2008

Accounting for Political Virtue: Consumer Choice and the Non-Consumption Movement in Revolutionary New York City

Melissa Faith Gray
College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Accounting for Political Virtue: Consumer Choice and the Non-consumption Movement in Revolutionary New York City

Melissa Faith Gray

Petaluma, California

Bachelor of Arts, Mount Holyoke College, 2006

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the College of William and Mary in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

The College of William and Mary
May, 2008

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Melissa Faith Gray

Approved by the Committee, May 2008

Committee Chair
Associate Professor Karen Wulf, History
The College of William and Mary

Professor Jim Axtell, History
The College of William and Mary

Dr. Marley R. Brown, III, Archaeology
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

Dr. Cary Carson, Historical Research
Colonial Williamsburg Foundation

ABSTRACT

The American colonies' resistance to Parliamentary legislation and the tenets of their new government demanded putting the corporate good before one's personal interest. In the language of republicanism, this was called "virtue". Many histories of the non-importation and non-consumption measures leading up to the American Revolution have characterized colonial virtue in economic terms as shopkeepers or merchants. However, by studying non-consumption as a separate, but complementary aspect of colonial resistance, the focus turns to the role of colonists as consumers. The shopping habits of customers in Samuel Deall's New York City shop suggest that non-consumption demanded a distinctive kind of "virtue", one that stigmatized, not so much economic self-interest, but individual expression that among the mobile European populations of the eighteenth-century had become a medium for claiming social status or group membership in an increasingly mobile world. The goods colonists were asked to boycott were linked to a form of self-interest that implicated a larger section of the population than the non-importation measures. This study attempts to analyze the nature of self-interest and, by extension, virtue that applied to colonists as consumers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This finished product would not have been possible without the many forms of support I have found in advisors, close friends and family. My advisors Karen Wulf, James Axtell and Cary Carson have offered insights and shown patience- both invaluable. I cannot thank Marley Brown enough for his guidance and interest in for my work from when I first came to Williamsburg as an undergraduate. Thanks also go to friends nearby- Kristin Raines, Libby Bond and Laura Steadman- and farther away- CJ Walsh and Anna, as well as the entire Clark family. Finally, gratitude to my own family, who continues to encourage me, despite all too infrequent visits home. In this category belong Kari, Katie and Stephen Gray, Myron and Patricia Steele and Joe Madrid. Most of all, I would like to thank my mother and father, Elizabeth Gray-Madrid and Richard Gray.

ACCOUNTING FOR POLITICAL VIRTUE
Consumer Choice and the Non-consumption Movement in Revolutionary New York City

If there was one thing worth dropping into Mr. Deall's shop for, it was his selection of gloves. The silk mitts and French kid gloves he carried began their transatlantic journey in Britain and arrived in America at one of the many docks that made New York a trading center in the mid eighteenth century. Mr. Deall's shop was situated less than a mile from the one of these commercial waterfronts. In the American colonies, the offerings in a store like Deall's was as "fresh" as fashion got. After Miss Schuyler and Peggy Schuyler made their way to the intersection of New York's Broad and Beaver streets to Deall's store in the last days of 1774, they both walked away with a pair of the cherished continental gloves. [1] French kid leather was softer and more elastic than other materials, which was an especially important feature before the development of standardized sizing in gloves.[2] Less than three months before, their colony's delegates attended the meeting of the newly formed Congress that passed resolutions asking communities to make sacrifices for their mutual interest. They called on merchants to stop all imports originating or coming by way of Britain beginning December 1. Soon the boycott would extend to consumers. There was no telling how much longer Deall's supplies of gloves would last, or how long New Yorkers could buy from his shop in good conscience.

By March 1, the third wave of boycotts would officially begin and the Miss Schuylers, for example, abruptly ended their visits to the end of Beaver Street. As daughters of one of New York City's congressional delegates, who would later command troops for the Continental Army, one can imagine that the pressure on the Miss Schuylers to toe the patriot line would have been significant, especially when it

---

[1] *Ibid.*, 9.
[2]Richard Maerschalck. "A Plan of New York from an Actual Survey" (New York, 1755); Valerie Cumming. *Gloves* (London: Batsford, Ltd., 1982), 44.

came to publicly visible imports, such as gloves.[3] When their consumption habits threatened to cast Peggy and Miss Schuyler at odds, not only with the patriot cause, but also with their family's public image, they chose to go without additions to their wardrobe.

While the years of curtailed shopping in 1765 and between 1767 and 1770 had lacked the support and institutional organization to make them effective, things were different in 1775. To the north, in Boston, the Intolerable Acts demonstrated to colonists elsewhere just how far Britain was willing to go to have its way, exercising precisely the kind of arbitrary power many colonists resented. Delegates went into the First Continental Congress in the summer of 1774 with a renewed sense of urgency. They came out with a comprehensive set of measures to cut all economic ties to Britain and to authorize the local infrastructure to see the non-importation, non-consumption and non-exportation agreements through.

Historians have only recently begun to consider separately issues of consumption and importation leading up to the American Revolution. Non-importation has been seen as a tactic or a tool British colonists in America used in their political disputes with the British parliament, which wielded its ability to tax in ways that, according to outspoken colonists, violated the English constitution. Non-consumption bolstered the strength of non-importation measures deployed in debates between colony and metropole. Most studies, however, have centered on non-importation and treated non-consumption as a minor aspect of the political debate.

---

[3] Samuel Deall. Account Books, 1768 to 1776, New York Historical Society, New York City, New York; "Peggy Schuyler" listed as third daughter of General Schuyler (*New-York Gazetteer*, 9 June 1783); Philip Schuyler elected was New York City delegate to Congress in May,1775 (*The New-York Journal*, 18 May 1775).

To appreciate the significance of non-consumption in addition to non-importation demands forces historians to reassess the identity of political actors and the meaning of public virtue. The efficacy of either depended on colonists putting their collective goals ahead of personal ones. Without civic virtue, the patriots' immediate and long-term political aims would fail.[4] By emphasizing non-importation at the expense of non-consumption, historians have focused largely on the role of merchants and their willingness to sacrifice monetary gains for the public good. As a result, virtue in the colonial context has been understood largely in terms of economics. However, by treating non-consumption as complementary, but separate from non-importation, a larger category of political actors emerges: consumers. Histories of popular participation in the American Revolution have centered on efforts by colonists to weave and wear homespun cloth or to do without British tea. For them, expressing political virtue involved more than money. The same held for the larger proportion of colonists that engaged in the debates of the Revolutionary era as consumers.

This paper aims to define the nature of consumer self-interest and, by extension, consumer virtue. By considering the ways consumer goods helped to fashion an individual's image it is possible to appreciate the extent to which colonists' purchases in the third quarter of the eighteenth century were connected to self-interest. To establish the nature of the consumer culture in New York leading up to the revolution, the study will begin with an analysis of advertisements drawn from

---

[4] In Gordon Wood's narrative of the development of American government during and after the American Revolution, the patriot leaders of the nascent government argued over how to create a republican government that respected individual and minority interest. They agreed that the success of the new republic depended on each man being "persuaded to submerge his personal wants into the greater good of the whole." See Gordon Wood. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 68.

New York newspapers published in the mid to late 1760s. The format of the notices show the extent to which shopkeepers drew on standards of gentility to sell their merchandize, while the advertised goods themselves show how tenuous the connection between physical objects and true refinement really was. The second and third sections build on the social context of consumer goods to understand the nature of consumer self-interest at stake during the third non-consumption protests through a case study of a retail shop account book from New York City. By evaluating the categories of goods for sale in Deall's store, I hope to show how consumer behavior before and after the non-consumption agreements went into affect in 1775 indicated an overwhelming concern for one's public image among those persons whose accounts with Deall showed modified patterns of consumption. If the overriding tenet of the patriot cause was putting one's interest after the collective good, these changes indicate the character of consumer virtue.[5] On the other hand, modifying one's appearance to comply with the non-consumption movement could have easily been in response to community intimidation. Ultimately, this study aims to show how, if most colonists experienced the political developments leading to the Revolution through boycotts, the sacrifices radical patriots asked (sometimes compelled) them to make was in their self-presentation. Forgoing consumer goods had significant implications for colonists in an era in which one's possessions articulated his or her public identity.

When Arthur Schlesinger contemplated the role of colonial merchants during the American Revolution in 1918, consumption was secondary to controversies over

---

[5] Barbara Clark Smith. "Social Visions of the American Resistance Movement." In *The Transforming Hand of Revolution*, edited by Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 55-56.

importation and exportation. The primary protagonists of his narrative leading up to the conflict were merchants, motivated largely by economic self-interest when it came to the colonies' disagreements with their main trading partners in Britain. In 1765, merchants agreed not to import British goods after January 1, 1766 until the tax on sugar and the Stamp Act were repealed.[6] Acquiescing to the taxes would cost them business, but agreeing to stop importing would help them get rid of excess inventory. Popular resistance to the Stamp Act was less orderly and turned into mob violence, leading to the destruction of private property, which merchants soon regretted.[7] In the late 1760s and into the 1770s, the medium of popular protest remained unruly and indicative of an increasing disposition towards lawlessness. Schlesinger argued that merchants concerned for the protection of private property were alienated from the radical agenda of patriots that relied on popular support.[8]

Merchants' ultimate decision to oppose the patriot cause rested in their refusal to put private, economic concerns second to what rebels had defined as the public good. Merchants, however, saw Congress's tandem restriction of international trade and consumption at odds with the collective good. Their vision of American independence rested on the promise of free trade, in which their interests and those of colonists collectively coincided. From the perspective of some merchants, Congress's measures embodied the tyranny patriots claimed to fight against, while their own efforts made them "the only true conservators of colonial rights."[9] Schlesinger did not address the role of non-consumption or consumers separately, but instead told a story of colonial resistance centered on non-importation, thus

---

[6] Arthur Schlesinger, Sr. *Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776* (1918; reprint, New York: Facsimile Library, Inc., 1939), 78.
[7] *Ibid.*, 591-92.
[8] *Ibid.*, 592.
[9] *Ibid.*, 594, 603-5.

involving a group defined by and acting in terms of commercial matters. Civic virtue was entirely about the sacrifice of economic interests. Since its earliest manifestations in 1765, non-consumption, as an addendum to non-importation, was tied to debates that pitted economic self-interest against those of the community.

Pauline Maier was more specific about the conflict between individual and corporate interests during both the non-consumption and non-importation movements, but again, her primary focus on non-importation put merchants' economic concerns at the center of the debate. She argued that, according to eighteenth-century political thought, collective interests were not necessarily in opposition to individual rights, but determined their boundaries. For example, early opponents to non-importation and non-consumption in 1765 and 1768 to 1770 questioned the movements' legitimacy because the violence they seemed to encourage threatened private property, which they equated personal liberties. However, when the Continental Congress backed these economic measures and authorized local committees to enforce them, the non-importation and non-consumption agreements acquired legitimacy; popular protest manifested in curtailed consumption, as opposed to disorganized mobs that harmed private property. [10] The importance of organized protest through non-consumption was implied in Maier's study, but not to the extent of non-importation and the tension between personal rights and corporate welfare remained a matter of economic interests.

For Maier and Schlesinger, putting one's self-interest second to the corporate good, entailed sacrificing one's economic self-interest. Other historians acknowledged that the affects of non-consumption lay not only in political disputes, but also in their relationship with daily life by asking colonists to make sacrifices that

---

[10] Pauline Maier. *From Resistance to Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 137.

effected how they dressed, for example. Moreover, by treating non-consumption separately one could get at the everyday experience of colonists as consumers, as well as merchants, committee members and political leaders. In the end, conceptions of "virtue" in studies of non-consumption were distinct from those associated with non-importation because they considered the effects of the conflict on the lives of colonists not necessarily at the forefront of the political debates.

For Barbara Clark Smith, the boycotts of the 1760s and 1770s assisted in bringing change, not only in parliamentary policy through the pressure of merchants and manufacturers, but also in social relations by uniting colonists in two ways. Non-consumption brought home the conflict with Parliament over unfair taxation in "a way relatively ordinary Americans, unversed in the nuances of imperial relations or niceties of constitutional thinking, understood."[11] Additionally, non-consumption helped to facilitate coalitions across social ranks by its promotion of the patriots' emphasis on mutuality, its enforcement based on community surveillance by ordinary men and women and its discouragement of gentility that had acted as an exclusionary standard of social sorting based on a combination of one's material possessions and behavior.[12] As a result, the struggle touched elements of daily life that previously existed outside the realm of politics, making localized issues of neighborliness and class relations part of an imperial debate.

The materiality of consumption played a minor role in Smith's interpretation of non-consumption when compared to T.H. Breen's *Marketplace of Revolution*. Breen argued that British colonies were first united, knowingly or not, through the goods they imported from Britain. Colonists saw these goods, largely textiles, as material

---

[11] Smith, "Social Visions," 55.
[12] *Ibid.*, 55-56, 34.

expressions of their imperial identity. In this they were united across geographies and social ranks. Collectively, they also had grown accustomed to the *variety* of goods available through their British networks. In fact, when Parliamentary taxes and colonial protests threatened their ability to choose, protests articulated their grievances by claiming that consumer choice was not just a privilege of being a part of the British Empire, but a right. As Breen noted:

> Whatever the long-term possibilities may have been, however, it seems clear that within this particular context–a colonial society dependent on consumer goods–the concept of freedom of choice was elevated to a right, and within that mental framework, choice no longer had to be defended on purely prudential or historical grounds.[13]

Breen claimed that by connecting consumer goods to an ideology that saw choice as a right, ordinary colonists could make sense of the political debates that stormed around them. No longer did the "pursuit of happiness" necessarily mean "a vulgar concern for economic self-interest."[14] If consumer choice stood in as self-interest, virtue, putting the corporate good ahead of one's own, took the form of consumer restraint. When merchants failed to put their economic interest aside as a patriotic sacrifice after the failure of the 1770 non-importation agreement, it became evident "that the people were ultimately accountable for the common good."[15] By then, colonists saw themselves collectively as consumers through their shared experience in a common material culture and in the commercial protests of the 1760s. It was up to consumers to cut their dependence on British imports if the boycotts were to have any political effect. If merchants' virtue was evident in their adherence to non-importation, most colonists could show theirs through non-consumption. As in

---

[13] T.H. Breen. *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 190.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] *Ibid.*, 292.

Smith's interpretation of non-consumption, the imperative of colonists to exercise their political clout through their purchases connected more mundane to larger, political aspects of colonial life. However, Breen, more than Smith, offered a direct response to earlier historians' pre-occupation with non-importation, merchants and a monetary definition of self-interest.

Both groups of historians, however, shared the fundamental assumption that the colonists' consumption habits were linked to self-interest in the in the late 1760s and 1770s. Many historians of consumerism would agree. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, economic change and migration overwhelmed the ability of traditional social hierarchies to order communities where residents lacked older identifiers, such as local connections and immovable possessions, such as land. New markers of identity that relied on consumer goods and behaviors emerged to identify the inhabitants of communities in flux. In a culture that depended on consumer goods for social communication, one's individual interest took the form of self-representation. Appearances cultivated in part through purchased goods could help one publicly claim or aspire to a social group. Goods were a means of pursuing social advancement or group affiliation and, once achieved, maintaining that identity. The role of material culture as a means of self-expression is a common denominator in the arguments of political historians of the non-consumption and non-importation agreements and social historians.

The notion of "gentility" was an example of a set of ideas that assigned status to people according to their physical possessions and environment and, increasingly, their etiquette and skills. In the American colonies, the standards of elite status were upheld by the colonial equivalent of the English gentry (only wealthy

middling sorts by English standards), who in turn kept their eye on London fashion.[16] Distinctions of status were based on refined comportment, as well as possessions. In a consumer culture, the former were not available to the masses and, therefore, according to some, constituted a more reliable index of one's status, or at least that was the theory. Advertisements for dancing lessons and etiquette manuals indicate manners were as much for sale as silk and china tea sets, but they helped to give the appearance of natural refinement nonetheless. Whether one entered the circles of the social elite depended on having both refined material goods and, increasingly important, the manners to go with them.

During the eighteenth century, people from a range of socioeconomic levels were swept up in the pursuit of refinement, a term that became synonymous with "British-ness." British colonists in America were accumulating more consumer goods than ever before in the mid eighteenth century, according to Carole Shammas.[17] As merchants responded to growing consumer demand informed by the same rules of gentility, the goods available to British colonists in America were increasingly similar and overwhelmingly British. Breen has called the standardization of consumer taste and choice a form of Anglicization, a term other historians have used to describe legal and economic developments in the colonies.[18] As a trend in consumption, Anglicization or gentility increasingly shaped the desires and goals of many colonists

---

[16] T.H. Breen, "The American Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," in *Of Consuming Interests: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, et al. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 459; Richard Bushman. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992), 70.

[17] Carole Shammas, "Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption from 1550 to 1800," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*. eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 199-201.

[18] Breen, "American Consumer Revolutions," 458.

over the course of the eighteenth century. The cult of gentility was not a new phenomenon by the late 1760s, but the number of its followers was.

Among those who pursued refinement, consumerism had a homogenizing effect on the material culture of all but the lowest ranks of society and created the need for additional ways to distinguish rank. Since physical possessions were easily accessible, etiquette and fashionability became critical ingredients of gentility. [19] These refinements were harder to possess, since fashion by definition was changeable and manners required training and seemingly effortless execution. Although as expressions of status they were ephemeral, knowledge of genteel skills and style trends pointed to one's "real" gentility.[20] Someone who only owned or displayed objects without the talents and knowledge related to rituals of refinement risked accusations of being only superficially genteel. True refinement was composed of more than silk petticoats and silver spoons; it was displayed by a silk petticoat in the latest color, with the newest trim, and wit and conversation shared at an elegantly set table.

Still further distinctions could be made between those who merely imitated genteel turns of phrases or manners and those who made them part of their person. One who seemed naturally to possess and manifest the qualities of refinement were said to have "taste." Through consistent socializing with those of taste, others might also acquire that distinction. As the label implies, "taste" was a matter of discrimination, "an attunement to what was appropriate to a situation, a sensitivity for

---

[19] Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America: Why Demand?," *Of Consuming Interest.* eds. Cary Carson, et al., 675.
[20] Bushman, *Refinement of America*,182-86; Carson, "Why Demand," 682.

the qualities of persons and things, a critical judgment."[21] Belongings and even behavior without the internalized sensibilities of gentility fell short of proclaiming one's total refinement.

Even though material culture was not the definitive indicator of rank for some, those who sought to live a genteel lifestyle could not afford to ignore it. An anonymous contributor to the *New York Gazette* in 1767, reflecting on his learned friend's bad luck with the ladies, admonished him to attend a tea-drinking ceremony for a lesson in socializing: "I have accordingly ordered him to attend a tea-table of celebrated beauties and assiduously to copy the manners of those that are there favourably received."[22] There he might learn the "apt phrases" and "language of the world" needed to show off the learning "locked up in his own breast." The friend's education spoke for his refinement, however, "those little embellishments which give an ease to, and decorate the person [should not] be entirely disregarded."[23] Even a man of learning could not do without adopting the social ease exhibited at the tea-table that subtly, but publicly, marked one as inherently refined.

Physical objects were props for the stages, like the tea-table, on which social elites and their emulators demonstrated their etiquette, skills, and artful conversation. When not in use, the accoutrement of genteel rituals continued to be statements about the owner's lifestyle.[24] Some goods were genteel because of their intended use.

While notions of refinement may have informed the choices of many colonial consumers, they by no means can account for them all. The same consumer goods

---

[21] David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 37-40.
[22] *New-York Gazette*, 26 November 1767.
[23] *Ibid.*
[24] Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 19.

could be deployed to communicate multiple values and identities. For example, when 'Francisque' in Sophie White's article about French Colonial New Orleans, attended a gathering of fellow slaves in 1766, he used European-made clothes and accessories to express masculinity and status in non-European ways. His sartorial display took its cues, not from gentility, but from the standards of a community informed by their current condition as slaves, but also elements of African culture. Clearly, goods could be appropriated to communicate ideas distinct from the intentions of their creators.[25] Moreover, as other historians have shown, in some instances, consumer goods could also express political values.

It is impossible to know what brought the Miss Schuylers to Samuell Deall's shop in December 1774. Perhaps one of them had come across an advertisement he placed in one of New York's weekly papers. His notice in *Rivington's New York Gazetteer* that September began with the same language he used when placing advertisements in the previous ten years: "Just Imported from London."[26] Deall's publicity and account indicate he dealt largely in garden seeds and goods to maintain one's personal health and appearance. The last category suffered the greater loss of sales during non-consumption. Dress was an important way to assert one's identity and status, but according to the rules of gentility, it was one among a constellation of attributes.

The majority of store advertisements that appeared in New York newspapers in the late 1760s demonstrated that storekeepers attempted to appeal to potential customers in pursuit of, not merely genteel goods, but genteel lifestyles. Consumer

---

[25] Sophie White, " 'Wearing three or four handkerchiefs around his collar, and elsewhere about him': Slaves' Constructions of Masculinity and Ethnicity in French Colonial New Orleans." *Gender & History* 15 (2003), 528-49.
[26] *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, 29 September 1774.

goods themselves were only part of the equation, making the gentility advertisements offered, incomplete. The list of stocks that appeared in newspaper mentioned items valued by genteel circles for their visual display and others for their place in the rituals where the elite performed their refinement. By mentioning items used by those who participated in genteel behaviors, merchants made assumptions about their readers' awareness of up-to-date clothing fashions and literary and social skills. Although a growing proportion of the population in colonial America could afford to purchase the goods advertised, the notices were subtle reminders that true gentility was not for sale, because the goods they offered had to be used in certain ways to be part of a refined way of life.

If readers had recently been in the city and heard a town crier and seen a shop sign or handbill listing a store's offerings, the newspaper advertisements may have offered old news. Most likely, this was not the case. Newspaper advertising had the potential to reach greater numbers of people than incidental exposure on the streets. For an average of two pence and six shillings, storeowners could place an advertisement in a newspaper, which by 1760, existed in most large communities in the American colonies.[27] Between 1767 and 1770, seven weekly newspapers were distributed throughout the greater New York City area. The *New York Journal* alone was delivered to approximately 1,500 addresses, according to subscription rolls.[28] These numbers, however, did not account for how many people read the paper at a local tavern or a borrowed copy belonging to a friend or neighbor or, if not literate

---

[27] Geoffrey Cranfield. *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper, 1700-1760* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1962), 226.
[28] Robert Barrow, "Newspaper Advertising in Colonial America" (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1967), 255.

themselves, heard a newspaper read by someone who was.[29] Thus, while subscription records cannot account for the true size of the audience for New York newspapers in the 1760s, it was clearly large. Extensive circulation enabled weekly periodicals and their announcements to reach more people, more consistently, than other media.[30]

Newspaper content, however, suggested that publishers in colonial America were preoccupied with serving a selected demographic with common concerns and principles. According to print culture historian Charles Clark, the target audience was, for the most part, elite and male. The prospective readership was also businessmen, property owners, Protestant church-goers and politically active citizens.[31] Their core values and interests were implied in essays, news items, and editorial opinions. These included the superiority of the white race over all others, of England compared to other nations, namely France, of households ruled by patriarchs, and of Protestantism over Catholicism and non-Christian faiths. Newspaper content also expressed the belief that freedom of the press and speech helped to keep potentially tyrannical governments in check and that one's moral character was evident through material success, which was in turn likely facilitated by the virtues of industry, frugality, honesty and piety.[32] Clark contended that the disjuncture between readership and target audience meant that a large group of readers, although not part of the elite, were exposed to the latter group's principles.[33]

---

[29] *Ibid.*, 58.
[30] *Ibid.*, 57.
[31] Charles Clark, "The Newspapers of Provincial America," in *Three Hundred Years of the American Newspaper*, edited by John Hench (Worcester Press: American Antiquarian Society, 1991), 383.
[32] *Ibid.*, 385-86.
[33] *Ibid.*, 389.

Newspaper advertisements for New York stores from 1767 to 1770 both confirm and complicate this picture. While wording and content indicated that shopkeepers attempted to appeal to the members of polite society, or those who aspired to be, their announcements made gentility only marginally more accessible. Shopkeepers' tended to sell textiles alongside cutlery, snuffboxes, china, and literary equipage, all physical accoutrements central to genteel lifestyles. However, merely possessing the materials of refinement was not enough to gain admittance into genteel circles. The need for outside knowledge and skills that naturalized one's refinement helped to maintain the exclusivity of genteel circles. It was up to the customer with outside knowledge to make informed choices about what was the fashionable or "proper" use of the goods advertised in genteel ways. Newspaper advertisements for consumer goods showed how cultural knowledge and consumption came together to define the boundaries of polite society.

Shopkeepers' announcements did not cater solely to an elite consumer base. The wording and the products listed suggested that advertisers anticipated that cabinetmakers, shoemakers, tailors, and country merchants, among other tradesmen, might also see their notices. Sometimes tradesmen were directly addressed, as in James Nixon's notice placed in the *New York Journal* in late November 1768, promising lower, likely wholesale, prices for "Town or Country Stores, Taylors (*sic*), Stay makers, &c, &c."[34] Nixon's ads made similar appeals to working newspaper readers between 1767 and 1769. Gerardus Duyckinck, Erasmus

[34] *New-York Journal*, 24 November 1768.

Williams and Ennis Graham were more subtle, stating in the first lines of the advertisement that their wares were also available at wholesale prices.[35]

At other times, the listed goods themselves indicated that storeowners knew advertisements reach more than the leisure class. Ads placed by Samuel Broome and company between May and July 1768, for example, demonstrated how a shop could reach out to a rather egalitarian consumer base. While over half of the merchandize Broome publicized was textiles, some of very fine quality, about a quarter of the goods listed were used in workshops. There were scissors of "Taylors," carpenters' and shoemakers' hammers, as well as locks, chisels, saws, furniture hardware, scythes, and sickles for cabinetmakers and prospective customers who worked the land.[36] Indeed, by using specialized names to refer to some tools, Broome targeted consumers with specific knowledge of a trade.

While Broome's ads were by no means exceptional, most storeowners did not visibly cast their consumer net so widely, other than by advertising in a medium accessible to people of all "sorts." The majority of store ads attempted to attract consumers not through their business concerns, but through their aspirations to genteel lifestyles. Notices that made no effort to appeal to the values of eighteenth-century gentility were, in fact, exceptional. Most storekeepers promoted their merchandize using wording and formats that relied on the standards of refinement as selling points

The format and rhetoric merchants used in New York newspapers in the late 1760s reflected what was happening in the presses of other large colonial towns, such as Charleston, South Carolina, Boston, Philadelphia and Williamsburg, Virginia.

---

[35] *New-York Gazette*, 23 April 1767; *New-York Journal*, 18 February 1768; *New-York Gazette*, 2 May 1768.
[36] *New-York Journal*, 21 July 1768.

According to Timothy Breen, colonial advertising along the eastern seaboard from the 1720s to the 1770s followed parallel trends in the way they emphasized choice, European associations, and fashionableness.[37] Breen's observations indicated that ads were deliberately crafted to appeal to what they perceived to be the readers' values. Shop owners' emphases on the origins and fashionableness of goods and on apparel in general suggested that they believed those values were informed by the standards of refinement.

When an advertiser composed notices, he made assumptions about his audience, in this case, how his readers understood gentility. Shopkeepers promoted certain goods as unambiguously genteel, anticipating that readers without prior knowledge would read their notices. But owning objects invested with European provenance and reputed fashionableness would get a customer only partway to true refinement. Since one needed additional knowledge to use or wear these items. In this department, advertisements were minimally helpful. On the other hand, those who already had the skills and know-how integral to socializing in elite circles would have read the notices easily and understandingly. Being culturally informed helped the truly genteel customer to navigate the lists of textiles and to make other items for sale, such as playing cards, tea and teawares, dining paraphernalia, snuff and snuff boxes, and writing equipment part of their refined lifestyle. Many of the goods advertised were part of genteel, leisure rituals that separated the well bred from pretenders. Customers seeking or engaging in a genteel lifestyle would have to already possess the knowledge to make certain items the storeowner promoted deliver. Ads attested to the assumptions merchants made

---

[37] Breen, *Marketplace*, 340n, 133-36.

about the cultural knowledge of potential customers and the varying levels at which they participated in genteel life.

Merchants assumed that prospective customers would be attracted to goods with a British or European association.[38] Opening or closing an ad by informing readers that the goods listed were imported from Europe or, more often, Britain or London, the capital of genteel taste, was almost universal in 1767 and 1768. Shop owner John Morton's ad that ran on October 10, 1768, in *The New York Gazette*, for example, began with a fairly standard opening line announcing that his goods were "Just imported in the last Vessels from London, Bristol, &c."[39] In fact, the same Samuel Broome who sold scythes and hammers began another advertisement by specifying that the "the following Goods" had just arrived "in the Mercury, from London, and the last Vessels from Bristol, Liverpool, and Scotland."[40] Broome was not the only merchant to advertise his utilitarian and consumer goods under the same sales pitch.[41] Merchants used the cachet of European or British origins to sell equipment for the workbench as well as the dining room table.

Connecting goods to Europe implied they were fashionable by genteel standards, but sometimes storekeepers felt the need to be more explicit. Fashionable items had to be both new and carefully chosen. As with Morton and Broome, sometimes advertisers promoted the up-to-date quality of their stocks by simply adding the words "just imported" or "on the last Vessels" to the port of origin.[42] Others used the terms *newest* or *fashionable* to describe specific products, usually

---

[38] Although many items, especially silks and cottons, originally came from Asia, what was important (and unavoidable) was that they came to the colonies by way of Europe.
[39] *New-York Gazette*, 10 October 1768.
[40] *New-York Journal*, 21 July 1768.
[41] *New-York Journal*, 20 October 1768.
[42] For examples, see *New-York Mercury*, 27 April 1767; *New-York Gazette,* 2 May 1768.

textiles, but sometimes furniture, dishes, and mirrors.[43] Still other merchants relied on their own reputation as discerning shoppers by telling readers that the goods for sale had been handpicked by the shop owner while in London—from whence he had just returned.[44] A merchant knew that his audience believed having the latest fashions in dress or possessions was part of genteel display, but also that they might need to be assured about which those goods those were.

Advertisers' emphasis on textiles and clothing accessories corresponded with the importance gentility placed on apparel as portable and visible statements of status.[45] Shopkeepers who sold textiles along with an assortment of other goods usually listed cloth first. For example, anyone who perused the ads in the *New York Journal* from May 5, 1768, would find that of the eleven advertisements that sold cloth, only one did not begin the notice by listing fabrics.[46] Moreover, the textile that the single advertisement did not list first was sailcloth, intended, not surprisingly, to outfit ships, not people.[47]

Not only did shopkeepers start their advertised inventory lists with fabric, but sartorial supplies in general dominated the text.[48] Textiles tended to take up the bulk of advertising space, followed by trimmings and other clothing supplies, such as lace, ribbons, needles and woven strips used to encase the raw edges of material or to add decorative detail. Millenary items were followed by ready-made accessories,

---

[43] For examples, see *New-York Gazette*, 26 September 1768; *New-York Gazette*, 23 April 1767.
[44] For examples, see *New-York Gazette*, 7 November 1768.
[45] Karin Calvert, "The Function of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America," in *Of Consuming Interest: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, et al. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 254.
[46] *New-York Journal*, May 5 1768.
[47] Florence Montgomery. *Textiles in America 1650-1870* (New York: Norton, 1984), 337.
[48] Textiles also accounted for over half of all manufactured goods imported to the colonies from Britain. This was understandable given the importance gentility place on clothing and colonists on British goods. See Breen, *Marketplace,* 62.

such as fans, stockings, cloaks, and gloves. If a shopkeeper wanted to announce that he sold goods made of metal or ceramic, he tended to list them after textiles. Advertisers were likely to relegate dining ware, buckles, cutlery, tea, and paper products to the ends of inventory lists in no apparent order.

John Morton's notice from November 1768 demonstrated how merchants who advertised fabric alongside other goods designated the most space to highlighting that they carried supplies for clothing. The ad arranged goods into two columns. He began his list by mentioning seventy-nine different types of cloth, followed by handkerchiefs, hose, cravats, and gloves. Next came literary supplies, such as writing paper, ink, and spelling books, along with ready-made coats and cutlery. The list ends with a jumbled assortment of metal ware, such as buckles, carpenters tools, and buttons. At the very bottom of the notice and conspicuously separate from the laundry list of textiles, trinkets, and tools, Morton listed raw materials for a blacksmith, followed by "a large assortment of chinaware, and a variety of looking glasses in the newest taste, &c. &c."[49] In all, Morton devoted over two-thirds of the advertisement to products associated with textiles and costume and listed the rest of his goods in the remaining portion in no particular order. By visually stressing the volume of textiles in their inventories, shopkeepers like Morton attempted to appeal to customers through the most obvious and superficial indicator of gentility.

Finding one's way through the long lists of textiles could be impressive but also intimidating. Breen argues that variety enabled "ordinary men and women to establish a meaningful and distinct sense of self through the exercise of individual choice, a process of ever more egalitarian self-fashioning that was itself the

[49] *New-York Gazette*, 11 July 1768.

foundation of a late eighteenth-century liberal society."[50] However, consumer choice was as much an opportunity for self-expression as it was a test of one's knowledge of fashion.

By the mid-eighteenth century, colonists were faced with an unprecedented number of clothing options that required some deciphering.[51] In the *New York Journal* from May 5, 1768, for example, over 139 terms were used by advertisers to describe the types of fabrics, trimmings, and accessories according to fiber, color and pattern. Descriptions rarely indicated what an item was used for or its relative quality. For example, *drawboy* referred to woolen fabric with woven designs more complicated than other plain wools, such as *satinette*, which was flimsy and typically striped.[52] Both materials, however, were used for clothing. *Durant*, *tammy*, and *budoy* were all worsted fabrics given a light sheen by the application of heat. Of the three, *durant* was the finest.[53] *Minionet* referred to fine linen used for men's shirts and curtains, while coarser varieties, such as *bunt* and *dowlas*, were used for bolster and featherbed cases or the clothes of lower ranks.[54] And a note of caution to those who considered using *shalloon* (wool) to line their silk suits- friction between the cheap, worsted twill and smoother, less sturdy fabrics brought about the destruction of many fine waistcoats and breeches.[55]

Potential confusion extended to silks. Although the fiber was reputed for its richness, some weaves were of mediocre quality or shared a name with a fabric that was not silk at all. For example, if a velvet was called *Geneoa*, it referred to the

---

[50] Breen, *Marketplace*, 55.
[51] *Ibid.*, 55-58.
[52] Montgomery, *Textiles in America*, 224-25, 342.
[53] *Ibid.*, 181-82, 229-30, 360-61.
[54] *Ibid.*, 223, 182.
[55] *Ibid.*, 346-47.

finest plush silk available. However, *Manchester velvet* referred to nothing more than a specially woven cotton fabric.[56] Other silks, such as *persia*, *ferret silk*, and *armazine* were thin, second-rate versions of finer materials.[57] In addition to being flimsy, ferret silk, and also tabby, were coarse, precisely the trait elites for centuries had valued silk for not exhibiting.[58] *Taffeta*, on the other hand, was silk that would never lose its luster in the eighteenth century— at least in women's fashion.[59] Clearly, some wools, linens, and cottons were inferior and not all silks were created equal.

A notice placed in the *New York Gazette* by Henry Remsen, Junior and Company in July 1768 would have presented the reader with a potentially perplexing number of choices.[60] The ad listed eighty-five different fabrics, including forty-six distinguished by name and twenty-five differentiated by color and pattern. There were twenty-three accessories, from wooden or bone fans to Barcelona (patterned silk) bandanas to men's lambskin gloves. To add fine details to one's appearance, Remsen's offered eight different ribbons and three laces, as well as none-so-pretties, a catch-all phrase for any tape or ribbon not already mentioned.[61] Where could the uninformed consumer begin? Perhaps, more choice in dressing options did not easily translate into broader access to true gentility.

The ability to dress genteelly went beyond sorting through sartorial jargon. The smooth silks and bright fabrics, materials once associated with noble costume, were no longer indicative of refined clothing as the social elite distinguished

---

[56] *Ibid.*, 370, 287.
[57] *Ibid.*, 237, 321-23, 150.
[58] *Ibid.*, 237, 355-56; Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 70.
[59] Montgomery, *Textiles in America*, 358.
[60] *New-York Gazette*, 11 July 1768.
[61] Montgomery, *Textiles in America*, 310.

themselves with understated fashion. Skilled tailors and seamstresses assembled clothing carefully fit to the wearer's body. Tailors made the backs of men's suits narrow and the fronts with ample fabric, exaggerating (or encouraging) the wearer's upright posture associated with genteel carriage.[62] Thus, the cut of clothes, as opposed to simply embellishments or the richness or volume of fine fabrics, expressed gentility.

Men's choice of stockings could also attest to refined behavior. Silk hose was thinner than woolen versions, and thus better suited to expose the contours of the calf. Ideally, these were "graceful curves of legs developed through the genteel pastimes of dancing, riding, and fencing."[63] Like the fine tailoring of clothes, silk stockings were meant to show off the wearer's body, his or her natural self, as long as doing so revealed a person whose gentility went deeper than his apparel, extending to how he carried himself or spent his leisure time.

If one lacked the knowledge to make informed choices in their cut of clothes or from dizzying lists of textiles, he or she may also have stumbled on the road to refinement when it came to using goods associated with genteel rituals, such as playing cards, tea and teawares, dining paraphernalia, snuff and snuff boxes, or writing supplies. Advertisers listed these goods in combinations that suggested that merchants expected potential customers to have the outside knowledge to know how to use them. Textiles, often in long lists, appeared most frequently alongside tea-drinking and dining equipment, but also writing utensils and playing cards. When Alexander M'Donald submitted an advertisement to the *New York Journal* in July 1767, the only goods he listed not related to dress were dining and tea-drinking

---

[62] Calvert, "Function of Fashion," 261, 274.
[63] *Ibid.*, 274.

wares.[64] Sometimes advertisements suggested the act of dining by listing tablecloths and napkins, but often through the mention of knives and forks.[65] Other times serving dishes and accessories, such as castors for dispensing spices and cruet frames to hold multiple castors, evoked the rituals of eating.[66] Objects used in formal dining most often appeared in combination with those associated with tea drinking, such as porcelain china, sugar dishes, and teapots. Some items connected to refined behavior appeared less frequently, but when they did, were invariably listed alongside dining and tea-drinking equipment and especially textiles. For example, merchants nearly always mentioned snuff and snuffboxes or objects related to writing (writing desks, sealing wax, writing paper and, ink powder to spelling primers) in conjunction with supplies for the wardrobe and dining table.

Like other "ritual" goods, such as dining and tea-drinking utensils, playing cards implied refinement because they were associated with a form of entertainment that demanded social skills. Before pulling up a chair, one had to make sure he or she knew the rules of the game. Unlike card games played before the seventeenth century, those of eighteenth-century polite society relied on skill as well as chance, some involving competing in teams or making alliances.[67] In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, for example, printers advertised instructional handbooks on genteel card games, such as whist. An advertisement placed by printer James Rivington in *Rivington's New York Gazetteer* in 1777 announced the sale of sheet music and works by Voltaire in alongside "Maxims" that promised "to instruct

---

[64] *New-York Journal*, 2 July 1770.
[65] For an example of "table cloth", see *New-York Journal*, 17 May 1770; for an example of "knives and forks", see *New-York Journal*, 2 July 1767.
[66] John Salter, *Sauce Labels, 1750-195.* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collector's Club, 2002), 2; Peter Hornsby, *Pewter of the Western World, 1600-1850* (Exton, PA: Schiffer, 1983), 141-42.
[67] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, 159.

Beginners, to assist moderate Proficient, and, in general, to put Players more upon Equality by disclosing the Secrets of the Game."[68] Another notice published in 1780 directed at "Young Adventurers, Spooners, and all others rated in the lower class of Card Players" advertised the availability of a "Treatise on the following fashionable games", including card games involving multiple players, such as whist, hazard, picquet and lasquenet.[69] Similar to dress materials listed in newspaper advertisements, card games, with regional variations, changing protocols, and popular strategies, were also vulnerable to fashion.[70]

Not every alliance formed at the card table was temporary. Cards symbolized an opportunity for acceptable heterosocial interaction. Although genteel games structured the relations between players, they signified the opportunity to display one's wit and conversational art for an audience of men and women, or rather gentlemen and ladies. Games were stages for "conversation, courtship, and conviviality," which, Samuel Johnson observed in the 1760s, "'generates kindness, and consolidates society'."[71] Historian David Shields argued that Johnson mixed up the cause and effect of the refining potential of card playing: "sociability generated kindlier forms of card play, which, in turn, consolidated society."[72] Game rules were social codes.

The ceremonies associated with the tea and teawares advertised by merchants were no less demanding. Intentionally or not, drinking tea in the late eighteenth century, historians argue, took on a distinctly feminine air that contrasted with more male dominated environments, such as the coffee house. Recent

---

[68] *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, 22 November 1777.
[69] *Royal Gazette* [New York], 6 Decemer 1780.
[70] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, 160.
[71] Cited in Shields, *Civil Tongues*, 159.
[72] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, 159.

scholarship describes tea-tables and the rituals women developed around it as a counterpart to the masculine coffee house atmosphere.[73] At tea, women "policed the reputations of members of the genteel classes" by gossiping or engaged their "feminine interest in fashion and its material manifestations," all through the art of conversation practiced and polished over cups of tea and tartlets, artfully juggled.[74]

By the late eighteenth century, the simple act of drinking tea had become so common among prosperous professionals and tradesmen -the middling sorts- that standards of etiquette and accoutrement became necessary for genteel tea-drinking.[75] There was an appropriate order in which to serve guests, depending on their sex, age, and rank. The increasingly specialized equipment for tea-drinking also tested one's familiarity with the nuances of the social ritual, such as selecting one's lump sugar using tongs, as opposed to fingers.[76] Prince de Broglie became keenly aware of the need for knowing his tea-table manners during a visit to Philadelphia in 1781:

> I partook of most excellent tea and I should be even now still drinking it, I believe, if the [French] Ambassador had not charitably notified me at the twelfth cup, that I must put my spoon across it when I wished to finish with this sort of warm water. He said to me: it is almost as ill-bred to refuse a cup of tea when it is offered to you, as it would [be] indiscreet for the mistress of the house to propose a fresh one, when the ceremony of the spoon has notified her that we no longer wish to partake of it.[77]

---

[73] *Ibid.*, 113.
[74] *Ibid.*, 119; Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America," 446.
[75] Ann Smart-Martin, "Buying into the World of Goods: Eighteenth Century Consumerism and the Retail Trade from London to the Virginia frontier" (Ph.D. diss., College of William and Mary, 1993), 332-33, 336.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] Quoted in Rodris Roth, "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1800*, edited by Robert Blair St. George (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987), 446.

As minor royalty, de Broglie was welcomed into polite society and kindly shown the error of his ways. Perhaps, rules which others were not so delicately initiated into equally governed tea and card tables.

Tea-drinking was also noted for the conversation it facilitated. According to New York newspapers in the 1760s, the tea-table as the center of fashion, manners, and female society. In a *New York Gazette* article published in January 1768, "Laura" defended the tea-table, arguing that its sole pre-occupation was not "calling particular parts of their dress by those names which distinguish them", as "Mr. De Speculo" claimed.[78] She invited her accuser to come see for himself. He accepted her invitation, resolving to attend her tea ritual that was allegedly not overly preoccupied with clothing "as soon as I get my great white tye-wig (...) new com'd and buckle'd."[79] "Mr. De Speculo's" fashionable preparation suggested that he remained to be convinced.

The social graces associated with tea and its accessories were also required to make the dining cutlery, dishes, and furniture that merchants listed in their notices, genteel. The knives and forks, tables, chairs, table linens, and serving dishes were essential to refined dining, but manners and conversation were the centerpieces. What set the genteel table apart from commoner versions was that every guest had his or her individual set of utensils, cups, and dishes. These were also "kits" used "to demonstrate the polite skills that validated claims to gentility."[80] Stemmed glasses were held with one hand, freeing the other "to engage in the practiced gestures that accompanied genteel conversations."[81] Mishandling dinnerware could result in

---

[78] *New-York Gazette*, 4 January 1768.
[79] *Ibid.*
[80] Carson, "Why Demand," 602.
[81] *Ibid.*, 588.

embarrassing situations, as it did for a tobacco inspector who found himself at the table of a Robert Carter, an eminent and genteel Virginian planter in 1774: "'He held the Glass of Porter fast with both his Hands, and then gave an insignificant nod to each one at the Table, in hast, & with fear, & then drank like an Ox'."[82] The tobacco inspector then attempted to give a toast in a refined manner that befitted his company and material environment. He failed miserably and earned the epithet of 'Dull', according to his observer, Philip Fithian, the plantation's tutor.[83] Table-centered rituals could be trying for the unknowledgeable, but aspiring, genteel.

Some performances of refinement evoked in advertisements were more impromptu. The decorative containers for snuff elevated the act of taking the powdered, smokeless tobacco to fashionable heights in England. By the second half of the eighteenth century, inhaling snuff in elite circles was not a straightforward affair.[84] Taking one's snuff and offering it to others had become a social gesture regulated by etiquette. The manner in which one offered snuff depended on their level of familiarity with the recipient. One historian goes so far as to say that wielding a snuffbox was as much a part of etiquette as fencing or dancing. [85] An elaborate, early twelve-step method for taking snuff appeared in *The Spectator* in 1711. It described which hand should hold the snuffbox while its contents were offered to company, and which fingers should pinch the powder. One was admonished to inhale the "'snuff with precision by both nostrils and without grimaces or distortion of the features'" and finally, to "'close snuff-box with a flourish.'"[86] As with other social

---

[82] Quoted in Carson, "Why Demand," 588.
[83] Carson, "Why Demand," 588.
[84] Edward Pinto, *Wooden Bygones of Smoking and Snuff Taking* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 17-18.
[85] John Arlott, *The Snuff Shop* (London: Michael Joseph, 1974), 29, 41.
[86] Quoted in Arlott, *The Snuff Shop*, 31.

graces, specificity of manners and comportment remained critical for snuff-taking. If the directions for taking and offering snuff were elaborate in the early days of its popularity, the same probably held true by the late eighteenth century when it became a common routine in genteel society.

Not every potentially genteel item depended on public display. Letter writing was more discreet and fell under the category of accomplishments: expressions of gentility more convincing and less ephemeral than gestures or conversation.[87] In correspondence, graceful penmanship demonstrated the author's years of instruction and effort. Artfully drawn words put to paper the sophisticated thoughts, refined turns of phrase, and sharp wit that made only cameo appearances on the stages of tea or dining tables.[88]

The fashionable clothing, rituals, and *belles lettres* that made up a refined lifestyle helped to define the boundary between those who were genteel and those who wished to be thought so. Advertisers who promoted "ritual goods" alongside assortments of textiles understood that gentility was both display and demonstration. While shopkeepers attracted prospective buyers with implicit promises of physical refinement, it remained the customer's responsibility to fulfill the remaining, critical components through outside information and etiquette. Newspaper store advertisements were incomplete guides to genteel lifestyles.

The composition of ads thus brought to mind consumers who took their literary activities, snuff-taking, socializing, and dress seriously. The genteel reader of the *New York Journal* on May 5, 1768, would have found a merchant on the last page able to supply most of his refined pursuits. William Booth let prospective

---

[87] Shields, *Civil Tongues*, 144.
[88] Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 92.

customers know that he carried "Queen's snuff in bottles made by her Majesty's snuff manufacturer," along with playing cards, tablecloths, napkins, writing paper, ink powder, teakettles, cutlery and pewter, not to mention forty-five different types of textiles.[89] Booth's was a one-stop shop for the polite consumer. The shopkeepers' lists of goods were collections of objects that implied a way of life that could not be bought. Such objects were not genteel in and of themselves. Instead, they were integral parts of rituals where participants exhibited refined manners, speech, and inside knowledge— their naturalized gentility.

Although those less culturally informed may have been attracted to the products offered in newspaper advertisements as a way of buying into gentility, according to some, the possession of refined goods did not necessarily lead to a refined lifestyle. This potential disagreement highlights the fact that consumers and ways of consumption stood between commodities and meaning in the eighteenth century. In other words, the significance of physical objects was contingent on how they were used. Recall that the clothing worn by the New Orleans slave in Sophie White's study could have served the ends of an aspiring man of refinement. Instead his appearance and actions helped him to fashion an identity and express a set of values quite distinct from the mores of New York's polite society. The meanings of goods depended heavily on the intentions of the consumer, making consumer goods a form of self-expression.

The flexible significance of consumer goods was especially evident in New York City in the first half of the eighteenth century. There, informal cash transactions

---

[89] *New-York Journal*, May 5 1768.

for merchandize in taverns and small shops and robbery made the goods of the growing consumer economy available to even the lowest ranked members of society or those just passing through who had no access to or established local reputations to qualify for credit in a shop. The accessibility of consumer goods was one of conditions that contributed to the "fluidity of identity in colonial New York."[90] While it would be problematic to claim that marginal New Yorkers would not have attempted to use consumer goods in genteel ways, their access to them ensured that the potential meanings of goods would be variable and thus tools for self-expression.

Identity communicated through consumer goods took on political dimensions during the boycotts leading up to the American Revolution. The political scene was particularly volatile in New York. There, merchants reacted to the 1765 Stamp Act that required colonists to pay taxes on commercial papers and legal documents by agreeing on 31 October 1765 not to import goods from England until the law was repealed.[91] What started out as an ordered legal response by the colony, however, turned violent as artisans, mariners and laborers, showed their support in gatherings that descended into riots lasting for four days. Parliament repealed the act by December, but colonial political leaders who saw the resulting vandalized property, burned effigies and general unruliness acknowledged that future resistance had to be more organized if it was to succeed.[92]

Encouraging colonists to express their dislike of Parliamentary policies through their consumption habits, as opposed to raucous gatherings, was a

---

[90] Serena Zabin. "Places of Exchange: New York City, 1700-1763" (Ph.D. diss., State University of New Jersey, 2000), 4, 18-19, 141-42.
[91] Schlesinger, *Colonial Merchants*, 65.
[92] Gary Nash. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 189-91; Breen, *Marketplace*, 20; Maier, *Resistance to Revolution*, 137.

promising alternative. Local committees approached colonists as consumers, asking them to refrain from purchasing and merchants from importing the taxed goods. Non-importation would mean an increase in demand for the more limited supply of local commodities, especially foodstuffs, such as flour. In this case, merchants were asked, not only to stop importing from Britain, but also not to raise prices on the finite stores of locally sourced goods or else face the a boycott of all their merchandize. The ultimatums of the Committees of Association conflated the individual interests of merchants with those of the colonies at large.[93] Consumers or merchants who complied with the demands of the Association "communicated to others a deep commitment to political principle."[94] The boycotts of 1767-70 added ideas about rights and liberties to the range of meanings goods could convey. Purchasing consumer goods (or not) could be a peaceful form of political self-expression, while committees that organized the boycotts worked to make the interests of merchants and colonial consumers coincide.

The success of the second wave of boycotts, however, was limited because most of the obligation to sacrifice fell on merchants and not consumers. By 1770, however, merchants defaulted on their non-importation agreement and colonial consumers resumed shopping. The shopkeepers and merchants of New York were the first to retract their pledge not to accept British goods in a published newspaper notice in the paper saying they would resume importing all commodities but those affected by the tax in July 1770.[95] Shortly after, similar non-importation agreements made by merchants in other colonies met the same fate. The efficacy of boycotts as

---

[93] Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters and the American Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51(1994), 11-14.
[94] Breen, *Marketplace*, 253.
[95] *New-York Gazette*, 23 July 1770.

peaceful political protest was limited without appeals to consumers that cast their material wants as self-interest to be sacrificed for the well being of the community.[96]

As support for the communal contract of non-importation evaporated, demand in the colonies for European goods arriving on British ships was greater than ever before. Commerce reanimated merchant warehouses and shops that relied on foreign merchandize. Alas it was too early for colonists with a taste for English stationary or Dutch lace to breath a sigh of relief. By the summer of 1774 talk of renewing a general boycott on British goods could be heard among many of the city's artisans.[97] Their calls for economic resistance to British policies attracted few recruits until the fall when the First Continental Congress made the mechanics' political wishes into a legal obligation. The colonies' collective assembly agreed to sever all commercial ties with Britain as part of a larger effort to reform their political relationship with London. Restrictions were to commence on December 1 with a ban on imported goods originating or coming by way of Britain. Colonists could continue to buy such merchandize until March first when they, too, would be required to stop. Exports to the mother country, however, could continue, at least until the next September.

To ensure these measures would be carried out, Congress authorized the formation of the Continental Association. The Association was made up of locally elected members deemed "virtuous citizens [who] were charged with monitoring the economic activities of their neighbors."[98] In New York where eight members were elected from each ward to serve on the Committee, the Anglican rector, Samuel Seabury predicted that its patriotic members would violate the privacy of local

---

[96] Breen, *Marketplace*, 298
[97] Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 223-40.
[98] Breen, *Marketplace*, 325.

consumers when 'their names are to be published in the Gazette, that they may be *publicly known*, and *universally condemned, as foes to the Rights of British America, and enemies of American Liberty*'.[99] However exaggerated Seabury's fears may have been, the committees did institute a network of community surveillance that identified patriots by their consumption choices, especially apparel.[100] Colonists began the 1770s ready to restore their material ties to the metropole, but as the third wave of consumer boycotts loomed, consumption habits again became a matter of public scrutiny.

Shopkeeper Samuel Deall witnessed the consequences of Congress's new regulations. His home and business lay at the intersection of Broad and Beaver streets not six hundred feet from the Exchange where the Committee of Association met in October 1774 to discuss the impending commercial ban.[101] The profits of Deall's shop went to supporting his wife, Elizabeth, then 46, and raising three children, Samuel, Jane and Peter.[102] His home and business had also served as a refuge for his nephew, John Arthur, whose loss of family and lack of prospects in England in 1763 compelled him to seek career opportunities through family connections in the America.[103] In 1774, it appeared as though John had found his feet, operating his own store three quarters of a mile away near the docks on the southeastern edge of the island. The year would also see Deall's son, Samuel,

---

[99] Quoted in Breen, *Marketplace*, 326-27.
[100] Breen claims that Seabury's fears were ill founded and that the consequences for unpatriotic consumers were not so extreme; Breen, *Marketplace*, 327.
[101] *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, 13 October 1774.
[102] Kenneth Scott. *Genealogical Data from Colonial New York Newspapers: A Consolidation* (New York: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1977), 207; New-York Historical Society. *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1905* (New York: AMS Publishing, 1906), 195
[103] Edward Eugene Steele. *Ebbets: The History and Genealogy of a New York Family* (New York: E.E. Steele, 2005), 18.

graduate from King's College.[104] The financial future for Deall and his extended family was by no means bleak in 1774, no doubt due to the success of business.[105]

Less secure was New York's political climate that in 1774 heaved under another wave of factional and social squabbles that had come to dominate political life for the past ten years.[106] This time around, as in others, political loyalties found expression in the ways colonists chose to spend in the shops. Retail establishments like Samuel Deall's where he dealt in imported British goods were key to transforming political sentiments into public statements as consumers withheld, altered or continued their patronage.

Deall kept a close record of all transactions made on credit in his shop between 1758 and 1776. In late the eighteenth century, livelihoods based in commerce had yet to shed their association with the vulgar pursuit of profit. According to Toby Ditz, to combat a negative popular perception, their writing "displays a virtual obsession with identity and reputation."[107] Bookkeeping was evidence of the merchant's morality and expertise; sloppy records equaled dishonest business practices. The conscientious merchant or shopkeeper kept his or her books thorough and neat to stand as a testament to the fairness of their dealings in case they were ever challenged. Storing account books in a visible place could serve as

---

[104] D. Van Nostrad. *Catalogue of the Governor, Trustees, and Officers, and of the Alumni and Other Graduates, of Columbia College* (Originally King's College), in the City of New York from 1754 to 1867 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1868), 44, 127.
[105] Deall's will, drawn up in December 1777 shows £305 distributed between his two sons, Peter (£300) and Samuel (£5), besides moveable and real estate assets also distributed between his sons and his daughter, Jane; his wife had died earlier that year. See New-York Historical Society. Coll*ections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1905*, 207.
[106] Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 189.
[107] Toby Ditz. "Formative Ventures: Eighteenth-Century Commercial Letters and the Articulation of Experience." In *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (edited by Rebecca Earle, 59-78. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999), 59.

an additional precaution taken to ward off accusations of fraud.[108] Whether or not Deall stored his account book somewhere visitors could see it, the store clerks, or Deall himself, who made entries in his book would have been aware that they inscribed their public reputation between the ledger's pages.[109]

In February 1774, passing through Broad street or skimming *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, colonists would have been tempted by Deall's array of newly arrived fine *peelong* silk, Essence of Pearl perfume, ivory fans or, perhaps "Weston's best snuff in Bottles."[110] On February 3, 1774, Deall's advertisement offered the most extensive list of imported drygoods in *Rivington's New York Gazetteer.*[111] The range of goods bought throughout the next year indicated that his selection continued to be as varied. [112] The goods available in Deall's store could be divided into four groups: sartorial, products to maintain cleanliness, medicinal, food-related and general domestic items.[113] For the purposes of this study, it is also important to point out that the merchandize might also be distinguished in other ways, such as their visibility or relative necessity. The clothing-related items offered in the shop would have been the most publicly visible items when in use. Merchandize associated with

---

[108] Toby Ditz. "Secret Selves: the Problematics of trust and Public Display in the writing of Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Merchants," in *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, edited by Robert Blair St. George (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 240; Ditz, "Formative Ventures," 61; Ditz 's study does not specify whether account books were typically displayed opened or closed, but only that they were visible.

[109] Three distinct hands are evident in Deall's account book.

[110] *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, 3 February 1774; Judge Horsemandon's account shows three bottles of Weston's snuff bought between December 1773 and Jauary 1774.

[111] *Rivington's New York Gazetteer*, 3 February 1774.

[112] See the accounts of "Mrs. Darlinton", "Miss Peggy Watts" and "Col. Fanning" for examples of accounts showing purchases into 1776 of cloth and other clothing-related items, as well as general supplies for the home and personal cleanliness.

[113] I chose to use the somewhat cumbersome title "products to maintain cleanliness" as opposed to "hygienic." The latter implies a knowledge of contagions that did not play a part in eighteenth-century European understandings of cleanliness, which had both social and medical connotations. "Cleanliness", on the other hand, is a more neutral term that leaves room for the olfactory and visual ways colonists may have identified cleanliness.

cleanliness, medicine, food and housekeeping would have been less so. The boundary between needs and superfluities concerning Deall's offerings is a harder line to draw, but the behavior of his consumers suggest that the more visible the item, the more expendable it was.

Deall's February 1774 ad offered the most comprehensive list of wares, including supplies to supplement or improve one's presentation. The range represented the choice colonial consumers had come to expect, but also opportunities for self-fashioning. Those looking for clothing-related items could find all manner of hosiery, gloves and trimmings, as well as a selected assortment of cloth. One could choose from nine types of hose of varying knits, colors, material and quality. Some were more indicative of efforts to appear refined than others. The cheapest and most unremarkable hosiery for sale was worsted hose, though some especially fine versions were available. All ranks could generally afford worsted hose.[114] Thread stockings cost about the same at 7 s. for a men's pair in late 1775. Cotton hose were less popular, but cost only slightly more at 10 s. in March 1774. Silk hose were another matter, costing between £1 10s. and £1 12s.[115] Of Mr. Deall's selection, these hose were the most ostentatious, not only because of their cost, but also their association with fashionable town living, as opposed to utilitarian, worsted versions, more suited to the dusty, rural life.[116]

The gloves available at Deall's store, such as those that attracted the Schuyler women, were equally accommodating to a range of tastes, lifestyles and billfolds. As with hose, silk versions were the most expensive, save for a few leather

---

[114] Jeremy Farrell. *Socks & Stockings* (London: Batsford, 1992), 39.
[115] For examples of hose types and variation in cost, see the accounts of John Watts, Jr., Miss Peggy Watts, Doctor Thomas Jones and Mrs. Philips, 154, 78, 105, 101, 100, 98.
[116]For a brief discussion about the merits of silk versus worsted hose, see Ben Jonson. *Every Man in his Humour. A Comedy* (London, 1759), 12.

types, such as *Woodstock*, *beaver*, *buckskin* or *shammy*, the last material valued for its durability when washed.[117] Other kinds included thread, worsted and French kid gloves. Glove historian Victoria Cummings argues that gloves were virtually universally worn, at least by women. In fact, gloves were modified so women could continue to wear them while working with their hands or dining. Cummings attributes the style of gloves without fingertips to the desire for constant wearing.[118] Mitts also lacked any sort of finger covering, save for the thumb and could arguably served the same purpose as fingerless gloves.[119] The mitts that appear in Deall's records were available in a choice of lamb's wool or silk, while conventional gloves came in silk, worsted material, thread and French kid leather, the last prized for its stretch and fit.[120] Although it is hard to say which gloves fell in the categories of being more fashionable versus more utilitarian, they were a standard feature of one's dress in public or private and their designs were modified to make them such, more so in the case of women than men.

The cloth for sale at Deall's shop was skewed more towards luxuries. Fine linens and silks dominated. Linen Holland could be used for the home and clothing, especially men's shirts.[121] The Cambric available at Deall's had similarly varied uses.[122] Other kinds of cloth were more explicitly intended for clothing. These included silk linings, such as Persian and Ferreting, but also outer fabrics, such as *mode* and *peelong*. Materials, such as *crape*, *book muslin*, gauze and specifically

---

[117] Cumming, *Gloves*, 44.
[118] *Ibid.*, 38.
[119] For an illustrations, see Cummings, *Gloves*, 48.
[120] *Ibid.*, 9.
[121] Montgomery, *Textiles in America*, 258-59.
[122] *Ibid.*, 187-88.

Cyprus gauze were prized for their thinness or transparency.[123] Fine, translucent materials could be used as part of female attire made into caps, decorative aprons, neckerchiefs or ruffles attached to sleeves or handkerchiefs for either sex. In a poem published in 1772 titled "A Way to Get Him, Or, Advice to Ladies", the author admonished women who wore *Cyprus gauze* for leaving nothing to the imagination thus losing their mystery and ability to lure men.[124] The advantages of the sheer and silk fabrics sold by Deall lay squarely in their use as ornamental apparel and not their practicality. The final category of textiles offered included ribbons, laces, and edging, as well as readymade accessories. Like the gloves, hose and fabrics described above, they were largely used for decorative purposes.

Deall also sold sartorial goods that were not textiles. These included accessories, such as jewelry, fans and ornaments for the hair or gown, but also items to style and maintain hair, perfumes and leather shoe polish. Women searching for necklaces could find French beads or pearls. Earrings came in drop, "undress" (casual), or Venetian pearl. Ivory fans were the most popular fans for sale with a "stick ivory fan" costing 7s. and a "fine" one costing £1 8s. Other decorative items included feathers or bunches of Italian Flowers.[125] Both were likely accents to tall and elaborate hairdos sported by women at formal social events.[126] The scents for sale, such as Essence of Pearl, were similarly associated with "fashionable

---

[123] *Ibid.*, 207, 246, 307.
[124] Dorinda Calsby, et al. *Ermina; or, the Fair Recluse* (London, 1772), 201.
[125] In *The Heiress*, a comedy by John Burgoyne published in 1786, the shallow, complement-seeking Miss Alscrip wears a "mixture of those charming Italian Flowers" with "the knots of pearl that gathered up the festoons" in her hair. According to her companion, "it put the whole ballroom out of humour, and that's the surest test of good taste." See John Burgoyne. *The Heiress* (London, 1786), 36.
[126] Emily Cunnington. *Costume in Pictures* (New York: Dutton, 1964), 112.

beauties."[127] Some goods had the potential to be less showy, but no less important, such as hairpins, hair powder, combs for dressing hair, brushes, pomatum rolls to hold curls (whether made of one's own hair or a wig) in place.[128] Indeed, tight curls, or "buckles" were a sign of being well-dressed.[129] Less conspicuous or glamorous was shoe polish, listed as "cake blacking." Nevertheless, it sold well at the shop.

Other classes of goods purchased at the juncture of Beaver and Broad streets fit under a larger category of domestic supplies. This included items associated with cleanliness, medicine and food-related commodities, as well as some miscellaneous goods. Merchandize connected to dental care included toothbrushes, dentifrice and tooth powder, both abrasives used to cleanse gums and whiten teeth.[130] Other items related to cleanliness included soap, shaving equipment and scowering drops (a solution to remove stains from clothes). Deall also stocked medicines, such as lavender and Hungary waters and Eau de Luce. These were

---

[127] In *The Heiress*, two of the principal characters, Lord Clifford and Lady Emily converse in a condescending tone about the to *"fashionable beauties"* who are nothing more than "a compilation of advertised perfumery, Essence of Pearl, milk of roses, and Olympian dew." See Burgoyne, *Heiress*, 29.

[128] There were two types of pomatum, soft and hard, or roll. Soft pomatum was probably a soothing balm, as suggested by the lines of Lewis Fay's poem: "bear's grease, pomatum, and ointment congeal'd . . ."all scabs in your heads shall be heal'd" ; See Lewis Fay, "I Born a Parisian." New York: 1770; A home medical handbook suggested using pomatum to sooth irritated, burned skin. See J. Kirkpatrick. *Advice to the people in General, with Regard to Their Health* (Philadelphia, 1771), 222; Roll, or hard, pomatum was advertised for sale by a perfumer, Richard Warren in London in 1780. His advertisement and a 1782 handbook on hairdressing indicate that hard pomatum was used specifically for styling hair. See Richard Warren. "Richard Warren and Co. Perfumers, at the Golden Fleece, in Marylebone-Street." London, 1780 and James Stewart, *Plocacosmos: or the Whole art of Hair Dressing* (London: 1782), 252.

[129] Aileen Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715-1789* (New Haven, CT: Yale U. Press, 2002), 128; Still, elaborate hairdos that were only possible with such supplies could attract ridicule in the politically tense atmosphere of the Revolution. For example, during the British occupation of Philadelphia in 1777 and 1778, reputed female Whig and Tory supporters were accused of taking fashion cues from their occupiers with their 'most Enormous High head Dresses after the manner of the Mistresses & Wh[ores] of the British Officers.' See Josiah Barlett to Mary Bartlett, 24 August 1778. Cited in Kate Haulman. "Fashion and the Culture Wars of Revolutionary Philadelphia." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 62(2005), 642-43.

[130] James Alleyene. *A New English Dispensatory, In Four Parts*. (London, 1733), 142.

used largely as smelling salts to treat headaches or as part of a "cordial or stimulating medicines" to rouse the victims of fainting spells due to fear, frailty or "disorders."[131] Fainting fits were thought to result from being caught in unventilated, crowded places, especially during warm seasons, such as "assembly rooms, and all other places of public resort."[132] Other toiletries and health supplies included lip salve, court plaister (a salve for cuts) and Turlington's Balsam of Life, also for treating minor cuts, but also "seminal weakness" and gonorrhea.[133] Essence of Pearl, however, could be used as both a medicine that "strengthens the heart, fortifies nature, revives all the spirits, Natural, Vital and Animal" and a cosmetic, probably to help achieve delicate, white complexions.[134] The medicinal goods and toiletries offered at Deall's could contribute to one's public image, as well as serve practical uses.

While his shop dealt largely in sartorial products Deall also supplied his customers with "A general Assortment of English Garden Seeds" grains and other foodstuffs.[135] The plants that sprouted from these seeds were intended for kitchen gardens, as opposed to ornamental gardens. Radish, mustard, rape, turnip and cabbage lettuce seeds on sale, for example, produced "small salad herbs."[136] Sandwich beans and peppergrass were also edible, as of course were the products of cabbage, cauliflower, celery and spinach seeds, peas, split peas, molasses,

---

[131] William Buchan. *Domestic medicine; or, The Family Physician* (Norwich, CT, 1778), 323.
[132] *Ibid.*
[133] John Hope. *Thoughts, In Prose and Verse, Started, in His Walks* (Stockton, 1780), 267; Bath & Co. *A Description of the Names and Qualities of Those Medicinal Compositions Contained in the Domestic Medicine Chests* (London, 1775), 17.
[134] Royal College of Physicians of London. *Pharmacopœia Londinensis: or, the New London Dispensatory* (London, 1716), 238; Ribeiro, *Dress in Eighteenth-Century*, 128.
[135] *Rivington's New-York Gazetteer,* 3 February 1774.
[136] John Abercrombie. *The Complete Kitchen Gardener, and Hot Bed Forcer* (London, 1789), 309.

butter, oatmeal and Scotch.[137] The canary seed for sale, on the other hand, was probably used as bird. Hemp and rape seeds, both sold by Deall, could also be used to feed birds.[138] While hemp plants produced fiber suitable for any number of uses, including cloth, in the home, its seeds were also used for their medicinal properties in poultices.[139] Despite a few exceptions, most of the seeds at Deall's shop were ultimately meant for the table.

The remaining stock available could be described as miscellaneous domestic supplies. This included pins, available as "middling pins", "short white pins" or paper pins. The playing cards, catgut and snuff, as mentioned above, had a place in households aspiring to refinement. "Henry's best cards" or simply "best cards" were bought at the shop singly or by the dozen. In Deall's February 1774 ad, the only "cards" listed were "Great Mogul and Henry's best Playing cards", suggesting that the cards purchased in his store were in fact playing cards. Card games could prove the focal point for social interaction that drew on cultivated sociability. Perhaps in this same vein of refined display belonged the catgut fabric for needle point and "Weston's best snuff." Such items presented opportunities of self-expression; whether they took the prescribed shape of genteel mores was up to the user.

A selection of merchandize to maintain health and appearances and to supply the home brought more than forty-eight documented individuals to Deall's Broad Street store between March 1, 1774 through March 1, 1775 when the non-consumption agreement went into effect. The purchasing habits of Deall's customers who ventured into his Broad Street store from March 1774 to 1775 show an

---

[137] *Ibid.*, 53.
[138] The only references to "canary seeds" I could locate also included rape and hemp seeds as bird food. See John Percy. *A natural history of Irish Song Birds* (Dublin, 1745), 58 and Nicholas Cox. *The Fowler* (London, 1780), 62.
[139] *The Ladies Dispensatory: Or Every Woman Her Own Physician* (London, 1755), 130.

overwhelming concern for appearances, a significant factor when political sentiment and the pressure not to consume entailed community relations. As the studies of non-consumption during the 1760s and 1770s by Barbara Clark Smith and T.H. Breen suggest, one's public presentation was a matter of community interest. A large proportion of the stigmatized British imports related to clothing, and although more than sartorial goods fell under the designation of banned imports, the buying patterns of Deall's customers point to the highly charged nature of clothing after the patriots' non-importation and non-consumption campaigns.

Of the forty-seven accounts kept between 1774 and 1775, thirty-three (70 %) showed changes in spending habits after the March 1 when the boycott went into effect. Of these, twenty-three (48% of the total) stopped purchasing all together. A further seven (15% of the total) altered their purchasing habits. A comparison of which goods were more likely to be foregone entirely and those which continued to be purchased indicates the areas in which colonists were most willing to make sacrifices, which goods they considered necessities and also the overwhelming degree to which public image was a deciding factor in the behavior of colonial consumers. Taken together, understanding consumer choices can help to show how consumer virtue meant sacrificing important tools of self-expression.

Customers who relied on Deall's shop to stock their closets or dressing tables were the most likely to modify how they spent their money. The accounts for twenty-two regular customers showed no activity after March 1775. The shopping habits of the Schuylers were examples of how consumers who normally came to Deall for clothing goods chose to stop. Miss Schuyler ventured into Deall's shop ten times between April and December 1774. In eight months, she purchased seven pairs of French kid gloves, one pair of silk mitts, about two yards of ribbon, as well as a half

pound of pins and a bottle of scowering drops. She probably had company on her last two trips December 22 and 30 when Peggy Schuyler also bought kid gloves and over three yards of ribbon. Purchases for trimmings and accessories at Mr. Deall's establishment ended just before the New Year. Only Peggy returned March 19 after the boycott to pick up hair powder.[140]

As consumers the Schuylers chose to sacrifice their appearance. Until the end of 1774, Miss Schuyler and Peggy purchased gloves, mitts and ribbons from Deall. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, keeping up with fashion trends was less about new cuts of clothing and more about the use of trimmings, such as ribbons.[141] Gloves or mitts made of cloth did not fit well and lost their shape after a few wearings and were generally selected to complete an outfit and were probably disposable.[142] As mentioned above, gloves and mitts in general were important, not for utilitarian purposes, but because they finished one's appearance; they were not wholly novelties, but a standard element of a woman's dress. After the boycott went into effect, however, the Schuylers would have had to put up with worn gloves and mitts and fewer ribbons or do without those items that would have finished their look.

The accounts of seventeen other customers who frequented Deall's shop for trimmings, cloth and accessories showed similar activity, suggesting that they made choices similar to the Schuyler girls'. Mr. Robert Andrews' account had charges for gauze, *Persian* silk (for linings), satin and muslin fabrics, as well as laces, ribbons and other trimmings and a pair of silk mitts. From May to September 1774, Andrews' account was charged for fifty-four yards of trimmings. All purchases, which in Mr.

---

[141] Nicola Philips. *Women in Business, 1700-1850* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2006), 18.
[142] Cumming, *Gloves*, 18.

Andrews' case dealt entirely with clothing, (save for one pound of pins bought in May 1774 could have been for sewing) came to an abrupt end just four days after Congress agreed to support non-consumption the following March.[143] Whether it was Andrews himself or a member of his household that had a taste for copious amounts of textiles, participating in the boycott showed the degree to which their sartorial desires were expendable when subject to public scrutiny.

Others shopped at Deall's store with a more comprehensive list of products aimed at supplementing their self-image. For example, Mr. Hay kept a regularly active account with Mr. Deall since October 1771 to which was charged not only multiple pairs of lamb, beaver, thread and Woodstock gloves, black ribbon and silk hose, but also items to care for his hair and teeth and general cleanliness. He consistently purchased role pomatum, powder, hairpins and combs (including a toupee comb), as well as a cockade (to decorate a hat). For whiter and cleaner teeth he kept a supply of toothbrushes, Essence of Pearl and pearl dentifrice. Wash ball soap would have also helped to keep clothes clean and lavender water, the impression of cleanliness. [144] When Mr. Hay closed his account with Mr. Deall in August 1774, his self presentation would have been affected superficially by forgoing clothing items, but also in more subtle ways that related to an overall polished and clean look, details that were important amidst an unstable social hierarchy that had come to rely on mobile and nuanced physical expressions of status and identity. Only four customers whose accounts were inactive by March 1 had not previously come to Deall's shop for items relating to their appearance.

---

[143] Breen, *Marketplace*, 325.
[144] Deall Accountbook, 65, 64, 60.

Consumer priorities appear in high relief among the seven accounts that show modified, but not entirely suspended purchasing. As with the trends of those who stopped buying at Deall's shop, these accounts showed a bias against clothing items, largely obvious, textile products. Amongst those who strategized their buying, three continued to purchase goods that related to their public appearance, but opted for less conspicuous options. When Colonel Fanning kept an his account in January 1772 until February 1775, his was charged for lamb's wool, worsted and buck gloves, thread, worsted and silk hose, black ribbon and *ferrit* silk fabric. Purchases for hair maintenance included hairpins, role pomatum, combs and powder and for teeth, dentifrice, Essence of Pearl and tooth brushes. Other domestic items included shoe polish and sealing wax and soap. After March 1, 1775, the buying patterns in Fanning's account showed a preference for less publicly apparent products. For the next year until his account closed, purchases were almost exclusively for hair-related merchandize, (roll pomatum, hairpins, and combs) and shoe polish.[145] Purchases of conspicuous sartorial items (besides two purchases of ribbon, buck and thread gloves), as well as those goods associated with cleanliness decreased dramatically. Instead, maintaining one's shoes and coiffure took precedence. Perhaps purchases used to looking after previously bought items, such as a pair of shoes or a wig, or one's natural head of hair were less subject to public scrutiny than an entirely new or obvious addition to one's appearance.

Similarly, when a member of Doctor Mallet's household returned to the shop after March 1 they walked out with only combs. Previous purchases included readymade clothing, health-related items and also seeds.[146] In a similar fashion,

---

[145] *Ibid.*, 97, 99.
[146] *Ibid.*, 127.

charges to "Frank at Dr. Bruce's" began in 1774 with Italian flowers and multiple yards of ribbon, but by 1775 the only items recorded were practical thread gloves and a wash ball.[147] The bulk of purchases from November 1772 to May 1774 under the account of "Mrs. Antel at the Post Office" had been ribbons, cloth, hose and gloves. By August 1774 and into 1776 the only items purchased were playing cards and products for teeth and hair.[148] Some consumers continued to shop for items that helped to maintain appearances after the non-consumption agreement went into effect. It is easy to see how well cared for hair and teeth and a look of general cleanliness may have coincided with standards of gentility that emphasized one's inherent refinement. The behavior of consumers who continued to buy goods that added to their image in subtle ways, especially cleanliness, suggests that only the most conspicuous and easily accessible elements of a genteel appearance were stigmatized.

Others altered their purchasing to focus on foodstuffs at the expense of clothing-related goods. Mrs. Colonel Read's account, for example, showed the purchase of seven pairs of gloves, three pairs of hose, as well as garden seeds and shoe polish from March 1774 through March 1775. Over the next year, the purchase of clothing items gradually faded and by June, oatmeal and paper pins dominated.[149] Changes in Mr. Imlay's account were more abrupt. In 1773 only hosiery had been charged to his account. The next entry was not until April 1775 for the purchase of garden seeds.[150] Some were willing to do with fewer new items of clothing or to look

---

[147] *Ibid.*, 131-32.
[148] *Ibid.*, 81.
[149] *Ibid.*, 93.
[150] *Ibid.*, 6.

elsewhere for them. Foodstuffs and smaller domestic goods, on the other hand, were not as expendable, or for that matter, as publicly visible.

The majority of Deall's customers responded to the non-consumption agreements in their own way, but over a third (seventeen in all) did not. Of these, the majority frequented Deall's shop for goods relating to clothing and cleanliness and continued to do so after March 1, 1775. For example, Miss Peggy Watt's taste for ribbons, lace, jewelry and gauze did not skip a beat after March 1775 and into 1777.[151] The same could be said of Mrs. Darlington's purchases through 1775 and 1776. Clothing in Darlington's household continued to be updated with lace, gloves, ribbons, gauze, hose and edging amidst boycotts that cast fashionable clothing in a critical light.[152] Exceptions were Mr. Johnston Fairholmes and Judge Horsemandon. Fairholmes was only ever listed in Mr. Deall's books for cards, food items and shoe polish.[153] He did not have to change his consumption patterns at the shop in order to safeguard his public image. Horsemandon largely came to Deall's store for snuff, peas and oatmeal. However, when it came to new hosiery in late 1774 and into May 1775, he had few reservations about picking up seven new pairs.[154] Horsemandon and Fairholmes, however, stand out as exceptions to the greater number of shoppers who continued to patronize Deall's shop for many sartorial supplies that maintained their public image.

Those who boycotted altogether or modified their patterns of consumption at Deall's store stocked with British imports were most likely to forego items they had used to present themselves to the community. The consumption behavior of Deall's

---

[151] *Ibid.*, 79, 81.
[152] *Ibid.*, 103-4.
[153] *Ibid.*, 128
[154] *Ibid.*, 118.

clients attested to this and more. The nature and physical form of one's personal interest owed much to the standards of refinement that had been evolving throughout the century and continued to do so after the boycotts. In a larger sense, they were also based on more fundamental changes in the modes of self-expression.

Consumers whose habits remained unfazed by the non-consumption and non-importation agreements were in the minority. The responses made by the majority of Deall's regular customers recorded in his account book showed that they were most concerned with their public image. The goods they chose not to buy had had a role in presenting them to the community. They were most likely to forego clothing-related goods, the most conspicuous items Deall offered. Even as colonists changed their purchasing habits at Deall's shop, their public appearance remained the overriding factor influencing their consumption choices. When R. Campbell, Esquire described the source of one's self-presentation, he attributed it wholly to the tailor's, wigmaker's and milliner's trades:

> There are a Numbers of Beings in and about this Metropolis who have no other identical Existence that what the Taylor, Milliner, and Perriwig-Maker bestow upon them: Strip them of these Distinctions, and they are quite a different Species of Beings; have no more Relation to their dressed selves, that they have to the Great *Mogul*, and are as insignificant in Society as Punch, deprived of his moving Wires, and hung upon a Peg.[155]

However, as we have seen, health and hair supplies also factored into one's overall appearance. These items were less publicly visible and thus, as Deall's records suggest, not as universally stigmatized as textile items. Nevertheless, purchases of such items were minimized, as were clothing supplies and accessories.

Whatever informed the consumers' personal choices of self-presentation, they did so with a public audience in mind. From the point of view of individuals,

---

[155] R. Campbell. *The London Tradesman* (1747. Reprint, Devon: David & Charles, 1969), 191.

goods helped consumers assert identity and claim membership in social groups. The public perspective, however, was just as important. For example, if objects were bought in pursuit of a genteel lifestyle they became part of performance that showcased one's behavior, as well. An audience was important to establishing one's refinement, but no less critical to the use of consumer goods in expressing identities generally.

The non-consumption movement brought a political dimension to consumer choices and the public's reception of them. Local audiences were endowed with the clout to draw negative attention to those who chose not to follow the non-consumption agreement. Consequently, a new rubric for political sentiment compromised the established avenues of self-expression, such as gentility. As in previous boycotts, political loyalties could be read into self-presentation.[156] The boycotts of the 1760s and 1770s brought about a new mode of self-expression that tapped into contemporary political debates in which patriot leaders asked colonists to temporarily deny individual interest in favor those of the community. If, as Barbara Clark Smith argues, most colonists experienced the Revolution through boycotts of British goods, the popular virtue leaders solicited stemmed from colonists' roles as consumers. The records in Samuel Deall's account book for before and after the non-consumption agreements were effective in March 1775 show that the self-interest colonists sacrificed was their self-expression. The community looked on and called it virtue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abercrombie, John. *The Complete Kitchen Gardener, and Hot Bed Forcer.* London, 1789.

Alleyene, James. *A New English Dispensatory, In Four Parts.* London, 1733.

Arlott, John. *The Snuff Shop.* London: Michael Joseph, 1974.

Bath & Co. *A Description of the Names and Qualities of Those Medicinal Compositions Contained in the Domestic Medicine Chests.* London, 1775.

Barrow, Robert. "Newspaper Advertising in Colonial America." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1967.

Breen, T.H. "The American Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century," in *Of Consuming Interests: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, et al., 444-82. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.

Breen, T.H. *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence.* New York: Oxford, 2004.

Buchanan, William. *Domestic medicine; or, The Family Physician.* Norwich, CT, 1778.

Burgoyne, John. *The Heiress.* London, 1786.

Bushman, Richard. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities.* New York: Knopf, 1992.

Bushman, Richard. "Shopping and Advertising in Colonial America", in *Of Consuming Interests: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, et al., 233-51. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.

Calsby, Dorinda, et al. *Ermina; or, the Fair Recluse*. London, 1772.

Calvert, Karin. "The Function of Fashion in Eighteenth-Century America," in *Of Consuming Interests: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, et al., 252-83. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.

Campbell, R. *The London Tradesman*. 1747. Reprint, Devon: David & Charles, 1969.

Carson, Cary. "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial America: Why Demand?," in *Of Consuming Interests: the Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, eds. Cary Carson, et al., 483-697. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994.

Clark, Charles. "The Newspapers of Provincial America," in *Three Hundred Years of the American Newspaper*, ed. John Hench, 367-89. Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1991.

Cox, Nicholas. *The Fowler*. London, [1780?].

Cranfield, Geoffrey. *The Development of the Provincial Newspaper, 1700-1760*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1962.

Cumming, Valerie. *Gloves*. London: Batsford, Ltd., 1982.

Cunnington, Emily. *Costume in Pictures*. New York: Dutton, 1964.

Deall, Samuel Account Books, 1768 to 1776, New York Historical Society, New York City, New York.

Ditz, Toby. "Formative Ventures: Eighteenth-Century Commercial Letters and the Articulation of Experience." In *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945*, edited by Rebecca Earle, 59-78. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 1999.

Ditz, Toby. "Secret Selves: the Problematics of trust and Public Display in the writing of Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia Merchants." In *Possible Pasts: Becoming Colonial in Early America*, edited by Robert Blair St. George, 219-42. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.

Farrell, Jeremy. *Socks & Stockings*. London: Batsford, 1992.

Fay, Lewis. "I Born a Parisian." New York, 1770.

Haulman, Kate. "Fashion and the Culture Wars of Revolutionary Philadelphia." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 62(2005): 625-62.

Hope, John. *Thoughts, In Prose and Verse, Started, in His Walks*. Stockton, 1780

Hornsby, Peter. *Pewter of the Western World, 1600-1850*. Exton, PA: Schiffer, 1983.

Jonson, Ben. *Every Man in his Humour. A Comedy*. London, 1759.

Kirkpatrick, J. *Advice to the people in General, with Regard to Their Health* Philadelphia, 1771.

The Ladies Dispensatory: Or Every Woman Her Own Physician. London, 1755.

Maier, Pauline. *From Resistance to Revolution*. New York: Knopf, 1972.

Martin, Ann Smart, "Buying into the World of Goods: Eighteenth Century Consumerism and the Retail Trade from London to the Virginia frontier," Ph.D. dissertation, College of William and Mary, 1993.

Montgomery, Florence. *Textiles in America 1650-1870*. New York: Norton, 1984.

Morse, Jedidiah. *The American Geography; or, a View of the Present Situation of the United States of America*. London, 1792.

Nash, Gary. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1979.

New-York Gazette

New-York Historical Society. *Collections of the New-York Historical Society for the Year 1905*. New York: AMS Publishing, 1906.

New York Journal

New-York Mercury

New York Times

Nostrad, D. Van. *Catalogue of the Governor, Trustees, and Officers, and of the Alumni and Other Graduates, of Columbia College (Originally King's College), in the City of New York from 1754 to 1867*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1868.

Percy, John. *A natural history of Irish Song Birds*. Dublin, 1745.

Pinto, Edward. *Wooden Bygones of Smoking and Snuff Taking*. London: Hutchinson, 1961.

Philips, Nicola. *Women in Business, 1700-1850*. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2006.

Ribeiro, Aileen. *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe, 1715-1789*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002.

Rivington's New York Gazetteer

Royal Gazette [New York]

Roth, Rodris. "Tea-Drinking in Eighteenth-Century America: Its Etiquette and Equipage," in *Material Life in America, 1600-1800*, edited by Robert Blair St. George, 439-62. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987.

Royal College of Physicians of London. *Pharmacopœia Londinensis: or, the New London Dispensatory*. London, 1716.

Salter, John. *Sauce Labels, 1750-1950*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collector's Club, 2002.

Schlesinger, Sr., Arthur. *Colonial Merchants and the American Revolution, 1763-1776*. 1918. Reprint, New York: Facsimile Library, Inc., 1939.

Scott, Kenneth. *Genealogical Data from Colonial New York Newspapers: A Consolidation*. New York: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1977.

Shammas, Carole. "Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption from 1550 to 1800," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*. Eds. John Brewer and Roy Porter, 177-205. London; New York: Routledge, 1993.

Shields, David. *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

Smith,Barbara Clark. "Food Rioters and the American Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 51(1994): 3-39.

Smith, Barbara Clark. "Social Visions of the American Resistance Movement." In *The Transforming Hand of Revolution*, edited by Ronald Hoffman and Peter Albert, 27-57. Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1996.

Steele, Edward Eugene. *Ebbets: The History and Genealogy of a New York Family*. New York: E.E. Steele, 2005.

Stewart, James. *Plocacosmos: or the Whole art of Hair Dressing*. London, 1782.

Warren, Richard. "Richard Warren and Co. Perfumers, at the Golden Fleece, in Marylebone-Street." London, 1780.

White, Sophie. " 'Wearing three or four handkerchiefs around his collar, and elsewhere about him': Slaves' Constructions of Masculinity and Ethnicity in French Colonial New Orleans." *Gender & History* 15 (2003): 528-49.

Wood, Gordon. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1969.

Zabin, Serena. "Places of Exchange: New York City, 1700-1763." Ph.D. diss., State University of New Jersey, 2000.

VITA

MELISSA FAITH GRAY

Melissa Gray was born May 2, 1984 in Petaluma, California. After graduating as Salutatorian from Petaluma High School in 2002, she attended Mount Holyoke College in South Hadley, Massachusetts to study American history where she graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2006. While pursuing a complementary interest in archaeology, Melissa found herself in Virginia for multiple summers and eventually at Williamsburg, where she returned to study history and material culture at the College of William & Mary. She is currently working towards earning a PhD in early American history.