

2018

## Literary Continuities/Imperative Education

Jane Snyder

College of William and Mary - Arts & Sciences, jane\_snyder@hotmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Snyder, Jane, "Literary Continuities/Imperative Education" (2018). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. Paper 1550153843.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.21220/s2-0rs2-pc96>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

Literary Continuities/Imperative Education

Jane G. Snyder

Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Bachelor of Arts, Agnes Scott College, 2016

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

Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

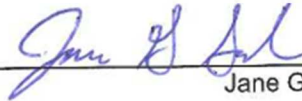
College of William & Mary  
August 2018



APPROVAL PAGE

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

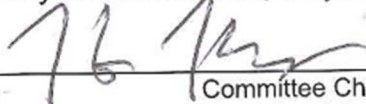
Master of Arts



---

Jane G. Snyder

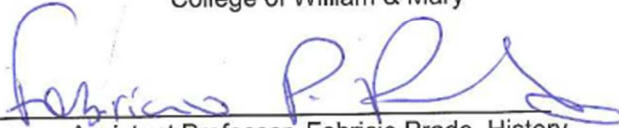
Approved by the Committee, May 2018



---

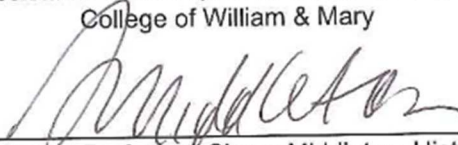
Committee Chair

Director of Graduate Studies, Hiroshi Kitamura, History  
College of William & Mary



---

Assistant Professor, Fabricio Prado, History  
College of William & Mary



---

Associate Professor, Simon Middleton, History  
College of William & Mary

## ABSTRACT

### Literary Continuities:

#### British Books and the Britishness of Their Early American Readers

People get their worldview from what they read. In a reading-saturated society such as 18<sup>th</sup>-century America, the most popular books determined the public consciousness. As such, the origin of these books must be carefully examined. Herein lies the question of whose books and ideas were popularized. According to quantitative analysis of primary evidence gathered from private and public library collections as well as booksellers' advertisements and inventories, the majority of books read in 18<sup>th</sup>-century America could be considered British more than American. Before, during, and after the American Revolution the most popular and highly culturally valued books were still British. This explains the continued Britishness of Americans even after they declared and won political independence. Few scholars consider the implication of the origin of early American ideas, particularly in the study of popular books, leading to a common misconception about the rate at which American society became wholly American.

### Imperative Education:

#### The Politics of Reading and Advice in Colonial American Colleges

Harvard, William & Mary, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth were all founded in some iteration before the American Revolution. Amazingly, these colleges are rarely studied collectively. Even more individualized is the discussion of their early college libraries. These book collections determined the range of knowledge available to students, so the people who decided which books were included had a great deal of power over the colleges. Library benefactors across the American colonies and from institution to institution had quite similar reasons for donating certain books. This commonality can be called imperative education, a scheme through which books were donated to consciously further the donor's value system and assign it as truth. Such a structure means the nine colonial colleges were pieces of one movement rather than polarized individual entities fighting religious representation wars as they are often misrepresented. Their charters and founding documents back up the universality of imperative education. The general idea that students' reading habits needed to be strictly controlled is also apparent in controversies surrounding several of the institutions in their early years.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	ii
Intellectual Biography	1
Literary Continuities: British Books and the Britishness of Their Early American Readers	4
Bibliography	24
Imperative Education: The Politics of Reading and Advice in Colonial American Colleges	29
Bibliography	58

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This writer wishes to express her gratitude to Fabricio Prado and Simon Middleton for their guidance, book suggestions, and especially their criticism. It was not always received gracefully, but it was always enlightening. Thank you to the peers who reviewed this work and offered book and primary source suggestions. She would also be remiss for not mentioning her friends, family, and roommate's cat for helping her brave the storm that is research and writing.

## INTELLECTUAL BIOGRAPHY

In my last year of college, I discovered the world of 18th-century literature. I spent countless hours reading conduct manuals written to teach young women how they were expected to behave. At the time, I thought my interests lay in early modern women's history. In hindsight, my true passion was present in the entire research process. My senior thesis was entitled "Knowledge, Virtue, and the 'Fair Sex': Liberating Conduct Literature for Women in 18th-century America." The conduct books I examined represented a fascinating field of reading to learn and writing to instruct. I became obsessed with the reasons why certain books were read, and decided to never focus on anything else. In graduate school, I've kept this promise to myself. While my future plans do not necessarily include further academic work, they do include continuing to think about books.

My initial interest in early American reading practices led me to two topics I considered at first to be unique, yet born from this same interest. Upon further reflection near completing these two projects, however, the connections are apparent. Both papers deal with who decided what early Americans were reading. This initial decision then influenced what ideas early Americans came into contact with and where the most widespread ideas began. In thinking about who originated and circulated ideas for both of these papers, the true underlying question has been why certain ideas were more popular or pushed more forcefully.



My fall semester paper, entitled “Literary Continuities: British Books and the Britishness of Their Early American Readers”, dealt with what books were actually being read in the early American British colonies and where they came from. It grew out of my undergraduate obsession with conduct books as an answer to why so many of them were written in London but influential in the American colonies. My interests widened even further from the books themselves to who was reading which book and why. As I began to delve into studying the book trade, it struck me that most books in early America seemed to be of British origin even after the Revolution disconnected colonies from their British intellectual beginnings. I applied this idea not just to the physical books shipped from Britain but the British authorship of all the most popular or frequently bought and recommended books. To quantitatively support my claim about book origins, I analyzed a sampling of American bookseller advertisements and library records. I decided to go further than a simple analysis of book origins by using the data I’d collected as an example of the continued Britishness of the American colonies following their independence.

The idea for my spring semester paper came from a desire to further examine my favorite source from the previous paper’s research, an early college library catalog. What started as an examination of early library collections grew into a study of the nature of book collecting for these libraries and how that affected the institutions that were created around them. In looking for historiography on this topic, which barely exists on its own, I decided to delve further into how the schemes of book collecting connected the colonial American colleges to one another. My contribution to this field joins together histories of the individual institutions and generally-held ideas about

reading and education in a scheme I call “imperative education.” This paper is entitled “Imperative Education: The Politics of Reading and Advice in Colonial American Colleges.” In it, I use the concept of imperative education to link these institutions in a system of value and recommendation. Fundamentally, this model of education relied on individuals using institutional libraries to consciously recommend certain values they deemed morally superior. Library benefactors and college officials chose books which aligned with their personal beliefs in order to convert students to the same way of thinking and further their own ideas of what it meant to be a good person. The concept of imperative education is integral to an understanding of colonial American colleges. They were not wholly separate entities, but pieces of one larger political-intellectual movement grounded in reading.

Together, these papers symbolize my continued and overpowering interest in reading and the cultural practices of 18th-century transatlantic literature. Questions such as how reading affects what you know, how your reading material got to you, and who decides what you know consistently rule my research interests. That being said, I have no current plans to write a PhD dissertation on these topics. Rather, my future is geared toward archival work. These current ruminations about books and access to knowledge will be helpful in my professional life, when my daily existence will revolve around providing access to books and the knowledge contained therein. Of course, I will never stop thinking about why we read certain books. From the undergraduate senior thesis that started it all, my love for conduct manuals has grown into a larger appreciation of the context of what and how we read.

LITERARY CONTINUITIES:  
BRITISH BOOKS AND THE BRITISHNESS OF THEIR EARLY AMERICAN READERS

Jane Snyder

Atlantic World

1 December 2017

When did Americans become American? The earliest permanent settlers in Virginia and Massachusetts stepped onto this land not as Americans but as Britons. Even the land itself was not America, but a vast expanse inhabited by countless people, none of whom thought of it as America. The task for early settlers in the British American colonies was to create a Britain overseas, to take the best qualities of Britishness and replace anything else with better practices. At the same time though, disparate peoples needed to come together for a common goal. They hailed from all over the British Isles, other parts of Europe, and Africa. Somehow these diverse groups had to collectivize, had to find a common ground from which to build their new community. They took a cue from their colonial status and settled on rallying around Britishness.

This adventure into early American history begins with the question of what is America. How can we tell who is an American? What distinguishes American culture from that of any other country or peoples? In fact, what defines culture at all? At the risk of diving into the depths of relativism, these questions should be addressed. In fact, their answers are discernible from one body of primary source material: books. Any print material, but books in particular, embodies the transmission of culture from one place to another, from one person to the next. In the context of the British Empire, books were used to transmit British culture from the metropolitan central of London out into the colonial peripheries. Disparate locations and distant people were unified by reading the same thing, or indeed reading about what was happening in each other's daily worlds. As the historian Benedict Anderson would say, print created an imagined community of

readers eager to imagine themselves part of a collective all reading one text.<sup>1</sup> In the context of the British colonies in what would later become the United States, books not only unified the colonists with Britain, but encouraged a unified mindset among the different colonies. This mindset even strengthened among the non-British immigrants to America, who were unified with the majority through collective rhetoric and print culture, all encouraging a singular conglomeration of softened difference. Of course, for most of the 18<sup>th</sup> century this meant adoption into the greater British cultural world.

The next question that needs to be asked, then, is how books shifted from being used to unify the British colonies with Great Britain to unifying America as distinct. Historians who have previously worked within the bounds of British literature in early America tend to take one of two paths. Many analyze how the content of books affected new American ideals and ideas, but their ultimate goal has been to use this analysis to explain American culture. This is oftentimes done at the expense of any indication as to the origin of these books, completely ignoring the irony in using a book authored and printed in London to explain the creation of the United States. The other historiographical trend is in briefly mentioning the widespread popularity of British books even into the years of the early American republic, but stopping short of implying what this means for early American nationalism. Where these two trains of thought need to converge is clear. Specifically, it needs to be argued that the early United States was still a British colony in cultural-economics if not in name and government.

The Revolution did not magically make British colonists into Americans. It was a much slower process to morph into something wholly new, and to truly define what that

---

<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin & Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006).

meant. Because of the importance of books in the transmission of culture, they can give us a clue as to the dominant cultural ideas of a time period. Considering what books were popularly sold, read, and collected in the 18<sup>th</sup> century before and after the American Revolution, the Britishness of the once British colonies is obvious. Even well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century British books are given higher cultural value than their American counterparts, and the American book trade is still based on its British foundation. Books are a clear example of the slow process of Americanizing the North American colonies, and even in imagining what it is to be an American and how distinct an individual must be from Britain to qualify as one.

To start, it is necessary to understand the nature of book culture and trade in early America. While the first permanent English settlement was in Virginia, it was the Puritans in Massachusetts who most enthusiastically encouraged literacy. Their religion was based on the idea of individuals being able to read sacred texts for themselves, which explains why the earliest printing press in what would become the United States was established in Massachusetts.<sup>2</sup> Throughout these vestiges of the British Empire in the New World, even when ignoring the Puritans, print was an integral part of establishing and maintaining early colonies. Before the technological advancement of transcontinental communication devices, the only way to reliably transmit knowledge and ideologies across an ocean was through the printed word. Print books were deemed much more useful in an empire than people or handwritten messages. Thoughts printed on the page of a book could not die before reaching their destination, or twist the author's original intent for personal reasons, or become indecipherable

---

<sup>2</sup> John Hruschka, *How Books Came to America: The Rise of the American Book Trade* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 28.

depending on the writer's hand.<sup>3</sup> Books for the earliest Americans were reliable tools of contact between the imperial metropole and its faraway colonies, as well as a method of transferring a sense of identity and belonging among readers. It is safe to assume that these two uses were often blended together.

The first printing press in North America was not established in the future United States, but in Mexico one hundred years before the Puritans had their own in Massachusetts. For both of these groups, local printing was established because of the difficulty in gaining access to dissenting theological books from their imperial centers. However, the Puritans' efforts were not funded by a wealthy patron as their Mexican forefathers had been, so they settled the foundation of American printing on reprinting. This involved making copies of books shipped from London for much cheaper than the price of printing a wholly new work or paying to ship as many copies as was wanted from a British printer.<sup>4</sup> Despite the economic promises of a localized printing network, imported books would remain the norm. True to this earliest of American printing practices, the books which were not printed in Britain were in fact reprints of mostly British books until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Between the first American imprint completed around 1638 until the end of obstructive colonial licensing laws in 1730, there was hardly any printing in the colonies whatsoever. In one extreme case, for that entire one hundred year span, Virginians were prohibited from operating presses. Even as late as 1776, on the eve of independence, only 425 books were produced domestically per

---

<sup>3</sup> Julie Hedgepeth Williams, *The Significance of the Printed Word in Early America: Colonists' Thoughts on the Role of the Press* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Hruschka, *How Books Came to America*, 28-29, 31.

year.<sup>5</sup> The ones which were produced in America were largely practical works used for the particularities of colonial life, such as almanacs.<sup>6</sup> For as much as freedom of the press in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is heralded retroactively, the presses in early America were recreating as opposed to creating. The colonies functioned as subsidiaries of provincial England rather than their own enterprise.

An advertisement in the Virginia Gazette for the year 1771 beautifully illustrates the attitude of an American printer toward his dependence on the British system. He starts off by addressing his advertisement to “the American World,” then goes on to list potential benefits of establishing a truly secure literary business in the British colonies. While he encourages book buyers to get their goods from local printers, he does so while constantly emphasizing the indelible connection between Britain and America. He states several times the connection between those two places as one of a shared imperial identity. Furthermore, he does not necessarily encourage the purchase of books written by or for Americans in particular, but local equates books with reprints of British works.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever autonomous agency there was in America, it was muddled by the fragmented reality of its book trade system. Each North American colony had its own

---

<sup>5</sup> For the first book printed in 1638, see George Emery Littlefield, *Early Boston Booksellers, 1642-1711* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 15-16; For licensing laws across the colonies, see James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), 6; For the prohibition of printing in Virginia, see Hruschka, *How Books Came to America*, 36; For the rate of domestic book production 1607-1776, see *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Harlan, “David Hall’s Bookshop and Its British Sources of Supply” in *Books in America’s Past: Essays Honoring Rudolph H. Gjelsness*, ed. David Kaser (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia), 4, 6.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Bell, *The Virginia Gazette*, “To the American World,” Colonial Williamsburg Official History & Citizenship Site (accessed 23 November 2017).



trade regulations, founded on the particularities of its local situation rather than any collective organizing principles. In larger cities, their book trade was often separate even from their own colony. Tellingly, those operating the trade in these disparate communities did not communicate with one another, but with London.<sup>8</sup>

Despite local variations, the American systems all generally operated in the same way in their relationship with the imperial center. American booksellers had one or two agents in London whose job it was to gather “books of character” which sold well, and send them to the American shops.<sup>9</sup> The bookseller paid for these shipments through a system of credit, which was extended by the agent for a certain amount of time. Hopefully it would be long enough for the bookseller to receive the books, sell an adequate amount of them to pay back the agent, and then send the money across the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>10</sup> Depending on the time of year and the weather, this back and forth process could take anywhere from about six to nine months.<sup>11</sup> American booksellers also ordered specific books they heard were popular elsewhere or which were particularly requested by customers. The most difficult part of this complicated process was how far ahead it was imperative for the American booksellers to think. They had to anticipate the needs and desires of their clientele two seasons in advance without any sort of standardized regulatory system upon which to rely. Even so, the trade of books from Britain to America was a profitable scheme for those on both sides of the ocean. By the time the American Revolution was about to begin, more British books were being

---

<sup>8</sup> Hruschka, *How Books Came to America*, 50, 59.

<sup>9</sup> Harlan, *David Hall's Bookshop*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, eds. *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, vol. 1 of *A History of the Book in America* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 193.

<sup>11</sup> The estimate of six months comes from Harlan, *David Hall's Bookshop*, 10; The estimate of nine months comes from Raven, *London Booksellers*, 11-12.

imported to the American colonies than to the rest of the world combined.<sup>12</sup> The reliance on this literary link to Britain was strong.

There are several possible ways of explaining the continued American dependence on British imported books throughout the tumultuous 18<sup>th</sup> century. First of all, practical trades necessary for the production of books were not adequately developed in the American colonies. Because of the colonies' rapid population increase at this time, printers and bookbinders could not be trained fast enough to keep up with exponentially growing demand.<sup>13</sup> Also, there was the problem of difference in valuation between American and British books. Because of the lack of highly skilled printers, those in America produced mostly lower quality books, cheap in monetary value and in literary genre. This fully placed the responsibility of providing America with books needed for public institutions and scholarly advancement onto Great Britain. In turn, imported books were given a higher social value and American manufactured books were seen as inferior.<sup>14</sup>

The American Revolution, although it did technically separate Britain and America on a political basis, minimally altered the transatlantic trade of British books. During the war years, these books were still coming into America. The main difference was where they were coming from, more frequently from Edinburgh or Amsterdam rather than London.<sup>15</sup> The authors and the content, however, remained the same.

Rather than taking the path of providing explanation without concrete proof, this next section is devoted to the facts culled from primary source data found in early

---

<sup>12</sup> Amory and Hall, *The Colonial Book*, 183.

<sup>13</sup> Hruschka, *How Books Came to America*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Amory and Hall, *The Colonial Book*, 196-197.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

American book collection lists. What follows is an explanation of the data and inferences made about the prevalence of books based on an author's national origin. There are hundreds of easily accessible library catalogues, book advertisements, and estate sale lists from the 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries from which to pull statistical information. As this is the case, culling the information necessary to have a statistically sound representation was not possible. Instead, random samples were drawn from across the American colonies and new United States to take the argumentative place of a larger project. The main primary sources consulted were from the Harvard College Library in Massachusetts and the Virginia Gazette. Neither places were the largest in the American colonies, and arguably Philadelphia was the most important for the book trade, but this makes them even more representative of books to which the average American had access. Lists from booksellers and libraries are also the easiest to use when attempting to form a general opinion of reading habits, because both institutions were heavily reliant on the tastes of patrons or customers in collecting books and making money.<sup>16</sup>

Before going any further in analysis, it is necessary to provide some background on the extent of literacy in early America. How representative of the general population could these books be if not everyone was literate? First of all, what it means to be "literate" has changed since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> At that time, reading and writing were taught separately and sporadically. Many more Americans could read than could write, so for these purposes and for theirs, the use of the term "literate" here signifies an ability

---

<sup>16</sup> Gregory A. Stiverson and Cynthia Z. Stiverson, *Books Both Useful and Entertaining: A Study of Book Purchases and Reading Habits of Virginians in the Mid-Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1977), 7-8.

<sup>17</sup> Amory and Hall, *The Colonial Book*, 10.

to read. Of those who have traditionally had the most evident access to literacy—white males—the Americans were more eagerly investing in books than even their British counterparts. By the year 1748, there were already six subscription libraries in North America in four colonies. The first major subscription library in Britain, however, did not appear until ten years later.<sup>18</sup>

It suddenly becomes necessary to mention the trope of women being excluded from reading the type of “High Literature” which came from Britain, or books which did not focus on their traditionally prescribed role as females in the British world. This argument has never seemed valid when taken out of a theoretical basis and transported into the reality of everyday life. These books were not under lock and key. Sure, women may not always have been able to subscribe to a library or have access to the money to buy books for herself. This does not mean that no woman read these books, which would be sitting in their family libraries or on a table in their homes or in public establishments. At the very least, the most popular books were widely discussed among friends, family, and neighbors. Some of the eagerly listening ears had to have been female. There is also surfacing evidence that not only were women reading in greater numbers than is traditionally assumed, but so were other minority or oppressed groups. Apprentices, indentured servants, and even free and enslaved Africans were taught to read more frequently than has previously been suspected or admitted.<sup>19</sup> While a concrete percentage of Americans who were literate or had access to the ideas found in

---

<sup>18</sup> Raven, *London Booksellers*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 3.

British books is impossible to tell, nevertheless the estimated number has grown higher thanks to recent scholarship.

There are a few necessary assumptions that needed to be made in order to organize the following data clearly. First, some general inferences of author origin had to be made based on book title when no information was easily found. In addition, several author nationalities have had to be grouped under wider umbrella titles. This second assumption benefits from a longer explanation which follows.

There are some books considered for these purposes as “British” which never made it to London, the great hub of the British book trade, at all. These were primarily printed or at least authored in Dublin and Edinburgh. There is much contention about whether or not these can be considered “British” places of origin. This debate is understandable from an English or an Irish point of view that saw these places as obvious quite different from one another, but from the view of American colonists looking across the ocean, some difference vanishes. Furthermore, Scotland and Ireland did have their own book trades, but all were dwarfed by England’s and their books were effortlessly incorporated as common items in their neighbor’s book trade. For these reasons, the term “British” here is meant loosely. For the sake of clarity, two other group categories are synthesized from several nationalities. “Flemish” here refers to either an author identified as Dutch, Belgian, or Flemish. “German” stands for books which were originally written in German or by someone who primarily spoke that language, hailing from either Germany or Switzerland.

In total, these sources produced evidence for almost 900 books in the American colonies and early United States, just from this small sample. Of these, the author’s

national origin could be identified for about 800 of the books. The aggregate numbers based on nationality breakdown are stark. 71% of these books were authored by someone from the British Isles. Clearly, most of the books that were present in the American colonies, whether we know if they were read or not, were of British origin. This may seem like an obvious conclusion due to the British origin and English language reliance of the United States, but the continuities are certainly worth expressing. Of course, to explain in more detail any change over time, it becomes necessary to break these numbers up into arbitrary time periods to engage with the incremental shifts in book origins throughout the era. These groupings are the 1760s (or The Happy Colonists), the early 1770s (Trouble Brewing), the war years (Revolution), and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Independence).

### The Happy Colonists

The title of this section is not meant to imply that American colonists were completely happy in the 1760s. For instance, take into account the earlier discussion on the Stamp Act. The happiness, however, comes in retrospect thinking about a time before a war was expected. The American colonies were decidedly British colonies at this time, and it is natural to assume the data will show a significant proportion of the books read and sold there were British-authored. This is absolutely correct, and is even starker of an imbalance than some expect. 79.5% of the books on the pre-1770 lists were written by British writers. The runner-up was French-authored books, which represented only 7.7% of those analyzed. If it had not been for the popularity of Benjamin Franklin, the American-authored numbers would not be as high as the already

miniscule 3.4%. Of course, there were also rarer non-English language authors represented, with Flemish and German authors just on the coattails of the Americans, and even a few Italians were represented. The number of authors from Antiquity exactly matched that of the American authors at 3.4% of the total.

### Trouble Brewing

In the early 1770s, the numbers would be expected to tilt slightly in favor of American authors or at least out of favor of the British, possibly replacing some with other Europeans. Surprisingly, just about the exact opposite happened. Increasing from the 1760s 79.5%, the number of British-authored books rose to a shocking 87.2% of the total. The percentage of American authors went in the other direction, falling from 3.4% to the abysmal 0.9%. Almost all of the other author nationality classifications increased a bit in number, but their percentages unanimously fell because of the drastic increase in the number of British-authored books.

Interest increased in these years shortly before the Revolution in all things British. Most colonists did not want to wage a war against the mother country and uproot themselves and their families from everything they knew. As far as the shocking lack of American authors represented in this set of the data goes, these numbers are those of books, but the general trend in America was tending toward pamphlets and broadsides. These could be easily printed locally, and were cheap enough to produce and procure that they proved essential for the conscious collectivizing of a purely American populace.

## Revolution

In the war years of the American Revolution, it is no surprise that this collective American populace authored and published very few books. There was the immediate danger to person, family, and property to think about. In fact, none of the books listed during the war years were authored by Americans. Zero percent. British-authored books maintained domination of over half of the total books, at 62.9%. The biggest leaps were in the numbers of Antiquities and Italian authors. Books first written in ancient Greece or Rome were four times more common in the war years than in the earlier 1770s, a jump from 3.2% to 21.6% of the total. Perhaps this has to do with the fact that much of the early American republic was inspired by Antiquity, this while beginning to decide what the United States should look like, Americans got their ideas from what they were reading. It may seem more difficult to reason with the increase in Italian-authored books, although perhaps that country was seen as holding the legacy of the Ancient thinkers and perhaps a glimpse into America's future depending on the war's outcome.

## Independence

The early 19<sup>th</sup>-century books present the widest variety of author origins out of the data set. Nine author nationalities were accounted for. Because of the sheer breadth of the numbers, just 49% of the books had a British author. While British-authored books lost some of the incredible magnitude in their prevalence, the second most common author nationality only accounted for about half as many books as the British. This category, French-authored books, made up 27.6% of the total numbers. Authors of antiquity came third, at just 9.4%, followed by the Americans at 4.7%. German authors



accounted for 2.1% and the remaining numbers were shared by less than 1% of the books authored by Flemish, Spanish, or Swedish writers. This source comes from the new United States of America, not from a British colony, and yet there are ten times as many British-authored books as American-authored. These numbers do not even take into account the books being brought into America prior to this time, when it was a British colony and expected to read primarily British books.

In analyzing book lists, it is all too common for book or social historians of this era to focus their studies simply on the changes between popular book genres of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and of the early 19<sup>th</sup>. After having statistically engaged with the data, there is an obvious genre shift. Of the early 19<sup>th</sup>-century books listed, several were named by genre such as a simple description like “fairy tales” or “plays” rather than by specific titles or the authors’ surnames. There was also a pointed increase in the number of books identified by just a title, and of those almost all seem to be novels. Of the earlier book lists, hardly any novels were listed at all. However, what is gained in telling the story of shifting genre popularity downplays or ignores entirely the numerous continuities between these eras. At the risk of sounding anti-Foucault, it is important to remember that continuities can reveal just as much about a time period as can difference. On the topic of British books in America, historians emphasize genre changes while rarely mentioning a grossly disproportionate lack of change in author origins. This fact reveals issues with how this era is considered, and even a wider downfall in the field of history itself. Partly because of the easy separation of time periods based on political or national organization as well as century, the American 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries have been broken apart into largely separate realms. This is done

without respect for the similarities between particularly the later early century and the earlier late century. These similarities reveal the true legacy of the 18<sup>th</sup> century as well as the non-revolutionary nature of the 19<sup>th</sup>.

While these total numbers are extraordinarily revealing of British books in America, one aspect of this analysis has actually skewed them away from the real extent. For a large number of these books which were originally written in a language other than English, they were translated in Britain prior to being shipped to the American colonies or United States. This means the ideas presented by the original authors were sifted through the minds of someone in the British metropole before the meaning was reinterpreted through this British lens. The translated books were implanted with British cultural understandings, making them almost as British in origin as they were belonging to their original author. There are a number of these books analyzed which were not translated from their primary non-English language, a fact which some may consider a complication of the idea of British supremacy in books read in America. However, these works of Antiquity or which gained prominence in continental Europe were also being widely read in Great Britain. There are very few books which were not read in a British context, completely separate and American. The Britishness of books read and circulated in early America was so strong that even those non-English books were a part of the transatlantic British book trade.

With these conclusions in mind, what does it actually mean that most books read in early America were British? Concerning a time which defined and continues to define the national organization of a singular community of Americans, a grave error would be

to ignore the Britishness of this communal identity and its implications for the definition of Americanness.

It is natural to assume, post-Benedict Anderson, that reading overwhelmingly British books was in fact what inspired Americans to carve out a distinct character for themselves.<sup>20</sup> As the countries grew apart and particularly as British authors wrote of Americans as increasingly foreign to themselves, they were creating the idea for Americans that the British were separate from themselves. When Americans were told they were no longer a part of the British collective, which implied that they were something different.<sup>21</sup> They were unique and separate. It is hard to refute this idea, but arguing is unnecessary. Pointing out the prevalence of British books in America, even into the early years of the United States, is not meant to imply that the Americans were still British. Rather, the implication is that national identification distinctions did not matter to the transatlantic book trade. Yes, Americans were different from their British counterparts, but that did not mean they had to read different things. When the colonies rebelled they were not casting off every aspect of Britishness, just the government under the King. Being American could mean still belonging to a grand British world without technically being a colony or considering oneself to be British.

The idea of cultural nationalism, or belonging to a distinct socio-ethnic group with unique traditions and history, strongly emerged into global consciousness between the 1770s and the 1820s. This was not a sudden break from past ideologies of belonging,

---

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

<sup>21</sup> Kathy O. McGill, *"A Remote People": British National Identity and America in the Eighteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2002), 5-6.

but a process of steady progression and cultural exchange.<sup>22</sup> The historian Leonard Tennenhouse described early America as a diasporic nation in his work entitled *The Importance of Feeling English*. He defines a diaspora as any group of emigrants who maintain their original cultural identity for a significant amount of time. This, in turn, makes them not a distinct culture but a subculture of their initial nation.<sup>23</sup> The implication of defining Americans as diasporic Britons lies in the necessity of cultural continuity rather than identification as citizens of a particular country. In effect, it is more important that early Americans were still connected to their British cultural history than that they broke from the Empire to form their own political unit. In fact, a common idea of the time was that English literary cultural ideals were perfected in America.<sup>24</sup> This issue was not who got to be British, but whether those in Great Britain or in the American colonies and subsequent United States were better at being British.

The bottom line is that national borders or name distinctions between culturally synonymous peoples, even those which were won in a politically aggressive rebellion, do not matter. As the American George Mason wrote to London in 1766, “In crossing the Atlantic Ocean, we have only changed our climate, not our minds: our natures and dispositions remain unaltered.”<sup>25</sup> A traditional “Founding Father” of the United States thus implied he and all other Americans were culturally British simply because of their ideological origins rather than any political ties to the imperial center. In light of these

---

<sup>22</sup> W.M. Verhoeven, ed., *Revolutionary Histories: Transatlantic Cultural Nationalism, 1775-1815* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 23, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Raven, *London Booksellers*, 218.

realizations, historians of early America need to limit their reliance on strict time periodization and arbitrary distinctions of political dependency when thinking about the actual lived experience of historical peoples.

Identity is not only fluid in the 21<sup>st</sup> century because of innovations in technological communication, but this idea existed as far back as the founding of America. In fact, it may have been even more prevalent during that time because of the implications of belonging to a global empire which brought disparate people from all over the world together in one collective group. Americans were not considered “only Americans,” but members of an interconnected world culture of English speakers even after their political break from the British Empire. Through studying the prevalence of British books in the early American book trade throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the complex issue of cultural identity becomes clearer. Because Americans were still reading culturally British books and thus instilling their community with British values in such astronomical numbers in the early republican years, it is safe to infer the Britishness of American cultural foundations in a much greater respect than has previously been assumed.

Some may argue that this analysis is too essentializing in light of the often disparate reality of early American culture. However, everyone living in the American colonies and new United States at that time lived in relation to their community environment. There are certain commonalities of experience or ideology, however base, which cannot be ignored for the sake of a glamorous analysis of difference. Certainly women and minorities of race or ethnicity had a different lived experience than a white British-descended Protestant male landowner. This difference, though, does not mean

that they were completely excluded from the common community. Each person, whether they are allowed to participate in every aspect of a “national culture” or not, is affected by the collective mindset and lives in relation to it in some way. Using the language of the celebrated social historian E.P. Thompson, culture was not imposed from above but was localized, individualized, and full of oppositions.<sup>26</sup> This is to say that Americans were not wholly culturally American or culturally British, but a mixture of the two which depended on experience but was never simply one or the other.

To conclude, Great Britain or the central British Empire was not telling early Americans who they should be. Even the widespread nature of British books in the colonies and United States did not essentially mean every single American was still culturally British. However, data insists that cultural continuity between the earliest British colonists and self-identified Americans existed in too large of an extent to be ignored. This undeniable fact that cultural ideas from Britain were common in early America insinuates that no political break could sever the ties of commonality, nor could subsequent hundreds of years completely untether the two nations from their cultural origins. The Britishness of American books implies who Americans were at their foundation, and thus who Americans continue to be today.

---

<sup>26</sup> David D. Hall, *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 23, 2017), 4-5.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amory, Hugh, and David D. Hall, eds. *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*, vol. 1 of *A History of the Book in America*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

"An account of books belonging to the late library which were in the hands of the senior sophisters when it was consumed by fire" ca. 1764. in *Records of books spared from 1764 Harvard Hall fire and subsequent gifts, 1764-1778*. Manuscript. From Harvard University Archives, UAIII 50.27.64, Box 1 Folder 3. Colonial North America at Harvard Library. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.ARCH:11179852> (accessed 23 November 2017).

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin & Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 2006.

Bell, Robert. *The Virginia Gazette*, "To the American World." September 5, 1771. From Colonial Williamsburg Official History & Citizenship Site. <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?IssueIDNo=71.R.22&page=3> (accessed 23 November 2017).

Burges, H. John. *The Virginia Gazette*. April 23, 1772. From Colonial Williamsburg Official History & Citizenship Site. <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?IssueIDNo=72.PD.19&page=2> (accessed 23 November 2017).

"Classed book list, undated" in *Papers of James Winthrop related to the Harvard College Library, 1780-1781, and undated*. Manuscript. From Harvard University

- Archives, UAIII 50.27.72, Box 1 Folder 13. Colonial North America at Harvard Library. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.ARCH:16084458> (accessed 23 November 2017).
- Davis, Richard Beale. *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1979.
- Cibbarelli, William R. *Libraries of the Mind: A Study of the Reading Histories of Mercy Warren, Abigail Adams and Judith Sargent Murray (1728-1820)*. Ann Arbor, MI: Bell & Howell Information and Learning Company, 2001.
- Fellows, John. "Catalogue of Valuable New and Second Hand Books..." New York: November 21, 1801. *Readex: America's Historical Imprints*.  
[http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wm.edu/iw-search/we/Evans/?p\\_product=EAIX&p\\_theme=eai&p\\_nbid=N5CA4CYAMTUxMTc40TM3OS43MzA4Mzl6MToxNDoxMjguMjM5Ljk5LjE0MA&p\\_action=doc&p\\_docnum=1&p\\_queryname=7&p\\_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-1044048D43EF1098@486-@1](http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wm.edu/iw-search/we/Evans/?p_product=EAIX&p_theme=eai&p_nbid=N5CA4CYAMTUxMTc40TM3OS43MzA4Mzl6MToxNDoxMjguMjM5Ljk5LjE0MA&p_action=doc&p_docnum=1&p_queryname=7&p_docref=v2:0F2B1FCB879B099B@EAIX-1044048D43EF1098@486-@1) (accessed 23 November 2017).
- Gilmore, William J. *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989.
- Hall, David D. *Cultures of Print: Essays in the History of the Book*. Amherst, Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996. *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 23, 2017).
- Harlan, Robert D. "David Hall's Bookshop and Its British Sources of Supply." In *Books in America's Past: Essays Honoring Rudolph H. Gjelsness*, edited by David Kaser, 1-24. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia.



Hruschka, John. *How Books Came to America: The Rise of the American Book Trade*.  
University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012.

Kelley, Mary, and Robert A. Gross. *A History of the Book in America: Volume 2: An  
Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society in the New Nation, 1790-1840*.  
Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010. *eBook Collection  
(EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 23, 2017).

"List of books bequeathed by Governor William Dummer and donated by Dr. Sewall,  
with list of some books saved from fire because checked out, undated" in  
*Records of books spared from 1764 Harvard Hall fire and subsequent gifts,  
1764-1778*. Manuscript. From Harvard University Archives, UAIII 50.27.64, Box 1  
Folder 47. Colonial North America at Harvard Library. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.ARCH:11179896> (accessed 23 November 2017).

"A list of books borrowed from the former Library & not yet return'd" in *Records of books  
spared from 1764 Harvard Hall fire and subsequent gifts, 1764-1778*. Manuscript.  
From Harvard University Archives, UAIII 50.27.64, Box 1 Folder 5. Colonial North  
America at Harvard Library. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.ARCH:11179854>  
(accessed 23 November 2017).

"List of books granted to Harvard by the Massachusetts General Court, ca. 1778" in  
*Records of books spared from 1764 Harvard Hall fire and subsequent gifts,  
1764-1778*. Manuscript. From Harvard University Archives, UAIII 50.27.64, Box 1  
Folder 31. Colonial North America at Harvard Library. <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.ARCH:11179880> (accessed 23 November 2017).

- Littlefield, George Emery. *Early Boston Booksellers, 1642-1711*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1969.
- McGill, Kathy O. "A Remote People:" *British National Identity and America in the Eighteenth Century*. Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 2002.
- Raven, James. *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002.
- Stiverson, Gregory A., and Cynthia Z. *Books Both Useful and Entertaining: A Study of Book Purchases and Reading Habits of Virginians in the Mid-Eighteenth Century*. Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1977.
- Tennenhouse, Leonard. *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. eBook Collection (EBSCOhost), EBSCOhost (accessed November 23, 2017).
- Verhoeven, W.M., ed. *Revolutionary Histories: Transatlantic Cultural Nationalism, 1775 1815*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- The Virginia Gazette*, "A Catalogue of Books &c. belonging to the Estate of John Mercer, Esquire, deceased, now remaining, and to be sold the 24th of September, 1771." August 29, 1771. From *Colonial Williamsburg Official History & Citizenship Site*. <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/VGSinglePage.cfm?IssueIDNo=71.PD.38&page=3> (accessed 23 November 2017).

Williams, Julie Hedgepeth. *The Significance of the Printed Word in Early America: Colonists' Thoughts on the Role of the Press*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999.

IMPERATIVE EDUCATION:  
THE POLITICS OF READING AND ADVICE IN COLONIAL AMERICAN COLLEGES

Jane Snyder  
Colonial America  
27 April 2018

“An author, who meant to be serious, has meditated on *the mystery of weaving*; an author, who never meant to be serious, has meditated on a *broomstick*; let me also meditate; and a *library of books* shall be the subject of my meditations.”<sup>27</sup>

“As to their STUDIES, it would be well if they could be taught *every Thing* that is useful, and *every Thing* that is ornamental: But Art is long, and their Time is short. It is therefore propos'd that they learn those Things that are likely to be most useful and *most ornamental*. Regard being had to the several Professions for which they are intended.”<sup>28</sup>

Nine modern colleges were founded in the future United States before it declared its independence. They are now known as Harvard, William & Mary, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, Brown, Rutgers, and Dartmouth.<sup>29</sup> These institutions are not as individualistic as they, and subsequent historians, claim. They were birthed out of a greater momentum of imperative education as a collective movement. This becomes evident in studying the circumstances around their views and actions about books and reading in their earliest history. Taken together with early modern notions of reading, the stated and implied educational beliefs of the colonial colleges tie them together as pieces of one larger project. Institutionally and societally, the colleges were answering the question of what students were “supposed to read,” and how that purpose was being fulfilled in early America.

---

<sup>27</sup> *Harrison's British Classicks, VOL VII. Containing the World, and Lord Lyttleton's Dialogues of the Dead* (London: 1787; Google Books), accessed April 16, 2018, 312.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania* (Philadelphia: 1749; Penn University Archives & Records Center), accessed March 18, 2018, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/1749proposals.html>.

<sup>29</sup> With the exception of William & Mary and Dartmouth, these colleges were not founded under the names listed here. However, I have used their modern names throughout the paper to make it easier to understand and follow their histories. For the same purpose, I have largely omitted the use of “College” or “University” in their titles.

“Diversity yielded to shared cultural perspectives. By this process a community of readers coalesced, sharing ideals, goals, & various forms of action.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it was the participation in a wider community of readers that succinctly tied together seemingly disparate colleges into one collective experiment. Issues related to reading (how to read, what to read, and where to get it from) were integral in the founding of these colonial colleges. Students were often reading the same books, or the same types of books, so even if the values their particular institution was trying to instill in its students were different they were building on the same foundation.<sup>31</sup>

What was truly similar about the nine colonial colleges was how their leadership used books. This connecting thread between institutions can be called “imperative education,” or the conscious act of prescribing reading material that furthered one’s own views or values and ascribed it with moral superiority.<sup>32</sup> It is worth taking some time to discuss the nature of this imperative scheme of reading in detail before connecting it back to the foundation of the colonial colleges. This era of education can be described as imperative in all senses of the word. First of all, it emphasizes the vital importance of education, and in particular education with the aim of preserving and perpetuating values. There is also the imperative sense of education as a command, exhibited

---

<sup>30</sup> William J. Gilmore, *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989), 288.

<sup>31</sup> This study is not focused on the books themselves. Of course, most of the colleges have published or archival accounts of which books their earliest students were reading or had access to in their library. These sources are primed for comparison in a future work.

<sup>32</sup> In some instances, I have chosen to use “imperative education” and “imperative reading” interchangeably. Imperative education incites reading as the foreground of learning, hence the similarity of the two phrases. Perhaps any stipulation between them would be in using “imperative reading” to mean the act of reading what has been imperatively recommended, and using “imperative education” to describe the practice more broadly.

through the act of prescribing proper books necessary to read in order to become an educated and moral adult.

Imperative reading involves a process of recommendation. As the 1787 collection *Harrison's British Classicks* humorously describes recommendation, "The sages of the law recommend this abridgement to our perusal. Let us with all thankfulness of heart receive their counsel. Much are we beholden to physicians, who only prescribe the bark of the *Quinquina*, when they might oblige their patients to swallow the whole tree."<sup>33</sup> The ones who are doing the "prescribing of the bark," like physicians, are not necessarily a young student's parents or tutors, and in most cases are not. Even those adults closest to each student are repeating what they have learned from the body of imperative didactic literature. For such an important task as informing the proper instruction of young minds, only "the experts" whose own works have been accepted into the wheelhouse of proper conventional literature have the authority.

Those who had the power to recommend then had to decide exactly which literary works were worthy of recommendation. A book being deemed worthy meant that the values it taught—either explicitly or implicitly—were also deemed worthy, and important to emulate. Fully understanding this point can only be done by studying examples of such moralistic recommendation, which was often repeated in published works. In James Buchanan's 1770 treatise entitled *A Plan of an English Grammar-School Educaton*, it is said that:

Youth should be constantly exercised in reading some of our best English classics, both in prose and verse... These passages should be such as are most

---

<sup>33</sup> *Harrison's British Classicks*, 313.

likely to inculcate the principles of religion and morality, and which tend to mend the heart, at the same time that they enlighten the understanding.<sup>34</sup>

The student's heart being "mended" implied removing unfit morals and ideas to replace them with the "proper" ones. In this way, students were being prepared for their futures by gaining a morally strong foundation. This sentiment is echoed in the later 1799 work *The English Reader*:

It would, indeed, be a great and happy improvement in education, if no writings were allowed to come under their notice, but such as are perfectly innocent; and if, on all proper occasions, they were encouraged to peruse those which tend to inspire a due reverence for virtue, and an abhorrence of vice, as well as to animate them with sentiments of piety and goodness. Such impressions deeply engraven on their minds, and connected with all their attainments, could scarcely fail of attending them through life; and of producing a solidity of principle and character, that would be able to resist the danger arising from future intercourse with the world.<sup>35</sup>

In this infinitesimal representation of the huge body of literature on recommended reading can be found the goals about which recommenders were explicit. What was often left out was the important idea of who had control.

The values deemed worthy of emulation were primarily those which the recommender personally held dear. Thus, with the recommendation inherent in imperative reading came an attempt to maintain social control by promoting one's own

---

<sup>34</sup> James Buchanan, *A Plan of an English Grammar-School Education: With an Introductory Inquiry, Whether by the English Language Alone, Without the Embarrassment of Latin and Greek, the British Youth, in General, Cannot be Thoroughly Accomplished in Every Part of Useful and Polite Literature, and Qualified to Make a More Early, Advantageous, and Elegant Figure in Life. Addressed to the Serious Consideration of Every Sensible Parent and Teacher in Great Britain* (London: 1770), accessed April 16, 2018, [http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebookbatch.ECCO\\_batch:N25207](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebookbatch.ECCO_batch:N25207), 116-117.

<sup>35</sup> Lindley Murray, *The English Reader, or Pieces in Prose and Poetry, Selected From the Best Writers: Designed to Assist Young Persons to Read with Propriety and Effect, Improve their Language and Sentiments, and to Inculcate the Most Important Principles of Piety and Virtue: With a Few Preliminary Observations on the Principles of Good Reading* (1799; New York: 1806, 6th addition), accessed April 16, 2018 (v).



ideals as ideal. In a few lines of his *Poem on Visiting the Academy of Philadelphia, June 1753*, William Smith illustrates this point beautifully. “Where *Emulation* keeps the virtuous Flame, / And *Merit* is the only Road to Fame... / That down from Sire to Son, thro’ every Age, / Your Virtues may survive You in your Race.”<sup>36</sup> Not only was contemporary social control at risk, but the future for your children and how you would be remembered to posterity. The importance of propagating your own values as those best fitted for all of society ensured your ideas would live on after you. In addition, if everyone thought as you did or placed higher moral value on the same issues as you, your own position in society would be higher for it. The best way to keep moral authority and thus maintain control was to spread your values as widely as possible. Many did this through works of literature written to guide readers in the best choices of books or authors, but the most viscerally effective solution was by founding an educational institution.

Imperative reading was a guiding theme for the founding and colonial years of early American colleges. They were founded to circulate usage of a specific worldview and set of values. Each represented not one individual’s values but the collective effort of clash and compromise between various educators and benefactors. In addition, they were not regulated as governmental institutions, but free to the whims and ideals of whoever happened to be leading them at any given time.<sup>37</sup> This meant the guiding

---

<sup>36</sup> William Smith, *A Poem on Visiting the Academy of Philadelphia, June 1753* (Philadelphia, 1753; Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image), accessed March 18, 2018, [http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/printedbooksNew/index.cfm?TextID=curtis\\_511\\_f&PagePosition=1](http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/printedbooksNew/index.cfm?TextID=curtis_511_f&PagePosition=1), 8.

<sup>37</sup> Donald G. Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 141.

values of each institution changed over time as different leaders came into power. Of course, these ideas are best illustrated through example.

In his 1749 treatise *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*, Benjamin Franklin laid out a plan for the establishment of an academy in Philadelphia with the eye to eventually turning it into a college. Franklin saw himself as establishing a uniquely new style of education focused on the individual in his own colonial context.<sup>38</sup> The writing of such an explicitly vocal early American intellectual and educational innovator contains important clues about the founding of colonial colleges. Franklin's proposed contribution to the American collegiate scene beautifully illuminates the reality of early imperative education connectivity, although in ways that would surprise Franklin himself.

Franklin described the current state of educational affairs in the American colonies as completely inadequate. He invoked the first settlers, men who were educated in Europe, and painted a picture of them as worthy of emulation. He bemoaned what he saw as a lack of strong educational foundation in the New World. If American schools of higher education were not up to the task of educating great men like those in Europe, then Americans would have fewer and fewer great men to lead their government and society. In fact, Franklin placed the weight of maintaining and strengthening the future of America on its young students. To do this, Franklin proposes using education as a tool for building up great men. He promoted educating youth consciously about the colonies and how best to add to their merits. At the same time, he

---

<sup>38</sup> Franklin, *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth*. This text will be analyzed in the next few paragraphs. Since it includes no page numbers so each footnote would be identical, citing every instance it was consulted in the following lines is repetitive and unnecessary. Instead, it is cited at the beginning and the end of its analysis.

placed emphasis on individual students' self-cultivation as a foundation from which they could go on to improve the society around them.

The main goals of Franklin's education with a purpose scheme involve quite a bit of groundwork focused on the individual students' minds. Fundamentally, his academy would teach its students how to be "good people," as defined by Franklin himself through the lens of his experiences in the world. This involves reading and studying with the goal of understanding the importance of virtue, public spirit, and other such values Franklin deemed essential. He proposed preparing students for whatever careers they ended up with by internalizing in them the values they read, and using them as inspiration for the cultivation of good habits while allowing their bad habits to slowly recede into the past. In his view, future American leaders need to be personally molded into leaders as early in life as possible. Franklin saw his new liberal education as a plan for teaching students to judge and act rightly in life, and he intended to use their newfound judgment to turn the wider society toward his ways of thinking.

Franklin's plan of education was truly focused on cultivating potential in each individual. His educational philosophy was centered on using logical reason born from thinking innovatively rather than following the custom of others. This ties into his criticism of previously-founded American educational institutions as too singularly religious. In practice, Franklin's new plan started with honoring students' inherent rational thinking abilities. For example, instead of forcing students to study only in Latin and Greek instead of the language with which they would have the most use in their life—as previous institutions did—he would explain the importance of these languages in the world system of learned men. According to Franklin, students would beg to read

the classics in their original languages if given mental enticement, and would actually perform these tasks more efficiently when self-motivated.

Franklin's proposed academy took his educational ideals and turned them into reality. While his treatise is mainly focused on inciting an educational upheaval across institutions, he does lay out some of the specific plans with which he planned to build up his academy in Philadelphia. Although this particular treatise is not the one in which he lays out his academy's curriculum, he does mention some educational causality by repeating phrases such as "after this, the students should..." when discussing the types of things students should be reading and learning. Not only does Franklin clearly have a plan, he has access to the literary resources necessary for a successful educational institution. A local Philadelphia gentleman's vast and supremely cultivated library was soon to be opened to the public, and had been explicitly offered up for the use of academy students and masters. This gave Franklin a head start in implementing his educational plan, as books are the means through which he would cultivate his students' minds.

Franklin presented himself as a lone pioneer in the field of educational reform.<sup>39</sup> However, his plans for revolutionary education were not as revolutionary as he believed, nor were they as practically applicable as he had hoped. Franklin's reforms were guided by his belief that previous institutions were created primarily to train clergymen. He saw his own institution as focusing on future government and business leaders more fitting

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. This ends the long interpretation of this one source.

of the cosmopolitan Philadelphia.<sup>40</sup> Of course, he failed to realize the numerous similarities between his own school and those created by other educational reformers. His colonial college predecessors were not solely focused on producing clergy. In fact, those wishing to train as clergymen in the Anglican Church had to go to England to complete their training.<sup>41</sup> For all nine colonial colleges, their institutional focus was similar to Franklin's. Namely, the emphasis was on educating young men with the purpose of instilling proper values in them.<sup>42</sup> Any minor differences were in which values were deemed most essential, or particularly how each value was consciously encouraged. Their purposes were fundamentally alike.

Franklin was naïve in thinking that his stated ideas could be implemented in the real world without question. In reality, an institution is not built by one man. Funding, building, leadership, and teaching needed to be joint efforts for reasons of politics, budget, and prestige. With wider involvement in planning and implementation came more opinions and often conflicting ideas. Franklin had to compromise on some of his ideals, and his institution became much more like its predecessors. Many of his trustees were Anglican, so they brought a religious perspective and teaching materials that encouraged the same in students. His Provost, William Smith, was also just as strong-willed as Franklin, but one of his most valued ideals was the mandatory teaching of

---

<sup>40</sup> Penn University Archives & Records Center, "From Franklin's Vision to Academy to University of Pennsylvania," (2004), accessed March 18, 2018, <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/penn1700s.html>.

<sup>41</sup> J. David Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 89-90.

<sup>42</sup> At this juncture, it is necessary to mention the use of "men" as a stand-in for all students. Men's and women's educations were separate at this time and women were not admitted into the colonial colleges, making them unnecessary in the discourse about these institutions. Of course, women's education was also rife with imperative education schemes. The topic of gendered imperative education deserves more time and space than this paper contains.

classical languages.<sup>43</sup> Gone was Franklin's plan for a purely secular, student desire-driven school. Instead, the Academy of Philadelphia and subsequent College of Philadelphia (now the University of Pennsylvania) was born like its fellow colonial colleges in political conflict and the mutual integration of often differing personal values.

The ways that Franklin's educational ideals and reality reflected earlier college plans played out again in subsequent colonial American colleges. These nine institutions were a collective movement. Each college was founded in conversation with those already in existence.<sup>44</sup> Franklin was not alone in creating an institution which sought to remedy the shortcomings of its predecessors, only in the amount of literary production he left behind explicitly naming his reasons and goals. Within the institutions' obvious or implied arguments, each had its own reasons for being founded. However, an indelible thread of imperative education connected all of these colleges in their early years, and influenced how their founding ideals would be taught.

The most obvious examples of imperative education in the founding of the colonial colleges can be found in their curricula. Within a college's curriculum was the official statement of what its leaders considered to be most important. In other words, a curriculum is "what, out of the totality of man's constantly growing knowledge and experience, is considered useful, appropriate, or relevant to the lives of educated men."<sup>45</sup> This implies that to be an educated man one must have certain knowledge and have read certain books. It is also within the curriculum that the often-repeated idea of colonial colleges as merely religious institutions can be most successfully refuted. When

---

<sup>43</sup> Penn University, "From Franklin's Vision to Academy"

<sup>44</sup> Hoeverler, *Creating the American Mind*, x.

<sup>45</sup> Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977), forward.

Rev. Richard Peters says in his 1751 *Sermon on Education*, “BLESSED and gracious God, avert these Evils from thy People, and sanctify THIS INSTITUTION for the Purposes of thy holy Religion and Virtue”, the emphasis is just as equally on religion as it is on virtue, though the evocative language has confused many.<sup>46</sup> Religion is just one way of perpetuating certain virtues, but was by no means the only or even main goal of colonial colleges. Returning again to the example of Benjamin Franklin, his aim was to establish a consciously secular institution. That being said, his advice to replace religion with virtue was not a replacement at all, but a semantic technicality. Virtue was already a stated institutional purpose within college curricula before Franklin, and it continued to be a universally-admired educational ideal after and despite the College of Philadelphia.

According to Samuel Davies, fourth president of Princeton and author of its first printed library catalog, curriculum was not the only imperative reading that mattered in colleges. In fact, every book that was collected in a college library was not only important but could be useful. As he wrote in the College of New Jersey’s 1760 library catalogue:

A large and well-sorted Collection of Books on the various Branches of Literature, is the most ornamental and useful Furniture of a College, and the most proper and valuable Fund with which it can be endowed. It is one of the best Helps to enrich the Minds both of the Officers and Students with Knowledge; to give them an extensive Acquaintance with Authors; and to lead them beyond the narrow Limits of the Books to which they are confined in their stated Studies and Recitations... it will enable them to investigate TRUTH thro’ her intricate Recesses; and to guard against the Stratagems and Assaults of Error.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>46</sup> Peter Richards, *A Sermon on Education: Wherein Some Account is Given of the Academy, Established in the City of Philadelphia: Preach'd at the Opening Thereof, on the Seventh Day of January, 1750-1* (Philadelphia, 1751; Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image), accessed March 18, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/earlyenglishcol00philgoog>, 14.

<sup>47</sup> William S. Dix, *The Princeton University Library in the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Library, 1978), 1; *A Catalogue of Books in the Library of*

Just as one individual's ideas didn't represent all of an institution's educational commitments, a college's official curriculum alone did not account for all of its educational material or forays into imperative reading schemes. What reading material colleges had access to determined their institutional thinking and the students and scholarship that thinking produced. It is important to keep in mind, then, that the majority of colonial college library books were donated by individual benefactors and represented their own interests. Their personal agendas in donating books determined a large part of the institutions to which they donated.

Very few in colonial America were fortunate enough to attend these colleges. Still, they were some of the most self-consciously important early American creations. One example of this importance is Princeton's Nassau Hall, which was built in 1756. At that time, it was the largest building in the British American colonies.<sup>48</sup> The mere fact that the largest building was not primarily used for governmental, economic, or religious purposes exemplifies the importance of consciously supporting education. Taken collectively, the nine colonial American colleges were beacons of educational opportunity. Their individual origin stories emphasize a less idealistic reality, particularly when discussed in conjunction with how they exhibited imperative reading schemes.

There are clear hints at the collective scheme of imperative education found in each colonial college's charter or founding documents. Here, the original instigators of institutional identity detailed their personal views on education and its purposes. A common complaint used when forming new institutions, as Benjamin Franklin did, was

---

*the College of New-Jersey, January 29, 1760* (Woodbridge, NJ: 1760; Google Books), accessed April 16, 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 26.



the overwhelming and exclusive religiosity of American colleges. However, if the founding documents of even the most religious institutions are consulted, it is obvious that they were not wholly designed for this purpose.

For instance, Harvard was founded under the Puritanical religious structure of early Massachusetts. This does not, however, mean its educational purpose was solely to produce clergy. Harvard began as a way to influence future leaders and nourish their minds with “appropriate” ideas, namely the intellectual foundations that made a “good” Puritan.<sup>49</sup> Harvard’s educational emphasis was on prescribing a specific type of religious-based morality rather than only educating clergy. Similarly, William & Mary was founded partially to educate future Anglican ministers for Virginia and partially that “the youth may be piously educated in good letters and manners.”<sup>50</sup> Not only were students like at Harvard guided by the recommendation of religious morals, but they were explicitly to expect access to “good” books which would then instill them with “good” manners. Rutgers has a slightly different religious foundational story. It was formed by combined leaders of the Dutch Church in New York and New Jersey. Despite its blatantly religious foundation, this charter was explicitly secular. It stated the institution’s purpose as “the Education of Youth in the Learned Languages and in the Liberal and Useful Arts and Sciences.”<sup>51</sup>

Rutgers was not the only colonial college to state its purpose as “useful” education. According to Columbia’s 1754 prospectus, the college’s foundational

---

<sup>49</sup> Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges*, 82.

<sup>51</sup> Thomas J. Frusciano, "From "Seminary of Learning" to Public Research University: A Historical Sketch of Rutgers University," *Rutgers University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives*, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/scua/rutgers-historical-sketch-part-1>.

emphasis was on teaching only that which would be “useful” for students and could contribute to their happiness in life.<sup>52</sup> Its attempted novel purpose was devised to combat seemingly continued religious emphasis in other colleges. King’s brand of usefulness meant training its students to deal with city life in a commercial society.<sup>53</sup> That is, students would be equipped with the modern values the college’s leaders deemed as being those best suited for their future. In the same vein, Princeton was founded “to cultivate the Minds of the Pupils” and “to rectify the Heart...in order to make them good Men.”<sup>54</sup> Its take on usefulness combined with active imperative education to produce graduates whose use in society was to be good people, as defined by the institution.

Every college, even those not founded for explicitly religious or useful purposes, fed into the overall imperative reading scheme. Yale’s foundation was repeatedly and explicitly linked with prescribed reading. Originally, the idea was of another college to compete with Harvard, which had been criticized as becoming too liberal, influenced by books sent from London.<sup>55</sup> Yale was to be the conservative stronghold that Harvard failed to be. Its leaders would pay even closer attention to what books students could access to avoid the negative influence of bad books that had poisoned Harvard’s conservative reputation. Of course, Yale’s particular ideals ended up influencing liberal-mindedness even more so than at Harvard.

---

<sup>52</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 47.

<sup>53</sup> “General History of the Columbia University Libraries,” accessed April 16, 2018, <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/projects/ebooks/prd/GuidetoResearch/GuidetoResearch.html>.

<sup>54</sup> Dix, *The Princeton University Library*, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Hugh Amory and David D. Hall, ed., *A History of the Book in America*, vol. 1, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 499.

In order to see out their individual educational ideals, the colleges needed to complete the chain connecting their values with the students. This was done through granting students access to certain books, or the contents of certain books. Since the entire imperative education scheme was balanced on access to reading material, the colleges were dependent on book donors. Many colonial colleges had one major benefactor whose donation shaped the curriculum and created a physical precedent in the form of their library for emphasizing the study of certain ideas. . In fact, there had been a tradition since the 13<sup>th</sup> century of naming universities—or at the very least library buildings—after the benefactor who first donated a large number of books to the school library. This was first the case with Robert de Sorbonne in Paris.<sup>56</sup> This tradition was an official endorsement that tied an individual’s values, often posthumously, with that of the institution as a whole. Such benefactors were viewed as charitably compassionate, particularly in texts meant to encourage similar donations from others.<sup>57</sup> Of course, this practice is indelibly tied with imperative education. Donors could push their own agendas or viewpoints by hand-picking which books to include in their donation, and thus what information and values students could access. Whether or not a college would rename itself for a library benefactor, at every college the donors were seen as integral for the growth of the institution.

Harvard was one renamed in honor of a library benefactor in 1639. Just a year before, John Harvard had died at age 31 and bequeathed half of his estate and his

---

<sup>56</sup> Henry Bartlett Van Hoesen, *Brown University Library: The Library of the College or University in the English Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England in America 1767-1782* (Providence, RI, 1938; Hathi Trust), accessed March 18, 2018, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3921929;view=1up;seq=1>, 12.

<sup>57</sup> *A Catalogue of Books in the Library of the College of New Jersey*

entire library to the college.<sup>58</sup> His books were not strictly Puritan doctrine, but consisted of a huge intellectual range that included religion rather than being powered by it.<sup>59</sup> William & Mary's answer to John Harvard was Francis Nicholson, although the institution did not change its name to honor him. When he became Governor of Virginia in the 1690s, Nicholson donated hundreds of books to the college.<sup>60</sup> He was not as scholarly-minded as his Massachusetts predecessor, a fact which was emphasized by the subjects of his donated books.<sup>61</sup> However, the highbrow Scholarly value did not matter as much as the books' moralistic contents. Yale also had a generous early benefactor of library books, Jeremiah Dummer, whose 1714 donation of over 700 books earned him a solid place in that institution's history. Yale did change its name to honor a library benefactor, but it was obviously not Dummer. In 1718, the college renamed itself in honor of Englishman Elihu Yale, who donated only half as many books as Dummer. The reason behind this quantitative discrepancy was politics; Elihu Yale was related to some of the colony's earliest founders.<sup>62</sup> Columbia had no library whatsoever until 1759 with the posthumous donation of lawyer Joseph Murray's law library. In 1763, more books arrived in the form of a theological library donated by a London rector. For Dartmouth, their beloved foundational library benefactor was Eleazer Wheelock.

Of course, waiting for a generous donor whose personal book collection happened to correspond with the college founders' desire for the institutional library was

---

<sup>58</sup> Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 29.

<sup>59</sup> Amory and Hall, *A History of the Book in America*, 133.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>61</sup> John M. Jennings. *The Library of the College of William and Mary in Virginia, 1693-1793* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968), 246.

<sup>62</sup> Judith Schiff, "A Brief History of Yale" (Yale University Library, 2017), accessed 18 March 2018, <https://guides.library.yale.edu/yalehistory>.

not a fool-proof educational strategy. The colleges frequently sent solicitors around Great Britain to drum up support for their proposed method of teaching and educational values, asking for money and books in roughly equal measure. Not only were the colleges echoing the idea that the center of their intellectual world was still British, but they were seeking collaborators for their personal schemes of imperative education.<sup>63</sup>

On behalf of Harvard, Thomas Shepard travelled around England convincing scholars and men of note to donate books or funds to the college. In this capacity, he was also a first line of defense against intellectual rumors circulating about the school's educational and religious priorities. Within his job description was the need to "defend [Harvard] against critics of the 'heathen' authors read there."<sup>64</sup> It is safe to assume that one of Shepard's defenses would be convincing potential benefactors that the best way to ensure the correct books were being read at Harvard was to donate them. In this way, imperative reading could be used as a strategic tool to manipulate donors into donating. William & Mary's answer to Harvard's Thomas Shepard was James Blair, who similarly traveled around England to solicit fiscal and book donations. He was apparently successful, as there is a surviving letter written by a student in 1699 to thank two English bishops for "makeing a noble present of well chosen bookes to our Library, intending hereby to take care that our Youth be well seasoned with the best principles of religion and Learning that can be taught by the most sound and Orthodox Divines."<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> For more on Britain as an intellectually superior center, see Amory and Hall, *A History of the Book in America*, 196-197; and Leonard Tennenhouse, *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), *eBook Collection (EBSCOhost)*, EBSCOhost (accessed November 23, 2017).

<sup>64</sup> Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 28.

<sup>65</sup> Amory and Hall, *A History of the Book in America*, 75.

When Blair died in 1743, he left a large sum of money for the college to purchase books. This donation he deemed so important it was mentioned on his tombstone.<sup>66</sup> Yale's aforementioned Jeremiah Dummer collected most of the books from his donation in London, where he solicited for contributions from members of the Royal Society. Brown's agent solicitor in Britain was Morgan Edwards, who officially was to request funds but was also given books.<sup>67</sup> Apparently Edwards was not entirely successful, as an official action of the college's corporation immediately after his return acknowledged the need to buy books rather than relying on donations.<sup>68</sup> Dartmouth used its local benefactor, Eleazer Wheelock, to try to combat lack of donation interest in Britain. Wheelock travelled in 1770 on the heel of his own large contribution to encourage others to do the same. He seems to have been successful as a visitor only four years later says of the library "It is not large, but there are some very good books in it."<sup>69</sup> Of course, participation in the imperative reading scheme did not require vast quantities of books, simply those which were "good" and could make the college's students "good."

Not all colonial colleges solicited books in Great Britain. Since Princeton was restricted by unprecedented institutional poverty, it widely and creatively self-promoted and solicited for donations across fellow colonies. "In all of these activities...the library

---

<sup>66</sup> William & Mary Special Collections Research Center Wiki, "Books Owned by the College of William and Mary Prior to 1793", accessed April 16, 2018, [http://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Books\\_Owned\\_by\\_the\\_College\\_of\\_William\\_and\\_Mary\\_Prior\\_to\\_1793](http://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Books_Owned_by_the_College_of_William_and_Mary_Prior_to_1793).

<sup>67</sup> Martha Mitchell, "Library," *Encyclopedia Brunoniana* (Brown University Library, 1993), [http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News\\_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=L0070](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=L0070).

<sup>68</sup> Van Hoesen, *Brown University Library*, 41.

<sup>69</sup> "History of the Dartmouth College Library," *Dartmouth Library*, accessed March 18, 2018. <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/home/about/libhistory.html>.

was prominently mentioned at every possible opportunity.”<sup>70</sup> The college’s leaders would not let lack of money keep them from trying to give their students access to their value system. Princeton even used its library to promote itself. College President Samuel Davies wrote in the library catalogue that its purpose was “in the hope of stimulating additional gifts” by showing readers exactly how many important works were lacking in the college.<sup>71</sup> Seeing a favorite or a highly-valued book missing would be perfect incentive for a donation.

The reasons why individuals donated books to the colonial colleges varied just as much as the types of books themselves. One donor at Harvard, Thomas Hollis, was convinced to donate particularly because of the college’s reputation of religious tolerance. He was familiar with Oxford and Cambridge’s religious exclusionary rules, so decided to donate to an institution that was theologically more tolerant of its acquisitions. In 1725, he wrote a companion letter to his book donations, saying “if there happen to be some books not quite Orthodox...dont be afraid of them.”<sup>72</sup> He had consciously chosen to donate to an institution where his perhaps unorthodox ideas could find a home, and influence likeminded students in the future. For every motivated donor like Hollis there were others who used college libraries as a way to get rid of duplicate editions in their own collections. The books at Brown were described in 1772 as “those not well chosen, being such as our friends could best spare.”<sup>73</sup> This can be taken to mean that the benefactors’ donations were not always of books which college leaders saw as exactly befitting their educational and moral ideals.

---

<sup>70</sup> Dix, *The Princeton University Library*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>72</sup> Amory and Hall, *A History of the Book in America*, 414.

<sup>73</sup> Mitchell, “Library”

While the colleges were largely dependent on which books their donors deemed appropriate and necessary to contribute, there were further rules in place to guard students against improper donated books. Of course, this meant different things for different institutions. At the Harvard library, a rule was added later on in the colonial era which stipulated a more involved vetting process for donated books. The college president and members of its corporation board needed to consent before any book was brought into the library.<sup>74</sup> Harvard's colonial years were passionately imperative, controlling everything the students read. On the other hand, Yale had little regulation for donated books. Its trustees "made no effort to censure or control the collection." They were excited that the newly-available books would add to their colony's moral and intellectual foundation.<sup>75</sup> Yale's leaders were primarily concerned with recommending to their students the value of modernization and pushing their desire to be included in a global intellectual community.<sup>76</sup> This meant Yale's book vetting policy was more relaxed than at other institutions, as its educational philosophy involved following current intellectual trends rather than combing donated books for certain ideals.

The reality of book use at the colonial American colleges reinforces the recommendation side of imperative education. While these institutions mostly depended on the desired educational outcome of individual donors for the types of books they offered, students were given access to those only in line with the college's desired imperative values. Even at institutions where there was little hypothetical constriction on

---

<sup>74</sup> Albert Matthews, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Volume XV: Harvard College Records Part 1* (Cambridge, MA: The University Press, 1925); The Colonial Society of Massachusetts, accessed March 18, 2018, <https://www.colonialsociety.org/node/586>, 166.

<sup>75</sup> Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 64.

<sup>76</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 27; Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, 55.



books students could access, the reality of early college libraries limited universal usage.

Harvard, the college with the longest colonial history, changed its library rules several times over the era. The rules of 1667 stipulate that governing officers of the college and members of the clergy could use books at their will. The only students who had that right were seniors.<sup>77</sup> The rules of 1736 tell a slightly different tale. College governing officers were still included, but clergymen had been taken off the list. In their place were two new groups. The first, graduates, partially filled the hole that the clergy left in library patronage as a number of them were likely clergy themselves. This clarification that only clergy who graduated from Harvard could use its library acted to privilege the information and moral superiority found within its books. The second new group was “Gentlemen of Learning,” defined as men of note who were visiting the area and had permission from Harvard’s president to use its books. Still, seniors were the only students who could check out books.<sup>78</sup> Of course, even privileged usage of the library was not without stipulations. Senior students who were allowed access still had to go through the college president or a professor. One of these individuals “shall advice them what Books are most proper for their reading.”<sup>79</sup> Students were earnestly gathered into the imperative reading scheme, given access to college books only when they were deemed appropriate. They would certainly have only had access to select opinions.

At Yale, students had unprecedented access to the books themselves. All students were allowed to use the library by the 1750s, ten years before Harvard started

---

<sup>77</sup> Amory and Hall, *A History of the Book in America*, 137.

<sup>78</sup> Matthews, *Harvard College Records*.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

letting only its juniors join its seniors in library privileges. However, students in their first two years could only borrow from a list of pre-approved books specified for this purpose.<sup>80</sup> Princeton students were “allowed the free use of the college library that they may make excursions beyond the limits of their stated studies into the unbounded and variegated fields of knowledge.”<sup>81</sup> That is, students could freely peruse any books which the college had already deemed important and acceptable for the students’ use. Of course, the college could only afford to staff the library for an hour or two every week in which limited time students could peruse the books.<sup>82</sup>

Apart from the physical regulations surrounding reading in the colonial colleges, the era saw numerous debates around intellectually which books should be read at these institutions. Some who voiced their opinions were not even affiliated with the colleges, but felt the need to weigh in with their ideas of proper imperative education. The most famous and explosive example is from Harvard. In 1740 and 1741, a conflict arose about this college allowing students access to books which were unacceptable according to their opponent, Rev. George Whitefield. Whitefield admonished Harvard students for reading what he repeatedly called “bad books,” even naming some offending authors and listing several others students had been remiss in not reading.<sup>83</sup> Obviously, Whitefield felt strongly about his imperative reading. College officials answered with a resounding denial of students having read books deemed unsuitable. In a defense on behalf of the college, leaders mentioned that students were actively

---

<sup>80</sup> Amory and Hall, *A History of the Book in America*, 420.

<sup>81</sup> Dix, *The Princeton University Library*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>83</sup> Edward Wigglesworth, *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield: By Way of Reply to His Answer to the College Testimony Against Him and His Conduct* (Boston: 1745; Sabin Americana 1500-1926), accessed April 16, 2018, 30.

using the local public library when not permitted to use the college one. Upon checking borrowing records of that institution, it was asserted that not only had students never once checked out the offending works between 1732 and 1741, but that authors similar to those Whitefield had suggested were actually more popular than he claimed.<sup>84</sup> It was not just the inaccurate account that enraged Harvard officials, but Whitefield's position as someone they did not see as worthy to be suggesting books for students.

Particularly, they wrote of Whitefield "his Arrogance is more flagrant still, that such a young Man as he should take upon him to tell what Books we shou'd allow our Pupils to read."<sup>85</sup> In the early history of Harvard, there was an institutional push to control imperative reading schemes with which its students came into contact. Not only were the "suitable" recommendations enthusiastically and repeatedly encouraged, but those who dared to overstep their moral authority were ridiculed.

The debate about what books college students should be reading was so important in part because of the impact that new books could have on the institutions themselves. It was not only the particular ideals of college founders which were filtered through schemes of imperative education, but the ideas that were transmitted by books that made their way into the colleges. The best example of this is at Yale. Jeremiah Dummer's donated collection, following his travel and solicitation in London, was categorized as "New Learning." Antiquities and traditional values were being replaced by an emphasis on scientific discovery and Enlightenment-style learning. Due to the radical popularity of these books, Yale changed its curriculum to better fill in the gaps in

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>85</sup> *The Testimony of the President, Professors, Tutors and Hebrew Instructor of Harvard College in Cambridge, Against the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, and His Conduct* (Boston: 1744; Eighteenth Century Collections Online), accessed April 16, 2018, 10.

student learning between colonial primary education and the great thinkers of Europe. Particularly, a higher level of math had to be taught in order for students to understand some of the more advanced arguments of the English intellectuals.<sup>86</sup> Such new ways of thinking were enthusiastically embraced by the college, as the adoption of more globally-minded modern education fit in exactly with Yale's ideals. The changes at Yale brought on by new books were reminiscent of Harvard's liberalizing, despite having been founded as an attempt at a staunchly conservative version Harvard.

Despite donations and regulations, the college library was not the only place where students had access to books. In an attempt to combat the inherent dangers of this reality, some college officials actively worked to prescribe their imperative reading onto students' extracurricular lives. Brown encouraged students to access local libraries and book collections when the necessary literature was not available in its own facilities. Within this acknowledgement of outside book sources was an implied reminder to students to read literature the college would recommend itself.<sup>87</sup> William & Mary took community access to books a step further. In lieu of any college book privileges or the existence of a public library in Williamsburg, a local bookseller became the go-between for students to get books. This is not to say that a non-college-affiliated individual was allowed to provide unchecked access to any books students fancied. In fact, this bookseller even had a contract worked up in 1742 with William & Mary that established the first textbook return system of an American college. He would order whatever textbooks the school requested for its students in exchange for the promise that the

---

<sup>86</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 33.

<sup>87</sup> Van Hoesen, *Brown University Library*, 96.

students would resell the books to him when they no longer needed to use them.<sup>88</sup> The school still had control over what students were supposed to read, although physical book access was peculiar to this institution.

In terms of extra-curricular imperative reading within the colleges, some institutions more actively acknowledged it than others. Instead of simply regulating which books students read on their own time, Yale's administration actively recommended to students what they should read for themselves. Its president Ezra Stiles, upon coming into that office, took it upon himself to recommend books to seniors that were appropriate for their intended careers but not necessarily listed in the curriculum.<sup>89</sup> In this way, Yale's ideals could be further prescribed outside of the classical educational setting. The self-styled innovative College of Philadelphia followed Yale's suit in extending recommended reading. Its curriculum under William Smith included "long reading lists that supplemented the regular courses and that were to be read, studied, and discussed with the tutors and integrated with the formal course of study."<sup>90</sup> Outside of even traditional classes, the students in several colonial colleges were being impressed with proper ideals through constantly reading prescribed books.

With such a massive collection of examples tying colonial American colleges with each other through a collective imperative education scheme, it is shocking that many historians have ignored this reality. Historians have sadly misrepresented these institutions, and largely ignored their collectivity. Instead of underlying similarities between the colleges, historians have singularly focused on religious denomination

---

<sup>88</sup> Amory and Hall, *A History of the Book in America*, 229.

<sup>89</sup> Rudolph, *Curriculum*, 42.

<sup>90</sup> Rudolph, 48.

wars that provided one of many contextual bases for their foundation.<sup>91</sup> Choosing to focus the wide breadth of historiography on religion has emphasized differences that undercut any important similarities between the institutions. It ignores the early formation of an American intellectual community in favor of dramatic doctrinal clashes.

For the most part, information about the colonial colleges can only be found as separate stories of their individual early years. The first examination of these nine colleges as one collective came as late as 2007 with J. David Hoeveler's *Creating the American Mind: Intellect & Politics in the Colonial Colleges*.<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, while his book is important, Hoeveler's decision to continue emphasizing religious denominational affairs undercuts the broader purpose this work could have. Each of the colonial colleges in modern-day have published pieces on their own histories, but have very rarely even mentioned where they fit in with other institutions at their beginning.<sup>93</sup> As they were all founded in direct reaction to other colleges, ignoring their relationships misrepresents their foundational ideals.

Another fault of early American college historiography is rushing through the colonial era to solely focus on the colleges' participation in the Revolution. This leaves out the enlightening truth that the colonial colleges were already collectivized in some sense before the war. The practice of focusing on the Revolution or early national period unfortunately means that many of the works that do collectivize the nine colonial

---

<sup>91</sup> See Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*; Tewksbury, *The Founding of American Colleges*.

<sup>92</sup> Hoeveler, *Creating the American Mind*, x.

<sup>93</sup> See just about every source that was cited in the previous section on individual colleges.

colleges do so only in a later context so are not useful for a project with a strictly colonial scope.<sup>94</sup>

At the heart of the issues with this historiography is the utter lack of focus on reading. For a discipline which involves a heavy load of reading and a good amount of imperative reading recommendations as to which books are the most important to read, this is a glaring omission. The purpose of this work is to tie together that which has been forgotten and that which has been torn apart. Namely, it has been an attempt at reunifying the nine colonial American colleges within the framework of an imperative educational scheme constructed to use institutionally-recommended books to propagate individual values.

Overall, connections between the colonial colleges become apparent in examining their usage of imperative education and punctuated emphasis on reading certain books. Each college leader focused on furthering their own worldview and value system within the larger educational context, which partially accounts for sometimes mixed messages and dramatic changes in institutional focus that characterize the colonial period. Thinkers of the time and modern historians alike have largely ignored the connections between colleges in favor of a more dramatic tale of ideological clashes, but from the words of many of the college's founding documents and works written by influential men involved in their foundations the similarities are echoed. Particularly, each college was used to further a set of established conventionally "good" values within their own local and colonial contexts. Taken as a whole, the nine colleges

---

<sup>94</sup> Margaret Sumner, *Collegiate Republic: Cultivating an Ideal Society in Early America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014); Lorraine Smith Pangle and Thomas L. Pangle, *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

actively participated in imperative education schemes, and envisioned a bright future built by their students using the values that had been instilled in them by having read the “proper” books.

    "'Tis by the morning of the world with us  
    And Science yet but sheds her orient rays.  
    I see the age the happy age roll on  
Bright with the splendours of her mid-day beams,  
    I see a Homer and a Milton rise  
    In all the pomp and majesty of song,  
    Which gives immortal vigour to the deeds  
Atchiev'd by Heroes in the fields of fame."<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> Philip Morin Freneau, *A Poem, on the Rising Glory of America; Being an Exercise Delivered at the Public Commencement at Nassau-Hall, September 25, 1771* (Philadelphia: 1772; Early American Imprints), 24.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Amory, Hugh and David D. Hall, ed. *A History of the Book in America* vol I, *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Buchanan, James. *A Plan of an English Grammar-School Education: With an Introductory Inquiry, Whether by the English Language Alone, Without the Embarrassment of Latin and Greek, the British Youth, in General, Cannot be Thoroughly Accomplished in Every Part of Useful and Polite Literature, and Qualified to Make a More Early, Advantageous, and Elegant Figure in Life. Addressed to the Serious Consideration of Every Sensible Parent and Teacher in Great Britain*. London: 1770. Accessed April 16, 2018.

[http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebookbatch.ECCO\\_batch:N25207](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebookbatch.ECCO_batch:N25207).

*A Catalogue of Books in the Library of the College of New-Jersey, January 29, 1760*. Woodbridge, NJ: 1760. Google Books. Accessed April 16, 2018.

Dix, William S. *The Princeton University Library in the Eighteenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Library, 1978.

Franklin, Benjamin. *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pensilvania*. Philadelphia: 1749. Penn University Archives & Records Center. Accessed March 18, 2018.

<http://www.archives.upenn.edu/primdocs/1749proposals.html>.

Freneau, Philip Morin. *A Poem, on the Rising Glory of America; Being an Exercise Delivered at the Public Commencement at Nassau-Hall, September 25, 1771*. Philadelphia, 1772. Early American Imprints.

Frusciano, Thomas J. "From "Seminary of Learning" to Public Research University: A Historical Sketch of Rutgers University." Rutgers University Libraries, Special Collections and University Archives. Accessed March 18, 2018.

<https://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/scua/rutgers-historical-sketch-part-1>.

"General History of the Columbia University Libraries." Accessed April 16, 2018.

<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/projects/ebooks/prd/GuidetoResearch/GuidetoResearch.html>.

Gilmore, William J. *Reading Becomes a Necessity of Life: Material and Cultural Life in Rural New England, 1780-1835*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1989.

*Harrison's British Classicks, VOL VII. Containing the World, and Lord Lyttleton's Dialogues of the Dead*. London: 1787. Google Books. Accessed April 16, 2018.

"History of the Dartmouth College Library." *Dartmouth Library*. Accessed March 18, 2018. <https://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/home/about/libhistory.html>.

Hoeveler, J. David. *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007.

Jennings, John M. *The Library of the College of William and Mary in Virginia, 1693-1793*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1968.

Matthews, Albert, ed. *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts Volume XV: Harvard College Records Part I*. Cambridge, MA: The University Press, 1925. The Colonial Society of Massachusetts. Accessed March 18, 2018.

Mitchell, Martha. "Library." *Encyclopedia Brunoniana*. Brown University Library, 1993.

[http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News\\_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=L0070](http://www.brown.edu/Administration/News_Bureau/Databases/Encyclopedia/search.php?serial=L0070).

Murray, Lindley. *The English Reader, or Pieces in Prose and Poetry, Selected from the Best Writers: Designed to Assist Young Persons to Read with Propriety and Effect, Improve their Language and Sentiments, and to Inculcate the Most Important Principles of Piety and Virtue: With a Few Preliminary Observations on the Principles of Good Reading*. 1799. New York: 1806, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. Accessed April 16, 2018.

Pangle, Lorraine Smith and Thomas L. *The Learning of Liberty: The Educational Ideas of the American Founders*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993.

Penn University Archives & Records Center, "From Franklin's Vision to Academy to University of Pennsylvania." 2004. Accessed March 18, 2018.

<http://www.archives.upenn.edu/histy/features/1700s/penn1700s.html>.

Richards, Peter. *A Sermon on Education: Wherein Some Account is Given of the Academy, Established in the City of Philadelphia: Preach'd at the Opening Thereof, on the Seventh Day of January, 1750-1*. Philadelphia, 1751.

Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image. Accessed March 18, 2018.

<https://archive.org/details/earlyenglishcol00philgoog>.

Rudolph, Frederick. *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1977.

Schiff, Judith. "A Brief History of Yale." Yale University Library, 2017. Accessed March 18, 2018. <https://guides.library.yale.edu/yalehistory>.

Smith, William. *A Poem on Visiting the Academy of Philadelphia, June 1753*.

Philadelphia, 1753. Schoenberg Center for Electronic Text & Image. Accessed March 18, 2018.

[http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/printedbooksNew/index.cfm?TextID=curtis\\_51\\_1\\_f&PagePosition=1](http://sceti.library.upenn.edu/sceti/printedbooksNew/index.cfm?TextID=curtis_51_1_f&PagePosition=1).

Sumner, Margaret. *Collegiate Republic: Cultivating an Ideal Society in Early America*.

Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014.

Tennenhouse, Leonard. *The Importance of Feeling English: American Literature and the British Diaspora, 1750-1850*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007. eBook Collection, EBSCOhost. Accessed November 23, 2017.

*The Testimony of the President, Professors, Tutors and Hebrew Instructor of Harvard College in Cambridge, Against the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, and His Conduct*. Boston, 1744. Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Accessed April 16, 2018.

Tewksbury, Donald G. *The Founding of American Colleges and Universities Before the Civil War*. New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969.

Van Hoesen, Henry Bartlett. *Brown University Library: The Library of the College or University in the English Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations in New England in America 1767-1782*. Providence, RI: 1938. Hathi Trust.

Accessed March 18, 2018.

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b3921929;view=1up;seq=1>.

Wigglesworth, Edward. *A Letter to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield: By Way of Reply to His Answer to the College Testimony Against Him and His Conduct.*

Boston: 1745. Sabin Americana 1500-1926. Accessed April 16, 2018.

William & Mary Special Collections Research Center Wiki. "Books Owned by the College of William and Mary Prior to 1793." Accessed April 16, 2018.

[http://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Books Owned by the College of William and Mary Prior to 1793.](http://scdbwiki.swem.wm.edu/wiki/index.php?title=Books_Owned_by_the_College_of_William_and_Mary_Prior_to_1793)