regard to race. Arguably the most influential Civil War novel, Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone With the Wind* (1936), made the case that slavery was preferable to the climate of racism that followed its demise. Tellingly, the most racist character in Mitchell’s novel is a white woman from Maine, presumably the wife of a “carpetbagger”
in Atlanta, who declares she would not trust a “nigger” to watch her children or even have one in her house and even describes one black servant as a “toad” and a “spoiled pet.”

A climate hostile to emancipation and the rights of blacks emerged in the decades after the Revolution. The overthrow of British rule and its accompanying rhetoric on freedom eliminated governmental constraints on American trade and industry, "... which we had been fighting, bleeding, and all most dying for- for the Space of 8 long years in the Army of the United States," wrote Jeremiah Greenman in his diary, "in order for to trade and try for a livelyhood." The new environment of every man for himself meant that in the heat of competition white agency had to be realized at all costs. Black agency suffered as a result. Competency as the basis of the new "scientific" American meritocracy that rewarded power through economic gain found myths such as racial superiority as its bedfellow. As Gordon Wood notes:

Suddenly the country became obsessed with racial distinctions and the problem of freed blacks. Even in the North the liberal atmosphere of the immediate post-Revolutionary years evaporated, and whites began to react against the increasing numbers of freed blacks... Whites in the North began copying the South in separating the races in ways they had not done earlier. Free blacks were confined to distinct neighborhoods and to separate sections of theaters, circuses, churches, and other places. Most Americans, both Northerners and Southerners, were coming to think of the United States as "a white man's country."

The belief that blacks were unable to grasp the same intellectual concepts as whites may have been stronger in the 1800s than in the 1700s. In the 1760s Benjamin Franklin visited The Negro School in Philadelphia accompanied by the "Reverend Mr. Sturgeon, and had the children thoroughly examin’d":

They appear’d all to have made considerably progress in reading for the time they had respectively been in the school, and most of them answer’d readily and well the questions of the Catechism; they behav’d very orderly, showed a proper respect and ready obedience to the mistress, and seem’d very attentive to and a
good deal affected by, a serious exhortation with which Mr. Sturgeon concluded our visit. I was on the whole much pleas'd, and from what I then saw, have conceiv'd a higher opinion of the natural capacities of the black race, than I had ever before entertained. Their apprehension seems as quick, their memory as strong, and their docility in every respect equal to that of white children.\textsuperscript{115}

If the American Revolution opened up possibilities for furthering the condition of mankind, the turbulent years following the Revolution closed them. From the early 1800s on persons of color receded as participants in the fight for freedom against Britain in popular historical and fictional accounts of the Revolution. Novels set in the time of the Revolution such those by Howard Fast, Esther Forbes, Kenneth Roberts and John Jakes include few African Americans or Native Americans, except as peripheral or antagonistic characters. Few blacks or Native Americans appear in movies such as Disney’s “Johnny Tremain” which came out not long before Martin’s memoirs were rediscovered and republished in 1962, or even more recent films like Al Pacino’s “Revolution” of the 1980’s or Mel Gibson’s “The Patriot” of the 1990’s and their presence at Colonial Williamsburg and Plymouth Plantation have been recent developments. They are still largely absent from the colonial American section of The Magic Kingdom in Disney World in Orlando, Florida, based upon my own inspection in 2009.

There has been much debate about the radical nature of the American Revolution in terms of racial equality. Some historians such as Gordon Wood have argued that even for African Americans the Revolution started a drive for individual liberty that ultimately extended to them. Douglas Egerton disagrees, believing “white revolutionaries utterly failed” African Americans, that in fact the Revolution accentuated white supremacy.\textsuperscript{116} It may be possible that both views were right, that the Revolution did create an inspiration for black emancipation but the record was distorted in the world of Jacksonian America.
when American literary maturity coincided with a newly invigorated American racism based upon economic pressures, westward expansion, and the fractious political realities concerning slavery to create an articulate but distorted view of the American Revolution.

Martin’s narrative is a rich source for the Revolution but a richer source to trace the distortion of its history in the American Imagination.


6 Quoted in Roediger, How Race Survived U.S. History, 40.


13 Quoted in Commager, Spirit of Seventy-six, 405.


Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass as American Slave, Written by Himself* (1845), rpt. (New York: Dell, 1997), 91-92.


Furstenberg, *Name of the Father*, 17.


University Press, 2009), 336-337.


43 Joseph Plumb Martin; *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier* (1830), rpt. (New York: Signet, 2001), 49-50.

44 The *Oxford English Dictionary* has found an American citation from 1713 in a diary by one “S. Sewall” referring to a black servant as “cuffee.” There were British references as early as 1616 and 1700 for “cuff” as a derogatory term for an old man. “Cuff” is perhaps an Anglicization of the Arabic “kafir” which in Islam meant a non-believer but was used by the English to denote any person of color though the *OED*’s earliest citation of this is 1792. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 4, 111, 112.


46 Sidney Kaplan shows that there was at least one other instance of a “Cuff” among the crew of a rebel war ship, that of the *Patriot* out of Virginia. Sidney Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the Revolution* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 44, 60.


49 Burnard, “Slave Naming Patterns,” 334, 335.

50 Martin, *Narrative*, 177.


52 Samuel Low, *The Politician Outwitted*, 1788, Act V, Sc. 1, Act V, Sc. 4. Dim-witted black servants mangling the English language predate this play. Robert Mumford’s *The Candidates* (1770) has a black servant named Ralpho using malapropisms (before Sheridan coined the term!) to comic effect. In a play

53 Quoted in Kaplan, The Black Presence, 58.


60 Atkins, Journal, 32-33, 208.

61 Dann, Revolution Remembered, 142-143.

62 Marin, Narrative, 208.

63 Dann, Revolution Remembered, 143, 50, 120-121, 134, 99-100, 190.


65 Dann, Revolution Remembered, 367.


68 Dann, Revolution Remembered, 309.


73 Martin, *Narrative*, 211, 106, 117, 170, 125-126. James Kirby Martin’s edition of Martin’s memoir includes this incident and Martin’s thoughts, but leaves out his description of the “negro man” being “as black and shining as a junk bottle.” Kirby Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 144.


78 Quoted in West, *Defoe*, 228.


87 Smedley, “‘Race’ and Construction of Human Identity,” 694.


94 Parish, *Slavery, etc.*, 31.


97 Kaplan, *Black Presence*, 184, 200, 202, 230, 201, 64.


104 Quoted in Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 42.


Quoted in Morrison, *Race and the Early Republic*, 27.


Wood, *Empire etc.*, 541-542.


CHAPTER V

“SMALL CAUSES” AND “GREAT EFFECTS”: SCIENCE, MEDICINE AND THE
CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE IN AN EMPIRIC EMPIRE OF LIBERTY

One night in 1778, as Joseph Plumb Martin later recalled in his narrative, he was on sentry duty when he and his comrades saw “for several hours… a jack-o-lantern cruising in the eddying air:” a strange ball of light floating over a swamp. “The poor thing seemed to wish to get out of the meadow, but could not, the air circulating within the enclosure of trees would not permit it. Several of the guard endeavoured to catch it but did not succeed.” Martin had seen “jack-o-lanterns” before in his youth; now, he theorized the cause of the phenomenon. Notwithstanding his playful personification of the ball as a “jack-o-lantern,” a term of superstition referring to some haunted spirit or demon, associated in our own time with Halloween carved pumpkins rather than with supernatural forces, Martin speculated that this “jack-o-lantern,” also called a “will-o-the-wisp” and “ignis fatuus” (fool’s fire) was probably “a species of glow-worm in their butterfly state.” In a rare footnote Martin then defended his theory as well as his right to weigh in on the scientific discussion: “Professor Silliman has said, on the authority of a certain Dr. Somebody, that jack-o-lanterns never move. With due submission to such
high authority, I would crave their pardon for telling them that they labour under a mistake. I have seen many of these exhalations, two of which I am satisfied beyond a doubt were moving when I saw them.”

The idea that experience and observation trumped academic training was a piece of the American imagination in 1830. The populist spirit of the Jacksonian era brought with it a distrust of authority that extended to the academic as well as to the political establishment and, when combined with a sense of the empowerment of ordinary citizens to control their own destiny, created an environment that frustrated persons in higher education. So great was the do-it-yourself mentality of the time that Charles Nisbet, of Dickinson College in Pennsylvania, complained that he soon expected to see books such as “Every Man his own Lawyer,” “Every Man his own Physician” and “Every Man his own Clergyman and Confessor.” In fact, *Every Man His Own Lawyer* (1744) by Giles Jacob, and *Every Man His Own Physician* (1766) by John Theobald were still in print and widely available, while influential clergy of the Second Great Awakening, such as William Miller, dispensed with divinity school, educating themselves to become ministers and leaders of their own sects. But self-education did not necessarily involve books. “I never read a book in my life,” declared James Fenimore Cooper’s immensely popular woodsman, Natty Bumppo, in *The Pioneers* (1823), “…and none know how often the hand of God is seen in a wilderness but them that rove it for a man’s life.” In the even more popular *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), Cooper/Bumppo’s distrust of higher learning was palpable: “I have heard it said that there are men who read in books to
convince themselves there is a God. I know not but man may so deform his works in the settlements, as to leave that which is so clear in the wilderness a matter of doubt among traders and priests.”

Bumppo had real life counterparts, and not just low-born backwoodsmen turned politicians, such as Andrew Jackson, David Crockett and William Carroll. Unschooled and successful inventors and innovators, like Oliver Evans, known for his improvements to the steam engine and the development of the first automated grist mill, and Thomas Blanchard, developer of the first assembly line and innovator of manufactured interchangeable machinery parts for easy replacement in factory equipment, helped to drive the American industrial revolution. Oliver Evans tweaked his nose at academia on more than one occasion, refuting theories “published by philosophers and received and taught as true, for many centuries past.” Martin’s adversary in the “jack-o-lantern” debate was probably Yale Chemistry Professor Benjamin Silliman who founded America’s first influential scientific periodical, the American Journal of Science in which, one year before Martin published his narrative, an article appeared entitled “Observations on Ignis Fatuus” by Reverend John Mitchell, “Dr. Somebody” in Martin’s parlance. Mitchell argued that the “locomotive power” of jack-o-lanterns was an optical illusion. “Ignis fatuus” merely fluctuated in size based upon the “quantity of flame” produced by marsh gases:

As the light dwindles away it will seem to move from you, and with a velocity proportional to the rapidity of its diminution. Again, as it grows larger, it will appear to approach you. If it expires, by several flickerings or flashes, it will seem to skip from you, and when it reappears you will easily imagine it has assumed a new position. This reasoning accounts for their apparent motion either to or from the spectator; and I never could ascertain that they moved in any other direction, that is, in a line oblique or perpendicular to that in which they first appeared. In
one instance, indeed, I thought this was the fact, and what struck me as more singular, the light appeared to move, with great rapidity, against a very strong wind. But after looking some time I reflected that I had not changed the direction of my eye at all, whereas if the apparent motion had been real I ought to have turned half round. The deception was occasioned by the motion of the wind itself— as a stake standing in a rapid stream will appear to move against the current.⁶

Martin disagreed:

I have seen many of these exhalations, two of which I am satisfied beyond a doubt were moving when I saw them, the one mentioned in the text and the other when I was a younger… I saw one of these meteors, if they may be so called, coming down the low ground before the wind, which was quick, it crossed the road within ten feet of me and passed on till it was lost in the distance… I could see with my natural eyes as well as a philosopher could with his.⁷

Martin’s fierce defense of his “own eyes” over the theories of experts probably reflected more than a penchant for scientific sparring. Mitchell probably reflected the snobbery of the formally educated when he dismissed many observations of those presumably of Martin’s class as “the offspring of imaginations tinctured with superstition, and of minds credulous from a natural love of the marvelous.” Certainly Martin felt the need to accentuate his non-superstitious credentials on more than one occasion in his narrative. Once he recalled being among a company of soldiers expecting a British attack when “there happened very remarkable northern lights. At one time the whole visible heavens appeared, for some time, as if covered with crimson velvet. Some of the soldiers prognosticated a bloody battle about to be fought, but time, which always speaks the truth, proved them to be false prophets.” At another time Martin recalled: “The day we were drafted the sun was eclipsed; had this happened upon such an occasion in ‘olden time,’ it would have been considered ominous either of good or bad fortune, but we took no notice of it.”
This is not to say that Martin’s conclusions were necessarily scientifically based, even if they relied on observation and logic. Shortly after the start of 1782 Joseph Plumb Martin came down with yellow fever. He recalled: “I bled violently at the nose, and was so reduced in flesh and strength in a few days, that I was helpless as an infant.” Lying with others in a ward at a hospital he attributed his survival and recovery at least partially to mathematical happenstance:

Four men died in the room into which I was removed after I was carried there… The first man that died… was the first in order from entering the door of the room, on the side I lay; next, the fourth man from him died, there was then four men between this last that died and me. In my weakness I felt prepossessed with a notion, that every fourth man would die, and that, consequently, I should escape, as I was the fifth from the one that died last; and just so it happened, the man next me on the side of those that had died, died next. I believe this circumstance contributed a great deal in retarding my recovery, until the death of this last man, and that after his death, when I thought myself exempted, it helped as much toward my recovery… small causes often have great effect upon the sick; I know it by too frequent experience.8

Martin’s narrative did indeed suggest “a natural love of the marvelous” at times. On the eve of the Battle of Kip’s Bay in 1776, Martin recalled witnessing one of his comrades shoot and kill a British soldier who was, in Martin’s estimation, more than half a mile away, 880 yards. Even a long musket in the hands of an expert marksman would have trouble hitting a target at one fifth that distance, much less have the velocity to kill a man past 300 yards.9 At the Battle of White Plains, Martin recalled: “One man who belonged to our company, when we marched from the parade, said, ‘Now I am going out to the field to be killed;’ and he said more than once afterwards, that he should be killed; and he was- he was shot dead on the field. I never saw a man so prepossessed with the idea of any mishap as he was.”10
To be fair, and no doubt to Charles Nesbit’s dismay, the do-it-yourself mentality, utilizing empiric observation and logic, had achieved some major successes in Joseph Plumb Martin’s lifetime, especially in the field of medicine. Many historians agree that the two most important medical discoveries of Martin’s lifetime were the widespread, government sponsored implementation of smallpox inoculation and later vaccination, and the discovery and commercial availability of cinchona bark, from which was extracted quinine, an effective treatment for malaria. In terms of saving lives, smallpox inoculation, later improved as vaccination, was perhaps the most important medical innovation in human history, until the discovery of antibiotics in the twentieth century. The medical establishment initially opposed smallpox “variolation” as it was also called, when it was first introduced to North America by the clergyman Cotton Mather in the early 1700s. When physicians were finally convinced of the efficacy of inoculation they frequently combined the procedure with costly and often harmful drugs and treatments that at best were ineffectual and at worst life threatening in and of themselves. The increasingly commercialized medical establishment also exploited cinchona bark as a cure-all, diluting its impact and clouding the medical lessons its existence made apparent: that specific disorders often needed specific treatments. In the end, distrust of academia stymied the advance of medical science, in the rough and tumble medical free-for-all that characterized the first decades of the early republic. 11

TAKING THE POX

It is symptomatic of Joseph Plumb Martin’s improvisational style of scientific inquiry that he failed to know a good thing when he saw it. In 1777 he was inoculated for
smallpox and portrayed the procedure in his narrative as little more than one of the worst crosses he had to bear for his country. It may be granted that he suffered in the short term but paradoxically, in this instance, putting himself in harm's way in service to his country may well have added years to his life. Martin lived to the year 1850, dying at nearly ninety years of age, astonishing in a time when life expectancy usually hovered around thirty-five, according to medical historian Carl Pfeiffer.\[12\]

The connection between inoculation and long life is anecdotal but quite a few Revolutionary War soldiers who were inoculated lived to a ripe old age. Massachusetts soldier Samuel Larrabee, born in 1753, was inoculated in 1776 and applied for a veteran's pension in 1837, lived into his 80s. Connecticut soldier Josiah Sabin, also inoculated in 1776, died at about 86 in 1833. Connecticut soldier Samuel Woodruff was inoculated in 1777 and lived to be near 90. Both Martin and Woodruff were born in 1760 and died in 1850.\[13\] Outside the military, many who were inoculated lived long lives. Inoculated decades before the Revolution, Benjamin Franklin lived to be active well into his 80s. John Adams, who was inoculated in 1764, died at 91.\[14\]

One is left to wonder at the coincidence, even allowing for other factors such as diet, genetics, lifestyle and environment. Following are the 1850 census figures for men over the age of 80 by state (total male population is rounded to the nearest 500):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Men 80-90 yrs.</th>
<th>Men 90-100 yrs.</th>
<th>Men 100+ yrs.</th>
<th>Total Male Pop.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MAINE</td>
<td>1683</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>298,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW HAMPSHIRE</td>
<td>1320</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>155,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERMONT</td>
<td>1226</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>158,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASSACHUSETTS</td>
<td>2335</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>458,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHODE ISLAND</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTICUT</td>
<td>1174</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>179,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW YORK</td>
<td>5709</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1,513,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Allowing for immigration, slipshod record keeping, and the fact that most men in America did not serve in the Continental Army, the U.S. Census statistics still seem to bear out that great longevity was enjoyed by many American males who came of age during the Revolution. In the decade Martin died at least 35,000 American males were over the age of 80, more than 3600 were over the age of 90, and 350 had reached 100 years or more. In Maine, the state where Martin lived most of his life, 1841 males were over the age of 80, including 149 over the age of 90 and 9 over 100. Twenty years before in the census of 1820 the U.S. government had not even bothered tracking persons of...
advanced age, merely listing those of Martin's generation among those over the age of 45. In the late 1830s, the years in which applications of veterans of the American Revolution were reviewed and pensions granted, Martin's generation was even more substantial: 47,207 American men were in their 70s, 21,677 were over 80, 2508 were over 90 and 476 were over the age of 100. Interestingly enough, women over the age of 100 in those years were fewer: 316. To be sure, only with an accurate census tied to governmental representation as dictated by the Constitution were demographic records kept in such detail. The first few attempts at a census in the young nation may not have been conducted as assiduously. Nevertheless, the fact of the longevity of many of Martin’s generation, especially of men who were in the military and were inoculated, gives one pause.

More work needs to be done in the area of demographics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Tommy Bengtsson and Cameron Campbell note that many infectious diseases including smallpox retreated as a primary cause of adult mortality in Europe by the late 1700s and therefore populations increased. But American population growth exploded, doubling every twenty years or so from the first U.S. census in 1790 on. Indeed between 1780 and 1790, when Martin and others of his generation were marrying and starting families, America witnessed the greatest demographic growth of any decade in its history. It is estimated that the United States’ population growth at the start of the nineteenth century outpaced that of most other countries in the world was and double the population growth of England, France and most other nations of Europe. Certainly increased immigration to America after the Revolution was a key factor in population growth. But longevity must have been a factor as well. Immigration to New England,
where Martin lived out the rest of his life, was less than to other parts of the country. Many people left New England for newly created states and territories in the west. Fertility rates in the early 1800s declined. Indian populations declined steeply from smallpox and other diseases brought by the Europeans. Yet there was still robust population growth in the northeast. European Americans were living longer than before and the men who came of age during the American Revolution were certainly a part of this demographic trend.\textsuperscript{19}

While it had been around for many decades, smallpox inoculation was made available to a large number of people for the first time during the War for Independence. The American Revolution occurred during a major smallpox epidemic, which, Elizabeth Fenn estimates, killed over 100,000 people. Smallpox felled many of the soldiers involved in the failed expedition against Quebec in 1775. In British-occupied Boston, under siege by the Americans in 1776, there were between ten and thirty funerals a day because of the disease. Coming from previously unexposed farms and villages, American soldiers were especially susceptible to smallpox and it was reported that as many as a quarter of the first recruits to the Continental Army may have been unfit for duty in 1776 largely because of the disease. Washington has received kudos from historians for instituting mandatory inoculation for his army in response to the epidemic: "When historians debate Washington's most consequential decisions as commander in chief," writes Joseph Ellis, "a compelling case can be made that his swift response to the smallpox epidemic and to a policy of inoculation, was the most important strategic decision of his military career."\textsuperscript{20} However, Fenn notes the British War Office had been inoculating its soldiers already, giving England a tactical epidemiological edge in the first
years of the war. Washington was not a complete visionary when it came to smallpox inoculation, nor was his decision to inoculate the troops especially swift, though when he did opt to adapt the procedure for the army his leadership was focused and effective.

Washington himself was immune to smallpox because he had contracted the disease as a youth on a trip to Bermuda. Initially the general seemed undecided as to the benefits of inoculation. He instituted inoculation for the troops besieging Boston in 1775. Yet some months afterward he countermanded the directive: "No person whatever, belonging to the Army, is to be inoculated for the Small Pox... Any disobedience to this order, will be most severely punished." A week later he accentuated his countermand in even harsher terms: "Any officer in the Continental Army, who should suffer himself to be inoculated, will be cashiered and turned out of the Army . . . as an enemy and traitor to his country." Surgeons who were complicit in inoculation, such as Dr. Azor Betts in May of 1776, were arrested, tried and jailed. Betts later defected to the British, where presumably a surgeon specializing in inoculation was welcomed. Ironically, at the exact same time that Betts was jailed for conducting inoculations, Washington’s wife Martha was inoculated in Philadelphia, with Washington’s blessing, as the general wrote to his brother John Augustine Washington on May 31, 1776: “Mrs. Washington is now under Innoculation in this City; & will, I expect, have the Small Pox favourably- this is the 13th day, and she has very few Pustules- She would have wrote to my Sister but thought it Prudent not to do so, notwithstanding there could be but little danger in conveying the Infection in the Manner.”
Martha’s example may have helped Washington change his mind yet again concerning inoculating the army. A Lieutenant Josiah Fuller, tried in a court martial of July 23, 1776 for “Inoculating, and disobedience of orders,” was “honourably acquitted and discharged from his arrest.” Many of Washington’s subordinates also appeared to favor inoculation and told him so. General Artemus Ward wrote to Washington from Boston on July 4, 1776: “so many of the soldiers got the disorder, that I apprehend the remainder of them must soon be inoculated.” Ward instituted the policy on his own initiative giving sound excuses as to why in a letter to Washington on July 15, 1776: “As the Small Pox prevailed so much in Boston the Legislature of this Government gave Permission for the Inhabitants to Inoculate, and as so many of the Troops in Town had taken the disorder I thought it might be most for the general good to Permit the [re]mainder of the two Regiments in Town to be inoculated.”23 Furthermore, many ordinary soldiers disobeyed Washington’s prohibition against inoculation anyway. Col. Seth Warner told his Green Mountain Boys: “I do not wish to Countermand the General Orders, but if you should take it [the smallpox] in the Thigh and Diet for it, it would be much better for you, and they will not find it out.”24

Whatever the final reasons, Washington countermanded the countermand, deciding its military advantages outweighed its disadvantage. From that point on, Washington was a vigorous and unwavering champion of inoculation. In a letter to Virginia Governor Patrick Henry from April 13, 1777 he wrote:

The apologies you offer for your deficiency of Troops, are not without some Weight; I am induced to believe, that the apprehensions of the Small Pox and its calamitous consequences have greatly retarded the Inlistments; but may not those objections be easily done away by introducing Innoculation into the State, or shall we adhere to a regulation preventing it, reprobated at this time, not only by the
Consent and usage of the greater part of the civilized World, but by our Interest and own experience of its utility? You will pardon my observations on the Smallpox, because I know it is more destructive to an Army in the Natural Way, than the Enemy’s Sword, and because I shudder, when ever I reflect upon the difficulties of keeping it out, and that, in the vicissitudes of War, the scene may be transferred to some Southern State.

On February 8, 1778, Washington wrote to General Thomas Nelson: “It is with pain and grief I find... that our Countrymen are still averse to Inoculation, especially when consequences so apparently ill, must result from it.” Once instituted, inoculation of American troops was an accepted practice throughout the war. By 1782 inoculation was standard procedure in both military and civilian circles.

Smallpox inoculation did have its risks. The procedure still took the lives of a fraction of those who undertook it and weakened many for weeks at a time after it. One of Washington's main concerns was that an inoculated army would be temporarily debilitated, giving the British an advantage to exploit if the information leaked out. The procedure had to be done with "as much secrecy as the nature of the Subject will admit of," he wrote. He appreciated that inoculation also posed risks to those without immunity who found themselves near the newly inoculated, so stringent quarantine regulations were instituted, as Martin’s account showed. Martin’s regiment was sequestered in the forest highlands of upstate New York and strictly forbidden to associate with anyone for weeks after inoculation. The newly inoculated were even forbidden to help fight a nearby fire even though their numbers may have prevented the extensive damage the fire caused.
Stories of smallpox used as a "biological weapon" by the British, most notably by Jeffery Amherst against Native Americans at the end of the French and Indian War, circulated at the time of the American Revolution. Contemporaries accused the British at Yorktown of deliberately inoculating slaves and sending them to circulate among Washington's army to infect it. While there is little evidence to substantiate this assertion, there certainly were British military strategists considering smallpox infection as a war tactic. Major Robert Donkin, a British officer writing in British-occupied New York in 1777, included a footnote involving smallpox use in war in a section on bows and arrows as part of his book entitled Military Collections and Remarks. It is unclear whether Donkin considered smallpox a deadly weapon or a scare tactic: “Dip arrows in matter of smallpox, and twang them at the American rebels, in order to inoculate them; This would sooner disband these stubborn, ignorant, enthusiastic savages, than any other compulsive measures. Such is their dread and fear of that disorder!” Like Franklin's lightning rod, inoculation did inspire fear in the pious and superstitious. As early as 1758 John Adams wrote: “This invention of Iron Points, to prevent the Danger of Thunder, has met with all that opposition from the superstitions, affectation of piety, and Jealousy of the new Inventions, that Inoculation to prevent the Danger of the Small Pox, and all other usefull [sic] Discoveries, have met with in all ages of the World.”

“Affectation of piety” notwithstanding, it was a religious leader, Angel of Bethesda author Cotton Mather, who pioneered the use of inoculation in America. His book The Wonders of the Invisible World (1693) argued that witchcraft was real but it also posited the existence of unseen forces that could enter and infect the body. In 1693, long before the discovery of microscopic pathogens unseen by the human eye, Mather
wrote: “An Army of Devils is horribly broke in... People there are fill'd with the doleful Shrieks of their Children and Servants, Tormented by Invisible Hands, with Tortures altogether preternatural... the terrible Plague, of Evil Angels, hath made its Progress... Neighbours... become Infected and Infested with these Daemons…” Mather believed these invisible forces produced smallpox:

The people thus afflicted are miserably scratched and bitten, so that the Marks are visible to all the World, but the causes utterly invisible; and the same Invisible Furies do most visibly stick Pins into the bodies of the afflicted, and scale them, and hideously distort and disjoint all their members, besides a thousand other sorts of Plagues beyond these of any natural diseases which they give unto them.”

Mather declared himself a believer in the benefits of inoculation and argued tirelessly for its implementation even as he strongly promoted preventive measures for the soul's salvation such as prayer and spiritual contemplation. The supposedly more scientifically minded James Franklin, older brother of Benjamin, argued against inoculation in his journal *The New England Courant*, because the "religious extremist" witch-hunting Mather was for it.

Mather’s views of inoculation were shaped by non-Christian sources. British aristocrat Lady Mary Wortley Montague observed smallpox inoculation on a trip to the Middle East in the late seventeenth century, and wrote about it in Royal Society journals to which Mather subscribed. Mather also heard about inoculation from one of his slaves who had undergone the procedure while living in Northern Africa. Mather enlisted a local physician, Zabdiel Boylston, to inoculate people during an epidemic in Boston in 1721. The practice was condemned by the medical elite of the city, including William Douglass, the only physician in Boston with an M.D. Douglass had studied at the University of Edinburgh, one of the most prestigious medical schools in the world.
Ironically, the basis for the medical establishment’s argument against inoculation was not scientific. Inoculation was criticized as being counter to the will of God, who had visited the pox on humanity to cleanse the world of the sinful. Others argued that because variolation had begun among "the Muslims and Africans" it could not be trusted. Furthermore, Lady Montague's association with inoculation tinged its reputation because she was a woman. In their endeavors to edge midwives and other unlicensed female healers out of the medical field, established physicians denigrated the practice as yet another old wives’ remedy built upon superstition and folklore.\(^{37}\)

The medical community's objections held some sway. Mather's life was threatened. The message on a failed explosive hurled through his window read:

"COTTON MATHER, you Dog, Dam you: I'll inoculate you with this, with a Pox to you."\(^{38}\) Opposition came from more established sources as well. Boston's selectmen took steps to prevent inoculation or at least to quarantine those who had "taken" the disease in this way.\(^{39}\) To more than a few observers, however, it was clear that inoculation was effective. Statistics from a 1753 epidemic in Boston revealed the following:

- Had smallpox the common way: Whites- 5059  Blacks- 485
- Of these died: Whites- 452 (9%)  Blacks- 62 (13%)
- Received distemper by inoculation: Whites- 1974  Blacks 139
- Of these died: Whites- 23 (1%)  Blacks- 7 (5%)\(^{40}\)

"Pray, Papa! Pray to God to bless us," exclaimed one girl, Frances Boscawen, in 1755, "for we are inoculated."\(^{41}\) People seeking inoculation flocked to cities such as Boston from outlying areas in such large numbers that the Boston selectmen had to institute measures to check the influx.\(^{42}\) Boylston boasted in 1726 that only three percent of his patients had died under variolation while death rates topped 14% for those contracting the
disease "in the natural way." Its efficacy was apparent to many by the end of the eighteenth century, for in Boston at least, variolation took hold. In 1721 two percent of all smallpox cases had been by inoculation and in 1730 10 percent were by this means. In 1778 in Boston, out of 2,243 smallpox cases, only 59 died, likely indicating that the vast majority of cases were from variolation, as natural smallpox cases in other towns in that year had far higher mortality rates. William Douglass finally conceded, at least in private, that he may have been wrong: "To speak candidly for the present, [smallpox treatment] seems to be somewhat more favorably received by inoculation than received the natural way." Benjamin Franklin, repudiating his older brother, was a champion of variolation, and spearheaded programs to inoculate the poor.  

Franklin’s efforts notwithstanding, variolation was largely available only to the rich. As a result, anti-inoculation riots were common as persons who could not afford the procedure realized their vulnerability when in the presence of inoculated but still contagious persons: a very real fear, as Abigail Adams, for instance, was not quarantined at all after her inoculation in 1776. She wrote about attending sermons with her three inoculated children to cheer the passage of the Declaration of Independence amid the throng in Boston Commons. Wealthy merchants who inoculated themselves were often a target for anti-inoculation rioters. In Norfolk, Virginia in 1768 a mob chased a group of rich merchants from their homes when it was learned that the merchants had just been inoculated. Elsewhere certain newspapers and pamphlets incited much popular anger by charging town business leaders with hypocrisy, contending that the merchants secretly
inoculated themselves, and then, through their influence with local officials, had prevented public inoculation programs which they believed would be detrimental to the flow of commerce.  

Variolation of Washington’s army was made safer and more cost-effective through the innovations of a British physician, Robert Sutton, whose work, against his will, became known in America by some of his followers. The Sutton method instructed inoculators to use scabs from those who had contracted the more mild smallpox from other inoculated persons. Sutton also emphasized strict quarantine of the inoculated. He dispensed with the invasive practices of other physicians such as use of mercury to prep patients before inoculation and recommended a sparse, digestible, but nourishing diet after variolation was completed. Implementation of these guidelines evidently produced excellent results, though not all American army inoculators were assiduous in following them.  

Joseph Plumb Martin had been in the war for just one year when he was ordered, with about four hundred other Connecticut troops, to a set of old barracks a mile or two distant in the highlands above Peekskill, New York, to be inoculated with the smallpox. The barracks were cleaned thoroughly before the occupation of Martin’s unit who were strictly quarantined there for several weeks after they "received the infection.” A troop of soldiers from Massachusetts, already immune, guarded the barracks to prevent the infected from escaping. Hospital supplies were stored in a farmer's barn nearby. Soldiers acting as nurses enforced a strict, sparse diet. A large rivulet ran in front of the barracks and Martin along with others were allowed to dip in it three or four hours at a time to alleviate the pain of the pustules which were "well cleansed" by the process.
Variolation of Martin’s regiment did not come off without a hitch. As mentioned before, the barn of stores caught fire and the inoculated men were not allowed to help put it out, so it was completely consumed. Even without the fire, the stores were inadequate. Martin believed a lack of medicine caused him not to be "properly physicked" after inoculation. He complained of having dysentery and boils; "eleven at one time upon my arm, each as big as half a hen’s egg, and the rest of my carcass in the same condition."

Furthermore, Martin, voraciously hungry, stole food from the nurse's cooking pot, an act he had cause to regret: “I should have killed myself in good earnest, had not the owners come and caught me at it, and broke up my feast. It had like to have done the job for me as it was; I had a sorry night of it, and had I not got rid of my freight, I know not what would have been the final consequences of my indiscretion.”

Another result of Martin's ordeal was "the itch" which evidently afflicted many of the inoculated long afterward. Their self-made cure was extreme but it appeared to work:

Some of our foraging party had acquaintances in the Artillery and by their means we procured sulphur enough to cure all that belonged to our detachment. Accordingly, we made preparations for a general attack upon it. The first night one half of the party commenced the action by mixing a sufficient quantity of brimstone and tallow, which was the only grease we could get, at the same time not forgetting to mix a plenty of hot whiskey-toddy, making up a hot blazing fire and laying down an ox-hid upon the hearth. Thus prepared with arms and ammunition we began the operation by plying each other's outsides with brimstone and tallow and the inside with hot whiskey sling. Had the animalcule of the itch been endowed with reason they would have quit their entrenchments and taken care of themselves, when we had made such a formidable attack upon them; but as it was we had to engage, arms in hand, and we obtained a complete victory. Two of the party, smarting from their burned skin, slept naked outside after this but others, observing the operation's mistakes, applied the hot concoction less liberally and therefore escaped the concoction's most toxic effects.
Martin also implied that drinking buttermilk brought him back to full health far more than any doctor's ministrations. Indeed, despite his occasional dietary missteps, he often touted the healing powers of food and drink.48

For all Martin’s travails he would have been envied by others who did not have access to inoculation. Ordinary American soldiers and sailors sometimes took the procedure of inoculation into their own hands when matters were desperate. Josiah Sabin, serving in the Quebec campaign when smallpox was prevalent, “inoculated himself; got the infection from the hospital. He also inoculated many of the soldiers, but as this was against orders, they were sent into his room blindfolded, were inoculated, and sent out in the same condition. Many lives were saved by this measure, as none thus inoculated died, while three out of four who took it in the natural way died.”49 Captured American privateer Thomas Dring, noting the presence of smallpox aboard a British prison ship anchored off the coast of Long Island where he was to be incarcerated, inoculated himself between the thumb and forefinger of one hand and lived to tell about it forty years later. Col. Warner’s Green Mountain Boys were clearly “taking the disease in the Thigh” themselves during the Quebec campaign.50 When American commander General John Thomas, himself vulnerable to the disease, ordered inoculations banned on pain of death, ordinary soldiers gathered contagious material at the camp smallpox hospital and inoculated themselves and their comrades in secret. Thomas tried to enforce a ban on inoculation vigorously and lamented its implementation in spite of this in letters to his superiors, but to no avail.51 He later died of the disease, probably contracted by exposure to his non-compliant soldiers.52
Self-inoculation was not just practiced among soldiers during the Revolution. Benjamin Franklin disseminated information on how a person could inoculate himself three decades earlier in a letter to one William Vassall who had thought to come to New York to be inoculated as it was prohibited in Boston. "Perhaps a journey is not quite necessary," wrote Franklin, "... a dry Scab or two will communicate the Distemper by inoculation... And such might be sent to you per Post from hence, cork'd up tight in a small Phial." Surgeon John Morgan in 1765 indicated in a back-handed way how commonplace inoculation done without aid of a physician was: “I do not mean however to refuse to innoculate for the small-pox, where my patients or their friends object to employ another hand to make the incision. This may frequently happen, although there is no more difficulty or art required in it, than in cutting an issue and inserting a pea or than in cupping and bleeding.”

Civilians during the war sometimes took inoculation into their own hands, with or without the complicity of doctors. Genevieve Miller demonstrates compellingly that inoculation on both sides of the British Atlantic was an accepted medical practice, especially during epidemics, and those inoculators boasting that they had restored it in the face of popular opposition and professional neglect may have been engaged in self-serving hyperbole at the expense of the facts. Even on the eve of the Revolution, "Inoculation Societies" were formed for the purposes of self-inoculation. Philadelphia businessman Christopher Marshall referred to one such society in his diary at the beginning of 1774. Abigail Adams wrote in 1778: "In this Town it [the smallpox] has been breaking out in the natural way for more than a month. The people not being able to get a vote for a Hospital, were in a rage, and began to inoculate in their own Houses." The
self-inoculation campaign spread very quickly. “The Whole Farms [now North Quincy, MA] became a Hospital, not one family but inoculated in their houses, and in consequence of that the Town gave leave for a number of houses to be taken up, and this Parish are with their minister almost all under inoculation. They will begin in Weymouth next week, when my Father is determined to take it.” 57

This is not to say that inoculation by physicians or even self-inoculation was the norm among civilian populations. Outside the military, most Americans, especially those of limited means, were still having smallpox "the Natural Way" and many died from it well into the nineteenth century. But death from smallpox declined considerably with the advent of a safer and, with help from the United States Government, more available and less costly guard against the disease. Vaccination was developed by Edward Jenner using the less invasive cowpox he discovered among the smallpox immune milkmaids of rural England. It was introduced to America by Benjamin Waterhouse and soon after by others, with the enthusiastic support of President Thomas Jefferson (who checked Waterhouse's greed and thus perhaps saved vaccination in America, as will be discussed below).

In This Republic of Suffering Drew Gilpin Faust argued that the Civil War transformed the relationship between the American government and its people. The government, Gilpin Faust believed, became guardians of the lives and welfare of its people through the imperative of establishing and guarding national cemeteries in hostile areas of the country. It may be that a similar dynamic was involved in Washington’s widespread inoculation of his men. Certainly, it was the first nationally mandated health initiative, even if the object was military victory, not social welfare. Inoculation would probably have remained available only to the rich were it not for Washington’s directive.
Even during the war well-heeled officers were more likely to be inoculated than the troops under them. Doctors and surgeons saw the opportunity to make money, especially during epidemics, and this drove up the price of the procedure. Furthermore, as said before, many physicians added costly medicines and treatments to the procedure that were mostly superfluous and in some instances were harmful to the patient, such as the administration of mercury and inducing purges with ipecac syrup, not to mention bleedings. A young John Adams undergoing inoculation in 1764 described some of these toxic additions to his treatment in a letter to Abigail: "... one heavy Cathartick, four and twenty mercurial and antimonial pills" were administered throughout his ordeal. Later in his autobiography he described his inoculation experience in more detail: “My Physicians... prepared me, by a milk Diet and a course of Mercurial Preparations, til they reduced me very low before they performed the operation. They continued to feed me with Milk and Mercury through the whole course of it, and salivated me to such a degree, that every tooth in my head became so loose that I believe I could have pulled them all with my Thumb and finger.”

Physicians followed what they considered to be the sound medical tradition that illness was a disruption of the body's natural balance of different humors. These “humors” corresponded with the ancient Greek notion that all things were composed of one of four elements- earth, fire, wind and water. All four elements comprised the make up of the human body as well, it was believed, and when they were in balance, good health resulted and sickness was caused by their imbalance. A balance could be restored by using emetics to purge the excess of bile corresponding to one of these elements and stimulants to promote the increase of a bile that was found in deficient supply. To
stimulate bile, sixteenth-century Swiss physician Paracelsus recommended administering mercury to promote "vapors" (wind) or sulfur to promote "heat" (fire). Good medicine or no, a doctor could stand to make more money prescribing drugs than consulting. Surgeon John Morgan, complained in 1765:

Patients who are kept in Ignorance of what Price Medicines are, considered separately, and what is the Value of Physical Skill and Attendance, naturally think the original Cost of Medicines, which are comparatively Cheap, to be very Dear, and under value the Skill of a Physician in his toil of Study, and his Experience of Time and Money in his Education, which have often amounted to very large Sums and to many Years spent abroad in quest of Knowledge as if they were no Consideration.

Even Morgan charged extra fees for the medicines he prescribed in the course of administering inoculation for smallpox, as did many other physicians. 61 Dr. Hugh Mercer of Fredericksburg, Virginia, for instance, could charge five shillings for a visit but seven shillings sixpence for "doses of galap." 62 "The patient... sometimes gets well in spite of the medicine," Thomas Jefferson remarked, though his own belief in the efficacy of drugs and other humor-based Paracelsus-inspired medical measures was apparently strong:

"...fulness of the stomach we can relieve by emetics; diseases of the bowels by purgatives; inflammatory cases, by bleeding; intermittents, by the Peruvian bark [cinchona- quinine]; syphillis, by mercury; watchfulness by opium &c." 63

Robert Sutton’s method dispensed with medicines, bleeding and purging but even he found ways to keep the price high, including playing music, telling stories and giving sermons to patients as they lay recovering from the procedure. Sutton carefully guarded his procedure so that he could command a higher price for his method. Only in 1796 did Sutton’s son divulge the procedure in print. Americans actually learned of it through one of Sutton’s students, Thomas Dimsdale, whose 1767 tract was republished in the colonies.
in 1771. If physicians could not charge extra fees for drugs, they might appeal to the inoculee's social status in order to coerce higher payments out of him. Dr. John Brickell who inoculated Nathanael Greene's family wrote the General unctuously: “People of fashion pay 5 guineas for inoculation; those whose circumstances are not elevated pay only 2... the whole is such a trifle that I would rather loose it than give one moment's dissatisfaction to General Greene.”

Surgeons in the Continental Army might have instituted the extra medicines, bleedings and purges physicians prescribed to "ease" the ordeal of inoculation had they not been prohibitively costly. Washington believed in bleeding and purging himself. Indeed, his death may have been accelerated by frequent blood lettings and other invasive treatments for what probably started out as a common cold. Joseph Plumb Martin, as said before, believed his treatment for the side-effects of inoculation was substandard for lack of “physicke,” drugs and emetics. All Washington earmarked for treatment was “Indian Meal for men undergoing Inoculation,” a kind of coarse corn meal, and some “Sulphur,” presumably to fumigate wards, or in some instances to burn off pustules. The "physicke" Martin hoped for may have been something along the lines of the post-smallpox "cooling" treatment prescribed by Dr. Adam Thomson, an Edinburgh-trained Scotsman who was a physician practicing in Pennsylvania and Maryland in the mid-1700s. Thomson was admired by Benjamin Rush among others. Post inoculation “cooling” involved massive doses of "mercurous chloride," "pulverized cornachin- a retch-inducing mixture of antimony and cream of tartar" over four days and nights that might have left a patient brain damaged and toothless if it were not also accompanied by constant bleedings that may have flushed the mercury from the system before it could
reach toxic levels. Persons in more comfortable circumstances probably had a much more dangerous inoculation experience. Fenn notes that the "nutritional regimen (not to mention mercury poisoning)" of Adams and others of the pampered set certainly weakened with malnutrition patients recovering from variolation.

Civilian inoculation with all the bells and whistles was apparently quite costly even during the war. In 1778 John Adams’ father-in-law, the Reverend William Smith, noted in his diary: “3 June was Inoculated by Dr. Wales in the 72 year of my age, at Col. Quincy’s. Tarried at the Col. 3 weeks wanting a day. Gave the Doctor 8 dollars for Inoculating me.” John Adams paid two pounds for wife Abigail’s inoculation according to his accounts. This was slightly less than he paid for a whole “barrell of flour” at wartime prices at two pounds, two shillings, twenty-six pence and more than the services of a laundress washing seven dozen and four pieces of linen as well as mending them. To put it another way, a British grenadier earned eight pence a day. Thus, inoculation as practiced by Dr. Shippen and other fashionable physicians cost the equivalent of nearly three months of a common soldier’s pay (two hundred forty pence to the pound), which was often higher than a common laborer’s pay.

Martin's post-inoculation complaint was treated by an officer telling him to “bear it as patiently as you can;” given the toxic alternatives this probably was good advice. Martin eventually recovered completely as did most others of the rank and file. Ten men out of 4000 inoculated at Yorktown in 1777 died of the disease, "despite the crudity and risks of the method." In Boston in 1778 an inoculation among those who could afford it, as administered by physicians with their extra instructions and medicines, claimed the lives of 59 out of some 2,243 inoculated, about 3 per cent. The survival rate of ordinary
soldiers in Washington's army was higher a year earlier with the no-frills approach. The nation’s poverty saved American servicemen’s lives.76

“The Small-pox is ten times more terrible than Britons, Canadians, and Indians together” wrote John Adams to Abigail in 1776, “this was the cause of the precipitant retreat from Quebec.”77 Elizabeth Fenn argues that smallpox was a major factor in the outcome of the Revolutionary War. Inoculation became a defensive weapon of the military at the same time it was instituted as a public health measure.78 While government authorities in Massachusetts debated back and forth on the issue, it is clear that smallpox containment in the interests of widespread social well being was a constant endeavor of the Massachusetts legislature from colonial times through the Revolution and after. With the advent of vaccination, societies dedicated to dispensing it among the working classes sprang up in great numbers on both sides of the Atlantic.79 It is perhaps symptomatic of the effect smallpox prevention had on the wellbeing of the poor that Thomas Malthus, anticipating the Social Darwinism of the late 1800s, opposed vaccination on the grounds that smallpox was “one of the channels, and a very broad one, which Nature has opened for the last thousand years to keep the population down.”80

Another area in which smallpox treatment may have advanced social equality of sorts in America was through the use of women as nurses. Some of these female nurses clearly were treated as professionals who were contracted individually. Samuel Larrabee recalled one Widow Dimond "who nursed me and got me well of the smallpox though I was long after very feeble and afflicted with boils. After recovering from smallpox, I sold my watch to pay the widow."81 Fenn notes that persons of both sexes who had immunity to the disease were invaluable in caring for smallpox patients and this was one of the
major imperatives that led to the official enlistment of women in the American army as nurses soon after the battle of Monmouth in 1777. There is even evidence that women acted as inoculators. Women often had supporting roles connected with the Continental Army but their assistance in matters related to medicine and healthcare, including smallpox inoculation, legitimized their service to the nation, even to the point that many were able to apply for veterans’ pensions. It may be noted that while women were part of the smallpox story, it was not always in a positive way. It was rumored that the British had sent deliberately infected women into the American camp during the Quebec campaign of 1776. Therefore, General Benedict Arnold had to go “woman hunting” out beyond the line of sentinels, as Josiah Sabin alludes in his pension account of 1832.

In the final analysis, smallpox prevention may have worked best when taken out of the hands of those doctors who owed their livelihood to keeping it from the general public so they could increase the cost. Later, it appears that the introduction to America of Jenner’s cowpox vaccination was attended by what may be interpreted as greed and opportunism on the part of some of its practitioners, though such chicanery was evidently curtailed by the efforts of then-President Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson had approved of variolation as an effective preventative to smallpox. He defied local ordinances against the practice by traveling to Philadelphia to have it done in 1766. In a letter to his daughter in 1797 he wrote "I entirely approve of your resolution to have the children inoculated. I had before been... convinced of the expediency of the measure." He was no less enamored of Jenner’s cowpox vaccination, an innovation introduced in England in 1799. As President in 1803, Jefferson instructed Meriwether Lewis that when he met with western Indian groups, who he would encounter on his
expedition to scout out the newly acquired Louisiana Territory, that he treat the Indians “in the most friendly & conciliatory manner which their own conduct will admit... Carry with you some matter of the Kine Pox; inform those of them with whom you may be, of its efficacy as a preservative from the Small Pox; and instruct and encourage them in the use of it.”

Harvard pharmacy professor, Benjamin Waterhouse, brought Jenner's cowpox vaccination to America in 1800 by virtue of his friendship with prominent London physician John Lettsom. Waterhouse tried to keep the secret of the vaccination to himself in order to profit from it. In September of 1800, he sent a proposal to Dr. Lyman Spalding of Portsmouth, New Hampshire demanding exclusive rights to supply the vaccine, plus a quarter of Spalding's fees. Waterhouse's vaccine monopoly did not last. Other enterprising American physicians found their own suppliers of cowpox from Britain (the disease was unknown among American cattle at the time), but supply far outstripped demand and some doctors and businessmen watered down the vaccine or substituted other materials instead. Even Waterhouse sometimes supplied vaccine that was either contaminated or inactive, most notably to one Dr. Elisha Story of Marblehead, Massachusetts in October of 1800, no doubt for an exorbitant fee, which did nothing to curtail and may have exacerbated an epidemic there in which 68 people died.

Jefferson's personal endorsement of the vaccine did much to quell skepticism. He publicly congratulated Waterhouse on the successful introduction of the vaccine in July of 1800: "...every friend of humanity must look with pleasure on this discovery, by which one evil more is withdrawn from the condition of man." When some supplies of the vaccine seemed ineffectual, Jefferson designed a container that would keep the cowpox
better preserved. Waterhouse accordingly supplied the president with an active vaccine which Jefferson then distributed to doctors across the country after vaccinating all the members of his household and staff as well as some of the last members of an Indian tribe who were in the vicinity. Waterhouse, his avarice largely forgotten, has been called "the Jenner of America."  

Jefferson's successor, James Madison, carried on Washington's practice of immunizing the army against smallpox during the War of 1812, though now he had the vaccine which was much safer. His 1813 Act to Encourage Vaccination solidified a practice he had begun to institute as early as 1808 and it included government collection and storage of vaccine and its distribution through federal post offices.

THE "BARK"

No government initiative regulated the availability of the other great medical discovery of the age: an effective treatment for malaria. In fact, the story of the use of the "malarial bark" by physicians points up a failing in the growing professionalism of American medicine during the early republic and its impulse to make economic gains without regard to scientific evaluation. Cinchona was an evergreen tree found originally on the slopes of the Andes Mountains. Cotton Mather and others in the English colonies called it "Jesuit Bark" because Spanish priests had brought the cure back from Peru where it had probably been in use by the natives for centuries. The Portuguese had successfully transplanted cinchona on Sao Tome off the West African coast by the time of the American Revolution. Much of the supply from there was used to safeguard the lives of Portuguese colonizing forces in tropical regions but some was certainly exported for
Though the bark's efficacy against malaria was only realized with the extraction of quinine from the bark in 1800, it had good results in combating the disease in North America when the bark was ground into powder (after the initial prejudice against it as a drug of Indians and Papists subsided). Unfortunately, demand for the imported bark in the American market made it quite costly by the time of the American Revolution and therefore its use was negligible, except by the wealthy. Even the poorer doctors could not get hold of it. Furthermore, American doctors saw profits to be made doubling as apothecaries and attempted to corner the market on it to keep the price artificially high.

Cinchona bark's contribution to American medicine was intellectual as well as physical, though the lessons it had to teach were not appreciated for many decades. Some historians have argued that the "one disease" medical tradition prevented advances in isolating specific diseases, the main reason why germ theory and the belief in microscopic pathogens post-dated the development of the microscope by two centuries. The American medical establishment was largely married to the “heroic medicine” concept that an unbalanced metabolism caused illness. Arguably America's most influential physician in the post Revolutionary era, Benjamin Rush, went to his death in 1813 believing that all sickness was the result of "capillary tension" and therefore, as he told his students, there was really "only one disease in the world" with presumably the same cure: a regimen of drugging, feeding and purging regardless of the diagnosis. One Dr. Robertson wrote in 1824: “Everyone knows how much under control are acute... diseases! Want of general success... must be the Practitioner's own fault, provided he be early called in; for the united agency of blood-letting, purgatives, mercurials, blisters, and opium, will commonly subdue the very elements of the disorders, when judiciously and
opportunely administered.”

The Jacksonian era was dominated by anti-establishment voices such as the herbalist Samuel Thomson whose “Thomsonian” followers attacked physicians and the “medical monopoly” as “oppressors of the poor.” In a time when mercury and other toxic substances were prescribed regularly, the herbs and other holistic remedies of the Thomsonians probably did less harm than the drugs of physicians but they still built upon the same centuries old principle that a healthy body was one in which the four humors were in balance. Cinchona only treats one disease: malaria. It starves or smothers malarial bacteria by blocking its ability to oxidize the glucose upon which it thrives. Cinchona, therefore, was "the great specific" that would ultimately disprove the four humors balance theories of numerous doctors and the “one illness” thesis of Benjamin Rush and his followers. Yet there were still physicians regulating body bile balance through bleeding, cupping, and the use of purgatives and emetics by the middle of the nineteenth century. Cupping and bloodletting instruments still appeared in inventories of doctors in the 1860s and certainly were in use during the Civil War.

Another factor in the slow appreciation of cinchona’s specific nature was commercialism. Considering the high prices that cinchona commanded, some physicians did not limit its use to malaria. Benjamin Franklin remarked that "the bark" was prescribed quite readily regardless of the ailment, even for treatment of a head cold; so much so that he wrote: "I took so much bark in various ways that I began to abhor it." It was believed that cinchona worked because of its bitterness and therefore other remedies of noxious taste were tried as replacements for the bark, without success. However, an English clergyman named Edward Stone, searching for a cheap replacement for cinchona, stumbled on the efficacy of willow bark (also bitter tasting) in alleviating arthritis pain.
Salicylic acid, which we now know as aspirin, is present in many plants. It does not cure anything, but it alleviates suffering and was a great boon to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century medicine when not used as a cure-all.\textsuperscript{105}

By 1820 it was discovered in Europe how to extract the active ingredient, quinine, from the cinchona bark, which made the drug more efficient as well as easier to produce and distribute. The ready availability of quinine, combined with improvement in sewage treatment and swamp drainage, reduced death by malaria the world over by the 1800s, contributing to the century’s unprecedented growth in population.\textsuperscript{106} The 1800s were witness to many medical innovations and discoveries but few of these were by Americans.

"FREEDOM TO CHOOSE QUACKERY"

Joseph Plumb Martin did not appreciate the role that inoculation played in his life and he probably never had need of cinchona. He did, however, maintain a distrust of physicians and many of Martin’s comrades-in-arms shared this attitude. As the authority of officers was constantly tested by the men under them, so too, physicians were second-guessed, contradicted or ignored by soldiers when their competence was doubted. Connecticut soldier Richard Vining was so ill that an army physician recommended he be discharged. "But I refused it, as I thought I might get better," he recalled. Continental Army soldier John Adlum related the story of one wounded Ensign, Jacob Barnitz, who refused amputation of his leg by surgeons and "carried the ball a little below his knee for thirty-two years" before finally having the procedure due to the pain. Ailing Pennsylvania soldier James Fergus refused to go to the hospital when a doctor told him to. "I replied I
had seen the hospitals in Philadelphia, Princeton, and Newark and would prefer dying in
the open air of the woods rather [than] be stifled to death in a crowded hospital."  
Private Josiah Atkins, after a short stint assisting surgeons, felt confident enough to
practice medicine on his own, which he did to some success until disease felled him.  
One soldier, David Freemoyer, treated his own wounded leg by "killing a striped squirrel
and putting the brains of the squirrel on the wound, and fastening them on with the skin
thereof." Soldier Justus Bellamy, after hearing doctors concluding that he would die of his
illness, cured himself by drinking "cider out of his mother's silver tankard."  

There was just cause to mistrust many doctors and surgeons. "Few Physicians
amongst us are eminent for their skill," one observer wrote in 1757. "Quacks abound like
locusts in Egypt... This is less to be wondered at as the profession is under no kind of
Regulation. Any man at his pleasure sets up for Physician, Apothecary, and
Chirurgen." One can wonder at some of the cures prescribed for certain ailments by
medical professionals in the Continental Army; for example this one prescribed for
Martin’s fellow Connecticut comrade in arms, Capt. Lemuel Roberts, though it appeared
to satisfy him:

[I had a] great distress arising from the heart-burn... I met our Surgeon, to whom I
made known my case, telling him that unless I obtained speedy assistance it would
certainly kill me: On this he told me to procure a buck’s horn and burn it white,
and then eat it at times when my disorder raged, and it would cure me. I followed
his prescription carefully, and it had a very desirable effect, for in ten days time
my complaint in a great degree left me, and I became more fit for duty than I had
been for many months before.  

Continental Army physicians did not have a very good track record. According to Louis
Duncan in *Medical Men in the American Revolution*, only one out of nine American
soldiers who perished in the conflict was killed or mortally wounded in action. The rest
succumbed to disease.\textsuperscript{112} By comparison only twice as many soldiers died from disease as opposed to combat-related injuries in the Civil War, even though the Union Surgeon General felt Civil War medicine to be little changed since the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{113}

Martin's relationship with doctors was cynical at best. In one instance he observed a friend with a bayonet wound die of tetanus under the care of an "ignoramus of a surgeon." When he was hospitalized with yellow fever he noted: "The doctor... (who attended upon us...) went home on furlough, and it was a happy circumstance for us, for he was not the best of physicians." He did find that doctors had their uses. At one point he conspired with the quackery of a surgeon's mate to be classified as ill so he could get out of duty:

...he felt my pulse, at the same time very demurely shutting his eyes, while I was laughing in his face. After a minute's consultation with his medical talisman, he very gravely told the sergeant that I was unfit for duty, having a high fever upon me. I was as well as he was; all the medicine I needed was a bellyful of victuals... I admired the Doctor's skill; although, perhaps not more extraordinary than that of many others of the "faculty".

Martin demonstrated the every-man's-a-doctor mentality in action after he sprained his ankle in an accident.

...some of my messmates went immediately for the Surgeon, but he was at a game of backgammon and could not attend to minor affair; however, in about an hour he arrived, bathed my foot, which was swelled like a bladder, fumbled about it for sometime, when he gave it a wrench, which made me, like the old woman's dying cat, 'merely yawl out.' The next day as I was sitting under the shade before my tent, my foot lying upon a bench, swelled like a puff-ball, my Captain passed by and must needs have a peep at it; I indulged his curiosity, upon which he said it was not set right, and taking hold of it, he gave it a twist, which put it nearly in the same condition it was at first. I had then to send for Mr. Surgeon again, but he was not to be found. There was a corporal who professed to act the surgeon in such cases, and he happening at the time to be present, undertook the job and accomplished it, but it was attended with more difficulty than at the first time, and with more pain to me. It was a long time before it got well and strong again, indeed it never has been entirely so well as it was before the accident happened.
Not surprisingly, Martin often took doctoring into his own hands. While a mere teen in 1776 he cured seven sick men using common sense: he procured them superior nourishment from neighboring farms. On a previous occasion, while sick from a severe chill, he treated himself back to health by constructing his own "hospital" away from others on a bed of dry leaves under the sun.\textsuperscript{114}

By the 1830s there were a number of influential Americans who perceived that few physicians had adequate training in the theories behind medical science. Samuel Jackson and John Godman, two European-trained physicians, blamed the slipshod quality of American medicine on want of research.\textsuperscript{115} Alexis de Tocqueville noted:

In America, the purely practical part of the sciences is admirably cultivated, and care is taken with those theoretical aspects of science that are immediately necessary for the application at hand... But almost no one in the United States devotes himself to the essentially theoretical and abstract aspects of human knowledge... Nothing is more necessary to the cultivation of the higher sciences, or of the loftier aspects of the sciences, than meditation, and nothing is less suited to meditation than the circumstances of democratic society... Everyone is restless: some want to attain power, others to achieve wealth. In the midst of this universal tumult, this constant clash of conflicting interests, the unending quest for fortune, where is the calm necessary to the deeper strategies of the intellect to be found?\textsuperscript{116}

One flirts with charges of hindsight in reflecting unfavorably on the history of medicine in America. Nevertheless, the record of missed opportunities is compelling. By the eve of the American Revolution, for instance, the existence of micro-organisms and their effect on pathology had been known in some intellectual circles for a hundred years. Dutchman Antonie van Leeuwenhoek noticed "animal-icules" through the rudimentary magnifying glasses that he fashioned as an avocation while working as a draper. His distorted looking glasses for examining the fine fibers of a fabric were the inspiration for the first microscope. Robert Hook in England and Marcello Malpigni in Italy carried on
van Leeuwenhoek’s work in microscopy. Cotton Mather drew a great deal from studying these early innovators when he wrote what many medical historians regard as the most important American work on medicine in the eighteenth century: *The Angel of Bethesda*, a decades-long project finally completed in 1724 when Mather was a very old man. Mather made perhaps one of the most lucid descriptions of microscopic pathogens to appear in scientific literature until the late nineteenth century:

> Every part of Matter is *Peopled*. Every *Green Leaf* swarms with *Inhabitants*. The Surfaces of Animals are covered with other *Animals*. Yea, the most solid *Bodies*, even *Marble* itself, have innumerable cells which are crowded with imperceptible *Inmates*. As there are Infinite Numbers of these which the *Microscopes* bring to our View, so there may be inconceivable Myriads yett smaller than these, which no glasses yett reach'd unto. The *Animals* that are much *more* than Thousands of times Less than the finest Grain of Sand... may insinuate themselves by the Air, and with our *Ailments*, yea, thro' the Pores of our skin; and soon gett into the Juices of our Bodies. They may be convey'd into our Fluids, with the Nourishment which we received, even before we were born, and may ly dormant until the Vessels are grown capable of bringing them into their Figure and Vigour for Operations. Thus Parents unto their Children, before they are born into the world.

The connection between pathogens and unsanitary conditions was not unknown in the eighteenth century. British physicians such as Sir John Pringle, Richard Brocklesby and Donald Monro made the connection between dirty surroundings and disease in a study of camp fevers in the 1740s and 1750s. Benjamin Franklin in 1773, after considerable study, jettisoned his Galen-based beliefs that excess of bodily humors caused disease. Diseases, he concluded, were spread by "contaminated air to susceptible bodies." Nevertheless, only after the work of the chemist Louis Pasteur, and the surgeon Joseph Lister in the late 1800s, did a widespread appreciation of the nature of infection bring about the antiseptics and other preventive regimens that dramatically reduced mortality in hospital wards.
The romantics and Transcendentalists of the early nineteenth century sensed the rejuvenating quality of being out in nature. Micro-biologists now believe that most natural environments do not contain as many pathogens as a hospital ward. The plethora of pathogens existing in a sick area in the antiseptic-ignorant eighteenth century must have been profound. Martin’s retreat to the woods to cure himself of a fever was probably a wiser choice than seeking medical care in a camp hospital.\textsuperscript{123}

Most steps toward improving healthcare in America were slow and tentative but there were some promising developments by the close of the eighteenth century. The scientific method in self-contradictory fits and starts tested the efficacy of traditional practices and new innovations alike. The role of academic institutions in the training of doctors expanded. Medical journals appeared in America from 1797 on, disseminating ideas and experiments of physicians from both sides of the Atlantic. The status of physicians was on the rise. There were more signers of the Declaration of Independence who were doctors, such as Benjamin Rush, Josiah Bartlett and Lyman Hall, than clergymen (Jonathan Witherspoon was the only acting clergyman in the Continental Congress in 1776).

The increase in academically trained physicians in America as the Revolution came to a close did not guarantee competence. Students applying to medical school were not competitively selected. Timothy Dwight, President of Yale University in the early 1800s, complained that the typical medical student was "too weak for the farm, too indolent for labor, too stupid for the law, and too immoral for the pulpit."\textsuperscript{124} Medical schools, even when supported by local governments, did not always have a harmonious relationship with the community at large. Physician and patriot Dr. Joseph Warren was
accused by a family of having bodies dug up for dissection as part of his lectures at Harvard. The Massachusetts governor, who was a member of the Harvard Corporation, refused to pursue the case. John Morgan, founder of America's first medical school at the College of Pennsylvania (now the University of Pennsylvania), made repeated attempts to standardize medical education and practice between 1765, when he returned to the colonies after receiving an M.D. degree in Edinburgh, and 1777, when he was dismissed by Congress from his post as Surgeon General of the Continental Army for attempting to regulate the practice of army surgeons. Though Washington backed his efforts, anti-elitist forces defeated the measure. The increased demand for medical professionals led to the establishment of medical schools with less extensive educational requirements and these blocked attempts by the main academic institutions and established hospitals to enact medical standards.

It should be noted that there is one instance in which economic imperatives brought about change for the better in medicine. Dental surgery in America blossomed with the influx of French surgeons who accompanied Rochambeau's army, many of whom remained in America after the war. By the early nineteenth century American dentists were in demand worldwide. It was an American dentist, W.T.G. Morton, who introduced ether anesthesia in Massachusetts in 1846 to ensure that patients returned for further treatments. Ironcally, surgeons at the same time did not use anesthesia. It was in a dentist’s interest to keep pain to a minimum. Surgeons rarely expected to see a patient more than once and therefore had little incentive in developing sophisticated and costly methods for reducing pain.
America dropped the ball, as it were, in the area of optometry. Bifocal spectacles, which Benjamin Franklin developed so he could read and watch the scenery while traveling, and also so he could see his food and his dining partners across the table without switching glasses, were made by glass grinders in England and France because the United States had no artisans of equivalent skill.\(^{128}\) Bifocals were only manufactured in America after President Thomas Jefferson, remembering Franklin's glasses, ordered a pair for himself from the first American optometrist, Dr. John McAllister, in 1807. London-based artists such as Joshua Reynolds and Benjamin West spear-headed demand for bifocal manufacture in Europe years before so they could see their models and their canvas at the same time.\(^{129}\) Ophthalmology did not become a viable part of the American medical scene until the 1850s with the emergence of hospitals specializing in eye and ear ailments.\(^{130}\) Just as doctors saw financial gain in acting as their own apothecaries, they also insisted that eye care be under their purview as well. General surgeons such as David Hayes Agnew (1818-1892) and Samuel David Gross (1804-1884) refused to relinquish the practice of ophthalmology as part of general surgery. Acceptance of ophthalmology as independent of the general practitioners only happened after the introduction of German scientist Hermann Ludwig Ferdinand von Helmholtz's ophthalmoscope in 1851 and other European innovations.\(^{131}\)

One wonders if American medicine would have benefited if John Morgan had been able to establish academically based oversight of the medical profession, as was the case in many parts of Europe. Morgan declared that he would have demanded an extensive education in the liberal arts and sciences before entrance into medical school to pursue an M.D. degree. Morgan also would have demanded that public money be devoted
to medical research in an academic setting and its fruits disseminated throughout the medical community by means of journals and symposia as was the case in France and Germany. Regulating agencies such as the Medical Society of New York and its offshoots the Medical Committee of the Academy of Natural Sciences and The American Medical Association were only formed in the 1840s and at first acted mostly as labor unions for doctors and medical professionals.

The greatest scientific research that informed medical thought before the twentieth century emanated from the university systems of France, Austria and Germany, where Kant and Descartes were as much a part of the curriculum as Newton; or from the efforts of European laymen such as Gregor Mendel among his pea plants in an Austrian monastery, or Louis Pasteur and the Curies in their laboratories, not by the hard-working mercenaries that practiced medicine in America. Joseph Plumb Martin’s health probably benefited most from a government initiative that immunized him against smallpox. His do-it-yourself attitude when it came to solving problems, scientific or otherwise, common among Americans in 1830, was not only born of distrust of authority, but part of a great self-confidence Americans felt in being agents of their own destiny, even when it came to doctoring themselves. In some instances his reliance on empirical observation blinded him to many ideas and discoveries, but of course in the matter of medicine especially, many of these ideas were faulty and disproved when scientifically tested. Martin felt qualified to weigh in on any scientific debate he had experience with. He felt free to question experts, perhaps to choose “quackery” as Richard Harrison Shryock put it. Americans in Jacksonian times often accepted medical treatments based upon faulty science, but they were also receptive to new ideas, if the ideas made sense in pragmatic
and utilitarian terms. Part of the American imagination emerging at this time was the belief that knowledge could be created by constant re-evaluation of ideas and concepts in terms of their immediate usefulness, rather than through trust and acceptance of established fact and received wisdom; a pragmatic individualistic ethos solidified in the democratic world of Andrew Jackson, Oliver Evans and Joseph Plumb Martin, encapsulated in James Fenimore Cooper’s description of his wilderness scout Hawkeye, changing his mind based on new information: “The scout and his companions listened to this simple explanation with the interest of men who imbibe new ideas, at the same time that they get rid of old ones, which had proved disagreeable inmates.”133


7 Martin, *Narrative*, 104.


9 Martin, *Narrative*, 29. James Kirby Martin is willing to believe it was a “lucky shot” even though 880 yards was 500 yards more than a revolutionary era musket was effective at, James : Kirby Martin, * Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin* (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1999), 21n.

10 Martin, *Narrative*, 47.


18 Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 2, 14; also a comparison of U.S. overall census figures 1790-1850

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27 Fenn, Pox Americana, 94.

28 Martin, Narrative, 57.


31 Fenn, "Biological Warfare", 1577.


36 Tony Williams, *The Pox and the Covenant: Mather, Franklin, and the Epidemic that Changed America's Destiny* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2010), 90-91.


41 Quoted in Allen, *Vaccine*, 25.

42 Williams, *Pox & Covenant*, 175.


44 Allen, *Vaccine*, 33, 44, 43, 42.

45 Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 35-36.

46 Martin, *Narrative*, 58.

47 Martin, *Narrative*, 56, 58, 96. Note that even Martin makes use of the term "animalcule" in speaking of "the itch." The existence of micro-organisms must have been common knowledge at least by the time Martin wrote his memoirs in the 1830's, if not before. Martin’s cure for "the itch" was common in military circles. General Israel Putnam suggested it to physician James Thacher for "ground itch" which soldiers complained of after sleeping on the ground too often. "'Did you never,'" says the General, "'cure the itch with tar and brimstone?' 'No, sir.' Then replied he, good-humoredly, 'you are not fit for a doctor.'” Thacher, *Military Journal*, 148.


50 Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 71.


52 Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 71, 75.

53 Quoted in Finger, *Franklin’s Medicine*, 58.


56 Christopher Marshall, *Extracts from the diary of Christopher Marshall, 1774-1781* (1877), ed. William


58 Pfeiffer, Western Medicine, 99, 87, 66, 41-42, 40.

59 Allen, Vaccine, 40-41, 42.

60 Adams, Diary, 3: 280.

61 John Morgan, Apology, 5-6, 4.


64 Fenn, Pox Americana, 41, 36.

65 Greene, Papers, 13: 673.

66 Pfeiffer, Western Medicine, 207-208; Francois Furstenberg, In the Name of the Father: Washington’s Legacy, Slavery, and the Making of a Nation (New York: Penguin, 2006), 92.

67 Martin, Narrative, 58.

68 Washington, Writings, 11: 107, 10: 272.

69 Allen, Vaccine, 40-41.

70 Fenn, Pox Americana, 34-35.

71 Adams, et. al; Adams Family Correspondence, Vol. 3: 34n.

72 Adams, Diary, 2: 167, 253.


74 Martin, Narrative, 95.


76 Allen, Vaccine, 44.

77 John Adams, Familiar letters of John Adams and his wife Abigail Adams, During the Revolution, With a memoir of Mrs. Adams By Charles Francis Adams (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1875), 189.

78 Fenn, Pox Americana, 83-84.

79 Pfeiffer, Western Medicine, 83.
Quoted in Allen, *Vaccine*, 56.


82 Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 101-102.


84 Nash, *Unknown Revolution*, 421-422.


86 Allen, *Vaccine*, 42.


90 Allen, *Vaccine*, 50, 51.

91 Quoted in Pfeiffer, *Western Medicine*, 111.

92 Allen, *Vaccine*, 51.

93 Pfeiffer, *Western Medicine*, 111.


96 To be fair many "Indian remedies" gained much credence in America, some to very good effect, especially in the treatment of snake bites, until, presumably, the "snake oil" industry curtailed their credibility. Finger, *Franklin's Medicine*, 35.

97 Dr. Henry Collins Flag wrote to Nathanael Greene in 1783, for instance: "This season has been fatal to country doctors... [who have] fell sacrifices to the fever of the season [a euphemism for malaria],” Greene, *Papers*, 13: 669.


99 Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda*, xxvii; Shryock also discusses lucidly cinchona's specificity as going against the grain of a firmly ensconced medical tradition, which impeded the lessons drawn from it for a

100 Quoted in Pfeiffer, *Western Medicine*, 201.


105 Finger, *Franklin’s Medicine*, 153; interview with Dr. Philip Catanzaro of the Cleveland Clinic (9/26/10).

106 Tommy Bengtsson, Cameron Campbell, *Life Under Pressure*, 44.


117 Cotton Mather gives the Dutchman and Englishmen their due, for instance: "... those Insects... have been discovered by M. Lieuenhoek (and other ey-witnesses) whereof above Eight Million may be found in one drop of water; and Mr. Hook proceeded so far as to demonstrate Millions of Millions contained in such a mighty ocean.” Cotton Mather, *The Angel of Bethesda* (1724), rpt. ed. Gordon Jones (Barre, Massachusetts, Barre Publishing, 1972), xxvii, 46.

119 Mather, *Angel of Bethesda*, 43-44.

120 Frey, *The British Soldier in America*, 41-42.

121 Finger, *Doctor Franklin’s Medicine*, 159-160.


123 As good understanding of the new science in microbiology can be found in works by Betsy Dexter Dyer, especially *A Field Guide to Bacteria* (Ithaca, NY: Comstock Books, 2003).

124 Quoted in Pfeiffer, *Western Medicine*, 112.

125 Pfeiffer, *Western Medicine*, 118.

126 An excellent discussion of this is in Shryock, *Medicine and Society in America*, 137-151.


128 Franklin, *Writings*, 1109-1110.


130 Shryock, *Medicine and Society in America*, 156.


133 Cooper, *Leatherstocking Saga*, 315.
CHAPTER VI:

“PLUMB”

A ONE CHARACTER PLAY

(The Scene: A small county courtroom in Belfast, Maine, July, 1820. Center stage left is the prisoner’s dock: a cage-like structure with spiked ends at about chest height of a person standing in it. The judges sit where the audience is. Center right is a lectern with a closed leather-bound bible and a candlestick upon it. Stage right is a door with a small window above it with an eagle motif stained into the glass. The door is flanked by a window downstage of it that glances out at the corner of a sleepy New England town square. Off, in the distance and vaguely discernible, is a fife and drum corps playing Yankee Doodle in an off-kilter way that barely resembles the famous tune, more like a loose dance step than a strict march. Plumb enters the door. He is a man of above average height, almost sixty years of age, somewhat light on his feet at the moment, stepping lively to the march behind him, though with a stiff leg that causes him to limp at times. He is showing his age but is far from decrepit. The limp comes and goes seemingly at his choosing and he uses it for effect when he wants sympathy though it will go away if he stops thinking of it. In fact, this is an opposite encapsulation of the man himself for he is capable of precise language when he concentrates on it, but stumbles into poor grammar when in a passion, which is often. His clothes are simple, frayed at the
edges, showing evidence of repair in places. On his head is a floppy felt hat that he has clumsily pinned up into a tri-corner, perhaps to accentuate his service in the revolution, for such hats have long gone out of style by 1820. A leather pouch is slung over his shoulder from which he will extract papers, reading glasses, clay pipe and a flask of spirits. He holds a beat-up piece of parchment which he waves like a sword. The opening of the door has let the music full force into the room as he marches in, caught up in the energy of the militia parade ground behind him on the town commons.)

(NOTE: there are for scenes to “Plumb,” thematically labeled as the conversation moves in the direction of the topic, though there should be no break in the action between them and indeed the play takes place in real time.)

LEADERSHIP

PLUMB

(Calling behind him to the marchers, off, a crusty New England growl of a voice.)

That’s it, boys, sway it like granny’s washing on the line. Hoopda hoopda! That’s how we did it in ’76. Ye mock that prissy redcoat spit and polish. None of this chopchopchop. Feel it upside your guts like an enema! Lead with the shoulders! Now ye’re talkin’, Yankee boy! That’s how free men march! Yankee Doodle keep it up! Yankee Doodle Dandy! Buy me some ale later I’ll tell ye what macaroni really means!5

(Laughs, waves through the door, closes it. To himself, scowling.)

Lousy militia.6

(Stops suddenly, seeing the Judge and recorder (never seen or heard) seated where the audience is. Embarrassed, PLUMB closes the door, muffling the
music and then comes forward, taking his hat off in deference.)

Oh. Your Honor. Ah.

(He opens the paper he has been waving, its official red ribbon and seal dangling.)

This is- Court of Common Pleas, Third Eastern Circuit, Hancock County. Judge Crosby, is it? Judge William Crosby? I am Joseph Plumb Martin, Revolutionary War Continental Army veteran. Regular army, yes, sir. Under General George Washington. Yes, your honor- I am here because of the Federal Veterans Pension Act of 1818 which President James Monroe- Aye. Like it says on the paper- July 7, 1820. That is today, if I am not mistaken. I am to report to the Court of Common Please Third Eastern Circuit- Well, I did not see your bailiff. Oh. Out there? Did I use the wrong door?

(He looks at the door, turns back, sheepish.)

Well, apologies, Your Honor, that was the front door last time I was down here. Now that Maine is a state are we to be sneaking into the courthouse on the side away from the town square so people cannot see us come in and out? Is that where the great republic is leading us? I would go out and come back in front but ye know this limp of mine... Must be that rain we had last night. Was I really dancing around a moment ago, your Honor? I reckon I was, now ye mention it. Well, ye know, when the fife and drum starts the joints loosen somewhat. But it’s temporary. See? Stiff leg. Got it in the war. (He limps around a bit for show.) Now, Your Honor, if you will forgive me but if I peruse this document correctly I am to give testimony in petition for an annuity of ninety-six dollars a year under this new Revolutionary War Veterans Pension Act. Martin. M-A-R-T-I-N. Joseph Plumb Martin… P-L-U-M-B. Mother’s name. Shall I spell “Joseph?” Everybody calls me “Plumb.” There’s more Martins and Josephs around than ants on syrup. Well, as we are
talking of war veteran I just assumed because… If its about combat credential I saw action at- let me see- (he puts a hand to his temple, thinks) First battle Long Island, last battle Yorktown so if we start in 1776- (closes his eyes to remember all the names.) Battle of Brooklyn Heights, Battle of Turtle Bay, Battle of Kip’s Bay, Battle of White Plains—won that one, lost the others. 7 1777- Battle of Monmouth, Battle of Mud Island—Say, am I not to be sworn in? Do ye not swear me in? I have been a Justice of the Peace so I know about court procedure… Well, perhaps ye should ask your bailiff to come back in if he is standing at the other door.- (in reaction to some harsh words from the bench, momentarily cowed) Yes, your Honor. Sorry, Your honor. No disrespect to the court. If his honor would kindly request the officer of the court to re-materialize and swear in a poor humble laborer and petitioner who served his country eight years in the great war of independence and has traveled all the way from Prospect, Maine- (Pause. He waits as the reporter fetches the Justice of the Peace who is serving as bailiff. To himself.) Get ahold of yourself, Plumb, ye foolish bastard. “Love and be silent.”8 (He spies the entrance of another man.) Ah! Mr. Justice! Yes, I am Joseph Plumb Martin. We were in a countermarch with each other. I infiltrated your rear! Yet I thought it a frontal attack. (Indicating the door he entered). His Honor Judge Crosby would have ye swear me in. I beg your pardon, Mr. Justice? You have already read my statement? Eh? Aye, that is my paper there that I sent. My letter of petition and my affidavit of which I have made a fair copy here. (Pulls out another sheaf of parchment.) Eh? Saving your Honor’s pardon, Mr. Justice, I thought you said you did not think I wrote that affidavit myself. Who would write it then, my plow horse? Me. Myself. Joseph Plumb Martin. That is my signature there. You think I would sign something that- What? No, I had no professional
assistance- Ye think me unlettered? Why? Because I was a common soldier? My father was a clergymen.⁹ Even if I were not, ye think we in the ranks could not read? I’ll not speak of other units from other places but in Connecticut you read your good book and everything else yourself and professional assistance to ye, and that goes for dirt farmer or selectman and sometimes the dirt farmer is the selectman or a Justice of the Peace like yourself, sir… I am not speaking in disrespect, sir. I am speaking in truth which cannot ever be disrespectful to God or man, or country, saving your Honor… Highest rank achieved in War of Independence? Sergeant. Well… Corporeal. That was at Yorktown. Sappers and Miners Corps. I was in on the first assault. We dug trenches and built the ramparts for… I beg your pardon, Mr. Justice, it sounded like you said you were only deposing officers today. The summons in the post said this date I was to report- well, corporeal is an officer, is it not? Commissioned? Your Honor, there was no commissions in the militia in 1776 that I heard about. Buy a fancy uniform and you’re an officer. That was all the commission I knew about, and a bad one it was at that, if ye don’t mind my saying so.¹⁰ Go to school with the general’s nephew you’re a lieutenant. Marry his daughter you’re a captain. If he owes you money you’re a major! Tomorrow for enlisted? Mr. Justice, I cannot come back tomorrow. Well, the rate your tavern-keeper charges will put me in arrears and my farm is very tight since the depression last year.¹¹ Saving Your Honor’s pardon, the wife is ailing and one of my sons is soft in the head and when I’m not there he takes to eating the feathers out of the pillows. The summons says today. Saving your honor: Corporeal. Is. An. Officer. I directed my trench unit at Yorktown. Well, our ensign was always off to the French camp to get provisions because we never had enough of our own.¹² (he is losing this argument) Sir, yes, sir. No, sir. Yes, sir…
Come back tomorrow. Yes, sir. With your permission, your honor, if I may speak candidly- I was not addressing you, Mr. Justice, I was addressing Judge Crosby. Is he not the presiding judge here? And are ye not a municipal officer and therefore outranked by a Circuit Judge of the Common Pleas? (takes out another paper, squints at it.) Well, if your honor will read the Federal Petition Act in full- especially 19 article six paragraph two- “all persons of experience in military service in the years 1776 until termination of duties or until general discharge of 1783 will hereby report-” there is nothing in the protocols about rank, there is nothing in the protocols about commissioned rank, there is nothing in the protocols organizing the procedures other than alphabetic- and July 7 is designated for “M”- that’s me, M as in Martin- and in consideration of need, of which I am. In need. In very much need. My summons is for today.¹³ I am a man with eight years service in the American Revolutionary War for Independence. I know about some in your war, Mr. Justice, your War of 1812- I see your insignia and your militia ribbon- I know some with eight MONTHS’ service in the War of 1812, that made one a major and another a colonel- after eight months of not marching, and eight months of not fighting, and eight months of not coming to the aid of the capital when the enemy was burning it down- (talking over Justice of the Peace’s shouts) BURNING IT DOWN, SIR. You- Mr. Justice, what were you in the glorious War of 1812? Captain? What was your unit, Captain? That is a quartermaster unit, is it not? Aye, Quartermaster, or I’m Napoleon - Quartermaster is nothing but a license to help yourself to food and drink and I know because I was in a quartermaster corp the winter of 1777 when everybody was shedding a tear over our poor starving soldiers at Valley Forge.¹⁴ And let me tell you, ye did not need to be at Valley Forge 1777 to starve for your country and 1777 was not the worst winter of the war
anyhow no matter what the history books say.\textsuperscript{15} EVERY winter was bad. ‘78 was bad. Men froze to death. ‘79 was bad… my point is that in my few months with the quartermaster corps was the only time in that eight years I had enough to eat! I’ll wager from the look of you it fed you very well too, sir! (As Justice threatens him with contempt) Aye, throw me in the brig for contempt of court if ye won’t observe your own protocol and ye won’t have respect for a man who served his country for the FULL DURATION OF THE WAR- 1776 to 1783 with no food, no pay, no leadership- I said NO LEADERSHIP… (Judge Crosby has intervened, saying something sharp. Cowed, respectful:) Very well, Your Honor. Sorry, your Honor. My quarrel is not with you and it is not with this court, it is only with your temporary bailiff… Tomorrow. Reckon I can borrow somebody’s barn loft to lay my head in…

(He starts to go. Stops, at the door.)

Oh yes. Wrong door. We are to sneak out the side now so the public cannot see us.

(Starts his way unsteadily downstage, stops, the last card in his deck.)

By the by, Judge, General Knox wished me to give you his regards. General Knox. Aye. Former Secretary of War. Under Washington. He is landlord of several parcels here in Maine as I am sure your Honors are both aware. Well… in a manner of speaking, ye could say General Henry Knox is a business associate of mine.

(Martin is not on good terms with Knox, so this is hard for him to say.)

Fine man. Great patriot. Dear friend. If ye will give me good consideration and take my testimony today I am sure the good General would be pleased. Aye, talk among yourselves if ye like. I’ll stand guard here and make sure no other bleeding democrat comes in off the commons using the wrong God thumping door.
(He limps over to the door, looks out the window, to himself.)

Why, damned if ye can’t see the new memorial they put up to commemorate 50 years since the Boston Massacre. Quite a nice shrine to the unwashed rabble, if ye ask me.

(He is summoned back.)

Sir, yes sir, Judge Crosby, are you addressing me?

(He walks stiffly, accentuating his limp, then stands at attention and salutes.)

Sir, yes, sir. Corporeal at Yorktown with the extended duties of a sergeant, if ye will and in fact Sappers and Miners had special status. We were not under any regional command. Aye, sire, one might indeed entertain the notion that a corporeal in the sappers might be equal to commissioned status in regular units. I took no orders from any lieutenants or captains, only my own chain of command… well, a very pleasant legal loophole, thank you for finding it, Your Honor.

(He eyes the Justice, who he can see is not pleased with the decision.)

Mr. Justice, I hope you will forgive words said in heat. I am but a poor laborer who is sometimes not master of his own passions. “Floods and streams.” Better to be “deep and dumb.”


(He rolls up his parchments, sticks them in his belt like a sword, and moves up to the podium with the bible, accentuating his limp, and puts his left hand on it while he raises his right and repeats what he is instructed to say.)

I, Joseph Plumb Martin, do solemnly swear that the testimony I am about to give is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

(He pulls the sheaf of parchment from his belt, reads from it.)

“I, Joseph Plumb Martin, being near sixty years of age, indigent and infirm, served my
country first in the Connecticut Militia, then in the Continental Army under His Excellency General George Washington, from 1776 until cessation of hostilities and even beyond, having been honorably discharged in 1783.” What, Your Honor? Well, the summons states that “all petitions for a veteran’s pension will be reviewed during testimony.” Well, are we not reviewing my petition? Aye, as I said, I am nearing sixty, Your Honor. I joined up at fifteen. I lied about my age. Not that anybody cared. Eh? What do you say there, Mr. Justice? How do I know General Henry Knox? Is this to be a hearing to be about General Knox then? Well, he is land owner up where I live. Aye. We—have had property concerns in common, you might say. I have the greatest regard and respect for Henry Knox. I have named my prize pig after him. Right you are, Mr. Justice, right you are. A great hero is General Henry Knox. Great artillery commander. Robbed Fort Ticonderoga of their cannon. Been robbing people ever after. With good British guns and a few books on gunnery my grandsire could be a great artillery commander as well. I mean no disrespect, of course. He was a fine Secretary of War under President Washington, yes, sir. Good warlike strategy, buying up all the good land in Northern New England out from under us who settled it and worked it and who it really belonged to. Us “White Indians” your precious Henry Knox and his Boston cronies call us before they come to “civilize us” with their taxes and their rents and their foreclosures. “White Indians.” The men whose backs this whole war was fought upon. Sorry. Sorry, Your Honor. No, sir. No hard feelings over Henry Knox. After all, the Panic of 1819 ruined him as well as me, I’d wager. What? What are ye whispering there? What is he whispering there, Judge? At an end? You cannot end it here. I have been sworn in and I have not given testimony. Oh, have you, Mr. Justice. You have enough for
what? For to deny me? You are not the presiding officer of this court. Your Honor, Judge Crosby, may I approach the bench in private with regard to your choice of bailiff? Well, then, may I respectfully remind the court that elections are up soon and we watch matters very carefully up in Prospect, where I believe the number of eligible voters is growing and woe betide your noblesse God thumping oblige because we will be heard after our full count is known in this year’s census, Mr. temporary bailiff!

(He realizes he has said too much. In a softer tone.)

I do not know why I am being used in this way. Are we not war veterans here? Have we not the sweat of our brows and the blood of our hearts spilled in service to the republic? You in 1812, me in ‘76. I will even give you your quartermaster corps, Mr. Justice. I am sure you kept the troops heartily fed. Heroes all. Your general Andrew Jackson is as good a man as Washington, I daresay. I was militia like you before becoming regular army. I cannot say enough about our local militias. Treat me to a jar of stout and I might say even more than enough. These days when a military epaulette can be bought with gold. These days when the world is run by the God-thumping Masons or Order of Cincinnatus blowhards or other little friendly networks that give privilege to the few and cut the manhood right out of the crotch of our Democracy…

I beg the court’s pardon. I have nothing against the Masons, if you are of that persuasion. His Excellency was a Mason and I say God bless the sainted Father of the Country, secret handshake and all. No, Your Honor, I am not bad-mouthing General Washington. I was witness to His Excellency’s actions on many occasions during the war. He was a true and constant leader making a hard way in a world of “summer soldiers and sunshine patriots” as Mr. Paine termed it. Good and level headed too. Like Baron Von Steuben. I have great respect for
good old “Von Shtumpfin’” as well. Barely spoke the language but he taught us to drill and made us real soldiers, he did. He saved me once. One time a tight-tail of a captain was working us to death in the hot sun. This was in 1780. We were rolling rocks across a shaky plank above a sixty foot drop when we were fortifying a position up on the Hudson above New York. Von Steuben put a stop to it and sent us back to barracks. “You might as well knock those men on the head,” he said, God bless his Prussian hide. Lafayette was a good man, though he was hardly much older than me. Some good officers who I knew fell in battle: Knowlton, Leitch. You need good leaders who are willing to make the sacrifice we all make when we serve our country. Never saw hide nor hair of an officer during the disaster at Long Island in ‘76. Reckon they ran off. I can hold my own in forest fighting and I think that is what an American soldier does best. But in an open field on formation without a sure hand to guide the line, we would be dead men. Some of our leaders get more credit than they deserve. Ugly old General Charles Lee was more bluster than brains, if ye ask me. He called for us to retreat at Monmouth when our blood was up and we wanted to keep fighting. I wager we would still be retreating had not General Washington come up and turned us around to defend our position- it was our Connecticut troops he used to make the stand that saved the day, by the by. I read one history said it was southern troops, but it was Connecticut and Rhode Island men- make sure you put that in the record, young man. Then there was “Old Put.” General Israel Putnam. Hero of Bunker Hill, say the history books, as if he fought the battle single handed. As good a commander as an overstuffed pullet, if ye ask me. To this day I smoke a pipe because he smoked cigars. A friend of your grandsire’s, Mr. Justice? Well then, God bless him. How about General Benedict Arnold? Were ye kissing cousins with him?
There’s a piece of vermin in satin if ever there was one. I knew General Arnold in older
days growing up in Connecticut and never thought much of him, the surly bastard. I had
occasion during the war to see his true character even before he betrayed his country.

(Looks up at the Judge, nodding.)

Ye like to hear about it? Aye, Benedict Arnold stories is tasty meat even today. Met him
face to face in 1780. Twice. Right before he betrayed his country, too. One time he sent
us out of a barn at night so he could have it to himself. All us recruits had to sleep in the
cold and wet while he had comfort to plot his treacheries and maybe talk about them in
his sleep where he could not be overheard. Another time I saw him alone on the road near
West Point, New York, measuring and marking and I do not know what all. Had I known
what he was really about then I could have popped him off with my rifle and saved us all
a great deal of misery.

(He regards the prisoner’s dock, touching one of the spiked poles.)

This is a good prisoner’s dock- solid. (hurts the tip of his finger on a spike) Sharp. Makes
me think of our fortifications on Mud Island. Fort Mifflin. A great terrible battle. But we
put up a good fight before we had to abandon it. The officers at Fort Mifflin insisted we
build the outer wall with spiky tops like this. Palisado, they called it. Good for stopping a
horse charge. Except we were on an island in the middle of the Delaware River. Still, we
must build the spikes and pile stones up behind them. Want to know the good effect of
these fine fortifications? Shells from the British ships slam right into these spiky ramparts
and rocks and spikes and splinters scatter and hit everyone around it. Better than
grapeshot for killing our own men. Leadership should be made of sterner stuff, says the
Bard- sort of. Do not mistake me, Fort Mifflin was as great a feat of American bravery
as anywhere in the war, officers and men together.\textsuperscript{30} What’s that, Your Honor? Congress? Oh yes, Your Honor. (facetiously) Congress showed great leadership back then, as they always do, do they not? Oh, yes, sir, why we were fairly coddled by Congress. Food? Why we ate handsomely, I daresay. Squirrel, when we could shoot it. Roast it up at a fire and eat it Indian style: on a stick, black on the outside and bloody red on the in…\textsuperscript{31} Not that we had sauce to help it down. Well, the gunpowder salt is not bad sauce for the meat if you do not have any other.\textsuperscript{32} Or sometimes Congress meant us to eat the smoke from our tobacco pipes. Nothing like a smoke to smother a growly belly-women or rum may betray you in the morning but a good smoke is a fine and true companion all the time.\textsuperscript{33} Not that Congress ever gave us tobacco. We had to steal it some from an officer’s stash or plunder a homestead for it. Sometimes we were short of rope because some soldiers were smoking that.\textsuperscript{34} I remember one time when Congress really came through for us. That was the time they gave us a sumptuous Thanksgiving feast. Want to know what was in that great Thanksgiving feast? One gill of gin. Do not misunderstand me. A man needs a quaff of the “Good Creature” to keep the Devil away.\textsuperscript{35} But that was the whole feast! Gin. And a troop of men on liquor and no vittles is a fine sight indeed. I recall one time we had gin but no vittles and we were ordered to advance over a fence in a meadow. The fence won.\textsuperscript{36} Sorry, Judge, what did you ask? Pay? Yes, Sir. I got paid. Twice. Once when I enlisted in 1776 and then a second time when I was discharged in 1783.\textsuperscript{37} Six dollars each time, as I recall. Nothing in between. No, sir. Nothing. There was money in enlisting, of course, so some soldiers deserted, and re-enlisted in another unit for the bounty.\textsuperscript{38} Not me, of course. Not smart enough, I reckon. Oh, certain we were \textit{promised} pay. And new clothing too. Sometimes we had to mutiny
for our pay or our food but that is because our leaders were either lining their pockets or making decisions any ordinary soldier could make better.39 Mutinies get some things done when Congress don’t. We got some socks and a shirt too, after the mutiny of 1779, for instance, if I remember right. Even better on discharge in ‘83. Six dollars was just enough to buy a new coat and a few other pieces of clothing. You don’t want to look poorly as a civilian. Oh, and I got my allotment of Ohio lands on discharge too. That is long gone. We had nobody to advise us about our land grants. We were on our own and so when speculators came along with good hard cash most of us sold it off, not knowing any better, myself included.40 Congress made it so us soldiers could get fleeced by the business concerns that lined their pockets. That is the leadership that the histories give credit for building this nation. I know many think Thomas Paine is nothing more than a Godless bastard these days but he always made common sense to me. We read him all through the war, and we still read him today.41 When leaders help themselves and do not help us all, they lose the right to lead. Now here we are in 1820 and we have made Maine a new state so the slave holders down south do not get the upper hand. Well, I do not fear the slave holders down there when we have men holding us as slaves up here with their rents and their tariffs and their friendships with those as can afford to buy legislation. In six years time we will have half a century without Johnny Bull and his Lord Haw Haws sucking us to furnish their palaces. How nice is your house, Mr. Justice of the Peace?
SURVIVAL

PLUMB

I beg your pardon, Your Honor, I thought you said we are here only to reward heroes.
Aye, and who are they? Nathan Hale? That one life he gave for his country does not need your pension. I will tell you what wins wars, Honors both, not heroics but presence. Does your army run away to fight another day or does it just stand there and die? Oh yes, Mr. Justice, it is also possible for an army to run away and never come back. Very well put. I daresay that is the sort President Madison found when he had to evacuate the White House in 1812. Me? Certainly, I ran away when it was in my interest to do so. Eight years of running away and sometimes turning around will people your trenches at Yorktown.
Away with your God-thumping heroics. So we are only awarding heroes? Then I submit to you that men that served their country for years are all heroes. Not because they died for their country, because they survived for it. Much is the heroics attached to surviving the war of Independence, your honor. I’d wager a fair number of the men that won the day at Trenton and Yorktown engaged in stealing food at times. I’d wager some of them ran away when block-headed officers put them in impossible situations, or dug holes to hide in when British Man-o-Wars raked their mud forts with twelve pounders. I’d say a hero is a man with eight years of service to his country, eight years of cold except when the enemy grapeshot made it hot, and eight years starvation not improved by the prospect of ending your days a skeleton on a Brit prison ship or nursing a bayonet in your belly, eight years of service to America and with not a thank you, not a God-ﬂipping damned “gramercy” from damn-all anyone, if ye’ll pardon my French.42 I know it is all the fashion to disrespect the regular army these days. We love those blessed Minutemen who
fired a few shots here and there and then went home to a full dinner and a warm wife. Well, we did not win that war in a minute, your honor, we won it in EIGHT YEARS. We won it with your regulars, not your militia. Heroics. Spare me. Ye want to know why I enlisted? Because I was angry at my grandsire because he would not let me go to Convocation. Yale College Convocation. No better drinking, brawling, wenching—saving your pardon—and whatnot in the county than the Yale Convocation. Take if from me—nobody can throw a how-do-ye-do and a fine pickling with good Jamaica like the boys at Yale. My father was an Eli and my ma was the tavern keeper’s daughter. That’s all ye need to know to finish that story. My grandsire had at first promised I should go and so when he changed his mind, I stewed all day over it. Fifteen years old ye stew easy. I skipped my chores to spite him, dodged his whip when he found out, and then I ran away to the war. I tell people now it was because we got the news about Lexington and Concord and my martial blood was up. I was more thinking it had to be better than chores. All very easy, joining up. They put a dollar coin on a drum and if you take it off and keep it you’re in the army. First it was only for three months. Three months and we’d tell King George a thing or two about our rights as Englishmen and then back home, no hard feelings. Well, eight years later, I’m thinking I should have stuck with the chores. At least the pigs don’t shoot back when you try to slaughter them. Oh, ye don’t see the great world down on the farm, to be sure. I seen sights. Men’s heads turned to mash. Arms and legs smacked off like cheddar by a cleaver. Trails of blood in snow from men marching without shoes. A beautiful canopy of rain and hail over your head while sleep in the muck… Your pardon, Judge? My limp? Even that was not heroic, Your Honor. I was jumping into one of the bateaux we were using to ferry ourselves across the Harlem river,
I believe it was, and my foot landed right on an oar and just rolled this leg right over at the ankle. Swelled up as big as my head. I have had other ailments and hurts in the war, to be sure. Came close to being shot by the enemy or blown apart by his cannons on several occasions, but I am here today not because I fought them off but because I was good at ducking down.46 There were times I was in more danger from own comrades. I almost went deaf once when a man sitting next to me discharged his musket by accident.47 Reckon I am still here mostly because I stayed away from the army doctors with their mercury and quicklime and other miracle cures that cured so many out of a life.48 Your revolutionary war hero shirked his duty, when that duty made no sense. He mutinied when food and clothing were kept from him so profiteers could ask a high price for ‘em. He sometimes lacks good discipline when those training him have less a clue at soldiering than he has. He falters on guard duty from time to time because he is not used to the drill.49 But a hero never fails his country. I never fails his comrades. I never fails the cause.50 I never failed mine. Are ye getting all this down, Court Reporter? Very good. You keep writing there, youngster. Maybe finally somebody will write a real history of the revolution. Not a great flag-waving God-spitting pageant where well-fed great men stand around spouting poetry and waving swords. A great unholy mess of flying limbs and weeping officers and stink and spew and running here and there and away.51 Give you the example. About my second battle of the war- at Kipp’s Bay in ‘76, I think that is when I came of age a soldier. Kipps Bay. Just above New York town on the East River of Manhattan Island. September of 1776. Sabbath morning. I remember that. The British liked to work their deviltry on church-going days. We lay quiet in our ditch watching the sun crawl up the sky. Suddenly BAM BAM BAM! British ships lay into us. The thunder
of it nearly took my ears off. Then come redcoats, emptying out of boats on the shore below us and marching in a thick line looking like a bloody gash in the hillside, but the blood is running uphill toward you. The sight was enough to spook our officers who told us to run and so we ran. Forty or fifty rods over level ground exposed full to the enemy’s fire—grapeshot and langrage flying merrily and you can be I could have outrun your best racer horse on that day.  

I ducked into a house where two women and some children were all crying bitterly. I took a few smart swigs from a bottle of rum they had and then raced on my way. Saw a party of men in blue coats and ran hard to overtake ‘em when HOLD. They had mustachios and pointy hats! Hessians! We run the other direction when- BAM BAM BAM. A line of British in a cornfield up ahead lays a storm of shot into us and so back we run again. We cast off whatever weight was on our backs and we run. The ground was covered with weapons, knapsacks, staves, coats, hats, old oil flasks… My companion was so overcome by heat, hunger and fatigue he got violent sick and so I had to carry his musket. He would not move so I dragged him on. BAM BAM BAM there’s another party of the enemy stretched across the main road so we quitted the road and went into the fields. I dove into the weeds just as some British passed by so near me I could see the buttons on their clothes. There I am, fifteen years old, carrying two guns in the heat and smoke. I had not eaten a mouthful of vittles in more than twenty-four hours. I run and stumble on as fast as I can and finally I come upon a spot where some of our soldiers are sweating and puffing under some trees, my sick friend sitting among them, his head between his knees. “I must die here,” says he. I yell and scream that he should not die there nor anywhere else and push him up and we move on. - Just as a rain comes- a drenching pounding waterfall of rain that soaks you right through to the soul.
We’re staggering through the rain and I see our company up ahead and I try to overtake them with my sick friend but another company is between us and the officer stops me and says we have to stay there. “But this man is sick and our regiment is just up there” I says! “Well,” says he, “if he dies the country will be rid of one who can do it no good.” And so we stay. Our company ahead, we behind with this fine gentleman of an officer who thanks be to God I did not shoot on the spot. And thanks be to God my friend did not indulge the wishes of the country, though I do not know what happened to him after. That was the battle of Kip’s Bay. Ducking and running much, shooting little. Many went missing that day, killed or captured, including our major who was a fine man. It was a bad loss. And the aftermath was worse. Men holding their bleeding bellies or heads, screaming and moaning all evening, all night, and by morning nor more sounds, just dead men staring at nothing with bugs crawling in their open mouths. So. Kipp’s Bay. God bless it. Many a brave friend I lost there. Many a night without sleep I have had because of it. Only afterward are we allowed the indulgence of believing we were heroes. While we are on the subject of heroics, shall I tell you of my service under the titanic General Putnam, sir Justice? That was spring and summer of ‘77 and the marching and countermarching and starving and freezing and sleeping on the ground under his illustrious command trumps any that came after for the magnitude of its inconsequence. One time after a long day’s march we were about to shelter in a barn from a hefty rain storm- the officers got to stay in houses but we got barns- and I’m thinking finally we’ll have a dry clean night, when word comes from “Old Put” that 3000 Hessians are bearing down on us, so out we run into the rain for more marching and countermarching, and “Mynheer” never does make his appearance so we are wet to the gills and sneezing our
faces off- all this on no food for we had not been fed in days. Aye, any man who survives the command of general Israel Putnam is a hero, I say. On two occasions I had some personal heroic encounters with General Putnam. One time early in the war at New York town one of our unit discovered a back door to a wine merchant’s shop so we all crept in and filled up our canteens with his stock. Good practice for a young lad, learned how to steal rum from officers’ casks without them the wiser. This wine seller was wiser, though. He complained. Old Putnam comes riding by bawling he would hang the lot of us. We hid away from him and when he rode off we went right back to taking the wine. Never drink water, so the Good Book says. Another time “Old Put” is riding along and I am coming off guard duty, all empty belly and aching limbs and there is this gate in the road with big heavy bars across and he orders me to lift the bars all by myself so he can pass by. Well, I lift one so I can step through but I leave the other up and take to my heels. “Old Put” is waving his pistol and bawling behind me “Curse ye! I’ll hang ye!” Reckon if Old Put really did hang all the soldiers he was fixing to half the Continental army would be long in the neck. Nobody helped us, Your Honor, so we helped ourselves. And if officers had food and wine when we ordinary soldiers did not, we helped ourselves to theirs when we could. I came into the war a foolish boy with no ideas in my head and I came out of the war a foolish man with at least one idea in my head: I am as good as any man and so are the men who have fought beside me. I can respect a man who is smarter than me but I will not respect any man as my better. And now as I am old and my head serves mostly as a mop for ale, I cannot flatter myself I am a great hero except to say, “I survived.” And us surviving meant an American army surviving. And an American army surviving meant the rebellion survived and Congress survived, and this country survived.
I think that worth ninety-six dollars a year. Your Tom Jefferson makes that in a few hours on the backs of his slaves… Come again, your honor? Slaves? Apologies. I should not have brought it up. Why? What should I care about slavery? Maine is at the north end of this Missouri Compromise. No Africans here, except a few freemen as keep to themselves and that is fine by me. I don’t vex my head about it and neither should you. Ask your Justice bailiff about it, Judge Crosby. For once he is sitting there mum, God bless us. I reckon he feels the same. Keep the slavery question far away from us! If my lord Justice needs someone to do his hard work for him and beat when they complain about it I reckon there’s plenty of displaced farmers hereabout would work for pennies. Why pay hundreds for an African?

SLAVES & TORIES

All this moaning and mumbling about what to do with the Africans, well, ‘tis no business of mine when I am slave to my creditors anyhow. I owned a slave once for about half a day when I thought I could barter him for some food or scrip. Seemed a natural enough thing. ’Tis in the bible, after all. If ye ask me, just let Old Cuff stay on his plantation and not come up here to steal my land and my work. Come again, Judge? Peace peace. King George made us all “slaves.” I read the history books too. Perhaps one day we can let the Africans have their liberty but that day has not come and I will tell you why. We have forgotten, Your Honor, or perhaps we would like to forget. The worst, most evil part of my war in ‘76 was not against the lobster backs. It was not against the stinking Hessians or even the Indians even if ye count up all the scalpings and massacres. The worst part of my war was Americans against Americans. Stir up that hornet’s nest about the slavery
and the next sound ye hear will be the United States of America cracking apart. Let them break heads in Missouri over it if they like. Maine is only a free state because God thumping tobacco and rice and cotton and sugar does not grow here and if it were different we would not be weeping over who is going to tend it and pick it and bushel it and cure it and refine it. Keep slavery and leave me alone about it. Will ye deny me my pension on that account? If so, you will have to deny His Excellency his glory and most of the Continental Congress as well because the freedom of a white man to own a black man is protected by the United States Constitution and as far as I know nobody has seen fit to make it otherwise this half a century. What, Your Honor? ‘Tis not for me to judge all men created equal or not. Never thought they were. The Great Providence let us remove the Indian and lord it over our women and our children and our Africans, so who am I to argue against it if I benefit from the arrangement? Who are you to argue against it? I’ll tell ye this, the man as invented the reaper or the steam engine was created a better than me and I give don’t begrudge him his dollars or his mansion or his fat family or his thousands of acres. He deserves it. And you will not convince me that woman and man are created equal either. I never saw a woman could carry a musket or fire a cannon- well, not strictly true. I did see one female cannoneer at Monmouth, and a fearless hussy she was too. I will grant her my equal but I make no claim for the gentle sex as a whole. I would make a fine figure in a lacy frill gown looking demure and blushing behind my fan, so we’re quits about it. I does not ask my wife to clear the land or break a new horse and she does not ask me to make the quilt or birth the baby. For that matter I fought side by side with men all across this land and it brought us together as a people and I respect them as good men to have with you in the fight, but I would be the first to tell you a New
Englander is the superior breed over all of them. Certainly more use than thick-headed New York Dutchman. Pennsylvanians will steal the shirt off your backs if ye let them.

I’d sooner my daughter marry a dog as a Marylander. Do not put me on the same level as an eye-gouging Irishman. Those Philadelphia Micks would bash their mothers for sport. I saw one drown a Hessian in the mud with his bare hands. I found good company with Indians from time to time but I wouldn’t let one sit in my parlor. I can tolerate a Hessian despite the stories about ‘em. I can perhaps forgive a British grenadier his trespasses—except when burns my land and slaughters my livestock for his pleasure or when he imprisons my comrades and treats ‘em like rats. I can even abide the red-coat Sawney with his kilt and his God-awful bagpipes, I reckon. I could abide any kind of human except for one animal, Judge, and that was your American Tory. That is a dirty war that war between Americans. That is a house to house war, never knowing friend from foe. Don’t ever ask me to love a Tory refugee. Scratch the skin of one of those scoundrels and worms will come out. Rampaging through a town of patriots plundering and burning everything to the ground, sometimes with the people inside the houses. I went hunting Tories in New York and Jersey where Tories were thick as fleas. This enemy was not strangers from over the sea. This enemy was your neighbor and sometime friend or even blood relative or in-law. They sneak up on a sentry, smile and talk to him in his own language, his own accent, about people they both know, then they shoot him or cut his throat and skulk off into the darkness; or capture foraging parties and cut them up and hang the carcasses like meat. We spent three full nights rounding up Tory refugees. Some were still in their green coats as if they were on parade. I think we caught twelve or fourteen of them, their families screaming at us as we took ‘em off. Easier to stem off a
bayonet attack than a gaggle of Tory grannies clawing and biting you. You have heard of His Excellency with his wooden teeth. Try getting the splinters out when granny leaves her false choppers in your hand. Dirty blasted when the enemy is anywhere around you.

One time we got word of a Tory raid and so we took turns standing sentinel to wait for ’em. For late night watch the sergeant put a man up a good man. Twist was his name. I knew him well. Young as me at the time and a great deal smarter. Ten o’clock that night, sure enough, the Tories came, sneaking along the path and Twist hears them and says “Who comes there?” And they say to him that if he can keep from discharging his gun in warning they will leave him alone. Twist fires his piece and runs for the house to alarm the others but he stumbles on a hedge fence and gets tangled in the bushes and the Tories are on him like wolves. We found him later. His breast was like a sieve. Twist.

(His eyes tear up and he wipes them away angrily.)

Damn I wish I did not have to remember that… I heard later about one of our militia captains captured by refugees like these and strung up and hung on the spot. And don’t you believe every Tory escaped the country after Yorktown. Far from it. Walk down a street in New York, Trenton, Elizabethtown, Perth Amboy, out Long Island or up along the Hudson, anywhere, and of the gray heads you see I would wager most were on the side of the enemy in that war and some probably carry evil secrets of what they did back then to fellow Americans. American on American must never happen again.
YORKTOWN

What is that Mr. Justice? Ye wish to speak to me on my affidavit now? Impressive? Very charitable of you, sir. Indeed I flatter myself I am a writer on occasion. I have written some light verse and some hymns. I think one day I might take my hand to writing about my days in the war. I also am a fair painter and something of a scientific philosopher in my spare time. What about it? Suspicion of what? Made up? Made up? Ye think I made all this up?! Every detail? Every name? What have I been talking of this past hour?! Ye think I have been spinning yarns?! A man can write his own deposition and not be a teller of false tales! How dare you! Check the rolls. Oh you have them in front of you and I am not on them? Of course I am not on them, those are Massachusetts rolls! I was a Connecticut man when I was shipped to New York in ‘76. 5th Connecticut 3rd Company under Captain Samuel Peck and Colonel William Douglas. State Militia. I know state militia is not supposed to serve outside state lines but the God-flipping war was in New York! Listen. They kept better records later. You should have me in 1781. I was with the Sappers and Miners at Yorktown. That was a national unit and there were many Massachusetts men in it. That was under Captain David Bushnell and I knew Old Bushy. He was mad as a cat on a coal scuttle but he was a fair inventor and he knew his mining and sapping and how to lay a siege. Bushnell is yet living, I believe. He is a Connecticut man. Ask him. Ask him about “Plumb!” How can ye say I made it up? I was at Yorktown! I can tell ye Yorktown from beginning to end! I can! Very well, then. No no. Hear me out. First off the sapper unit was stationed in the north- you with the pen, are ye getting this? Made up, he says. I will make you eat those words, sir. We were north getting ready to invest New York but then they sent us to Yorktown instead where
Cornwallis was bottled up with his army.\textsuperscript{74} We came down to Virginia on the
*Birmingham*, with all our ordinance and tools and building materials. We met up with the
French Fleet at Lynnhaven Bay- so many ships they looked like a swamp of dry pine
trees, included men-of-war further up the bay, great floating towns, with hundreds of
hands and more guns than a well-fitted shore battery. We waited out a terrible rain storm
there for two or three days and I’ll never forget that storm because all we did was drink.
That was where we siphoned off ale from the back of our officers’ cask with our
grappling hooks. Ask any soldier who was there about the storm! The storms pass, we sail
further into the bay and then disembark and march for Williamsburg and meet up with
General Lafayette and then proceed on to pay the Brits a visit holed up at Yorktown. I
have seen the Marquis de Lafayette on several occasions, several occasions always
looking fine and brave as he does to this day and a great help he was to the cause. I will
not say we could not defeat the British without the frog eaters like many say these days,
but the French had a navy- and that is the only way to beat the Limeys is if he can’t get to
his ships. We were a tight and good corps, us miners, and some of us are yet living and
not a few of those are up here in North New England. You ask any one of them about
crusty old Corporal Plumb who could open his mouth and make a new enemy every day
of the week! Our miners arrived and camped just a mile and half from Yorktown in open
view of the British. We were ahead of the main corps and had to forage for our vittles.
There were hogs roaming those woods, fat and plump and no owners at hand to claim
them, so we made free mess on them while the officers made rumblings about respecting
the local inhabitants and then looked the other way while we did it, and even shared in the
meat. This was hot work digging and building. Platforms for batteries. Ammunition
stores to stack and make ready. Fascines and gabions laid. I could build you a fascine here and now, by God, with my bare hands. I know my business. This was October and good thing too because the nights were cool. Too much hot weather sweats your bombs. We had nights of storms, though—lightning makes a sapper nervous. We worked at night, mostly, so we couldn’t be seen. We opened trenches and assisted the engineers and layed out the works: long boards to mark where the trenches should be dug laid end to end. One night we had to wait at one point in the outworks while the engineers went ahead in the darkness and they did not want us to move from the spot which was only 40 rods from the British trenches so we were of course a little jealous of our safety, but we stayed put. I saw General Washington in the dark, talked to him myself—this is God’s truth I be telling you. We were laying our trenches and this fellow in a long coat comes out of the darkness and asks us where the engineers are and we tell him they are further down the line looking around and he passes a little time with us. Hard to see him in the dark but a tall man and he tells us something we already knew and which is there on my paper, your Honor. If we are captured we take off our Sapper insignia and bury it because nobody gives quarter to Sappers and Miners, that’s how hated they are—worst reputation in the war saving the cannoneers. Then he also makes sure we are quiet so we does not get fired upon. We thank him for his courtesy and he moves on. Soon he is coming back with the engineers and I hear one of the officers calling him “Your Excellency.” Aye, it was General Washington right there exposed to enemy fire that could come at any time and it was all we could do to keep ourselves from urging him to retire back to a safer place. I have seen it myself before, his recklessness. All six foot whatever of him standing up straight in the middle of a battle with shots whizzing all around and the rest of us diving
for cover but him not flinching as if they were so many flies buzzing about his ears. He had made the ceremonial first breaking of ground for the trenches with a pickax that started the siege and we continued the work at night in the rain and fog. Fast work it was because the soil was soft and sandy and by the first weeks we had trenches cutting up the plain on the entire landward side of the town. Still don’t believe me, Your Honor? Here. A diagram. This (Points to the prisoner’s dock) is Yorktown with all its battlements and to the back wall there be the sea and would be the escape route except for the frog eaters’ boats locking them in. Now- to the right here is a marshland.

(He tosses his hat to the audience right.)

Brits were sure we would go through the marsh because the trees are thick and the going is so miserable they thought we would undertake it to surprise them. We lit fires in the marsh so the Brits would think we were in force over there.

(He takes out his pipe, holds it up.)

Fires.

(He tosses the pipe so it lands up above the hat on the floor with a crack.)

Fires and fires all night long and it worked to draw their attention well enough. They lay most of their shots that way. On the left is the French-

(He takes out a flask, holds it up, tosses it across the floor)

and they keep a feint attack coming up and going back so the Brits are looking that way as well. Also the French had their batteries started over there and mayhap the Brits saw that too and so they’re directing their fire left and right but not at us so we’re digging and digging and we have our breastworks up before they even notice.
Here’s us. The Brits never saw us in the first days. They are shooting at our fires in the marsh and at the French parading on the east. And here we are trenching under their noses. When the Brits finally got wise we had breastworks all finished and they could only shoot into them as we finished making our bomb batteries. The French got their batteries done a few hours before us but they were not allowed to discharge their guns until we were ready.

(Takes his bag and opens the strap and whips it out across the front of the stage.)

Here be the York River and all along this line is our cannon and bomb batteries—our commanding battery be right next to it with ten heavy guns, three large mortars in the bomb batteries, and with us and the French together the total was 92 cannon, mortars, and howitzers with our flagstaff on the right of the whole line. 92- ye can check me on that. I remember. I was in the trenches when we waited for the signal to open up fire on Yorktown. I can tell you we were on tiptoe with excitement. We knew we had ‘em and we had ‘em good. The sign to start bombarding was the raising of the American flag on the command battery.77

(He moves the flag in its stand and places it to the right of the bag and strap and continues to hold it, holding up his hand as his inquisitors protest.)

No no no you wanted proof I was not making this up and so you hear me out! You hear me out! Twelve noon, Mr. Justice. October ninth, Your Honor. Up goes that flag! Up up up the beautiful star-spangled banner!

(He raises the flag out of the stand and waves it around.)
And with it we yell like madmen, Americans and French alike—Huzzah! Huzzah! And we open up! BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM! Such a thunder ye never did hear! The first shell from our gun enters a fancy house and the shot burns directly over a table surrounded by a large party of British officers at dinner, killing and wounding a number of ‘em. A warm day! A very warm day for the Brits! Those French are good gunners because a lot of the Brit guns are silenced for good in the next several days. And now the real work begins. I had been in the dirt at Mud Island with shells whizzing over me so this was a game of patty cake for me. We begin our second parallel halfway between our works and the Brits.

(He is alive with excitement now, his limp forgotten. He deftly spears the dock with the end of the flag until it is sticking up out of it.)

Two Brit redoubts on the left and we need to capture these to complete our trenches. I had been up all night in the trenches on duty with the other miners but the next day we are ordered up to the lines anyhow and damn all not a man complained of a want of sleep! We wanted to be in it! The officers are fix bayonets to long staves. The riflemen fix ’em to their bessies and keep cartridges in their sleeves. We are going to storm the outer redoubts.

(He kicks a chair up in front of the dock.)

This is us.

(He kicks a stool over on the other side of the dock.)

This is the French. The Sappers and Miners go in front with their axes to cut a passage for the troops through the abatis-

(Indicates the spikes on the prisoner dock.)
-logs- tops of trees, small branches all of it sharpened spikes slanted toward over
trenches. Impossible to cut through but we cut it, chop it, tearing into it, like a starving
wildcat to a haunch. I can do the stroke in my sleep.

(Motions with his arms. We can feel the sheer violence of it in motions.)

and all this time the bullets whizzing in your ears. All day we do this and at dark the
whole force of assailants is beyond the trench and lay down on the ground to wait for the
signal. I remember up above you can see Venus bright and like to burn a hole in the sky
and Jupiter hot as lightning and at first they were so bright that when I looked up I
thought they were our signal flares and I almost start off. Our watch word is
“Rochambeau”- that’s the commander of the French- Ro-sham-bow. Say it quick it
sounds like “rush on, boys.” Suddenly we get the signal- three flares POP-POP-POP
like terrible meteors- and we scurry silent and quick as cockroaches up to the lip of the
trench at the redoubt. We’re right at the abatis when the Brits discover us and start a sharp
fire upon us. Our shells had pockmarked the ground- holes big enough to bury an ox in
and I see men falling down all around me and I’m thinking they must be killing every last
one of us when I fall too- right into a great hole. I think a lot of lives were saved by those
holes as the shots came over the top of us. And then we’re climbing up the sides shouting
“RUSH ON BOYS!”

(He grabs the flag and spears it through the chair.)

We hack at the walls, the men rush through. An officer is trying to shout “Miners and
Sappers stay back outside” but we rush in anyhow so all he can say is “well, go to the
damned if ye will!” The passage in is so crowded I hack the wall at another place where
our shot had cut away some of the abatis and open it up and jump through with some others. A man at my side gets a ball to the head, screams and goes down. We’re at a trench and we have to cross it and now the enemy lobbs grenades, so thick I think at first they’re cartridge papers on fire but then they crack and you have to leap away to stop them burning your leg off. I’m up on the enemy’s breastwork now with my axe and another man I knew is hitching himself down into the trench and the light of the enemy’s muskets makes everything bright so I can see his face as he goes down. I see a Brit jump over the walls, jump down the bank and run off like his feet had wings. Ran all the way to London, I’d wager. Soon the redoubt is ours and the Brits are showing us their backs as the limp off to the walls of the town or sit and wait for us to take ‘em. And the French flag goes up on the other redoubt with a Huzzah that could break the night in two! We lay down then and there and rested while a storm of grape and canister whizzes above us. Second detachment digs out the second parallel that night, swallowing up the redoubts and everything moves toward the town now. But they call a halt and return us to camp. My sapper unit is mostly safe and sound except for one of our lieutenants who got a slight wound on the top of the shoulder by a musket shot. Seven or eight of the infantry were killed and many were wounded and later died. I wanted to go on and finish the job. Me and my axe. Sometimes when I’m good and drunk my arm starts chopping the redoubt in my mind. I smash a table, a chair, a wall. Don’t know how to stop it. Just happens. Hurt my hand and arm a number of times. One time asleep I hit my wife and now we have separate beds.

(Pause, he is tired, an old man again, sits in the chair that was the redoubt and takes the flag in his lap.)
After capturing the redoubts we are back to our routine. We’re on duty 24 hours in the trenches and 48 hours in the camp. Invalids did camp duty. The rest of us waited. One night I put up a bomb battery and the enemy were directing their fire at a large tree near it because that is all they can see in the dark, so we are ordered to fell that tree. Hell of a job attacking that thick black tree. Our axes lose their whetting after an hour of smacking and that job took us a good part of the night so we’re down to hitting that trunk with what seems like dull clubs and the British grape shot and round bounces off the tree and nearly bounces into us the whole time.

(Makes a sharp motion with his arms holding an imaginary axe.)

Cut cut cut. Can’t stop my arms sometimes even now. It groans and tilts, that tree, then CRASH!-it smacks the ground like an earthquake just as the red morning light plays over us like blood and the relief column is coming up into the trenches- some New York troops, and one of their sergeants steps up to the breastwork to look about him and the enemy throw a small shell which falls on the outside of the works and the man turns his face to look at it and a shot from the enemy passes just by his face without touching him at all and he falls dead into the trench right in front of me. I put my hand on his forehead and- his skull is shattered. Blood is flowing from his nose and mouth but not a particle of skin is broken on his face. I have seen many a man killed in the war but never like that. Be careful what you look at. It just might kill you.

(He touches his forehead and face gingerly.)

Well we finished our second line of trenches and I look around me and there’s no firing on either side and I’m wondering what new mischief is coming. That night there’s a terrible rain storm that nearly took the roof off our huts. Next day we hear that Lord
Cornwallis tried to lead an escape but the storm prevented him. Finally some days later we see a white flag carried on a spear by a fine British officer and a drummer boy beside him. Their backs are as stiff as ramrods and their faces might as well be statues. The boy plays a loud tattoo that cuts the stillness.

(He pounds a mournful tattoo on the ground with his flag staff.)

All quiet but for that little drum. All we can do is stare at ‘em but they look straight ahead as if we are not even there: their brass and boots gleaming and that TUMTUMTUMTUM of the drum. I will say this for the Brits, they always put on a good show, even for a parlay. No wonder the best actors are from London. Before night it is read out that the British had surrendered. I drop to the ground at the news. My head is spinning. The greatest empire in the world and here we are all ragtag and bobtail and we beat them with all their spit and polish. Of course, now we had to try some spit and polish of our own. Don’t want to show up in rags to see Cornwallis give up his sword. We spend the night repairing coats and shining the buckles on our shoes up as best we can. One man had no buckles so he shined up an old watch chain and draped it along the front of his hat. He asked me how it looked. It looked like a damn watch chain stuck on a hat but I lied for maybe the first time in my life and said he could be part of the General’s bodyguard with such a fine ornament. Reckon the others saw fit to lie to him as well, for he was in good humor the whole day through. I put charcoal on my shoes to make ‘em look black. We took turns using the one razor that was still sharp enough to shave with. Of course, looking back on it I have to laugh. Next to the French we must have seemed like rats next to a thoroughbred. Well we turned out as best we could. The trenches had been leveled so there was a march-way for the redcoats to come up and stack their arms. After breakfast
we parade in tight order: Americans along the right hand side of the road and the French on the left. Then we waited. Two or three hours. The Brits were in no hurry to show. We took pleasure in the waiting, though. It was all we could do to keep from jigging. Finally they come on, beautiful and perfect as always, bayonets fixed, straight of line, drums beating, their faces so long they looked like they would fall off. They’re led by General O’Hara, Cornwallis’s second-in-command, with a white wig that made his face look yellow. Our General Lincoln, second to Washington, was with them on O’Hara’s right. The French beat a march as they passed between us, ye can hear the gloat in it. TATATA-RUN-TA.

(He raps the flag pole energetically to mimic the French flourish.)

Not a great appearance in terms of numbers. Many of the Brits stayed away. But all the Hessians were there with their big droopy moustachios and curly hair under those funny triangle hats. They had no great care whose hands they were in. The Brits looked through us Americans, but they looked at the French. And if looks could kill… No love lost between the Limeys and the Froggies. One British officer bawls out something we could not understand and the whole red line snaps to a stiff halt. Almost looked like if ye pushed down the first man the rest would totter like dominos. More sharp commands. They approach, stack their rifle, turn on a heel, head back, two double lines from each corps, one leading up, one leading back. Sun glare bounces off their boots and brass and stabs the eye as ye watch ‘em- up, stack, turn, march, up, stack, turn, march, as rhythmic as tin toys on a Swiss clock.
(He replaces the flag in the stand.)

Officers keep their swords as a gesture of honor. I did not see it but I heard General O’Hara tried to give his sword to General Washington but His Excellency would not accept it. A second-in-command gives his sword to someone of the same rank and so it was given to General Lincoln. Even here the Brits tried to slight us. Lincoln, you know, had had to surrender to the Brits at Charleston a year earlier and they had forced him to give his sword to their second-in-command so this made it quits between them. Later the redcoat whole army is assembled and they all march away. Yorktown is a shell of a town, smoking and stinking. Officers march in a separate line, as special prisoners to be ransomed, I think. We march the other direction, up the Chesapeake. All around the woods we could hear the moans of starving and dying negroes as we passed. They’d run off to be protected by Cornwallis and now must go back to their American masters or starve to death. Many had the pox and were lying dead, sometimes with food still in their mouth. It was as sad a sight as I have ever seen and I have seen many.\(^79\)

(He pauses and hobbles downstage and looks out at his judges.)

When we had not a morsel in our bellies. When we had not a roof over our heads. We who stayed in the struggle. Not until the first of the frost. Not until the last of the meat. Until the last of our breath or, God willing, until the end of the war and the start of the peace. We the disciplined regulars at Saratoga, at Cowpens, at Yorktown, at a hundred other places not in the history books because nobody important was there leading the fight. Nobody but us, that is. Us cobblers and farmers and tradesmen who were the private soldiers in your first standing army. We who won your country for you. We looked up and we saw fire in the sky boiling away thousands of years of divine right.
Those with the perfume and the purses try to put a lid on it but it is still boiling. Mark my words. Ignore us at your peril.

(He gathers his bag and his flask, opens it and drinks, replaces the items in his bag, slings it over his shoulder.)

Sir, yes sir, Your Honor. I reckon I have said all I mean to say. Very good, sirs, thank you for your time and your consideration. Now, with or without your permission, I am leaving through what should be your God flipping front door!

(Clicks his heels smartly, turns to the door. Outside we hear the militia fifes and drums again. He defiantly opens the door and starts to exit, then as an afterthought he salutes the judges.)

With all due respect…

(He turns and goes. We hear him shouting out the door.)

That’s the spirit, boys, kick up that leg! Stick it to the air, stick it to the sky and let ‘em know ye’re alive! Huzzah! Huzzah, boys, huzzah!

END OF PLAY
This would be Belfast, Maine, according to George Scheer, “Introduction,” Joseph Plumb Martin, *Narrative of a Revolutionary War Soldier*, rpt. (New York: Arno Press, 1962), xiv. When Congress adopted the Revolutionary War Pension Act (1818), Martin made a sworn statement that he was a “laborer” who “by reason of age and infirmity” was unable to work and that his wife was “sickly and rheumatic” so that without the pension’s $96 a year he would be “unable to support myself and family.” This statement was before Judge William Crosby of the Court of Common Pleas, Third Eastern Circuit, Hancock County, Maine, July 7, 1820 (War Pension File of Joseph Plumb and Lucy Martin, No. W.1629) (National Archives, Washington, D.C.- microfilm).

For the theatrically uninitiated, stage right and left are the actor’s right and left when facing the audience, downstage is toward the audience and up is away from the audience. Off means activity is heard but not seen.

In fact, he lived another 30 years.


“There is indeed a kind of animal, neither male nor female, a thing of neuter gender… It is called a Macaroni…” *Oxford Magazine*, June 1770. Colonists questioned the sexuality of British “macaronis” or foppish aristocratic dandies who were in evidence among the redcoat officer corps and were satirized by the Americans. Even British soldiers “laughed heartily at their effeminacy.” *Morning Chronicle* 16 July 1778, quoted in Gillian Russell, *The Theatres of War: Performance, Politics and Society, 1793-1815* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 37, 47. Trumbull in his *M'Fingal* referred to the hated and much lampooned British general, playwright and dandy John Burgoyne as a “martial Macaroni”- a work Martin refers to at least twice in his memoir, John Trumbull, *M'fingal, A Modern Epic Poem, in Four Cantos* (1782), microfiche, Canto 4. Martin here may have been reminding the militia of the kind of effete foppish display some Americans might have used to mock the British.

To the end of his days Martin and many Continental Army veterans regarded militia and their legendary counterparts the “Minutemen” of Lexington and Concord fame as inferior to the regulars. See Joseph Plumb Martin, *Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier*, rpt. (New York: Signet, 2001), 249. For their part, veterans of the militia often argued that they actually had a tougher time of it than the continental because the continentals got paid even when not fighting while the militia did not. See for instance John Struthers’ statement as featured in John C. Dann, ed. *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 258.

Martin knows his Shakespeare and can sometimes pull a germane quote out of the air without thinking too hard about it. In this instance he is alluding to *King Lear*, I, 1, 62 “What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent” in which Lear’s youngest daughter, of a good and honest nature, is vilified by her father for speaking her mind while he is won over by the false flattery of her evil older sisters. Plumb guesses that he may have a similar fate if he speaks his mind, even if it is truthful and heartfelt.

Martin’s clergyman father was Yale educated but unable to remain with one congregation for any length of time, perhaps sharing the blunt nature his son exhibited in his *Narrative*. James Kirby Martin, *Ordinary Courage, The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin* (St. James, NY: Brandywine Press, 1999), ix.

Questioning authority is a common theme of Martin’s *Narrative*. Martin often criticized bad officers and
the friction between them and their men, even relating instances where soldiers schemed to play pranks or worse on their commanding officers. And he relates major mutinies in 1779, 1780 and 1781. For instance he relates one instance of an officer trying to get a heroic subordinate executed for insubordination, Martin, Narrative 40-41.

11 1819 was the first of many nineteenth-century bank panics that destroyed the fortunes of many Americans. See Scott Sandage, Born Losers: A History of Failure in America (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 22.

12 The French even gave the Americans money for new uniforms, Martin Narrative, 191.


15 Martin was not present at the famous winter at Valley Forge in 1777 as he was foraging for the Quartermaster Corps, though he was at Valley Forge other years and certainly had his share of starvation and cold, Martin, Narrative, 88-92.

16 Martin is indulging in a little more knee-jerk allusion, this reference from the prelude to Sir Walter Raleigh’s poem “The Silent Lover:” “Passions are likened best to floods and streams; The shallow murmur, but the deep are dumb,” Walter Raleigh, “The Silent Lover” (c. 1600), bartleby.com, http://www.bartleby.com/161/authors/1418.html (accessed 9/26/11).

17 Knox’s name does not appear in Martin’s Narrative. Alan Taylor, Liberty Men and Great Proprietors: the Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 229, 247-249 discusses Martin’s quarrels with Knox as proprietor of much of his property in Maine, which found Martin dispossessed of much of his holdings.

18 Martin often finds that his irrepressible “risibility” often got him in trouble. Here he is seeing how far he can mock his interrogators’ self-importance without them noticing for his own quiet amusement by literal dumb compliance. Having been a justice of the peace himself in his home town he is clearly affecting ignorance of court protocols here in reaction to his inquisitors’ arrogance.

19 Martin is speaking of the network of political patronage that many believed stemmed from membership in the secret society Freemasons which gave rise to the Anti-Masons as a political party at this time and led to such screeds as Col. David Miller’s introduction to Freemasonry Exposed, in which among other things he writes: “Masonry is to the modern world what the whore of Babylon was to the ancient,” William Morgan, Freemasonry Exposed. 1827. rpt. (Chicago: Ezra Cook, 1986), vii-viii.

20 Martin might have been caught up in the common early republic adoration of Washington represented by Mason Weems’ 1800 hagiography of the general but his memoir is unfriendly to most American military leaders though Washington’s bravery, especially at Monmouth and his solicitude toward his men at Yorktown and after the war are often quoted sections of Martin’s Narrative, 111, 199, 251.

21 This is from Thomas Paine’s The Crisis (1776): "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." Thomas Paine, The Crisis (1776), rpt. us history.org. http://www.ushistory.org/paine/crisis/c-01.htm.

22 Martin admired Von Steuben who he wrote “had more sense than his officers” Narrative, 167.
23 Martin, Narrative, 38.

24 This idea was reinforced by James Fenimore Cooper and his “Leatherstocking Saga” books of the early 1800’s in which the hero is an American woodsman and scout, Natty Bumppo, “Hawkeye” who has learned forest combat from his Indian friends. There is much in Martin’s literary persona in the memoirs that seems to mimic this first great hero of American literature.

25 Martin, Narrative, 111.

26 Putnam often comes off as a foolish figure in Martin’s memoir as will be seen later, vainglorious as a leader and incompetent as a general. Martin, Narrative, 20-21, 43-44 for examples of his vainglory and 127 for an example of his incompetence.

27 Martin, Narrative, 176.

28 Actually Fort Mifflin was on Port Island near Woodbury, New Jersey, just touching Mud Island, garrisoned with 450 men of whom only 200 survived after five days of pummeling by the British to evacuate to nearby Fort Mercer which also had to be abandoned Nov. 20, 1777 Alan Axelrod, The Real History of the American Revolution (New York: Sterling, 2007), 239-240.

29 “Ambition should be made of sterner stuff.” Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, III, 1, 98.

30 Martin is proud of his role in this. He cites Thomas Paine who wrote about it, quoting imperfectly, probably from memory: “they had nothing but their bravery and good conduct to cover them,” Martin, Narrative, 82. The full quote from Paine: “After this retreat a new difficulty arose which exhibited the power of Britain in a very contemptible light; which was the attack and defence of Mud Island. For several weeks did that little unfinished fortress stand out against all the attempts of Admiral and General Howe. It was the fable of Bender realized on the Delaware. Scheme after scheme, and force upon force were tried and defeated. The garrison, with scarce anything to cover them but their bravery, survived in the midst of mud, shot and shells, and were at last obliged to give it up more to the powers of time and gunpowder than to military superiority of the besiegers,” Thomas Paine, The Crisis, 5: “Letter to General Howe,” quoted in “233rd Anniversary of the Siege and Bombardment of Fort Mifflin,” fortmifflin.com, http://www.fortmifflin.com/new-noteworthy/233rd-anniversary-siege-bombardment-fort-mifflin (accessed 3/9/11).

31 Martin may be stretching the truth here to accentuate the privation he suffered during the war (and have a little fun, perhaps, at his interrogators’ expense). He never describes eating squirrel briefly as a meal once and ate meat perhaps of suspect origin “Indian style:” cooked on a stick over a fire so that it is “black as coal on the outside and as raw on the inside as if it had not been near the fire,” Narrative, 39. Another ordinary soldier, Jeremiah Greenman ate “the head of a Squirll” during the Quebec campaign of 1776, Jeremiah Greenman, Diary of a common soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783: an annotated edition of the military journal of Jeremiah Greenman, eds. Robert C. Bray & Paul E. Bushnell (Dekalb, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 18.

32 Martin makes constant complaint of having no seasoning for his food and this bit of military culinary folklore is actually documented. Napoleon’s surgeon Larrey stated that he seasoned horsemeat broth for wounded soldiers when provisions were scarce with gun powder as the saltpeter made it more palatable (“la coction de cette viande, et au lieu de sel, dont nous étions entièrement dépourvus, elle fut assaisonnée avec de la poudre à canon” As quoted in Musee des Familles (1841-42) Études Hygieniques de la Chair de Cheval Comme Aliment http://leslivresoublies.free.fr/leslivresoublies/Sciences_et_techniques_muse/cheval.html- accessed 3/9/11).

33 A whole genre of tavern songs praising tobacco or liquor over marriage date from the time of Tobias Hume in the 17th century to Irish imports such as “Stingo” or “Big Bellied Bottle” in the 18th. See Taylor
Largely my own conceit given the paltry evidence, but considering the soldier’s love of artificial stimulation, perhaps not too far-fetched. George Washington apparently refers to hemp- “The artificial preparation of hemp, from Silesia, is really a curiosity.” Letter to Dr. James Anderson, May 26, 1794. in Writings of George Washington. Washington DC., vol. 33., 384 There are suspect but tantalizing assertions at http://www.marijuanalibrary.org/7_presidents.html that Jefferson, Washington, Monroe and others were hashish smokers and that Jefferson and Franklin were ambassadors to France when hashish smoking was much in vogue

“Drink is in itself a good creature of God, and to be received with thankfulness, but the abuse of drink is from Satan, the wine is from God, but the Drunkard is from the Devil.” Increase Mather, Wo to Drunkards (1673), microfiche.


In fact Martin quotes Paine several times in his memoir. See for instance Martin, Narrative, 82.

This is a loaded phrase for many reasons. Martin worked with French soldiers often during the war, especially with the engineer Col. Fleury in New Jersey in 1777. Martin, Narrative, 76-77. Martin was perhaps more French leaning in his sympathies during the polarizing period of the French Revolution and subsequent rise of Napoleon and his inquisitors here were probably more inclined to favor the British. “Gramercies,” however, more bespeaks Martin’s familiarity with Shakespeare who he alludes to many times in his memoirs perhaps as a badge of learning in spite of his humble station (ie: “Gramercies, Tranio, well dost thou advise” from The Taming of the Shrew Act I, Sc. 1, line 41).

While Martin does not disparage the Militia as violently in his narrative, having been one himself at the start of the war, he does make a strong case that the Regulars were more important to the success of the conflict. Martin, Narrative, 249.

The Ivy League was no stranger to alcohol or alcohol-inspired riot even at the time of the early republic and before. See for instance Gordon Wood, Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 244. Martin was quite susceptible to “the creature” as he called rum and his memoirs were full of stories of drunkenness among the troops, often with government complicity as sometimes gills of rum or whiskey were given the men in lieu of food, and with near-disastrous results Martin, Narrative, 68, 82, 101, 126, 162, 193, 196, 211, 245.

Perhaps a slight exaggeration for effect and sympathy as Martin talks of fashioning moccasins from cowhide at one point in his memoir though he does swear the truth to the story that soldiers tracked blood across the frozen ground from their shoeless feet, Martin, Narrative, 88, 245.
46 Martin told of his ducking just in time to evade British shots from across a ravine, for instance. At another time he barely escaped a band of Tories, Martin, Narrative 185-186, 188-189.

47 Accidents with muskets must have been common in camp. Martin, Narrative, 209.

48 This is not completely in character. Martin, like many others, believed expensive treatments by doctors were better ones and while he does not mention mercury, Martin felt short-changed that his smallpox inoculation skimped on treatments that other more well-heeled patients suffered through. Martin Narrative, 95-96. John Adams was a case in point. While still young he underwent inoculation and afterward was treated with mercury which made his teeth feel loose. See John Adams, Diary and Autobiography, eds. L. H. Butterfield, Leonard C. Faber et. al. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 3:280.

49 Martin documents his shortcomings as a sentry, for instance, Martin, Narrative, 55-56.

50 Martin is quick to show some of his follies as a soldier. For instance, one time he accidentally alarmed his entire company while on night guard, sounding a false alarm when he only wanted to inquire the time of another sentry, Martin, Narrative, 42-43.

51 Martin has little regard for many “Historians of the Revolution,” Narrative, 30.

52 “Grapeshot consisted of racks or bags of iron balls fired from cannon; langrage was irregularly shaped shot most often employed in naval encounters to rip apart enemy sails and rigging,” James Kirby Martin, Ordinary Courage, 23n.

53 Martin, Narrative, 30-37.

54 “Mynheer” (mein herr) is a Dutch form of address but Martin uses it for as an ironic nickname for a Hessian. Martin, Narrative, 60.

55 Martin, Narrative, 193.

56 Martin’s memory of scripture seems encyclopedic and he quotes it liberally in his memoir. Here he alludes to Philippians V, 23: “Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach’s sake.”

57 Much has been made of Martin’s encounter with a woman who took over running at cannon at the battle of Monmouth, 1778, though Martin does not name her “Molly Pitcher.” Martin, Narrative 115. “Margaret Corbin” is how Thacher refers to her, Thacher, Military Journal, 169. James Kirby Martin asserts with some authority she was Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley “later sanitized as the legendary ‘Molly Pitcher’ to suit nineteenth-century sensibilities about proper spheres of activity for women,” Kirby Martin, Ordinary Courage, 80 n.

58 Martin has no great love of the New York Dutch who come across from time to time as thick-headed figures of fun to him. See for instance Martin, Narrative, 108.

59 As they did in Martin, Narrative, 196-197.

60 He describes the (“caravan of wild beasts”) baggage train and troops of “the Middle States,” Martin Narrative, 170.

61 In one instance an Irishman drowns a Hessian in mud with his bare hands; in another he describes friendly fights among Irish troops, Martin, Narrative, 119 125-126.

62 As most people of his time, Martin had a belief that Indians were another species and he appears to think
backwoodsmen are the same. James Fenimore Cooper’s Hawkeye did little to dispel this exotic aura, this idea that Indians and frontiersmen were lean, savage creatures of nature. “Hungry as Indians” is an expression of Martin’s, Narrative, 103, 120.

Accounts of Hessian atrocities abounded. See Martin, Narrative, 173. Even if stories were not believed it appears some Americans regarded these mercenaries as subhuman in other ways. As Mercy Otis Warren described them: “strangers and aliens of different nations, who had adopted the ardor of conquest equal to their employers… [of whom] nothing less could be anticipated than new scenes of carnage. The auxiliaries on the part of Britain, were feudal vassals of despotic lords, the mere automatons of German Princes, who held them as their hereditary property,” Mercy Otis Warren, History, 2:474.

Martin Narrative 113 refers to “poor Sawney.” A lowland Scot, a nickname for “Alexander” are some of the meanings. A “Sawney ha’peth” was a Scottish half-penny and was a pejorative term for a fool in England and America. Martin may also have known of Sawney Bean who was a legendary Scottish robber and cannibal who supposedly lived in seaside caves in Ayrshire or Galloway who was the subject of many chapbooks in the eighteenth century. Ronald Holmes, Legend of Sawney Bean (London: F. Muller, 1975) is a good source for this legend.

Martin outwardly may refuse to regard the revolution as a civil war, but one primarily between Americans and foreigners with a few American supporters. Frequently he characterizes the Tories as on the margins of society: “cowboys” and “refugees”, implying banditry or the behavior of social outcasts and criminals. “Vermin” is one of his choice words to describe them. Inwardly, however, he probably dreaded the mayhem that he knew another war between Americans would produce, Martin, Narrative, 120.

Many assert that Washington’s teeth were in fact ivory and gold, not wooden, as American folklore asserts and were fashioned by the “father of American dentistry” on Dr. John Greenwood. For instance, http://www.goodteeth.com/gwteeth.htm (accessed 3/10/11) though Joseph Ellis appears to assert they were an amalgamation of cow’s teeth, human teeth and ivory set in lead according to his book His Excellency George Washington, http://www.historywiz.org/bookstore/moreinfo/hisexcellency.htm (accessed 3/10/11). It is entirely possible by Martin’s time the endeavors of Parson Weems and others to paint Washington as a man of the people also transformed his gold or ivory dentures into something more sympathetic to ordinary Americans.

Martin’s animosity for Tories is fierce, Martin Narrative, 120-121, 154-155. This is the only time in the Narrative that Martin mentions an ordinary soldier by name.

Martin prefaced each chapter in his Narrative with doggerel of his own devising. This appeared before Chapter IV, “Campaign of 1778” and mirrors Hudibrastic poetry, that is, mock epic heroic satiric style originated by Samuel Butler in his 1678 anti-Roundhead satire Hudibras and carried on in Trumbell’s anti-Tory M’Fingal composed during the Revolution, both works which were clearly influential to Martin who alluded to them in his narrative.


Kirby Martin, Ordinary Courage, 13 n.
74 Martin, *Narrative*, 188.


76 Martin, *Narrative*, 199. This is one of the most quoted incidents in Martin’s memoir and merely adds to Washington’s legend as solicitous of his men and unflinching in the face of danger.

77 Martin uses a lot of patriotic American imagery which he might have assimilated long after the revolution, including using the term “Star Spangled Banner” to describe the American flag at Yorktown. Martin, *Narrative*, 200.


79 Martin, *Narrative*, 206-207. Others have remarked upon the sight of smallpox infested slaves roaming the woods outside of Yorktown after being let out of the town by the British, including Sarah Osborn in Dann, *Revolution Remembered*, 244.
CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION:

“HAVE THE PATIENCE JUST TO HEAR ME OUT”

Historiographer Peter Novick urges us to embrace the idea that a writer of history is not merely a truth machine but also a product of his or her time, perhaps a product of many times rolled into one; connected to events past and present, webs of consciousness, concerns, and ideas studied, digested and accepted. Sometimes a reader of history looking for clues as to what really happened can be misled by failing to take into account the background of the writer. Joseph Plumb Martin was a seventy-year-old man who conveyed enough of the illusion that he was sixteen and writing a diary of what he had just seen, that his subsequent life experience was rarely taken into account by modern readers. He was frozen, and froze himself, certainly, in the time of the War for Independence. But merely seeing him in terms of the battles he described in 1776 distorts our understanding of the construction of American nationalism. The generation that came of age during the Revolution found meaning in the struggle years later, when ideas connecting the United States’ political system with popular sovereignty percolated to the top. For Joseph Plumb Martin the American Revolution represented a struggle between the forces promoting personal liberty and those perpetuating the privilege of the few to lord over the many. Though not of elite status, Martin believed he deserved agency in the
destiny of the new republic because, as he hoped his narrative would demonstrate, he possessed the competence and moral integrity needed to assume the responsibilities that come with freedom. Martin implied that competence was defined by how well one could take information gleaned through empiric observation and utilize it for personal and collective gain; moral integrity, he suggested, existed in persons who committed acts of self-sacrifice for the common good, and who maintained an attitude of personal humility. In Martin’s narrative he himself was the protagonist; his war-time sufferings were his badge of honor, and his survival evidence of his resourcefulness. He showed humility through the portrayal of himself as a common soldier, the butt of his own self-deprecating humor, yet with wit enough to quote Shakespeare and scripture and with common sense enough to come out ahead even when in impossible situations. Paradoxically, because it was composed in a time of increased conflict centered around African American and Native American agency, Martin’s narrative suggested that liberty should only be extended to white males like himself. African Americans in his depiction were either child-like in their simplicity or wrong-headed, often taking the side of Britain in the conflict. Native Americans were underfed and instinctively violent creatures of the forest. Perhaps because he wrote his narrative in a time when the nation was showing signs of division as the south asserted its right to own slaves, Martin accentuated national unity in his narrative. He depicted soldiers from all regions of the colonies fighting side by side and, for the most part, tolerating each other and their differences. He depicted persons bent upon dividing the nation, such as the loyalist “refugees” and “cowboys” he sometimes fought against, as amoral, blood-thirsty criminals. Because he wrote his narrative in a time when Andrew Jackson and other politicians of humble birth were
perceived as struggling with elitist forces for control of the American government, Martin sought to redefine leadership in terms of competence and ethical behavior, not social pedigree. Thus, in Martin’s narrative, self-important or colicky officers were buffoons to be ignored or out-maneuvered by their more savvy underlings and Hessian mercenaries were the victims of the tyranny of a morally bankrupt aristocracy.

The widely read writings of Mason Weems depicted a George Washington in keeping with Martin’s paradigm that true leadership must be competent and moral. George Washington appears in both Weems’s biography and Martin’s narrative as a person with the honesty, humble attitude and self-sacrificing steadfastness in the face of adversity that were at the core of his popular image in the early republic. Other attributes the general did not exhibit but were perhaps manufactured by some of his hagiographers, such as piety and abolitionism, also became part of his heroic persona.\(^1\) It may be argued Washington also possessed certain elitist qualities ignored by Martin and others of his time: an aloof aristocratic mien, a distrust of the masses, and ambition to be superintendent of a hierarchical order rather than a democratic free-for-all; useful qualities for a leader to possess in 1790 when the nation needed a figurehead to rally around in creating order out of chaos at the start of the new republic, but antithetical to the struggles centered around popular sovereignty in the 1820s and 1830s.\(^2\) Benjamin Franklin, another figure lionized by Weems, inspired admiration in the early republic for his self-made material success and fame despite humble origins, while his views that government should be the province of an educated and enlightened elite were forgotten.\(^3\)

It is possible that the Joseph Plumb Martin who enlisted in the army in 1776 was different from the man who wrote about it fifty years later. The Martin of 1776 submitted
to punishing marches, lack of food, lodging and pay, the horrors of smallpox inoculation and now and then brushes with death in battle. The Martin of 1830 submitted to little he could not reconcile to his own appetites and observations: not a theory about jack-o-lanterns by some grand poobah of academia, not the verdict of historians about the battle of Kip’s Bay, not the lionization of a past leader at the expense of the men who served under him. It is possible that the American imagination made a transition similar to Martin’s own shift in sensibility and embraced individuality over conformity, self-pride over subservience, and self-empowerment over submission. In writing a play to reconcile the individualistic revolutionary man-child of the early 1800s with his later narrative, I attempted to demonstrate how this shift manifested itself. The human condition is a mass of screaming emotions that needs ideas to know which direction to scream in. When Martin discovered self-empowerment, its protection became his prevailing need. The meaning of American nationalism to the ex-soldier was personal liberty, pure and simple, and the recounting of his sacrifice to the cause of liberty was a tool utilized to perpetuate his own agency and self-determination. Self-empowerment could not prevent his failure in a world of economic collapse, however; therefore a pension and the respect of the nation were needed to sustain him, so he made his story public, presented it with humility, characterizing his role in the nation’s success as a sacrifice, but depicting himself as an intelligent voice deserving to be heard in the political cacophony of the early republic.

The American imagination found its footing when it lost its head, three score years after the new nation was brought forth on this continent. The splintering of authority that took place when monarchy was eliminated and aristocratic rule eroded also
created the world driven by consensus we live with today. Social mobility (in both
directions) based upon wealth played a part in this shift toward popular sovereignty. But
so did mass education which started in New England where a boy of limited means, the
son of an itinerant preacher, learned to express himself on paper. The boy became a man
in eight years of military service. He rubbed elbows with persons from other parts of the
country, developed a loyalty to the army and to his comrades, often poor underprivileged
persons like himself, and taught himself ideas through reading and study. He probably on
more than one occasion railed against the great men of privilege who larded the historical
record with their achievements before feisty old age and a change in the times made the
“common private soldier” feel ready to add his ink to the pond of posterity.

From Mason Weems to David McCulloch, biography has usually been the most
widely read form of history, perhaps because we are wired to focus on one person at a
time or the story gets too complicated. Biographies create the impression that great men
bring about historical change, leading a mindless multitude in the right direction. Thus,
we are still taught that elites such as Jefferson, Hamilton, Adams, Madison, and John
Marshall provided the governmental framework which then was given stability by the
kingly but benevolent figure of wealthy plantation owner George Washington. But a
populist sensibility that emerged in the 1820s forced populist rhetoric into the great man
paradigm as it existed in the American imagination, making any hint at pedigree a
liability. Lowly Joseph Plumb Martin was merely a small voice, a cricket singing in the
weeds that were rising out of the manicured lawn left by an eighteenth-century sensibility.
He was unnoticed in his own time, noticed now mostly for his recollections of the great
battles of his youth, yet he hummed a tune America sings even today: that individual
liberty, the freedom to pursue one’s appetites, aspirations, to speak one’s mind, is the measure of all things. Martin’s imagination did not extend beyond his own kind, writing in a time when a purported Tennessee backwoodsman such as Andrew Jackson could enter the White House because all the other backwoodsmen, tradesmen, artisans, workers and small farmers could put him there, but blacks, women and Indians had no say in the matter. But Martin’s central themes stressing individual liberty and distrust of authority are in the bedrock of the American imagination. The idea that unchecked authority leads to corruption was the theme of many of Martin’s articulate contemporaries and immediate descendants, mostly Northeastern Yankees: Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, Dickinson, Longfellow and Whitman (as well as a largely New York-dwelling Samuel Clemens), who created a body of work still influential today. The concept that a life bereft of liberty is no life at all, found in the narratives of Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Harriet Wilson and others also emerged soon after Martin’s lifetime.

Joseph Plumb Martin lives in the American imagination of today. The crusty little guy pushing back against a system that seeks to control his destiny or against villains who seek to sit on the shoulders of others for personal gain, that is the American hero. He is Esther Forbes’s *Johnny Tremain* disseminated by Walt Disney, the ordinary American David slaying the English Goliath. The Minuteman and the World War II American G.I. both embodied the idea that citizen armies will triumph over despots and tyrants because their world view is morally superior. Simple unassuming common soldiers like Jonathan, Sergeant York and Audie Murphy represent the better angels of our nature in the history stories we tell; they fired a shot heard ‘round the world, fought unwillingly but with courage and determination to protect the liberty of their people, before going home and
beating their swords into ploughshares, preferring to be as Thoreau, in his little cabin on a pond rather than a golden warrior enshrined in some opulent patriotic pantheon.

Joseph Plumb Martin’s common soldier narrative has been exported. What after all is Tolkein’s *Hobbit* but a little, unassuming citizen, unwilling and a bit cowardly, but ultimately able to defeat evil through his superior morality and gumption? What were the people who tore down the Berlin Wall or ousted the dictators in Egypt, Tunisia but descendants of the “good” mob Martin was a part of tussling with redcoats and Hessians? Though there has been tyranny in mobs and demagogues aplenty mixed among the masses, the Sons of Liberty and the Continental Army have kept the good side of popular insurgency still ensconced an increasingly global imagination.

Martin’s idea of competence gained through experience is with us still. It has led to some destructive conclusions because such a method of knowledge creation could inform science with narrow-mindedness and social interaction with racism, and in American history both have come into play. But the constant reassessment of received wisdom has created receptiveness to new ideas and sometimes managed to overthrow or alter some wrongs. Martin’s self-confidence in weighing in on every issue and problem, however good or ill the result, has certainly informed a culture of innovation and invention that has eclipsed many a society stagnating under imperatives directed toward maintaining the status quo.

Martin’s distrust of self-importance, of self-aggrandizement and his trust in the rhetorical powers of humility, self-sacrifice and self-deprecating humor are still part of the vocabulary of interaction we use today to successfully sell our ideas, thoughts and opinions to others. A politician with the aura of an Abraham Lincoln stands a better
chance of getting elected than one posturing like Napoleon. We are more likely to pick our lessons out of the humor-laced prose of Mark Twain than from the didactic diatribes of his contemporary Karl Marx.

As we continue to celebrate ourselves and sing ourselves, let us consider the place of an initially anonymous narrative of the American Revolution, composed by an eye witness of events who told them while an elderly product of Christian piety, New England crust, and Jacksonian populism, in the foundation of the American imagination.


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