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The Birth of Exceptionalism: American Newspaper Coverage in the Revolutionary era

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

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Abstract

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This thesis explores American exceptionalism through the lens of American newspapers during the Revolutionary era. As American newspapers covered the revolutions in France, Haiti, and Latin America, unique narratives developed around controversial leaders like Thomas Paine, Toussaint Louverture, and Simón Bolívar. Although at first newspapers covered the events in France and Latin America with glee, their coverage gradually began to change over time, increasingly finding flaws large and small in revolutions other than their own—chaos and violence in France and Haiti, and failures in the realization of republicanism in Latin America. If Americans initially believed their revolution was responsible for the Revolutionary era, newspapers increasingly touted the success of the American Revolution and the failures of other revolutions. A feeling of superiority began to develop in the United States regarding its own revolution, which created a powerful sense of American exceptionalism. American newspapers, this thesis shows, sought to downplay the success of subsequent movements by casting doubt on the success of the movements overall. Over the course of the Revolutionary era, American newspapers reinforced American patriotic values by creating narratives that justified a sense of American superiority based on a contrast of the American Revolution with the other revolutions in the Atlantic world during the early republic.

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I am particularly grateful for the support of my family. Their love and encouragement inspired me during the difficult times. I especially want to thank my first teacher, my mother. I still remember our weekly trips to the public library. She instilled a love of reading that I value to this day. It is true what they say that a good teacher can make all the difference in the world. I also want to thank my father. His grad school war stories helped me believe a master's degree was possible. His confidence in me was enough for the both of us.

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Introduction

In 1840, William Henry Harrison, the Hero of Tippecanoe (and soon to be elected U.S. president) spoke at a banquet in Cleveland, Ohio. He reflected on his interactions as U.S. Ambassador to Colombia with the famed revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar. The *Madisonian* of Washington D.C. reported, "He made a beautiful allusion to Simon Bolivar, who after once and again defended the independence of his country, at last fell before the seductive influence of *power long possessed*, and conspired against those liberties which he had so oft defended."[1] The comment, coming a decade after the death of the South American leader, perfectly encapsulated the American mindset at the end of the revolutionary era. Gone were the days of unbridled optimism, during which citizens in the young republic took pride in the sense of their own influence on the revolutions of other nations. A growing American exceptionalism now led them to hold up their own revolution as ideal, while disavowing ownership for the real and perceived weaknesses of other movements. Harrison's words echoed an American narrative that was often too quick to adopt simplistic and inaccurate accounts of those movements in France, Haiti, and Latin America and to assess those revolutions as failures in contrast to Americans' own revolution. While such words served a political agenda, they also selfishly distorted the histories of other revolutions and the legacies of men like Simón Bolívar, Toussaint Louverture, and Thomas Paine.

Newspapers like the *Madisonian* played a crucial role in determining public perceptions of major revolutionary events and figures. They often supported subject narratives regarding other revolutions. The commentary on Harrison's speech in the *Madisonian* is a prime example of this type of journalism. Rather than simply providing information, newspapers told their readers what

[1] "From Cleveland Herald. Gen. Harrison at Cleveland," *Madisonian* (Washington, DC), June 25, 1840, 2.

they should think about the South American leader. As historian Joseph M. Adelman has pointed out, this subjectivity originated in the years after the American Revolution as newspapers redefined their role in American society.[2] According to the press of the 1840's, Bolívar was a tragic, heroic figure, who unlike the Founding Fathers had misused his power. This makes newspapers an important source of information for understanding the United States as it navigated the major revolutions of the period and sought to help American develop a clear sense of themselves in a complex world. Because American newspapers often displayed views similar to this self-serving, inaccurate depiction espoused by Harrison, they laid the foundation for the ongoing development of American identity vis-à-vis a comparison to other nations. While similar patterns of coverage emerged for each revolution, newspapers also reveal the steps taken by the American republic as it increasingly moved toward exceptionalism.

This thesis defines exceptionalism about the American Revolution was as a feeling of superiority over other revolutions. It was not merely that the Revolutionary War had been different than others or had different outcomes, as Jack P. Greene has defined exceptionalism, but that it was somehow better in ways that the newspapers that touted such claims rarely explained.[3] Many in the United States took pride in believing that the American Revolution had spawned subsequent movements, but the alleged chaos and violence of revolutions in France, Haiti, and Latin American only strengthened this arrogant notion of American dominance. Even when these movements created their own constitutions, they often drew the criticism of newspapers for failing to meet

[2] Joseph M. Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*: *The Business and Politics of Printing the News*, 1763-1789, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019) 169.

[3] Jack P. Greene, The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); see also John M. Murrin, "The Jeffersonian Triumph and American Exceptionalism," Journal of the Early Republic 20, no. 1 (2000): 1-25.

American standards. American exceptionalism grew over the course of the Revolutionary era as major movements challenged its supremacy.

Such exceptionalist views were not inevitable. In 1789, as word of the tumultuous events in France made their way across the Atlantic, American newspapers eagerly reported the events of another revolution. They enthusiastically informed their readers that this movement had resulted from Americans' own fight for freedom. Connecting the two events, the American press often used high-minded rhetoric to portray the gallant fight of French revolutionaries for individual rights. This narrative was further supported by comparing the Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington. Stories like these urged reading audiences to make a connection between the revolutions and place the United States at the center of the liberation movement.

But as the French Revolution gradually became more violent, American newspapers adjusted their narratives that had previously linked the two movements. Fearful of the emergence of political and social chaos in their own country, newspapers now sought to separate the American story from events unfolding in France, seemingly eager to distance the United States from the Reign of Terror and the atheistic ideology of leftist radicals. The Haitian Revolution caused a similar reaction as newspapers reported with horror the massacres perpetrated by formerly enslaved people of African descent as they sought freedom from bondage. No longer eager to draw close comparisons between the United States and subsequent revolutions, American newspapers began noting distinctions and expressing skepticism about other movements, even as they also offered up admiring accounts of leaders like Toussaint Louverture. Despite their early enthusiasm for the French Revolution, these papers could not condone the loss of life, liberty, property, and much less the upheaval of the plantation economy and racial slavery, of the French and Haitian

Revolutions. Nor could they sanction the full realization of some principles that all American revolutionaries had articulated, such as "all men are created equal." A new narrative was needed.

The Latin American revolutions of the early nineteenth century took place during the latter stages of the Age of Revolutions, during a period when American skepticism about other worldwide revolutions had become much more entrenched. Distinct differences now appeared in how American newspapers covered revolutions and compared them to their own. While these papers still celebrated the independence movements, and offered admiration for leaders like Bolívar, they now exhibited a more obvious national exceptionalism. American newspapers still contended that the United States had initiated the Revolutionary era, but they went out of their way to disseminate narratives that disdained the revolutions in Latin America. These narratives reveal with clarity the extent to which a shift had occurred in how American newspapers presented independence movements worldwide to their readers. The end of the Revolutionary era saw the birth of a fully formed American exceptionalism.

American newspapers provide an ideal resource for understanding these changes as new revolutions shaped exceptionalism in the United States. Newspapers sought to tell Americans how to make sense of these movements—and they particularly did so, as I will show, by urging readers to consider subsequent revolutions in contrast to their own. Although the American press reflected the polarized partisan politics of the day, both Federalist and Republican newspapers revealed similarities in how they sought to remember the American Revolution and how to understand the subsequent revolutions in the Atlantic world. The press often celebrated the early stages of a revolution, seeking to compare the leaders with its own. When those movements turned violent, they contrasted events and movement leaders with those of the American Revolution, holding up the latter as superior. The final stage of coverage involved expressing skepticism about those more

recent revolutions, and even distorting coverage as newspapers nearly always sought to draw meaningful distinctions between their own "successful" revolution and the dangerous, sometimes anti-democratic movements elsewhere. Federalists and Republicans agreed on little else, but they seem to have shared this tendency.

In examining newspaper coverage of these three events—the French, Haitian and Latin American revolutions—this thesis offers two important contributions to the scholarship. First, it is the first scholarly effort to trace newspaper responses to all three movements, so while it builds on scholarship that has analyzed individual revolutions, it also finds a broader pattern taking place during the early American republic. According to the American press, the French Revolution ultimately illustrated the problematic rise of radical leftists; the Haitian Revolution demonstrated the limitations of non-white races and the importance of the plantation system of slavery; and the South American revolutions showed the corrupting nature of power and unfitness of the many regions of the western hemisphere for republicanism. No matter how troubling such conclusions might appear to twenty-first century readers, by tracing these patterns over the course of all three movements we can see the press's role in helping to shape not only Americans' views of international events, but also an evolving sense that no other revolution could match both the grandeur and the restraint of the American Revolution—an exceptionalism that had powerful implications for an emerging American identity.

The second major way that this thesis contributes to the scholarship is by noting the press's fixation on significant leaders of or advocates for these international independence movements. For even as these movements usually emphasized the replacement of monarchical control with democratic republics, the American press found the leaders of those movements to be compelling figures akin to (or differing from) the heroes of the American Revolution. This thesis shows how

newspapers drew particular attention to Thomas Paine's writings on the French Revolution and in advocating for deism, Toussaint Louverture's leadership during the Haitian Revolution, and Simón Bolívar's role as the "Liberator" of Latin America, men who received changing and often ambivalent treatment in the American press. By the end of the Revolutionary era, as we shall see, this tendency manifested in a republican capitalism which sought to market a version of Bolívar for monetary gain, a move that sought to contain the truly revolutionary aspects of Bolívar's legacy, including his views of race and slavery.

My research relies on American newspapers during the early republic. To draw a distinction between the great work already done by historians, it mainly focuses on the coverage of major events by rural newspapers that arose during the years after the American Revolution. In particular, it utilizes previously overlooked newspapers from places like Vermont and North Carolina rather the newspapers studied by previous scholars located in major urban centers like Philadelphia and Charleston. When I undertook this project, I sought to ascertain how newspapers in more rural regions like these differed from the urban newspapers with larger readerships analyzed by historians like Seth Cotlar, Caitlyn Fitz, Philippe Gerard, John Lynch, and Ashli White. Ultimately, I found few differences—because these rural newspapers often reprinted pieces from papers, published in major urban centers like Philadelphia, Charleston, or New York, and vice versa. Even though I discerned little variation between rural and urban papers. However the exercise proved valuable and made extensive use of the Newspapers.com database because it revealed little ideological difference between views promoted by papers in a Northern state like Vermont that had eliminated slavery, and a Southern state like North Carolina where few questioned the institution. As a result, even as my thesis confirms some of the findings of other historians, the

research provided indispensable information on changing American viewpoints during the early republic period.[4]

Newspapers provide the best source for charting American viewpoints due to the regularity of their printed issues. While books and pamphlets also recorded major societal shifts, newspapers created a weekly, sometimes daily portrait of unfolding events, offering the clearest possible picture of the white, American reaction to historic moments.

In placing newspapers at the center of my analysis, it is important to offer a better sense of the figures who produced them and their possible reasons for offering specific views of international news. Establishing a newspaper in the early republic was a difficult endeavor, and most printers aligned themselves with either the Republican or Federalist party to underwrite some of the costs and serve up partisan views to likeminded readers. Newspapers were undertaken by artisans who worked with their hands to produce the paper, usually weekly in rural areas, which combined local advertisements, international and national news, and to a much smaller degree, local news. It was often a family business with a small group of apprentices and hired employees working hard to make ends meet. To be successful, printers needed two things: reciprocal relationships with other newspapers to exchange copies of their papers throughout the United States, allowing them to have consistent access to information and a large enough readership to justify their expenses.[5] Additionally, newspaper editors in port cities greatly benefited from connections with ship captains and other news arriving on board ship in the form of letters, international publications, and gossip.

[4] Philippe Gerard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011); Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic*, (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2010); Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006); Caitlyn Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2016).

[5] Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 26,30.

Readers were hungry for international news, and ship captains connected printers to the outside world. This posed a problem for printer in inland towns and cities. to produce original material; as a result, they often relied on reprinting such news from their port city peers.[6] But even if a rural North Carolina printer did not come up with an original notice offering news that no other paper had yet printed, his paper still served a vital role in serving up information to his readers. "Printers worked to establish themselves as the key conduits of a burgeoning national communications infrastructure," Joseph Adelman explains.[7]

Topping out at four pages altogether, a typical newspaper during the early republic dedicated at least half of its first two pages to national and international news, with an emphasis on the latter. They reserved the remainder of those first two pages (and very large portions of the remaining two pages) for advertisements from local businesses. Some of these included notices of runaways: runaway apprentices or indentured servants who had abandoned their contracts, runaway people of African descent escaping enslavement, runaway horses whose owners often offered valuable rewards, and even "runaway" wives who, unable to procure divorces, determined simply to leave their husband's homes rather than suffer miserable marriages. Usually, only one-third to one-half of the third page might contain local news and birth, marriage, and death notices. The fourth page often included a small smattering of poetry, amusing or strange stories, and public notices.

Because of newspapers' roles during the American Revolution and the long Constitutional ratification period, Americans had increasingly come to see newspapers as vital conduits for disseminating information in their republic. From the formation of the United States, newspapers

[6] Jack Larkin, "'Printing is Something Every Village Has in It': Rural Printing and Publishing," An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation (A History of the Book in America, Vol. 2), eds. Robert A. Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press in association with the American Antiquarian Society, 2010), 145-59.
[7] Adelman, Revolutionary Networks, 195.

kept their readers informed about important issues. Printers also used their coverage of the American Revolution to justify continued readership, and often invoked their revolutionary bona fides to remind readers of the close association between newspapers and patriotism. John Holt, a printer from New York "continued to invoke his service to the state and country in the Revolution as justification for people to subscribe to his newspaper," as Adelman notes.[8] As other independence movements emerged across the Atlantic world, Americans looked to newspapers for information on revolutionary people and events. Newspapers met this demand as they crafted audience pleasing narratives.

As a set of primary sources, American newspapers also come with their own set of limitations. The majority were owned and published by white men, were usually written with a white male audience in mind, and their accounts often exhibited limited perspectives on race and slavery. During the Haitian Revolution, these newspapers used racially charged language and argued for the necessity of slavery. Still others questioned the ability of formerly enslaved Africans to govern themselves. This often led northern newspapers papers to voice some of the most patronizing racial views inherent in an era when a majority of whites believed that in order to "prepare" enslaved people for gradual abolition, they must learn the values of education, Christianity, Christian marriage, and self-reliance. African-American newspapers, which began appearing near the very end of this study (the 1820's), were few and far between. In addition, printers were limited by their dedications to partisan organizations or their position as official government newspapers.[9] These limitations mean that newspapers throughout the early Republic bring a series of biases that I have sought to acknowledge throughout my work with them.

[8] Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks,* 182.
[9] Adelman, *Revolutionary Networks*, 32,34.

The young United States wrestled with the legacy of its revolution, and the implication of its rhetoric about "all men are created equal" in the years of the early American republic. The fight for American independence paled in comparison to the challenges of translating revolutionary motivations into sustainable political institutions. The revolutions that sprang up all over the Atlantic world challenged every facet of the American Revolution. The French Revolution threw those romanticized hero narratives and the United States' political power structure into question. The Haitian Revolution forced American readers to confront the hypocrisy of slavery in a United States ostensibly founded upon individual liberty. And the Latin American revolutions caused many in the United States to defend their own political systems. Many newspapers sought to respond to such challenges by distinguishing the Founding Fathers from "lesser" political leaders, implicitly defending slavery or, at most, offering their preference for gradual abolition, and reaffirming the balance of power produced by its three branches. The American exceptionalism that emerged during the Revolutionary era developed on the pages of newspapers as they continually revealed and responded to these challenges for American newspaper readers.

Although the first project of this thesis is to draw attention to the sweep of American newspapers' responses to these three different revolutionary movements, my research builds on that of other scholars who have studied individual movements. Although most scholars do not place newspapers at the center of their work, I have benefited from those who do. Ashli White surpasses previous works in her use of newspaper coverage of the Haitian Revolution. She examines the periodicals of cities like Charleston, New York, and Baltimore to understand the cultural impact of Haitian refugees to the United States.[10] Seth Cotlar expertly analyses the development of American political institutions during the French Revolution. His contention that

[10] White, *Encountering Revolution*.

opposing parties paved the way for a balanced political identity illuminates important changes within the United States.[11] As for the South American Revolutions, Caitlyn Fitz examines the development of American exceptionalism as it solidified during the revolutions. She contends that their failures helped solidify American exceptionalism while reinforcing flawed beliefs regarding the validity of slavery.[12] Her thoroughly researched book, referencing numerous newspaper articles, greatly informed the creation of this thesis. This thesis could not be possible without the great work accomplished by these esteemed historians.

This thesis has also made use of scholars whose research focuses on Thomas Paine, Toussaint Louverture, and Simón Bolívar, the three figures whom I found garnering so much attention in the American newspaper coverage. Philippe Gerard explores the realities of the Haitian Revolution through several books. His portrayal of Toussaint Louverture as an extraordinary leader with tremendous flaws contextualized the abolition movement within the Revolutionary era.[13] While Seth Cotlar's book broadly discusses the progression of American politics during the early American republic, he uses Thomas Paine as a vocal point for the fault lines within American politics.[14] John Lynch's biographical work on Simón Bolívar presents a complicated defender of individual freedoms whose actions were limited by the realities of the time.[15] These authors provided an invaluable foundation of information that informed my research of these men through the perspective of American newspapers.

More widely, my analysis here has benefited from wider scholarship that has scrutinized the revolutions that followed in the wake of the American Revolution, scholars who often incorporated

[11] Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*.
[12] Caitlyn Fitz, *Our Sister Republics*.
[13] Gerard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon*.
[14] Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America*.
[15] John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*.

at least some degree of newspaper literature into their works. For example, Matthew Clavin's book beautifully charts the effects of the Haitian Revolution after it took place.[16] Laurent Dubois's comprehensive analysis of Haitian society illustrates the complicated forces at work throughout the conflict.[17] Gordon Brown examines the racial worldviews of the founders through primary sources other than periodicals.[18] Dillion and Drexler's edited contribution explores the economic, literary, and American perception of the Haiti Revolution.[19] James Dun investigates American reaction to the Haitian Revolution through newspapers, plays, and other primary sources. His book examines race relations within Philadelphia while it served as the nation's capital.[20] Donald Hickey uses newspapers alongside other primary sources to explore the contrasting foreign policies of Federalists and Republicans toward Haiti.[21] While these authors provide important contributions, the sheer number of newspapers from the period leaves much to be learned about racial complexities in the United States.

Historians have gone to great lengths to reveal the American perspective of the French Revolution. Many books, articles, and dissertations detail the exchange of ideas and information between the two nations. Adam-Max Tuchinsky's work explores American politics through the eyes of the New York Tribune as it became involved in an interparty debate over societal ideals.[22]

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[16] Matthew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).
[17] Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*: *The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004).
[18] Gordon S. Brown, *Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005).
[19] Elizabeth Maddock Dillion and Michal J. Drexler, eds., *The Haitian Revolution and the Early United States*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[20] James Alexander Dun, *Dangerous Neighbors: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).
[21] Donald R. Hickey, "America's Response to the Slave Revolt in Haiti, 1791-1806," (*Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 4, (1982): 361-79.
[22] Adam-Max Tuchinsky, "'The Bourgeoisie Will Fall and Fall Forever:' The New-York Tribune, the 1848 French Revolution, and American Social Democratic Discourse," *Journal of American History* 92 no. 2, (2005): 470–97.

Tuchinsky uses commentary on revolutionary France to portray this war of words. Elizabeth Packer charts the American response to the French Revolution through presses in Philadelphia.[23] In similar fashion, Lee Baker Jr.'s research focuses on a single locality. His work deals with a single newspaper in the Northwest Territory during the late eighteenth century.[24] In contrast, Joseph M. Adelman and Victoria E. M. Gardner provide broader insight into the workings of printing presses during the Revolutionary Era.[25] Their research analyzes the political ties of American newspapers which developed from the emphasis on freedom of speech. Continuing this political emphasis, Courtney Chatellier investigates the connection between Federalist newspapers and French aristocracy.[26] Likewise, Jeffrey L. Pasley analyzes the intimate relationship between politics and newspapers in the early republic as American newspapers became swept up in the partisan bickering between Federalists and Republicans.[27]

Historian Matthew Rainbow Hale has contributed two important works to the subject. His dissertation addresses the effect of the French Revolution on American political identity.[28] Hale's thorough examination of the topic contains thirty-four primary sources from American newspapers. Hale's research mostly uses sources from Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and New York.. This makes since given the role these states played as centers of trade and capitals of the young republic. Nevertheless, his research overlooks available sources from Maryland, Vermont,

[23] Elizabeth Packer, "This Time a Spectator: Philadelphia's Printers Come to Terms with the French Revolution (1789-1793)," (M.A. thesis, Tufts University, (2013).

[24] Lee Baker, Jr., "La Frontiere des Etats-Unis Et La Revolution Francaise: L'exemple de Cincinnati," *Annales Historiques De La Révolution Française*, 343 (2006): 147.

[25] Joseph M. Adelman and Victoria E. M. Gardner, "News in the Age of Revolution," in *Making News*: *The Political Economy of Journalism in Britain and America from the Glorious Revolution to the* Internet, eds. Richard R. John and Jonathan Silberstein-Loeb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[26] Courtney Chatellier, "Not of the Modern French School: Literary Conservatism and the Ancien Régime in Early American Periodicals," *Hispanic Review* 16, no. 3 (2018): 489.

[27] Jeffrey L. Pasley, *The Tyranny of Printers*: *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

[28] Matthew Rainbow Hale, "Neither Britons nor Frenchmen: The French Revolution and American National Identity," *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* ((Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 2002).

North Carolina, Kentucky, and New Hampshire, sources that I have sought to use here. While not as obvious as the ones chosen by Hale, they still reflect a cross section of American society. Additionally, such research reveals the perspective of regional newspapers and by extension the opinion of Americans neglected by mainstream newspapers.

In 1959, historian Beatrice Hyslop examined the newspapers of six cities to better understand American newspaper coverage of the French Revolution.[29] In similar fashion to Hale, Hyslop's work focuses on major states of the early republic. Her work examines newspapers from Boston, Philadelphia, New York, Charleston, Baltimore, and Lexington, Kentucky.

As for the Latin American revolutions, John Charles Chasteen has contributed several works on the subject. His *Born in Blood and Fire* expertly tracks the stories of important South American leaders as they tried to implement their ideals despite the complexities of the South American continent.[30] His *Americanos* details the history of the South American Revolutions from Napoleon's invasion of Spain to the formation of nearly twenty republics.[31] Peter Blanchard is another historian with a long list of works devoted to the South American revolutions. His book *Under the Flags of Freedom* explores the plight of enslaved Africans as they fought for freedom on both sides of the conflict.[32] He continued this theme in *Slavery and Abolition* by investigating the role of slavery in Peru.[33] Historians Catherine Davies, Hilary Owen, and Claire Brewster's work examines the role of gender and the contradictions within the South American movements.[34]

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[29] Beatrice F. Hyslop, "The American Press and the French Revolution of 1789," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 104, no. 1 (1960): 54.
[30] John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America* (New York: Norton, 2001).
[31] John Charles Chasteen, *Americanos: Latin America's Struggle for Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
[32] Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom: Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008).
[33] Peter Blanchard, *Slavery and Abolition in Early Republic Peru* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1992).
[34] Catherine Davies, Hilary Owen, and Claire Brewster, *South American Politics: Gender, Politics and Text* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006).

Their work illustrates the limitations of revolutionary ideals in the 19th century. Jay Kinsbruner investigates transatlantic capitalism as it relates to colonial Spanish American cities.[35] Additionally, his *Independence in Spanish America* charts the unique political developments within the South American Revolutions. He argues that these factors adversely effected leaders like Simón Bolívar as they attempted to establish governments.[36] Historian Jaime E. Rodríguez O. asserts in *Political Culture* that the South American revolutions resulted from a combination of its Spanish heritage and the Protestant Reformation.[37] This created a clear delineation between other revolutionary movements such as those in American and France which were inspired by the Age of Enlightenment. Such contributions by historians creates an invaluable foundation on which to investigate the Revolutionary era.

As helpful as this scholarship proved to be, I still found that viewing the grand sweep of American newspapers' responses to all three independence movements allowed me to see a longer and more interesting trend. The American, French, Haitian, and Latin American revolutions exhibited similar tendencies regarding the implementation of revolutionary principles. Their successes and failures illustrate the complexities and limitations of the early republic.

This thesis contains three chapters. In chapter one, I examine American newspapers' portrayals of the French Revolution. As the violence and chaos of La Grande Révolution's latter stages intensified political divisions in the United States, Thomas Paine, the adopted Founding Father became a source of controversy. In a series of letters, Paine challenged the idealized positions of former revolutionary leaders and condemned the Alien and Sedition Acts and the formation of a

[35] Jay Kinsbruner, *The Colonial Spanish-American City: Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).
[36] Jay Kinsbruner, *Independence in Spanish America: Civil Wars, Revolutions, and Underdevelopment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000).
[37] Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *Political Culture in South America, 1500-1830* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017).

national army as fearmongering designed to deny individual rights. His support for the French Revolution was followed by a move that shocked many American Christians when he challenged Christian religious beliefs in his *Age of Reason*. Paine's heavily criticized work energized American deists and atheists, but created new religious factions in the United States, these debates that often took place on the pages of newspapers. This forced American readers to examine their nation's ideological path through the Revolutionary era. Paine's war of words illuminated the ongoing struggle for political identity within the United States. Newspapers provided a stage for the exchange of political ideology as differing points of view balanced each other and forced stalemate. Viewed from one perspective, the United States benefited from this limiting, binary system. for inasmuch as the Federalists and Republicans waged fierce battles against one another, those battles also stymied more radical political changes wrought by a dominant party, leading to a degree of comparatively conservative balance (that perhaps appears more striking from a twenty-first century perspective than from eyewitnesses). Certainly, many newspaper stories at the time congratulated American citizens for not slipping into the violent political chaos being reported about the French Revolution after 1793; but they did not weigh in on the democratic possibilities lost as a result. Indeed, following France's Reign of Terror, the United States saw even fewer chances for expanded democratic citizenship for previously excluded groups. The respite from domestic violent conflict paved the way for many newspapers to tout the American Revolution as exceptional. Its roots firmly planted; exceptionalism survived going forward into the nineteenth century and beyond.

In reporting the events from France, the first Atlantic revolution after its own, American newspapers at first connected those events to the American War of Independence, taking some measure of credit for fomenting a desire for human rights. As they would do later with Louverture

and Bolívar, the press compared Lafayette to Washington and applauded the triumph of republican values. Americans' early enthusiasm dissolved, however, as the French Revolution devolved into violence.

Chapter two focuses on the Haitian Revolution as revolutionary ideals spread to this French colony in the West Indies. The American press covered the slave rebellion with equal parts worry and approval. The conflict raised questions about race, slavery, class, and the trajectory of the revolutionary movement. Toussaint Louverture, a formerly enslaved, brilliant, revolutionary leader fascinated writers for American newspapers as contrasting narratives emerged to describe his significance to the United States. They portrayed him as alternately the savior of the plantation system and the author of its demise. The shifting portrayals of Louverture's life on the pages of newspapers illuminated the growing divisions within the young United States. The dialogue it created foreshadowed further progress as competing viewpoints forced American citizens to contend with its political contradictions. His story, as framed by the American press, revealed the evolution of American exceptionalism at the turn of the century.

The third and final chapter deals with the Latin American revolutions of the early nineteenth century, and particularly how newspapers described the revolutionary leadership of Simon Bolívar. American newspapers depicted Bolívar during the early 1810s with enthusiasm, but by the 1820s had begun expressing increasing skepticism toward him and the new republics that threw off Spanish control. The American press used many different names to describe the revolutionary leader, names that kept him in the public eye throughout his career, and which eventually led the American press to depict him as a tragic hero, a flawed crusader in the fight against tyranny. Moreover, newspapers became the venue for disseminating news of a wide range of other uses for Bolívar's name. They reported that Americans named counties, ships, lakes, and towns after him,

but even more curiously, an opportunistic clothing industry made Bolívar hats, boots, and coats to make money off the revolutionary leader's legacy. This was the emergence of a republican capitalism intent on monetizing revolution. This disingenuous development represented a low point in the fulfillment of revolutionary ideals even as it represented a high point for American exceptionalism. It demonstrated a self-serving initiative to construct the revolutionary narrative in a way that benefited the United States.

While American newspapers initially viewed other revolutions as resulting from their own, claiming that the United States was the progenitor of democratic revolution in the Atlantic world, they changed their tunes as they witnessed outcomes in France, Haiti, and Latin America that they found distasteful, whether it be extreme political violence or challenges to racial slavery of white supremacy. Such an environment created opportunities for newspaper readers to contend with their own ideas about revolution as they compared their own nation's history with new revolutions. The American press played a key role in constructing new forms of exceptionalism in thinking about the legacy of the American Revolution, forms that resulted from their coverage of other Atlantic revolutions. This thesis traces that story.

Chapter One

Trading Barbs: Thomas Paine, the French Revolution, and the American Press

> My anxiety to get back to America was great for several years. It is the country of my heart, and the place of my political and literary birth. It was the American Revolution that made me an author, and forced into action the mind that had been dormant, and had no wish for public life; nor has it now.[38]

On November 30, 1774, Thomas Paine arrived in the American colonies, as he described it in this quote from nearly thirty years later.[39] Despite repeated failures in jobs ranging from an apprentice staymaker to a tax officer, Paine quickly found employment for the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, a position that allowed him to display his writing talent and strong political opinions. Two years later, with the publishing of his pamphlet *Common Sense*, Paine established himself as an important political figure on the world stage. While Paine's adopted home helped launch his political career, his writings became increasingly more controversial over the course of his career, and received harsh criticisms from less radically minded American newspapers. As historian Seth Cotlar has demonstrated, Paine's long and eventful journey home resulted in his political death at the hands of a landscape forever changed during the years he spent in England and France during

[38] "For the National Intelligencer. Thomas Paine. To the Citizens of the United States, Letter the Fourth, "*Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), January 4, 1803, 4.

[39] Born in Thetland, England on January 29, 1737, Thomas Paine, the son of a staymaker, experienced mostly failure early in his life. By the age of 37, Paine had dropped out of school, failed in his father's apprenticeship, left the navy, and managed to be fired twice from his job as a tax officer. In 1774, The American colonies provided Paine with a fresh start. Only two years later, with the publishing of his pamphlets *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis*, Paine became a household name, an adopted member of the pantheon of American patriots. By 1793, Paine, now living in France, had earned the ire of groups in the Great Britain, the United States and France. In Britain, his *Rights of Man* criticized the monarchical system, in the United States, Paine's *Age of Reason* seemed to argue for atheism, and his criticism of the execution of the monarchy in France landed him in Luxemburg Prison. Invited back to the United States in 1802 by Thomas Jefferson, Paine had escaped imprisonment in Britain, execution in France, but failed to elude the criticism of American Federalist newspapers. Paine experienced tremendous highs and lows throughout his life. His career reflected the turbulent nature of the Revolutionary Era as old systems and beliefs collided with a radical progressivism, which unable to fully attain its goals, still impacted the lives and structure of people and nations.

the 1780's and 1790's.[40] Yet Paine's legacy lived on, buttressed by his writings. His politics represented a different side of the political "coin," which helped to ensure balance as opposing arguments regarding revolution appeared within the American political system. American newspapers served as the battleground for these ideas as Paine's published correspondence challenged the often more cautious domestic and foreign policies of the young nation, while inspiring the more radical wing of the American political spectrum. Additionally, the dialogue encouraged by radicals like Paine continually questioned the larger meanings of the revolution in the national consciousness. Its consistent presence on the pages of American newspapers inevitably led to a greater realization of these principles as the American public and their representatives were forced to contend with unfulfilled revolutionary standards.

At the same time that Americans sought to transform their revolution against the British into a workable new nation, they also had to come to grips with the contagion of revolution in other places. This chapter particularly examines how American newspapers engaged with news about the French Revolution, an uprising that Americans viewed at first with great optimism, as we shall see. As they delivered information about the early years of that revolution, American newspapers used it as an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of Americanness and the historic significance of their own successful revolution. But this did not last. As more alarming news began to trickle across the Atlantic about the growing violence in France—violence that came to be termed The Terror—Americans retreated from their earlier embrace of the French Revolution and many feared that similar violence might infect the new and fragile United States. Thomas Paine's The Rights of Man, a book that wholeheartedly embraced the principles of the French Revolution, firmly associated him with the dangers of social upheaval. Bringing together American newspapers'

[40] Seth Cotlar, *Tom Paine's America: The Rise and Fall of Transatlantic Radicalism in the Early Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

changing treatment of the French Revolution with their shifting views of Paine illustrates how many came to reconsider the meanings of their own revolution, and the political identity of the United States. The ensuing dialogue across the political spectrum, which encompassed everything from the meaning of revolution to a reconsideration of the radical meanings of the United States' founding documents, did not wholly skew to the right. Indeed, as this chapter demonstrates, this dialogue established a pathway for the realization of some of those ideals that remained unfulfilled during the early American republic.

On January 10, 1776, Paine published his pamphlet *Common Sense*, a work that increased popular support for strong opposition to Great Britain, mocked the concept of monarchy, and played an outsized role in leading to the American Revolution. Writing to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed three months later, General George Washington noted, "I find that *Common Sense* is working a powerful change in the minds of many men."[41] His commitment to the revolution in America extended to his finances as well. As his pamphlet became an enormous success, Paine donated the proceeds to the fledging Continental Army. Completing his transformation into an American patriot, Paine served as a civilian aid to General Nathaniel Green during the War for Independence. Despite his contributions, years later, Paine found himself a despised figure by the very men who once applauded his actions.

The Early Years of the French Revolution

Not everyone greeted the uprising of the peasants in France with enthusiasm, but it produced terrific enthusiasm from writers on the radical end of the political spectrum. In England, for example, conservative philosopher and statesman Edmund Burke expressed deep reservations in

[41]"From George Washington to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, 1 April 1776," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-04-02-0009. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 4, *1 April 1776–15 June 1776*, ed. Philander D. Chase. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991, pp. 9–13.]

his Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790), fretting that such a challenge to the established social hierarchy might infect Great Britain. But other writers found much more to admire, and offered direct challenges to Burke. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) engaged directly with Burke in offering a far more enthusiastic account of the radical possibilities of republican politics and challenges to monarchy and aristocracy. She would go on soon afterward to pen a wildly popular and influential book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) that extended that republican thinking to the realm of gender and riveted readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

Almost as soon as American newspapers began to circulate news of the revolution in France, they greeted it as the natural extension of the American fight for independence. France acknowledged this connection, and the two nations, recent allies during the American Revolution, considered each other brothers in the cause of liberty. *The North Carolina Journal* asserted proudly that "Astonished nations, too long the dupes of perfidious kings, nobles, and priests, will eventually recover their rights, and the human race will owe the American and French nations."[42] Politics and societal upheaval would, of course, force the two nations a part as Americans reassessed their own struggle for liberty and their obligations to their wartime ally.

By the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, Paine had moved back to England. In 1791, Paine wrote his *Rights of Man* in defense of the French Revolution and in opposition to the conservative philosopher Edmund Burk, who had written a year earlier his own observation on the French Revolution, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The two men represented the leading pillars of their respective political philosophies. It is perhaps illustrative that in 1792, the *Vermont*

[42] "[Translation] The Representatives of the French People, composing the Committee of Public Safety, of the National Convention, charged by the law of the 17th Fructidor, with the direction of foreign relations; To the Representatives in Congress Assembled," *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), January 25, 1796, 1.

Gazette, in a section titled, "Literary Portraits or Modern Characters," printed two poems devoted to Paine and Burke.[43] The works of these men demonstrated the deep political divide over the issue of the French Revolution. This debate sometimes resulted in colorful depictions of the opposing side. In response to accusations that he was to blame for the rise in radical left support for the French Revolution, Burke replied, "It was there before, or it could not be brought out –no, no! The cats would not give out their electrical fire till they were well scratched on the back."[44] Burk argued against the ultimate success of the French Revolution and criticized the unlawful nature of the insurrection. On the other side of the political aisle, Paine, drawing on earlier works such as *Common Sense*, contended that the monarchy constituted a violation of basic, human rights. Their rivalry over the meaning of the French Revolution mimicked the debate taking place between Federalists and Democratic Republicans in the United States.

During the French Revolution's early stages, however, most newspapers preferred to draw close connections between it and the American Revolution, as those seeming similarities allowed Americans to take some credit for the contagion of liberty. The *North Carolina Journal* drew powerful links between the two efforts. "The efforts and immense sacrifices of both nations in the defense of liberty and equality; the blood which they have spilled together; their avowed hatred for despots; the moderation of their political views; the disinterestedness of their councils; and especially the success of the vows which they have made in presence of the Supreme Being, to be free or die—all combine to render indestructible the connections which they have formed," it opined.[45] With sweeping statements like this—which, for the time being, aligned with Paine's

[43] "Literary Portraits or Modern Characters," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), June 22, 1792, 4.
[44] "For the Charleston Courier. Thespis, No. XLV. Fair Penitent and Robin Hood," *Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), March 7, 1804, 2.
[45] "Literary Portraits or Modern Characters," Vermont Gazette (Bennington, VT), June 22, 1792, 4.

optimism—seemed to suggest that the two countries were tied together in their mutual rejection of tyranny.

As news of the French Revolution's early stages traveled across the Atlantic, American newspapers like *The Vermont Gazette* illustrated the optimism felt by many Americans on behalf of their French brethren. "The rays of the western star diffused from a distant portion of the globe, are now met, and reverberated by that rising sun of glory, which floods with light the dominions of France, and begins to illuminate the world." The paper further argued that the revolution was the "Most important event which has happened in the old world."[46] America enthusiasm was tied closely to its belief that France had it to thank for its current societal transformation. *The State Gazette of North Carolina* noted, "Liberty will have another feather in her cap. The seraphic contagion was caught from Britain—it crossed the Atlantic to North-America, from whence the flame has been communicated to France."[47] American papers also made sure to note that the French themselves had openly acknowledged the American contribution. *The North Carolina Journal* published an address from the Committee of Public Safety to the U.S. Congress that stated, "You were the first defenders of the Rights of Man. In another hemisphere—strengthened by your example, and endowed with an invincible energy, the French people have vanquished that tyranny, which, during so many centuries of ignorance, superstition and baseness, had enchained a generous nation."[48] With such mutual sentiment, revolutionaries in France and the United States found themselves in an unprecedented union. It did not last.

[46] "The Address Offered to the national Assembly of France, in the name of the of the citizens of the United States of America," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT.), October 25, 1790, 2.
[47] "London, June 29. Received at ten o'clock last night, by express from Versailles," *State Gazette of North Carolina* (New Bern, NC), September 24, 1789, 2.
[48] "(Translations) The Representatives of the French People, composing the Committee of Public Safety . . ."

American newspapers further encouraged the sense of affinity between the American and French Revolutions by creating a new narrative. This connection between countries seemed even more apparent as newspapers filled American revolutionary roles with French actors like the Marquis de Lafayette on one side and King Louis XVI on the other side. *The Vermont Journal* asserted, "The great Washington of France, Lafayette['s] . . . vigilance will render all private intrigues, or essays to sovereign usurpation, abortive, and eventually fix the liberties of France upon a permanent basis."[49] In many cases, American newspapers had only to reprint the words of French radicals to draw a direct tie between the revolutions of the two nations. For example, the *State Gazette* reprinted a speech by Jéròme Petion de Villeneuve, the mayor of Paris, commenting about King Louis XVI: "How many reasons are there for setting him aside at the moment the people regained their sovereignty!"[50] Such language circulated in newspapers met the approval of many readers. Once American newspapers had identified the French equivalents of George Washington and King George, they established a familiar and compelling story for Americans to embrace. This narrative benefited from parallel events such as French radicals fighting against a proposed stamp tax increase, a declaration of rights, and the formation of a new national constitution. All of these incidents further cemented the ties between the two nations. Even as circumstances changed, American newspapers would find ways to adapt the narrative to changing circumstances.

As these passages reveal, American newspapers encouraged a broader sense of American support for the French Revolution during these years before the Reign of Terror, based largely on the many likenesses between the two countries that they sought to draw. Americans felt a new

[49] "Newyork. New York. April 1," *Vermont Journal* (Windsor, VT), May 05, 1790, 2-3.
[50] "Translation of the Speech of M. Petion, Mayor of Paris. At the bar of the National Assembly of France, on the third of August last," *State Gazette of North Carolina* (New Bern, NC), November 23, 1792, 1.

surge of national pride and a sense of the United States' important place in the word as the French Revolution seemed to originate from their own fight for freedom. This created a new narrative that placed the United States at the center of the revolutionary movement. The resulting American exceptionalism would only grow stronger as each successive revolution shaped the Atlantic world.

Inasmuch as Thomas Paine had been crucial to helping establish an American revolutionary identity, his evolution as a thinker during the 1790s made him the target of vitriol. The newspapers who printed the letters of Thomas Paine helped expose a deeply rooted divide within the United States. His advocacy for deism, revolutionary violence, and democracy made him a target for attack from many sides. As the founders knew all too well, the written word was a dangerous weapon for a talented writer. Thomas Paine became a symbol to Federalists of all that could go wrong with revolution. The dialogue created by this challenge contributed to the eventual success of the Revolutionary era as Federalists and Republicans continued the conversations about government and society that would eventually lead to positive change.

The Terror and the American Backlash

> Dragging him, however, to the place of execution, he protesting he was an Englishman all the time, one of the mob cried out, 'D—m you, if you are an Englishman, why don't you speak English?' This hint recovered him, and again protesting his innocence in English, they released him; of which he took the immediate advantage, and set out that night for England.[51]

Beginning in the fall of 1793, the Reign of Terror engulfed France in a cycle of chaos and violence. Struggling to maintain order in a time of civil war, the Committee of Public Safety, under the authority of the revolutionary government, eliminated political opponents in a killing spree that ended the lives of over 15,000 people, with countless others dying in prison. Executions were conducted using the guillotine and sentences were conducted without a public trial. The loss of life

[51] *Vermont Journal* (Windsor, VT), February 24, 1790, 2.

and individual freedoms effectively ended the high-minded ideals that characterized the early stages of the French Revolution. Paine was one of the people caught up in the societal chaos of the Reign of Terror. The passage above illustrates the stakes for those who ran a foul of the French mob.

In retrospect, some suggested that the violence of 1793 had been anticipated from the beginning. A 1789 issue of the *State Gazette of North Carolina* reported the exodus of French citizens and foreigners from Paris. "All the English gentleman who lately ventured from France, speak of the savage behavior of the mobs, particularly those in Paris, in a manner that must make one feel for the depravity of human nature." Four years later, the *Vermont Gazette* reported that "advices are personally communicated, that general distrust and deadly jealousies universally prevail, that every man suspects his neighbor; that the guillotine works as constant as a sawmill, and a human head is too frequently beheld, trunkless."[52] While some newspapers such as the *Windsor Federal Gazette* declared in retrospect "The French Revolution was an uninterrupted series of steps, the wrong of which could not for a moment be doubted."[53] The majority of papers expressed less certainty. As societal upheaval consumed France in what became known as the Reign of Terror, American newspapers were forced to change their carefully constructed narrative of American and French comradeship. Although far from finished, the revolutionary age envisioned by many Americans was at an end.[54]

Thomas Paine was one of those early enthusiasts for the French Revolution who found himself facing mob violence. Although he had earlier served in the French National Assembly, he had

[52] "Bennington, Friday, February 7," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), February 7, 1794, 3.
[53] "Miscellanies. The Origin and Principles of the American Revolution, compared with the Origin and Principles of the French, Translated from the German of Gentz. By and American Gentleman, and lately published at Philadelphia," *Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT), August 11, 1801, 1.
[54] The Reign of Terror, which lasted roughly ten months from September 1793 to July 1794, led to the execution of 17,000 people as the Committee of Public Safety eliminated Frenchmen considered to be enemies of the state.

fallen out of favor for criticizing the execution of the French royal family and the frequent use of the guillotine to enact public executions. He was arrested by the crowd and housed in Luxembourg Palace, which had been repurposed as a prison during the Revolution. He wrote to President George Washington, begging for assistance in obtaining his freedom. Washington refused, probably for political reasons.

Considering how close he came to death, it appears unsurprising that Paine would begrudge Washington the refusal to help. Upon his escape, Paine penned letters to Washington that addressed his hurt feelings on the matter and got circulated in American newspapers in 1802 and 1803. His second letter began by describing the physical and mental hardships he endured in Luxembourg Prison while waiting for execution and suffering through an incapacitating fever. "Scarcely a night passed but in which ten, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty or more were taken out of the prison, carried before a pretended tribunal in the morning, and guillotined before night." But Paine explained that his anger stemmed from a far broader set of concerns about American leadership. Men like Washington represented everything wrong with American politics: a rich elite with little care for the plight of others. "[Washington] accepted as a present (though he was already rich) 100,000 acres of land in America; and left me to occupy six foot of earth in France."[55] Although Paine's criticism of the Washington administration no doubt emerged in part out of desperation, Paine also believed Washington wished to not offend the British government by working to release Paine. In a third letter he explained that "I was at no loss to understand Mr. Washington his new fangled faction, and that their policy was silently to leave me to fall in France." Paine extended his criticism to attack Washington's character. "The other [Washington] is prudent enough to

[55] "Thomas Paine. To the Citizens of the United States, Letter the Third," *Lancaster Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), December 14, 1802, 1.

conceal the want of them [morals]."[56] Paine's criticisms of Washington stemmed from his close encounter with a French guillotine a decade earlier, but those criticisms had a very different ring after the turn of the century, especially in the wake of Washington's death.

Whereas Paine used the aftermath of his escape from death in France to criticize Washington and American political leaders' cautiousness in foreign affairs, American newspapers began to take a new view: they reconsidered their earlier endorsement of the French Revolution and their claims about the American Revolution being the genesis of that second revolt across the Atlantic. In 1797, the *North Carolina Journal* looked back at the previous few years and declared, "The original object of the French Revolution is abandoned and tyranny and oppression march in the train of the republican armies. They have brought republicanism into disrepute: in Europe—they make the very name of revolution dreaded, as the scourge, instead of the blessing of nations."[57] The process of American newspapers helping their readers draw a sharp divide between the two nations had begun.

One of the most thoroughgoing attempts to mark that divide appeared in an essay under the pseudonym of Americanus that originally appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1797 and was reprinted in many other papers around the country. In this essay, Americanus detailed the problems of the French Revolution and the American response providing a fascinating examination of American political identity during the Revolutionary Era. The author first sought to mark the important differences between the two countries. Because the American colonies had been "Separated from the mother country," Americanus explained, "the colony has none of its prejudices, its connections or its depravities to contend with. It is against these it unites all its sincerest efforts." The situation was far different in a country like France, for "when [a] . . . rupture

[56] "Thomas Paine's Letter to President Washington," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), February 23, 1803, 1.
[57] "New York, April 19," *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), May 8, 1797, 2.

falls out in an old monarchy, a conflict of all the opposite and jarring interests, passions, prejudices and institutions, that can occur in the constitution of human society, takes place. Royalty and all its train of aristocracy, with all their corruption, their terror and their dependencies, beside being and open and separate foe, mix in the ranks in a thousand mattered shapes." Moreover, residents of an old monarchy also had to contend with "the still more dangerous and destructive enemies of jealousy and suspicion, against their friends . . . and all the consequences of the same jealousies and suspicions." These patterns made for a far more formidable set of hurdles for an old monarchy seeking to remake itself as a republic, as it suffered "from the extravagance of its own depravity, was but too well calculated to run men into excess of the opposite and still more the enormous kind. [58] In other words, Americanus articulated a fundamental divide between the revolutions in the United States and France.

Americanus asserted that the colonies had developed a separate identity from their cousins in Britain. This had contributed to the outbreak of the American Revolution, and had also inoculated the young nation against the societal problems of the French Revolution. Without a decadent and corrupt monarchy on their shores, he claimed Americans had united around shared values and thus avoided the destructive levels of infighting that the French had witnessed. While American patriots may not have had a decadent royal infrastructure to destroy, they did face a substantial loyalist population. Additionally, although the French Revolution exceeded the bloodshed of the American Revolution, the cause of the violence emanated from a similar source. Like French radicals, American patriots fought for individual liberty against the confines of an oppressive political system. Americanus painted an overly simplistic picture of similar contests for individual liberty. *The Vermont Gazette* quoted him as saying in regard to the American and French Revolutions,

[58] "From the Virginia Gazette. A Development of the Causes of the Disturbances Between the American and French Republics," *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), August 14, 1797, 1.

"While seas of blood were the price of yours . . . reason has dissolved ours."[59] Americanus held up the United States as a superior republic, capable of social and political stability.

The article further explores why so many Americans would have embraced of the French Revolution during its early years. "From a belief that the French revolution was bottomed upon principles similar to our own, we were ready to receive any impression that went to a confirmation of the idea, that the salvation of our independence depended upon the success of their cause."[60] According to Americanus, the fates of the two nations appeared tied together over similar values, at least for a time. Americans felt justified for their own actions as they witnessed the seeming success of the French Revolution. Prior to events such as the Reign of Terror, Americans gained additional confidence in this link from French advocates and political leaders like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison. Jefferson felt especially drawn to a movement that placed at its forefront the Enlightenment values of reason and science. According to Americanus, these factors made it almost inevitable that Americans would come to look on the French Revolution as an extension of its own.

In the wake of Americanus's essay, additional American newspapers rushed to join the move to distance the United States from the turmoil in France. *The Vermont Gazette* reprinted an article that ranked the young democratic republic ahead of nations like Great Britain and France and, like Americanus, drew sharp distinctions between the two countries. "If we turn our eyes to France, we behold a mighty nation in an advanced age, bowed down with infirmities and an enormous debt, struggling with deep rooted privileges and a despotism that is interwoven in the very texture of the people." In contrast to the decadence of France and countries like it, the author pointed out

[59] *The Vermont Gazette*.
[60] "From the Virginia Gazette. A Development of the Causes of the Disturbances Between the American and French Republics," *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), August 14, 1797, 1.

the advantages of the United States. "The United States on the other hand, are by dispensations of Providence placed at a goodly distance from all these scenes of tumult and misery—peace reigns triumphant through our country . . . under the fostering hand of the federal government."[61] According to the article, the geographic isolation of the United States contributed to its well-being.

As optimistic as such claims might have been, they sometimes glossed over elements of the situation that might have led to less rosy conclusions. North America at the time of the article remained a mosaic of different European territories. As for the quality of government, the newspaper points to the lack of debt and the presence of a federal government, yet the United States government still struggled with its own amassed debt from the Revolutionary War. Its federal government may have been republican, but aside from its lack of a monarch, was not completely dissimilar from the ruling systems of France and Britain. Additionally, the author noted in regard to French decadence, "All these circumstances are hostile to that happiness which results from good government—they subvert the principles of the social compact—property is set afloat—and human hope is now cut off." Clearly, property rights were very important to Americans. In stark contrast, France contained a complicated system of land ownership that created few opportunities for the lower classes. The article ended by noting that in the United States, "Everyman enjoys in security the fruits of his industry" an optimistic view, given the many remaining restrictions on social mobility and opportunity by gender, race, and class, but those opportunities were greater in the United States than in Europe.[62] The attempts by American

[61] "Miscellany. From the United States Gazette," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), November 01, 1790, 4.
[62] "Miscellany. From the United States Gazette," On social mobility and opportunity see Jack P. Greene, The Intellectual Construction of America: Exceptionalism and Identity from 1492 to 1800 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); and Gordon S. Wood, The Radicalism of the American Revolution (New York: Vintage, 1993).

newspapers to tout a unique political identity working hard to narrate the Revolutionary era in a way that offered a rosy picture of the United States in contrast to European nations.

While important differences existed between the two nations, the United States had certainly built its political ideals and institutions using the influences of European institutions and ideologies, particularly lifting from British models. In his groundbreaking work, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, Bernard Bailyn charted the development of American Revolutionary thinking as it embraced radical British philosophy of earlier in the eighteenth century. "The transmission from England to America of the literature of political opposition that furnished the substance of the ideology of the Revolution had been so swift in the early years of the eighteenth century as to seem almost instantaneous," he explains. This ideology undergirded the ideas behind the War of Independence and in the formation of a democratic republic with the writing of the Constitution. In addition, Bailyn examined the founding fathers' eagerness to find pervasive and effective ways to translate ideals into pragmatism. "The old beliefs of '76 which had served to destroy an imperial power had somehow to be reconciled with nationalist needs."[63] As a result, this new system of government possessed many of the same characteristics as its British parent, from its strong, centralized government to its large legislative bodies, which had political parallels in Europe. In addition, the young republic was still in its infancy when American newspapers boldly proclaimed its ascendency over countries that measured their existence in terms of centuries instead of years. Similar to Bailyn's portrayal of early America, this youthful optimism struggled to cope with the reality of the period. The connection between American and French societies was deeper and far less positive than American newspapers were willing to admit.

The Age of Reason, Religion, and National Identity

[63] Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967; repr., Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 2017).

> The tyranny and superstition which their religious system had long imposed, both upon their bodies and minds, when an opportunity presented itself to shake it off, proved naturally, but too productive of the opposite extreme, atheism which was the opposite of superstition, was considered reason and light; and all the most immoral.[64]

In this essay that originally appeared in the Virginia Gazette, the author suggests that France's long association with the Catholic Church had infused "their bodies and minds" with the taint of "tyranny and superstition," making it even harder to "shake it off." Nor was this the only article to fret about France's Catholicism. *The Vermont Journal* noted, "France will soon be emancipated from its present wretched situation, now that the immaculate Mary is to be melted down to supply the want of the state."[65] *The Vermont Gazette* observed, "The flame of liberty which has spread so rapidly in France, seems to direct its next conflagration to the pope's dominions"[66] and the *North Carolina Gazette* wondered openly what could possibly compensate for religion.[67] Such anti-Catholic sentiment eventually resulted in legislation by the French National Assembly that refused to authorize monastic vows. During the Reign of Terror, priests were targeted and killed by a radical anti-religious movement. Clearly, the predominantly Protestant American population still fostered deep distrust of the powerful Catholic Church holding sway over vast swaths of Europe. As American newspapers sought to distance the United States from France, they increasingly used two means: the disparagement of Catholicism, and—counter-intuitively—anxious concerns about the French's abandonment of Christianity in favor of deism and atheism. As they did so, they found Thomas Paine a useful cautionary tale, especially as his deist masterpiece, The Age of Reason

[64] "From the Virginia Gazette. A Development of the Causes of the Disturbances Between the American and French Republics," *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), August 14, 1797, 1.
[65] *Vermont Journal* (Windsor, VT), February 24, 1990, 2.
[66] "England. London, August 14-19," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), November 01, 1790, 2.
[67] "Extracts, Translated from the History of Crimes Committed during the French Revolution, just published at Paris, in 2 vols. 810 Vol. 1, page 1," *North Carolina Gazette* (Wilmington, NC), September 28, 1797, 3.

(1794), appeared almost conterminously with the news about the Reign of Terror. As a result, the subjects of religion, violence, and excessive radical democracy became intertwined.

Newspapers condemned *The Age of Reason* and tied it closely to the chaos in France. "It is said that 'Paine's Age of Reason,' lately so eagerly sought, is now sold at auction in Philadelphia for one cent each!" the *Vergennes Gazette* trumpeted. "Atheistical Deistical opinions, at present, are too unpopular to sell as a high price."[68] The timing of its publication did more than anchor Paine's reputation to the fate of France. It also led Americans who might earlier have continued to see him as a pillar of republican thinking to now wholly reconsider him as a political thinker. *The Age of Reason* transformed him into a pariah.

In the wake of the societal upheaval of the French Revolution, American newspapers sought new narratives to explain the failure of the movement. For conservative Federalists, the obvious culprits existed on the left. Radical Jacobins became the reason the revolution in France failed to live up to American standards. According to their political opponents, their violence and lack of values posed a threat to American society.

Newspapers found ammunition for those views in the 1797 publication of Augustin Barruel's *Memoirs Illustrating the History of Jacobinism*, which offered conspiratorial accounts of the "real" actors behind the French Revolution's violence and radicalism. Barruel, a Catholic priest, held that the revolution's radical turn had been the design of secret societies like the Jacobin Clubs, freemasons, and others dead set on overthrowing Christianity. Such an argument offered new fodder for papers eager to denounce the French Revolution. The *Farmer's Museum or Literary Gazette* congratulated the reprinting of parts of Barruel's work in a Connecticut newspaper, "This is a most salutary undertaking, and is rendered peculiarly useful to the people at large, in

[68] "Domestic," *Vergennes Gazette and Vermont and New-York Advertiser* (Vergennes, Vermont) January 31, 1799, 3.

consequence of the abridger's choice of a newspaper for a vehicle of this warning against the daring impiety of the French sophisters."[69] One reader wrote in a letter to the editor of the *Hartford Courant,* "I think the printers can scarcely do so great a service to the country, as by inserting that work in their Gazettes."[70] The statesman and conservative philosopher Edmund Burke, long opposed to the French Revolution in his own right, wrote a letter to Barruel complimenting the attributes of the book. "The tendency of the whole is admirable in every point of view, political, religious, and, let me make use of the abused word, philosophical."[71]

This anti-Jacobinism even extended at times to include American citizens, as American fretted that they might have similarly disruptive clubs of radicals in their midst. A Jacobite became associated with all immoral activity. The *Green Mountain Patriot* linked Jacobinism to profanity, godlessness, hypocrisy, debauchery, and traveling on the sabbath. "But Messrs. Printers, if every one, who sought to be contemplated in this light, is really a Jacobin, I am apprehensive, that we have many more of them among us, than is generally imagined; and even that same, who make very loud pretensions to Federalisms, must be placed on the list . . ." wrote a correspondence.[72] In the eyes of some, Jacobinism symbolized the worst of human characteristics. Far from being simply a political movement, Jacobinism was sin incarnate. "And the man, who lives in open violation of explicit laws, and in the practice of those vices, which tend directly to the destruction of social happiness, and to the subversion of government, is the enemy—He is a Jacobin."[73] In

[69] "Walpole, September 9, Incidents at Home," *Farmer's Museum of Literary Gazette* (Walpole, NH), September 09, 1799, 3.
[70] "For the Connecticut Courant," *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), July22, 1799, 1.
[71] Edmund Burke to Augustin Barruel, 1 May 1797, in *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. P.J. Marshal and John A. Woods (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968), 9: 319-20. For a general account of Barruel's reception in England see Bernard Schilling, *Conservative England and the case against Voltaire* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1950), chap. 13, esp. pp. 261-77.
[72] "Miscellanies. For the Green Mountain Patriot. A Mirror for Jacobins," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), October 03, 1799,1.
[73] "Miscellanies."

such a political climate, rational arguments were non-existent. Jacobinism became a cautionary tale to scare youngsters into proper behavior. American newspapers helped fuel these arguments as the Federalist press consolidated its power and influence in the United States.

Paine's association with deism, radical democracy, and therefore with dangerous, French-style politics permitted some newspapers to contrast him with conservative figures like Burke, who had early on disparaged the French Revolution. The Philadelphia Inquirer reprinted an article from London describing Burke as a good Christian. "To the Protestant religion, as by law established, he was attached from sincere conviction."[74] In the wake of what they characterized as democratic violence and social chaos, Paine represented all that could go wrong in society when leftist radicals gained power. He became a focal point for papers looking to criticize the failings of the French Revolution.

Newspapers often referred to Paine, as an infidel, or one who opposed the Christian church. In reference to Paine and others like him, the *Hartford Courant* noted, "We hoped for and expected Christian Rulers, such as we had formerly been blessed with; but we are now often shocked to hear of the promotion of deists and infidels."[75] Clearly, politics and religion were intertwined within the fabric of Western society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a deist and an Enlightenment figure who placed primary trust in human reason, Paine did not reject the notion of God, but condemned many of the Christian church's teachings regarding supernatural events, arguing that stories about a virgin birth or turning water into wine had the effect of asking Christians to believe in magic. He felt that religion should not be a determining factor in American

[74] "From the London Paper of July 12, the Late Right Hon. Edmund Burke," *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), September 7, 1797, 3.
[75] "For the Courant," *Hartford Courant* (Hartford, CT), May 11, 1803, 2. On deists and "infidels," see Eric R. Schlereth, *An Age of Infidels*. The Politics of Religious Controversy in the United States (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

politics. He declared in a letter reprinted in newspapers, "Our relation to each other in this world is as men; and the man who is a Friend to Man and to his Rights, let his religious Opinions be what they may is a good citizen." Paine argued that the English government paid Presbyterian ministers to support the nation and suspected that the same thing occurred in the United States. He further contended that religion often formed the excuse for imperialist actions taken by nations. "The world has been overrun with Fable and Creeds of human invention."[76] According to Paine, in the United States, the Federalists used religion to criticize opponents and remove the rights guaranteed by the constitution.

The French Republic's rejection of religion at the same time that its social violence reached its peak prompted many Americans to rush in the opposite direction, insisting that morality required the Christian religion, and without it chaos would result. The *Green Mountain Patriot* noted, "Now righteousness consists in practicing the duties of religion and morality; and this it is which exalteth a nation. And on this firm basis, are the constitutions and laws of our country established."[77] The paper even went as far as to compare following national laws to obeying the commandments of God. The *Maryland Gazette* concurred. "Nay, when we consider the facts now stated, are we not constrained to view the French republicans as so many infernais, broken loose from their chains in the pit below, and now appearing in this upper world under the shape of men, but still thinking and acting as demons?"[78] According to American newspapers, the religious morality of the United States resulted in a more moderate revolution.

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[76] "Mr. Thomas Paine. To Samuel Adams," *Lancaster Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), February 8, 1803, 2.
[77] "Miscellanies. For the *Green Mountain* Patriot. A Mirror for Jacobins," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), October 03, 1799 #1.
[78] "Some facts evincive of the antithetical, anarchical, and in other respects, immoral principles of the *French republicans*, stated in a sermon delivered on the 9th of May, 1798, the day recommended by the president of the United States for solemn humiliation, fasting, and prayer, by David Osgood, D. D. Minister of the church in Medford, Massachusetts," *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis, MD), September 06, 1798, 2.

Building on this growing animosity toward Paine, several newspapers printed an exchange of letters between him and Samuel Adams on the subject of religion. To New Englanders like Samuel Adams, Paine's previous contributions to the patriot cause did not exclude him from criticism when it came to religion. "I have frequently with pleasure reflected on your services to my native, and your adopted country…," Adams explained. But when I heard that you had turned your mind to a defence [sic] of infidelity, I felt myself much astonished, and more grieved, that you had attempted a measure so injurious to the feelings, and so repugnant to the true interest of so great a part of the citizens of the United States." Paine responded by pointing out that "If I do not believe as you believe, it proves that you do not believe as I believe, and this is all that it proves."[79] For Paine, the specific differences between religions were inconsequential. The unifying belief in God mattered more than how generations of humans interpreted their belief through traditional practices and sacred, canonical texts. Although controversial, this broad interpretation of religion was more palatable than actual atheism.

In the highly charged atmosphere of the French Revolution, men like Adams argued for the importance of the Protestant religion for national continuity and morality. Catholicism and atheism were dangerous threats. Often tied the excesses of the French Revolution and the Jacobin endorsement of atheism. What was the difference between a Godless universe and one in which God did not intervene? Adam's response underscores his concern. "Do you think that your pen, or the pen of any other man can unchristianize [sic] the mass of our citizens or have you hopes of converting a few of them to assist you in so bad a cause?" In response, Paine angrily denied being an atheist, claiming that "I endangered my own life " by speaking up against "the execution of the

[79] "Mr. Thomas Paine. To Samuel Adams," *Lancaster Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), February 8, 1803, 2.

[French] king . . . and by opposing Atheism."[80] He did not, however, explain why his avowed deism ought to be seen as any less worrisome to anxious Christians.

He further identified his critics as Federalists, arguing that their political ideology placed them in opposition to the values of the American Revolution and its dedication to liberty. "Who have been working by various means for several years past, to overturn the Federal Constitution established on the representative system, and place government in the new world on the corrupt system of the old."[81] Paine believed this could be accomplished by created a standing army to defend against an imaginary invasion. But priest and public figures were not the only ones responsible for this deception. Federalist newspapers also shared some of the blame. Paine's letter to Adams demonstrates the interconnectedness of religion and government in the United States. American newspapers enabled political parties to bind cultural constants to political objectives. This allowed newspapers to serve as powerful tools in the ongoing revolutionary dialogue. In addition, Paine's criticisms served as a warning of the dangerous role played by religions when manipulated by government.

As angry as he was at Federalists like Washington, Paine did not see their political differences as an insurmountable barrier. Indeed, there remained some ideological overlap between political factions. While numerous differences existed, Paine admitted on several occasions that he agreed with many of the original values touted by the Federalists. Paine supported a national government that united the states and worked to promote the "common interests." He also shared the enthusiasm of men like Washington and Adams for a representative form of government. In his second letter to the citizens of the United States, Paine declared, "I ought to stand first on the list

[80] "Interesting Correspondence, between Samuel Adams," *Weekly Wanderer* (Randolph, VT), February 26, 1803, 4.
[81] "From the National Intelligencer. Thomas Paine, To the Citizens of the United States. Letter the Second," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT) December 22, 1802, 1.

of federalists."[82] Referencing his *Age of Reason,* Paine pointed out that when he saw the French Revolution careening toward atheism he "had the work translated and published in their own language, to stop them in that career, and fix them to the . . . Creed . . . I believe in God."[83] Both Paine and his Federalist enemies valued religion. Paine simply had a much more expansive view about religion and its purpose in society.

Unlike the Federalists and most American Protestants, however, Paine attacked foundational weaknesses within established Christianity. Paine also argued that given the number of different religions throughout history, it was ridiculous to subscribe to a single doctrine, especially when it came to the governance of a country. "If we go back to time more ancient, we shall again be Infidels, according to the Belief of some other Forefathers." To Federalists, Paine's deism, in which God left mankind to his own devices, was blasphemy, and undermined the purpose and viability of the Protestant religion. In the end, Paine's beliefs about religious freedom and not his views about God became the adopted norm in the Unites States. Such a stance by the political Left resulted in a more liberal interpretation of religious freedom in the United States and prevented the establishment of a rigid political and religious relationship like the Anglican Church in England or the Catholic Church in much of Europe. These shared values helped ensure the survival of the United States as it emerged on the world stage after its own turbulent revolution.

The Rejection of Paine and a New America

The political divisions that emerged between Federalists and Republicans—and the different visions they offered of the American political identity—did not represent a newly divisive political environment. Although some liked to imagine a time in the American past when they had enjoyed unity and unanimity, those fantasies contrasted with the events of the American Revolution. The

[82] "From the National Intelligencer . . ."
[83] "Mr. Thomas Paine. To Samuel Adams," *Lancaster Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), February 8, 1803, 2.

War for Independence was by no means a majority affair. Patriots and Loyalist Americans frequently came into conflict as the two sides disagreed about the future of the colonies. As Alan Gilbert has explained, "In a war within a war, patriots murdered Tories, and Tories, led by William Franklin and Captain Tye, retaliated. A cycle of unnecessary death and terror marked the Patriot and Tory clash. It helped create an atmosphere in which many Tories had to flee," Tories that included large numbers of African Americans.[84] While this should not be surprising given the nature of war and widely held beliefs about race during the period, it does conflict with the views put forward by some American newspapers during the early republic. The violence between patriots and those loyal to the crown closely resembled the societal chaos of the French Revolution. American newspapers proved unwilling to see inconvenient similarities between themselves and France.

In order to fully understand the French Revolution, the United States needed to come to terms with the failings of its own movement. Newspapers were not willing to contemplate such a move. Only one way remained, if reality did not reflect kindly on the United States, a new history needed to be created. American exceptionalism would characterize the new narrative regarding the Age of Revolutions.

But the newspapers found one way to foster unity among their readers: in a full-throated opposition to Thomas Paine and the corruptions of the French Revolution that they associated with his mode of thinking. Paine himself helped them when in 1802 he began publishing a series of letters to the citizens of the United States. The letters comprised both a defense of Paine's actions as well as harsh criticism for the Federalists.

> But a faction, acting in disguise, was rising in America they had lost sight of first principles. They were beginning to contemplate government as a profitable

[84] Alan Gilbert, Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013).

> monopoly, and the people as hereditary property. It is, therefore, no wonder that the *Rights of Man* was attacked by that faction, and its author continually abused. But let them go on, give them rope enough, and they will put an end to their own insignificance. There is too much common sense and independence in America to be long the dupe of any faction, foreign or domestic.[85]

As these passages reveal, Paine letters provide a window into the political divide and attack the monopolistic and aristocratic views of the Federalists. He also comments on the development of the U.S. Constitution, and refers back to his most famous pamphlet from 1776 when he claimed that "there is too much common sense and independence in America" to fall for such misrepresentations that led away from the true "rights of man." Above all, he tried to persuade readers that the Federalists had unleashed a campaign to abort the progress of liberty.

Paine's letters focused on a turbulent time in the history of the U.S. government. In 1798, the Adams administration passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, which created four new laws governing free speech and citizenship.[86] The laws reflected the culmination of tensions with the French Government. Although they had been allies during the American Revolution, the United States had neglected to intervene during the early years of the French Revolution, and by the mid-1790s found itself in an undeclared, naval war with France. The conflict stemmed from the Jay Treaty of 1794, which had established new commercial relations between the United States and Great Britain. In the eyes of the French, the treaty violated American neutrality and illustrated favoritism toward their rival. In 1797, the United States dispatched three Ambassadors to France to negotiate better relations between the two countries. The American diplomats were denied access unless

[85] From the National Intelligencer. Thomas Paine, "To the citizens of the United States, Letter First," *Weekly Franklin Repository* (Chambersburg, PA), December 01, 1802, 2.

[86] The Alien and Sedition Acts comprised four laws governing freedom of speech and immigration. The Naturalization Act forced immigrants to wait fourteen years for citizenship and the right to vote. The Sedition Act prohibited U.S. Citizens from criticizing the U.S. Government using false information. The Aliens Enemy Act gave the U.S. Government the power to deport people from countries at war with the United States and the Alien Friends Act allowed the government to deport people who it deemed to be dangerous.

they paid a bribe and approved a large loan to the French government. The incident, known to history as the XYZ Affair, angered the Adam's administration, and Congress refused to accept the French demands. From 1798 to 1800, in what became known as the Quasi War, the United States and France engaged in war on the high seas. As a result, the U.S. government raised additional taxes in order to field a national army against a potential French invasion. The Alien and Sedition Acts illustrated the lengths to which the U.S. government would go to in order to defend itself from enemies abroad as well as critics within its own borders.

To staunch democrats like Paine, the Alien and Sedition Acts represented a betrayal of the principles established by the new national government. In defiance of the first ten amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the new laws granted the executive branch unprecedented national authority. In a letter widely circulated in American newspapers, Paine declared, "To them it served as a cloak for treason, a mask for tyranny. Scarcely were they placed in the seat of power and office, than [sic] federalism was to be destroyed, and the representative system of government . . . was to be overthrown and abolished."[87] He called the Federalists the "Terrorists of the new World" and "The same Banditti" for the fear they spread and the money they took from trusting, patriotic Americans. Adding insult to injury, President Adams reinstated George Washington as commander in chief to lead the national army in case of French invasion. According to Paine, here was yet another Federalist party member usurping the will of the American people by acquiring power in the name of safety. "I have reason to believe and a right to say, that the Leaders of the Reign of Terror in America, and the Leaders of the Reign of Terror in France, during the time of Robespierre, were in character the same sort of men; or how is it to be accounted for, that I was persecuted by both at the same time."[88] Paine's comparison made sense. The self-proclaimed

[87] Paine, "To the Citizens of the United States, Letter the Third."
[88] Paine, "To the Citizens of the United States, Letter the Third."

Committee of Public Safety sent thousands to their deaths without trial in the name of national security. The Alien and Sedition Acts granted similar powers to the U.S. government. What was to prevent the Adams' administration from indulging in the bloody excesses occurring in France? To Paine and others like him, it was only a matter of time before the American people were stripped of their freedoms.

In 1802, newly returned to the United States at the invitation of President Thomas Jefferson, Paine held nothing back in his indictment of Federalist newspapers and their political leadership. According to these newspapers, the feeling was mutual. Paine described the relationship. "I am become so famous among them, they cannot eat or drink without me. I serve them as a standing dish; and they cannot make up a bill of fare, if I am not in it."[89] Like many others on both continents, Paine believed the French Revolution resulted from the revolution in America. "The French Revolution was beginning to germinate when I arrived in France. The principles of it were good, they were copied from America, and the men who conducted it were honest. But the fury of faction soon extinguished the one and sent the other to the scaffold." Unfortunately, the divisive factionalism in France had found a home in America. "But, in the midst of the freedom we enjoy, the licentiousness of the papers called federal (and I know not why they are called so, for they are in their principles anti-federal and despotic) are a dishonor to the character of the country."[90] Paine believed the Federalists had usurped the American spirit of independence by creating a corrupt and power hungry national government which used the failings of the French Revolution to justify the accumulation of power.

[89] Paine, "To the Citizens of the United States, Letter the Third."
[90] "From the Aurora. Thomas Paine, To the Citizens of the United States. Letter the First," *Evening Post* (New York, New York), December 02, 1802, 2.

And yet, Paine wished to make a distinction between a federalist form of government and the one created by George Washington and John Adams. In his second letter to the people of the United States, Paine briefly recounted the history of America as it attempted to unify itself. According to Paine, he had been a key figure in imagining the creation of the new government. "For the proposition for establishing a general government over the Union came originally from me in 1783." This included a strong legislative branch elected by the states. Paine believed the legislative branch could check the power of the executive branch and prevent it from descending into tyranny. The key to the functioning of this new government was the "quiet and rational process by which the constitution was first formed." In the opinion of Paine, this optimistic start became distorted by the rise of the Federalist faction. "Apostacy stalked through the land in the garb of patriotism, and the torch of treason blinded for a while the flame of liberty." To Paine, the Federalist party disregarded average Americans, "Who pay no regard to the clamors of anonymous scribblers, who think for themselves, and judge of government, not by the fury of newspaper writers, but by the prudent frugality of its measures."[91] Not only did the Federalists represent a coalition of the elite, it contradicted the representative institutions of the United States Constitution.

Paine identified John Adams and George Washington as the leaders of this corrupt, Federalist movement. He described Adams' political career as hypocritical, arrogant, and ultimately a failure. As for Washington, Paine portrayed him as a blundering general with a problematic personality. "But it was always known of Washington . . . that he was of such an icy and death-like constitution, that he neither loved his friends, nor hated his enemies."[92] According to Paine, both men had

[91] "Letter the Second."

[92] Thomas Paine, To the Citizens of the United States. Letter the Third, "*Lancaster Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), December 14, 1802, 1.

attempted to increase the power of the executive branch to a dangerous extent. "John Adams talked of making government hereditary, and that as Mr. Washington had no children, it should be made hereditary in the family of Lund Washington."[93] This push for power manifested in the collections of new taxes to raise an army to enforce the mandates of the executive office. Although the Adams administration had defended those taxes as the means to defend the country against a potential invasion by France, Paine believed the actions indicative of more sinister intentions. "The danger of invasion was a bubble that served as a cover to raise taxes and armies."[94] Paine's concerns about the new, powerful American government were not new or unique. As Bernard Bailyn has so eloquently pointed out, this debate over political power was hardly new at the turn of the century; it had pervaded the early revolutionary discussions and dominated the Constitutional Convention as delegates strove to make revolutionary principles meet pragmatic political requirements.[95] Paine's challenge to the establishment helped temper Federalist ambitions and paved the way for more moderate political voices.

Paine's challenges to the Federalist establishment may have complained about partisan politics, but his advocacy of political radicalism and deism also helped to ensure that those partisan divides remain so significant in the early United States. Perhaps in part because he had been so vital to the American Revolution, his strident engagement with the French Revolution further enhanced a political divide by the early nineteenth century. American newspapers, divided along party lines, enhanced those divisions. In reprinting his letters, they encouraged their readers to reject Paine's

[93] "Miscellaneous—From the National Intelligencer. Thomas Paine. To the Citizens of the United States. Letter the Second," *Vermont Journal* (Windsor, VT), December 14, 1802, 1.
[94] "From the National Intelligencer. Thomas Paine. To the Citizens of the United States. Letter the Fourth," *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), January 4, 1803, 4.
[95] Bernard Bailyn, 324-325.

radicalism and anti-Christian views, and to embrace a more cautious vision of a United States united by political moderation and the rejection of firebrands like Paine.

Conclusion

The American and French Revolutions had terrific and unpredictable effects on the rest of the world. In France, the soaring ideals of the Declaration of the Rights of the Man gave way to bloody purges and the rise of tyranny. Its radical social and economic changes also helped to inspire a small island in the West Indies to fight its own revolution, as we shall see in the next chapter. Built upon the principles of revolutionary France, the leaders of this Caribbean revolution against French control both drew on and challenged the ideals of Enlightenment thinkers as they more fully embraced the concepts of liberty and equality. In the end, the French and Haitian revolutions, which exhibited many of the same characteristics and violence, drew sharp criticism from American newspapers. Over time, no matter how enthusiastic they had been about the French Revolution's early years, most newspapers viewed the American War for Independence as distinct from and superior to the excesses of the French Revolution and the dismantling of racial hierarchy in Haiti.

By 1803, despite the fears of both political parties, the United States had not spiraled into chaos due to power hungry Federalist politicians or radical, bloodthirsty Jacobins. Thomas Paine admitted as much in one of his letters to the citizens of the United States. Only a year earlier, the young nation, after a bitter presidential race, peacefully transitioned executive power from John Adams to Thomas Jefferson. At the same time, in France, Napoleon Bonaparte became First Consul for life. These disparate outcomes contradicted the early optimism expressed by American newspapers as news of the French Revolution reached its shores. Americans' perceptions of the French Revolution underwent drastic changes as newspapers compared it the American

Revolution, constructed similar narratives about its leadership, began distancing itself from the ever increasing violence, and finally articulated reasons for why it had failed to live up to expectations. The French Revolution created an unexpected challenge to American political institutions. It forced Americans to reevaluate the mechanisms that governed the nation. The French Revolution also highlighted the delicate nature of revolution. While American newspapers went to great lengths to justify why the United States avoided the mistakes of France, the heated debates conducted by politicians illustrated the ongoing formation of the United States. It showed the existence of two distinct political parties with differing views on religion and politics. Although politicians on both side of the aisle may not have wanted to admit it, the key to societal and political stability in the United States seemed to exist in the balance of power between these two competing forces. As France's revolution turned toward a Reign of Terror, the conservative right in the United States responded by also amassing power and usurping the rights of ordinary citizens. Paine's criticism along with others, helped to establish a balance of political power in the United States. While Paine harbored harsh criticisms for the Federalist factions, he ultimately returned to a country that unlike Britain or France had not attempted to imprison of execute him. The French Revolution proved that the American experiment, while far from living up to all its standards, could avoid many of the dangers of revolution.

Thomas Paine embodied all the major tensions of the French Revolution, and many American newspapers tied him to the religious, societal, and political turmoil in France. His life also illustrated the inherent and ongoing danger of the Revolutionary Era. Words could propel a man to fame and glory, and quickly bring him to ruin. As Paine lived out his final years in New York City, a penniless and friendless man, the policies he had advanced continued to shape American political discourse as the two parties battled for power to realize their visions for the nation's

future. American newspapers were strategically placed to continue this war of words. Paine's letters in local and national newspapers created a dialogue about the American Revolution that continued as other revolutions took their turn on the world stage.

While revolutionaries were able to articulate the rights of men, societies across the western hemisphere had a harder time translating these values into viable political institutions. Nevertheless, the spirit of revolution would survive and influence the dialogue of American newspapers.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of newspapers to the change unfolding in the Western world during the Revolutionary era. Even as they turned Paine into a pariah and opponent of all that Christians held dear, newspapers used his words and his condemnation of Federalists to articulate warnings to their readerships about the dangers of what they framed as immoderate political action and extreme religious views. Newspapers lumped Paine in with the excesses of the French Revolution and, in so doing, helped to cement in many readers' minds the seeming importance of more cautious developments by the United States.

As the next chapter reveals, the French Revolution was not the only revolution taking place during the 1790s. A rebellion of formerly enslaved people in the Caribbean provided an opportunity for newspapers to further define American exceptionalism. Yet again, a revolutionary leader emerged to fascinate the press. His unique journey from enslaved, to enslaver, to dictator maintained a dialogue about race and slavery on the pages of American newspapers. His name was Toussaint Louverture.

Chapter Two

From Slave to Dictator: The American Newspaper Portrayal of Toussaint Louverture

In 1791, the *Gazette of the United States* published a letter from the provincial assembly of the Caribbean island of Saint—Domingue, a French province, to King Louis XVI of France. Its members requested that their sovereign repeal the newly minted decree that free colored people were eligible to become members of the assembly. They warned, "The misfortunes that will follow its promulgation are unaccountable; they will be such as will draw after them the total annihilation of this flourishing colony."[96] The assembly feared a society without strict boundaries between the races and white political control. In other words, the radical implications of revolution in France analyzed in Chapter 1 had led to a reckoning with the problem of racial inequality and slavery in the French empire. Not long after the all-white assembly sent this letter, revolution would break out on the island by its people of African descent to overthrow the French regime, leading to the renaming of the island and what would come to be called the Haitian Revolution.

More than a decade later, another newspaper, the *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser* said the Haitian Revolution was "not perhaps generally considered or foreseen," despite the island's demographics that, like other sugar-producing islands in the Caribbean, reveal a comparatively tiny white population. Indeed, the *Mirror* had recently printed a 1787 census that showed that whites made up only about 8 percent of the population, with 1,236 whites, 14,967 (enslaved) blacks, and 445 mulattoes and free negroes.[97] While the number of enslaved people was closer to 500,000, the census still reflects a sizable difference in the number of free to enslaved

[96] "A Letter from the Provincial Assembly of the North of St. Domingo, to the King of the French," *Gazette of the United States* (New York, NY), August 24, 1791, 1.
[97] "The Peace Establishment of France. . .", *Mirror of the Times and General Advertiser* (Wilmington, Del.), February 25, 1804, 3.

people on the island. This would play a significant role in the eventual overthrow of white, French leadership on the island. The prosperous slave colony of Saint-Domingue, the crown jewel of French colonization in the West Indies, erupted into a bloody, thirteen-year revolution in 1791. Enslaved Africans led by men like Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines accomplished the first successful slave rebellion in human history.[98] Saint-Domingue became the nation of Haiti, and its new leaders transformed it from a society based on exploitation into one based on freedom. Not surprisingly, United States newspapers covered the revolution from start to finish. This coverage provides a glimpse into the fascinating story of race and slavery in the United States, as newspapers wrestled with the specter of slave uprisings in their own nation. This chapter focuses on the extensive coverage by American newspapers of the latter half of the Haitian Revolution, especially as it pertained to Toussaint Louverture.

The thirteen—year conflict saw invading armies from Spain, Britain, and France as European powers fought to gain control of the valuable sugar colony. Armies of formerly enslaved men combated each threat using innovative tactics, and were led by capable leaders as the former French colony marched determinably toward independence. Along the way, it also contended with conflicts from within as different factions battled for control and the realization of revolutionary goals. Despite some setbacks, by 1804, Saint Domingue became Haiti, named after the indigenous people of the island.

Newspapers comprise an invaluable source of information for understanding American responses to the Haitian Revolution. The printing presses of the eighteenth and nineteenth

[98] Philippe Girard, *The Slaves Who Defeated Napoleon: Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian War of Independence, 1801-1804* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2011), 8-9. Dessalines was second in command to Louverture and had fought for the French, rebels, and Spain during his military career. After the arrest of Louverture, he assumed dictatorial powers in 1804, but was killed during a mulatto uprising a year later. Girard notes that "his complex trajectory was far from unusual."

centuries revealed, disseminated, and sought to shape the views and opinions of their constituents. The articles in these periodicals at least in part reveal the mindset of members of the public as they sought to make sense of the events in the West Indies. Newspapers reveal information fundamental to understanding race, slavery, shared values, and the realities of the Revolutionary era. They hold a key to understanding the official American response to the Haitian Revolution and the extent to which Americans saw in the Haitian example a hint of where their own system of race-based slavery might lead. In addition, their portrayal of the Haitian Revolution and Toussaint Louverture, the Revolution's key leader, demonstrated an American exceptionalism intent on constructing narratives that sought to resolve American anxieties and appease different U.S. factions.

In contrast to previous scholarship, my research focuses on previously unused newspaper portrayals of Toussaint Louverture, particularly from Vermont and North Carolina. His depiction sheds light on the complex sets of values held by the newspapers and their readers, and illustrates vividly their ambivalence about him. No Haitian figure captivated American reading audiences more than Louverture. His early life, military triumphs, and tragic end filled the pages of newspapers across America. Closely examining these depictions illustrates the public's beliefs about marriage, slavery, class, economics, and racial hierarchy. In these papers, Louverture became a nexus for how Americans sought to understand their own nation's own path during the Revolutionary era. The newspapers that covered his life provide a unique window into nineteenth-century America. They reveal the complexities and contradictions of a nation struggling with the unresolved issues of the modern world. The American newspaper fixation with Louverture reveals their willingness to believe that a black man had the capacity to defy what many Americans considered to be cultural and societal norms. While partisan and regional differences between papers existed, their racial narratives often aligned. Studying newspaper views of Louverture as a

leader and a visionary also offers a different perspective than more general treatments of slavery per se. The accessibility and variety of these newspapers enable a distinctive perspective on race and its effects on American society. The following pages will mine these invaluable resources to understand the portrayal of race and its existence through the lens of the Haitian Revolution.

The Newspapers

American newspapers revealed complex and sometimes contradictory views of race and slavery. *The National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser* (D.C.) illustrated this point in a piece on Louverture. The newspaper noted that a weaker man than Louverture might "hate and persecute the whites; but he knows well that the island cannot flourish without them; that they are necessary for cultivation and good government."[99] While this statement almost entirely misrepresented Louverture's views, it bears striking resemblance to a quote made by another man just two years earlier. The *Gazette of the United States and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* reported that Congressman Albert Gallatin, in a debate about the state of formerly enslaved people in Saint-Domingue argued, "Men who, if left to themselves . . . if altogether independent, are by no means likely to apply themselves to the peaceable cultivation of the country." Additionally, Gallatin said, "No man . . . wishes more than I do to see an abolition of slavery . . . but no man would be more unwilling than I to constitute a whole nation of freed slaves, who had arrived to the age of 30 years, and thus to throw so many wild tigers on society."[100] Louverture would make a series of moves that American newspapers would interpret as repudiation of his earlier revolutionary idealism. His reinstatement of white administrators on plantations, strict labor laws, and assumption of dictatorial power mimicked the concerns of Gallatin. Those newspapers would effectively draw

[99] "Character of Toussaint Louverture," *National Intelligencer and Washington Advertiser* (Washington D.C.), August 17, 1801, 3.
[100] "Congress House of Representatives: Suspension of Intercourse with France." *Gazette of the United States and the Philadelphia Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), February 19, 1799, 2.

lines between these wo men, one a formerly enslaved black revolutionary and a white Democratic-Republican Congressman from Pennsylvania, implying that they sometimes shared common ground on the issue of slavery and good governance of the island nation. These overlapping viewpoints provide crucial insight into the abolition movement during the Revolutionary era. Men in leadership positions could continue to place limitations on emancipation. This consensus demonstrated the ceiling of progressive ideology during the period.

Perhaps the most obvious lesson learned from researching American newspapers involves the differences between the North and South with regard to their views of slavery. And yet, as we shall see, papers shared some values when it came to the Haitian Revolution. Both expressed concern with the impact of the Haitian Revolution on two major issues. The first involved the atrocities committed during the conflict particularly against the white residents of the island. In dramatic language, the *Wilmington Gazette* (VT) proclaimed, "The rude and barbarous ages of antiquity, when civilization and humanity were strangers to the world, have not produced such direful events as this country [Haiti] has unhappily witnessed."[101] The *Green Mountain Patriot* (VT) made reference to "Scenes of massacre and destruction."[102] *The Enquirer*, a Richmond, Virginia newspaper, mentioned a massacre committed by the forces of General Dessalines (one of Louverture's colleagues), "We are assured that from the beginning to the end of the hellish work, the most unparalleled cruelties were inflicted on the whites . . . men, women, and children were hacked down with swords and plunged with bayonets."[103] The American public had good reason to fear the insurrection to the south, for it evoked their own ongoing anxieties about the rebellion of enslaved people in the United States. Newspapers portrayed scenes of horror that reinforced

[101] "A short account of the present state of affairs in St. Domingo," *Wilmington Gazette* (Wilmington, N.C.), December 25, 1804, 3.
[102] "Domestic Intelligence: From the West Indies," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), March 31, 1802, 3.
[103] "Massacre of all the Whites at St. Domingo." *Enquirer* (Richmond, VA), June 13, 1804, 1.

for white Americans the fragility of the social structure of racial slavery. For some it justified American policies regarding enslaved Africans and the buttressing of the institution of slavery, while for others it indicated the need for gradual abolition, a form of emancipation currently underway in a number of northern states.

The second concern shared by American newspapers was the economic impact of the revolution. In particular, papers in the South worried the insurrection might destabilize their plantation-based economy. If black people in Saint-Domingue could successively overthrow their enslavers, so could enslaved blacks in the American South. Historian Ashli White extends these similarities, "Both were slave societies, both had contentious relationships to their respective metropoles, and both saw the rise of colonial elites."[104] A synchronized slave rebellion had the potential of destabilizing parts of the South. *The Enquirer* revealed one of the main fears held by white enslavers. It noted, "We learn with pleasure that no fears can arise with respect to any danger of our possessions in the West Indies, should the new government of Saint-Domingue prove hostile to us." The *Green Mountain Patriot* of Vermont published a letter from Norfolk that exclaimed, "It is impossible to prevent the fugitives from the French islands, creeping into our plantations; and secretly sowing the seeds of rebellion and pillage."[105] This clearly indicates the concern for the potential loss of material possessions.

Slave owners feared the impact of the Haitian Revolution on slavery in the United States for economic as well as racial reasons. In 1800, the *Weekly Raleigh Register* published a debate in the U.S. Senate over funds for a federal army in the South. Because of the turmoil in the Caribbean as well as the potential aggression of Napoleon Bonaparte in the area, the United States discussed

[104] Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2010), 11.
[105] "A Letter from Norfolk," *Green Mountain Patriot*, June 2, 1802, 3.

the idea of raising a national army to supplement state militias in case of an invasion by the French. The need for the army was later questioned because of a treaty signed with the government of Saint-Domingue. The paper asserted that "We were told of the proximity Saint-Domingue to the Southern parts of America; we were told of the weakness of that part of the country, arising from their black population, and the danger to which they were exposed from an invasion of blacks from Hispaniola."[106] The economic concern felt by Southern leaders originated from the social structure of their rural, plantation communities. The Haitian Revolution was not the first slave rebellion in history, and it could certainly happen in the Southern states where millions of enslaved Africans worked under similar circumstances. Additionally, an army led by the talented Napoleon Bonaparte and comprised of vindictive, formerly enslaved men posed a serious threat—both real and existential—to the southern United States. The success of their revolution in the Caribbean was an important reminder of the interconnectedness of the Atlantic world and the impact revolutions could have on capitalist plantations systems.[107]

As for the threat perceived by Northern states, they appear to have viewed the Haitian Revolution as more of a danger to their trade in the West Indies. They had less to fear from a slave insurrection due to their comparatively small, enslaved population. In fact, Gordon Brown argues that Northern support for the Haitian Revolution "stemmed more from economic than political factors, as it was the highly lucrative commerce with the island." He futher notes that the conflict between the North and South was fundamentally a "clash between the shipping and merchant

[106] "Continuation of the Debate on Mr. Nichols's Proposition: For repealing certain Parts of the Act for raising an additional army," *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), February 18, 1800, 2.

[107] Clavin, Matthew J. *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). The author attempts to make a connection between the events of the Haitian Revolution and the American Civil War. For example, both conflicts were fought over slavery. Additionally, both had largely agricultural economies that specialized in cash crops. Clavin uses primary sources such as newspapers and speeches to show not simply a divided country on the issue of slavery but also systemic America racism. He believes the Haitian Revolution exacerbated the rift that would lead to war between the north and south. Clavin especially sees evidence for this influence during the conflict itself.

interests, largely from the north, and the slaveholding interests in the South, and it was an exemplar of the fundamental North-South divide that characterized the nation's politics at the time."[108] Both Northern and Southern newspapers provide countless examples of concern for trade. In times of peace, American merchants filled their vessels with the coffee and sugar grown on the plantations of Saint-Domingue. The economies of the United States and the former island colony were intimately connected.

Nevertheless, Carol Sue Humphrey in *The Revolutionary Era: Primary Documents on Events from 1776 to 1800*, points out the varied response to the conflict. "Americans were in a quandary because they did not know what to do concerning this revolution in the Caribbean."[109] Newspapers reflected a more multifaceted perspective of the Haitian Revolution. While Southern papers may have been more likely to point to the chaos and violence of the insurrection and more skeptical of a republic administered by people of African descent, they still printed relevant news regardless of whether it cast the revolution in a positive light. For example, the *Wilmington Gazette* (NC) published an overview of the Haitian Revolution in 1804 that blamed the former slaves and the French equally for the atrocities committed during the event. The paper stated that Africans of the island "committed depredations upon the property of the planters, and murdered numbers of them."[110] As for the French, the *Gazette* asserted, "They exercised such an unexampled tyranny and diabolical cruelty as to insure them universal detestation." Even Vermont's *Green Mountain Patriot*, which could otherwise often express support for Toussaint Louverture and the Haitian Revolution, would refer to the island's Black people by saying, "Their very natures are savage,"

[108] Brown, *Toussaint's Clause*, 6.
[109] Carol Sue Humphrey, *The Revolutionary Era: Primary Documents on Events From 1776 to 1800: Primary Documents on Events From 1776 to 1800*, Debating Historical Issues in the Media of the Time. (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2003), Chapter 14; 221.
[110] "A short account of the present state of affairs in St. Domingo," *Wilmington Gazette* (NC), December 25, 1804, 3.

and describe the movement's new armies engaged in a "dance of death."[111] As these examples reveal, newspaper reports both North and South could engage in fearmongering about newly freed people of African descent, but they could also point out the problems of French governance.

It is unsurprising to find that American newspapers used florid language to draw racial distinctions between leaders during the Haitian Revolution. A clear difference exists between the vocabulary used for African and white leaders during the conflict. For example, the *Aurora General Advertiser* of Philadelphia wrote about General Dessalines, "But few persons have learned the train of uninterrupted crimes and atrocities of this African, whose ferocity is at least equal to, if it does not surpass, that of tigers." The papers also called him "this barbarian" and described his actions as "so well worthy of such a cannibal." They noted, "he caused these three hundred victims to be massacred, and their heads fixed on the spikes which surrounded . . . the habitation of the chief."[112] The *Weekly Raleigh Register* described the "ignorance and superstition in the great body of the . . . descendants of Africa."[113] Additionally, the *Green Mountain Patriot* published a letter from Norfolk which says of Africans, "their very natures are savage."[114] This language ascribed inferior and animalistic qualities to the African race, continually drawing attention to their alleged extreme violence and barbarism.

In contrast, this vocabulary remained mostly absent from descriptions of French General Charles Leclerc and General Donatien Rochambeau, two of the Frenchman who had committed atrocities while attempting to reclaim Saint-Domingue for France and who would receive withering treatments by later scholars. Indeed, historian Phillipe Girard lists some of their crimes

[111] "St. Domingo," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), March 13, 1804, 3.
[112] "From a Late French Paper: The Emperor of Hayti," *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia, PA), July 24, 1805, 2.
[113] "The transactions . . .," *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), August 25, 1801, 3.
[114] "A Letter from Norfolk," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, Vt), June 02, 1802, 3.

as "gassing prisoners to employing man-hunting dogs."[115] Rochambeau delighted in using a variety of execution methods such as drowning, crucifying, burning, and hanging. He even created catch phrases for the different forms of execution.[116] Nor were American newspapers unaware of Rochambeau's reputation and the atrocities committed by French forces. The *Rutland County Herald* asserted that Rochambeau had garnered the hatred of Africans for "thousands drowned on board vessels or hunted to death by bloodhounds."[117] The *Charleston Daily Courier* republished an article that describes Rochambeau as having "the little mind of a vain man" and being a "fashionable patriot."[118] Yet, these portrayals stand in a sharp contrast to the use of derogatory language for leaders and soldiers of African descent and descriptions of white French officers. This speaks to the racial hierarchy that newspapers sought to maintain, and illustrates their willingness to employ caricatures to influence their readers. For many newspapers, Africans more closely resembled the beasts of the field than the more "civilized" whites, and to enhance that perception, papers deployed language in pointed ways to confirm those assumptions. This was an important narrative when trying to construct distinctions between revolutions.

The Man

Born around 1743 on the island of Saint-Domingue, Toussaint Louverture was enslaved by the wealthy Count Henry III of Nassau-Bréda. He appears to have been gifted with horses and worked in the stables. Historians are divided on the extent of his education. Charles Forsdick and Christian Hogsbjerg believe Louverture may have been educated by Jesuit or Dominican monks. He knew how to read but his knowledge of French was limited. They also suggest that secretaries produced

[115] Girard, *The Slaves*, 223.
[116] Girard, *The Slaves*, 234-235.
[117] "St. Domingo," *Rutland County Herald* (Rutland, VT), January 7, 1804, 3.
[118] "From a Glasgow Paper: General Rochambeau," *Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), April 30, 1804, 2.

much of his later correspondence.[119] In 1776, he gained his freedom and managed a small plantation with enslaved people of his own. Yet if his background might have suggested an increasing social distance from the thousands of enslaved people on the island, by 1793, Louverture had undertaken a leadership role in directing an army of formerly enslaved men and had acquired a reputation as a brilliant general in the quest for black freedom. Possessed of many talents, Louverture was the perfect man to help lead the uprising. In 1801, he became the Governor of Saint-Domingue and helped create a new constitution. The new government made him ruler for life, banned slavery, and made discrimination based on race illegal. First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte vacillated over whether to allow Louverture to maintain power in the former French colony. He eventually sent a French invasion fleet to take back control of the island. The French arrested Louverture on charges of treason in 1802. Bonaparte viewed the new constitution as a usurpation of French authority over the colony of Saint- Domingue. Louverture was sent to Fort de Joux in France, a castle used as a prison, where he died shortly afterward in 1803. His commitment to the emancipation of his fellow countryman while attempting to negotiate with the French over the racial status quo continues to intrigue historians seeking to understand race relations and the struggles to end slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Age of Revolutions. His portrayal by American newspapers illuminates not just the complexity of his legend at the time, but also how his career offered a mirror to Americans seeking to understand the legacy of their own revolution.

The "Good Slave"

Focusing on newspaper representations of Toussaint Louverture offers a unique window into a transformative moment in American thinking about slavery and the legacy of the American

[119] Charles Forsdick and Christian Hogsbjerg, *Toussaint Louverture: A Black Jacobin in the Age of Revolutions* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 21.

Revolution. American newspapers rarely devoted space to the personal stories of black Haitians, but Louverture became an exception. The Haitian Revolution was not simply a conflict between formerly enslaved peoples and their French enslavers. The thirteen-year upheaval in Saint-Domingue drew other European countries fantasizing about gaining possession of the valuable sugar colony. Against all odds, armies comprised of formerly enslaved men defeated western superpowers on the way to national independence.

Yet in portraying Louverture, many American newspapers portrayed him as a complex figure who could also be friendly and accommodating to the island's former enslavers. Such portrayals seemed to characterize him as a man who felt a debt of obligation to at least some white men—almost a caricature of a "good slave." In 1798, as the British became one of several countries to attempt and fail to capture the precious colony of Saint-Domingue, General Thomas Maitland in charge of British forces negotiated with Louverture for the withdrawal of his troops from the island. In what must have been a surprising request, Louverture asked a favor of Maitland: he asked that Bayon de Libertat, his former enslaver, be sent to him. In a widely circulated biographical sketch, the *Vergennes Gazette* (VT) explained that "Toussaint restored his master to his estates, [sic] and gave him negroes for their cultivation. He behaved in the most affectionate and kind manner to him who had truly been his father." The same article recounted General Maitland asking Louverture to reinstate the plantations of twelve additional leading white property owners in a similar manner. He agreed, and when the planters arrived, Louverture "embraced them, and reconciled his followers. He restored them to their estates, and gave them negroes as servants."[120] Given its preoccupation with property, disregard of racial inequality, and the subordinate role of slave to master, the story would seem to fit into the stereotypical newspaper of

[120] "Character of the Celebrated black general, Toussaint Louverture," *Vergennes Gazette* (Vergennes, VT), September 17, 1801, 4.

a Southern slave-holding state. Instead, the story's appearance in Vergennes, Vermont, and newspapers all over the country attests to the shared values held by Americans. Revealing a similar perspective, North Carolina's *Wilmington Gazette* noted, "Toussaint, lived in peace and harmony with the white inhabitants, who now enjoyed as great privileges as they had done [under] the French government"[121] According to American newspapers, Louverture became a figure worthy of praise despite his racial class for his respect of property, the need for slavery, and his acceptance of the racial hierarchy. Regional newspapers exhibited a consistent interest in the man who compared so favorably to their own revolution.

The "good slave" narrative contrasts a bit with Phillipe Girard's more factual account of the reunion. He points out that Louverture did not hug his former master.[122] He cites the *La Révolution de Haiti* written by French General Joseph-Francois-Pamphile Lacroix, which explained that Louverture had told Libertat, "There is today more between you and me than there was in the past between me and you."[123] Sent to Saint-Domingue in 1802, General Lacroix had been tasked by the French government with returning the island to French authority. While it remains unclear how Lacroix acquired this information, the story may illustrate the disconnect between the historical narrative and the one created by newspapers. Recounted by newspapers in Vermont and North Carolina, the story attests to the widespread appeal of the "good slave" narrative to American readers. This depiction of Louverture raises the question of motive on the part of American newspapers. Presenting Louverture as easily reconcilable with continued slavery eased the fears of slave owners, justified the plantation system, and aligned the insurrection with American values. Louverture's actual relationship with slavery was likely more contentious.

[121] "A short account of the present state of affairs in St. Domingo," *Wilmington Gazette* (NC), December 25, 1804, 3.
[122] Girard, *The Slaves*, 25.
[123] Joseph-Francois-Pamphile Lacroix, *La révolution de Haiti*, 240, quoted in Girard, *The Slaves*, 25.

Newspaper portrayals of other Haitian leaders who came to power after Louverture demonstrated similar sentiments regarding class and race. In a proclamation published by the *Wilmington Gazette*, Jean Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, and Augustin Clerveaux announced, "O! Landlords of St. Domingo, wandering in foreign countries, by proclaiming our independence, we do not intend to forbid you indiscriminately from returning to your property, far be from us this unjust idea." While they echo the same message of reconciliation, their proclamation came with a warning absent from Louverture's plantation policy. To those evil property owners who "affect to believe that they are destined to be our masters and our tyrants, let them never come near the island of St. Domingo."[124] For American newspapers that sought to maintain a part of the plantation system, Louverture and his successors represented convincing arguments for their case.

American newspapers that had expressed fears about the formation of a black republic in Haiti may have felt justified by events taking place in 1801 and afterward. On December 14, 1801, the *Weekly Raleigh Register* published a letter about a massacre in Saint-Domingue. The writer of the letter speculated that perhaps between four and five hundred people had died in what became known as the Moyse uprising. "Scarcely a white or mulatto, man, woman or child escaped the bloody carnage."[125] Additionally, "All the beautiful and productive estates in the Quartier Morin were destroyed," the *Vermont Journal* explained.[126] The killings had resulted from competition between Louverture and his adopted nephew General Moyse. Phillippe Girard notes, "Contrary to many officer feuds, the Moyse uprising was not merely a dispute over territory and spoils, but a

[124] "Proclamation of Dessalines, Christophe, and Clerveaux, Chiefs of St. Domingo. In the name of the Black People and Men of Colour of St. Domingo," *Wilmington Gazette* (Wilmington, NC), January 31, 1804, 1.
[125] "A Letter from Cape Francois, dated October 30," *Weekly Raleigh Register* December 15, 1801, 3.
[126] "Massachusetts, Boston, October 19. Extract of a letter from Capefrancois [sic], dated October 9, 1791. *The Vermont Journal* (Windsor, VT), November 01, 1791, 2.

true ideological struggle over the meaning of the Haitian Revolution." Louverture's protection of the plantation system created enemies who viewed the conflict as an opportunity to remake Haitian society.[127] Louverture and his generals put down the rebellion. They arrested Moyse, placed him on trial for treason, and sent him to the firing squad. The incident proved Louverture's willingness to allow slavery and retain power in St. Domingue.

Nevertheless, the incident, occurring only months after the adoption of the new constitution, illustrated the deep divisions present in Haitian society. According to Girard, the members of the Moyse uprising had reason to fear the continuation of Louverture leadership. Citing Article 17 of the Haitian constitution, he interprets the subtle language to mean that "What Louverture had in mind was no less that the restoration of the Atlantic slave trade." In addition, "Ever since 1799, Louverture has secretly inquired whether the British slave traders would be willing to sell some of their human cargo along the coast of Saint-Domingue."[128] Although rebellion leaders like Moyse may not have known about Louverture's communication with the British, Girard contends that they knew about the "recent overtures to Jamaican slave traders made by Louverture."[129] This portrayal of Louverture contradicts that of many other historians. Nevertheless, Dubois points out that although Louverture did implement strict labor laws, they were intended to keep the island independent by keeping it productive.[130] From the beginning of his time as governor, Louverture understood the need to increase the population of Saint-Domingue, which had declined during the revolution, in order to return the island to its former economic prosperity.[131] While American newspapers may not have been privy to this intelligence, they no doubt understood the strict laws

[127] Girard, *The Slaves*, 77.
[128] Girard, *The Slaves*, 17.
[129] Girard, *The Slaves*, 77.
[130] Laurent, *Avengers*, 239.
[131] Girard, *The Slaves*, 17.

placed on "free" plantation workers since the early 1790s. Louverture increased these restrictions by forcing black laborers to work on specific plantations and, to add insult to injury, reduced their pay.[132] Given this information, the "good slave" portrayal of Louverture by newspapers may have reflected much wishful thinking on the part of Americans, but also indicated some of the shifting events in Saint-Domingue. His actions, born of necessity, proved convenient for American newspapers.

General Moyse was not the only person with connections to Louverture. The letter printed by the *North Carolina Journal* also mentioned a specific victim of the Moyse uprising. "Among the killed is general Toussaint's old master."[133] Roughly three years after Louverture had restored his property, Bayon de Libertat, the white, kindhearted plantation manager, died as another white casualty of the rebellion. His death foreshadowed the eventual destruction of the plantation system, an economic and racial structure that could not be saved. Out of the chaos of insurrection, Louverture emerged as a man capable of bridging the gap between black and whites working to preserve the nation's economic strength. The Haitian Revolution created a thirteen-year dialogue about the institution of slavery in the United States. While difficult to measure, this undoubtedly affected the American perception of slavery.

The Letter

> The high situation I fill is not of my own choosing; it has been forced upon me by imperious circumstances. I have not overturned a constitution I had sworn to maintain. I saw this wretched isle a prey to frantic and contending factions. My character, my complexion, gave me some influence with the people who inhabit it, and I was almost by their unanimous voice called to authority. I crushed sedition; I put down rebellion; I restored tranquility, I established order in the place of

[132] Girard, *The Slaves*, 17.

[133] "Extract of letter from a young gentleman at Cape-Francis, dated Oct. 30, to his father in this city," *The North-Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), December 14, 1801, 3.

> anarchy; I gave them peace and I gave them a constitution. Have you Citizen Consul, another or near title to the commanding situation you occupy?[134]

Regional newspapers exhibited a consistent interest in the actions and character of Toussaint Louverture, and particularly the ways he seemed so uniquely positioned between the vast population of people of African descent on the island and the white leaders of France and other neighboring countries. On January 5, 1802, a letter appeared in the *Raleigh Minerva* written by Louverture, then governor of Saint-Domingue, in response to First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte' demand that he submit to French authority. Two months later it was published in the *Charleston Daily Courier*. Almost a month later, the *Weekly Wanderer* (VT) printed a copy of the same letter. Ignoring the rebellion, Bonaparte held that Haiti still belonged to France. In his letter, Louverture defended his actions arguing, "I established for an unfortunate race of beings . . . the only system of rule that was suited to their conditions or capacities."[135] While Louverture admitted that the new Haitian political system left room "for coercion and despotism," he challenged Bonaparte by questioning whether "the constitution of the Republic of France [was] . . . quite free of them?"[136] Rather than offer extensive details or provide additional commentary, editors of each paper deemed the letter important enough to capture the ongoing story of revolution, so they reprinted it in full. Clearly, these newspapers allowed Louverture to speak directly to the American people. He addressed a nation in an era when Africans, especially in the South, usually remained voiceless. His letter functions as a commentary on the larger story of equality and racism.

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[134] "Toussaint Louverture to General Bonaparte, First Consul of the French Republic," *Weekly Wanderer* (Randolph, VT), April 30. 1803, 1.

[135] Louverture wrote several letters to Bonaparte. The First Consul never responded, but instead communicated through intermediary ministers. Bonaparte wrote one letter to Louverture in an attempt to formally ally himself with the revolutionary leader. Bonaparte decided no to send the letter, deciding instead to send an invasion fleet to St. Domingue.

[136] "Toussaint to Bonaparte," *The Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), March 25, 1803, 2.

The printing of Toussaint Louverture's letter in so many American newspapers nevertheless illuminates tangled views about race in American society. As Ashli White notes in *Encountering Revolution*, "Black and white cannot be starkly disaggregated."[137] American newspapers reveal a more complicated picture of race in the United States. No matter how they may have felt about the institution of slavery, the editors of Northern and Southern newspapers praised Louverture for his military prowess and humanity. The *Green Mountain Patriot* defended him as "Not that black villain, hypocrite, and scoundrel which he has been called by the French toadeaters."[138] The *Weekly Raleigh Register* published a biography of him that pointed out his faith, honor, and compassion.[139] Additionally, newspapers from all over the United States published his new Haitian Constitution. Seen through the lens of American media coverage, many in the United States thus appeared to rally behind an individual who had helped lead a slave rebellion. In fact, the seeming universality of these portrayals in newspapers again appears to contradict the regional divide emerging between the North and South. Examining newspapers from both regions demonstrates many commonalities. Throughout the Haitian Revolution, a period comprising thirteen years from 1791 to 1804, both the North and South shared economic concerns, disgust at atrocities, and appreciation of the values exhibited by a leader like Toussaint Louverture. These similarities not only complicate perceptions of race relations but also provide a compelling argument against regional stereotypes.

Indeed, newspapers reveal that many Americans held predictably limited views of black capacity for self-rule. The *Weekly Raleigh Register* pointed out that "Our readers know how the misinterpretation of the principles of liberty and equality desolated St. Domingo. The whites were destroyed, and after them the people of color, the blacks remaining in fact masters of the island."[140]

[137] White, *Encountering the Revolution*, 8.
[138] "Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 28," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), June 23, 1802, 3.
[139] "Some Account of Toussaint Louverture," *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), October 29, 1799, 4.
[140] "Some Account of Toussaint Louverture," *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), October 29, 1799, 4.

Newspapers covered the many atrocities that occurred over the thirteen years of the Haitian Revolution. One event in particular captured the horrified imaginations of Americans. On July 20, 1804, the *Tennessee Gazette and Metro-District Advertiser* published an article dramatically titled, "Massacre of all the Whites at St. Domingo."[141] According to the paper, thousands of white men, women, and children were killed by the black forces under the leadership of General Jean Jacques Dessalines. White Americans no doubt found the event even more alarming when they learned that the property of the slain was requisitioned by Dessaline's forces. The solidarity born of similar racial values could not extend to murder or seizure of property.

Marriage and Slavery

> The most essential mean to improve the morals of men, the ligament which the most strongly binds them to society, is marriage. In the first moments of the revolution, St. Domingo would not have presented to the world, a spectacle of so much unhappiness, of so frightful a dissolution of morals, if the mas [sic] of the inhabitants had been restrained by this powerful check, by those sentiments of order which habits of domestic morality produce in every heart.[142]

Newspapers did not only tout Louverture's alleged respect for property and racial hierarchy. The subject of marriage provides another source of this unlikely praise. In 1802, the *Raleigh Minerva* posted this letter from Louverture to the people of Haiti addressing the value of marriage as a source of stability and morality in society. Marriage had also played a prominent role in the Saint-Domingue Constitution as the ninth article overall and the first recorded article under the heading "Morals." A close inspection of the above text reveals the full extent of Louverture's views of the importance of the institution of marriage, but the wide circulation of his argument in the United States also reflected Americans' own desires to see moderating influences like marriage

[141] "The Massacre of all the whites at St. Domingo," *Tennessee Gazette and Metro-District Advertiser* (Nashville, TN), July 20, 1804, 2.
[142] "Port Republican 6th Brumaire. In the Name of the French colony of St. Domingo. ARRETTE. Toussaint Louverture, Governor of St. Domingo," *The Raleigh Minerva* (Raleigh, NC), January 5, 1802, 3.

bring social stability to the region. And yet, such views seem to contain an anti-slavery message in its emphasis on social unity and its critique of the institution of slavery which so rarely permitted legal and stable marriages among enslaved people. Such a statement would seem to suggest that for Louverture, family values, not race, predicted the harmony of a nation. In the United States, slave codes prohibited the marriage of enslaved African Americans. Thus, the institution of slavery, by denying marriage and by extension secure families, created an unstable environment. So many American newspapers drew attention to this letter of Louverture's because the subject of marriage formed a cornerstone of gradual emancipationist thinking: the concept that whites must "prepare" enslaved people for freedom by teaching them some of the values that, they believed, buttressed stable societies, marriage among them.

The *Green Mountain Patriot* addressed the topic of marriage and societal cohesion in a reprinted article on the benefits of gradual abolition and the end of the slave trade. The paper believed enslavers exacerbated the problems of slavery by neglecting the needs of their enslaved people. The paper wrote, "But the planters saw their advantage in having them 'fresh and fresh' from the general granary, which answered their purpose better than that of encouraging marriage and the education of children, regulations of humanity which must have required great care, attention and expense." Ultimately, the *Green Mountain Patriot* argued for education and more lenient laws regarding things like marriage in order to facilitate the eventual end of slavery. Despite Louverture's negative views about slavery, his arguments about marriage and that of the *Green Mountain Patriot* support the compatibility of marriage and slavery. In the same article by the *Green Mountain Patriot*, the author pointed out the rationale for gradual abolition, a highly popular element of much antislavery thinking of the era, which revealed a highly paternalistic view of enslaved people. The paper asserted, "Freedom must be introduced by soft and gradual means

amongst them; their minds must be cultivated in order to receive the benefits of social rights . . . and . . . to make them useful and industrious citizens."[143] Papers like the *Green Mountain Patriot* aligned with Louverture's beliefs about marriage and abolition and fell within the umbrella of anti-slavery sentiment. Social stability, according to such thinking, remained contingent upon the education of enslaved blacks in the knowledge and values of American society. The *Green Mountain Patriot* reflected the anti-slavery views of many newspapers, but their arguments above illustrate the hypocritical, white centric narrative of the American press.

The move toward gradual abolition was part of a larger push by white abolitionist societies to transition African Americans into American society. Paul Polgar points out, "Abolition society members advocated gradual emancipation coupled with a reform program of uplift based on the tenets of environmentalism—which claimed that people were products of their surroundings."[144] The Haitian Revolution intensified this discussion as many white Americans believed Africans were not ready for emancipation. However, Manisha Sinha notes that many abolitionists applauded the immediate emancipation of the revolution to their south.[145] American society was thus divided between those who were proslavery, antislavery, and others who argued for gradual abolition.

The Haitian Constitution

> Slaves are not permitted in this territory; servitude is forever abolished—All men born here live and die as free men and Frenchmen . . . there exists no other distinctions than that of talents and virtues, and no other superiority than that which the law confers by the exercise of some public office. The law is the same to all, either when it punishes or protects.[146]

[143] "Abolition of the Slave Trade," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), September 4, 1804, 2.
[144] Paul J. Polgar. "To Raise Them to an Equal Participation: Early National Abolitionism, Gradual Emancipation, and the Promise of African Citizenship," *Journal of the Early Republic*, no. 2 (2011): 233.
[145] Manisha Sinha. *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 62.
[146] "The Constitution of the French Colony of St. Domingo," *Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT), September 1, 1801, 1.

On July 8, 1801, the Deputies of the Haitian Central Assembly decreed a new constitution for the nation of Saint-Domingue. The event represented a pivotal moment in the history of the Caribbean island. For many formerly enslaved peoples, it embodied the fulfillment of the high-minded goals set by their revolution. The constitution ended the slavery of the plantation system and made it illegal to discriminate based on the color of a person's skin. Printed in the *Windsor Federal Gazette*, the constitution declared, "There exists no other distinction than that of talents and virtues."[147] Predictably, American newspapers expressed a mixed response to the new government. The *Lancaster Intelligencer* (PA), quoting an article from the *National Intelligencer* stated that the constitution "May be classed among the most extraordinary of the present age."[148] As for the *Weekly Raleigh Register*, it asserted, "But we are among those that question who deny the competency and question the legality of the authorities assumed by the extravagant organization which has been lately set up at Saint-Domingue." Although the article displays uneasiness toward the idea of a black-led government, most of its critique deals with the new constitutional system. It argued that the Saint-Domingue constitution was but "A despotism contrived with so much ingenuity as to afford every facility to the concentration of power, and no check on usurpation, or protection of the rights of the people."[149] Clearly, American newspapers were divided over the rights given to the people in the new Haitian Constitution. It represented many of the fears surrounding the creation of its own political institutions.

American newspapers also exhibit different opinions on Toussaint Louverture's position of power in the new government. The *Weekly Raleigh Register* portrayed the new Haitian government as just another tyrannical institution led by uneducated and immoral Africans. In contrast, the

[147] "The Constitution for the French Colony of St. Domingo," *Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT), September 1, 1801, 1.
[148] "The Declaration of Independence," *Lancaster Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), August 19, 1801, 2.
[149] "The Translations . . ." *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), August 25, 1801, 3.

Windsor Federal Gazette of Vermont said of Louverture, "But Toussaint did not treat as an independent prince, as some of the papers have said."[150] This clearly shows a division amongst Americans who viewed Saint-Domingue's government as either compatible with or antithetical to republicanism. The portrayal of Louverture and the new constitution varied according to the newspapers. In the eyes of some, he appeared the benevolent general as portrayed by his fellow officials. The President of the Saint-Domingue Central Assembly announced in the *Windsor Federal Gazette* that "The proclamation of the general in chief, who has convoked your selectmen together, proves to what a degree he wishes for your welfare . . . he demonstrates the necessity of giving you laws of convenience."[151] In the eyes of others, however, Louverture had become a tyrant similar to Bonaparte. More important than discussing the despotism of Louverture, the coverage of the Saint-Domingue Constitution shows that some Americans viewed the new Saint-Domingue system of government with skepticism. As for Louverture, newspapers portrayed him as either the power-hungry leader or the kind overlord of the people.

American newspapers also went further, questioning some aspects of the government enacted by Toussaint Louverture and his peers. Article 28 of the Haitian constitution established Louverture as the governor and military leader of Saint-Domingue for life, a decision out of keeping with American republican ideals. The Constitution also granted him the right to choose a successor. Under Title III, dealing with religion, Article Eight placed organizational restrictions on Catholic churches—and while American protestants wanted little to do with Catholicism, this constitutional restriction on religion appeared the first step toward the terrifying anti-religious moves made during the French Revolution. Most alarming of all, American newspapers announced

[150] "Character of the Celebrated Black General, Toussaint Louverture," *Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT), August 25, 1801, 2.
[151] "French Colonies. Promulgation of the Colonial Constitution," *Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT), August 18, 1801, 2.

that the new constitution had installed press censorship. Article 39 declared, "He [Louverture] superintends and condemns through his commissioners all writings designed for the press in this island."[152] Not only did Louverture reserve the right to prevent foreign and domestic newspapers from being read in Saint-Domingue, these reports claimed, but all news was subject to an examination of its "moral" value by Louverture; violations could result in criminal charges. For American newspapers already contemptuous of a black led nation, Louverture's assumption of such extraordinary power offered another reason to question whether the nation was truly dedicated to republicanism.

American newspapers reveal the shifting political identity of the United States through their coverage of the Haitian Constitution. The *Weekly Raleigh Register* in its observation on Saint-Domingue's constitution stated, "It is the right of every nation, however small, to will its own independence and the form of its government." Louverture echoed this sentiment in a line repeated in other papers: "Why should it not? The United States of America did the same, and with the assistance of the monarchical France they succeeded."[153] Nevertheless, the *Register* placed qualifiers on nations that should pursue individual liberty. The paper argued that civilization, police, and means should determine suitability. Additionally, the *Register* made a comparison between Louverture and Bonaparte's rise to power. Regarding Bonaparte, it noted, "We shall be willing to trust until a peace shall test his choice between a glorious name and the freedom of his country." This established an important criterion for the formation of a republican government. Its leaders must place power in the hands of the people. Interestingly, the *Register* questioned the "legality of the authorities assumed by the extravagant organization which has lately been set up

[152] "Miscellanies: The Constitution for the French Colony of St. Domingo," *Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT), September 1, 1801, 1.
[153] "Toussaint to Bonaparte," *The Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), March 25, 1803, 2.

at Saint-Domingue."[154] *The North-Carolina Journal* pointed out that "Toussaint only recognized a nominal dependence on France," even though it remained a French colony.[155] Thus, in the eyes of papers like the *Weekly Raleigh* Register, the validity of individual liberty depended upon legality. If true, this represents a far more conservative justification for American Independence. Viewed through this lens, Saint-Domingue's new constitution appeared more like a coup than a revolution because unlike Britain and its American colonies, France had not violated its colonial agreements.

Fifteen years after the Treaty of Paris, the *Register* failed to see the justification for the Haitian Revolution. The paper asserted, "No man who regards human rights or free government, can discover anything to admire,"[156] about the constitution. By failing to acknowledge the rights given to Africans by the Saint-Domingue Constitution, the *Register* illustrated a lack of concern for true equality. Article five of the new constitution stated, "There exists no other distinction than that of talents and virtues . . . the law is the same to all, either when it punishes or protects."[157] This law fits with the lofty ideals espoused by such founding documents as the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. The critique of the Saint-Domingue Constitution by the *Weekly Raleigh Register* provides another example of inconsistency in American views regarding individual freedom, depending on whether the rights of whites or blacks were under discussion.

The combination of violent massacres, arguments for gradual abolition, and constitutional restrictions regarding freedom not only confirmed racial prejudice but also created the means for a growing American exceptionalism. American newspapers helped propagate this movement as

[154] "The transactions . . .," *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), August 25, 1801, 3.
[155] "Of St. Domingo," *North Carolina Journal* (Halifax, NC), December 14, 1801, 2.
[156] "The transactions . . .," *Weekly Raleigh Register* (Raleigh, NC), August 25, 1801, 3.
[157] "The Constitution for the French Colony of St. Domingo," *Windsor Federal Gazette* (Windsor, VT.), September 01. 1801, 1.

readers learned of the alleged failings of other revolutions. While some of these arguments represented honest attempts to establish American identity, they nevertheless resulted in the United States imagining itself as superior to other nations.

Conclusion

The newspapers of Vermont and North Carolina (and other regional papers) reveal the complexity of the American landscape at the turn of the nineteenth century. Their beliefs and values if not their proximity reveal a shared value system. Interestingly, their views often overlap on important issues. Three lessons emerge from the pages of these newspapers. First, the portrayal of Toussaint Louverture varied depending upon the newspaper. To some, he exemplified the promise of gradual abolition and the natural rise of people of great talent. To others, Louverture represented the "good slave" who understood the importance of racial hierarchy. His beliefs and accomplishments allowed him to speak directly to the American people. Louverture's time in the international spotlight helped enable future changes to the racial hierarchy as Americans continued to question societal institutions. Second, while differences existed between newspapers, a similar perspective on race and economics emerges from periodicals throughout the United States. This reveals the commonalities held by diverse Americans across the landscape during the Revolutionary era. Third, the papers reveal an emerging political identity of the United States, which itself had recently claimed its own independence. In their reactions to Haitian independence, American newspapers revealed their own political values. They illustrated a nascent American exceptionalism that depicted itself as an anomaly on the world stage. This provides important insight into past perceptions of American Independence. It also aligns with modern scholarship on American ideology.

The Haitian Revolution added two components to American exceptionalism: race and slavery. They joined politics and religion as focal points of the growing divide between the United States and other revolutions. Toussaint Louverture embodied all of these elements as American newspapers used him to support their larger narrative. As a new series of independence movements took their turn on the world stage, newspapers became more sophisticated in how they developed these issues.

The American newspapers that printed with rapt attention the happenings of the Haitian Revolution and its most capable general, were no less attentive to his fate after being transported in chains to France by troops acting out Bonaparte's order. The *Green Mountain Patriot* noted, "This unfortunate African chief, it is said, is destined to occupy the dungeon of Besanco."[158] Published months after his death, *The Charleston Daily Courier* criticized Bonaparte's treatment of Louverture, stating, "The unfortunate Toussaint Louverture, a man to whose memory posterity will do justice."[159] By imprisoning Louverture, Bonaparte had vanquished another opponent, but the Haitians were not so easily defeated. Within a year, the French, like the Spanish and British before them, sailed back to Europe, defeated by an army of formerly enslaved peoples. The Revolutionary era had come to the West Indies, its high-minded values could not be defeated by European empires determined to take advantage of this sugar producing island. And yet, for all its idealism, the Haitian Revolution as portrayed by American newspapers reflected the limitations of the nineteenth century. The ink published on their pages tells a story of racism, classicism, and slavery firmly imbedded within society. Thankfully, they also reveal the seeds of the greater equality experienced in the twenty-first century. As for Toussaint Louverture, despite falling

[158] "Toussaint," *Green Mountain Patriot* (Peacham, VT), October 13, 1802, 3.
[159] "St. Domingo," *The Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), November 10, 1803, 2.

victim to the portrayals of American newspapers, his short time on the world stage yielded changes to Haiti that eventually affected the world.

Chapter Three

Simón Bolívar: The Transformation from Man to Myth in American Newspapers

By the early 1800's, the Spanish colonies in Latin American had begun to manifest the latest revolutionary movements of the long revolutionary era. Factions in countries like Venezuela, Ecuador, and Colombia rebelled against monarchical control. And in similar fashion to its predecessors, these revolutions exhibited many of the hallmarks of the period. Revolutionary goals mobilized by opportunistic and idealistic men fueled debate in newspapers and conflict on the

battlefield. During the French and Haitian Revolutions, men like Thomas Paine and Toussaint Louverture had garnered their share of coverage on the pages of American newspapers. With those conflicts now receding in the minds of Americans, another leader rose to capture the imaginations of early nineteenth-century Americans: Simón Bolívar. And yet, many Americans began to lose interest in the lofty ideals that had once inspired their appreciation for liberation movements, now that the Revolutionary era extended past the turn of the nineteenth century, American newspapers began to reveal a more pragmatic perspective as they sought to assess the revolutions to the south. While this new perspective sometimes reflected a genuine desire to truly understand those movements, it also illustrated a growing American nationalism that continued to blossom throughout the century and express skepticism about whether people in Latin America could live up to the model that the United States had set in establishing a republic.

This growing sense of nationalism benefited from the War of 1812, which once again pitted the United States and Great Britain. Donald R. Hickey notes that the conflict is "often called 'America's second war of independence.'"[160] While he admits the simplicity of this argument, the war undoubtedly effected the growth of American exceptionalism. The United States had once again defended its independence against a militarily superior foe. The high tide of nationalism influenced its perspective of other revolutionary movements. The more sophisticated American exceptionalism that existed by the early nineteenth century resulted in part from its recent war with Great Britain.

This chapter scrutinizes that shifting American national identity as it evolved during the early nineteenth century as American observed and sought to make sense of the revolutions in Latin America. It pays particular attention to American newspaper's preoccupation with the figure of

[160] Donald R. Hickey. *The War of 1812: A Short Story* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 115.

Bolívar and the way those papers sometimes changed their minds about him over the course of his long career. This chapter also scrutinizes the ways that American newspapers remained strangely silent on the issues of race and slavery as they related to Latin American revolutions. As I will show, Bolívar remained for many a heroic figure, even as those newspaper accounts often ignored his comparatively progressive views on racial equality. To be sure the 1810's and 1820's witnessed a transformation in the contours of the institution of slavery as well as in a sense of national identification; the absence of commentary may reflect an emerging American exceptionalism that allowed American to see their nation's revolution as unique amongst the other revolutions of the period while also ignoring the country's increasing reliance on enslaved labor.

This chapter builds on the groundbreaking work of Caitlin Fitz's *Our Sister Republics*, which argued that although many Americans initially welcomed the revolutions in Latin America, their enthusiasm ultimately dissipated during the 1820s in the face of changing partisan politics and an altered cultural landscape.[161] Increasingly over the course of these years, she demonstrates, Americans grew skeptical of the success of those independence movements and began to see their own revolution as exceptionally superior. This chapter goes further in two respects. First, in anchoring Americans' views to their responses to the French and Haitian revolutions in the first two chapters of this thesis, I seek to establish a meaningful context for Americans' growing sense of exceptionalism—and to show how their notable avoidance of issues of slavery and race in Latin American revolutions, particularly after the Haitian Revolution, may have affected their emerging skepticism.

Second, this chapter tracks a curious outcome of Americans' growing disenchantment with Bolívar and the new republics to their south: a new commercialization of Bolívar's name. Perhaps

[161] Caitlyn Fitz, *Our Sister Republics: The United States in an Age of American Revolutions* (New York: Norton: 2016).

the ultimate sign of the changing American mindset toward revolutions other than their own involved their treatment of patriotic heroes. More than Louverture or Paine, the Bolívar name became a marketable item, by which average Americans connected to and participated in the revolutionary movement. American newspapers dramatized the life of Bolívar, giving him numerous names from Liberator to Tyrant. This helped maintain his popularity on the pages of newspapers as readers followed his fascinating career. Over time they named landmarks, counties, and even a ship after Bolívar. Additionally, Americans participated in an ascendant consumer culture by purchasing stylish Bolívar hats, bonnets, boots, and coats. Clearly, the idealistic notions of revolution had given way to a national capitalism bent on monetizing republican values and commercializing distinctive names. As the loser in this situation, Bolívar thus became a caricature, a victim to an emerging republican capitalism that now proved as powerful as revolutionary ideals once had.

Bolivar's Early Life and Transition to Revolutionary Hero

Born a child of the Revolutionary era in Caracas, Venezuela, July 24, 1783, Bolívar met with repeated tragedy early in life. As a young boy, he lost both his parents and was taken under the care of his uncle, Don Carlos Palacios. In 1801, after receiving three years of education in Spain, he married the daughter of a Spanish nobleman and returned to his South American home. When his wife died of yellow fever within the year, he returned to Europe and studied the greatest Enlightenment thinkers: Locke, Hobbes, Montesquieu, and Voltaire, among others. Inspired by the accomplishments of Bonaparte in France and impressed by the political institutions of Britain, he sailed for Venezuela intent on bringing the ideals of the Enlightenment to South America.[162]

[162] John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 25.

By 1810 Spain's South American colonies had begun to seek independence in a manner they had witnessed in both old and new worlds. Bolívar and others like him faced an uphill battle, however. In Venezuela, the leaders of the independence movement met stiff resistance from loyalists to the Spanish crown. The line between friend and foe blurred as opportunists used the political and societal chaos to acquire power. From 1812 to 1814, driven from Venezuela and even exiled on two separate occasions, Bolívar used the setbacks to promote his revolutionary agenda, writing his *Cartagena Manifesto* (1812) and later the *Carta de Jamaica* (1815). The Carta (Letter), in particular, became a rallying cry. It called for economic and political self-determination in response to years of Spanish oppression.

To what extent had he been inspired by the model of the United States? Historian have offered mixed assessments. John Lynch notes that "Bolívar's view of the old regime and of revolutionary change was not that of a European or a North American, and there were basic limitations on the extent to which outside models could serve him."[163] His *Carta* had been a product of Enlightenment thinking more generally, but Lynch also traces the connection between Bolívar's ideas and that of Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence.[164] His attempts to connect the plight of South American to that of political institutions in the United States, Great Britain, and Haiti, ultimately garnered military aid from the latter two countries. Thus, the letter not only allowed him to keep the revolutionary movement alive but create the conditions for continued resistance on the field of battle.

From Jamaica in 1815, Bolívar watched with horror as Spanish forces under General Pablo Morillo retook Venezuela. Morillo mercilessly punished revolutionary sympathizers in a bloody campaign to stamp out resistance. He ordered numerous executions and requisitioned land in the

[163] Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 94.
[164] Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 93.

name of the Spanish government. Two years later, Bolívar along with General José Antonio Páez and General Francisco José de Paula Santander turned the tide of the conflict in New Granada by capturing the city of Bogotá. Consisting of Latin American and British soldiers, Bolívar's revolutionary army used unlikely tactics to take the valuable city by surprise in a decisive and unexpected victory. Within the same year, Bolívar helped to establish Gran Colombia, a unified, revolutionary state made up of Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama. With this, his dream of a united, republican South America appeared within reach. In 1821, his victory at the Battle of Carabobo freed Venezuela of Spanish authority and by 1822, with the help of General Antonio José de Sucre, Bolívar defeated Spanish forces in Ecuador. By 1824, once again with the help of Sucre, he gained victory over the Spanish in Peru. In gratitude, a breakaway portion of northern Peru took the name Bolivia in honor of the man they called their Liberator, Bolivia. These victories were followed up by an association of United Provinces of Central America, the United Provinces of the Rio de la Plata, Mexico, Colombia, and Peru. In 1826, at the Congress of Panama, eleven Latin American nations signed a treaty promising mutual support, a unified military, and equal protection under the law.

The limited success of the Congress, however, revealed the fault lines in South American politics and foretold problems that would plague the latter part of Bolívar's political and military career.

Within the same year of the Congress, Bolívar was forced to negotiate a peace between Páez in Venezuela and Santander in New Granada. As part of the agreement, Bolívar allowed the Venezuelan government to create a new constitution, but this decision only deepened the division between liberal factions desirous of an even distribution of powers and those demanding an executive who served for life. In 1828, Bolívar barely escaped an assassination attempt by liberals

loyal to Santander. Moreover, other frictions had now emerged. By 1830, Peru had attacked Ecuador, Venezuela had seceded from Gran Colombia, and the Colombian General José María Córdoba had staged a revolt. In the same year, Bolivar's loyal compatriot, General Sucre died at the hands of an assassin. Bolívar passed away on December 17, 1830 in Colombia from tuberculosis. His dreams of Latin American independence had partially succeeded, but his desire for unification had met with failure as the countries of Gran Colombia went their separate ways. Their resistance to amalgamation vindicated his greatest fears as South America countries continued to fight amongst themselves. Nevertheless, the liberating legacy of Bolívar would live on as other South American leaders proclaimed their dedication to the man most responsible for their freedom. Bolívar's life proved once again that the results of revolution, despite originating from common Enlightenment roots, produced different results in the nations it inspired.

Tracing American newspapers' responses to these developments and to Bolívar's distinctive career provides a curious mirror illustrating Americans' views of their place in the western hemisphere and their political influence there. And because these accounts transform over the course of two decades, they also reveal much about the changing American political and cultural scene. They especially reveal the newspapers' metamorphosing perspectives on Bolívar himself, to whom they granted a range of names—from "the Liberator" to dictator.

The Names of Simón Bolívar

> *Colombians:* I leave you: but my last prayers are offered up for the tranquility of Colombia: and if my death will contribute to this desirable end by a discontinuance of party feeling, and consolidate the union, I shall descend with feelings of contentment into the tomb which will soon be prepared for me. Simon Bolivar.[165]

[165] "The Liberator to the Citizens of Colombia," *Natchez Weekly Courier* (Natchez, Mississippi), March 12, 1831, 3.

When Bolívar died in 1830, American newspapers offered a wide range of tributes to his achievements, commemorations of a man who had become a household name for nearly two decades. When newspapers quoted dying words like those quoted here, they reminded their readers of some of his most noble actions on behalf of Latin American political unity and peace—actions reminiscent of Americans' own revered George Washington. Newspapers did not always, however, portray Bolívar in such a flattering light. As this section illustrates, they ultimately endowed him with a wide range of names, both complimentary and critical. They called him The Liberator, as many in Latin America did; they also accused him of harboring dictatorial ambitions. Examining this series of names granted him by the American press reveals much about his evolving reputation among American citizens.

By the early 1800's, the revolutionary spirit returned to American shores. And in similar fashion to some of the Americans who advocated for independence, some members of the South American elite, touched by Enlightenment ideals, embarked on an improbable campaign of rebellion to liberate their countries from Spanish rule. If anyone were to change the political structures of nineteenth century South American countries, and win U.S. approval along the way, history pointed to Simón Bolívar as a likely candidate. American newspaper readers responded instantly to portrayals of this man, seemingly born of two worlds, coupling with a European education with a demeanor suited for the task; he seemed to appear as a new champion of democracy. But as time passed and American newspapers found themselves reassessing his achievements after a decade or more, they began to divide into two opposing camps, offering admiration or distrust. These names used to describe him help illuminate those political divides.

Representations of Bolívar revealed some of the distinct divisions within the United States. Newspapers from both sides of the political aisle expressed varying degrees of appreciation for the

South American leader, but no matter what their view, the American press consistently covered his career. He was a political celebrity who captivated the imaginations of average Americans. To some he appeared opportunistic and power hungry; to others he exemplified the highest ideals of revolutionary fervor. A new vocabulary emerged to describe the controversial Bolívar as the events of the South America revolutions unfolded in characteristically complicated fashion. This collection of nicknames and titles varied by partisan political position and could sometimes illustrate an all too common attempt by newspapers to portray the South American revolutions as following the model of their own independence movement. Such portrayals kept the Bolívar narrative fresh for insatiable American readers. Each moniker added to the Bolívarian legend as American newspapers stoked interest in South American revolutionary intrigue.

As the number of liberated South American countries increased, the American press endowed Bolívar with new names, monikers that sought to make sense of the United States' place among the revolutions happening throughout the West. For example, the *North Star* of Danville, Vermont referred to the Colombian government established by Bolívar as "the political constitution presented by the Liberator Simon Bolivar."[166] Here the implication was obvious, like American Revolutionary heroes, Bolívar represented resistance to the tyrannical oppressors of humanity, in this case, the monarchical Spanish government. He continued to earn the title by contributing to the independence movements of countries throughout Central and South America.

By calling him the "the Liberator," American newspapers exhibited strong opinions about Bolívar's early military career. They granted him the name early in his career. Having returned to his place of birth in 1807 after finishing his education in Europe, he participated in the subsequent Venezuelan independence movement of 1811 and prepared to defend the new nation against

[166] "Colombia-Important. From the Curacoa Courant, April 28," *North Star* (Danville, VT), June 26, 1827, 2.

Spanish attempts at reclamation. When the defense failed, he fled to New Granada to organize resistance. By 1813, Bolívar and a new army retook Caracas. For this triumphant return he was called the Liberator, the name that defined his legacy. The Pennsylvania paper, the *Susquehanna Democrat* proclaimed this success, associating his forces with the cause of "Liberty" against "despotism and tyranny" when it explained, "General Bolivar in conjunction with General Marino have conquered and cleared all the towns in the plains, reestablishing their inhabitants in that Liberty which Spanish despotism and tyranny had wrested from them." Going further while commenting on a subsequent expedition against Spanish remnants, the same paper pointed out that Bolívar had conquered his foes "Without spilling a drop of blood."[167] Speaking for many, the *Vermont Gazette* pronounced, "Freedom must and will triumph—Heaven has willed it; and if she frowns on patriot arms, if she dooms them to a purgatory of adversity, tis to convince mankind of the value of liberty."[168] The portrayal of him as the champion of liberty, often designated with a capital L, lasted longer and heled more weight for Americans than subsequent portrayals that associated him with arrogance, vengefulness, and warmongering. "The Liberator" would prove to be his most important and long-lasting title—so important, in fact that the historian W. Caleb McDaniel speculates that William Lloyd Garrison would borrow that name when creating a firebrand newspaper advocating for the immediate abolition of slavery in 1831, less than a year after Bolivar's death.[169]

Some accounts went even further, drawing similarities between Bolívar and George Washington. By 1819, having won the pivotal Battle of Boyaca and taken possession of the former

[167] (Communication) Extract of a letter dated "Guayra, April 27th, 1814," *Susquehanna Democrat* (Wilkes-Barre, PA), July 1, 1814, 1.
[168] "Defeat of General Bolívar," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), September 2, 1816, 2.
[169] W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2013).

Spanish Viceroy of New Granada, Bolívar had cemented himself as a leader worthy of admiration. Comparing the American revolutions, the *Pittsfield Sun* optimistically noted that "Simon Bolivar, the Washington of South America—May he effect the same for his country that Washington has for ours."[170] This account portrayed him as an undaunted military leader, who faced adversity but never gave up on the vaunted revolutionary ideals in a manner Americans could easily recognize from their own history. This gave another generation of American citizens a patriotic leader to idealize. Especially following Washington's passing in 1799, Bolívar filled an important cultural role in the United States. *The Vermont Journal* also attempted to make a connection between the American Revolution and those of South American by calling him, "General Bolivar. (the Republican).[171]" Far from positioning Bolívar as a partisan in the American mode (Republicans vs. Democrats), this statement clearly associates him with "small-R" republicanism—a form of government with classical roots that rejected monarchy and granted power instead to the people. Additionally, to term him (The Republican). placed him in a class of typically well-educated, liberty minded statesmen who had taken leadership roles in the United States to determining the pathway to independence and the surest means of creating a constitutional government to protect that independence.

As much as American newspapers reported his actions, they remained silent on Bolívar's progressive stances on race and slavery. Lynch explains that "He freed his own slaves, first for service in the army of liberation, for it was right that slaves too should be prepared to die for liberty, then unconditionally as an absolute right to freedom."[172] While freeing enslaved people was not unprecedented, the American patriots during the Revolution had viewed the freeing of enslaved

[170] "Jackson Dinner, in Kentucky," *Pittsfield Sun*, (Pittsfield, MA), September 8, 1825, 2.
[171] "Carthagena, Santa Fe," *Vermont Journal*, (Windsor, VT), June 5, 1815, 4.
[172] Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 288.

African Americans as primarily instrumental and reactive—as a promised reward for military service, but also in response to the British army's much more convincing early promises to protect the liberty of enslaved people who escaped to seek shelter. Moreover, although George Washington had famously set the stage for freeing some of his enslaved people in his will, few of the founders had followed a similar path. Peter Blanchard writes about a similar road to emancipation in South America. He argues that emancipation did not become fully realized after the revolutionary period due in part to pritorities. "They were wars of independence, not wars of abolition, and the accompanying anti-slavery initiatives had been a necessary but not always desirable by product."[173] As a result, Bolívar's belief in the "absolute right" of abolition ran counter to many Americans in the southern states states—and, for that matter, some in the northern states as well. Additionally, in Colombia, Bolívar set aside land for Native Americans and attempted to give them equal rights. This contrasted with American western expansionism as it continued to progress throughout the nineteenth century, a process during which Americans rarely challenged slavery as an institution or racism as a set of practices. No matter what Bolívar enacted in Latin America with regard to enslaved people of color, American newspapers displayed almost no interest in reporting on it.

It might be tempting to suggest that the ambivalent effects of the South American revolutions on race and slavery inhibited newspapers from offering clear assessments. As Lynch explains about the long history of those revolutions, "The Spanish American revolution was ambiguous on slavery, prepared to abolish the slave trade but reluctant to release slaves into a free society, where they might not conform to creole rules on law and order and would leave masters without labor."[174]

[173] Peter Blanchard, *Under the Flags of Freedom*: *Slave Soldiers and the Wars of Independence in Spanish South America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 160.
[174] Lynch, *Simón Bolívar*, 288.

This familiar pattern resembled American responses to events during the French and Haitian revolutions with regard to the institution of slavery. But it is more likely that American newspapers simply proved reluctant to discuss these matters during an era when slavery in the United States appeared increasingly entrenched and immutable.[175] Anxious to retain the attention of its readers, the American press looked for more appealing narratives. They eventually settled on focusing on Bolívar's character and the political institutions he helped to establish, as well as the corrupting nature of power, and the chaos of revolution. These were both convenient and important narratives shaped American reactions.

"Liberator" and "Republican" were not the only names granted to Bolívar by American newspapers. They landed on a series of negative names for the South American leader as well, as names that evoked images of violence, cruelty, and lawlessness. In 1814, for example, reprinting an article from the *Connecticut Spectator*, the *Lancaster Intelligencer* told its readers, "We cannot help but remark the similarity of sentiments in the leaders of the banditti in South America, and that of the General who had determined to exterminate the Creeks, in North America. Bolivar, Briceno, and Andrew Jackson, seem to be equally rigid in their determination to exterminate the enemy."[176] The criticism offered a very different portrayal of Bolívar's second failed attempt to hold Caracas against Spanish forces and underscored the chaotic nature of civil war in South America. To call him and his compatriots "banditti" who were "rigid in their determination to exterminate the enemy" cast Bolívar in an entirely different light.

[175] Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of Democratic Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63, no. 4 (2006): 643-674. Blackburn contradicts this statement by arguing that the Latin American revolutions forced the United States to confront the issue of slavery. While this appears true for the Haitian Revolution, American newspapers spend little time discussing the impact of the Latin American revolutions the institution of slavery. This seems to indicate a shift in the way Americans viewed abolition and their own revolution.

[176] "From the Connecticut Spectator," *Lancaster Intelligencer* (Lancaster, PA), June 10, 1814, 3.

The transformation of how Americans understood Bolívar's character accelerated when he met a famed military general and future U.S. president. In 1828, U.S. President John Quincy Adams appointed General William Henry Harrison as ambassador to Colombia. The hero of Tippecanoe, and renowned by many Americans for his merciless approach to fighting Native Americans in the Great Lakes region before and after the War of 1812, Harrison came into conflict with Bolívar before being recalled from his post a year later by Andrew Jackson. Angered by his dismissal, Harrison wrote a letter to Bolívar defending his actions as U.S. Ambassador and offering a withering review of Bolívar. The letter eventually made its way into national newspapers, which also published Harrison's advice regarding the accumulation of power in Colombia. Harrison later gave a speech in which he admitted regret over not sending the letter during his ambassadorship. His depiction of Bolívar, at least in part, paralleled the newly skeptical national views of the South American leader. Commenting on Harrison's statements at a reception in Ohio, the *Madisonian* reprinting commentary from a Cleveland newspaper, noted, "He [Harrison] made a beautiful allusion to Simón Bolívar, who after having once and again defended the independence of his country, at last fell before the seductive influence of power long possessed and conspired against those liberties which he had so oft defended."[177] Some newspapers such as the *Charleston Mercury* contested this characterization. After printing a long passage in which Bolívar defended his actions, the *Mercury*, using a vaguely Biblical pronouncement, noted, "This is the man accused of designing to wear a crown. Comment is unnecessary."[178] Harrison's remarks permitted American newspapers to tell a tragic story of decline that applied to both Bolívar's character and the progress of the revolutions in Latin America: although they began with noble intentions and admirable achievements—so much so that part of his character would always be compared to Washington—

[177] "From Cleveland Herald. Gen. Harrison at Cleveland," *Madisonian* (Washington, DC), June 25, 1840, 2.
[178] "From the New York Post," *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, NC), June 2, 1830, 2.

they ultimately succumbed to far less worthy errors. A determined leader who lost battles but never the war, Bolívar's apparent fall from grace in Harrison's telling reinforced bias and created an even more ambivalent figure for American reading audiences.

Harrison's assessment of Bolívar also included a surprisingly thorough list of his habits and tendencies. And yet, despite its level of detail, Harrison's depiction contains all the hallmarks of a fabrication rather than reality. According to Harrison, Bolívar was a warrior scholar, a passionate but jealous lover, a fabulous host, addicted to fame over money, and an enigmatic demeanor, yet he suffered from a driving desire for fame. The image, while enticing, bought into stereotypes about South American leaders and would-be dictators. Harrison asserted, "His temper, spoiled by adulteration, is fiery and captious . . . He is prone to personal abuse, but makes ample amends to those who put up with it." He continued, "Speaking as well as he does, it is not wonderful that he should be more fond of hearing himself talk than of listening to others."[179] A man of contrasts and passions, Bolívar, according to Harrison certainly sparked the imagination and offered a satisfyingly easy description that fed nicely into the tragic narrative created by Harrison. The South American leader, prone to lavish parties, a healthy ego, and a fiery personality, eventually succumbed to his own hubris. This narrative made since to an American populace eager for a compelling description of the fascinating South American hero turned autocrat.

By the late 1820's, American newspapers had another name for the embattled general: criminal. *The Charleston Mercury* reported breathlessly that, "A proclamation of Páez, dated Valencia, 2d March, declaring Bolivar an outlaw, and offering a reward of $2,000 for his head!!!"[180] This name provided an irresistible contrast for American newspapers that had previously admired him. The idea of a Washingtonian leader being hunted like a common criminal, regardless of merit, proved

[179] "Simón Bolívar," *National Banner and Nashville Whig* (Nashville, TN), March 9, 1831, 3.
[180] "Charleston, Friday Morning, May 21," *Charleston Courier* (Charleston, SC), May 21, 1830, 2.

too tantalizing for an opportunistic press. The wide coverage of the controversy complicated the narrative surrounding the famous general. He could not be both criminal and leader of democracy in South America, at least, not in the straightforward narratives of American newspapers. Bolívar had placed José Antonio Páez, a compatriot in the Venezuelan independence movement, in authority in Venezuela, and had acquiesced to Páez's demands for a new national constitution. Páez's issuance of the bounty called into question the idea of Bolívar as the Liberator, even among his former allies.

The conflict between Bolívar and Páez revealed to many American readers the political complexities of Latin American politics—politics that contrasted sharply with emerging narratives about the American Revolution that transformed the latter independence movement into black and white stories of heroism and perfidy. Thus, even for readers who refused to believe that Bolívar was truly a criminal now had to acknowledge that his vision of a unified and independent South America was crumbling. Now he was a fugitive from his home country, the one he had first attempted to liberate. The irony of the situation was tragic. As many papers increasingly began to disparage Latin American chaos and violence, their earlier admiration of Bolívar faded.

Sometimes they simply opted for sarcasm. In 1830, *The Burlington Weekly Press* called Bolívar one of "The greatest and best of men,"[181] in an article that proceeds to criticize the despotic tendencies, a phrase that one late eighteenth-century source had attributed to George Washington and other contemporaries used when speaking of Washington.[182] Curiously, the *Long Island Star*

[181] "Bolívar and the Bolivian Constitution," *Burlington Weekly Free Press* (Burlington, VT), February 5, 1830, 2.
[182] In a eulogy to Washington on December 31, 1799, Gouverneur Morris claimed to quote him from back during the Constitutional Convention of 1787. Others, including the nineteenth-century historian George Bancroft, continued to make that attribution, though no sources from 1787 confirm it.
https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/George_Washington. The Marquis de Lafayette was one of the many who used the phrase in referring to Washington, as he did in 1824 when visiting Mount Vernon.
https://rmc.library.cornell.edu/lafayette/collection/exhibit/iampol_tomb.htm

used the same phrase to compliment him[183] while the *Vermont Republican and American Journal* used the same wording sarcastically to criticize another controversial politician, Andrew Jackson. "Every citizen is a freeman. Every publik [sic] officer has the same rights as any other citizen; but, virtually, says Gen. Jackson to all such, 'dare to doubt my pre-eminent qualifications for the Presidency—dare to deny that I am the 'greatest and best of men.'"[184] *The Charleston Daily Courier* extended its meaning to include people who supported the seventh president of the United States.[185] Seeing comparisons between Bolívar and Jackson—while using George Washington's alleged phrasing—helped to maintain his presence in the minds of American newspapers.

"Tyrant" was another name ascribed to Bolívar by American newspapers. In some cases, this appellation came directly from events in South America. By 1828, as another sign of the growing discontent with Bolívar's authority, the South American leader barely escaped an assassination attempt in Bogotá, Colombia. Relating the story from a correspondent in New York, *The United States Gazette* recounted the harrowing incident. Bogotá citizens of every class, including members of an artillery unit had descended upon the barracks and local palace where Bolívar lived. He escaped by ducking out a window and hiding under a nearby bridge, up to his waist in water, nearly within reach of his enemies. "It was lucky for him as it was the artillery crying out, *'Muerie al tyranno Bolivar!'* Hearing the cry of '*Viva el Libertado*,' he ran there, and found it occupied by his friends."[186] Learning that Colombians disagreed about whether he was a tyrant or a liberator may not have resolved the issue for American newspaper readers, but it promoted uncertainty both about Bolívar and the progress of democracy in South America.

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[183] "Interesting Correspondence," *Long Island Star* (Brooklyn, NY), December 7, 1826, 2.
[184] "One Thousand Victims," *Vermont Republican and American Journal. Windham and Orange County Advertiser* (Windsor, VT), July 3, 1830, 2.
[185] "Colombia," *Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), December 8, 1830, 2.
[186] "Highly Interesting from Colombia," *The United States Gazette* (Philadelphia, PA), November 11, 1828, 2.

Knowing that the incident Colombia was not the only attempt on Bolívar's life also provoked uncertainty about his successes and his legacy as a liberator. Three years earlier the *Vermont Gazette* had reported another near miss when an assassin killed Bolívar's secretary, asleep in bed, mistaking him for his target. Commenting on Bolívar's penchant for escaping assassination, the *Gazette* asserted, "Energy is the predominant trait of his character. His movements are always prompt, decisive, and rapid, and at the same time directed with so much discretion. . .."[187] This skepticism from the American press continued into the final years of his life. Commenting on Venezuela's attempts to secede from Gran Colombia and create its own government, one story in the *Charleston Daily Courier* placed the blame at Bolívar's feet. "Such things speak volumes. During the most horrid times of the Revolution, the Spaniards, cruel as their warfare was, was even less dreaded than this mild, 'father of his country.' It is impossible that he can succeed, his cause is unrighteous and must fail."[188] Another article that appeared in the *Courier* as well as in other national papers continued this theme. "We have no room today to publish the truth, as far as it has been obtained, in relation to the last, and as it is believed, abortive attempt of Bolívar to return to the dictatorship . . . Sucre has been assassinated; and if he stays much longer, we shall perhaps hear that his master has perished as ingloriously."[189] As Bolívar's dream of unification came to an end, some newspapers were all too happy to see him fail. Not persuaded by his revolutionary efforts, they believed he sought fame and power over liberation.

Following his death, as Bolívar's name began to recede from their pages, American newspapers explored a range of narratives to help their readers assess his life. One set of threads portrayed him as a tragic figure who had either succumbed to the corrupting influence of power or failed due to

[187] "Simón Bolívar," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), August 16, 1825, 1.
[188] "The Courier. From the *Camden Journal*," *Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), January 27, 1831, 1.
[189] "New York, July 3rd," *Charleston Daily Courier* (Charleston, SC), August 6, 1830, 2.

no fault of his own. Salisbury, North Carolina's *Journal* concluded, "The ambition and violence of such men as Bolivar, Lavalle, and so many other chieftains, who have for a time flourished as patriots and ended despots, in the ever varying scenes of the south."[190] The *Charleston Mercury* opined that "Gen. Bolivar is doomed to be alien from his home and friends, without even the consolation of knowing that his ungrateful countryman have benefitted by his exertions."[191] Casting him in such a light constituted yet another attempt to establish a coherent and relatable political narrative regarding revolutions, distinguishing them from the United States' own revolution, which they portrayed as superior. Although his list of names varied in tone, they sought to shape how average Americans understood Bolívar, and by extension, the revolutions to their south. These portrayals also reflected the diverse political opinions expressed by American newspapers and the United States varying interests. However diverse those views, American newspapers displayed a continued fascination about the South American leader.

As this section has revealed, newspapers' varying means of framing Bolívar's character and relative success offered profoundly mixed messages for their readers. Liberator or criminal? Republican or tyrant? All served to cast doubt on the claims made by Latin American countries to be following in the footsteps of the American Revolution to create republics and ensure democracy. As we shall see, these ambivalent portrayals of Bolívar mirrored newspapers' accounts of Latin American revolutions more generally, particularly during the 1820's.

Examination of the American Newspaper Portrayal of the South American Revolutions

> Mr. Elliott—There is a prevailing error throughout the United States, whenever they judge the successes or reverses of the South American revolution; they pretty generally form an idea of what is taking place there by the events of the revolutionary war in this country … the theater now opened to the examination of

[190] *The Journal*, (Salisbury, NC), February 24, 1829, 3.
[191] "From the Journal of Commerce. Latest from Jamaica," *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), July 23, 1830, 2.

> the world, is laid down upon a more extensive scale than any that we have witnessed prior to the beginning of the present century.[192]

The events of the South American Revolutions, so close to its own shores, deeply intrigued the American press. Fundamental to the coverage was the attempt to understand what the American people should make of the events to their south. The American press displayed at times an honest desire to understand the complicated and intricate political relationships that fueled the South American Revolutions. This was a refreshing change from the more reactionary critiques of the Haitian Revolution. The letter quoted above, published by the *Vermont Gazette* in 1816, clearly desired to correct the flawed, simplistic narrative that sometimes emerged to compare American revolutions. While comparisons developed naturally and rationally in the United States, the writer acknowledged, he encouraged his readers to approach the South American conflicts without always drawing facile contrasts. *The Pittsfield Sun* echoed similar sentiment regarding the difficult process of understanding the South American revolutions. "As our government is essentially popular, I wish information to be given to the people. I wish for information, that our judgments may sanction sentiments our hearts so warmly approve."[193] Here again, the author sought to avoid obvious conclusions and allow a for more informed examination of revolutionary events. But as we shall see, newspapers over the course of the 1820's increasingly revealed less enthusiasm for the political changes taking place to the south. Increasingly, they held up a strict dividing line between events in South America and the emerging popular memory of the American Revolution. As Fitz has noted, Americans changed the narrative of the American Revolution and criticized those in Latin American to establish their own national superiority.[194] This section dedicates

[192] "From the Washington Gazette," *Vermont Gazette*, (Bennington, VT), October 1, 1816, 2.
[193] "Friday, Dec. 5.—Mr. Robertson of Lou. offered the following resolution for consideration," *Pittsfield Sun*, (Pittsfield, MA), December 17, 1817, 3.
[194] Fitz, *Our Sister Republics,* 239.

particular attention to that latter development and its implications for understandings of American identity.

American newspapers' portrayals of the South American revolutions exhibited many of the same characteristics as their early coverage of the French Revolution.[195] Especially at first, Americans seemed to hope to welcome and, in part, to take responsibility for the revolutions that emerged in the wake of their own. This sometimes appeared as a celebration of Enlightenment values, heralding these nations that sought to liberate themselves from more oppressive systems. For example, sometimes American news coverage took the form of romanticized self-aggrandizement, such as when the *Western Carolinian*, commenting on the revolutions remarked, "When the native valor of freemen humbled their proud foe, who were compelled to surrender the iron sceptre [sic] of despotism, into the hands of liberty."[196] And in similar fashion, newspapers drew comparisons between events and people located thousands of miles apart.

Some American newspapers wished not only to change American's perceptions of the South American revolutions but also called for better education on the subject. The writer in the *Vermont Gazette* believed knowledge could and should replace baseless speculation. "Without looking at the map of Mexico, and South America on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans or examining the position of their respective armies, and the durability and progress of their civil institutions, were certainly liable to misunderstand the great events which are so intimately connected with our primary interests as Americans and freemen."[197] This line of thinking demonstrated a rational comparison of the two revolutions without the baggage of exceptionalism, a pattern more common

[195] Caitlyn Fitz, "The Hemispheric Dimensions of Early U.S. Nationalism: The War of 1812, its Aftermath and Spanish American Independence," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 2 (2015): 356. Fitz charts this narrative from its beginnings as intercontinental unity to United States exceptionalism.
[196] "By the Mails. South America. Extract of a letter to a gentleman in Baltimore, dated St. Thomas, April 22," *Western Carolinian* (Salisbury, NC), June 13, 1820, 2.
[197] "From the Washington Gazette," *Vermont Gazette*, (Bennington, VT), October 1, 1816, 2.

in the 1820's than afterward. This argument was clearly the best America had to offer when it came to narratives about South America. Later narratives were not so kind or progressive in their evaluation, and as such, illustrate a clear evolution in the way the United States came to perceive of revolutions other than its own.

As the years passed, many American newspapers began offering new narratives that drew sharp lines between the American Revolution and the independence movements in Latin American. One of their tactics involved alerting readers that easy comparisons between them, perpetuated by newspapers, were often false. This often consisted of assigning events and people of the American Revolution to the one currently gracing their front pages. Seeking to dispel these myths, the *Burlington Weekly Free Press* asserted in 1830, "In a point of view well calculated to correct the erroneous estimate formed of them in this country and to teach us the folly of too hastily proclaiming every General who achieves a victory and talks loud about liberty, a second Washington."[198] Not everyone, this writer suggested, could be as exceptional as Washington. In as much as this source raised the flag of American exceptionalism, it makes three valid points. First, Washington and Bolívar defied easy comparisons. They were men from different backgrounds fighting on different continents. Second, there were distinct differences between the various American revolutions. Third, actions spoke louder than words when it came to establishing successful republics with functioning governments. Thus, over time some American newspapers increasingly sought to hold the American Revolution and its values above the leaders and events taking place in South America.

Newspaper opinions of the 1820's could often contain thinly veiled arrogance in offering accounts of the South American revolutions. *The Journal* of Salisbury, North Carolina explained

[198] "Bolívar and the Bolivian Constitution," *Burlington Weekly Free Press*, (Burlington, VT), February 5, 1830, 2.

patronizingly in 1829 that "We all understand pretty well that the habits of free institutions are not to be acquired in a day; but they are simple and easy to a persevering people." It was a line implying that the United States and not South America held the key to fully realizing individual liberty; or at least South Americans would need to learn the virtue of perseverance if they hoped to raise themselves and their "free institutions" to American levels. *The Journal* underlined its skepticism when it proclaimed, "We have long been of the opinion, that the South Americans were incapable of appreciating the advantages of a free government; the habits acquired and perpetrated by ages of servitude, could not be changed in a moment."[199] This is a puzzling statement given that those without freedom would certainly be desirous of it and willing to make the necessary sacrifices. The author seemed to premise his sense of doubt about South American capacities on their history of "servitude," suggesting circular line of thought: that only a free people were capable of "appreciating the advantages of a free government," and perhaps implying that an educated upper class was necessary for a nation to enact the necessary laws of a free country. Such comments ignored, of course, the fact that the various countries of South America were not bereft of educated upper classes. Indeed, Bolívar himself was proof that the southern continent contained, elite, educated figures and capable leaders. Additionally, historian Jay Kinsbruner points out that Latin America and the United States were similarly rural with education opportunities concentrated in urban areas.[200] Jaime E. Rodríguez O. has also noted the similarities between the two continents. He asserts that a "shared Western European culture," existed that created similar cultural and political institutions.[201] While racism and a sense of cultural superiority likely played a role in such

[199] *The Journal*, (Salisbury, NC), February 24, 1829, 3.
[200] Jay Kinsbruner, *The Colonial Spanish American City: Urban Life in the Age of Atlantic Capitalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 132.
[201] Jaime E. Rodríguez O., *Political Culture in Spanish America*, 1500-1830 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 149.

criticisms, societal and political differences prevented the full acceptance of South American revolutions by the American press.

American newspapers also expressed deep skepticism that South American governments might develop republican constitutions that matched that of the United States. In 1825, as the Bolivian government enacted a new national constitution, many in the United States turned a critical eye. The *Burlington Weekly Free Press* declared, "So complicated is the arrangement proposed for the enactment of laws by means of this novel legislature, and so arbitrary and unnatural the distribution of powers among the several branches that it would be impracticable for any people having just notions of legislative proceedings." Indeed, the paper went further, stating that it was "impractical for men like the South Americans. [who were] not at all familiar with the business of ordinary legislation: to develop something as complex as a constitution. The paper went on to condemn the new constitution for placing too much power in the executive branch and creating an executive who governed for life, claiming that it gave President Bolívar dictatorial authority. In what the *Burlington Weekly* went on to describe as "The most odious feature in the constitution," Bolívar did in fact create for himself a political position antithetical to the ideals of the revolution.[202] Historians have supported this claim by American newspapers.[203] John Charles Chasteen notes that Bolívar "lacked deeply democratic sentiments."[204] While newspapers were often dependent upon translated copies of Latin American newspapers to understand the character of Bolívar, their assessment of his political intentions proved at least partly true.

[202] "Bolívar and the Bolivian Constitution," *Burlington Weekly Free Press* (Burlington, VT), February 5, 1830, 2.
[203] Daniel Gutiérrez Ardila, "The Chilean Republic in the Face of Bolívar's Expansionism (1823-1828)," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* Issue 36, no. 3 (2017): 313-325. Ardila further examines how Bolívar's ambitions ran counter to republican values in Chile.
[204] John Charles Chasteen, *Americanos: Latin America's Struggle for Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 179.

American newspaper's criticism of the new Bolivian constitution rested on shakier factual ground, even as it revealed their eagerness to assert the superiority of the American system. To accuse the Bolivians of having created a complicated arrangement of laws overlooks the fact that the U.S. Constitution was also an amalgamation of different elements drawn from past and present civilizations, and rested heavily on the mixed government in Great Britain (even as it rejected a monarch). As Jay Kinsbruner points out, Bolívar was also inspired by the British political system as well as the teachings of Enlightenment philosophers.[205] The only advantage held by the United States' Constitution lay in having allowed the U.S. federal government work for thirty years. And even along this seeming success, the two major political parties continued to battle one another when interpreting the Constitution in different ways, each striving to manipulate its laws to advocate for very different versions of the United States and its future—and in the process often argued that should the opposite side succeed, it would destabilize the nation. Thus, although criticisms put forward by newspapers like the *Burlington Weekly* could sometimes reflect valid points, like concern that Bolívar might be undermining the values of a republic, those newspapers' eagerness to assert American superiority at all costs undermined their sometimes legitimate critiques.

As we have seen, American newspapers particularly liked to stress that South American revolutions tended to be disturbingly violent and chaotic. This permitted them to portray the American Revolution, in contrast, as an exceptionally "good" movement. That exceptionalism did little to enlighten newspaper readers about the political realities of the new republics in the western hemisphere. But it granted them an increasingly powerful sense of identity forged in contrast to

[205] Jay Kinsbruner, *Independence in South America*: *Civil Wars, Revolutions, and Underdevelopment* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 112.

the other American republics that, they learned in their papers, were markedly inferior to their own.

American newspapers portrayed the Latin American revolutions alternately as failures and successes, often fostering a confusion about the facts shadowed by an arrogant exceptionalism. Nevertheless, at times it exhibited the ability to accurately diagnose the fault lines within South America as men like Bolívar used revolution to realize the unique needs of the former Spanish colonies.

Republican Capitalism

> Call and examine well my store;
> You ne'er seen such hats before;
> My workmen, too, are grown so clever,
> They make my hats to last for ever.[206]

As American newspapers covered the news of Bolívar and his compatriots' struggles, another version of his name appeared as it was adopted for use in selling new consumer products and places. Merchants began selling Bolívar hats, bonnets, boots, and coats with clever advertising strategies like "You ne'er seen such hats before" in the ditty from an 1825 newspaper advertisement quoted above. American lakes, ships, counties, and towns also adopted his name. The hero of Latin America may have received ambivalent responses from the columns of American newspapers, but their advertisements showed a very different response: there, at least, he was fully embraced by United States culture.

Bolívar-named items thus offer a troubling facet of exceptionalism. Americans believed they could buy, sell, and interpret revolutionary figures as they saw fit, transforming his memorable name into consumables. As newspapers argued over his place in history, the Bolívar being sold by

[206] "An Address to all Men of Taste," *Evening Post* (New York, New York), June 15, 1825, 4.

merchants caricatured his memory and monetized it for republican capitalism. To some extent, this form of marketing based on the powerful memories of American heroes had appeared in the wake of Washington's death in 1799, but found exceptional purchase with the Liberator (no one, after all, had tried to sell Washington bonnets or gloves). It brought together three distinct developments in the revolutionary era. First, Americans wished to associate themselves with an optimistic version of the period. Second, American exceptionalism had now revealed an apolitical, market-driven side. And finally, this consumer culture stretched beyond American exceptionalism to include the rest of the West. The American pride during the age of revolutions had indeed aged by the time of the Latin American revolutions. This was a very different vision of civilization and human progress than that proposed by Enlightenment philosophers.

As news of Bolívar's death in December of 1830 made its way onto the pages of American newspapers, his legacy lived on in a series of consumer goods. Readers from all over the United States read in their local newspapers his emotional, death bed letter and final will and testament. At the same time, newspapers like the *Courier Journal* of Kentucky continued to print advertisements for Bolívar hats and bonnets. The hats in particular, made for both men women, included the catchy poem, quoted above, which continued: "Let it be known throughout the states, that I'm the self-same Thomas Yates; who makes the best of beaver hats—despising rabbit skins, or cats."[207] The Bolívar hat closely resembled other beaver stovepipe hats of the time. In particular, the D'Orsay design, prevalent in the 1820's, shared many if not all of the Bolívar hat characteristics with its black color, curved brim, and cylindrical design. The key factor was the Bolívar name. Businesses like Thomas Yates's used it to transform the hero of South American independence into a marketable brand. This new apparel, unsolicited by Bolívar (although he was presented with

[207] "An Address to all Men of Taste," *Evening Post* (New York, NY), June 15, 1825, 4.

a version of his hat), represented an early republican capitalism which sought to market the man and the era.[208]

Did these expensive hats offer the upper classes in the United States opportunities to identify with the revolutionary movements happening throughout the western hemisphere? The advertisement mentioned that the hats were designed for the "genteel part of the community" and the poem itself was titled, "An Address to all Men of Taste." Perhaps Bolívar's well known history as a member of the Venezuelan elite who also embraced republicanism proved too appealing a tie between class status and democratic ideals. Bolívar the man had become Bolívar the brand. The seller further explained that "To adhere to custom, and still retain in fashion hats which have heretofore been worn, would evince a want of good taste in the public, and would moreover be the means of imposing upon purchasers those of an inferior description to the neat and durable Bolívar hat."[209] This barrage of appeals to consumers to see the difference between the Bolívar hat and "those of inferior description" sought to ratchet this item up in the hierarchy of fashionable hats. Nor was it the only article of clothing attached to the South American leader. Products such as the Bolívar hat not only lined the pockets of clever marketers but also perpetuated the memory of this leader in the minds of members of the public.

Bolívar's transition from revolutionary hero to clothing brand represented a new iteration of public memory. An advertisement in a Tennessee newspaper further illustrated the disconnect between Bolívar the man and Bolívar the consumer product. For several days in 1831, the *National Banner and Nashville Whig* published an ad for a runaway enslaved man named Gabriel that offered a five dollar reward for his return. Gabriel had not runaway empty handed. The ad included

[208] "The Bolivar Hat." *Democrat* (Huntsville, Alabama), June 18, 1825, 1. The paper noted that a Bolívar hat, manufactured by a Mr. Hurley, was to be presented to the Liberator.
[209] "An Address to all Men of Taste," *Evening Post* (New York, NY), June 15, 1825, 4.

along with a physical description of him, a listing of several things he took before leaving his master. "He carried off with him a suit of fine clothes and a black Bolívar coat."[210] Similar to the hat, the Bolívar coat was designed to appeal to the upper classes. It consisted of a long, formal train suitable for travel, the type of coat a gentleman might wear on horseback. While perhaps too ostentatious for an enslaved man, the garment held enough value to have been sold to pay travel expenses as Gabriel made his way north to freedom. It seems fitting that such an article of clothing, bearing the close association with to the Liberator of so many regions of Latin American, might have contributed to the liberation of a formerly enslaved individual. At a time when the image of Bolívar was quickly becoming absorbed by consumer capitalism, the advertisement briefly reflected another side of that process. Thus, even though newspapers continued to remain silent on Bolívar's abolitionist efforts, republican capitalism might have ironically lived up to a part of the Bolívar legacy.

Conclusion

When Bolívar died of tuberculosis on December 17, 1830, American newspapers like the *Vermont Gazette* published the details of Bolívar's funeral. The ceremony reflected the many achievements of Bolívar with a forty-six—foot tall monument, seven hundred invisible lamps, and an obelisk containing military trophies. Interestingly, the ceremony included the flags of several nations. "Around these four figures, were displaced with much taste and symmetry, the flags of England, the United States, France, Holland, and the South American States."[211] Given Bolívar's tenuous relationship with most European nations and his neighbor to the north, the presence of France and the United States appeared as only the most tenuous of allies.[212] Nevertheless, this

[210] "$5 Reward," *National Banner and Nashville Whig* (Nashville, TN), January 28, 1831, 4.
[211] "Funeral of Bolívar," *Vermont Gazette* (Bennington, VT), March 22, 1831, 2.
[212] David Bushnell, "Simon Bolívar and The United States: A Study in Ambivalence," *Air Force University Review* 37 no. 5 (1986): 106-111. Bushnell discusses the complicated relationship between Bolívar and the United States as the

association further illustrates how the Bolívar mythology was adopted into the culture of the West as a repurposed vision of the Revolutionary era.

In the years after his death, the practice of appropriating the Bolívar name became an all too common occurrence. As historian John Lynch points out, even in death his name held power for opportunistic South American leaders. The myth and legacy of Bolívar captured the imagination of people in the Americas. "He was the Padre de la Patria, the soul of the nation's independence and nationality, the accepted savior of Colombia as well as of Venezuela," Lynch has written.[213] Greatness, or at least a form of greatness could be gained by those tied to the memory of the Liberator. Even former enemies tried to tie themselves to his legacy. The Bolívar name granted power and popularity. For many in the United States, Bolívar was the Liberator in life and the tragic hero in death. His name lived on in consumer products as the memory of the man faded from cultural awareness. Consumers could literally wear their beliefs on their sleeves. For some outside the western hemisphere, the allure of these products that signaled both capitalism and republicanism no doubt held special significance.

This republican capitalism was a far cry from the idealistic protestations of revolutionaries during the War of American Independence. It represented a new stage of American exceptionalism, permitting Americans to buy themselves an association with other hemispheric revolutions. It also meant the departure of the optimism and idealism of the eighteenth century. This tension between idealisms and consumerism continues to determine the trajectory of the United States and the rest of the West. Unlikely bedfellows, they have emerged as cornerstones of modern society.

South American leader both applauded U.S. political institutions and warned of the republic's expansionism. Far from allies, the policy of the United States toward Latin America was one of neutrality.

[213] Lynch, *Simón Bolívar,* 299.

As Bolívar strove to bring independence to his native continent, another version of him was first circulated in the United States, and then marketed in the form of consumer products. At first, newspapers tethered his name to new flowering of republicanism in Latin America that thrilled American and prompted some degree of identification; reader speculated that their own revolution had been responsible for fomenting new ones. Yet, over time this enthusiasm dampened. Additionally, the names of Bolívar created a political vocabulary for newspapers to contextualize their political narratives. The variety and simplicity of the nicknames reveals the lengths papers were willing to go to establish a relatable account of the South American revolutions and yet an account that encouraged American newspaper reader to see the allegedly superiority of their own revolution. Even if they made reference to Bolívar's more progressive stances on race and slavery, they sought to offer admiring, if sometimes patronizing or mildly critical accounts of his achievements.

The extent to which the newspapers ratcheted up their criticism during the 1820s is striking. Particularly after William Henry Harrison's views of Bolívar circulated widely, newspapers scrambled to offer more complex and often dismissive views of the success of the Latin American Revolutions, often instructing readers to view their own revolution as superior and those that took place to their south as violent, chaotic, and led by men of questionable and shadowy motives. Bolívar reminds us of how one man's legacy can be twisted to meet current needs.

When American newspapers got in on the act of selling Bolívar themed consumer items, however, they offered up yet another portrayal: a strangely sanitized version of revolution as symbolized by the portrayal of Bolívar. Here was a man stripped of his progressive ideals and human qualities in favor of a kind of status transmitted by his name. Important issues like abolition and slavery were replaced with a caricatured image of a South American leader on horseback.

Sadly, this created narrative worked. As Americans bought stylish Bolívar hats and bonnets and christened their ships and towns after the famed the leader, the ideals he stood for remained dormant in American society, waiting for a future age to take up the revolutionary fight and risk life and limb for Enlightenment ideals. By the time of Bolívar's death in 1830, progressives in the United States had not long to wait.

Conclusion

American newspapers provide a fascinating picture of American exceptionalism regarding the allegedly unique nature of the American Revolution during the Revolutionary era. Connected by information networks, these local, often family-run newspapers kept Americans informed about events happening across the Atlantic world. Their narratives shaped public opinion on international events as well as issues such as race and slavery. Above all, they urged their readers to understand the eruption of revolutions as stemming from their own—and failing to live up.

Newspapers exhibited a consistent pattern regarding revolutions other than their own. What typically began as an attempt to romanticize subsequent revolutions and compare them to the United States eventually led to distinctions being drawn between the apparent success of the American Revolution and the failures of other revolutions. Newspapers compared revolutionary leaders like Toussaint Louverture and Simón Bolívar to George Washington, men who doggedly led resistance movements against superior foes. If the simplistic comparisons failed to reflect reality, they served to boost American nationalism. American newspapers encouraged their readers to believe that their revolution was responsible for the democrat movement in France. But as the Reign of Terror erupted and, later, when massacres spread across Haiti, and chaotic infighting characterized the Latin America revolutions—newspapers portrayed those other revolutions as failing to live up to American standards. These narratives ignored the elements of the American

Revolution that had disregarded their founding ideals, and instead sought to criticize other countries' new constitutions and the leaders who allegedly "failed" to live up to the standards of the American Revolution.

As American newspapers covered the revolutions in France, Haiti, and Latin America, unique narratives developed around controversial leaders like Thomas Paine, Toussaint Louverture, and Simón Bolívar. Paine's letters in local newspapers exposed two competing ideological voices as differing viewpoints debated the viability of American political institutions. Federalist newspapers criticized the anti-Christian tendencies of the radical left, citing the Reign of Terror as a warning that the advocates of Jacobin-style politics would destroy American society. In contrast, Paine argued against Federalist abuses of power like the Adams administration's installation of the Alien and Sedition Acts. which landed a number of newspaper editors in jail for publishing stories critical of the federal government. He was hardly the only one to do so, but by then his anti-Christian politics had become so derided and despised in the press that dozens of mainstream newspapers urged their readers to reject him, along with the French Revolution—style politics he had admired.

In Haiti, Toussaint Louverture became the subject of competing narratives. Some heralded him as an emancipator of the enslaved people in this former French colony, but others, particularly Southern papers, portrayed him as a savior of the plantation system. While Northern newspapers expressed concern over the revolution's effect on trade in the West Indies, but fretted about the overly abrupt emancipation of enslaved people who were not yet "ready" for freedom, Southern newspapers argued more vigorously for the importance of slavery and the plantation system in Haiti. Southern papers had good reasons for doing so, and worried openly that the slave rebellion in Haiti might further destabilize Southern society and encourage their own enslaved people to revolt. As Louverture implemented strict labor laws and restored the property of white plantation

owners. Some newspapers portrayed him as a defender of the plantation system and even characterized him as a "good slave" who saw the value of white property ownership on the island. These constructed narratives met the needs of different groups and allowed newspapers to justify differing American values. Ultimately, these contrasting viewpoints furthered American exceptionalism by characterizing the Haitian Revolution as a dangerous precedent that stood in sharp contrast to the American Revolution.

By the time of the Latin American revolutions, American newspapers showed less interest in engaging with the subjects of race and slavery, even as many new Latin American countries took steps to eliminate the institution of slavery and antislavery efforts became closely associated with revolutionary movements worldwide. Instead, they focused on Bolívar—vacillating between portraying him as a hero, a liberator, a failure, or a traitor to republicanism, depending on the news. By the end of the 1820's, newspapers increasingly elected to focus on the struggles faced by new Latin American countries, emphasizing a new skepticism about their success, and certainly a deep ambivalence about how they compared to the American Revolution. Perhaps the crowning glory of this American exceptionalism was the move by opportunistic businessmen to adopt Bolívar's name to sell clothing to the wealthy. American newspapers advertised Bolívar hats, coats, and boots to commemorate the brave revolutionary hero of Latin America. This image of Bolívar barely scratched the surface of the man's actual legacy, instead reducing his name to a consumer brand devoid of political (or abolitionist) meaning. This gradual shift in perspective represented the culmination of American exceptionalism. The idealism of the Revolutionary era's early years had been replaced by a growing disinterest in other revolutions and an emphasis on republican capitalism—a striking development indeed for a country convinced that it alone had successfully carried out a meaningful and stable democratic revolution.

Over the course of the Revolutionary era, newspapers used subsequent revolutions and the men who led them to create narratives that seemed to justify American superiority. These actions had lasting effects. While newspapers created stories for a specific audience—mainly white, male readers with money to spend, these readers constituted the voting majority in the United States. The newspapers examined in this thesis reveal how readers perceived democratic movements, the age in which they lived, and the place of the United States in the Atlantic world.

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