

REVOLUTIONARY RHETORIC: VERSE AND IDEOLOGY DURING THE WAR
FOR AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

by

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DEDICATION

For my sister, Shelby

Let me but live my life from year to year,
With forward face and unreluctant soul;
Not hurrying to, nor turning from the goal;
Not mourning for the things that disappear
In the dim past, nor holding back in fear
From what the future veils; but with a whole
And happy heart, that pays its toll
To Youth and Age, and travels on with cheer.

So let the way wind up the hill or down,
O'er rough or smooth, the journey will be joy:
Still seeking what I sought when but a boy,
New friendship, high adventure, and a crown,
My heart will keep the courage of the quest,
And hope the road's last turn will be the best.

Life by Henry Van Dyke

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I readily admit that the Americans have no poets;

I cannot allow that they have no poetic ideas.

-Alexis Tocqueville

Democracy in America

PROLOGUE

On April 17, 1782, the Patriot colonists of Philadelphia published a poem titled, “Address to Cornwallis on Leaving Virginia.”

Farwell, my lord, may zephyrs waft thee o’er
In health and safety to thy native shore:
There seek Burgoyne, and tell him though too late,
You blam’d unwisely his unhappy fate:
Tell your deluded monarch that you see,
The hand of heaven uprais’d for liberty:
Tell your exhausted nation, tell them true,
They cannot conquer those who conquer’d you.

With the Treaty of Paris not signed until September of 1783, the poem sent a clear political message to the crown. It identified the colonial rebellion a success; one punctuated by the capture of General Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia. Moreover, this was a political message of unified strength amongst the colonies, strength that put the British on the run, fleeing across the Atlantic.¹

Political poetry was part of the colonists' steady diet of ideological consumption during the Revolutionary Era, broadening widespread engagement in revolutionary politics before, during, and after the Revolution. Poetic expression during the Revolutionary Era shaped public opinion in order to challenge British political authority in favor of the patriot cause. Verse satisfied many needs desired by the patriot poets. However, poetry was most prevalent and spirited during the revolutionary protests. By

¹ “Addressed to Cornwallis on leaving Virginia,” The poem has no author and can be found in *The Freeman’s Journal* or *The North-American Intelligencer*: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 17, 1782, pg. 2.

employing rhetorical versification as a means of defiance this form of literary resistance became an emotional complement to republican ideology.

Historians generally understand political rhetoric during this time to be confined to conventional forms of political expression such as pamphlets, newspaper columns, and published orations. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* reflects the norm. Poetry revealed a different rhetorical avenue of colonial defiance, providing insight into an expression of rebellion that was not confined to the educated elite but accessible to all colonists. Oppositional verse achieved this quality by using simplistic, persuasive, and unifying language in order to subvert authority and maneuver political ideology. Poems engaged the reader by appealing to imagination and emotion rather than rational augmentation. In fact, if only rhetorically, it skewed objective reasoning into logical defiance of imperial rule and in doing so, simplified the moral and political complexity of treasonous action against the crown.

Revolutionary verse— long downplayed by historians as a peripheral or whimsical form of political expression— helps us better understand colonial identity during a time of political crisis. It does so by allowing a more inclusive understanding of those involved in the debates over sovereignty during the Revolutionary period, as well as a more inclusive exploration of the vernacular of resistance. Through literary warfare, colonists unified behind rhetoric to oppose the crown, putting poets and printers on the front lines of war and resistance, and ensuring that culture was persistently political.

The convergence of poetry and politics existed before the American Revolution.² Resistance literature has its English roots dating back to the Glorious Revolution in the 1680s. Some of the notable authors are James Harrington, John Milton, and Algernon Sidney.³ Their resistance literature took the form of published essays and poetry. According to Caroline Robbins, “they were all active in different ways— Harrington concerned with a changing society, Milton with liberty of the mind and tyranny, Sidney with the problems of the Restoration government.”⁴ Their form of resistance came in pamphlets, essays, and poetry. Verse was a part of the public political discourse in response to the English Civil Wars during the 1640s and the Glorious Revolution in 1688. American colonists followed the tradition of Whig ideology.⁵ In the early 1720s, their ideology was transferred to the colonies in large part by two commonwealthmen, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, with *Cato’s Letters*. Patriot poetry during the American Revolution was an addition to the long-standing tradition of British oppositional literature.

Historians examining poetry during this time mainly offer a broad overview of its involvement within colonial society, highlighting literary characteristics and general thematic descriptions. Notable books are most often a collection of poems into an edited

² For the intersection of poetry and Whig politics see Abigail Williams, *Poetry and the Creation of Whig Literary Culture, 1681- 1714* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

³ For more on Milton’s influence on early America see George F. Sensabaugh, *Milton in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

⁴ Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthmen* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), 22- 23.

⁵ For Whig political thought in England and America see Lee Ward, *The Politics of Liberty in England and Revolutionary America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

volume. For example, David Shield's, *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* and Harrison T. Meserole's *American Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* both fit into the mold of notable edited volumes containing colonial poetry. Furthermore, significant studies mainly focused either on a single poem or a single author, rarely combining poems and poets into one thematic argument.⁶ At the turn of the nineteenth century scholars collected and inventoried colonial libraries, observing the many literary works, including poetry, that filled the shelves and desk of colonists. The new social history movement made notes and mentions of poetry within the context of the American Revolution.⁷ For instance, George F. Sensabaugh's book *Milton in Early America* and Bernard Bailyn's *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, both begin to use poetry or a poet as a part of explaining the rhetoric during the American Revolution. Historians primarily focused on a poet or an individual poem for examination and in doing so, did not link them to a broader social context during the revolution. Scholars attributed social context to poetry before the revolution, but not during it. Overall, most scholars who have noted the role of poetry in revolutionary rhetoric have not fully appreciated how the social context of the revolution welcomed the persuasive power of poetry in shaping public opinion.

⁶ Important books regarding early American history that prove to use a poet or a poem on its standalone basis include but are not limited to: *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* by Bernard Bailyn, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* by Gordon Wood, *Pursuits of Happiness* by Jack Greene, and *American Creation* by Joseph Ellis. Poetry as a term is not mentioned in any of the indexes within the previously mentioned books.

⁷ Some of the authors who begin to put poetry during the American revolution into a political context are, Kenneth Silverman's *Cultural History of the American Revolution*, William C. Dowling with *Poetry and Ideology in Revolutionary Connecticut*, David S. Shields and his work *Oracles of Empire*, Pattie Cowell and *Women Poets in Pre-Revolutionary America 1650-1775*, George F. Sensabaugh's book *Milton in Early America*, and J. A. Leo Lemay with his book *Calendar of American Poetry*.

A notable exception was a work published in 2018: *Poetry Wars* by Colin Wells. This monograph recognizes poetry as a mode of political expression. The author focuses on the years of the early republic but begins by investigating poetry during the American Revolution. Wells argues that poetry beginning in the early stages of resistance to the crown became—by subverting authority—“pervasive” in the early national period. Poetic warfare used during the Revolution became a favorable avenue of literary expression by partisan poets in order to gain political power during the early stages of the republic. This is all critical territory, much of which I will explore here. However, Wells gives little attention to the use of poetry before the American Revolution. For example, he argues that poems became a “common feature of newspaper culture” during the early 1720s, citing James Franklin’s *New England Courant*.⁸ Poetry was part of the early stages of colonial development. Before the eighteenth-century poetry was used to promote colonial expansion. Promotional verse was an avenue for marketing and promoting imperial expansion into the “New World.”

Adding political poetry to the discourse of ideology surrounding the American Revolution opens another genre of colonial defiance. Noting that few scholars have given the proper attention to poetry during the revolution reveals a gap in the historiography, this work intends to show poetry as a genre that needs to be further recognized and researched in order to comprehend the different forms of political expression and defiance. Poetry evoked emotions differently from prose. According to Anthony Easthope, “the poetic function is a specialized use of language in which the signifier

⁸ Colin Wells, *Poetry Wars: Verse and Politics in the American Revolution and Early Republic*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 11.

intensifies the message.”⁹ In other words, due to rhythm, sound, aesthetics, tone, and imagery, poetry maximizes the emotional effect of language. Furthermore, the restriction of political poetry to a single continent did not provide the agency necessary to show how widely this form of expression was used. A trans-Atlantic understanding must be discussed with the acknowledgment that King George III used poetry for political purposes as well.

Revolutionary verse was different from other forms of political rhetoric. Poetry was able to seduce colonial emotions. Moreover, verse during the American Revolution was able to balance emotions more effectively. The multi-faceted capabilities of political poetry made it more versatile and as a result reached a wider audience. Also, verse during the American Revolution subverted authority with parodies and satire. Furthermore, political poetry separated itself from other forms of rhetoric by exploiting its unique qualities— rhythm, repetition, aesthetics, imagery, and form.

The use of rhythmic tactics found in colonial poetry amplified the passion for defiance. For example, freedom and liberty were often repeated or capitalized. In addition to these words are “faith, virtue, God, brave, and patriot.” These words elicit an emotional response— evoking a collective solidarity. On the other hand, words such as “slavery, oppression, tyrant, and chains” could provoke a different type of emotional response— hostility or violence. Poetry during the revolutionary era had a way of asking colonists to linger on specific words and to consume them in specific ways. Altogether, the reoccurring use of these loaded political words, isolated by the poetic form, acted as

⁹ Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse*. New Accent Series (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3-18. For more on theories and methodologies about poetry see Jonathan Culler, "Why Lyric?" *PMLA*, Vol. 123, No. 1 (January 2008): 201-06.

metaphorical nails to help frame the notion of resistance. In other words, poems were employed as an emotional literary counterpoint for republican ideology to aid colonial union against imperial authority. The repetitive nature of words by colonial poets sets verse apart from prose and provided the patriot authors another weapon in their arsenal of literary defiance.¹⁰

Poems were especially versatile. They took on different meanings and interpretations, given the subject matter it was considering. For example, a poem targeting General Thomas Gage, the commander and governor of Massachusetts beginning in 1774, reflected a military tone; a poem that addressed a loyalist contained a more personal attitude; and a poem directed at King George III might attack his monarchical divine right. The poems were mostly written in response to an action, and therefore, when an author wrote reactionary verse, it led to the poet having a distinct target in mind—more distinct than in other forms of expression.¹¹ Also, poets used different forms of verse to achieve their ideological goals. For example, the use of satirical verse was prevalent in subverting Thomas Gage’s royal proclamations. Moreover, parodies were employed to exaggerate and imitate British authority.

Revolutionary verse was different from other forms of political rhetoric. Poetry was able to seduce colonial emotions and amplify them. Moreover, verse during the American Revolution was able to balance emotions more effectively. The multi-faceted

¹⁰ Strachan, John and Richard Terry. *Poetry*. 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Press, 2011), 10.

¹¹ David Orr. “The Politics of Poetry.” *Poetry*, Vol. 192, No. 4. Summer (July- Aug., 2008), pp. 409-418.

capabilities of political poetry made it more versatile and as a result reached a wider audience.

This study benefits from monographs, journals, diaries, newspapers, notes, and correspondence to provide substantial evidence in illustrating the depth at which political poetry circulated in the British North American colonies. However, the source that is most prevalent throughout this work is newspapers. The distribution and consumption of poetry during the eighteenth century was found in the rapidly growing literary print culture in the colonies. The vehicles by which verse became continentally distributed were newspapers such as the *Virginia Gazette*, *Pennsylvania Journal*, *South-Carolina Gazette*, or *The Massachusetts Spy*, and others. Newspapers showed specific dates and locations of publication that allow for the interpretation of specific political intentions and contexts. For instance, examining a specific poem, at a specific time, in a specific location, can personify localized attitudes, revealing geographically diverse rhetoric— providing evidence that shows the western frontier, port cities up and down the Atlantic coast, northern and southern colonies all actively consumed the same political poems.¹²

Furthermore, within this work I selected only to examine published poems. This examination follows a chronological timeline of the American Revolution and within that I searched for published works that followed an important event. The significance is to reveal the poems that were available for the public to read. Published works allows for a

¹² The databases that are primarily used in this work are from early American newspapers such as: Gale and Cengage Learning: *17th and 18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers*, Readex: *America's Historical Newspapers*, *America's Historical Imprints (Series I: Evans and Series I: LCP)*, and ProQuest: *American Periodical Series* and *British Periodicals I*. Furthermore, some spelling and grammar were fixed to make the sources comprehensible. An example of this would be the 18th century's use of the "dropped s." This is modified to represent the "ss" in the 21st century.

more general understanding of the circulation of revolutionary rhetoric. Non-published poetry circulated by word of mouth, through notes, private letters, and among literary circles. For example, Milcah Martha Moore's common place book contains political poetry by Hannah Griffitts.¹³ The book is a collection of prose and poetry that circulated amongst her literary circle in Philadelphia. Few women were published authors during the American Revolution, if they were published, it is most likely they used a pseudonym. The absence of women authors in this examination is due to the existence of societal hierarchies during the revolutionary era.

Following both thematic and chronological structure, I set out to examine three phases of time during which political verse became an instrument of colonial defiance, a mode of political expression, and the source of a unifying ideology. First, from 1765 to 1776, understanding political verse as resistance to taxes and proclamations. Second, from 1775-1783, examining poetry with regards to victories, military losses, and eulogies. Third, from 1783 to 1807, investigating verse in the early years under the Articles of Confederation, development of a new constitution, and the forging of a national ethos.

As for inclusiveness, the eighteenth-century had its obvious limitations and restrictions on minorities. This analysis both acknowledges these limitations but, when possible, aims to show how marginalized social groups occasionally read and wrote political poetry. Without overstating the claim, part of this thesis aims to reveal how political verse came to be a way for social groups across all the colonies to assert their

¹³ Catherine La Courreye Bleck and Karin A. Wulf, eds., *Milcah Martha Moore's Book: A Commonplace Book from Revolutionary America* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ Press, 1997).

political authority and autonomy. At times, different social groups used different methods in order to achieve their political goals. For example, women used their gender and sexuality more often than men, while men tended to use a more violent expression. The poetry itself was gendered. Furthermore, by acknowledging societal hierarchies, uneven rates of literacy, varying degrees of access to publications, and inequalities that existed, this work also hopes to suggest how disenfranchised groups might have been more active than previously thought in the politics of revolutionary expression.

Overall, this work intends to recognize poetry and poets during the War for American Independence. Moreover, my aim is to put verse at the forefront of influencing political discourse. Through this analysis I hope to grow the field of literary rhetoric within the American Revolution. Furthermore, through increasing the field of rhetoric and exposing poetry as a source for ideological content, my intention is to inspire other historians to reexamine poetry in their respected fields. Lastly, this work aspires to advance our knowledge of the Revolution and what it meant to those who lived it.

Verse before the Revolution

Before the American Revolution, poetry was used to promote the colonization of the New World. Verse became an enticing way private companies and governments shaped the narrative of colonization, especially as it related to labor. Promotional verse had techniques reflecting other literary forms. For example, poetry was employed as a type of advertisement. The motive was to lure the prospective colonist to the new world.

The appealing nature of promotional verse marketed the colonies as a desirable place for potential colonists looking to relocate to the New World— making it clear to

prospective migrants that the new world was both similar to home but different in that it offered an opportunity to own land and rise in social status. Promotional rhetoric generally masked the daily dangers of colonial life, such as Native American attacks, starvation, and sickness, highlighting its especially manipulative nature. Using poems to promote continental colonization further aided the desire to expand the British Empire. Verse was central to the building of empire.

Michael Drayton, an English poet, in 1606, wrote the poem "Ode to the Virginia Voyage." This poem succinctly highlights the thematic verse written to inspire colonists to travel to Virginia in hopes of finding the treasures in paradise. A small stanza from the poem is as follows:

And cheerfully at sea,
Success you still entice,
To get the pearl and gold
And ours to hold,
Virginia, Earth's only Paradise.

Luring colonists with promotional verse assured them of something that came never to be found. The fantasy of wealth to be overflowing in the Chesapeake became a tangible attachment that filled the minds of the hopeful colonists. Poetry served its use to promote the new world and lure adventurous souls into colonizing North America further.¹⁴

¹⁴ Kirkpatrick Sale. *The Conquest of Paradise: Christopher Columbus and the Columbian Legacy*. NY: Penguin Group, 1990, pp. 244-245. See page 258 for a poem by John Donne with the relation of coming to the new world and the seduction of women. Printed in its entirety, see Arthur Quiller-Couch, *The Oxford Book of English Verse, 1250-1900* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1919). For further reading, see Joanne Van Der Woude, "Migration of the Muses: Translation and the Origins of American Poetry," *Early American Literature*, Vol. 45, Issue 3 (Fall 2010): 499.

Poetry in the later parts of the seventeenth and earlier parts of the eighteenth century had distinct natural characteristics about the environment and individual social themes. Native American civilizations already occupy the environment that colonists entered. Moreover, the environment in the North American continent is dissimilar from that of northern Europe. To this point, nature became a prime subject worthy of verse and literary distinction.¹⁵

Prelude to Revolution

The outcome of the Seven Years' War created economic, social, and political tension within the British Empire. The most significant of these three was the war debt left on the British government— £137 million, the annual interest alone was £5 million.¹⁶ But who was to pay for this debt? In the early 1760s, Parliament voted to enact Proclamations and directly tax the American colonists. In opposition to the direct tax, a colonial resistance movement quickly formed.

¹⁵For an example see Edward H. Cohen. *Ebenezer Cooke: The Sot-Weed Canon*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1975. First published in London in 1708, this poem encompasses many themes familiar to those occupying the middle and southern colonies. Although the poem was written in Maryland, many similarities and parallels can be drawn to Virginia and the Carolinas. Cooke acknowledged the creatures (domesticated and wild) that filled the forest: snakes, steers, bears, fish, swine, dogs, mosquitoes, ducks, geese, horses, and a fox. Also, the author mentioned Natives as both savages and Indians. Furthermore, Cooke provided evidence of runaway slaves and servants by being accused of one himself. The poem encapsulated all the norms associated with life in Maryland, as well as other colonies in the new world. The detailed description in the poem of the natives and the awareness of labor problems involving runaway servants brings about the political structure within the newly formed colonies. The poem distinctly shows the political relationships within the confines of class and different societies.

¹⁶ Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution, A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), 17.

Chapter 1.

Literary Activism: Violence and Verse during the Imperial Crisis

There it stood, a large elm tree towards the edge of Boston. Around the base dozens of glowing lanterns held by enraged colonists— all shouting “liberty and property forever, no stamps.” In response to the Stamp Act, on the night of August 14, 1765, two effigies hanged from the Liberty Tree, a common locale for violent resistance during the American Revolution. One of the effigies resembled the stamp master Andrew Oliver and the other a jackboot*. The mob quickly took down the effigy, stuffed it in a coffin, and marched with it down Main Street. Upon reaching Oliver’s house the mob beheaded the effigy, stripped the trees of their fruit, broke windows, burned coach doors and cushions, drank Oliver’s liquor, destroyed furniture, and broke what is said to be the largest “looking glass” in North America.¹⁷ All of this was due to The Stamp Act, an internal tax imposed on the colonies of British North America meant to raise revenue for the crown in an effort to pay for the war debt accumulated during the Seven Year’s War. The act directly taxed all internal paper goods in the colonies, although a small tax, it was passed by Parliament without colonial representation. In the response to the Stamp Act we can begin to see the origins of colonial defiance.

The Liberty Tree became a defining symbol of resistance for the colonists. Many British Americans such as Thomas Paine found it to be an inspiring wooden statue. Before the British cut down the Liberty Tree in 1775, Paine wrote a poem celebrating its

¹⁷ “Supplement to the Boston Gazette, &c. of.” Monday, August 19, 1765. * “jackboot” is a military style boot in reference to an authoritarian.

grandeur. According to Paine, the tree arrived on a chariot of light guided by ten thousand celestials, a gift of love from the Goddess of Liberty. The last octave of the poem presents the tree as a symbol of Liberty, something every colonist must unite to defend:

But hear, O ye swains, 'tis a tale most profane,
How all the tyrannical powers,
Kinds, Commons, and Lords, are uniting amain,
To cut down this guardian of ours;
From the east to the west blow the trumpet to arms,
Through the land let the sound of it flee,
Let the far and the near, all unite with a cheer,
In defence of our *Liberty Tree*¹⁸

When historians consider rhetorical forms of colonial resistance, poetry rarely comes to mind. The first chapter explores how verse during the imperial crisis used rhetoric and emotion to aid the rebellious colonists. Poets began by initiating literary activism in order to sway public opinions and then as more grievances amounted, verse moved into an emotional plea for outright rebellion and independence from Britain.

Paine's poem was most likely published after Lexington and Concord to provide a unifying message with a call to arms in defense of our heavenly gift— Paine, in the first stanza states the “Goddess of Liberty” was directed by “ten thousand celestials” to “pledge her love” by giving Bostonians the tree. Paine extended his colonial call to arms and unification the following year with his pamphlet *Common Sense*. In this missive he argues for political separation, testifies against hereditary succession, and lays out plans

¹⁸ Thomas Paine, *Liberty Tree*. Published in the Pennsylvania Magazine, 1775. British troops and loyalists cut it down the Liberty Tree in late 1775.

for what the “new” colonial government should look like. The poem and the pamphlet are forms of literary political rhetoric and send a unifying message, but unlike *Common Sense* in 1776, the poem does not yet call for the separation of imperial bonds. The notion of cutting economic and political ties with Britain before 1776 is not found to be a popular or valuable idea. But, as the conflict intensifies so does the poetry, signaling a change in tone, rhetoric, and eventually a common call for outright rebellion against the mother country. Because of their brevity and ability to shore up colonial emotions, poems were especially well suited to foster the transition from resistance to revolution.

“The TIMES are Dreadful, Dismal, Doleful, Dolorous, and Dollar-Less”¹⁹

Colonists violently and non-violently opposed the Stamp Act.²⁰ Violence came in the form of intense physical protests whereas the non-violent opposition appeared in the form of boycotts and the circulation of—among pamphlets and treatises— literary political verse. Poetry quickly became propagandized and began targeting the crown for imposing the Stamp Act without political representation. During this time, from 1765-1774, the colonists were not collectively discussing open rebellion. Instead, they hoped to assert their grievances through a range of cautious actions. In time these grievances found their way into ideological patriot verse. For example, *The Times a Poem* and *Oppression, a Poem by an American* offered ideological opposition to the Stamp Act through satirical

¹⁹ A quote found on the top left title page of *The Pennsylvania Journal; and Weekly Advertiser*, October 31, 1765. Printed one day before the Stamp Act went into effect. Accompanied on the adjacent side of the quote is a skull-and-crossbones image, found often as symbol of resistance to the crown.

²⁰ For a complete history of the Stamp Act see, Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1962).

verse exposing the imperial infringement of civil liberties.²¹ In addition to employing satire, verse delivered the ideological message. Here the message targets corruption, unconstitutional taxation, a standing army, and long-term British placemen, initiating something historians have generally overlooked— colonists turned the medium of verse into political rhetoric and defiance.²²

The implementation of satirical verse in opposition to the Stamp Act is evident in “The Times, A Poem,” by Benjamin Church. The oddity is that its written by a patriot but soon to be traitor. Church, an active member of the Sons of Liberty and first Surgeon General of the United States Army, wrote this powerful satirical poem in 1765, revealing the author’s frustration with the crown. But it does so without being overly aggressive or pro-rebellion while systematically acknowledging the guardian relationship the colonies long enjoyed with the mother country. Accompanying Stamp Act poetry is the absence of rhetoric calling for open rebellion against the crown. Furthermore, anti-Stamp Act verse recognizes the familial ties between the colonies and Britain and, in doing so, uses the parental association to highlight how generational dependency can yield to a slave to master exploitation. In the early stages of the revolution, poetry was a soft form of literary resistance. The significance was that poetry had the ability to command the emotion of the colonists. To put it differently, verse was able to control the tone and

²¹ For more see, Bruce Ingham Granger, “The Stamp Act in Satire,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Winter, 1956), pp. 368- 384.

²² Benjamin Church. *The Times a Poem*. Printed by Thomas and John Fleet at the *Heart and Crown*. Advertised as “For sale at the Heart and Crown.” *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Newsletter*, October 31, 1765. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 9930. *Oppression. A Poem. By an American. With notes, by a North Briton*. London, 1765. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 10113. *Oppression* was re-printed in New York and Boston the same year.

message of rebellion— either calling for violence and mayhem or orderly and disciplined defiance.

Church's poem's introduction states that greedy tyrants were unjustly imposing taxes on the colonists, thereby trampling the English Constitution. Or as Bernard Bailyn states, "they saw policies violating the principles upon which freedom rested, and nothing less than a deliberate assault launched by plotters against liberty both in England and in America."²³ The tone settled down as the poem asserted devotion to the King: "Not for a Monarch would I forge a lie / To nestle in the sunshine of his eye." Shortly after acknowledging this loyalty, though, the author provided insight to a five-year period of neglect after King George's coronation in 1760 and the subsequent lack of recognition of the colonists as full members of Britain Empire under the constitution:

George, Scarce one lustrum numbers out its days,
Since every tongue was busy in thy praise;
O make it nameless in the tale of time,
Nor consecrate to ages such a crime;
We lov'd him, we love him still, by heav'ns do more,
But make us British subjects, we'll adore.

The rhetoric and tone then heat up, identifying key players in the taxation of the colonies and those who resisted that policy, for example— John Stuart the 3rd Earl of Bute, George Grenville, Charles Pratt 1st Earl of Camden, and John Wilkes.²⁴ Poetry

²³ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1976), 95.

²⁴ The Earl of Bute was the Prime Minister of England from May of 1762 to April of 1763. His successor, Grenville, imposed the Stamp Act on the colonies and was dismissed by the King in July of

unlike prose, allows the author to make rapid changes in tone and subject matter within just a few words or lines. This makes it easy for the poet to target multiple people within one stanza:

The Stamp and Land-Tax are as blessings meant,
And opposition is our free consent;
That where we are not, we most surely are,
That wrong is right, black white, and foul is fair;
That Mansfield's honest, and that Pitt's a knave,
That Pratt's a villain, and that Wilkes's a slave;
That godlike Temple is not greatly good,
Nor Bute a rigid *Jacobite* by blood;
That sordid Grenville lately is become,
The patron of our liberties at home

A unique parallel appears in the poem, the author compared the Stamp Act as a pathway to enslaving colonists to the mother country. This fear of enslavement hit home for the colonists because they knew first-hand what slavery looked like, with their lived experience of residing in a slave society.²⁵ In the following stanza Church emphasizes this notion:

Where lies our remedy, in humble prayer?
Our lordly butchers have forgot to hear;
'Tis rank rebellion, rashness to complain,
And all submission tighter tugs the chain:

1765. Charles Pratt is known for his stance against taxation of the colonies without representation. Lastly, John Wilkes, was a Member of Parliament who opposed the war against the American colonies.

²⁵ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1976,) 232- 246. Also see the first chapter of Edmund S. Morgan, "Dreams of Liberation," in *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003,) 3-6.

Go ask your heart, your honest heart regard,
And manumission is your sure reward;

Answering his rhetorical question, the author states that the chain tightens after every colonial complaint. In addition to this, Church tells the “lordly butchers” to refer to your heart or conscience and, in doing so, you will find that manumission is the answer.

Understanding the correlation between “submission” and “chain,” then “manumission” or freedom with a reward, a clear parallel between colonial poetry and the language referring to slavery as a means to provoke fear and emotion emerges. Verse surrounding the Stamp Act, such as Church’s poem, employed this type of rhetoric to achieve an emotional reaction based upon preexisting race relations. According to Edmund Morgan, the American paradox was that the “rise of liberty and equality, accompanied the rise of slavery.”²⁶ Poetry, teeming with revolutionary rhetoric, was another avenue of colonial expression that demonstrated this paradox. Verse’s unique ability to use evocative metaphors and imagery allowed the poet to create powerful rhetoric surrounding slavery, freedom, and liberty.

Church then asks for mercy, such as a child comes to ask his parents for permission or forgiveness. Pleading for clemency and desiring to stay in royal favor, the last stanza positions the author at royalty’s feet:

To close- dread sovereign at whose sacred seat,
Justice and *Mercy*, spotless maidens meet;
GEORGE! Parent! King! Our Guardian, Glory, Pride,
And thou fair REGENT! Blooming by his side;

²⁶ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 4.

Thy offspring pleads a parent's fostering care,
Reject not, frown not, but in mercy spare;
Besprent with dust, the lowly suppliant lies,
A helpless, guiltless, injured sacrifice:
If ever our infant efforts could delight,
Or growing worth found favor in thy fight,
If warm affection due returns may plead,
Or faith unshaken ever intercede;
With modest boldness we thy smiles demand,
Nor with salvation from another hand;
Depress, not helpless, while a BRUNSWICK reigns,
Whose righteous scepter, no injustice stains.

The poem by Church acknowledges grievances the colonists had against the Stamp Act but does not call for rebellion against the mother country.²⁷ Verse thus achieved the balance between colonial grievances and remaining loyal to the crown by positioning the reader between obedience and defiance. This caution is important to reiterate, because as more colonial grievances arise through the imperial crisis the decision to begin an outright rebellion against Britain garners more support. Poetry was able to monitor the increasing tensions between Britain and their North American colonies with brief but emotional appeals. Political verse did not start out as incendiary as Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*, but this steady fusion of colonial defiance and verse in response to British governmental power, eventually came to inform notions of rebellion.

²⁷ Benjamin Church. *The Times, A Poem*, 15-16.

Verse in opposition to the Stamp Act identified individuals thought to be involved in an economic or political scheme to perpetuate British taxation. Here poetry was able to channel public outrage down a path towards specific British imperial authority. For instance, an anonymously published poem in late 1765 reveals an intensified anger towards John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute and the first Scottish Prime Minister, and John Hughes, a stamp collector in Philadelphia.²⁸

ARISE my Boys, awake and hear my Song,
Your Spirits cheer, your Liberty not gone,
Though *England* strives to put his Stamp on you,
We'll drive the *Scotch Mist* back, from whence it blew,
The *Highland Plot* 'twas first that made the Scheme;
A spiteful Dog, whose Teeth is very keen,
To strive to ruin *England*, still but he,
Shall dance without a Head you all shall see.

The poem's opening lines suggest a wakeup call in defense of liberty. The author positions the reader against then Prime Minister John Stuart, 3rd Earl of Bute. Stuart was the first Scottish Prime Minister of England and the poem exploits his nationality to suggest a pre-existing scheme against England as a precursor for a crackdown on the colonies. The poem pushes the reader to consider a violent retaliation against the Stamp

²⁸ "The Lamentation of Pennsylvania, On Account of the Stamp Act," Philadelphia, 1765, Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 10031. At the beginning of the New Year in 1766 news couriers published small one-page poems on their broadsides. Lawrence Swinney dedicated a New Year's Ode, "New Year's Ode for the Year 1766," that calls for the death of Grenville and Bute by the hands of the Devil. Lawrence Sweeney, "New Year's ode for the year 1766, being actually dictated by Lawrence Swinney, carrier of the news, enemy to stamps, a friend to the Constitution, and an Englishman every inch." New York printed in late 1765. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 41663.

Act. As the poem continues the author focuses his anger on the Philadelphia stamp collector John Hughes:

For Liberty and Property we'll have,
And stand to it with Courage, then so brave;
If John Hughes, don't the *Stamp* refuse,
I with he may be thus abused.
Grant Heaven, that he may never go without
The Rheumatism, Itch, the Pox or Gout;
May he be hampered with some ugly Witch,
And die at last in some curst fouldsome Ditch,
Without the benefit of Psalms or Hymns,
And Crowds of Crows devour his rotten Limbs.

Not even sleep could rid the colonists of worry. One notable poem published anonymously in late 1765 in Connecticut illustrates how deeply opposition to the Stamp Act permeated colonial life. The poem titled “A Poetical Dream” describes the author’s political consciousness while asleep.²⁹ The short prelude to the poem provides insight to the authors’ subconscious feelings about the Stamp Act. It presents, “A DREAM upon a subject which engages Men’s minds very much, when they are awake, as well as when they are asleep.” Within this dream the author grieves over the seven different documents that are to be stamped and taxed— bond paper, court papers, probate papers, diplomas, licenses, newspapers, and yearly almanacs. By revealing these papers as subject to taxation, the author shows the crown’s unconstitutional intrusion into daily colonial life.

²⁹ “A New collection of verses applied to the first of November, A.D. 1765, &c. Including a prediction that the S---p-A-t shall not take place in America. Together with a poetical dream, concerning stamped papers,” New Haven, Connecticut, 1765, pp. 19-24. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 10085.

He assumes the identity of the “bonded paper” itself: “Must I (the Bond cries) suffer the Abuse / Of being stamped, when I’m of so much Use / To Men of all Professions, rich and Poor / Whose Property I daily do secure?”³⁰ These four lines provide multiple insights into what the Stamp Act affected. Here poetry became explicitly political. It used labor and class to unveil the economic impact the law had on the colonies. This was political activism in the form of poetry. In response to the Stamp Act colonial verse mobilized to impede imperial taxes while laying the foundation for literary activism to evolve into open imperial defiance.³¹

The poetic form allowed the author to address a wide range of disparate points. Beginning with bonded paper the author shows the physical abuse of stamping, not to an individual, but to the paper by the harm caused in changing its physical nature. The second notion is how the Stamp Act affects the rich and poor alike, being as it was a class blind revenue generating measure— something that was unique from previous imposed taxes.³² The Sugar and Currency Acts of 1764 largely focused their burden on elite merchants. The Stamp Act, however, taxed everyone on internally traded paper goods, providing a pretext for the unification of all colonists— rich or poor, on the frontier, in the port cities, and from Georgia to Maine.³³ The third notion is that of individual property

³⁰ Ibid., 19-20.

³¹ More on the colonial economy during this time with regards to consumer culture see, T. H. Breen’s *The Market Place Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³² For more on the Stamp Act Crisis consider the book by Edmond S. Morgan and Helen S. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

³³ For more about class and wealth before the Revolution see Gary B. Nash, “Urban Wealth and Poverty in Pre-Revolutionary America,” *JIH*, 6 (1976), 545-584.

being targeted and taxed. The act was an attempt to strip the colonists of their individual property and grant it to the wealthy corrupt government officials. According to Bernard Bailyn, enacting the Stamp Act was “recreating the inequalities and dependencies of feudalism.”³⁴ Creating a mandatory stamp on paper goods and then requiring the colonists to pay was a direct attack on individual property, thus an attack on English liberties. Poetry in response to the Stamp Act thereby illustrated the emotional anxiety between imperial authority and colonial autonomy. According to Colin Wells, this tension is revealed by verse “expressing moral outrage, tending toward a logic of rebellion, and an equally powerful desire for reconciliation with the Crown.”³⁵ Verse was uniquely suited to achieve this balance because the format of poetry allows multiple sentiments to be made within a few lines or one stanza.

In the last stanza the author dreams about the repeal of the Stamp Act. As he does so, he demands sensibility from those imposing the taxes, the force of reason from the crown, and prayer from those resisting:

The KING and *Parliament* vouchsafe to hear,
The Force of Reason, and the ardent Prayer
Of those who joined to plead the *Papers* Cause;
And eased their *Burden*; and repealed those *Laws*
Which were so grievous.

³⁴ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1976), 101.

³⁵ Colin Wells, *Poetry Wars: Verse and Politics in the American Revolution and Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 37-38.

The poetic and political dream came to fruition a few months after this publication, resulting in celebratory poems noting that freedom and liberty prevailed.

“The Snare Broken”³⁶

Upon the repeal of the Stamp Act, joyful celebration occurred with the sounding of fireworks, church bells, sermons, broadsides, engravings, and poetry.³⁷ The poetry that followed the repeal of the Stamp Act expressed a heightened resolve towards resistance, celebration of successful defiance (whether it was boycotts or violent protests), acknowledgment of an ideological union among the colonists, and, perhaps most critically, the knowledge that verse was now a distinct vehicle of political expression. Poetry was written to assert ideological control over political events, demonstrating a rare ability to interpret and reinterpret public opinion. When it came to sway colonial ideologies, poems proved its worth as a form of uniquely identifiable political rhetoric. It turns out that verse, as well as violence, could move the needle of resistance.

Verse as an artful literary style illustrated the anger and frustration to which an individual author can express. With multiple poets publishing across the thirteen colonies, and, all of them bringing personal qualities into their publications, verse revealed a more continental attitude of expression. Poetry became another avenue of politicized expression that differed from others such as *Common Sense*. For example,

³⁶ Rev. Jonathan Mayhew, “The snare broken,” A thanksgiving-discourse, preached at the desire of the West Church in Boston, N.E. Friday May 23, 1766. Occasioned by the repeal of the stamp-act, <http://name.umd.umich.edu/N08145.0001.001>. The title derives from Psalm 124: 7-8.

³⁷ For celebrations found in colonial newspapers see, *The Boston Gazette*, May 19, 1766; *The New-York Gazette*, June 9, 1766; and the *Georgia Gazette*, July 16, 1766.

verse was a malleable genre of literary expression; in other words, it had no rigid guidelines and did not hold itself accountable to the laws of prose. The author could therefore bend and break free of those literary confines founded within other forms of literature.

Poetry during the early stages of the revolution began to subconsciously provoke internal emotions with every line and stanza, drawing a starker dichotomy between the oppressor and the oppressed. The colonists started to feel two different forms of conflict that were expressed in verse: external and internal. The external conflict contained emotions toward economics with regards to taxation without representation and the internal conflict was concerned with emotion towards identity and loyalty. Nicole Eustace in her book, *Passion is the Gale*, asks a critical question: “what was the immediate appeal of emotion in the midst of imperial upheavals?”³⁸ Her answer is found in the consideration of three problems faced by the colonists. First, the colonists needed to “find a mode of protest that signaled dissent without disrespect, resistance without rebellion.”³⁹ Second, the response needed to respond to popular opposition...directed at the king’s ministers and not the local elite.”⁴⁰ Third, “had to find a way to react to a new direction in British policy.”⁴¹ Her answer is sensible petitions from the colonists to Parliament. Petitions are a form of protest towards royal authority, but poetry was also written as another means of protest. In response to Eustace’s question, verse answers the

³⁸ Nicole Eustace, *Passion is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 389.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 389.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

three problems faced by colonists, revealing that poetical emotion appealed to the patriot resistance.

The length of a poem contributes to its sharp and violent tone. When allowed limited space in a newspaper, a poet condensed his language and emotion into a smaller space, resulting in more intensified rhetoric than if the author had several pages to write expository. Allowing short poems to be read quickly could help it circulate among the colonists faster because of the time it takes to read them. Plus, they were cheaper to produce, thus reaching a greater audience.⁴²

Ten days before the last poem was published, Thomas Plant composed another poem with a harsher tone than the previous one. Plant praised King George and William Pitt before showing animosity for Grenville and Bute, who were thought to subjugate colonial citizens:

Ye SONS OF LIBERTY rejoice!
For GEORGE and PITT's our friends,
Huske, Grenville, Bute, all worse than mad,
Shall never obtain their ends.
For had their cursed scheme taken place,
Which they had basely laid,
Then dear bought LIBERTY was lost,
And ruined was our trade.
Let Bute and Grenville's hated names,
Be mentioned still with scorn!
For to our weal in all respects,

⁴² "Boston Ode, on the repeal of the Stamp-Act." *Boston News-Letter*, published as *The Massachusetts Gazette Extraordinary*. Boston, Mass. May 29, 1766. *America Historical Newspapers*, Issue 3269, pg. 2.

Foes greater never were born.
Huske, Grenville, Bute, three imps of hell,
Worse than old Nick himself,
That cursed leash in triple league,
Combined for worldly pelf.

Within this hostile poem a new characteristic emerged from protest verse. A unique line states, "It's Freedom, sacred Freedom we / AMERICANS esteem." The two lines set a profound tone for independence through a celebratory poem responding to the repeal of the Stamp Act.⁴³ At this early stage of revolutionary ferment, verse did not seek outright imperial separation, however it did plant poetic seeds for a more radical response.

In Philadelphia, similar passion and emotion greeted the repeal of the Stamp Act. The colonists rejoiced over the tax's repeal yet continued to disdain those who implemented the act during the months when it was law. An anonymously published poem in late 1765 exhibited characteristics similar to previous poems. Notably, the two-part poem continued to show allegiance to Britain, the King, and the Queen. Titled "Good NEWS for AMERICA. To the Sons of LIBERTY," it begins with a short prelude noting that Parliament was going to repeal the act.⁴⁴ In the prelude, the author admits to his involvement with the Sons of Liberty and explains why he printed the poem. Emotion impacted the author enough to provoke him to channel his feelings into this poem, one

⁴³ Thomas Plant. "Joyful News to America, a poem. Expressive of our more than ordinary joy, on the repeal of the Stamp Act. Together with the Praise for Liberty, and two Acrosticks." Philadelphia: Printed by Andrew Steuart, May 19, 1766. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 10465. For another celebratory poem see, *A New Year's Wish from the Carrier of the Post-Boy & Advertiser*. Boston: Printed by Green and Russell, 1766. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 41744.

⁴⁴ "Good NEWS for America. To the Sons of LIBERTY." Philadelphia, late 1765. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 10320.

crafted to illicit an emotional response from the Sons of Liberty and whomever else reads the poem. Political poetry during this time was designed to do just that, evoke powerful emotions—sometimes controlled and channeled, other times evoking turbulent disorder and mayhem. They could be calibrated and trusted to make such subtle distinctions. For example, a finely tuned poem read by a member of the Sons of Liberty might lead him to take part in boycotts while another poem riddled with violent verse might help insight a riot against a tax collector.

The poem begins with, “YOU Sons of Liberty arise such News with joy attend,” calling for all Sons of Liberty to hear the good news. A few months before all hope of liberty was thought to be extinct: “So liberty we thought was dead, begins now to arise.” But now hopes for freedom have returned to the colonists. The poem closes with the call for all to drink to the health of King George and to “Burn the Scotch Boot, and repeal my excise.” Again, the author calls not for revolution or harm against the crown, but instead continues to show anger and violence towards John Stuart the Scottish born Prime Minister. Colin Wells states, the distinction to target John Stuart is largely due to the belief he “manipulated the king into imposing policies that opposed the people’s interests.”⁴⁵ The second part of the published poem starts with a subtitle in which all words are capitalized, “ON THE KING AND QUEEN.” This part favors the colonists’ allegiance to the crown with praise and glory to the King and Queen. The last two lines of the poem invites the reader to drink with the Sons of Liberty: “Come drink unto each Son of Liberty / Rejoice for now we have our property.” The correlation between a small tax

⁴⁵ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 40.

on paper goods and a direct violation of private property achieves emotional resonance in the form of political verse. It suggests that violating basic English rights will no longer be tolerated or excused without an emotional reaction, violent or otherwise. The last two words found at the bottom of the page are, “No STAMPS.” This is not a plea for no more taxes or violations of private property but rather a freshly emboldened resistance to royal authority, one that will not tolerate further taxation without representation.

Poems did not stand alone, some powerful political poems accompanied other forms of artful political expression. For example, upon hearing the news of the repeal of the Stamp Act, Paul Revere quickly engraved an obelisk.⁴⁶ The obelisk stood at the foot of the Liberty Tree outside of Boston in May of 1766 and each of the four sides depicted different chapters in the struggle against the Stamp Act. One side indicates the “total loss of LIBERTY,” another “She employs the aid of her PATRONS,” a third “endures conflict,” and finally “has her LIBERTY restored.” Accompanying each side are illustrations contributing to the political message found in the poems on the obelisk.

⁴⁶ Paul Revere. *A view of the obelisk erected under Liberty-tree in Boston on the rejoicings for the repeal of the --- Stamp Act*. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003690787/>. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

From left to right, the first side cites America’s loss of liberty with the last two lines stating: “GODDESS! we cannot part, thou must not fly / Be SLAVES! we dare to scorn it— dare to die.” In the second side America is in need of aid from her patrons: “To you blest PATRIOTS! we our Cause submit... O save us, shield us from impending Woes / The foes of Britain, only are our Foes.” The third side recounts the conflict that America endured: “Boast foul Oppression! boast thy transient Reign / While honest FREEDOM struggles with her Chain... See in the ’unequal War OPPRESSORS fall / The hate, Contempt, and endless Curse of all.” The fourth side portrays the restoration of liberty in America by King George III: “Our FAITH approved, our LIBERTY restored / Our hearts bend grateful to our sovereign Lord / Hail darling Monarch! By this act endeared / our firm affections are thy best reward.”

The poetry that accompanied the obelisk images retraces the enactment of the Stamp Act and its repeal, providing the reader with a visceral and visual account of what

transpired. Verse inspired the reader's imagination. Poetic excerpts from the obelisk represent three distinct themes— liberty, slavery, and devotion to the King. From the colonists' perspective their economic and political autonomy from the crown came under attack and they feared what would become of them if that liberty were ripped away, in effect: slaves.⁴⁷ Moreover, living in a slave society, this fear took on added resonance for the colonists. With the passage of each colonial tax, the prospect that the mother country would enslave through unconstitutional and burdensome taxes intensified. The repeal of the Stamp Act allowed for their liberty to be restored and faith in their monarch to be reassured. Devotion to crown never fully faltered, but defiance against imperial authority such as, Grenville and Bute, became clear within political verse.

“Here then, my dear countrymen, ROUSE yourselves”⁴⁸

Upon hearing that Parliament passed the Townshend Acts in 1767 John Dickinson wrote, “the single question is whether Parliament can legally impose taxes without our consent, if they can, our boasted liberty is bit a sound and nothing else.”⁴⁹ The Townshend Acts were named after Charles Townshend, the British Chancellor of the Exchequer. This act, like the Stamp Act, was a revenue generating measure imposed on

⁴⁷ More on the intersection of American liberty and slavery see, Edmund S. Morgan. *American Slavery, American Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1975) and Robert G. Parkinson. *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

⁴⁸ John Dickinson, *Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania to the Inhabitants of the British Colonies*. Letter 2, Pennsylvania Chronicle, December 2-7, 1767. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/dickinson-empire-and-nation-letters-from-a-farmer>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

the North American colonies without representation. It forced colonists to pay taxes on glass, paint, paper, lead, and tea— all of which were imported into America from Britain.⁵⁰ The taxes were used to pay the colonial governors' salaries, generate revenue for the crown, and most importantly, reaffirm Parliament's authority over the colonies.⁵¹ This flexing of Parliamentary power was partially in response to the Stamp Act resistance. Asserting control became paramount for British leaders. The colonial response was nonimportation boycotts. As with the Stamp Act, poetry played a critical role in shaping colonial resistance to a controversial imperial measure.

Verse during this phase of the imperial crisis democratized to include a wider range of voices. A significant poem in opposition to the Townshend Act came in December of 1769 from a source not typically accustomed to making a public political statement: a woman. Into the fray marched Hannah Griffitts. Her poem was titled, "The Female Patriots- Addressed to the Daughters of Liberty in America, 1768."⁵² This expression of protest, as Colin Wells states, is one of the few political verses published by a woman during the Revolutionary era.⁵³ More flexible than a formal treatise, verse allowed women to assert their political agency in the same manner men did, providing a unique avenue of momentary equality in the realm of literary resistance.

⁵⁰ Maier, *Resistance to Revolution*, 113. For more see, Joseph R. Alden, *A History of the American Revolution* (New York: De Capo Press, 1989), pp. 95-96.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² "The Female Patriots. Addressed to the Daughters of Liberty in America, 1768," *Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, December 18-25, 1769. America's Historical Imprints, vol. 3, issue 48, p. 392. For more Townshend Act poems see Alexander Martin, *America. A Poem* (Philadelphia, 1769).

⁵³ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 50.

The title of the poem explicitly appeals to women. The mention of the Daughters of Liberty in the title acknowledges a separate female political faction in harmony with the Sons of Liberty. Griffitts intended to further the cult of domesticity into the public forum through political opposition to the crown. Her literary resistance expanded how many women contributed to colonial defiance. Homespun was one method for women to promote and assist in boycotting British goods. Poetry, it turns out suggested another.⁵⁴

In the opening lines of the poem a staunch message becomes evident: men have not gone far enough to defy the Townshend Acts. Griffitts writes:

Since the Men, from a Party or fear of a frown,
Are kept by a Sugar-Plumb, quietly down,
Supinely asleep—and deprived of their Sight,
Are stripped of their Freedom, and robbed of their Right;
If the Sons, so degenerate! the Blessing despise,
Let the Daughters of Liberty nobly arise;

The author also used Whig republican ideology to buttress political agency among colonial women. She writes, “The use of the Taxables, let us forbear / Stand firmly resolved, and bid Greenville to see / That rather than Freedom we part with out Tea.” Furthermore, this poem acknowledges the virtuous women participating in boycotts and

⁵⁴ For more on homespun see Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *The Age of Homespun: Objects and Stories in the Creation of an American Myth*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001). For another poem regarding women and boycotts see *The Female Patriot, No. 1. Addressed to the Tea-Drinking Ladies New-York*. New York, May 10, 1770. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 11653.

“forbearing” English goods. The lines exhibit a sense of republican motherhood— public service with personal sacrifice.⁵⁵

Griffitts, like other colonial poets before her, stated that patriot women would not succumb to British “enslavement” and permit the violation of their English rights. She reiterates, “And Paper sufficient at Home still we have / To assure the Wiseacre, we will not sign Slave.” The fear of British thus enslavement crossed gendered lines in the ferment of colonial opposition. Although Griffitts’ case was rare, she showed that verse was able to poetically articulate patriot concerns regardless of domestic position. Poetry may have better lent itself to women’s participation than other rhetorical forms of opposition.

The concluding six lines of Griffitt’s missive call for solidarity in defiance. The end offers a uniquely gendered message:

Join mutual in this— and but small as it seems,
We may jostle a Grenville, and puzzle his schemes;
But a motive more worthy our Patriot-Pen,
Thus acting— we point out their Duty to Men;
And should the Bound-Pensioners tell is to hush,
We can throw back the Satire, by bidding them blush.

A FEMALE.

The message was potent— female patriots should offer resistance. Griffitts identified with the notion that these taxes were a part of a corrupt scheme to extort cash from the

⁵⁵ For more on women and the family during the revolutionary era see, Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel Jr., *The Way of Duty: A Woman and Her Family in Revolutionary America* (New York: Norton, 1984).

British colonies without providing them parliamentary representation. Should husbands insist that women cease through active defiance, women, Griffiths suggested, could resort to verse to remain political relevant. The author signed the poem— A FEMALE— to assert her gender. This political poem demonstrates female agency against the crown.

Mobs, Mayhem, and Massacre

In front of Boston's Customs House on March 5, 1770, emotions and hostilities culminated in a bloody confrontation on Boston's snow-covered King Street. That night a mob formed outside the Customs House, holding clubs, throwing rocks, and yelling insults at the soldiers standing guard. Heightened tensions in the aftermath of the Stamp Act and Townsend Acts quickly triggered both parties. At the pinnacle of the encounter shots rang out. Five colonists died and six were wounded.⁵⁶

Verse-driven resistance to the perceived injustice of the Boston Massacre further propagandized the ongoing struggle against British authority. Both sides sought to gain and manipulate the event through the publications of political pamphlets, blurring the lines of reality for ideological purposes.⁵⁷ Here, once again, Paul Revere shaped colonial opinion with a powerful political engraving depicting the scene of the massacre. In

⁵⁶ For more on the events surrounding the Boston Massacre and the trial of the British Soldiers see: Hiller B. Zobel. *The Boston Massacre* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1970), L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel, eds., *Legal Papers of John Adams*, in three volumes. (Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1965), and Eric Hinderaker, *Boston's Massacre* (Massachusetts: Belknap, 2019).

⁵⁷ Neil Longley York. "Rival Truths, Political Accommodation, and the Boston 'Massacre'." *Massachusetts Historical Review*: Vol. 11 (2009), pp. 57-95.

With murderous Rancor stretch their bloody Hands;
Like fierce Barbarians grinning over their Prey,
Approve the Carnage, and enjoy the Day.

The second stanza imagines the reader in a victimized state. By calling for the world to weep inconsolably and offer tribute to the patriot dead, the poem's empathetic emotions call for an impassioned "Tribute" against this heinous act.

Or if a Weeping can ought appease
The plaintive Ghosts of Victims such as these:
The Patriots copious Tears for each are shed,
A glorious Tribute which embalms the Dead.

In the third stanza Revere stokes the continuing fear of British corruption. Fate takes root in the American appeal for justice against the murderous British.

But know, FATE summons to that awful Goal,
Where JUSTICE strips the murderer of his Soul:
Should venal C—ts [courts] the scandal of the Land,
Snatch the relentless Villain from her Hand,
Keen Execrations on this Plate inscribed,
Shall reach a JUDGE who never can be bribed.

This type of poetry— which fused with fear and contempt--became a persuasive tool to stir abrupt political action.

After the Boston Massacre. memory and commemoration become politicized.⁵⁹

Verse took the reader on a journey through that cold bloody night. Complimenting verse

⁵⁹ For more on memory and the Revolution see: Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Blood in Revolutionary America* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

were images such as Paul Revere's engraving, designed to illicit the same response as the poetic rhetoric. The next example of verse and imagery joining to effect reform came in 1770. In this case, five black coffins, each with the initials of colonial dead, accompanied a poem aiming to shape and sustain a particular memory of the massacre.⁶⁰



Courtesy from the Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society

Once again, this poem intends to evoke an empathetic point of view. Motivation to write and published these poems derives from a basic impulse to sway public opinion against the crown. Whether the soldiers were provoked into shooting, accidentally discharged their weapons, or are involved in a murderous plot does not concern the author. The poem instead excoriates the British soldiers involved. It is here that verse created a memory that could be read out loud, passed around at a tavern, and reprinted

⁶⁰ *A POEM In MEMORY of the (never to be forgotten) FIFTH of MARCH, 1770.* Broadside, Boston, 1770. Image found in the Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Also see the poem in *Early American Imprints*, Series 1, no. 42156.

over and over across the colonies and Atlantic. As such, it acted as a mode of literary propaganda, providing the colonists with active political agency via verse.

Two years later in 1772, the committee of the town of Boston voted to commemorate the Boston Massacre. At this commemoration, Dr. Joseph Warren, member of the Sons of Liberty, gave an oration.⁶¹ James Allen's poem was not originally published with the oration because some thought Allen's loyalties might lay with the Tories.⁶² Allen begins the poem by comparing King George III to a Biblical tyrant, Pharaoh, once again using republican terminology to represent colonial interests. The terms "virtue" and "martyr" suggest the rhetoric of opposition. Having the moral courage to self-sacrifice for the greater good is a common theme represented in pro-Whig/republican ideology, for example:

FROM realms of bondage and a Tyrant's reign,
Our Godlike Fathers bore no slavish chain,
To Pharaoh's face the inspired Patriarchs stood,
To seal their virtue, with a Martyr's blood

The author then declares the Patriot's name and spirit to be greater than that of Rome and Sparta: "And each ingenuous, speaks in freedom's cause / The Spartan spirit, no the Roman name / The Patriot's pride, shall rival these in fame." This line suggest that

⁶¹ Joseph Warren. *An Oration Delivered March 5th, 1772. At the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston; to Commemorate the Bloody Tragedy of the Fifth of March, 1770*. 2nd ed. Boston: Edes and Gill by order of the town of Boston, 1772. For more on Joseph Warren see, Samuel A. Forman. *Dr. Joseph Warren: The Boston Tea Party, Bunker Hill, and the Birth of American Liberty* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing, 2012).

⁶² James Allen. *THE POEM, which the committee of the town of Boston had voted unanimously to be published with the late oration; with observations relating hereto; together with some very pertinent EXTRACTS from an ingenious composition never yet published*. Boston: Printed and sold by E. Russell, at the Printing-Office, near Dr. Gardener's [SIC], in Marlborough Street, 1772.

the legacy and memory of revolutionary cause was to be remembered and renowned for years to come, hinting at a national ideology that would “rival” antiquity.⁶³

The author relates the “Here” as a more enlightened land than that of mainland Britain: “Here all the sweets that social life can know... the full fonts of civil sapience flow / Here golden Ceres clothes the autumn plain / art’s fair empress holds new domain / Here angel Science spreads her lucid wing / And hark, how sweet the new-born muses sing / Here generous Commerce spreads her liberal hand.” The author signals to the reader his devotion to the colonies and praises how their early-modern and pre-industrial mindset exceeds that of Britain. An emerging colonial identity shines through the poem. Providing insight into the slow erosion of imperial bonds. Patriot poets began to write in a way that stressed a new identity, paving the way for the creation of future national ideals and beliefs.⁶⁴ Poetry, unlike prose, is a condensed form of expression—the execution of precise words at the precise time in poem resulted in a more powerful interpretation.

Additionally, the author argues that the colonists then living in the colonies were no longer born from the mother country and this bore no “filial tie” to Britain. Severing the familial tie was paramount to the authors’ argument, signally political and cultural autonomy. However, the end of the poem calls for listening to “Heaven’s decree” and

⁶³ Gordon S. Wood. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 48-53.

⁶⁴ For more on the transformation of the American colonies into a republic see, Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the America Republic, 1776- 1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

putting their wrongs in the past, to receive forgiveness in order to not let a curse remain on them:

Yet could our wrongs in just oblivion sleep,
And on each neck revived affection weep,
The brave are generous, and the good forgive,
Then say you've wronged us, and our Parent live;
But face not fate, oppose not Heavens decree,
Let not that curse our Mother light on thee.

James Allen's poem captures the complexities of colonial life during the imperial crisis. The first is the distrust in him by other patriot colonists. Once thought to be a Tory, the author of the poem was pulled from the commemoration schedule and not published. This decision shows the polarizing political climate emerging within the colonies. In the end, the town of Boston came together in order to vote unanimously for this poem to be published with the oration. This decision put the town committee members, the author, publisher, and anyone owning a copy of this poem at risk of being punished by the British government. It was an act of defiance towards the authority of the crown. Through verse, hostility towards the King and those who represented his authority in the colonies reminded colonists of past violations of the English law. The poem, presented as part of a commemoration and published along with the oration from Dr. Warren, proved how deeply poetry, alongside prose, had penetrated colonial consciousness.

Parodies vs. Gage

In the wake of the Coercive Acts, British authority strengthened its grip on Boston in response to the Boston Tea Party.⁶⁵ These acts contained severe laws in reprisal of colonial disobedience. The Coercive Acts included three more subsequent acts: The Port Act, Quartering Act, and the Massachusetts Government Act. Understanding the poetry that gets published during this tumultuous time requires understanding the political context for these acts.

The Port Act shut down the Boston Harbor, cutting the economic lifeline to the colony, signaling a new standard of authoritative power by Parliament and the king.⁶⁶ The Quartering Act was a renewed assessment of the previous act in 1765. However, this act now permitted the housing of troops in private colonial homes. This was an underrated representation of British authority. This act put British troops in the everyday private sphere of the colonists. This policy went against the long English tradition of no standing armies. Power and influence changed drastically within the confines of a home as opposed to a public town square or city street. This act was meant to reduce colonists to their previous subordinate role.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Another name for the Coercive Acts most recognizable to colonists is the Intolerable Acts. More on the Boston Tea Party examine Benjamin Woods Labaree. *Boston Tea Party*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. For a song concerning the Boston Tea Party see: *TEA, destroyed by Indians*. Broadside, Boston, December 1773, found in the Library of Congress. And for a poem see, "A Zealous Daughter of Liberty." *Massachusetts Spy*, December 2, 1773.

⁶⁶ Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, 235-236.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 236-237.

The Massachusetts Government Act targeted local colonial authority by replacing those on the council with officials appointed by the Crown. Parliament now had power to control local politics. Knowing this, the colonies quickly became more unified in their political measures against the crown. If this kind of power could be asserted on Boston it could just as easily be extended to Philadelphia, New York, or Charleston.⁶⁸

In the Spring of 1774, shortly after the passing of the Coercive Acts, General Thomas Gage, by order of the King, became the Military Governor of Massachusetts. Buttressed by the Coercive Acts, he ushered in a new wave of British rule. Along with this potent assertion of power the colonists respond in radical new ways, Colin Wells puts it succinctly as “verse parody,” but during the revolutionary period the term is identified as “versification.”⁶⁹

General Gage immediately published several proclamations in the summer of 1774.⁷⁰ Later that year on November 10th Gage issued another proclamation responding to the formation of a “Provincial Congress” in Boston.⁷¹ Gage aimed to declare his authority on all matters concerning the province of Massachusetts. Previously, Bostonians subverted the crown's authority by using verse to respond to an act made by

⁶⁸ Ibid., 236-245. For more on the cities during the American Revolution see Benjamin L. Carp. *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶⁹ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 19.

⁷⁰ Thomas Gage, “By the Governor. A Proclamation For discouraging certain illegal combinations,” *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Post-Boy*, June 27, 1774. And “By the Governor. A Proclamation For the Encouragement of Piety and Virtue, and for preventing and punishing of Vice, Profaneness and Immorality,” *Massachusetts Gazette and Boston Weekly*, July 28, 1774.

⁷¹ Thomas Gage. “By the Governor. A Proclamation. Printed by M. Draper, Printer to his Excellency the Governor, and the Honorable His Majesty’s Council.” Boston: November, 1774. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 13414.

Parliament. Now, with Gage's "absolute power" being published through proclamations, the famed patriot poets John Trumbull and Philip Freneau used parody to create literary caricatures for patriot political propaganda.⁷²

Focusing on Freneau and his parody, *Thomas Gage's Proclamation Versified*, the author began the poem with "WHEREAS the Rebels hereabout / Are stubborn still, and still hold out."⁷³ Noting the rebels were in fact in his domain of "control" and filled with determination, the poem alluded to the idea that the rebels were nothing more than rebellious children. In addition, Freneau repeats this "connotation" concerning the men at Concord: "But peaceably, without alarm / The men of Concord to disarm / or, if resisting, to annoy / and every magazine destroy." Freneau next highlights a key point in Gage's proclamation, the one declaring martial law in Boston.

To every reader that can read:
And as nor law no right was known
Since my arrival in this town;
To remedy this fatal flaw,
I hereby publish Martial Law

The author presents the contradiction that no such right or law was known in Boston and parodies it with the implementation of martial law. By taking a proclamation originally

⁷² For an earlier poem in response to a proclamation from Gage see Freneau's, *American Liberty, A Poem*. 1774. Within this poem the author calls the whole country to unite into action against British tyranny.

⁷³ Philip Freneau. *Thomas Gage's Proclamation Versified*. New York: June 30, 1775. Early American Imprints, 1639- 1800: Series 1, no. 14527. This poem was reprinted in Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and New Hampshire from July 3- July 10, 1775, in the *Virginia Gazette*, July 20, 1775, in Rhode Island with the *Newport Mercury*, July 17, 1775, and in the *Massachusetts Spy or American ORACLE of Liberty*, July 19, 1775.

written in prose, and then recreating it with “verse parody,” the poet ideologically liberates the colonists from obeying a direct public decree. Here the parody maneuvers the authoritative role from a proclamation into verse. Poems not only attacked royal decrees but also the prose it was written in. According to Wells, “versifying a proclamation alters the text from a manifestation of power into mere language...nullifying the function of legal or official discourse.”⁷⁴ With these parodies, verse engaged with prose by dislodging colonial authoritative power from imperial proclamations. If verse was able to shift authoritative power then it must be relocated, the poets have ascertained that power, or in other words, the patriot cause gained political influence amongst its readers.

An anonymously published poem in December of 1774 highlighted the ongoing literary conflict between Gage’s proclamations and colonial verse.⁷⁵ The satirical poem’s long title proved to illustrate the conflict— “An Heroical Panegyric on the valorous achievements of General Gage, in the Paper war in America, A.D., 1774. Occasioned by some late Proclamations.” The author called attention to Gage’s authoritative and strong-willed words found in the proclamations and asked rhetorical questions in response to them:

And is this mighty huff and vapor,
Reduced to wrangling upon paper?
Are Tories still condemned to patience,
And Gage to scribbling proclamations?

⁷⁴ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 27.

⁷⁵ “An Heroical Panegyric on the valorous achievements of General Gage, in the Paper war in America, A.D., 1774. Occasioned by some late Proclamations.” *Early American Imprints, 1639-1800: Connecticut*, December 18, 1774. *Massachusetts Spy or, Thomas’s Boston Journal*, January 12, 1775.

Are all his military fits
Closed in the straining of his wits?
Will all the troops in common placed,
Lay not but quires of paper waste?
Go on, ye conquering sons of might,
Indite, ye Whigs, ye Tories, write!
With strokes alternate stun the nation,
Discharge address and proclamation;
Let speech met speech, fib clash with fib,
And Gage still answer, squib for squib.

Belittling Gage's authority with rhetorical questions in satire carried on the colonial tradition of challenging authority for ideological needs. Stating that Gage's military accomplishments were confined to just scribbling on parchment insulted his status as a General. Moreover, antagonizing Gage to publish more and more proclamations, which he did, reinforced the perception that Gage had little to no authority. In other words, the more Gage wrote the more colonial poets used satire and parody against him, furthering the slow and consistent stripping of "ideological power" from him— and when power is lost, power is gained.⁷⁶

Proclamations were not the only form of expression under attack from colonial poets. Even private letters were subject to satire. On August 13, 1775, General Gage wrote a letter to General George Washington. The letter called for proper treatment for

⁷⁶ For another poem attacking all three of Massachusetts last governors in acrostic form see, *Part the third, on Pirates*. (Boston? 1775?) Early American Imprints, 1639-1800: Series 1, no. 50407. The poem also discusses the Battle of Lexington and Concord in the use of violent verse.

the captured prisoners of war.⁷⁷ In it, Gage appealed to George Washington’s honor in order to seek the proper treatment of captured British soldiers. Several lines in the poem advance the colonial cause. For example: “Upon these principles your Prisoners, whose Lives by the Laws of the Land are destined to the Cord, have hitherto been treated with care and kindness...” A poem by Freneau, “REFLECTIONS on GAGE's Letter to GENERAL WASHINGTON, of Aug. 13,” published shortly after this letter was sent to Washington. It moved this sentence into an entirely different direction.⁷⁸

“REBELS you are,” the hopeful General cries,
Truth, stand thou forth and tell the wretch he lies.
Rebels—and see the high imperial lord
Already threats those rebels with a cord.

The second to last stanza repackages the term “cord,” in order to sell a provocation into a call to arms in defense of Washington and freedom.

To arms, to arms, and let the trusty sword,
Decide who best deserves the hangman's cord,
Nor think the hills of Canada too bleak,
When desperate freedom is the cause you seek.

⁷⁷ “To George Washington from Lieutenant General Thomas Gage, 13 August 1775,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, version of January 10, 2019, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-01-02-0203>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 1, *16 June 1775–15 September 1775*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985, pp. 301–302.]

⁷⁸ “REFLECTIONS of GAGE’s Letter to GENERAL WASHINGTON, on Aug. 13.” *Constitutional Gazette* (New York), October 18, 1775, pg. 3. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.

The author's full attention and motives are clearly stated within this poem. Freneau was actively calling for a collective military movement against the British. Moreover, this poem took a simple sentence out of context and catapulted it into the realm of political rhetoric with the intention to further incite rebellion.

Colonial Literary Defiance— Reimagined

During the imperial crisis verse collectively maneuvered ideological control from British Authority into the hands of colonial poets. The patriot poems deployed satire and parody to propagandize politics and sway public opinion. Rhetoric found in verse reshaped perceived political reality, influencing how colonists interpreted increasingly volatile tensions. Eleven years before Thomas Paine's widely published, *Common Sense*, the patriot poets were engaging in political propaganda and calling for a united front in a rebellion against Britain. It was not just pamphlets but also poems that sounded the call for liberty. With the Revolutionary War pending, these same techniques, and new ones, would shape American opinion during the war.

Chapter 2.

War and Verse: Ideological Combat

Once the exchange of gunpowder and the dense fogs cleared in the Charlestown peninsula, one British officer stated, "The Rubicon is now passed and matters are become very serious indeed." It marked the end of the Battle of Bunker Hill— and the beginning of the looming Revolution.⁷⁹ The Battle of Bunker Hill, or otherwise known to the British as Beacon Hill, signified to the British that the colonies were in open rebellion.⁸⁰ From this battle, the patriots chalked a loss but not without exacting heavy losses on the British side.⁸¹ Among the casualties on the patriot side was Major General Dr. Joseph Warren, a notable and charismatic leader on the field of battle. From his death blossomed elegies, poems worded with great sorrow and grief. More importantly, these expressions become political verse by illustrating martyrdom and republican sacrifice for the emerging cause of liberty at a critical time in the Revolutionary era.

Poets during the war sought to shape public opinion, unify the colonists, and sustain the war effort. Through poetic expression, Freneau and other patriots provided hope in times of great desperation. They elevated martyrs and patriot victories,

⁷⁹ Marion Balderston and David Syrett, eds., *The Lost War: Letters from British Officers during the American Revolution* (New York: Horizon Press, 1975), 32.

⁸⁰ For a poem regarding the battle see, *Battle of Bunker Hill. Composed by a British Officer, the day after the Battle, June 17, 1775*. Boston, Massachusetts. Library of Congress.

⁸¹ British had 226 dead and 828 wounded, while the Americans had half that, 140 killed, and 271 wounded. See, Middlekauff, *Glorious Cause*, 298.

denounced the King, loyalists, and other colonial leaders in favor of the crown, undermined British victories, and championed their losses. Furthermore, King George III and loyalists penned poems to subvert patriot influence in the colonies. Other patriot poets sought to reveal the difficulties with waging war against Britain—reflecting the harsh realities of rebellion. Verse was a military and ideological weapon, and it exerted power and influence across the Atlantic and the Caribbean. Moreover, patriot printers published rebellious rhetoric from Jamaica. Verse reprinted in the colonies from Jamaica revealed that poetry was employed by enslaved peoples abroad. Poetry in the Caribbean during the revolutionary era shared the same ideological motivations as verse in the British colonies. Collectively, this chapter will reflect these themes during the revolutionary war.

Two distinctly emotional poems appear on a broadside in Salem and Boston, Massachusetts, presumably shortly after the battle concluded.⁸² Both contain somewhat the same title and mostly the same content. One important difference, though, was that the broadside printed in Salem contained sixty black coffins at the top, while the broadside printed in Boston had only twenty. Why?⁸³ One option is to admit this was to save space, and by doing so, make the printing process cheaper; another option, is to

⁸² “An Elegiac Poem, Composed On The Never-To-Be-Forgotten Terrible And Bloody Battle Fought At An Intrenchment On Bunker-Hill.” Broadside, Salem, Massachusetts: NE Printed and sold by E. Russell, next to John Turner, Esq; in the Main-Street., 1775. *Massachusetts Historical Society*. http://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=785. The broadside from Boston see, “Account of the Bloody Battle on Bunker Hill, an Elegiac Poem.” Broadside, Boston: Massachusetts, 1775. *From the Collections of Henry Ford*, Object ID: 69.144.506. <https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research/digital-collections/artifact/248343>.

⁸³ Another point to consider about these almost identical broadsides is perhaps the organizations that hold these primary sources have missed identified the location or simply do not know and assumed the location. What is most likely certain, is that these were found in or near Boston shortly after the battle.

hypothesize that it was geared to illicit a more passionate response from the patriot readers.



Courtesy of the Collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society

This broadside was remarkable for several reasons. First, with the black coffins, it captured the somber mood of Boston. Second, it offered a retelling of the battle from the patriot perspective. Third, it was a poem memorializing the conflict. Lastly, there was an acrostic containing Joseph Warren's name. The vast implications of this broadside spoke to the conviction of the author. With an elegy, one finds a more introspective examination of an individual, perhaps enough to cause an *elegiac action*. In other words, a broadside like this aimed to evoke an emotional response as a pretext to "act" or "mobilize" in the war effort. That being said, the "act" or "action" could range from joining the continental army, gathering intelligence for the patriots, or solely devoting some goods or services to the rebellion.

The poem, as an emotional, political expression, revealed a wide range of literary tactics used by the anonymous author to propagandize the war effort. Beginning with the graphic design of the broadside, the printer's inclusion of sixty black coffins at the top captured the reader's attention with an artful expression masking a defiant motive. The thin black lines that encompass the entire broadside suggested that nothing outside of this document was of urgent importance. It held the readers' attention on the daily imperial contest that engulfed the city of Boston, forcing them to confront the ideological bout between defiance of the empire and loyalty to the crown.⁸⁴

Below the black coffins came a description of what actions took place in Charlestown on June 17, 1775. The prelude was emotionally charged and asserted itself as a literary time capsule illustrating the "wantonly and inhumanly" actions involved in the engagement. Moreover, the prelude acknowledged that such an "attempt to delineate the horrible and shocking situation...afford matter of speculation to the Historian." In so doing, it suggested that these acts conducted by the British were so "calamitous" that future generations might be in disbelief. Furthermore, the author declared the "cannonading" of the innocents within Charlestown before the battle was, an act "executed by orders from that arch-traitor and worst villains Thomas Gage."

In addition to the literary time capsule and assertion that Gage ordered the bombardment before the battle, the prelude incorporated an emotional plea for

⁸⁴ Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial radicals and the development of American opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1991), 266-270. For more on the loyalist side see, William H. Nelson, "The Crisis of Allegiance," in *The American Tory* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 64-84, and for a more comprehensive look at the year 1775 see, Kevin Phillips, "Part II. The Revolution— Provocations, Motivations, and Alignments," in *1775: A Good Year for Revolution* (NY: Penguin Books, 2012), 35-221.

martyrdom with regards “to the inexpressible grief of our whole army . . . [and] . . . that honorable, renowned, and magnanimous hero, Major- General Joseph Warren.” A single line toward the end of the prelude that was of utmost importance.

“...is here annexed to the proceeding Poem, and printed in this form at the request of a great number of Friends to the AMERICAN CAUSE, to whom (but more especially those belonging to the Continental Army, who may have this sheet very cheap) it is recommended to preserve...”

Thus, the prelude accompanying this poem exemplified the necessity of accessible unifying rhetoric, and poetry’s ability to fulfill that need. Selling this broadside “very cheap” provided for a higher readership within the military and surrounding communities. Moreover, the use of the word “cheap” shows the economic sacrifice by the printer for ideological purposes. Again, verse along with broadsides were cheaper to produce and circulate than pamphlets. Consequently, the printing and selling of this broadside was an act of defiance to shape public opinion with emotionally charged ideological and unifying rhetoric found within the prelude, poem proper, acrostic, and graphic design. Nothing could accomplish these goals as well as a poem.

The poem was, in fact, the essence of this broadside. As a political expression, poetry possessed dominant qualities underappreciated by historians. The poem begins by saying goodbye to lies that might be circulating about the battle: “Adieu to wanton songs and foolish joys / To idle tales that fill the ear.” Then, the author engages the reader by asking if this struggle was part of their destiny: “What shall we say when ‘tis decreed / By fate it must be so?” This was a common thread found within colonial poetry: the role of fate and providence in the ideological motivation for revolution. In other words, mixing fate, providence, God’s will, or destiny into the lexicon of resistance further

skewed objective reasoning for imperial separation. This diluted the moral dilemma of what was treasonous behavior and what was not. For example, in the prelude, the author labels Gage the “arch- traitor.” By labeling him a traitor, the author assured that the colonists and not Gage were in defense of liberty and currently occupying the moral high ground. As we will see, colonists similarly reacted with verse to the “treasonous” actions of Benedict Arnold, further demonstrating how verse came to be a literary weapon of resistance.

Shaping public opinion was an essential byproduct of revolutionary verse. Poetry achieved this goal in a way that is not generally recognized among other forms of resistance. This stanza illustrates the point:

A dear-bought victory they gain'd,
If it is called so,
When most the flower of British troops
Met with their overthrow.
Small was our loss compar'd with those
Who now the lines possess;
Great was the slaughter of our foes,
And poor was their success.

The British won the battle of Bunker Hill and took control of the strategic land it occupied. Here, within the opening two lines, the author undermines the importance of the victory. The remaining lines point to an interesting notion: a loss is only a loss if it is called one. What this meant for the colonists, as for early in the revolution and before the Declaration of Independence the following next month, was that the ideological battle was a critical as the literal field of battle far surpassed what happened in the field of

combat. Verse actively shaped validity and truth, manipulating public opinion to gain ideological power and, at the same time, subvert British colonial authority.

Creating a martyr was essential to facilitating acts of colonial defiance. The notion of republican self-sacrifice in the cause of liberty reverberated well within this poem and the acrostic that followed it. In one significant stanza, we find an elegiac emotional performance ushering in an emotional appeal to empathy:

Brave General WARREN'S hapless fate
And weep upon his urn.
My trembling hand, my aking heart,
O! how it throbs this day!
His loss is felt in ev'ry part
Of vast America.

Positioning Warren's death within an elegiac appeal to the reader invoked an emotional contagion, that, according to the author, resonated all over the colonies. Poetry and related literary works containing elegies for the newly created martyr appeared throughout the colonies over the coming weeks.⁸⁵

Located on the bottom right of the broadside, Warren was discussed in a separate acrostic. The importance of the acrostic was to give prominence to a significant word or message. In this case, "Joseph Warren" was visible as the first letter of each line

⁸⁵ For more elegies see the *Pennsylvania Packet*, July 3, 1775 and another brilliantly designed elegiac broadside located at the Library of Congress titled, "An elegy, occasion'd by the death of Major-General Joseph Warren, who fell fighting in defence of the glorious cause of his country, at Charlestown, in New England, on the memorable 17th day of June, 1775. Printed and sold in Watertown, near the," <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbpe.0380180b>. For a poem mocking Thomas Gage's losses at Bunker Hill see, John Trumbull, "A new proclamation! By Thomas Gage, whom British frenzy stil'd honourable and excellency, o'er Massachusett's sent to stand here vice-admiral and chief commander ...," Hartford, 1775, 8pp, Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 14526.

memorializing his good name. The acrostic intended to use mnemonic tools in order to inject and preserve Warren's legacy in colonial memory.

Just as JOSEPH took his flight
Onward to the realm of light,
Satan hurl'd his hellish darts,
Evil angels played their parts;
Piercy, Burgoyne, Howe, and Gage,
Hover about infernal rage:
WARREN step'd beyond their path,
Aw'd by none, nor fear'd their wrath;
Ran his race to joy and rest,
Rose amongst the loyal blest;
Enter'd in the rolls of fame,
North and Devil mist their aim.

The poet politicized martyrdom by elevating Warren and his death to such a height that neither Satan, evil angels, infamous British generals, or a colonial Governor could capture his soul from reaching heaven's "realm of light." By placing Warren on this divine path of martyrdom, the author used a psychological tool in order to propagandize his death, showing how republican self-sacrifice, in resistance to the crown, became an emotional mobilizing force for the patriot forces.

Controlling the resistance narrative became an essential way for the colonists to obtain and retain support for the war. Poets began to build political and moral favor by versifying military conflicts and deaths. In doing so, they legitimized colonial defiance amongst their readership. With every line and stanza, this ideologically charged rhetoric

was cheaply bought and sold, read, and consumed, then scripted into the consciousness of the reader, calling for unified action.

“Treason in mask of Liberty”

Not all poets or colonists supported the patriot cause. Loyalists or anyone who supported the King and British colonial rule began to write their own verse to resist the patriot rabble, or as one New York clergyman dubbed them “poor giddy Wights, without pretense.”⁸⁶ Loyalist poetry revealed the ideological bout brewing in revolutionary America between defiance and loyalty, further showing colonial disunity. Poetry was not limited to the patriots and their cause. It also served the ideological imperatives of loyalists, many of whom entered the fray of literary warfare using their own form of fevered rhetoric. Moreover, by unleashing their loyal verse, they ignited a debate over the morality of treason.

A thirty-four-page poem by Rev. Myles Cooper titled, “The Patriots of North America: a Sketch,” highlighted increasing loyalist frustration in the face of moblike behavior among New York patriot rebels. The advertisement or preface unveiled a transatlantic truth that long eluded historians. During this time, did any patriot or loyalist literature reach the mother country? If so, how much? The answer comes within the first line of the prelude, “There is not a single pamphlet written in North America that does

⁸⁶ Myles Cooper, *The Patriots of North-America: a sketch. With explanatory notes*. New York: Printed [by James Rivington?], 1775. Early American Imprint, Series 1, no. 14359. For more Loyalist satirical verse see, Jonathon Odell, *The American Times. A Satire, in Three Parts*, 1780.

not, by some accident or other, find its way to England.”⁸⁷ Understanding this, the author provides evidence to support a transatlantic literary war, with both sides firing ideologically charged rhetoric. More importantly, the use of verse was found inside this dueling literary bombardment.

The staunch political divide between Patriots and Loyalists paved the way for the strengthening of ideological positions. It was conducted by the poets writing verse infused with oppositional rhetoric. The loyalist Rev. Cooper demonstrated this point by launching insults at those who defied the crown, following suit with familiar Patriot tropes:

Men undefin'd by any Rules,
Ambiguous Things, half Knaves, half Fools,
Whom God denied the Talents great,
Requir'd to make a Knave complete;⁸⁸

By labeling the Patriots in such terms, Cooper argued that rebels were not worthy of British rule or found to be capable of governing because God did not give them moral principles. Furthermore, those defined as incapable must be guided by someone else who is competent. In other words, the unruly colonial "rabble" required patriot leadership. In the following stanza, the author declared that those in defiance of the crown were in fact puppets to egotistical Patriot leaders:

Whom Nature form'd, vile Party-Tools,

⁸⁷ Cooper, *The Patriots of North- America*, pg. 4 [?]. The page is not numbered, but the title of the page is "Advertisement." For an extensive collection of 125 published poems in London from 1763- 1783 see, James C. Gaston, *London Poets of the American Revolution* (New York: Whitston, 1979).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

Absurder much than downright Fools,
Who from their own dear Puppet-Show,
The World's great Stage, pretend to know.
In Politics mere Punchinellos,
Yet pass for rare, for clever Fellows;⁸⁹

The crime of treason conveyed by Loyalist rhetoric admonished colonial disloyalty. Rev. Cooper provided a few more lines on this subject:

Too fond and credulous to see
Treason in Mask of Liberty.
What false Conclusions Knaves can draw
From Gospel Truths, from Statue Law;⁹⁰

Here the author attacked the foundation of patriot ideology, liberty— stating those in rebellion were naïve and credulous, deriving their logic from false conclusions found in the Bible and the English constitution. Loyalists' verse began to expose the patriot ideology as a disguise for anarchy and betrayal. The motive for loyalist verse was an effort to regain loyalty or subvert patriot influence by demystifying revolutionary rhetoric; in other words, it aimed to shape public opinion in favor of loyalty to the crown. To that point, the significance of verse on the Loyalists' side shows how literary tactics were employed on both sides, using verse and rhetoric to achieve political legitimacy. It also reminds us how verse could be a terse and rhythmic way to fight a war of words.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3. Punchinellos are characters in a puppet show found in Europe and the colonies. Colin Wells echoes this notion in *Poetry Wars*, 103.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 7.

“Grow immortal by the stand we make”

Of course, the Patriots were ready to respond with poems countering Loyalist verse. The American colonies in 1775 were at a pivotal point in the revolution.⁹¹ Momentum carrying the rebellion was magnifying “patriotic furor and a passion for arms.”⁹² Philip Freneau wrote a passionate poem to unite the colonies into open war with Britain. The title of the poem— *American Liberty, a Poem*, argues for revolution due to the “Present situation of affairs in North- America.”⁹³ Within this argument, the author addressed a wide range of topics, all of them listed on the front page. It contains twenty different points, for example: “Cruelties of the Indian Natives, Present happy Unanimity among the Colonies, Character of a weak Monarch, the determined Resolution of the Colonies to be free, and the future Happiness of America if she surmounts the present Difficulties.”⁹⁴

Freneau began by acknowledging the difficult situation in Boston, following the pattern of previous poets by contextualizing the calamities perpetrated by the British. He wrote, “See Boston groan beneath the strong blockade / Her freedom vanish’d, and destroy’d her trade.”⁹⁵ Here the author advances a distinct notion. By linking freedom

⁹¹ For a thorough account of conflict in the early stages of the American Revolution see, Rick Atkinson, *The British are Coming: The War for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775- 1777* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2019).

⁹² Phillips, *1775*, 3.

⁹³ David S. Shields, *American Poetry: The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Library of America, 2007), 723. The poem can also be found in the public domain.

⁹⁴ Shields, *American Poetry*, 723.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 724.

and trade, Freneau highlighted a correlation— doing so with the sharpness of verse— that colonists might have lost sight of. Kevin Phillips emphasizes this link by combing "economic motivations and constitutional rhetoric in a single capsule." In other words, Freneau showed another concept of patriot ideology that was rooted in colonial economic determinism.⁹⁶ Towards the end of the poem, the author used repetition to drive home the point. In a prose explication this would have been redundant, but in a poem, it worked to make the political point: "Commerce extends as far as waves can roll / And freedom, God-like freedom, crowns the whole."⁹⁷

A successful rebellion required some level of colonial unification. Freneau understood this requirement and called patriots to stand behind the cause in order to achieve two outcomes:

Dark was the prospect, gloomy was the scene,
When traitors join'd to break our union chain:
But soon, by heaven inspir'd, arose the cry,
Freedom or death, unite, unite or die.⁹⁸

The sense of urgency revealed Freneau's passionate poetic plea for those who were undecided about opposition to the crown to make a choice. This poem acted as a recruiting tool, enlisting patriots to fight against Britain. By conveying the message through verse, Freneau linked instilled war with a dash of romance that a poem could convey. The significance of the poem deploying recruitment rhetoric is that verse

⁹⁶ Phillips, *1775*, 205- 108.

⁹⁷ Shields, *American Poetry*, 730.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 727.

provoked emotions far removed from the current resistance effort, aiming to gain moral and physical support in resistance to imperial authority.

Freneau employed another tactic, one that pinned the patriot in a moment of grandeur. Providence and fate had previously been a part of the poet's rhetorical arsenal, but here the author catapulted the readers' imagination into an everlasting, immortal realm:

Fall'n on disastrous times we push our plea,
Heard or not heard, and struggle to be free.
Born to contend, our lives we place at stake,
And grow immortal by the stand we make.⁹⁹

Drawing on the sense of mystery that poetry could uniquely capture, Freneau became a fortune-teller, offering immortality to those who mobilized against the crown. He placed the current struggle for Independence on a pedestal, making it equal to or greater than any previous rebellion and revolution in the past. In short, the author, through the power verse, offered the reader the chance to participate in a cause with immortal gravitas. In turn, he provided the colonists with an almost spiritual justification to make a stand against Britain. Freneau intended to influence the readers' drive for self-distinction against the force of imperial control.

The author aimed to appeal beyond the societal hierarchy at this time with his "proletariat poetry," considering this revolution would be fought and won by colonists of the lower statue in society. Freneau ignored the rigid societal structures and employed

⁹⁹ Ibid., 730.

class-blind passions. Comparable to Thomas Paine's pamphlet *Common Sense*, the poems' comprehensible rhetoric was tailored to influence all classes of people within colonial society. Furthermore, the author's content suggested that patriot commitment to the revolution would present opportunities for advancement that British rule would never permit.

Freneau also brought forward another concept for the colonists to consider: the notion of providential- birth. In other words, the colonists were predestined from birth to oppose imperial authority. For example, Freneau wrote, "Born to contend, our lives we place at stake." Destiny became as something that was decided before birth—and so was an individual's stance on freedom. By extension, the author pushed the reader to consider that the American Revolution and their fate was pre-determined. According to Robert Middlekauff, the elite leaders of the revolution— such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin— were all "marked by the moral dispositions of passionate Protestantism."¹⁰⁰ In other words, due to their impassioned religious beliefs, "providence had set them apart for great purposes," and it "gave the revolution much of its intensity and much of its idealism."¹⁰¹

A King's prayer to God

The language of liberty was not restricted to the patriot cause, the King also resorted to verse during the revolution. King George used poetry to communicate with

¹⁰⁰ Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

God through prayer. The King desired divine intervention and wanted to assert his monarchical authority. By January of 1777, George Washington crossed the Delaware River, escaped from General Howe, and successfully captured New Jersey.¹⁰² The American Revolution was well underway, and Winter began to set in for the warring armies. News about the ongoing conflict reached the mother country and the King. Given the current state of affairs, King George III penned a poem titled— “A Poetical Address to Almighty God.”¹⁰³ Employing verse, the author desired to “convey a just idea of character and conduct of that great Monarch, to every subject in the British Empire.”¹⁰⁴

The title alone suggested that the King saw verse as the avenue through man could communicate with God. The notion that poetry could take the form of written prayer, and that a poet could compose a prayer informed the King’s resort to verse. George III used poetry to reveal his “just character and conduct” regarding his monarchical status in America and asked God to “prevent others from falling” into further rebellion.¹⁰⁵ By using verse instead of prose to appeal to God, it suggested that prayer and poetry could be similar means of expression.. This elevated verse as a means for mortal men to ask for God’s intervention in times of political conflict.

¹⁰² Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 363- 369.

¹⁰³ King George III, *A Poetical Address to Almighty God*. London, 1777. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale document number: CB131633299. Also found in the British Library. The poem is attributed to King George III, but there is no conclusive proof that he was the author. It very well could have been someone posing as King George III. The author is writing the poem from the King's perspective. For more on King George III and the American Revolution see Jeremy Black, *George III: America's Last King* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹⁰⁴ King George III, *A Poetical Address*, second title page.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, i.

The preface of the published work confirmed the author's motivation for writing the poem. King George III stated that he could not offer his "Fortune or material Service to the general Cause" because his "abilities were confined to the Powers of Pen."¹⁰⁶ The King strategically chose to use poetry as a way to assert his imperial claim. In other words, verse was a method to sustain authority in the colonies and abroad. Furthermore, the preface argued that the entire poem consisted of universal truth, despite the popular sense that poems were fictional "(how unfavorable soever Facts may be to Poetry)."¹⁰⁷ The author insisted that his words were valid and factual while acknowledging poetry's ability to bend the truth or create falsehoods. The significance of the King's statement revealed a deeper understanding of a poet's motives, further clarifying that verse was used to achieve a specific goal necessary to the author.

The poem begins with the King, on his knees, appealing to God. He asks if he has ignored or mistreated his subjects. This appeal continues through the next seven stanzas and ends with praise for Lord North, the current Prime Minister of Great Britain, asking for God to assist him in his efforts against the rebellious colonies.

O guide him safe, Immortal Pow'r,
In this alarming, dreadful hour !
Give him, O God ! the nearest course
To stop rebellion's rapid force !
And let my misled people see
The real friend of Liberty¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., i-ii.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., ii. The term "soever" is likely to be translated to mean: "in any way" or "at all."

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 5.

King George III thus called on divine intervention to halt the revolution. The King argued against the colonial poets by attempting to steer the “misled” colonists away from those in charge of the rebellion and into the just and honest arms of the Prime Minister. The author intended to reposition Lord North, moving him from imperial foe to friend. Verse by the King did something new, and it showed how perceived loyalties could change. In other words, it attempted to turn an already existing figure of colonial authority into a companion of liberty. In this respect, it reflected previous poetry by patriot poets. Their specific goal was to sway loyalists or those remaining neutral into joining the rebel cause. The stark imagery allowed by the poetic expression thus motivated both sides of the ideological divide to make their case for or against revolution in verse.

The religious divide between the American colonies and Britain was another factor that strained imperial bonds. “If England had thirty different religions, then America had hundreds, and none of them was traditionally organized,” wrote Gordon Wood.¹⁰⁹ This was primarily due to the massive immigration to the colonies over the previous 150 years, bringing a multitude of different religious sects— Puritans, Methodists, Anglican, Protestant, Quakers, Baptists, and more. The crown's religious authority began to unravel during the Great Awakening, 1720-1740.¹¹⁰ King George III returned to this rejection of religious loyalty and offered this insight:

O, weak religion, which has need
Of force or fraud that is succeed !

¹⁰⁹ Gordon S. Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 112.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 144-145.

But soon, I trust, that Thou, O Lord !
Thy kind assistance will afford,
And teach Thy sons, of ev'ry sect,
To treat each other with respect,
That we at length may all agree,
And be united firm in Thee !¹¹¹

The King called upon God to teach the colonists of every religious sect to unify and come back into the fold of traditional Anglican belief. The King thought that his royal subjects, the colonists, had been led astray. In his poem, which can also be seen as a prayer, he appealed to God to intervene.

The political advantage sought here in this nineteen-page publication is to illustrate the King's penitence to his people and God, also, to raise his public perception. Ultimately, the motivation to write this poem and publish it in London was to assert his monarchical authority over his dominion by flexing his "divine right" as a King, and to do so while appealing to his deeper sense of virtue. The King had, as he poetically expressed it, been given power from God to rule, and his power was all-encompassing toward his subjects. Another motivational point for this poem was to garner local support for the fight against the rebels. Lastly, the author intended to deflect the blame for the cause of the colonial insurrection. With this in mind, the King wanted to push back against the rebels by maneuvering himself in front of God, using verse as a means to communicate between the two. The application of poetry instead of prose to communicate with God presented a different belief. The credence instilled in poetry as a divine language—or at

¹¹¹ King George III, *A Poetical Address*, 7.

least a language more open to the mysteries of divine authority— contributed to the understanding of how much influence and power it has amongst the people in the eighteenth century.

Rebellious Verse in the Caribbean

During the American Revolution, verse was not limited to mainland North America. It also spread into the Caribbean. A slave wrote a poem published in Boston in November of 1778 at his execution for rebellion on the island of Jamaica.¹¹² The enslaved man recited this poem to his wife before his death. The author summarized his rebellion in the last two lines of the first stanza: “In Freedom’s cause I bared my breast / In Freedom’s cause I die.” In comparison to white colonial poets, here verse was used to declare freedom from physical enslavement rather than a sovereign political entity. The notion of freedom carried a different meaning to those enslaved in the colonies and the Caribbean. It was clear that this was not a metaphor about the oppression of British taxation, but a statement on breaking the shackles of chattel slavery, an ambition that slaves might legitimately thought to be synonymous with revolution.

Race and freedom became a point for the author to attack. He did so by acknowledging his oppressors attempt to quell his rage:

But know, pale Tyrant, ‘tis not thine

¹¹² “The NEGRO’S Dying Speech on his being executed for Rebellion in the island of Jamaica; by B. E. Esquire.” *Independent Ledger* (Boston, Massachusetts), November 23, 1778, pg. 4. Readex: America Historical Newspapers. For more on the Jamaican Slave Revolt in 1776 see Richard B. Sheridan, “The Jamaican Slave Insurrection Scare of 1776 and the American Revolution,” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 61, No. 3 (July 1976), pp. 290- 308.

Eternal war to wage ;
The death thou give shall but combine
To mock thy baffled rage.

The author targeted his masters' race and provided evidence that his death will not be the end of the enslaved insurrection. In other words, the enslaved man used verse to identify with liberty and rebellion. Furthermore, the last stanza calls for outright freedom to the oppressed slave:

O Death, how welcome to th' opprest !
Thy kind embrace I crave ;
Thou bring'st to Misery's bosom rest,
And Freedom to the slave !

Here the poet illustrates two different forms of freedom, death and emancipation. The soon-to-be-executed slave promoted his individuality and humanity in verse. The author chose to recite verse due to its ability to provoke public emotion. And in doing so, provided evidence of an articulate slave within a time period of strict standards against slave literacy. He was welcoming and embracing death because it would ensure his freedom: "In Freedom's cause, I bared my breast / — In Freedom's cause I die." The poet clearly believes that he is dying for the cause of freedom, but he indicates that the fight is not over with his death, but it will continue long after him.

The poem exhibited a connection between verse and liberty. But, why use verse as a mode to deliver your "dying speech"? Is verse the voice of rebellion or defiance? Poetry was a mode to which the oppressed could express sincere emotional appeals towards those in power and others who share their sentiment. Verse made its way from

mainland North America, Europe, and into the Caribbean. Poetry was not limited to race, geography, or freed and unfree peoples. Freedom from oppression was desired by both colonials and enslaved Africans. The significance is that during this time poetry highlighted two different forms of freedom and provided evidence of verse's multifaceted capabilities.

Due to the fear of “contagion,” slave insurrections were not widely reported before the revolution.¹¹³ According to Robert Parkinson, after the Battle of Lexington, “slave insurrections— because they had an attributable, identifiable cause— were described in detail,” by newspaper editors and printers.¹¹⁴ Patriot printers identified the rhetoric within the enslaved man's verse to the current struggle for American independence. At the time, printers were blind to the colors of the flesh, only if the author of the printed material shared their ideological motivations. Verse was a common thread that gave different people, regardless of societal standing and race, a way to express their ideological goals relating to freedom and liberty.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016) 140.

¹¹⁴ Parkinson, *The Common Cause*, 140.

¹¹⁵ For more on slavery and the revolution see, Patricia Bradley, *Slavery, Propaganda, and the American Revolution* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998) and Gary B. Nash, *The Forgotten Fifth: African Americans in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006). Also, Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (New York: Ecco, 2006). And Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006).

Freneau's Defiance Reignited

The patriot poet Freneau wanted to offer faith and hope to those that are experiencing dark times during the early stages of the revolution. Until 1778, the poet never engaged in physical combat against Britain. However, his passion for the cause of American Independence would soon push the poet into the war.¹¹⁶ Freneau enlisted as a third mate upon the ship, *Aurora*. Shortly after its departure, the ship was seized by the British Navy, and Freneau became a prisoner of war. The lived experience of his captivity on a British prison ship would reignite his patriotism, leading with rhetoric infused with passion and emotion, all of it invested in his poetry.

The poem that would come to be recognized as a demonstration of his renewed loyalty is aptly named "The British Prison Ship."¹¹⁷ Freneau brought a sense of realism to his poetry, and this quality allowed the poet to provide exhaustive details in his work. The details that are highlighted show the barbarous ambition of the British:

Death has no charms except in British eyes,
See, how they paint to stain the world with gore,
And millions murdered, still would murder more;
This selfish race from all the world disjoined,
Eternal discord sow among mankind;
Aim to extend empire over the ball,
Subject, destroy, absorb and conquer all;
As if the power that form'd us did condemn

¹¹⁶ Lewis Leary, *That Rascal Freneau: A Study in Literary Failure* (New York: Octagon Books, 1964) pp. 65-73. For more on Freneau also see Mary W. Bowden, *Philip Freneau* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1976).

¹¹⁷ Philip Freneau, "The British Prison Ship: A Poem, in four cantoes." (Philadelphia: F. Bailey, 1781). Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 17159.

All other nations to be slaves to them;¹¹⁸

Highlighting the global death and destruction done by the British brought forward something different— an argument about Britain’s global political policies. The author was not targeting an individual such as General Gates or the King but rather the entire political and cultural existence of Britain. He argued that other nations not involved in the American Revolution, and even the rest of the world, should be concerned with the actions of Britain. This humanitarian plea and understanding of what could happen to those who did not oppose Britain would result in a kind of global slavery. These lines represent how Freneau attempted to shape global public opinion with impassioned verse.

Freneau, in 1779, decided to specifically target King George III with his poem titled, "George the Third's. Soliloquy."¹¹⁹ The author portrayed the King as a monarch filled with distress and uncertainty. For example, on France’s recent commitment to the Americans and possibly Spain as well, he writes, “France aids them now, a desperate game I plays / And hostile Spain will do the same, they say.”¹²⁰ The end of the poem highlighted King George's fate: the loss of his empire (if not his head):

For late I find the nations are my foes,
I must submit, and that with bloody nose,
Or, like cur James, fly basely from the state [sic],
Or share, what still is worse— old Charle’s fate.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Freneau, “The British Prison Ship,” 8.

¹¹⁹ Philip Morin Freneau, *Poems on Several Occasions. Poems Written Between the Years 1768 & 1794, by Philip Freneau, of New Jersey* (Monmouth, 1795). Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale. Document no. CW114395303. Pp. 153-154.

¹²⁰ Freneau, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 154.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

Here the author depicted the fear of what might happen to the monarch if this war continued. Freneau provided insight into what possible effect the war had on King George and depicted the stance against America as a doomed endeavor.

Verse provided insight into other individuals' perceived consciousness. Freneau used poetry to show the ongoing internal conflict that nagged the King. This poem belittled and tore down the mighty and awe-inspiring image of the monarch. Verse allowed the reader to assume the identity of the subject. Moreover, this message opened the enemies' minds to the patriots. Freneau illustrated to those in opposition to the patriots that their cause had lost favor in the mind of the King. In other words, the will to fight against the colonists has been destroyed, and continued war was, he suggested, futile.

A Daughter of Liberty revealed a different view of the war in 1779. Her observation countered Freneau's attempt to persuade colonists that the war was going well. A broadside published in Massachusetts painted a different scene, titled "A New Touch on the Times."¹²² The poem revealed the inflated prices due to the war: "It's hard and cruel times to live / Takes thirty dollars to buy a sieve / ... / ... / For times they sure grow worse and worse / I'm sure it sinks our scanty purse." The poem continued to show the lack of food and preservatives:

For salt is all the Farmer's cry,
If we've no salt we sure must die.
We can't get fire nor yet food,
Takes 20 weight of sugar for two foot of wood,

¹²² Molly Gutridge, "A New Touch on the Times. Well adapted to the distressing situation of every Seaport Town. By a Daughter of Liberty, living in Marblehead," Broadside. Danvers: Massachusetts: Printed by Ezekiel Russell, 1779. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 43671.

We cannot get bread nor yet meat,
We see the world is naught but cheat.

Her verse shows the realities of the rebellion, the lack of food, money, daily necessities, and rampant inflation. This was the side of the ideological war that Freneau tried to target to shape public opinion. The author provided evidence to the hard times that engulfed the colonials, Freneau attempted to present a different perception with his published works. In this contrast we can see how Freneau used verse to distort reality to achieve political goals while the Daughter of Liberty used it to highlight the cost of committing to Freneau's plea. Together, these examples confirm the centrality of poetry in the larger discussion of the war, be it ideological or material.

Such dire times moved people away from the cause of liberty. Two stanzas illustrate their willingness to give up on the cause and repent to God:

If we'll repent of all our crimes,
He'll set us now new heavenly times,
Times that make us all to ring,
If we forsake our heinous sins.
For sin is all the cause of this,
We must not take it then amiss,
Wan't it for our polluted tongues
This cruel war would never begun.

The poet acknowledged they are to blame for their own suffering, noting that their "polluted tongues" started the war, to begin with. Verse thus offered a way for poets and readers to reflect upon their deeds internally. Instead of provoking emotions to unify and stand for the cause, the heavy burden of the war provoked a feeling of remorse.

Furthermore, if the rebels continued down their "sinful course / Time will grow on us worse and worse." The author, in her most profound moment of despair, called for God to intervene: "The gracious God now cause to cease / This bloody war and give us peace!"

Freneau wrote his poetry to give hope to those in the direst of situations. His verse was intended to guide colonists through dark and ideologically confusing times. The message Freneau wanted to convey was faith and hope in the cause of liberty. Both poems side with the patriot cause, the *Daughter of Liberty* revealed the truth about the struggle for independence and Freneau hoped to bolster colonial morale. Poetry allowed for the flexibility of expression. Two different poets on the same side of the revolution had contrasting views of their experience during the war.

The Moral Dilemma of Treason

Patriot poets used rhetoric to shape public opinion and in doing so, diluted the moral dilemma of treasonous actions against the crown— one of the principal foundations of patriot propaganda. Previous poems showed how the Americans were able to mask their treachery as a righteous cause for all humanity. In September of 1780, Benedict Arnold betrayed the patriot cause. After Arnold was appointed command of West Point, a significant patriot fortification on the Hudson River, he defected and intended to give the position over to the British. For his treachery, he would receive massive compensation and a position in the British military as a major general.¹²³

¹²³ Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 203-208. For a specific monograph about Benedict Arnold see, Barry Wilson, *Benedict Arnold: A Traitor in our Midst* (London: McGill- Queens University Press) 2001 or Willard Sterne Randall, *Benedict Arnold: Patriot and Traitor* (New York: Morrow) 1990.

According to Colin Wells, anti-Arnold verse started a few days after his betrayal, and it materialized from Boston to Philadelphia to Connecticut.¹²⁴ A published broadside in Philadelphia depicted a parade that took place on September 30, 1780.¹²⁵ As seen before in previous broadsides, there was a brief description of events, and here it described the procession and Arnold's treasonous actions. The image above the description portrayed Arnold having two faces and sitting in front of the devil while riding a carriage towards a bonfire. Accompanying the image and description of events were two short poems, the first fourteen lines long and the second only three.

The first poem declared Arnold's actions as unproductive and in vain: "How ends the bargain? Let us see / The fort is safe, as safe can be." Here the author reassured the reader that nothing was lost due to the actions of Arnold, and in doing so, reduced fears of any strategic loss due to his treachery. Verse turned the outcome of this event from a dramatic violation of military and national ethics into an insignificant loss of one defector.

Poets grabbed hold of this moment and villainized Arnold in order to achieve an ideological goal. The goal was to provide the public with an opinion on what a "true" traitor looked like. The second poem promoted Arnold as an evil creature from folklore: "Mothers shall still their children, and say— Arnold!— / Arnold shall be the bug- bear of their years / Arnold!— vile! Treacherous, and leagued with Satan."¹²⁶ With this

¹²⁴ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 108.

¹²⁵ "A Representation of the figures exhibited and paraded through the streets of Philadelphia, on Saturday, the 30th of September 1780," (Philadelphia: Printed by John Dunlap?), 1780. *Early American Imprints*, Series 1, no. 16959.

¹²⁶ A bug- bear is a creature of folklore used to frighten children into compliance.

imagery—and the pointed insults that poetry excelled at delivering—the author created an abstract identity filled with traitorous characteristics. This stigma, fashioned by verse, became a national myth for years to come. The myth was based upon the idea that Arnold was "leagued" or connected to Satan in any way. In addition to the myth, using verse as a means of educating the youth further enhanced its ability to shape public opinion. In other words, teaching children about the actions of Arnold and correlating it with a demonic figure solidified his identity as a national traitor.

Patriot poets used Arnold to reveal a deeper significance of political disloyalty, and as a result, deflected accusations regarding their own treasonous behavior. Moreover, verse also was used to determine an individuals' reputation. Anti-Arnold poetry was able to brand him as a "traitorous traitor."¹²⁷ According to Colin Wells, poets such as Philip Freneau and Jonathon Odell, "penned poetry with an underlying claim to truth so compelling that it ended the debate over what constituted as political legitimacy, loyalty, and treason."¹²⁸

Surrender of the "arch-butcherer"¹²⁹

On October 17, 1781, the British General Cornwallis was surrounded at Yorktown by Washington on land and the French by sea.¹³⁰ Cornwallis surrendered a

¹²⁷ Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009) 179.

¹²⁸ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 109.

¹²⁹ Freneau, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 189.

¹³⁰ For a complete study on the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown see, Nathaniel Philbrick, *In the Hurricane's Eye: The Genius of George Washington and the Victory at Yorktown* (New York: Penguin, 2018).

quarter of the British forces in America and brought about the end of British tyranny in America.¹³¹ It was not until two weeks later that Philip Freneau authored a commemorative verse.¹³² The poem was filled with anger, and revenge as it celebrated the end of Cornwallis. Freneau's frustration was seen in his constant defamation of Cornwallis: "Lord of War, tyrant, swine, and arch-butcherer." With the war nearing an end Freneau called for revenge:

O come the time, nor distant be the day,
When our swift navy shall its wings display;
Mann'd by brave souls, to seek the British shore,
The wrongs revenging that their fathers bore:¹³³

At the end of the poem, Freneau showed Cornwallis "limping" back home: "To wasted nations bid long adieu / Shrink from an injured world— and fare like YOU."¹³⁴

The author's vituperation reflected the patriots' experiences before and during the war. Freneau wanted the evil deeds of Cornwallis to lodge in American memory, and serve as a caution to an overly quick move toward reconciliation:

When memory paints their horrid deeds anew,
And brings these murdering miscreants to our view,
We ask the leaders of these bloody bands,

¹³¹ Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 295. Also see, Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 590. For more on Cornwallis see, Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

¹³² Leary, *The Rascal Freneau*, 91.

¹³³ Freneau, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 190.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 192.

Can they expect compassion at our hands?¹³⁵

Verse began to shape the memory of the war and how it was fought. Freneau mourned the loss of the Americans who died under General Greene in South Carolina on September 8, 1781. He dedicated a poem titled. “TO THE MEMORY.”¹³⁶ The poem was not a rousing battle cry, nor a call for revenge, but a somber mood of respect for those killed in action. He glorified the slain men and secured their spot in history as dying for a just cause.

Early the next year, Freneau was asked to compose a prologue for a theatre production in Philadelphia to honor General Washington on January 2, 1782.¹³⁷ Once again, the author envisioned the future greatness of America:

See, a new Athens rising in the west !
Fair Science blooms, where tyrants reigned before,
Red war, reluctant, leaves our ravaged shore—
Illustrious heroes, may you live to see
These new Republics powerful, great and free;
Peace, heaven born peace, over spacious regions spread,
While discord. Sinking, veils her ghastly head.

Freneau predicted a new nation free of tyrants and war, similar to the prominence of Rome and Athens. A place where science and enlightened can flourish. In the eyes of Freneau America’s destiny was boundless.

¹³⁵ Freneau, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 189.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 192.

¹³⁷ Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 93.

The poem is a significant piece of propaganda. It also revealed the prominence of poetry in the larger political and cultural context. Poetry was not just for newspapers, broadsides, or pamphlets but for the performing arts as well. A speech drafted in prose did not get selected, but a poem by an ardent patriot was. It conveyed the importance of poetry and the unique power it wielded in shaping opinion before, during, and after the war. With the war over, verse was used to achieve a different goal: achieving partisan favor among political factions during the years of the American republic. Moreover, it paved the way for patriotic verse to create and promote a new American identity.

Chapter 3.
Verse in the Age of Independence

The Treaty of Paris was signed on September 3, 1783, and the American Revolution was over. For a brief time, the newly formed nation relished its victory over the most powerful empire in the world. The celebration included verse embracing peace and prosperity for the whole North American continent. However, the post-revolution era brought about difficulties. This included debt, the Articles of Confederation, the creation of a new constitution, and the future glory of America. The ideological conflict concerning the development of the new government involved verse as an element of partisan rhetoric. Poets of the revolution used their tactics to shape public discourse during the creation of the early republic. Gordon Wood described the decades that followed the events of 1776 as “a search for an American identity.”¹³⁸ Poems played a critical role in that exploration. The decades that followed Independence, verse was applied to various topics— commemorations, expansion, discrimination, and identity.

The beginning of the new year in 1784 initiated a new age of independence. The newspapers printed poems to celebrate the new year and more especially commemorated the nation's newly founded departure from the British empire. For example, Philip Freneau anonymously published a poem for *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, and illustrated a change in the emotional state of the country: “How things have chang’d since last New

¹³⁸ Gordon S. Wood, ed., *The Rising Glory of America, 1760–1820*. The American Culture: 2. (New York: G. Braziller, 1971), 1.

Year / What dismal Prospects then arose / ... / ... / But Time at length has chang'd the Scene / Our Prospects now are more Serene.”¹³⁹ The poem acknowledged another aspect of the revolution that would come to present problems for the newly formed government: lack of payment to the veterans of the war. Freneau noted, “The Army fretting for its pay.” In 1783, the failure to pay army officers their pensions almost resulted in a coup.¹⁴⁰

The third stanza celebrated the newly acquired land from the British and brought forward the notion of westward expansion towards the Great Lakes:

Now let's be joyful for the change—
The Folks that guard the *English* Throne
Have given us ample Room to range,
And more, perhaps, than was their own;
To Western Lakes they stretch our Bounds,
And yield the *Indian* Hunting Grounds.

Moreover, the author noted that the new land under American jurisdiction was not Great Britain's to relinquish. According to Barbara Graymont, Native Americans were excluded from the Preliminary Articles of Peace in 1782.¹⁴¹ During the presidency of George Washington, Native American sovereignty would become an issue with American expansion into the West. The poem brought forward awareness about the encroachment on Native American hunting lands. Another significant characteristic of

¹³⁹ Philip Freneau, “New-Year Verses, for Those Who Carry The Pennsylvania Gazette to the Customers. January 1, 1784.” Philadelphia: Printed by Hall and Sellers, 1783. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 18717.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763- 1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 603- 604.

¹⁴¹ Barbara Graymont, *The Iroquois in the American Revolution* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1972), 259- 262.

this stanza is the aesthetics of the two italicized words, *English* and *Indian*. Again, Freneau desired to forge an American identity, one that was separate from the New World indigenous population and that of the mother country. With the revolution finished, poets during the early stages of the republic begun to pursue an image that was distinctively American. Verse was an avenue for poets to construct a national identity in the public sphere.

Phillis Wheatley, under a pseudonym, Phillis Peters, supported the celebration of Independence with her poem, “Liberty and Peace.”¹⁴² Wheatley was an enslaved African that was able to learn how to read and write. She was emancipated after publishing a book titled, “Poems on Various Subjects, Religious, and Moral” in 1773.¹⁴³ The poet praised the end of the war: “For now kind Heaven, indulgent to our Prayer / In smiling Peace resolves the Din of War.”¹⁴⁴ According to Colin Wells, the poem “hinted at unacknowledged contradictions surrounding the continuation of slavery in a republic founded on liberty.”¹⁴⁵ The poem did not have a verse relating to slavery or the contradiction of a free people celebrating freedom while owning slaves. However, Wheatley’s authorship of the celebratory poem in and of itself highlighting, if only

¹⁴² Phillis Peters, “Liberty and Peace.” Boston: Printed by Warden and Russell, 1784. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 18727. The poem is accredited to Phillis Wheatley.

¹⁴³ Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage*. Sarah Mills Hodge Fund Publication (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 136-137. For another monograph on Wheatley see, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Trials of Phillis Wheatley: America’s First Black Poet and Her Encounters with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 2003).

¹⁴⁴ Wheatley, “Liberty and Peace,” 2.

¹⁴⁵ Colin Wells, *Poetry Wars: Verse and Politics in the American Revolution and Early Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 111.

implicitly, the contradiction. Verse slowly began to tackle the issue of race and slavery but did not root itself in poetical rhetoric until the 1790s with northern Federalists.

In 1787, Joel Barlow published his 263-page epic, “The Vision of Columbus,” a poem that encompassed the glory of past accomplishments and the future of America.¹⁴⁶ Barlow was a veteran poet from the revolution and a member of the Connecticut Wits, along with other patriot poets— John Trumbull, David Humphreys, and Timothy Dwight.¹⁴⁷ According to Wells, the group was known for its “mock-epics, parodies, and versifications for the ratification of the proposed Federal Constitution.”¹⁴⁸

The epic traced Christopher Columbus’s journey from Europe to the shores of the New World and through the victory in the American Revolution. In the seventh book, the author set Columbus on a mountain top and revealed to him the hopeful vision of what America was to be:

As over the canvas, when the masters mind,
Glow with future landscape, well designed,
While gardens, vales and streets and structures rise,
A new creation to his kindling eyes;
He smiles over all; and, in delightful strife,
The pencil moves, and calls the whole to life.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Joel Barlow, “The Vision of Columbus; a Poem in nine books.” Hartford: Printed by Hudson and Goodwin, 1787. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 20220.

¹⁴⁷ William C. Dowling, *Poetry & Ideology in Revolutionary Connecticut* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1990), 2-3.

¹⁴⁸ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 110.

¹⁴⁹ Barlow, “The Vision of Columbus,” 201.

Barlow used verse to create the origin of a nation's birth, and by doing so, constructed a national memory. The author commemorated the progress of the American populace and combined them into a single unified vision. It personified an American identity because it provided citizens of the newly formed republic a sense of belonging, shared experience, and history—poetry was an instrument that formulated a national mythos.¹⁵⁰ Wheatley's poetry highlighted the notion of race and equality within American tradition, it added to the conflicted ideologies regarding the future vision of America. Barlow and other poets that promoted the future glory of America sought to protect their vision by minimizing any attempt to confront the paradox of race and slavery.

Hopkinson and the Constitutional Debate

The Articles of Confederation, the first North American constitution that was developed in 1777 and then ratified in 1781. The battle lines for the constitution were drawn between the Federalists and the Anti-Federalists, or as Gordon Wood states, "aristocracy and democracy."¹⁵¹ During the constitutional debate of 1787, verse articulated the deep political divide between the two factions in the historic political battle for the future of America.

¹⁵¹ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776- 1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 485.

In support of the Federalists, Francis Hopkinson, penned an allegorical song titled, “The New Roof: A Song for Federal Mechanics.”¹⁵² The poem used simple metaphors to describe the required building materials for a “new roof”— that is, a new constitution. In the second stanza, Hopkinson relayed the importance of the people’s role as understood by the constitution. He wrote, “Come, up with the plates, lay them firm on the wall / Like the people at large, they’re the ground work for all.”¹⁵³ He continued to describe parts of the building and related them to the newly proposed constitution: “Like girders, our senate prove loyal and strong/Our king-posts are judges— how upright they stand/Up! Up with the rafters—each frame is a state” It ends, “Come, raise up the turret— our glory and pride.”¹⁵⁴ The last stanza envisioned the United States’ constitution as an enlightened document that guided others to the American shore:

Huzza! My brave boys, our work is complete,
The world shall admire Columbia’s fair seat;
Its strength against tempest and time shall be proof,
And thousands shall come to dwell under our ROOF.¹⁵⁵

The straightforward metaphors made the arguments for Federalism straightforward, even unsophisticated. The song provided a way for the general populace to understand better why they needed a more centralized governmental authority.

¹⁵² Francis Hopkinson, “The New Roof: A Song for Federal Mechanics,” published in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, December 29, 1787, found in “The miscellaneous essays and occasional writings of Francis Hopkinson,” vol. 2, 320- 322. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 24407.

¹⁵³ Hopkinson, “The New Roof,” 320.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 321- 322.

¹⁵⁵ Hopkinson, “The New Roof,” 322.

Hopkinson envisioned the Articles of Confederation as a cracked roof and in need of repair, and possibly expansion. He compared the recently proposed constitution as a means to repair and strengthen the home of the American people. The significance of the song was its persuasive power conveyed through concrete and straightforward metaphors. In other words, the song stressed everyday phenomena— tangible objects to construct a new roof— and linked them to Federalism and the development of a new constitution. Also, the name "new roof" metaphorically rejected the Articles of Confederation, indicating it must be repaired or ripped apart and assembled again. Lastly, the poem illustrated a sense of desired unity towards creating a new constitution. A "new roof" cannot be constructed by one person or one "state" in the union. Colin Wells echoed this notion, "songs and ballads provided occasions for a chorus of singers to at once enact and symbolize unison in a time of political division."¹⁵⁶

Verse put to a tune provided an intensified form of political rhetoric than a regular poem. Songs during the constitutional debate either ridiculed the opposition or validated a home cause, but both used the power of persuasion, something enhanced by a tune, to achieve their desired ideological goal. Moreover, verse transferred into musical composition created another avenue for poetical recognition. Unlike prose, verse and music could coexist, both exploited each other's strengths. For example, verse occupied the desired form and could easily be put to a tune without much editing to the content. However, the prose would need to be cut and reworked in order to fulfill its musical needs. Finally, another critical distinction was that verse in musical form allowed for

¹⁵⁶ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 9.

chants or auditory slogans to be easily remembered and recited due to repetition and rhyme. In contrast, prose would be more challenging to put to musical composition because it lacked the proper musical structure.

“The curse, the scourge, the ruin of our race”¹⁵⁷

In 1791, Thomas Paine published a widely circulated book titled, *The Rights of Man*. In it, he defended the Revolution in France and attacked the notions of monarchy and aristocracy. Shortly after Paine's publication, Philip Freneau wrote, "Lines Occasioned by Reading Mr. Paine's Rights of Man," a poem that glorified Paine's views and offered criticism of the Federalist party.¹⁵⁸ Freneau attacked the Federalists because he thought them to be self-serving, tyrannical, and elitist.¹⁵⁹ The main argument of the poem was not only against the French King Louis XVI, but all European monarchs, whom he equated with the Federalists at home.

Roused by the REASON of his manly page,
Once more shall PAINE a listening world engage;
From reasons source, a bold reform he brings,
By raising up making he pulls down kings¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 189. A quote by Freneau upon him describing monarchial tyranny.

¹⁵⁸ Philip Freneau, "Lines Occasioned by Reading Mr. Paine's Rights of Man." New York: *Daily Advertiser*, vol. VII, issue 1956, pg. 2. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers. For another poem following Freneau's footsteps, see Joel Barlow's "The Conspiracy of Kings."

¹⁵⁹ Leary, *That Rascal Freneau*, 109-110.

¹⁶⁰ Freneau, "Paine's Rights of Man," 2.

Freneau echoed the anti-monarchical sentiment found in Paine's publications. For Freneau, the poem also warned of the new nation of its "kingly pretentions." It advised, "Be ours the task the ambitious to restrain / and this great lesson teach, That kings are vain."¹⁶¹ Moreover, the poem reflected Freneau's growing suspicion of Washington's administration.¹⁶² The significance of the poem revealed that poetry in the early republic championed prose that was following the author's political beliefs.

Race and Rhetorical Verse

Native American conflicts in the Ohio River Valley during the early 1790s resulted in verse being deployed for the purposes of racial discrimination. Poetry adapted to a specific event or situation. Verse's adaptability permitted poets to write about race and society in early America. The rhetorical power and influence of verse were weaponized in order to propagate further encroachment and seizure of Native American land. Since the 1780s, the federal government struggled to maintain authority in the Ohio River Valley.¹⁶³ Significant Indian victories stagnated further economic development in the Ohio Country, and according to Alan Taylor, further "deprived the nation of desperately needed revenue."¹⁶⁴ Hugh Henry Brackenridge served as a judge in

¹⁶¹ Bowden, *Philip Freneau*, 89.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 342.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 404.

Pittsburgh and published a poem in *The American Mercury* on March 12, 1792.¹⁶⁵ The poem highlighted race relations between Native Americans and the early republic. It also highlighted less than favorable views of the native population. The first stanza revealed racial prejudice:

I grant my pardon to that dreaming clan,
Who think that Indians have the rights of man;
Who deem the dark skinn'd Chiefs, those miscreants base,
Have souls like ours, and are of human race;
And say the scheme so wise, so nobly plann'd,
For rooting out these serpents from the land,
To kill their squaws, their children yet unborn,
To burn their wigwams, and pull up their corn;¹⁶⁶

According to Brackenridge, “the rights of man” were only limited to Anglo-Americans. In other words, the “uncivilized” natives were separate from humanity and were not deserving same constitutional rights claimed by white Americans. Moreover, Brackenridge offered a solution to the Native Americans for those who occupied the lands of the Ohio River Valley— extermination. Rhetoric within the poem represented an avenue for verse to become a literary form of discrimination and racial prejudice. In addition, verse after the American Revolution also shaped American identity, it contributed to the advancement of white supremacy and promoted racial inequality

¹⁶⁵ Hugh Henry Brackenridge, “The Echo, No. VII.” *The American Mercury*, Hartford: Connecticut, Vol. VIII. No. 401. Monday, March 12, 1792, pg. 1-2. Readex: America Historical Newspapers.

¹⁶⁶ Brackenridge, “Echo, No. VII,” 1.

during the early stages of the republic.¹⁶⁷ Verse, paired with race and rhetoric, offered Brackenridge a method to advance his agenda against Natives, in hopes to gain political or military actions against them.

Verse became a method of literary activism that could not only racialize a group of people, but also the opposite: highlight racial inequalities. Poetry during the 1790s started to stress public awareness of the brutality and sufferings of the enslaved. Poets and printers began to publish works of poetry involving the injustices that marked chattel slavery. For example, a poem titled, “The African,” provided insight into this brutality.¹⁶⁸ The second stanza features the destruction of African families, noting how slaves were removed from their current family structure and shipped across the Atlantic: “Torn from the friendly parents’ care / Alas ! to meet no more / ... / He leaves his native shore.” The author, in light of this suffering, questions God’s will: “Father of light ! — is this thy will ! / Must thus shy [sic] image live?” Furthermore, in the next few stanzas the poet takes a firm stance against God’s will:

It will not be— thy laws are just—
Man must have LIBERTY!
From Heaven shall come the sacred trust
And nations all be free.

Thus in the West the glorious cause
Or virtuous freedom sprung;

¹⁶⁷ For more on race in early America see, Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early North America* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992).

¹⁶⁸ Junio, “The African,” *General Advertiser* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania), July 30, 1794, pg. 2. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers. The poem was authored by “Junio” and is most likely a pseudonym. For more poems regarding the issue of slavery, see; “On Slavery, and the Slave Trade,” *Monitor* (Litchfield: Connecticut), February 15, 1792; Freneau, “The Island Field Negro,” *Daily Advertiser*. February 1, 1791.

This manumission's sacred laws

The joyful clarion rung

The poet championed the image of the West as the birthplace of freedom and morally just laws. Moreover, the author wanted to bring awareness to the fact that manumission was a pathway to freedom for the enslaved. In this poem, verse was able to achieve two points: one, advocate for the emancipation of slaves, and, two, promote Western society as a moral and just place. Poetry stimulated readers with rhetoric, in hopes they would mobilize and act against slavery. Furthermore, the poem aided the formation of a national identity because it attempted to shape the image of the West as a virtuous land.

Remembering Franklin

The first “Founding Father” to die was Benjamin Franklin, in April of 1790.¹⁶⁹ Having been a printer, statesman, signer of the Declaration of Independence, author, inventor, abolitionist, ambassador, and much more, he was also, according to Ron Chernow, “the only American whose stature remotely compared to that of Washington.”¹⁷⁰ Shortly after his death, poems were published in tribute to his memory and success.¹⁷¹ Verse was used to commemorate Franklin and advance the foundation of

¹⁶⁹ For more on the “Founding Fathers” see, Richard B. Morris, *Seven Who Shaped Our Destiny: The Founding Fathers as Revolutionaries* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), and Ray Raphael, *Founders: The People Who Brought You A Nation* (New York: MFJ Books, 2009).

¹⁷⁰ H. W. Brands, *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000). For the quote, see Ron Chernow, *Washington, A Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010).

¹⁷¹ For other monographs regarding Franklin see, Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004). And, Edmund S. Morgan, *Benjamin Franklin* (Newhaven: Yale University Press, 2002).

a national ethos. The ethos came to be embedded in the memory of American citizens and other nations around the world because it projected the image of opportunity and prosperity— as it continued to forge an evolving American identity.

As the nation mourned, poets began to write poetic tributes to Franklin. Poems typically began by expressing praise and sorrow. In the opening stanza from Freneau he provides an example with the use of a metaphor, it compared Franklin to a tall old tree that stood the test of time:

Thus, some tall tree that long has stood
The glory of its native wood,
By storms destroyed, or length of years,
Demands the tribute of our tears.¹⁷²

Poets hardly needed to elevate Franklin’s accomplishments. But they continued to promote them out of reverence and national pride for his past deeds. Again, Freneau: “The patriot heaves a sigh / And scarcely will believe / That so much worth can die.”¹⁷³

Before and during the American Revolution, poets immortalized fallen patriots through the guise of martyrdom. With the death of Franklin, verse was now used to promote his image at home and abroad, gaining immortal fame for himself and the nation he represented:

Through every future age
While history holds a pen,

¹⁷² Philip Freneau, “Stanzas Occasioned by the Death of Dr. Benjamin Franklin,” *The Pennsylvania Packet*, May 3, 1790. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷³ “Elegiac Ode, on the Death of Dr. Franklin.” *The Gazette of the United States*. New York, May 15, 1790, pg. 455. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.

She'll rank our virtuous Sage
Amongst the first of men;
And when she counts her sons
Who've earned immortal fame,
Shall next to WASHINGTON'S
Record our FRANKLIN'S name.

The image fashioned by verse provided the reader with a metaphorical statue to embrace as an American icon. Additionally, this was a construct of heroic identity and poetry was the method that altered the perception of reality. The significance was verse attributed to the glorification of the founding fathers, and by doing so, deconstructed their old British identities and assisted in forming new American ones.

An anonymously published poem in the *Federal Gazette* on April 21, 1790, encompassed how Franklin was to be remembered.¹⁷⁴ For example, there were his scientific endeavors with electricity:

O Electricity! From thee he draws
A large, glorious portion of applause.
Lightning! confess the glory of the Sage,
Who dared with all thy terrors to engage.

The poem also called to attention the state in which Franklin long resided: "Thou, Pennsylvania! Over his ashes bend / Revere the memory of thy steady friend."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ "Verses Sacred to the Memory of Benjamin Franklin." *The Federal Gazette*. Philadelphia, April 21, 1790, pp. 2-3. Readex: America's Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷⁵ "Verse Sacred to the Memory of Benjamin Franklin," pg. 3.

Moreover, the last stanza in the poem pertained to Franklin's eternal fame and called for the manufacture of a statue:

The, Pennsylvania! Every tribute pay;
Erect the sculptured marble over his clay—
Thus youth at equal praise shall boldly aim,
And catch at Franklin's tomb worth's hallow'd flame.¹⁷⁶

The use of precise words and clarity, in addition to rhyme, allowed verse to construct an image of Franklin that appealed to the imagination. In other words, with poetry's lack of jargon and avoidance of complex sentences, it was relatively easy to create an American icon. Verse, unlike prose, was able to appeal to memory due its repetition and rhyme scheme. The lack of literary structure aided the reader's ability to comprehend Franklin's various accomplishments. Furthermore, the soft and subtle aesthetics helped to cope with the death of a loved one. The young nation mourned the loss of a paternal figure, he was there when she was fighting for Independence, creating a constitution, and in the early years of development— America lost a father.¹⁷⁷

Poetry facilitated the construction of Benjamin Franklin's identity and memory. With the loss of a founding father, poets channeled internal emotions of sorrow and grief into building an American icon for posterity. Verse produced an American ideal, or an

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. For another poem on Benjamin Franklin's death see, "Court of Apollo. On the Death of Dr. Benjamin Franklin." *The New-York Weekly Museum*. New York, May 8, 1790, pg. 4. Readex: American's Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷⁷ There are numerous poems following the death of George Washington on December 18, 1799, here is a few: Jonathon Ellis, "An Eulogical poem, on General George Washington," Portland: Maine, Printed by Elezer A. Jenks. February 22, 1800. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 37358; Charles Caldwell, "An elegiac poem on the death of General George Washington," Philadelphia, Printed by R. Aitken. February 1, 1800. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 37079.

aspiration of what American citizens should procure, however, this was unattainable for the most of America. Poetry aided in the creation of a national symbol that was projected around the world in hopes to appeal as an enlightened and prosperous nation.

Celebrating July 4th

Poetry surrounding the celebration of July 4th, 1776, preserved memory and aided in solidifying a national ethos. Poems ranged from a few stanzas to pages of verse that pertained to the anniversary each year. Commemorating the birth of a nation and acknowledging its War for Independence played a significant role in shaping early American identity. In other words, rejecting the old British identity and celebrating political freedom created “space” for the birth of a new American identity— perhaps one that would alleviate the factions otherwise searing the nation apart. The two decades that followed Independence were filled with political turmoil. This was largely due to the thirty percent decline in national income between 1774 and 1790.¹⁷⁸ According to Len Travers, observing the Fourth of July “celebrated a pivotal moment in the past from which to date a national existence, endorsed and cultivated a mythos of national identity, allowed Americans to reexamine their comprehensions of the past at regular intervals, and the ritualized celebrations helped to mask disturbing ambiguities and contradictions in the new republic.”¹⁷⁹ Poems were at the core of each goal.

¹⁷⁸Peter H. Lindert and Jeffrey G. Williamson, "American Incomes Before and After the Revolution." *The Journal of Economic History* 73, no. 3 (2013): 725-65.

¹⁷⁹ Len Travers. *Celebrating the Fourth: Independence Day and the Rites of Nationalism in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), pp. 6- 7. For more see Sarah J. Purcell,

Verse was a ceremonial ritual along with cannon fire, games, sports, bonfires, parades, song, and drink. Poetry accompanied many other customary ceremonies such as funerals, birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries. Ten days before the storming of the Bastille and the beginnings of the French Revolution, America celebrated its thirteenth year of Independence. A poem published in 1789 rejoiced over America's origins:

Hail heaven born Freedom, of virtue the spring!
Hail bright Independence! thy birth-day we sing;
Unfold all thy graces, thy brilliance display,
Enrapture our souls and inspirit our lay.¹⁸⁰

Also, the author relished in the coming glory of America: "Awake fair Columbia, thou child of the skies / Awake to importance; to virtue arise."¹⁸¹ Moreover, he wanted to predict a future that was bountiful and enterprising during the early stages of Industrialization. But these attitudes were not a direct reflection of how the country was, at the most they were a desired vision of what America was supposed to be.

On pinions of genius and industry soar;
The fountains of science and wisdom explore.
See rich agriculture exult over the land,
And new manufactures, fast rising, expand;
While nature propitious luxuriantly smiles;
Mechanics and farmers rejoice in their toils.¹⁸²

Sealed with Blood: war, sacrifice, and memory in Revolutionary America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹⁸⁰ Aspasio, "ANNIVERSARY ODE, for JULY 4th, 1789." *Christians, Scholar's, & Farmer's Magazine* 1, no. 4 (October 1789), 518- 519. The author used a pseudonym for the publication.

¹⁸¹ Aspasio, "ANNIVERSARY ODE," 519.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

The last stanza did something significant; it revealed the "ambiguities and contradictions" in the new republic. Furthermore, it called for national unity during a polarizing time of political strife:

On Virtue's firm basis sublime may the rise;
"Extend with the main and dissolve with the skies."
May righteousness triumph; may union prevail,
And justice impartial exhibit her scale;
May discord and slavery be banished our shore,
And liberty bless us till time be no more.¹⁸³

Within verse, a single line has the potential to offer a soft version of literary protest. The poet protested for the end of slavery. The author did not use the whole poem to argue for the end of slavery but decided to add it in the second to last line— an impassioned abolitionist punchline. One stanza or possibly one line could potentially project the same spirited rhetoric into several themes, a tactic that would seem haphazard in other forms of political expression.¹⁸⁴

Poetry on Independence Day also projected American determination. With the ever-expanding boundary of the United States to the West and land disputes in the North West, many Americans thought they needed to assert itself as a formidable military, political, and economic power. On the anniversary of Independence in 1798, a poem published by John Miller Russell reflected much of the enthusiasm needed to sustain a

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ For another poem on July 4th see, Isaac Story, "Liberty, a Poem, Delivered on the Fourth of July." Newburyport: Massachusetts. Printed by William Barrett, 1795. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 29572.

competing image on the North American continent.¹⁸⁵ The author argued for peace and neutrality with foreign nations, but if there was no choice, he insisted on a defense of the land:

Keep peace with all the world, if in your power;
But should that be denied, and tempests low'r,
Stand firm in glorious Independence' cause,
Defend your country, and protect her laws.¹⁸⁶

Should there be a need for war, the poet called upon the reader to display grit: "Gird up your loins like men; bestrong and bold / Nor let your dear-bought liberties be sold."¹⁸⁷

During the Fourth of July celebrations, verse championed the spirit of 1776 and projected an image of strength and determination. Moreover, the American identity that was rooted in the revolutionary years was, these poets hoped, something future generations could call upon in times of need.

American memory and identity were not limited to the abstract consciousness of the reader. For example, Russell established Bunker Hill as an area to memorialize the heroic acts of imperial defiance: "There Bunker's heights remind the patriot breast / What gallant heroes in their bowels rest / There fell the bravest of Columbia's sons."¹⁸⁸ Not only could poetry appeal to the imaginative and abstract qualities of national identity, but it could help define and sustain— through memorialization— physical areas of

¹⁸⁵ John Miller Russell, "A POEM, on The Fourth of July, 1798." Boston: Printed by Manning & Loring, 1798. Early American Imprints, Series 1, no. 34500.

¹⁸⁶ John Miller Russell, "A POEM, on The Fourth of July," 4.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 5. A similar passage is found in the Bible: Luke 12: 35.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

remembrance. The poet recalled the gallant actions of the patriots at Bunker Hill, and in doing so put the spirit of 1776 in an authentic battle site for future Americans to visit and recollect the character of those that fought and died on that day: “When you behold where freedom’s blood was shed / The verdant sod that wraps the glorious dead / The spot where all-immortal Warren bled.”¹⁸⁹ It also highlighted a space that, for more critical observers, would warn against the hubris and devastation of war.

Symbols supported the creation of a national ethos in the early development of the nation during a time when political strife was unprecedented. Some of these symbols were found within the verse that was published on the Fourth of July. The author revealed a few symbols in the poem, such as an eagle, stars, stripes: “The pride of young Columbia. See her move / Her *Stars* and *Eagle* in the heavens above,” or “’Tis then Columbia’s stars and stripes display / Over the broad main, and cleave their rapid way.”¹⁹⁰ According to Len Travers, symbols “have the ability to encode and establish the parameters of group identity, values, motivations, and actions, especially when manipulated in ritualized performance.”¹⁹¹ In other words, verse recited annually along with orations bound in prose injected symbols of the nation into the national memory of its citizens, even as the country teetered on the brink of implosion in the 1790s.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 6-7.

¹⁹¹ Travers, *Celebrating the Fourth*, 12.

¹⁹² For more on rituals during the American Revolution, see Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981).

Verse and Westward Expansion

The Louisiana Purchase, sealed in 1803, was a pivotal moment in American history because it doubled the size of the nation, became a divisive topic among the rival political parties, and allowed for westward expansion. Before completing the purchase of the Louisiana territory, President Thomas Jefferson dispatched Meriwether Lewis—the Secretary to the President—to assemble an expedition to search for a water route to the Pacific Ocean.¹⁹³ In 1807, upon the return of the expedition Joel Barlow, a Jeffersonian Republican, composed a poem celebrating the return of Lewis and his men.¹⁹⁴

Barlow wrote the poem as a commemorative piece but also to advance the civilizing mission of westward expansion, or as Colin Wells argues, “the exploration of the West as the latest in a long series of scientific, commercial, and philosophical advances.”¹⁹⁵ Barlow professed that Africa was an area confined in darkness and barbarity in contrast to the future prospect American West.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, the author portrayed the continent of Africa to be unenlightened, with the lack of civility and progress:

Let the Nile cloak his head in the clouds and defy,

¹⁹³ Joseph J. Ellis, *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998) 247. For more on the Lewis and Clark expedition see, Stephen E. Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the American West* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), James P. Ronda, *Lewis and Clark Among the Indians* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), and Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Definitive Journals of Lewis and Clark* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983-2001).

¹⁹⁴ Joel Barlow, “On the Discoveries of Captain Lewis.” *National Intelligencer*. Washington, D.C., January 16, 1807, pg. 4. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.

¹⁹⁵ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 248.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The researchers of science and time;
Let the Niger escape the keen traveler's eye,
By plunging, or changing his clime.¹⁹⁷

In the following stanza, Barlow proclaimed the newly acquired land would be brought from the dark and into the light, ushering in a new wave of enlightened expansionism:

Columbus! not so shall they boundless domain,
Defraud their brave sons of their right;
Streams, midlands and shorelands illude us in vain,
We shall drag their dark regions to light.¹⁹⁸

On the contrary, John Quincy Adams, future president and soon to be Republican in 1808, offered a poem under the same title.¹⁹⁹ The poem was written in the form of a parody to undermine the accomplishments of Lewis, and subvert the presidential powers of Jefferson, although Adams claimed to not “deprecate the merits of Captain Lewis.”²⁰⁰ Published in the *Hampshire Federalist* newspaper, Adams began by satirizing Barlow: “GOOD people listen to my tale / ‘Tis nothing but what true is / I’ll tell you of the mighty deeds / Achieved by Captain Lewis.”²⁰¹ Furthermore, Adams continued to mock Jefferson and Lewis by stating what they did not find in the expedition: “a mammoth,

¹⁹⁷ Barlow, “On the Discoveries of Captain Lewis,” 4.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 249. For complete monographs concerning John Quincy Adams see, Paul C. Nagel, *John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, A Private Life* (New York: Knopf, 1997), and Robert V. Remini, *John Quincy Adams* (New York: Times Books, 2002).

²⁰⁰ Alicia Demaio, “The Lewis and Clark Expedition and the Partisan Debate over Western Expansion.” *We Proceed On* 39, no. 1 (February 2013): 21-23.

²⁰¹ John Quincy Adams, “On the Discoveries of Captain Lewis.” *Hampshire Federalist*. Springfield: Massachusetts, April 22, 1807, 4. Readex: America’s Historical Newspapers.

Mountain saus'd in Pickle, and an Indian tribe / From Welshman straight descended.”²⁰²

Colin Wells proclaimed that the verse between Adams and Barlow provided a

“competing ideological interpretation of the Lewis and Clark expedition.”²⁰³

The poem also revealed the ideological and political bout over the future of expansion, and with expansion—the future of America. Looking to expand westward was a divisive topic of political debates during the early parts of the nineteenth century. Expanding West raised multiple problems: the legacy of slavery, commerce and land development, Native Americans, and other foreign European nations. The reason poetry fused with partisan rhetoric was that it allowed for verse to continue to shape public policy and opinions. Poetry unified citizens behind their allegiance to a political party and further divided America along factional lines. Verse was able to fashion an American identity associated with expansionism, political parties, and the revolutionary spirit of 1776.

²⁰² Adams, “On the Discoveries of Captain Lewis,” 4.

²⁰³ Wells, *Poetry Wars*, 250.

EPILOGUE

The poetic influence on political culture traced in this thesis did not abate in the early national period. The beginning decades of the 19th century brought about several difficulties for post-Revolutionary America— expansion of slavery, industrialization, financial crises, exploratory expeditions in the West, new states admitted to the union, and the War of 1812. Britain’s impressment of sailors and their effort to restrict American trade with France all led to the war.²⁰⁴ With the conflict underway, once again, poetry advocated for American liberty:

But Union can perform
Thy wonders of a host—
Avert the danger quell the storm,
And drive them from our coast.

Unite and side by side,
Meet victory or your graves,
That moment WE IN WAR DIVIDE,
That moment WE ARE SLAVES.²⁰⁵

Verse captured the desire to defend the new republic. Moreover, the last two stanzas reflected a need— yet again— for unified action against Britain. The poem displayed the political divisions within America between the Republicans and the Federalists parties. Poets after the Revolution championed the passionate qualities of verse. Also, the poem

²⁰⁴ Donald R. Hickey, *The War of 1812: A Forgotten Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 1-4. For more on the War of 1812 see Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2004), Alan Taylor, *The Civil War of 1812: American Citizens, British subjects, Irish rebels, Indian Allies* (New York: Knopf, 2010).

²⁰⁵ William Rea, “War,” *Public Advertiser*. New York, January 21, 1813, 3. Readex: American Historical Newspapers. Originally published in the *Albany Register* in 1807.

extended the rhetorical language of the Revolutionary era, revealing the War of 1812 as Britain's second assault on American liberties. According to the author, the War was an effort to recapture and enslave the young nation.²⁰⁶

Investigating rhetoric during the Revolutionary era provided an array of primary sources not yet examined. Poetry was a method used by many different colonists and revealed the full spectrum, accessibility, and depth to which it disseminated through colonial society. Historians should integrate verse, along with prose, when considering revolutionary era rhetoric. The significance is that it exposes more primary sources and provides opportunities in furthering academic discourse in early America. Moreover, revolutionary verse presents an intersection of emotion, rhetoric, and ideology—expanding our comprehension of eighteenth-century political culture.

Concerning republican ideology, verse became an addition to patriot prose. Poetry was able to persuade loyalists with rhetoric in such a way to reshape their political ideology in favor of the patriots. Moreover, patriot poets used impassioned language to give credence to the cause during difficult times. Also, verse put to a musical tune offered the colonists a different avenue to consume rebellious expression.²⁰⁷ The ability to attach a poem to a musical composition allowed for memory to be extorted and aided in the ability to further spread ideological rhetoric.

Verse ignited emotions within the rebellious colonies. Poets wrote poems to illicit physical defiance or to further literary resistance. It began with literary activism and its

²⁰⁶ Note that Britain banned the slave trade in 1807 with the Slave Trade Act, which led to the abolishment of slavery in all of Britain's colonies with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833.

²⁰⁷ For more on colonial music see Irving Lowens, *Music and Musicians in Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1964).

ability to shape public opinion against imperial rule. Then as colonial resentment increased towards the crown, poetry turned to promote violence and called for American Independence. Verse's unique ability to evoke emotion allowed for the rhetoric strategy to shift from defiance to open rebellion. During the early stages of rebellion, poetry asserted ideological control over political events, proving its capacity to interpret and reinterpret public opinion.

Verse was not always published alone in broadsides and newspapers.²⁰⁸ Printers and publishers made use of verses' flexibility. Poetry joined graphic images and prose to display a more passionate appeal. Engravers such as Paul Revere used poetry and their art to propagandize defiance, and later, the war effort. Moreover, after tragic events such as the Boston Massacre, poetry, and graphic design merged to politized memory and commemoration.

During the war, verse continued to propagandize the war effort by promoting martyrdom and republican sacrifice. Creating a martyr was essential early in the rebellion. The elegiac appeal of martyrdom and its emotional power was contagious amongst ardent patriots, heightening colonial resolve for independence. To this effect, it allowed poets to control the resistance narrative. The power to manipulate the narrative was significant because loyalists actively employed verse to subvert colonial authority and sway public opinion within the colonies and in Britain.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ For a vivid book containing newspapers and reporting the War for Independence see, Todd Andrlik, *Reporting the Revolutionary War: Before It Was History, It Was News* (Naperville: Sourcebooks, 2012).

²⁰⁹ For more on loyalists during the war see, Ruma Chopra, *Unnatural Rebellion: Loyalists in New York City During the Revolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011) and Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Knopf, 2011). Also,

After the War for Independence, verse promoted American identity and helped establish an American ethos. Patriot poets used their revolutionary strategies in the development of their American identity. Verse celebrated the end of the war and commemorated the beginnings of a new nation. Furthermore, poets formulated a national myth surrounding the Nation's founding, providing a sense of belonging not associated with Britain. The notion was to deconstruct the old-world British persona and forge a new one, a distinctly American identity.²¹⁰ Poets and printers alike began to publish verse in hopes of pursuing racial justice. Poems highlighted the brutality and expansion of slavery in the decades following the Revolution.²¹¹ Moreover, verse exposed the paradox between liberty and slavery during the early republic and beyond.²¹² With the death of Benjamin Franklin, poetry asserted itself as a means that cultivated an American persona. The value of this type of verse was to project an aspiring image for posterity and promote the future progress of the nation.

As the 19th century progressed, political poetry was averted towards national reform. For instance, in the Era of Good Feelings, abolitionists penned poetry that brought awareness to the question of slavery. Verse, once again, employed its rhetoric in

for a strictly British vantage point of the War see Michael Pearson, *Those Damned Rebels: The American Revolution as Seen through British Eyes* (New York: Putnam, 1972).

²¹⁰ For more on governance, identity, and social construction see, Jack P. Greene, *Creating the British Atlantic: Essays on Transplantation, Adaptation, and Continuity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013). For American identity in the 19th century see, John D. Kerkering, *The Poetics of National and Racial Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²¹¹ For the expansion of slavery within the Louisiana Territory see, John Craig Hammond, "'They Are Very Much Interested in Obtaining an Unlimited Slavery': Rethinking the Expansion of Slavery in the Louisiana Purchase Territories, 1803-1805." *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, No. 3, 2003: 353-80.

²¹² For a monograph concerning the intersection of slavery, liberty, and public memory see, Roger C. Aden, *Upon the Ruins of Liberty: Slavery, the President's House at Independence National Historical Park, and Public Memory* (Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2015).

the form of protest. The early decades witnessed the fall of the Federalist Party and with that, verse as a partisan political weapon. The new century gave rise to new poets—Thoreau, Whitman, Longfellow, Dickinson, Emerson, and Poe. The authors fell into a literary and philosophical movement called Romanticism. The poems drifted away from politics and revealed an intersection of nature and an industrializing society.

Collectively poetry during the American Revolution was a separate genre of patriot rhetoric. Poetry's literary characteristics, flexibility of expression, and multifaceted components allowed for poets to contribute to the ideological consumption of the rebellious colonists. Poetry was catapulted into the eighteenth-century public sphere, gaining credibility and dependence on its relentless pursuit of changing political discourse. Poets and printers alike contributed to the War for Independence, creation of a federal Constitution, and the rise of Nation— forever changing our knowledge of rhetoric and the American Revolution.

THERE is a blot upon my country's fame
There is a foul, a deep, and damning stain
That soils the very soul of Liberty;
Pollutes her flag, and dyes her snowy robes
In human blood— There is a blighting curse
That mixes with her prayers, and cries to heaven²¹³

²¹³ Village Minstrel, "Slavery," *Village Record, or the Chester and Delaware Federalist*. West Chester: Pennsylvania, July 8, 1818, 2. Readex: Americas Historical Newspapers.

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