

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: “A DECENT EXTERNAL SORROW”:
DEATH, MOURNING, AND THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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This dissertation argues that the study of eighteenth-century deathways provide important perspectives on the lives and experiences of those who lived through the colonial era, the Imperial Crisis, the American Revolution, and the early national period. Beginning with a broad survey of funereal culture in colonial America, it shows that individuals used their mourning customs to make public and private statements about a variety of topics ranging from proper social relationships to intimate matters of religious conviction and personal feelings. It also demonstrates that, as Americans faced the numerous challenges and changes of the eighteenth century, they adapted their funeral customs to suit new circumstances and worldviews. Thus, as tensions arose between Great Britain and its North American colonies over issues of Parliamentary policy, American protestors expressed their discontent by staging mock funerals and executions of government officials. At the same time, they boycotted imported mourning accessories in an attempt, not only to put economic pressure on Britain, but also to demonstrate a willingness to sacrifice public status and private comfort to preserve colonial liberties.

When American resistance to British rule broke out into armed conflict, wartime disruptions to burial customs required further changes and new understandings of funeral rites. By both tradition and official regulations, differences in military rank usually served as the most important consideration in soldiers' funerals. However, strict separation between officers and the rank-and-file, and sometimes even broader conventions of "decent" burials, were often subject to the vagaries of war. When casualties were high, or when armies had to move quickly, the disposal of the dead took second place to the imperatives of military strategy. Similarly, the crowded and unsanitary conditions of hospitals and wartime prisons often led to perfunctory or even indecent interments as burial parties struggled to deal with high mortality rates and the callousness of enemy captors. These significant departures from traditional funeral rites often distressed soldiers as they witnessed the deaths of their friends, neighbors, and comrades. Many tried to provide whatever final respects they could to the fallen, even as official rhetoric encouraged them to believe that the approbation of God and country would serve as ample reward for patriots' sacrifice.

In the years after the war, funereal culture became one arena in which Americans attempted to work out the meaning of the ideals that had underpinned the War for Independence. As many began to look forward to the return of traditional mourning practices, the growth of religious freedom and promises of liberty and natural equality encouraged individuals to use their funeral customs to communicate new denominational alliances and to challenge older ideas about social hierarchies. These changes encouraged churches to adapt their approach to the final services that they offered, prompted merchants to return to offering a wide array of mourning accessories, and encouraged the growth of the undertaking profession in America. At the same time, the fallen soldiers of the Revolution, as well as those who survived the conflict, presented

special challenges as the nation attempted to grapple with the legacies of the war. Ultimately, the task of finally reconciling with the dead of the American Revolution would fall to later generations as they defined their own relationship to the nation's founding conflict.

“A DECENT EXTERNAL SORROW”: DEATH, MOURNING, AND THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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Dedication

To Nonnie.
(1933-2010)

She loved me most.

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Writing this dissertation has been an adventure of several years, much travel, and dozens of fortuitous meetings that has invariably shaped my research, scholarship, and approach to doing the work of history. Though I wish I could mention everyone who has given their time, support, and insights to the project, there are a few outstanding individuals and institutions who merit particular acknowledgement as the final version of this manuscript comes to completion.

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Introduction: On the Importance of Death Ritual

In the midst of life, we are in death.

—Order for the Burial of the Dead, Book of Common Prayer

In his seminal work on early American deathways, Erik R. Seeman posits that hundreds of years ago, when our ancestors sought to understand cultures that differed from their own, the first question that they asked would likely have been: “How do they bury their dead?”¹ For most modern Americans, the inquiry seems strange and even morbid. In this society, with its focus on youth and success, they have relegated death and its attendant rituals to professionals—doctors, nurses, ministers, and funeral directors—who manage these concerns for them.² Despite the violence they encounter in television shows, news stories, and in their everyday lives, the experience of death remains somewhat disconnected from most people’s “normal” routines. Funeral rituals, such as they are, are separate; men and women call upon them in times of extraordinary grief and loss, indulge in them for a short period, and attempt to return, as quickly as possible, to their lives. Very few stop to seriously consider the many messages that American deathways express about their beliefs, their culture, and their history.

The fact is that Americans’ modern approach to death ritual is the product of generations of changing ideas about topics ranging from religion and moral virtue to consumerism and the

¹ Erik R. Seeman, *Death in the New World: Cross-cultural Encounters, 1492-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 1. Seeman’s definition of “deathways” includes “deathbed scenes, corpse preparation, burial practices, funerals, mourning, and commemoration.” For this dissertation, I use both “deathways” and “funereal culture” to refer particularly to cultural practices that surround death, including actual funeral ceremonies and the mourning customs that took place beyond funeral rituals. These terms also encompass both the literary and material culture associated with funeral traditions.

² Other scholars have noticed how preoccupations with youth, success, and individualism have shaped modern death culture. Perhaps the most sustained attention to the subject appears in Chapter 12 of Phillipe Aries’s *The Hour of Our Death*. Aries calls the Twentieth Century’s approach to death “the Invisible Death,” or “Death Denied.” See Aries, *The Hour of Our Death: The Classic History of Western Attitudes toward Death over the Last One Hundred Years*, trans. Helen Weaver (1981; repr., New York: Vintage, 2008), 559-601.

nature of freedom. As Americans have reshaped how they view themselves, their relationships with others, and their place in the world, so too have they adapted their funereal customs to suit their changing outlooks. In some cases, it is a major historical event such as the Civil War that significantly alters American mourning culture.³ In others, change is the culmination of a long series of historical processes that have fundamentally redefined both life and death in American society. Sometimes, funeral customs even become an arena of conflict, as some cling to traditional rituals to shore up their own worldviews while others use the same rites to challenge the status quo. Always, as Seeman's question suggests, a society's funereal culture reveals "the most important cultural values by which people live their lives and evaluate their experiences." In short, "life becomes transparent against the background of death."⁴

This dissertation is a study of American deathways in the late eighteenth century. It argues that because funereal culture sits at the nexus of the sacred and the secular, the public and the private, and tradition and change, death rituals can provide invaluable perspectives on the experiences of those who lived through the Imperial Crisis and the War for Independence. As they prepared for their own deaths and responded to the deaths of others, the inhabitants of British North America deliberately crafted their funeral rites not only to express grief and provide comfort; they also made public statements about myriad subjects ranging from intimate matters such as religious conviction and personal affection to broader issues regarding public virtue and social hierarchies. More importantly, amid the tumultuous events of the eighteenth century, funereal culture provided one arena in which people grappled with weighty questions of personal and collective identity, patriotism, sacrifice, and the promises and limits of

³ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (2008; repr., New York: Vintage, 2009).

⁴ Peter Metcalf and Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of Death: The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 25.

revolutionary ideals. Ultimately, as Americans faced the disruptions of political division, the trials and violence of war, and the uncertainties of the nation's founding, they adapted their funeral customs—and the meanings behind them—to meet those challenges and to reflect new understandings of both life and death in the early United States.

This study reflects growing scholarly interest in the history of death and its accompanying rituals in America. The earliest books on the topic, such as Robert Habenstien's and William M. Lamers's *The History of American Funeral Directing* (1955), provided surveys of funeral culture for those actually in the funeral trade. The authors of later works, however, have sought broader audiences as they explore the significance of mourning customs in the social and cultural history of the nation.⁵ Gary Laderman has produced two works on death and the ideologies and customs that surround it, namely *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (1996) and *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth Century America* (2003).⁶ Several works on death during the American Civil War, including Drew Gilpin Faust's *This Republic of Suffering* (2008) and Mark S. Schantz's *Awaiting the Heavenly Country* (2008), have examined the Victorian ideology of death and the impact that the devastation of war had on funereal culture.⁷ One of the more recent works on the history of death in America, Erik R. Seeman's *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800* (2010), casts death and mourning in the Atlantic world as an important site of cross-cultural interaction that informed both understanding and conflict among

⁵ Robert W. Habenstien and William M. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 5th ed. (Brookfield, WI: Burton & Mayer, 2001).

⁶ Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996); Gary Laderman, *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁷ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*; Mark S. Schantz, *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America's Culture of Death* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008).

the peoples who encountered one another in the New World.⁸ In a similar fashion, Vincent Brown's *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (2010), uses the attitudes and customs surrounding death to show that the treatment and memory of the dead played an important part in the negotiation of power between the European and enslaved populations of eighteenth-century Jamaica.⁹

In examining death rituals in all regions of the British North American colonies during the eighteenth century, this study expands the geographical focus of previous scholarship to demonstrate the diversity of deathways in early America. To date, works on mourning culture in the American colonies are relatively sparse and overwhelmingly focused on Puritan New England.¹⁰ Even those broader works that attempt to engage in a more comprehensive study of the history of American mourning customs typically focus upon northern and Mid-Atlantic population centers and make only passing references to funereal culture in the early South, usually generalizing their conclusions based on the mourning culture of the Chesapeake.¹¹ In contrast, this dissertation examines deathways in the northern, mid-Atlantic, and southern colonies to show how differences in settlement and religious culture affected the choices that individuals made as they planned their funerals. Similarly, expanding regional parameters allows this study to see the way that different approaches to death ritual affected the way that the American colonists understood the sacrifices they made as they protested Parliamentary policy.

⁸ Seeman, *Death in the New World*, 1.

⁹ Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁰ For examples, see David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Gordon E. Geddes, *Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England*. *Studies in American History and Culture*, ed. Robert Berkhofer (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1976).

¹¹ See Charles Shively, *A History of the Conception of Death in America, 1650-1860* (New York: Garland, 1988) and Charles O. Jackson, ed., *Passing: The Vision of Death in America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1977).

For example, while boycotting mourning accessories fit well into recurring concerns about funeral expenditure in New England, some South Carolinians attacked the same boycotts as encroaching too far on the sacred purposes of funeral observances. Thus, it is important to understand that, while the American colonies joined one another in similar kinds of protests, regional differences could affect the way that individuals understood and reacted to them.

In addition, while several scholars have produced impressive works on mourning customs immediately before, during, and after the American Civil War, most historians have paid less attention to the way that Americans dealt with death during the War for Independence. Though Ann Fairfax Withington and T.H. Breen have analyzed the political implications of the funeral regulations introduced to protest British imperial policy, both focus almost exclusively on the impact of mourning restrictions in New England and end their discussions of funeral culture before the onset of war.¹² This study is one of the few works on the American Revolution that look at deathways as an important to understanding soldiers' experiences during the conflict. In *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice and Memory in Revolutionary America* (2002), for instance, Sarah Purcell uses wartime deathways as a means to examine the subject of shared memory, writing that revolutionaries used soldiers' deaths during the war to rally support for the patriot cause and to build a sense of unity and national identity. She argues that the deaths of soldiers in and of themselves mattered less than the commemoration of those deaths, particularly in the case of officers, whose images became those of martyrs who exemplified the virtues of an ideal American nation. According to Purcell, it was not until several years after the war that the

¹² Ann Fairfax Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Virtue and the Formation of American Republics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 92-143. T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 213-17.

memory of those ordinary soldiers who had given their lives in the struggle became more central to the process of creating a national identity based on a shared sense of gratitude and sacrifice.¹³

In *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army* (2004), Caroline Cox uses wartime deaths to demonstrate how the treatment of soldiers' bodies reflected and reinforced deeply-held ideas about social hierarchies.¹⁴ In Cox's view, the fact that officers were usually buried separately from their men and that "officers' interments [were] accompanied by ceremony and elaborate ritual, while those of soldiers were done in a perfunctory manner" suggests that "in death, the social status of soldiers and officers was confirmed by the world around them."¹⁵ This treatment, Cox argues, mirrored the physical distinctions made between officers and soldiers in other dimensions of military life, including the day-to-day operations of camp, army discipline, and medical treatment. While rank-and-file soldiers frequently tried to provide their comrades with as "respectable" a burial as possible, they could often do little more than privately protest neglectful practices that they found particularly "distressing or egregious."¹⁶

A more recent work, Holger Hoock's *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (2017), takes soldiers' deaths as evidence of the extreme, but sometimes forgotten, violence of the war. Along with terrorism, plundering, and the appalling conditions of prison ships, the mutilation of corpses and denial of proper burials serves as Hoock's evidence as to the cruelty of what was, in essence, a civil war.¹⁷ Hoock argues that defining "acceptable" levels of violence

¹³ Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 49-91.

¹⁴ Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 163-98.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 164, 166.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 166.

¹⁷ Holger Hoock, *Scars of Independence: America's Violent Birth* (New York: Crown, 2017), 151-63, 197, 223, 265, 275-77, 286-87, 317-18, 387.

presented a “strategic and ethical dilemma” for government officials and army officers as they strove to achieve a balance between effective wartime tactics and maintaining the civilized reputations that were central to the legitimacy of their cause.¹⁸ Though Americans tended to downplay their own brutality and focus on the atrocities committed by the British and their allies, Hooch demonstrates that neither side was blameless when it came to crimes committed against both the living and the dead.

While this dissertation draws upon some of the conclusions of previous scholarship about death in the Revolution, it nevertheless adds to the current literature in several key respects. While acknowledging that soldiers’ funerals reflected the military hierarchy, which was itself based on eighteenth-century social hierarchy, it also argues that concerns about status were ultimately secondary to the exigencies of military strategy. It shows how authorities, particularly ministers and others who had the opportunity to address the Continental troops, attempted to give meaning to the violence of war, and the possibility of perfunctory burial, by directing soldiers’ attention to the higher purposes and rewards of their sacrifice. Finally, it demonstrates that, in the early national period, both those who had fought in the war and those who had not saw funeral customs as part of a larger debate over the possibilities and limitations of ideas about freedom and equality.

In the broadest sense, this study shows how deathways can be used to gain important perspectives on the study of the past. Funeral customs show how ideas about religion, society, politics, and personal feelings can combine to affect individuals’ actions and outlooks. They also show how practical circumstances, such as trade relationships, local laws, and military necessities can both shape mourning customs and disrupt them. Most significantly, the study of

¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

American funereal culture proves that even seemingly timeless traditions such as death customs are subject to historical circumstances. As ideas about the individual and the soul, the proper organization of society, the importance of national identity, and the meaning of service and sacrifice have changed, so too have American understandings of death and the rituals that surround it. Through death customs, scholars can see how ideological, political, and material changes have combined to shape the ways that Americans live their lives, deal with death, and imagine their place in history.

Methods and Sources

This study examines funereal culture, including both the rites and rituals surrounding death and associated material and literary culture, in America from approximately 1700 to 1820. The chronological boundaries of the discussion allow it to explore traditional colonial funeral practices, the ways that colonists used familiar mourning customs to express their growing discontent with Parliamentary policy, and how the violence of war disordered ideas of what a “decent” burial might look like. The dissertation extends into the years of the Early Republic to discuss the ways that contention over the legacies of the Revolution and the proper ways to reward soldiers for their service became important concerns in the fledgling United States. Though the last chapter touches on the first decades of the nineteenth century, it leaves in-depth discussions of changing ideas about the military, the religious fervor at the peak of the Second Great Awakening, and the growing influence of romanticism to studies that deal exclusively with antebellum America.

In regard to sources, this study relies heavily on the death notices, funeral descriptions, and political commentary that appeared in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century newspapers.

While the authorship of these articles usually belonged to educated elites, social critics, and students of politics, they nevertheless reveal some of the most common ideas that Americans encountered over the course of the colonial, Revolutionary, and early national periods.

Newspaper publication expanded in these years, with the result that growing numbers of individuals were able either to read about important events and political perspectives themselves or learn about them as others read aloud. The same principle applies to pamphlets, published orations, and broadsides that described and commented upon everything from social customs and republican virtue to the outcomes of battles and the deaths of prominent individuals. In particular, published sermons, which ministers originally delivered both at funerals and in military encampments, provide outstanding insights into the ways that Americans understood life and death, service and sacrifice, and the broader meanings of the Revolutionary struggle. The ways that individuals adopted, contested, and modified these notions before, during, and after the war is a central topic of this dissertation.

Other important sources for this work include diaries, letters, and other personal writings. In some ways, the very ubiquity of death in the colonies and the nascent United States makes it somewhat difficult to find detailed descriptions of death rituals and mourning customs over these decades. Between the mortal dangers posed by the environment, childbirth, youth, war, disease, accidents, and the natural progression of old age, colonists found themselves constantly confronting the deaths of loved ones and friends, with all of the attendant ceremonies. Because deaths and funerals were a part of everyday life, they seldom received much attention in primary sources unless they were unusual, extravagant, or related to some prominent individual. Nevertheless, descriptions of funerals and other mourning customs appeared in private writings, though discovering them requires persistence and creativity. For example, the instructions in

individuals' last wills and testaments often provide important information about the practical concerns, beliefs, and priorities of testators as they made their final arrangements and contemplated how they wanted others to remember them.¹⁹

When it comes to studying death during the Revolution, military sources prove particularly useful. Precisely because war itself is unusual and disruptive, soldiers' funerals often depart from civilian practices, either because of military custom, the need to maintain discipline, or the exigencies of battle strategy and survival. In these cases, official records such as those relating to the proceedings of Congress reveal the special attention that officers such as Joseph Warren and Richard Montgomery received at their deaths and afterwards. Meanwhile, orderly books, which record the general military orders for the day, sometimes mention who might be assigned to burial details, when soldiers were excused from duty to attend funerals, and when quartermasters provided allotments of rum and other refreshments as part of "decent" funeral rites. Other descriptions of military deathways appear in the diaries, journals, biographies, and other personal recollections of both officers and ordinary soldiers. In many cases, soldiers and others collected and published these writings after the war as the nation attempted to honor and preserve the experiences of the revolutionary generation as its members aged and passed from the scene. While the diaries of officers and men in the lower ranks provide some glimpse into

¹⁹ It is appropriate here to explain my method of gathering and interpreting early American wills. The bulk of my collection comes from the South Carolina Lowcountry as a result of previous research for my master's thesis. As I attempted to expand the geographical limits of my discussion of eighteenth-century deathways, I have met some challenges in collecting a broad sample of wills from other locales. Since a significant part of my dissertation research, especially for the later chapters, occurred in the midst of a pandemic, my access to archives has been subsequently limited. Most of those wills that come from outside of the South are those which have been easily available for access over the internet or in published collections. In addition, the majority of the wills that I have examined come from testators who occupied the upper ranks of society, as they generally had the most concerns about the property and wealth that they left behind. As my research continues, I will make a better effort to seek out a more balanced sample of wills, both regionally and in regard to economic status. It is my intention in the to try to pair last wills and testaments with executor's records of their management of the estates, which usually include some notes on funeral ceremonies and the monies laid out for them.

military deaths, the journals of regimental doctors and chaplains, as the individuals most likely to play a part in arranging and conducting final services, are also rich in detail about how the Continental Army dealt with death from disease, exposure, accident, and engagements with the British.

Finally, this study also examines material culture as an important aspect of death, mourning, and commemoration before, during, and after the American Revolution. Throughout the eighteenth century, mourning accessories such as rings, buckles, swords, and full suits of clothing were a central part of American funeral customs and an equally important part of cultural and commercial ties to Great Britain. During the Imperial Crisis, boycotting the more luxurious trappings of mourning (which merchants often imported from England) became a visible way for individuals to associate themselves with the patriot cause. At the same time, protesters staged elaborate pageants of mock funerals and executions that played upon the meaning of the material elements of death rituals to broadcast their discontent. Still, in the years before and after the war, adopting simpler funeral customs supposedly became a hallmark of American virtue and patriotism even as those from different social classes contended with one another about the dangers of conspicuous consumption.

Similarly, the iconography and epitaphs on tombstones and other grave markers provide unparalleled examples of how inherited ideas about religion and morality, social hierarchies, and the meaning of life and death both persisted and changed over the course of the eighteenth century. Just as the Revolution opened new avenues to explore the meanings of liberty and natural equality, so too did the conflict give rise to new ideas about public and private virtue, religious faith, and the fate of the soul. The engravings and inscriptions in cemeteries and on monuments show how these new ideas developed alongside older beliefs to create a death culture

that reflected both tradition and change—reverence and contention—and a uniquely American determination to insist on both.

Moving chronologically, each chapter of this dissertation explores how the conflict between Great Britain and its American colonies both upset traditional mourning customs and fostered new approaches to funereal culture to deal with the challenges of political upheaval, and wartime violence. In order to understand how the Revolution changed how Americans understood and used mourning customs, this study begins with a broad survey of colonial funeral rituals beginning in the early eighteenth century.²⁰ Chapter One demonstrates how the inhabitants of the North American colonies used their funeral customs to make public statements about their religious opinions and affiliations, their place within the social hierarchy, and the importance of personal relationships. Though some attempted to replicate British funeral practices in the colonies, the conditions of life in the New World—including high mortality, religious and ethnic diversity, imperial trade relationships, and truncated social hierarchy—ensured that many familiar practices required significant modification to suit the practical circumstances of the American colonists. For example, the distance between clergymen and their parishioners, particularly in the South, made it necessary for laymen to conduct at least some of the religious observances at funerals. Similarly, because the colonies possessed no formal aristocracy, social elites experienced some anxiety about the ability of those of the lower ranks to replicate their funeral customs. Thus, the wealthy and prominent turned to increasingly elaborate funeral rituals to set themselves apart from their neighbors. In these matters and in others,

²⁰ It should be noted here that Chapter One is by no means a comprehensive discussion of colonial deathways. It serves only as a basic foundation for the chapters that follow. While it focuses heavily on religious diversity, it says less about social diversity. It only touches on concerns about gender and the rich mourning practices of both free and enslaved African Americans. It is my belief that these topics need more attention that I have been able to give them in this dissertation. They will provide fruitful areas of study for future projects.

Chapter One shows that colonial funereal culture consisted of an amalgamation of inherited rituals and beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and distinctively American approaches to the rituals of death.

Chapter Two argues that because the American colonists and their British counterparts shared many similarities in their mourning customs, the symbols and ceremonies of death provided a convenient language for the protesters of the 1760s and early 1770s to announce their frustration with Parliamentary policy in particularly stark terms.²¹ By staging mock funerals for liberty and mock executions for stamp collectors, disgruntled Americans were able to intimidate colonial officials through both real and latent violence while simultaneously relating images of submission, slavery, sin, and death to evoke visceral reactions among all who witnessed the grim spectacles. At the same time, boycotts of imported funeral accessories, as well as a general turn toward simpler funerals, provided a visible way for colonists to associate themselves with the patriot cause and demonstrate their political virtue.

This chapter differs from other historians' treatments of the Imperial Crisis in two important ways. First, it pays significant attention to the boycotts and protests outside of New England. In particular, it examines the debate over funeral culture and politics in South Carolina, where a newspaper debate between Patriot leader Christopher Gadsden and prominent Loyalist William Wragg demonstrated some of the important issues that surrounded funeral restrictions. In their public responses to one another, both Gadsden and Wragg went beyond questions of politics to impugn one another's Christianity, humanity, reason, and gentility, showing that funeral rituals' complex meanings made them an especially controversial means of political protest. Second, it recognizes the parallels between the mock funeral and execution pageants and

²¹ Ann Fairfax Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 92-184.

the very real punishments that authorities imposed on enslaved African Americans. The effigies of colonial officials that protestors hang, dismembered, burned, and buried met fates that the law reserved only for those who occupied the lowest positions in society. The parallels between the treatment of the enslaved and the mock victims of protests would not have been lost on American audiences. Thus, Chapter 2 demonstrates that the conversation around the alternatives of slavery and freedom was more than mere rhetoric—most Americans had examples of the consequences of enslavement before their very eyes.²²

The third chapter of this dissertation interrogates death and burial during the War for Independence. While the American colonists had experience with wartime casualties from earlier wars, the Revolution was the first conflict in which soldiers fought for the notion of an American republic. Still, the Continental Army borrowed most of its military customs, including funeral rituals, from the traditions of the British Army. Thus, military funerals reflected a preoccupation with discipline and “due subordination” even while the rhetoric employed in military encampments encouraged soldiers to think of themselves as citizen soldiers who fought for a nobler cause than their British counterparts. The sermons given in military encampments, for example, focused keenly on how the soldiers who fought for liberty would receive the acclamations of their countrymen and the approbation of God even, and perhaps especially, if they laid down their lives in the contest. In these orations, the Continental Army became the army of God and righteousness whose rewards would far surpass any indignities their bodies suffered in death. Soldiers’ subordination, though at odds with the liberty for which they fought, was part of the patriotic sacrifice that proved their superiority to their British counterparts.

²² Other historians have pointed out that the prevalence of slavery in the American colonies affected the ways in which colonists thought about slavery and freedom. For one example, see Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom* (1975; repr., New York: Norton, 2003). This study is the first, however, to notice images of slavery in mock funeral and execution ceremonies.

At the same time, the treatment of dead soldiers was an important part of military organization and strategy. Historian Caroline Cox contends that the differences in the funeral ceremonies and burials of officers and soldiers simply reflected long-standing ideas about social hierarchies. In contrast, this dissertation argues that the death customs of the Continental Army put the imperatives of military strategy before concerns about social pretensions. Because military leaders equated the deference and discipline of their soldiers with their chances for success in battle, both life and death for Revolutionary soldiers differed according to their rank. Still, when circumstances required armies to move quickly, the bodies of both officers and private soldiers might be left to the mercy of enemies or remain unburied on battlefields for weeks, months, and years.²³ Similarly, when casualties rose due to disease or particularly sharp engagements, those responsible for burying the dead often did so in a cursory manner in order to devote time and attention to other matters. While the officer corps may have been sensitive to perceived slights to rank or dignity, the larger question of burying soldiers' bodies always privileged practicality over pretension.

The final chapter of this study looks at American funeral culture in the first decades of the American republic. Many individuals looked forward to returning to familiar mourning customs after the war, yet those customs took on new meanings in the aftermath of the Revolution. Even as elites attempted to reestablish themselves at the top of the social hierarchy, new ideas about religious freedom, liberty, and natural equality encouraged those of the lower ranks to use their funeral rites to claim some of the promises that had sustained the war effort over eight long years. Merchants and a growing number of professional undertakers aided them

²³ It is important to note that when armies had limited time to bury their dead, the officers always had precedence over common soldiers. The same principles applied in cases of high casualties, when officers might be the only ones to rest in their own individual graves.

in their efforts as they sought “decent” burials for themselves and their loved ones. Undertakers such as those in Charleston, South Carolina, promised to deliver all the necessary materials for funerals “at the shortest notice,” allowing those without the time or knowledge to plan a fashionable funeral to give their loved ones a “decent burial” according to the “customs of the country.”²⁴

At the same time, Americans had to grapple with the demands of soldiers both living and dead to a share of the nation’s gratitude. While George Washington’s death in December of 1799 resulted in some of the most elaborate funeral rites in the nation’s history, ordinary veterans still had to wait years to receive public attention during their lives or at their deaths. Further, the mortal remains of countless soldiers continued to litter the sites of wartime battles, hospitals, and prisons awaiting proper burial. Though some began efforts to gather and inter Revolutionary soldiers in the early national period, much of this work remained for later generations to finish. Ultimately, funeral culture in the early Republic was one of many arenas in which Americans worked out the meaning of the Revolution, the nation’s obligations to its soldiers, and the limits to freedom and equality.

In a letter to *The Charleston Post and Daily Advertiser* in 1787, a writer who had much to say on the “Mode of conducting Funerals in the City” wrote that “although the subject I am about to handle may be considered a gloomy theme, being connected with all the dismal apparatus of the grave,” he hoped his readers would “take the intention, not the words” and spare him the “imputation of treating a solemn topic with levity.”²⁵ Like that author, this dissertation seeks to look beyond the “gloomy” and “dismal” elements of American funereal culture in the

²⁴ *South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser* (Charleston), December 16, 1783 and October 28, 1806.

²⁵ *The Charleston (SC) Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, April 24, 1787.

eighteenth century. It demonstrates that, through the challenges of the colonial period, the Imperial Crisis, and the War for Independence, individuals used their funeral rites to make powerful statements about religious faith, social hierarchies, political loyalties, and the meaning of service and sacrifice on behalf of a nation that barely existed. Mourning customs served as one place in which people tried to define the legacies of the Revolution and the limits of the rhetorical promises of liberty and equality that sustained the war amid sickness, violence, and death. Through it all, the way that Americans lived their lives determined the ways that they approached the rituals of death.

Chapter 1: Ways of Life, Ways of Death: Funereal Culture in Colonial America, 1700-1770

“It is not amiss, for Christians of the best Form, in Funerals, to follow the General Custom of the Countrey where they Live, if it be an Innocent Custom.”

—Cotton Mather, “A Christian Funeral,” 1713.

In many ways, funerals throughout the North American colonies looked remarkably the same no matter where they occurred. Until the American Revolution, most colonists were subjects of the British Empire and shared a common culture with their compatriots across the Atlantic. This particularly held true for the basic rites surrounding death. Upon the death of an individual, friends and family (or servants and enslaved persons) prepared the body for burial by washing it and dressing it in either a winding sheet or in a carefully selected suit of clothes. Afterwards, mourners generally kept vigil with the body until they could make funeral arrangements. When the time came for the actual funeral ceremony, mourners accompanied the corpse, usually ensconced in a coffin, to the church or the burial place for a religious service. After the interment, the company adjourned to the deceased’s home for refreshments of some sort, which ranged from a full-fledged banquet to “funeral biscuits” and spiced wine. A minister might perform a funeral sermon, if he gave one at all, either at the funeral or in the days and weeks following the death.²⁶ Depending upon the wealth and status of the deceased, friends,

²⁶ This general overview is drawn from several summaries given by scholars interested in both English and Early American deathways. See Julian Litten, *The English Way of Death: The Common Funeral Since 1450* (London: Robert Hale, 1991), 123-25; David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, & Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 421-46; David E. Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 103-116; Gordon E. Geddes, *Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1981), 133-53; Robert V. Wells, *Facing the “King of Terrors”: Death and Society in an American Community, 1750-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14-18; Louis P. Nelson, *The Beauty of Holiness: Anglicanism & Architecture in Colonial South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 282-96; Lauren F. Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 149-61.

families, communities, and in the case of British royalty, the nation itself might go into a period of mourning. During this time, mourners exhibited outward signs of sorrow and loss by retreating from public life and displaying signs of grief such as black clothes, jewelry, armbands, shoe buckles, and other accessories ranging from swords to stationary. For close family members or prominent figures, periods of mourning could last weeks or months. In these cases, the strictures on activity and clothing eased over time.²⁷

Beyond these basic forms, however, funerals and mourning could vary significantly according to a variety of circumstances. While uniformity of funereal culture found support in England through a nationally established church, traditional social hierarchies, and a professional undertaking trade, these institutions did not translate well into the New World.²⁸ Though the Anglican Church maintained a significant presence in some colonies, it never completely dominated colonial religious life.²⁹ In addition, while colonial society remained hierarchical, its structure was more flexible than that of England, especially as individuals acquired wealth and status through landholding and successful business ventures. The eighteenth century witnessed

²⁷ Lou Taylor, *Mourning Dress, A Costume and Social History* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 108-119; Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 2011), 176-80; Robert W. Habenstein and William M. Lamers, *The History of American Funeral Directing*, 122-32.

²⁸ For a brief history on the English undertaking profession, see Habenstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*, 97-117.

²⁹ In his work on the evolution of the relationship between church and state in America, James H. Hutson observes that, "The religious map of the colonies in 1689 resembled Joseph's coat with its multiple hues and colors. In some colonies the state compelled obedience to one official church; in others it was stripped of all power over its citizens' consciences. There were colonies in which religion was regulated in some places but not others. And there were colonies in which the brand of religion supported by the state varied from place to place. In still other colonies the state refrained from regulating religion but signaled its intention to do so in the future." See James H. Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1. For a complete history of the path of the path from religious establishment to disestablishment, particularly in regards to which religious groups developed strongholds in which colonies, see Carl H. Esbeck and Jonathan J. Den Hartog, eds. *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent: Church-State Relations in the New American States, 1776-1833* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2019). While each of these religious groups incorporated details into their funereal culture that distinguished their mortuary customs from those of other groups, this paper will only describe the practices of selected groups in order to demonstrate the diversity of colonial funerals.

an expansion of both religious and consumer culture, allowing even middling- and lower-class people more choices about the way they lived their lives, prepared for their deaths, and responded to the deaths of others.³⁰

Perhaps most importantly, the American colonies lacked professional undertakers to care for the dead and arrange their funerals. The separate elements of mortuary rituals, which included preparing the body, arranging for a coffin, conducting a public procession, securing religious services, overseeing burial, and providing mourning dress were completely in the hands of the family and friends of the deceased. In a world in which death was a frequent part of life and individuals were intimately involved with the rituals surrounding death, they used their choices about funerals and mourning practices to reflect their religious beliefs, their wealth and social status, and their respect and affection for those who passed. At the same time the history and culture of the region and colony in which they lived shaped and bounded their choices, as did the realities of life in the New World.

Religion

The colonists of North America would have been most familiar with the burial service prescribed in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. A product of the English Reformation, the

³⁰ Jon Butler, *Religion in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54. Butler writes that religious diversity flowered between 1690 and 1770. While the late seventeenth century saw that “90 percent of all congregations...were either Congregationalist...or Anglican,” the picture had changed by 1770, when Butler estimates that about 20 percent of colonists were Congregationalist, 15 percent were Anglican, 18 percent were Presbyterian, 15 percent were English and Welsh Baptists, and Quakers, German Lutherans, and German Reformed made up the last 5 to 10 percent. The Great Awakening also witnessed a proliferation of churches, both because of the expansion of existing congregations and because of the split of older denominations along “Old Light,” or anti-revivalist, and “New Light,” or pro-revivalist churches. See Butler, *Religion in Colonial America*, 97-99, 102-3, 110-19; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2001), 339-57. On the proliferation of consumer goods, see T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, xv, 33-71, Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, 310-14, and Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 154-56.

Book of Common Prayer organized the liturgical life of the Church of England around Protestant beliefs, discarding many of the rituals of the Catholic Church as innovations in Christian worship that had no foundation in scripture or in the practices of early Christians. Protestants particularly objected to the doctrine of Purgatory, a place where departed souls remained in suffering until purged of sin, allowing them to proceed to heaven. If, as Protestants believed, there was no Purgatory, the Catholic practices of saying masses and prayers for the dead could be of no benefit to departed souls. Likewise, Protestants of all stripes asserted that burial near holy places such as altars and holy relics had no effect on the fate of the soul.³¹ The Anglican Book of Common Prayer demonstrated the rejection of Catholic ideas and practices in vastly simplified death rites which religious reformers then refined over decades as Protestant thought matured in England, Europe, and America.³²

The prayerbook that would have been familiar to the British colonists in the eighteenth century originated in 1662 with the revisions to the liturgy occasioned by the restoration of Charles II to the throne after the English Civil War.³³ The text for the burial service that appears in the book provides a basic outline for a funeral ceremony that usually began once the mourners had reached the church or place of burial. The clergyman (or officiating layman) generally met the funeral procession at the entrance to the churchyard and proceeded with them either into the church or to the graveside, reciting or singing verses from the books of John, Job, and 1

³¹ Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 47-49, 53-63.

³² Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, 124-187; Gordon Jeanes, "Cranmer and Common Prayer," in *The Oxford Guide to the Book of Common Prayer: A Worldwide Survey*, eds. Charles Hefling and Cynthia Shattuck, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37-38; Judith Maltby, "The Prayerbook and the Parish Church: From the Elizabethan Settlement to the Restoration," in Hefling and Shattuck, 86-88.

³³ It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the political and religious conflict that encouraged the 1662 revision. For an account of the circumstances, see Brian Spinks, "From Elizabeth I to Charles II," in Hefling and Shattuck, 51-55.

Timothy.³⁴ The church added the psalms that followed, Psalm 39 and Psalm 90, to the service in the 1662 revision, reflecting their popular use during the Commonwealth.³⁵ The longest part of the service featured the reading of 1 Corinthians 15:20-58, which emphasized spiritual victory over death and the ultimate hope of resurrection. After this reading, the mourners lowered the corpse into the grave, as the officiating individual reminded his audience of the immediacy of death and the necessity of God's mercy. The onlookers then proceeded to cast earth upon the body as the reader committed the "body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," trusting in the promise of resurrection through Christ.³⁶ The service concluded with Revelation 14:13, assuring the mourners of the blessings and rest offered by a Christian death, a recitation of the Lord's Prayer, and the reading of prescribed prayers that praised God for deliverance from mortal burdens through death, beseeched His mercy at the Day of Judgment, and reminded listeners not to mourn for those who had died with the promise of redemption.³⁷

The Church of England enjoyed its greatest privileges in the southern colonies of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, where both law and custom supported the use of the Anglican burial service.³⁸ Moving northward to Maryland, the situation became more complex. The earliest years of the colony saw the deliberate effort of its proprietors to promote religious toleration and harmony, particularly between Protestants and Catholics.³⁹ By the eighteenth century, however,

³⁴ Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer* (1662; repr., London: John Sturt, 1717), 104.

³⁵ Charles Hefling, "The 'Liturgy of Comprehension'," in Hefling and Shattuck, 67. While the *Book of Common Prayer* was officially outlawed and replaced by *A Directory for the Public Worship of God* during the Commonwealth, many Englishmen continued to use the *Book of Common Prayer* or close adaptations to it. See Spinks, "From Elizabeth I to Charles II," in Hefling and Shattuck, 51.

³⁶ *Book of Common Prayer*, 106.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ South Carolina broke away from North Carolina in 1720. The Church of England was also established in North Carolina, but the establishment there was relatively weak. See Nicholas P. Miller, "North Carolina: Early Toleration and Disestablishment" in Esbeck and Den Hartog, 102-6.

³⁹ Michael D. Breidenbach, "Church and State in Maryland: Religious Liberty, Religious Tests, and Church Disestablishment," in Esbeck and Den Hartog, 309-12.

their vision had collapsed under repeated attacks from the colony's Protestant majority. In 1689, the crown abolished proprietary government in Maryland, opening the way for it to become a royal colony in 1692. In 1694, the Church of England became the established church in Maryland and in 1704 the general assembly passed the *Act to Prevent the Growth of Popery in this Province*, which imposed legal penalties for practicing or encouraging conversion to the Catholic religion, including fines, incarceration, and the threat of deportation for Catholic priests who offered religious services.⁴⁰ The assembly repealed the law at the urging of Queen Anne in 1707 and instituted a new law that allowed Catholics to worship only in private.⁴¹ As a result, Catholic families began to observe the sacraments at home, in private chapels on the property of wealthy Catholics and at those on estates belonging to Jesuit priests.⁴²

The domestic nature of Catholic worship in Maryland extended to funerals. When the government closed Maryland's Catholic churches in 1704, the cemeteries attached to those churches became inaccessible. With no church for religious rites and no cemeteries for Catholic burial, funerals themselves became private affairs. The family would prepare the remains of the deceased for burial, then his or her body would lay in state in the home surrounded by candles and crosses. During this period, friends and family attended the body and paid their last respects by keeping watch and reciting appropriate prayers. When it came time for the body to be buried, black-clad mourners accompanied the pall-covered coffin to the place of burial either at a family

⁴⁰ Ibid, 312; Fr. Charles Conner, *Pioneer Priests and Makeshift Altars: A History of Catholicism in the Thirteen Colonies* (Irondale, AL: EWTN Publishing, 2017), 120; Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 84.

⁴¹ Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience*, 84, 88; Connor, *Pioneer Priests*, 120-21. Maura Jane Farrelly, *Papist Patriots: The Making of an American Catholic Community* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 195-6.

⁴² Connor, *Pioneer Priests*, 121, 127; Farrelly, *Papist Patriots*, 175; Tricia T. Pyne, "Ritual and Practice in the Maryland Catholic Community, 1634-1776," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 21-23. It should be noted here that the Jesuit properties were owned, not by the church, but by individual persons who happened to belong to the Jesuit order.

cemetery or at one of the burial grounds that the Jesuits maintained on their plantations. Where possible, a priest would meet the funeral procession at the burial site to conduct the Catholic burial service, which included blessing the body with holy water and incense, reading selected prayers, and singing appropriate hymns.⁴³

While Catholics believed it was ideally preferable to have the burial service presided over by a priest, clergymen were not always available for funeral rites. The distance between Catholic families and their priests made an itinerant clergy necessary, with individual priests riding long circuits to conduct religious services for communities. When a priest was not available, a layperson might perform what burial rites he could by reading prayers and Psalms at the graveside.⁴⁴ While some may have used the Latin liturgy, there is evidence that Anglophone devotional books produced for Catholics in England found their way across the Atlantic and included prayers for funeral services. One of the most successful works, Richard Challoner's *Garden of the Soul*, appeared in England in 1740 and soon became popular with American Catholics as well.⁴⁵ In it, Challoner included an English version of the Psalms to for the funeral service, the *Miserere* and the *De Profundis*, "a Prayer upon the Day of a Person's Decease or Burial," and prayers to be said on "the Anniversary Day" of the death. In addition, *The Garden of the Soul* gave specific prayers in English "for all the Faithful departed," "for one recently deceased," "for a Bishop or a Priest," "For Father and Mother," "For Brethren, Relations, and Benefactors," "For all that lie in the Church or Church-yard," "For a Man deceased," "for a Woman deceased," and "For many deceased."⁴⁶ Because this book provided readings and

⁴³ Pyne, "Ritual and Practice," 41.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 23-24, 41.

⁴⁵ Farrelly, *Papist Patriots*, 160; Pyne, "Ritual and Practice," 41.

⁴⁶ Richard Challoner, *The Garden of the Soul: or, A Manual of Spiritual Exercises and Instructions for Christians who (living in the World) aspire to Devotion* (London: T. Meighan, 1751), 140-41, 144-46, 264-67.

prayers in English, it is not hard to imagine that its services might have been more accessible to Catholic laypersons as they carried out funeral rites on their own. Later, the priest who served the community could perform a communal service and say prayers for those who his parishioners had buried in his absence.⁴⁷

The middle colonies of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York offered even more diversity in ethnicity and religious practice, which translated into a wider variety of religious services at funerals.⁴⁸ William Penn, the proprietor of Pennsylvania, had converted to Quakerism about fifteen years before founding the colony and had suffered persecution in England for his religion.⁴⁹ Both his experience and his faith dictated that authentic religion could only thrive in the absence of coercion from the state. Accordingly, he offered freedom of religion to those who settled in Pennsylvania. While Penn's Quaker co-religionists would maintain strong political and social influence from the colony's founding, Pennsylvania also welcomed the members of both mainstream and minority faiths, allowing all of those who professed belief in one God to live and work together in the same society.⁵⁰

The Quakers believed that all men and women possessed an "Inner Light" that enabled them to personally commune with God and understand His word. As a result, they rejected all

⁴⁷ Pyne, "Ritual and Practice," 41.

⁴⁸ Alan Taylor writes that "diversity became the defining characteristic of the middle colonies, the collective name for New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania because they lay between the Chesapeake and New England. In the early eighteenth century, the middle colonists included Anglicans (mostly English), Presbyterians (Scots and Scotch-Irish), Congregationalists (relocated New English Puritans), Quakers (English and Welsh), Reformed (Dutch and German), Lutherans (the Scandinavians and some Germans), an array of pietistic sects (German and Swiss), and a few Catholics (primarily Irish), and Jews (from the Netherlands). In addition, most of the enslaved Africans preserved their traditional beliefs, which remained mysterious to their indifferent masters." See Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, 271. While each of these religious groups incorporated details into their funereal culture that distinguished their mortuary customs from those of other groups, this paper will only describe the practices of selected groups in order to demonstrate the diversity of colonial funerals.

⁴⁹ David Little, "The Pennsylvania Experiment with Freedom of Conscience and Church-State Relations," in Esbeck and Den Hartog, 71; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, 265-67.

⁵⁰ Hutson, *Church and State in America*, 37-38; Little, "The Pennsylvania Experiment," in Esbeck and Den Hartog, 71-74; John Butler, *Religion in Colonial America*, 66-67.

sacraments, rituals, and clerical intermediaries as unnecessary and even evil, as they intruded upon the pure relationship of the soul to God. Further, because all individuals possessed the same potential to realize their Inner Light, Quakers worked to abolish both social and spiritual hierarchies as well as the outward signs of status. They rejected ostentation and “pomp” as worldly vanity. They dressed plainly, refused to swear oaths or pay church tithes, and refused to display deference by bowing or doffing their hats.⁵¹ The Quakers’ belief in spiritual equality, which was displayed in their religious and social conduct, made their funeral rites particularly distinctive. In his preface to a publication of Quaker founder George Fox’s journal, William Penn described their burials in detail:

If the *Corps* of the Deceased be near any publick *Meeting-place*, it is usually carried thither...and it so falls out sometimes, that while the Meeting is gathering for the *Burial*, some or other have a *Word of Exhortation*, for the sake of the People there met together: After which the *Body* is born away...: The *Corps* being in a plain *Coffin*, without any *Covering* or *Furniture* upon it. At the *Ground*, they pause some time before they put the *Body* into its *Grave*, that if any one there should have any thing upon them to exhort the *People*, they may not be disappointed, and that the *Relations* may the more Retiredly and Solemnly take their last Leave of the *Corps* of their departed *Kindred*, and the *Spectators* have a Sense of *Mortality*, by the occasion then given them to reflect upon their own *latter End*. Otherways, they have no set *Rites* or *Ceremonies* on those Occasions; neither do the *Kindred* of the *Deceased* ever wear *Mourning*; they looking upon it as a *Worldly Ceremony*, and piece of *Pomp*...⁵²

Though other denominations criticized Quakers for seeming to lack proper religious observances at their funerals, the rejection of prescribed funeral services was in fact an important testimony of faith. Instead of performing special prayers and readings that had been handed down from church

⁵¹ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, 264-65; Patricia C. O’Donnel, “This Side of the Grave: Navigating the Quaker Plainness Testimony in London and Philadelphia in the Eighteenth Century,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 49, no. 1 (Spring 2015), 39.

⁵² William Penn, “The Preface, Being a Summary Account of the Diverse Dispensations of God to Men [. . .] by the Ministry and Testimony of his Faithful Servant George Fox, as an Introduction to the Ensuing Journal,” in *A Journal, or Historical Account of the Life, Travels, Suffering of* [. . .] *George Fox* (1694; repr., London: T. Swole, 1709), 1:xxvi.

authorities, Quakers turned instead to their Inner Light, allowing the Holy Spirit to guide them in their exhortations at funerals.

Pennsylvania also played host to several German Protestant denominations that came to the New World seeking both economic prosperity and refuge from persecution in Europe.⁵³ The two largest groups, the German Lutherans and the German Reformed, each struggled to transplant their traditional deathways from their homes to their new settlements in the British colonies. In each case, a lack of ordained ministers and printed liturgical works resulted in diverse religious rites at funerals. Many times, laymen officiated at funerals, drawing upon the Bible, their own religious readings, and community custom to guide them.⁵⁴ The congregations of the German Reformed churches in both Pennsylvania and New York came principally from the Palatinate, an area in modern-day Germany along the Rhine River.⁵⁵ They preserved the basic forms of the religious portion of their funerals chiefly through memory and via hand-written copies of the Palatine Liturgy of 1563, which itself provided only a guideline for Reformed congregations. It dictated that, “[i]n the burial of the dead all popish and superstitious ceremonies are to be avoided.” Instead, the congregation was to take the deceased to the church, accompanied by the ringing of a bell to announce the funeral, and be met there by a minister who would read appropriate scripture and exhort his audience to “meditate upon its application to the solemn occasion on which we have been assembled.” Funeral sermons were to be short, to avoid “extravagant commendation of the departed,” and to dwell upon the themes “of the death, burial,

⁵³ Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, 317-20; Butler, *Religion in Colonial America*, 57-60.

⁵⁴ Patricia U. Bononmi, “‘Watchful against the Sects’: Religious Renewal in Pennsylvania’s German Congregations, 1720-1750,” *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 50, no. 4 (October 1983): 274-76, 280-81.

⁵⁵ Butler, *Religion in Colonial America*, 58.

resurrection, and glorification of the body.”⁵⁶ The liturgy also laid out the following detailed instructions for the officiate:

Especially should it be explained that [the funeral] is not done as though the deceased would be benefited at all by our funeral services, seeing that believers, as soon as they depart enter into eternal life, and unbelievers into eternal damnation, and the former therefore do not need our help, whilst the latter cannot receive it. But these services are held for the benefit of the living, that they may thus renew their confession of faith in the resurrection of the dead; show their affection for their departed friends; praise God for the comfortable assurance they have that all the faithful pass from this life into eternal felicity, and that He is thus gathering unto Himself from our midst an eternal Church; and beseech Him to preserve them in the enjoyment of this comfort unto the end, and so collect and qualify from among them such as shall forever acceptably serve Him; and therefore lead them to a proper contemplation of the death which awaits them.⁵⁷

The spirit of the Reformed liturgy, then, was to constantly draw the attention of the living to their beliefs about death and the afterlife, while allowing for a show of respect and affection to those who had passed.

The German Lutheran Church suffered from many of the same disabilities of the German Reformed Church. Like their countrymen, German Lutherans lacked ministers to conduct religious services. In addition, they had no set liturgy for worship or funerals, relying instead upon the customs of individual congregations who were most often led by laypeople.⁵⁸ The first real attempts at uniformity came with Henry Melchior Muhlenberg (b. 1711), whose efforts laid the foundation of the Lutheran Church in America. It was Muhlenberg who gathered many of the Lutheran ministers in the colonies into a “ministerium,” or an association of ministers who worked together to define and articulate the points of doctrine and practice that they would

⁵⁶ J. H. A. Bomberger, “The Old Palatinate Liturgy of 1563,” *Mercersburg Review* 3, no. 2 (1851): 115-16, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065504717>.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵⁸ Bonomi, “‘Watchful Against the Sects,’” 280.

institute in their churches.⁵⁹ It was these ministers, led by Muhlenberg, who produced the first common liturgy for use in the Lutheran churches in the colonies.⁶⁰

Disappointingly enough for Muhlenberg, neither this liturgy nor any other was universally accepted by the German Lutheran churches in the colonial period.⁶¹ His own journals make no mention of using a burial liturgy when he officiated at funerals. Instead, he noted giving addresses to the mourners who assembled before burial services. A prime example of one of these entries occurred on February 1, 1743: “Here they put the body on a wagon, and whoever is able to, follows on horseback through the woods and bush. Since there were all sorts of people present, I delivered an address over the body in the house. . . . After the interment, I preached a funeral sermon, for here one must have regard for these occasions when the mind is subject to impression.”⁶² A few years later, in February of 1749, he gives another clue as to the nature of his addresses at funerals: “. . . it is not our custom to go into great particulars concerning personalities and preach about the dead. Ordinarily we say very briefly if they had seen anything good in the deceased, they should deem it a gracious gift from God and let it serve them as an example of repentance and faith. But whenever they saw anything wicked, they ought to see mirrored there their own corrupt hearts and let it serve them for a warning and improvement.”⁶³ As Muhlenberg demonstrated, while a common liturgy might be desirable to promote order and regularity of worship, the most important function of Lutheran funerals was to provide an opportunity for the religious instruction of the living.

⁵⁹ Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, Introduction to *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, by Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (1942; repr., Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1993), 1:ix.

⁶⁰ Ibid.; Eric W. Gritsch, *A History of Lutheranism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 176.

⁶¹ Luther D. Reed, *The Lutheran Liturgy: A Study of the Common Service of the Lutheran Church in America* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1947), 181.

⁶² Henry Melchior Muhlenberg, *The Journals of Henry Melchior Muhlenberg*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein (1942; repr. Camden, ME: Picton Press, 1993), 1:88.

⁶³ Muhlenberg, *Journals*, 215.

If the religious freedom of Pennsylvania encouraged diversity in belief and practice, the history and culture of New York provided the same atmosphere farther north. Though authorities attempted to encourage the growth of Anglicanism in the formerly Dutch colony, the Church of England could only maintain an establishment in part of the colony, forcing it to share ecclesiastical power with the Dutch Reformed Church.⁶⁴ Interestingly, the Dutch Reformed liturgy that made its way to North America did not contain a burial service. This may reflect the fact that, while some early Dutch liturgies contained burial rites similar to those of the Palatinate liturgy, Dutch religious authorities began discouraging religious rituals at funerals in the late sixteenth century, reflecting the more general attitude of Reformed theology which held that rituals for the dead did more harm than good.⁶⁵ The English translation of the liturgy that the Dutch Reformed Church printed and adopted in New York in 1767 included prayers for the sick which commented on the proper way to face death. Addressing God as “the eternal Salvation of the Living and the everlasting Life of the Dying,” the second prayer went on to affirm that “we submit ourselves intirely to thy holy Will, whether thou art pleased to continue our Souls longer in these Tabernacles, or take them into eternal Life . . .” and pleaded for God to “[a]rm us with Faith and Hope, that we may not be ashamed or confounded by the Terror of Death, but when our bodily Eyes are closing in Darkness, may the Eyes of our Souls be directed towards thee.”⁶⁶ Beyond these comforting prayers, ministers and laymen alike may have offered readings and

⁶⁴ Kyle T. Bulthuis, “Religious Disestablishment in the State of New York,” in Esbeck and Den Hartog, 119-20.

⁶⁵ Daniel James Meetz, “The North American Liturgy: A Critical Edition of the Liturgy of the Reformed Dutch Church in North America, 1793” (PhD diss., Drew University, 1989), 275-76, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

⁶⁶ “The Liturgy of the Reformed Church in Netherland [. . .]” in *The Psalms of David with the Ten Commandments, Creed, Lord’s Prayer, &c [. . .] also the Catechism, Confession of Faith, Liturgy, &c. Translated from the Dutch. For the Use of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church of the City of New-York* (New York: James Parker, 1767), 85-86.

prayers either in the home or at the graveside as was common in other Reformed traditions in the eighteenth century.

Simplified funeral rituals were also central to the funereal culture of New England, particularly its earliest years. Like their co-religionists in England, the American Puritans believed that the Anglican Church retained too much of Catholicism even after the liturgical reforms that followed the English Reformation. They therefore rejected the burial service as prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer, preferring instead to avoid all funeral rites that even vaguely resembled the Catholic practices of saying masses and prayers for the dead. While Puritans began articulating their objections to Anglican funeral practices as early as 1572, their beliefs about proper Protestant death rituals found clearest expression following the Puritans' victory in the English Civil War.⁶⁷ In *A Directory for the Public Worship of God*, which became the official rubric for religious services under the Puritan regime, the Puritans stripped the Anglican burial service of many of its required readings, psalms, and other religious elements. In accordance with Puritans' Calvinistic beliefs, they also removed any references to confidence of the deceased's salvation and resurrection.⁶⁸ Instead, the *Directory* both prescribed and justified a simpler burial service:

When any person departeth this life, let the dead body, upon the day of Burial, be decently attended from the house to the place appointed for public Burial, and there immediately

⁶⁷ Geddes, *Welcome Joy*, 106-110; Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, & Death*, 403.

⁶⁸ Calvinist belief set forth the doctrine of "predestination," or the belief that, while Christ had died for all sinners, God had chosen only a select few, the "elect," to receive salvation. Because God's decision was both unalterable and unknowable, Calvinists spent most of their lives struggling for some evidence of inward grace as a sign of election. This Calvinistic view of life and death played a major role in shaping the beliefs and experience of Puritans both in England and New England. See Butler, *Religion in Colonial America*, 36-37; Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death*, 41-42, 72-76, and 89; and Maltby, "The Prayerbook and the Parish Church," in Hefling and Shattuck, 87-88. In the Book of Common Prayer, the first part of the Burial Service read: "I commend thy soul to God the father almighty, and thy body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ...". Puritans objected to any statements of certainty about the salvation of particular deceased persons, if not to the ideas of salvation and resurrection. See Jeanes, "Cranmer and Common Prayer," 37-38, and Maltby, "The Prayerbook and the Parish Church," in Hefling and Shattuck, 87-88.

interred, without any Ceremony. And because the customs of kneeling down, and prayer by, or towards the dead Corpse, and other such usages, in the place where it lies, before it be carried to Burials, are Superstitious: and for that, praying, reading, and singing, both in going to and at the Grave have been grossly abused; are no way beneficial to the dead, and have proved many ways hurtful to the living, therefore such things be laid aside...⁶⁹

The Puritans arrived in New England years before the English Civil War, but they shared their funereal culture with the Puritans in England. Perhaps more importantly, they had the opportunity to practice their deathways with more freedom in the colonies than they had in England both before and after the war. Early New England funerals were supposed to be as simple as possible, lacking even a funeral sermon on the day of the funeral because sermonizing might appear too close to the Catholic practice of praying for the dead. Instead, “the Christian friends, which accompany the dead body to the place appointed for public Burial,” should “apply themselves to meditations and conferences suitable to the occasion.” The minister, “if he be present...may put them in remembrance of their duty.”⁷⁰ Their tombstones were vivid with the emblems of death, from grinning skulls to scythes and broken hourglasses. Their purpose was clear: to remind mourners and the wider community that, no matter the wealth or status of the deceased, or the piety they displayed in life, death is the end of all men and that the fate of the soul rested in God’s hands alone.⁷¹ Puritan ministers encouraged even their youngest

⁶⁹ Westminster Assembly, *A Directory for the Publique Worship of GOD* [. . .] (London: 1651), 49, Accessed October 20, 2020, Early English Books Online.

⁷⁰ *The Directory for Public Worship*, 49. Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, 103, 109; Geddes, *Welcome Joy*, 113-16, 145, 162. While Stannard notes that the timing of funeral sermons became increasingly more immediate to the funeral itself, Geddes does not mention a transition, insisting that were supposed to be given “for select Saints at the regular lecture or Sunday Service.” He does note that the very practice of giving funeral sermons caused some ambivalence among Puritans. See Geddes, *Welcome Joy*, 160-163. These differences most likely result from the fact that Puritan churches were Congregationalist in structure, meaning that each congregation and its minister had considerable latitude to determine the practices of their own church while remaining within Puritan discipline. See Butler, *Religion in Colonial America*, 37.

⁷¹ Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, 116-17; Francis Y. Duval and Ivan B. Rigby, *Early American Gravestone Art in Photographs: 200 Outstanding Examples* (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), vii-viii. There is a significant amount of scholarship on the symbolic, artistic, and literary content of New England tombstones. These works examine headstones from the perspectives of both history and material studies. For the purposes of this chapter, only a very broad overview is needed. For detailed studies of New England tombstones, see: Peter Benes, *Masks of Orthodoxy: Folk Gravestone Carving in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1689-1805* (Amherst:

congregants to “Go into the *Burying-Place*, CHILDREN; you will there see *Graves* as Short as your selves.” The sights of little headstones and short graves served as a reminder that “you may be at *Play* one Hour; *Dead, Dead* the next.”⁷²

By the eighteenth century, however, much of the zeal of the first generation of settlers had waned, resulting in a relaxation of the strictures on funeral customs. While funeral sermons had always been an important part of Puritan deathways, by the late seventeenth century, ministers were performing them at the funeral itself, justified by the conviction that they could remind mourners of their religious duties at funerals.⁷³ Sermons on the day of the funeral were also more closely connected to the deceased and their families, allowing at least portions of the sermon to touch upon the character of the deceased and the grief of his or her friends and families. More importantly, Puritan ministers began to focus on more optimistic messages in their funeral sermons, reminding their audiences of the hope of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ and suggesting that families and friends might be comforted by concentrating on that hope.⁷⁴ The iconography on tombstones also began to soften, as skulls and crossbones transitioned first to winged-skulls and then to soul-effigies to signify the release of the spirit from mortal woes.⁷⁵ These changes were due in part to a softening of New Englanders’ worldview, allowing the harshest dictates of Calvinism to evolve into more optimistic beliefs about death and the afterlife

University of Massachusetts Press, 1977); Allan I. Ludwig, *Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and its Symbols, 1650-1815* (Middletown: CT, Wesleyan University Press, 1966); James A. Slater, *The Colonial Burying Grounds of Eastern Connecticut and the Men Who Made Them*, rev. ed. (New Haven, CT: The Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences, 1996).

⁷² Cotton Mather, *Perswasions from the terror of the Lord: A Sermon Concerning the Day of Judgment* [. . .] (Boston: Timothy Green, 1711), 35.

⁷³ Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, 115-16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 152-54.

⁷⁵ Duval and Rigby, *Early American Gravestone Art*, vii-viii; Ludwig, *Graven Images*, 67-77; Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, 116-17, 156-57.

that were more in line with traditional Christian beliefs about forgiveness, salvation, and eternity.⁷⁶

In surveying the religious structures of colonial funerals, it is important to remember that the regional divisions described above were never absolute. There were Presbyterian congregations with varying strength in all the colonies who used *A Directory for Common Worship* as the guideline for their funerals, adapting it as local customs dictated.⁷⁷ There were strong congregations of Quakers and Baptists in North Carolina and Puritans faced competition from Anglicans in New England.⁷⁸ In the backcountry, colonists of a vast array of ethnicities and religious professions buried their dead without the benefit of a clergyman to ensure conformity to any set forms. In the 1740s, the Great Awakening upset denominational lines and beliefs, prompting some to use their funeral customs to highlight their affiliation with “Old Light” and “New Light” congregations and ministers.⁷⁹

Whatever their differences may have been, all of the various denominations and sects agreed on one important principle: they believed that religious observations of some sort were integral to a “decent” burial and they worked hard to ensure the ceremonies took place, whether they had to rely on itinerant ministers, bits and pieces of half-remembered traditions, or private rites that received little notice from the wider world. Religious rituals, however elaborate or austere they may have been, provided a tangible way for the North American colonists to deal with the spiritual upheaval caused by death. Even though the majority of Protestant denominations

⁷⁶ Stannard, *Puritan Way of Death*, 150-56.

⁷⁷ Robert Milton Winter, “American Presbyterians, the Directory for Worship, and Changing Patterns of Sacramental Practice,” *American Presbyterians* 71, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 141-44.

⁷⁸ Miller, “North Carolina: Early Toleration,” in Esbeck and Den Hartog, 102; Hutson, *Church and State in America*, 47-48.

⁷⁹ Butler, *Religion in Colonial America*, 107-12; Alan Taylor, *American Colonies*, 351-53.

believed that religious rites held no benefit for the dead, in practice, these ceremonies allowed men and women to take comfort in seeing that their loved ones and friends were prepared, in both body and soul, for the eternity. At the same time, religious rituals at funerals also allowed individuals and families to declare their denominational preferences amidst the religious diversity of the American colonies. In doing so, they articulated important beliefs about religious doctrine, the proper way to worship God, and the crucial task of preparing for death.

Wealth and Social Status

Next to religious belief, wealth and social status were the most important factors in determining the shape of funeral and mourning customs. Elites designed their funerals to broadcast the wealth, influence, and gentility of the deceased and their family, publicly reinforcing ideas about social hierarchies and properly ordered relationships. At the same time, the material trappings of death—items such as coffin trimmings, fine black palls and mourning coaches, and mourning clothes and jewelry—were part of the flood of imported goods that sustained the consumer revolution of the eighteenth century.⁸⁰ As these luxuries became more available and more affordable, ordinary men and women found themselves able to adopt some of the deathways of the upper classes, if on a smaller scale. For those colonists who could afford them, the requirements of a “decent” burial came to include a panoply of consumer items.

A few advertisements gleaned from colonial newspapers will serve to give some sense of the wide selection of funeral goods available to colonial consumers, as well as the range of artisans and merchants who provided them. Though coffined burial only became common in England at the end of the seventeenth century, coffins were a regular part of funerals in the American

⁸⁰ Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, xv, 33-71.



Figure 1. The material trappings of funerals. *Top*, a well-appointed coffin; *bottom left*, mourning rings; *bottom right*, mourning dress. These items appeared in a temporary exhibit in the Everard House at Colonial Williamsburg, November 2018. Photos by author.

colonies from the very beginning.⁸¹ In Charleston, for example, colonists could call upon cabinet makers such as William Watson (and later his widow) or John Carne to fashion coffins and then embellish them with “coffin furniture,” which included hardware such as nails, name plates, and handles that were made of a variety of metals and engraved or lacquered to enhance their

⁸¹ Litten, *English Way of Death*, 86, 99-100; Brent Warren Tharp, “‘Preserving their Form and Features’: The Role of Coffins in the American Understanding of Death, 1607-1870” (PhD diss., College of William and Mary, 1996), 53-54, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

attractiveness.⁸² Samuel Williams of Philadelphia also built coffins, along with furniture such as cradles, tables, bedsteads, and chests of drawers, and offered “joiner’s stuff” including “a very great quantity of walnut and mohogany coffin boards” for those who practiced the same trade in the countryside.⁸³ Rural craftsmen and shopkeepers could purchase imported hardware and cloth for their customers’ coffins from various general goods stores in urban centers.⁸⁴

Some merchants found the funeral business lucrative enough that they decided to combine several services into one business. This trend was especially conspicuous in Philadelphia. Jasper Carpenter, who oversaw the care of the public burial ground for the city, kept a workshop “where all sorts of Joyner’s Work is done, and a Hearse and all Things necessary for Funerals” were provided. James White quite literally imported the undertaking business as practiced in England when he advertised himself as an “Upholsterer and Undertaker, lately arrived from London” who, in addition to upholstering furniture and making window curtains, offered “funerals furnished and shrouds ready made, pink’d as in London, or plain and plaited, and sheets.”⁸⁵ By the 1750s, Philadelphia’s James De Nyce offered the most comprehensive funeral services:

At the sign of the hearse, in Second-street, opposite the Baptist meeting-house, is undertaken the supplying of funerals with all materials; viz. Coffins, hat-bands, handkerchiefs, gloves, black and white, &c. Said undertaker has a very convenient carriage, or hearse, that may be of great service to those who have a distance to carry; it may be drawn by one horse, with as much ease as a chaise, or a chair: Any person that applys to him for the coffin, &c. may have the use of the carriage, with its harness, gratis,

⁸² Bradford L. Raushenberg, “Coffin Making and Undertaking in Charleston and its Environs, 1705-1820,” *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 16, no. 1 (May 1990): 21, 36-41; *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), April 13, 1765 and April 37, 1767.

⁸³ *Pennsylvania Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* (Philadelphia), May 4, 1767, and June 12, 1769.

⁸⁴ Many colonial merchants who offered funeral and mourning accessories offered their wares wholesale, presumably for rural vendors to resale to their own customers. See, for examples, *American Weekly* (Philadelphia), August 1, 1763 (Daniel Jones), *New York Mercury* (New York City), February 2, 1761 (Garret Noel), *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), February 25, 1764 (Philip Tidyman).

⁸⁵ *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 4 and 11, 1754. He continued to offer “funerals furnished, and shrouds ready made, as in London” in his partnership with Thomas Lawrence. See *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), October 4, 1754.

if they provide a horse, or with a horse on reasonable terms; as it is convenient for many, who are obliged to borrow or use chaise wheels, it is hoped this may meet with encouragement, as he will make the coffin, and [sell] the mourning, as cheap as any other person, being so well provided, that any common funeral may be supplied in five hours after notice. Likewise all sorts of joiners work made, and coffin furniture sold by, JOHN DE NYCE.⁸⁶

The beginnings of the undertaking trade in Philadelphia were distinctive to that city. Most of the time, it was necessary to visit several craftsmen and merchants when arranging a funeral. As De Nyce's advertisement shows, coffins and hearses were not the only material elements American colonists thought necessary for a "common" funeral. During and after the funeral, the family and close friends of the deceased customarily dressed in mourning attire both to express their grief and to conform to fashion. The array of mourning clothing and accessories offered by colonial merchants, which were almost always imported from England, was so vast as to be overwhelming. At the most basic level, there were mourning clothes, which were typically black and made of materials that would not reflect light.⁸⁷ In addition, there was a vast selection of accessories that could be as simple or ornate as a person's or family's resources allowed. For men, there were hatbands and armbands made of crepe, buckles to be worn at the knees or on shoes, and, for those whose status required them, swords.⁸⁸ For ladies, there were jet necklaces, black handkerchiefs and fans, and buckles for their own shoes. Booksellers offered black-edged

⁸⁶ *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), April 5, 1753.

⁸⁷ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 176-77. On the English custom of mourning dress, see Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 248-52 and Claire Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1988), 118-22. It should be noted here that countless colonial merchants published lists of the different colors and types of cloths available at their shops in advertisements. This study limits its examination to those goods specifically designated for funerals and mourning, excluding the many advertisements for black cloth, which could have been used to make clothing and hangings for homes and churches that were put into mourning to mark a death.

⁸⁸ For advertisements, see *Boston Evening Post*, March 5, 1759 (Capt. Dunn), December 21, 1761 (Francis Borland); *Boston Gazette*, July 7, 1760 (Christopher Clarke); *New-York Gazette* (New York City), February 7, 1763 (Rivington and Brown); *New York Mercury* (New York City), February 2, 1761 (Hubert Van Wagenan), January 12, 1761 (Isaac Hays), September 14, 1761 (Hayman Levy); *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), June 8, 1765 (Andrew Hibben).

paper and black wax for sending death announcements to family and friends as well as for carrying on correspondence during mourning periods.⁸⁹ Mourning rings were also ubiquitous throughout the colonies. These were usually engraved with the emblems of death, lacquered in white or black, and might have contained the initials and death date of the person that they were meant to commemorate. Most often, rings were given as personal mementos, though the wealthy could afford to give them on a larger scale.⁹⁰

The funerals of New England's elite provide some examples of the excesses of material display that elites engaged in at funerals. The most well-known chronicler of funerals, the Boston merchant, judge, and Massachusetts council member Samuel Sewell, recorded his attendance at over 500 funerals. At 140 of them, he served as pall bearer, assuring himself a prominent place in the public funeral procession and a share of any funeral gifts that were distributed.⁹¹ At the funeral of Wait Still Winthrop, a prominent magistrate and former military leader, Sewell received one of each of the funeral gifts offered: a pair of gloves, a scarf, a mourning ring, and an escutcheon.⁹² Each of these gifts had significance in itself. The gloves, which were among the most common gifts at funerals in New England in the early eighteenth century, were a mark of

⁸⁹ For advertisements, see *The Boston Evening Post*, November 10, 1760 (Caleb Blanchard), December 8, 1760 (Todd & Purcell); *The Boston Gazette*, May 26, 1760 (Henry Barnes), June 16, 1760 (Todd & Purcell); *The New-York Gazette* (New York City), January 5, 1761 (Isaac Hays), November 7, 1763 (John Wetherhead); *The New York Mercury* (New York City), January 5, 1761 (Garrat Noel), January 26, 1761 (H. Gaine); *The Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), January 8, 1761 (Joseph Wood); *The South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), February 21, 1736 (William Lasserre), January 20, 1760 (John Paul Grimke), December 10, 1763 (Andrew Hibben).

⁹⁰ For advertisements, see *New York Mercury* (New York City), January 3, 1763 (Charles Oliver Bruff); *Pennsylvania Gazette* (Philadelphia), July 26, 1764 (Christopher Frederick Fowell); *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), December 20, 1760 (John Paul Grimke), February 25, 1764 (Philip Tidyman).

⁹¹ Steven C. Bullock, "Often concerned in funerals": Ritual, Material Culture, and the Large Funeral in the Age of Samuel Sewall," in *New Views of New England: Studies in Material and Visual Culture, 1680-1730* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2011), 184. Unlike in modern times, when pall bearers carry the coffin to the gravesite, the position of pall bearer in the eighteenth century was an honorific one in which the bearers were only responsible for holding up the edges of the pall. The under-bearers, who actually shouldered the weight of the coffin, were of lower status and were usually covered by the pall. See Habenstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*, 125, 128. It should be noted here that Sewell was somewhat unique in his funeral gift collection. As a prominent and well-respected member of Boston society, he was a sought-after guest at funerals.

⁹² Bullock, "Often concerned in funerals", 182.

the genteel status of both the bearer and the family who gave them.⁹³ The scarf, which was usually made of about three to four yards of fine fabric and worn over the shoulder in a sash-like fashion, served to distinguish important participants in the funeral such as pall bearers, ministers, and officers of the government or military from the larger procession. Both individuals and families gave rings, which were more expensive than scarves, as personal tokens of respect and sometimes affection.⁹⁴ Escutcheons were paintings of the family's coat of arms on fabric and stretched over a wooden frame. During the funeral ceremony, these decorated the coffin, the mourning coach, the hearse and the horses which pulled it, and the pulpit from which the minister delivered the funeral sermon.⁹⁵ For Wait Still Winthrop's funeral, his family commissioned fifty escutcheons in addition to buying rings, scarves, gloves, hundreds of yards of black material, nine dozen buttons, and over 100 yards of ribbon. They also provided thirty-two new halberds and six new drumheads for the military regiment that accompanied the procession. Altogether, Winthrop's ceremony cost £600, about one-fifth of his entire estate and more than the annual tax bill of most Massachusetts towns.⁹⁶

New Englanders did not have a monopoly on elaborate funerals, of course. Philip Livingston of New York, the father of the Philip Livingston who signed the Declaration of Independence, had a dual ceremony: one at his residence on Broad Street in New York City and another at Livingston Manor. In both places, servants decorated the lower rooms of the house with black cloth to receive guests, who the family invited to partake of *doed-koecks* (dead cakes) and spiced Madeira wine. Livingston's bearers also received gifts of gloves, scarves, handkerchiefs, mourning rings, and, after Dutch fashion, "monkey-spoons." Together, the whole

⁹³ Ibid., 207.

⁹⁴ Ibid., "'Often concerned in funerals'", 203-4.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 191; 181-82.

funeral cost £500.⁹⁷ Southerners also marked their funerals with expensive trappings and refreshments for mourners. In 1705, Sarah Rhett, who served as the executrix for Elizabeth Sindrey of South Carolina, wrote an itemized list of the charges for her modest funeral. It included payments for women to lay out the body and attend the service, a coffin, several gallons of wine, sugar and spices for the wine, twenty-five pounds of confections, numerous pairs of gloves and scarves for mourners, a rented cart and horses to carry the coffin, payment to a minister to conduct the funeral service and money for a horse to carry him there, and fees to the sexton of the parish for ringing the church bells and digging the grave. In total, Elizabeth Sindrey's funeral cost £73.0.3 South Carolina currency, or around £49 in British currency.⁹⁸

One of the most ostentatious funerals of the colonial period belonged to Andrew Faneuil of Boston, the uncle of Peter Faneuil, who later donated Faneuil Hall to the city. The March 30, 1738 edition of the *American Mercury* included an account of the ceremony. Besides "His Excellency the Governor, His Majesty's Council, Justices of the Peace, Ministers, and almost all other Persons of Note in this Town, and from many of the Neighbouring Towns, with others of different Ranks, to the Number of between Eleven and Twelve Hundred, besides Mourners," a "vast Number of other People were assembled together to observe the Procession." At the start of the funeral, "the Guns began to fire, and continued firing every half Minute till the Solemnity was over." The expense and ostentation was justified, the newspaper noted, because "Mr.

⁹⁷ Alice Morse Earle, *Colonial Days in Old New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896), 298. "Monkey-spoons" were silver spoons that were supposed to feature the figure of an Apostle on their handles. Unfortunately, the engraving usually turned out to look more like a primate than a saint. See Habenstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing*, 129.

⁹⁸ "From the Collections: Funeral Charges for Elizabeth Sindrey," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 82, no. 1 (January 1981), 83-84. The currency conversion above is based on an exchange rate of £150 South Carolina currency to £100 sterling, which was the fairly constant rate from 1703 to 1712. See Gary L. Hewitt, "The State in the Planters' Service," in *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of Colonial South Carolina's Plantation Society*, ed. Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 60-63.

Fanueil was possess'd of the largest Estate of any Gentleman in these Parts of the World, so his Funeral was as grand as any ever known among us before, and far more expensive." Fanueil's nephew, who had inherited the majority of the estate and was responsible for financing the ceremony, displayed great generosity on the occasion: "For besides Mourning, &c. there were given away between three and four thousand pair of Gloves, and upwards of two hundred Rings." Though the observer wrote that "every thing was done by the Executor, that had any Tendency to do Honour to his deceased Unkle," it is also clear that Peter Fanueil's own reputation was an important consideration in the planning and execution of such an elaborate public display.⁹⁹ By using part of his inheritance to finance such luxurious proceedings, he also established himself as a wealthy and generous man with such an upright character that he went to great effort and expense to pay proper respects to his uncle and benefactor.

Opulent funerals performed several functions for those wealthy enough to afford them. In addition to advertising the wealth of an individual or a family, well-appointed funerals also demonstrated the gentility of the deceased and his or her survivors. Such displays of refined manners and sophisticated tastes were particularly important in American society because, unlike the aristocratic society of Great Britain, the American colonies had no formal nobility. Thus, American elites had to demonstrate their social superiority and bolster their claims to leadership by adopting the behavior of gentlemen and ladies. Richard Bushman defines gentility as "the visible expression of gentry status," which included efforts to beautify the everyday scenes of life, scrupulous attention to one's body and behavior, and a cultivated taste for fine things.¹⁰⁰ Gentility also required a strict avoidance of all things which caused unease or "discomfort."¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ *American Weekly Mercury* (Philadelphia), March 30, 1738.

¹⁰⁰ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (1992; repr., New York: Vintage, 1993), xiv-xv, 96-99, 63-78, 83.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 99.

Death is an event which is neither beautiful nor easy. Those who aspired to gentility, then, sought to make the rituals that surrounded death as beautiful and decorous as possible. They were assisted in this venture by the vast material culture available to soften the hard lines of death, from covering the hands of mourners in spiritual contact with death to covering the ornate coffins that concealed the ugly reality of decay.

The funerals of those who eighteenth-century Americans considered to be the “middling sort” are harder to locate in the historical record than the much noticed and commented-upon obsequies of the elite. In some cases, their worldly estate was not large enough to require a detailed will and estate inventory. Many simply left their funerals up to the discretion of their executors, indicating that the contours of a “decent” burial were so widely known as to require little comment. Still, the funeral and mourning goods that colonial merchants provided were available to anyone who had the money to buy them. The services of the church, including ringing bells and providing a rented pall, were also available for small fees.¹⁰² Thus, those of the middling classes had opportunities to adopt some of the customs of the wealthy and prominent while simultaneously defining the elements of a respectable funeral for themselves.

In New York City, for example, a public funeral inviter, or *aanspreecker*, went from door to door to invite funeral guests and enjoyed set fees for his services.¹⁰³ This office had been retained from New York’s days as a Dutch colony. In New York City, laws on funerals required his services, leading one contributor to the *New-York Mercury* to complain that “if a Person dies, being never so poor . . . he cannot be buried, without their being at the Expence of 18s. to some Person authorised by the Mayor, to invite People to the funeral; nor can any Friend do it gratis,

¹⁰² Nelson, *Beauty of Holiness*, 295.

¹⁰³ Earle, 293. For the public notice of the law establishing funeral inviters’ fees, see *The New-York Weekly Journal* (New York City), May 15, 1738.

without subjecting himself to be fined 40s. if anyone complains against him.”¹⁰⁴ Much of the expense at common funerals, however, was the refreshments provided for mourners. Every “decent” funeral was required a significant amount of alcohol, including wine, rum, cider, and other spirits. The practice of drinking at funerals was so widespread that, in 1713, Boston’s Cotton Mather complained that “them that should *Walk as Mourners about the Streets...Reel as Drunkards about the Streets*, and be fitter for the *Stocks* than the *Streets*!”¹⁰⁵ Though Mather was writing in the early eighteenth century from a Puritan perspective, the custom of eating and drinking, sometimes to excess, at funerals remained common throughout the century and into later times.

Another important element of respectable funerals was the number and quality of people who attended the funeral. The account of Wait Still Winthrop’s funeral that appeared in newspapers in 1717 noted that he was “Honourably Interr’d in the Tomb with his Ancestors; the Regiment of Boston being under Arms, and accompanied to his Funeral by the Governour, Council, Representatives, and Chief Gentlemen and Inhabitants both of Town and Country.”¹⁰⁶ As Winthrop’s funeral showed, it was important for the deceased’s peers to participate in the ceremony, both to pay their respects to a member of their own class, and to validate the family’s place in the social hierarchy. This rule applied, not only to magistrates who had descended from prominent families, but also to members of particular professions. So it was that when Aaron Burr, Sr., the father of the infamous duelist, died, his “funeral was attended by several ministers, all the students, and a large number of the neighbouring inhabitants.”¹⁰⁷ Burr was part of the

¹⁰⁴ *New-York Mercury* (New York City), February 17, 1755.

¹⁰⁵ Cotton Mather, *A Christian Funeral. A brief Essay On that Case, What should be the Behaviour of a Christian at a Funeral?* [. . .] (Boston: Timothy Green, 1713), 22.

¹⁰⁶ *The Boston News-Letter*, November 18, 1717.

¹⁰⁷ *Boston-News Letter*, October 20, 1757.

ministerial profession, and his students would soon become part of the educated upper class to which he himself belonged. Beyond having peers present, Burr's funeral was also well-attended, which displayed the respect the inhabitants of Princeton, New Jersey, had for him as a minister, an educated man, and as the president of the College of New Jersey.

Even those further down the social ladder recognized a well-attended funeral as an important element of a decent funeral. Many death notices in colonial newspapers went to lengths to describe the good character of the deceased, justifying their praise with the observation that his or her funeral was well-attended. Take, for example, George Michael of Portsmouth, New Hampshire. According to his obituary, he was "a Person of an easy genteel Behaviour and a Pattern of Politeness." He had also served as the "Master of the Lodge of free and accepted Masons" for a number of years. Thus, the members of his lodge attended his funeral "in a regular Procession to the Episcopal Church," where the "Reverend Mr. *Brown*, a Member of that Society, made a moving Address to the bereav'd Family and Brotherhood, and to a very crowded assembly."¹⁰⁸ A respectable number of attendees was also important for women's funerals. In August of 1761, Mrs. Mary Parsons, the wife of Captain Thomas Parsons of Newbury, Massachusetts, passed away at just twenty-one-years old. Her character was exemplary, as she had been "a Person of graceful Aspect, and superior natural Endowment of Mind, which were much improv'd by a good Education." By "her virtuous and agreeable Conduct" she had won the affection of "the Rev. Mr. Parsons, her Father-in-Law, and his Family." It was only proper, then, that "as a Token of Respect to the Living and the Dead, the Funeral was attended by a great Concourse and Procession."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *Boston Evening Post*, April 7, 1755.

¹⁰⁹ *The Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, August 10, 1761.

The examples above also demonstrate another important way that funeral rites and social status intertwined. Whether the deceased was rich and prominent or merely an ordinary subject of the British Empire, the sermons, elegies, and eulogies that were an important part of colonial mourning culture also served to highlight those traits that were considered admirable for men and women in their particular stations. For one comparison, we have the Rev. Mr. Gilbert Tennent of Philadelphia and his wife, Cornelia. Mrs. Tennant passed first, in 1753. The death notice printed in *The American Weekly Mercury* was a lengthy one that listed her virtues in detail, holding her up as a picture of exemplary feminine behavior. According to the newspaper, she was accomplished and educated, but modest and humble. She was honest and sincere and a faithful wife to her husband. She ran his household well and also gave liberally to the poor. She was a loving mother and a good friend. Most importantly, she was a steadfast Christian.¹¹⁰ These same qualities appeared in countless relations of the lives and deaths of colonial women, serving not just to celebrate their characters, but also to reinforce beliefs about ideal femininity in colonial society.

Cornelia's husband, the Rev. Gilbert Tennant, followed his wife in the summer of 1764. As a minister, he was "a well-studied Divine;--of generous and Catholic Sentiments;--a judicious, pungent and eminently successful Preacher; a Lover of all good Men...who made it the delightful Business of his Life to serve GOD." As a man, he was "a Gentleman of great Integrity,--a sincere Christian, of exemplary Conversation unaffectedly devout and serious, but pleasant and chearful with his Friends."¹¹¹ Though Tennant is best known as a preacher during the Great Awakening, he also exhibited the traits commonly praised in those who operated in the

¹¹⁰ *The American Weekly Mercury* (Philadelphia), April 16, 1753.

¹¹¹ *The Boston Evening Post*, August 6, 1764.

masculine sphere. He was educated and took pains to perform his occupation well.¹¹² He was devout and serious, but nonetheless affable with personal friends, just as a sociable gentleman should be. Though his obituary made no mention of his character as a husband or parent, his funeral sermon declared him “tender, loving, and compassionate; kind and agreeable in every Relation.”¹¹³ In a similar vein, magistrates and businessmen received praise at their deaths for their good judgement and integrity while also being lauded for their private conduct with family and friends.¹¹⁴ As with his wife’s obituary, Reverend Tennant’s death notice demonstrated the influence of ideas about gender roles in remembering the deceased’s life and character. The ability and willingness to conform to colonial society’s expectations earned praise at the end of life, justifying elaborate mourning rites.

Finally, the place of burial and the quality of the grave marker were also important indicators of wealth and status. The wealthy generally had their choice of burial places, whether that was in a private cemetery, a family tomb, in a churchyard, or in the church itself. While the Protestant Reformation had cast suspicion on the practice of burial in or near churches, burial in the church building, also known as intramural burial, or burial “ad sanctum,” was still available for those of great importance. Though Protestants officially assigned no spiritual benefit to these positions, burial within the church still allowed a permanent place for the deceased in a place of

¹¹² It should be noted here that Gilbert Tennent was a celebrated minister of the First Great Awakening and, as such, the foremost quality remembered about him was the strength and passion of his preaching. In a funeral sermon preached by Rev. Samuel Finley, who was then president of the College of New Jersey, Tennent’s extraordinary ability to stir the emotion of his audiences is highlighted: “DID he set himself to alarm the secure Sinner? Hell, from beneath, was laid open before him, and Destruction had no covering; while *the Heavens* above *gathered Blackness*, and a Tempest of Wrath seemed ready to be hurled on the guilty Head. Many a Sinner has trembled...while this Man of God *reasoned of Righteousness, Temperance, and the Judgment to come.*” See Samuel Finley, *The successful minister of Christ distinguished in glory. A sermon, occasioned by the death of the late Reverend Mr. Gilbert Tennent* [. . .] (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1764), 23.

¹¹³ Finley, *The successful minister of Christ*, 19.

¹¹⁴ See, for examples, the obituaries of Addington Davenport, who was a superior court justice in Boston, and merchant Jasper Farmer, in *Boston Evening Post*, April 19, 1736 and *New York Mercury* (New York City), May 1, 1758.

frequent visitation. Thus, every time the community gathered for worship, the memorials of the dead were buried within the church surrounded them, reminding them of the individual's past importance and the continuing importance of their family. In some cases, men and women could even have their graves underneath the pew that they had occupied in life, making church services a family affair for generations to come.

The status enjoyed by high-ranking government officials, for example, won them burial in prominent places inside America's Anglican churches. In 1735, the inhabitants of Charlestown, South Carolina, "decently interred" the province's governor, Robert Johnson, "in a Vault near the Altar in Charles-Town Church."¹¹⁵ In 1740, the congregation of Trinity Church in New York deposited the body of the New York Lieutenant Governor's wife "in a Vault in [the church] with the remains of her Mother, and the late Lady *Cornbury* in the most handsome and decent Manner."¹¹⁶ Likewise, in 1760, the same congregation buried James De Lancey, the Lieutenant Governor of New York, under the church's central aisle, "with the greatest Decorum and Solemnity."¹¹⁷ Even successful merchants might enjoy the honor of burial within the church's walls. In 1758, a militia unit in New York City escorted Jasper Farmer, their founder, to his grave, also in Trinity Church.¹¹⁸ These individuals, prominent in the political and social life of their respective colonies, remained part of the physical church after their deaths, much as they had been important members of the church congregation during their lives.

The same principle of prominence and remembrance applied to the stately monuments in the churchyard. At each gathering of the congregation, the living had the opportunity to visit the graves of the dead, learning the lessons communicated by the iconography and inscriptions and

¹¹⁵ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), May 10, 1735.

¹¹⁶ *New York Weekly Journal* (New York City), May 26, 1740.

¹¹⁷ *New-York Mercury* (New York City), August 4, 1760.

¹¹⁸ *New-York Mercury* (New York City), May 1, 1758.

remembering their friends, loved ones, and important men and women of the community's past. While all the colonies shared a common style of gravestone carving, with death's heads, soul effigies, and religious emblems dominating most stones, stone carvers were also careful to tailor their work according to the taste of their customers in each region. The historian Diana Williams Combs has discovered that, while wealthy South Carolinians employed New England carvers for their stones, the southern grave markers evinced a baroque style earlier than New England stones. According to Combs, this is evidence of "the extent to which Charleston's urbane anglicized culture emulated the fine arts in Britain."¹¹⁹ In short, in their attempts to follow the most fashionable trends in the mother country, Charlestonians demanded that the stone cutters that they employed adopt English styles, perhaps conveyed to the colonies in pattern books, instead of simply copying the provincial New England style that the craftsmen had originally learned.¹²⁰ The inhabitants of Charleston were so fond of large, ornate monuments that the vestry of St. Philip's Church had to prohibit the building of tombs, the placing of headstones, or the building of fences around family plots in its churchyard in 1771, claiming that it was becoming overcrowded. Instead, those who wished to could place a monument flat on the ground or next to the walls of the cemetery. Charleston's other Anglican Church, St. Michel's, had to take similar steps in 1773.¹²¹ This measure proved unsatisfactory to many parishioners, as one of the points of erecting a monument was to capture the attention of churchgoers as they went to and from services. In this way, prominent individuals and families reminded the community of their importance both in secular society and as benefactors to the church.

¹¹⁹ Diana Williams Combs, *Early Gravestone Art in Georgia and South Carolina* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 3.

¹²⁰ Combs, *Early Gravestone Art*, 135.

¹²¹ Minutes of the Vestry, St. Philip's Parish, 1761-1795, 90-91, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC; Minute Book, St. Michael's Church, 1759-1824, 93, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC.

Even though southern churchyards provided a conspicuous place to erect monuments to the wealthy and powerful, most elite southerners preferred to be buried in private cemeteries on their own plantations. As Hugh Jones wrote in his *Present State of Virginia* in 1724:

The parishes being of great extent (some sixty miles long and upwards) many dead corpses cannot be conveyed to the church to be buried: So that it is customary to bury in gardens or orchards, where whole families lye interred together, in a spot generally handsomely enclosed, planted with evergreens, and the graves kept decently.¹²²

Decades later, in the 1770s, a tutor for Virginia's Robert "King" Carter also observed that "only the lower sort of People are buried at the Church; for the Gentlemen have private burying Yards."¹²³ Even though southern elites forewent the recognition that a city funeral and churchyard burial would give them, they nevertheless made themselves a permanent part of the landscape at their estates, cementing their place in the legacy that they would leave their families and reminding any who visited the grave that all of their surroundings had been shaped by their power and success.

The funerals of the poor and destitute stood in stark contrast to those of the colonial elite. In the south, poor relief fell to the vestries of Anglican churches who oversaw parish affairs. They often noted in their minutes the allowances they gave to provide for funerals for those who could not afford the basic elements of a "decent" funeral. In 1743, for example, "a poor Widow named Mary Brandrett whose Husband was lately Buried, waited on the Vestry [of St. Philip's Church] to beg their Charity to pay the Doctors and to pay for a Coffin &c." The vestry allowed

¹²² Hugh Jones, *The Present State of Virginia; from Whence is Inferred a Short View of Maryland and North Carolina*, ed. Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for Virginia Historical Society, 1956), 96-97, quoted in Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith*, 149.

¹²³ Philip Vickers Fithian, *Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, A Plantation Tutor of the Old Dominion, 1773-1774*, ed. Hunter Dickinson Farish (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1957), xxv-xxxii, 41; Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith*, 149-50.

her £5 to pay for the coffin.¹²⁴ This was slightly more than the £4 they customarily provided for both coffins (£2) and coffin bearers (£2) for other funerals.¹²⁵ In 1758, the inhabitants of Prince Fredrick's Parish allowed an average of £10 each for the funerals of travelers and the poor. The vestry of St. John's Parish, Colleton, gave Mrs. George Fickling only £3.2.6 for burying Grace Andrews.¹²⁶ These allowances could not possibly have provided ceremonies that approached the splendor of funerals for the wealthy and prominent.

The same holds true for New England, where poor relief fell to town officials. It seems that Boston's Overseers of the Poor made regular payments to individuals and companies to provide funerals for the city's poor. In August of 1738, for example, they paid Frances Warden £20.17.4 "in full of his Note for Coffins," suggesting that Warden had been providing coffins in the months before the meeting and had now presented his bill for service. The allowance made by the Overseers, then, would have covered several coffins. This conclusion seems to be justified by the fact that in September of the next year, they only paid £9.5.0 to Thomas Moulin & Company for "funerals," which would have included coffins, burial fees, and any spirits provided at the burials. In May 1746, the Overseers agreed to contract with Nathaniel Band to provide the necessities for all the funerals for the poor. The rate that they approved for each funeral was £0.20.0 for "Funerals within the House" and £0.25.0 for those who received outdoor relief.¹²⁷

Even though poor relief operated differently in different locations, final services for the impoverished looked much the same. For the poor, there were no newspaper accounts

¹²⁴ Minutes of the Vestry, St. Philip's Parish, 1732-1755, 96, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina, 96.

¹²⁵ Nelson, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith*, 295.

¹²⁶ Minutes of the Vestry, Prince Frederick Parish, Winyah, 1729-1763, 57, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC; Vestry Book, St. John's Parish, Colleton, 1738-1874, 33, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, SC.

¹²⁷ "The Overseers' Finances," in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 69, *The Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor*, ed. Eric Nellis and Anne Decker Cecere (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 673, 677, 836.

highlighting the number and status of those who attended the funeral, nor were there posthumous “characters” printed to highlight the virtues of the dead. Their burials were acts of public charity, which delegated officials enacted with little comment or recognition for the deceased beyond a name and a number in a ledger. The remains of the poor occupied “Potter’s Fields,” usually spots of undesirable land reserved for the burial of the destitute and the transient. Their grave markers, if they received one, were scraps of wood, ensuring that, unlike the more permanent stone markers of the upper and middling classes, they would soon be lost to decay, leaving the graves of the poor unmarked and largely forgotten.

Those who found themselves outside the law also had distinctive death rituals that marked them as outsiders to accepted members of colonial society. Most historical investigations of colonial-era executions focus on New England because of the prodigious literature produced by criminal confessions and execution sermons from that region.¹²⁸ The spectacle of executions in other regions followed the same pattern, however, and sought to achieve the same goals.¹²⁹ In some ways, execution rituals can be viewed as a reversal of traditional funeral rites. The execution of Joseph Sommers in 1732 offered a dismal example of the possible consequences of violent crimes in colonial South Carolina. In a sad inversion of a standard funeral procession, Sommers’s wife and child followed him to the foot of the gallows, where he said his final farewell. Instead of receiving praise for his virtues in a funeral sermon, the condemned man himself delivered something of a eulogy as he protested his innocence but admitted to general moral weaknesses that had led him to his fate. Finally, the executioner carried out the sentence and placed Sommers’s corpse in an open grave until authorities provided a coffin later that

¹²⁸ For one example, see Scott D. Seay, *Hanging Between Heaven and Earth: Capital Crime, Execution Preaching, and Theology in Early New England* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009).

¹²⁹ For a detailed account of colonial-era executions, see Stuart Banner, *The Death Penalty: An American History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 24-53.

afternoon.¹³⁰ The distinct lack of final services for executed criminals communicated popular condemnation in the same way that the opulent funerals for elites reflected approbation.

African Americans, both enslaved and free, occupied the lowest positions in the colonial hierarchy. Their place in society, as well as their resistance to complete servility, was also evident in their funeral customs. As many historians have argued, the Africans that the slave trade forcibly imported to the North American colonies held on to some of their native funereal culture in the New World, including nocturnal burials, emotional behavior at funerals, and the practice of leaving grave goods.¹³¹ Early studies of the African American Burial Ground in New York also found African roots in the decorative arrangements of nails on coffins, concluding that they resembled the *Sankofa* symbol found in nineteenth-century west Africa.¹³² Though the presence of the Sankofa symbol in New York has been convincingly challenged, both the documentary and archeological evidence points to the fact that, by the eighteenth century, the funereal culture of both enslaved and free Blacks throughout the colonies was a syncretic blend of both inherited African customs and Euro-American deathways. So it was that the majority of the burials in the New York cemetery showed evidence of coffins and shrouds along with a few examples of grave goods such as pipes and jewelry made of glass beads and cowrie shells.¹³³ Evidence from the southern colonies confirms the same blend of African and European deathways, especially in those cases where whites provided funeral goods to enslaved people or

¹³⁰ *South Carolina Gazette*, Tuesday, April 1, 1732.

¹³¹ For examples, see Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (1974; repr. New York: Vintage, 1976), 194-200; David R. Roediger, "And Die in Dixie: Funerals, Death, & Heaven in the Slave Community, 1700-1865" *Massachusetts Review* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1981): 169-176; Phillip D. Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake & Lowcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 640-42.

¹³² Erik R. Seeman, "Reassessing the 'Sankofa Symbol' in New York's African Burial Ground," *William and Mary Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (January 2010), 108-9.

¹³³ Seeman, "Reassessing the 'Sankofa Symbol'," 108-21.

oversaw funerals themselves.¹³⁴ As historian Erik R. Seeman has pointed out, “the eighteenth century was a crucial period of transition from largely African to newly African American deathways.”¹³⁵

The few freedoms that African Americans exercised in the burial of their dead, however, should not obscure the fact that the expectations of white society always bounded the choices that they had for respectable burials, even according to their own standards. To keep African Americans, specifically the enslaved, in their proper place, both individual slave owners and lawmakers attempted to restrict some of their funeral practices. On plantations, funeral rites only proceeded with the permission (or sometimes the indifference) of slaveowners.¹³⁶ When Black funerals began to threaten the social order, however, colonial authorities found it necessary to step in with official legislation. In 1737, New York City enacted a law that required “all Negro, Mullatto, & Indian Slaves” buried by daylight, with a fine of ten shillings for each breach of the regulation. Further, to prevent large gatherings of enslaved people at funerals, “under the pretext whereof they have great Opportunities of Ploting and Confederating together to do Mischief,” the law limited the number of mourners at funerals to twelve, besides the coffin bearers and the grave-digger. Authorities also prohibited enslaved people from using a pall or having pall-bearers at their funerals.¹³⁷ The fact that the specter of revolt, as well as that of muddying social distinctions, bedeviled New Yorkers is evident from the fact that the 1737 law was an elaboration on one enacted in 1722 and would be reissued in 1748 and 1763.¹³⁸ Lawmakers

¹³⁴ Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 197; Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 642-43; Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith*, 296.

¹³⁵ Erik R. Seeman, *Death in the New World*, 230.

¹³⁶ Roediger, “And Die in Dixie,” 165-66.

¹³⁷ *New-York Weekly Journal* (New York City), March 13, 1737. Prohibiting palls both prevented slaves from approximating white funeral customs and kept them from hiding weapons under the cloth, lest they used the funeral as a pretext for an uprising.

¹³⁸ Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 52.

enacted similar laws at various times in other colonies, particularly in the southern colonies where the enslaved population was large.¹³⁹ While authorities passed these restrictions with very real fears of insurrection in mind, they were also attempting African Americans from adopting funeral customs perceived to be above their station.¹⁴⁰

Personal Feelings

The pageantry and materiality of colonial funerals makes it tempting to imagine that colonial Americans designed their funereal culture to advertise the wealth, virtues, and status of the rich and powerful, while those lower down the social scale simply mimicked the practices of those above them. Besides committing time and money to planning a respectable funeral, however, the men and women of the eighteenth-century colonies also sought more personal and private ways to commemorate loved ones and friends. Bequests of memorial tokens like mourning suits and rings conveyed loving sentiments to the recipients.¹⁴¹ In 1740, for example, Benjamin Plumber of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, left his “most esteemed friend” Mary “a ring of five guineas Price Desireing She would accept the Same as a Token of the Great Value & regard I have for her.” He also left rings to Theodore Atkinson and his wife, as well as a suit of mourning clothes for John Loggin.¹⁴² In 1745, John Colleton, desiring to remain in the mind and heart of his friend Mrs. Ann Collins, left her a ring “to wear in Remembrance of me.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Morgan, *Slave Counterpoint*, 640-41.

¹⁴⁰ These regulations, of course, were never completely effective. The very fact that authorities had to pass almost identical laws over and over most likely suggests that either white masters and city officials were continually lax in enforcing the laws, that such laws only mattered when fears of a restive slave population became acute, or that African Americans went about their funerals without paying much attention to the laws at all. Still, the intention behind the laws restricting African American funeral customs remained the same.

¹⁴¹ Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith*, 161-67.

¹⁴² Benjamin Plumer, Last Will and Testament, *Probate Records of the Province of New Hampshire*, ed. Henry Harrison Metcalf and Otis Grant Hammond, (Bristol, NH: R.W. Musgrove, 1914), 2:785-786.

¹⁴³ John Colleton, Last Will and Testament, October 26, 1745, Record of Wills, Charleston County, vol. 6, 392, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

Individuals also left rings in memory of other family members and friends. In 1751, John Fordyce bequeathed a mourning ring he had received at his wife's death to his son, Thomas. He also gave his children Elizabeth and Isaac mourning rings in memory of their sister Anne. Another provision in his will allowed Thomas Crofton "his mother's wedding Ring to his Father and her mourning ring for him."¹⁴⁴ Similarly, Thomas Wibird's 1765 will left his niece mourning ring from his mother's death and one from a "Mr. Andrew Pepperrell" to his nephew.¹⁴⁵

Rings were a particularly effective way to remember a departed friend or loved one. Men and women traditionally wore rings close to the skin, making them both a physical way to keep the memory of a loved one close and, because engravings would require close scrutiny to read, a private way to remember past affections. Mourning rings and lockets could also incorporate physical tokens from the beloved figure. The most popular method of saving physical mementos was through hairwork jewelry. Though the preservation of locks of hair in jewelry is most associated with the explosion of mourning culture in the nineteenth century, it was also very popular in the colonial period.¹⁴⁶ Colonial craftsmen and merchants advertised their ability to do hairwork, as in New York when Charles Oliver Bruff, "having employed a jeweller from London," advertised "mourning rings of all sorts" as well as his employee's ability to "[plait] hair in a curious manner in true lovers knots, for buttons, rings or lockets, plain or ename'l'd."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ John Fordyce, Last Will and Testament, February 2, 1751, Record of Wills, Charleston County, vol. 6, 517, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Wibird, Last Will and Testament, *Probate Records of the Province of New Hampshire*, ed. Otis G. Hammond, (The State of New Hampshire, 1940), 8:218.

¹⁴⁶ Sarah Nehama, *In Death Lamented: The Tradition of Anglo-American Mourning Jewelry* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2012), 23-24. Another discussion of mourning rings and hairwork jewelry as "Relics of the Heart" appears in Susan M. Stabile's *Memory's Daughters*. Though Stable's examples come from the nineteenth century, her observations also apply to the eighteenth century. See Susan M. Stabile, *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004), 222-27.

¹⁴⁷ *New York Mercury* (New York City), January 3, 10, 17 and June 20, 27, 1763.

These rings could be of such sentimental value that people advertised their loss publicly, as when a subscriber to the *South Carolina Gazette* offered a reward for the return of a missing ring in March of 1732.¹⁴⁸

Perhaps the most permanent way that men and women expressed their feelings for departed loved ones was erecting tombstones at their graves with inscriptions attesting to their affection. Though the examples of this practice are endless, one particularly striking monument stands in the churchyard at Bruton Parish Church in Williamsburg, Virginia. In the early 1730s, Elizabeth Bray, devastated by the loss of her husband, David, had the following inscription carved on his monument:

Here lies buried David Bray, Esquire. A man handsome, able, and affable and charming in manner, A Justice Appointed to the Council in Virginia By the most serene King George the Second, He was snatched away by death Before entering office, in the prime of his life. He had joined to him in matrimony Elizabeth Eldest daughter of John Page, Esquire, Most closely joined to him by mutual affection, And he left her childless and grieving October 5th, 1731, aged 32. She set up this monument as a final tribute to their conjugal love.¹⁴⁹

A few years later, when Elizabeth herself died, her inscription joined her husband's on the other side of the same stone:

Here are laid The mortal remains of Elizabeth Bray Together with her most beloved husband. Consumed by a wasting disease, she Gave up the ghost on the 22nd day of April, 1734, In her 32nd year, Serenely, courageously, piously.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), March 25, 1732. This subscriber was not alone in seeking the return of a lost mourning ring. Similar advertisements appear in other colonial newspapers, as well. See, for examples, the *Boston News-Letter*, October 5, 1752, and the *Boston Evening Post*, December 26, 1763.

¹⁴⁹ Bruton Parish Church, *Bruton Parish Churchyard and Church: A Guide to the Tombstones, Monuments, and Mural Tablets* (Williamsburg, VA: Bruton Parish Church, 1976), 28.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* The Bray inscriptions can be confusing when read together. To clarify: David Bray was "aged 32" when he died in October and left his wife "childless and grieving." The age on this side of the stone refers to the husband, not the wife, who, according to her own inscription, was 32 when she died in 1734.

Thus Elizabeth, like many other men and women in the colonies, chose to inscribe her love for her husband on his tombstone. At her death, in a further act of love, she chose to be buried beside him.¹⁵¹

As Mrs. Bray's example shows, burial with family, either in family tombs or private cemeteries, was a common request in colonial wills. In some instances, testators even provided for the maintenance of family burial plots. This was especially common on southern plantations, but could also be found elsewhere in the colonies. In 1722, Thomas Olney, Sr., directed that "the burieing place in my afore said fathers homestead Lott where my father and sum of my Children and many other of my Relations are buried and where I desire to be Layed myself: there shall be Reserved a piece of Land...fenced in Intire for that perticulior use: for my Children and Grand Children and so to be Continued to there Generations forever...."¹⁵² By this provision, Olney both expressed his desire to be buried amongst his relations and set himself as the patriarch of the generations that would follow him to the family burial ground.

Conclusion

From the survey of colonial mourning customs in this chapter, it becomes clear that eighteenth-century funereal culture possessed a complex set of meanings for the North American colonists. Though mourning customs varied from region to region and among different communities, they all answered the same general purposes. Funeral rituals had important religious meanings that expressed hopes and fears about both this life and the next. Appropriate

¹⁵¹ Burial with family, either in family tombs or private cemeteries, was also a common request in colonial wills. In some instances, testators even provided for the maintenance of family burial plots. This was especially common on southern plantations, but could also be found elsewhere in the colonies.

¹⁵² Thomas Olney, Sr., Last Will and Testament, *The Early Records of the Town of Providence* (Providence, RI: Snow & Farnham City Printers, 1901), 16:202.

religious rites were central to solving the dilemma of imagining one's own dissolution and assuring that loved ones were properly situated in both body and soul to meet eternity. The diversity of religious practice in the colonies also made it necessary to declare one's spiritual allegiance to one denomination or another to clearly express personal religious views and to find belonging among like-minded Christians. At the same time, the importance of religious rites stood as one of the unifying characteristics of colonial mortuary practice that allowed colonists to imagine themselves as civilized people even as they dwelt on the frontiers of the British Empire.

Funeral customs also served to highlight the wealth and status of particular individuals and families. Their funerals included a great deal of ceremonial pomp, especially in the procession, which was the most visible part of the ceremony. With all the participants properly attired and ordered according to rank and relation, the funeral procession was a microcosm of the ideal well-ordered society. The material aspects of colonial funeral culture, however, also provided opportunities for non-elites to demonstrate their own sense of social position, propriety, and politeness. Because funeral and mourning accessories were available for anyone who could pay for them, those of the middling and sometimes lower ranks frequently adopted some of the trappings of elite funerals in their own bid to define what a "decent" burial might look like.

Colonial deathways also exalted those who seemed to exemplify the qualities that society dictated were ideally suited to their particular station. Funeral sermons, eulogies, and obituaries highlighted the leadership and good judgment of government officials and magistrates while ministers received praise for their Christian virtues and prowess in the pulpit. In a broader sense, colonial funereal culture celebrated men for their education, their successes in business and public life, and for the care they provided for their wives, children, and dependents. Women, in contrast, won approbation for their piety, their devotion to their family, and their gentle tempers.

Loyalty, dedication to friends, and industriousness were model qualities for both sexes. In short, the eulogies, elegies, funeral sermons, and headstone inscriptions that were important parts of the literary culture of death sketched out the ideal characters of men, women, and children in the colonial setting. These traits also made them good subjects of the English crown.

The elements of a “decent Christian burial” were so important, so widely shared, and so well understood that any deviation from the accepted customs attracted notice. This was why the execution of criminals seemed to parody the funerals of more respectable individuals—the inversion grabbed onlookers’ attention. Colonial society criticized the failure to provide appropriate final rites as uncivilized, disrespectful, and even sacrilegious. The colonists all shared a common understanding of the ceremonies of death, no matter what their religion or status, and they recognized the messages conveyed by both the sights and sounds of normal mortuary practice and the dire messages sent by funeral rites that were somehow disrupted. As tensions between Great Britain and her colonies worsened in the 1760s and 1770s, disgruntled colonists seized upon shared conceptions of death rituals to dramatically highlight their grievances with the mother country.

Chapter 2: Death and Taxes: Funeral Culture and Political Protest during the Imperial Crisis

“The TIMES are Dreadful, Dismal, Doleful, Dolorous, and DOLLAR-LESS.”

—*The Pennsylvania Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, October 31, 1765

It was mid-August, the end of the summer of 1765—market day in Boston. That morning, as people began to travel into the city for business, they passed a strange, macabre sight. Near Boston Neck, the only route into the city, stood a tree, and from that tree hung the figure of a man. A closer inspection revealed that someone—or several someones—had strung up an effigy of the Massachusetts stamp collector, Andrew Oliver; no doubt in retribution for his “crime” of accepting the job of collecting the newest tax imposed by Parliament. If the message was unclear to passers-by, the connection between Oliver and the stamp tax became clear as the men under the tree accosted onlookers, forcing them to have their goods “stamped” before continuing into the city. Later that evening, a crowd gathered under the tree to cut the effigy down, but the mock stamp master’s ordeal was far from over. The mob carted the effigy through town, stopping at the Town House where the governor and his council were meeting, and winding up at Fort Hill, where they proceeded to dismember and burn their victim on a bonfire made from the remains of the real Andrew Oliver’s office building.¹⁵³ A few days later, the inhabitants of Newport, Rhode Island, followed the Bostonians’ example by executing their own pseudo-stamp master.¹⁵⁴ Similar tableaux of death soon broke out in other colonies from north to south, with each community imposing violent justice on the representatives of stamp tax collectors. Crowds hanged, dismembered, and burned the images of those they considered traitors, intending not just

¹⁵³ *Boston Evening Post*, August 19, 1765; Edmund S. Morgan and Helen M. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 128-129, Kindle.

¹⁵⁴ Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 150-51.

to shame them, but to give them a glimpse of the real violence that might befall those who persisted in threatening colonial liberty.¹⁵⁵

More grim pageants followed as the time came for the Stamp Act to go into effect. Between October 31 and November 1, 1765, the ships in colonial harbors lowered their colors to half-mast while muffled church bells rang out death knells. Black-edged newspapers topped with skulls, spades, and scythes announced the death of Liberty and warned readers of further danger to all that they held dear. When the time came, mourners gathered for Liberty's funeral, complete with a coffin and a funeral procession for the dearly departed who had been, according to her children, cruelly murdered by a set of ministerial tyrants in England and sniveling, greedy stamp distributors at home.¹⁵⁶

In the mock funerals and mock executions of 1765, the inhabitants of the British colonies used their shared deathways to express their dismay about new Parliamentary policies that they believed would prove fatal to North American liberty. As tensions with the mother country grew, colonists drew heavily upon the symbolism of grief and indignation that these familiar ceremonies provided, communicating not only their displeasure with Parliament's actions, but also the mortal threat that they posed to the colonists' way of life. At the same time, real mourning practices provided a promising avenue for reform, both in an economic and a moral sense. By boycotting British funeral goods and mourning accessories, those who joined the non-

¹⁵⁵ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 145, 153, 171. This chapter uses Withington's interpretation of mock death ceremonies and funeral boycotts as the foundation for its analysis of funeral customs and protest during the Imperial Crisis. While many of the conclusions are the same, this chapter builds on Withington's work by noticing the parallels between the treatment of mock stamp tax collectors and other officials and the punishments dealt out to the enslaved. In its discussion of funeral boycotts, this chapter also extends the parameters of Withington's work, which focuses primarily on New England, to look at the debate over funeral restrictions in the South.

¹⁵⁶ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 145-47. The use of "herself" to refer to Liberty comes from the fact that she was normally portrayed as a woman, making her by turns a goddess, a lover, a mother, and a woman in need of protection. See Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 181-83.

importation and non-consumption agreements that proliferated in the 1760s and early 1770s hoped not only to reduce expenditures on British products, but also to reject the growing addiction to luxury that endangered colonists' personal and political virtue. These mock ceremonies and boycotts proved powerful because real-life death rituals—their structure, meaning, and emotions—were familiar throughout the colonies and could be used to convey multiple layers of meaning to the widest possible audience. Most importantly, the colonists' appropriation of funereal culture during the colonial crisis brought political issues dramatically to the forefront, allowing men and women to visibly associate themselves with the colonists' resistance to Parliament. Ultimately, using mourning customs and funeral rituals helped to symbolically cast individual and collective devotion to liberty as a matter of life and death.

The Crisis Begins

In February of 1763, Great Britain emerged victorious from the Seven Years' War. Known in America as the French and Indian War, the conflict effectively ended the French threat on the colonies' borders and added vast swathes of new territory to Britain's overseas dominions. While the colonists congratulated themselves on their material and military contributions to the war effort, authorities in England faced unprecedented war debt, the daunting prospect of assimilating new acquisitions into the imperial structure, and a growing realization of the expensive financial obligations that came with administering and defending the nation's far-flung possessions. Parliament needed to find new sources of revenue while making existing sources more efficient and profitable. Given that the citizens of England were already paying extraordinarily high taxes, and that most of the war debt and ongoing expenses resulted from

British operations in America, it seemed only proper that the American colonists should bear their share of the burden, especially as they enjoyed a greater share of the benefits.¹⁵⁷

As the government had learned during the recent war, extracting financial support from the American provinces could prove frustrating. The relationship of Britain to her colonies had never been clearly defined or strictly enforced, and each colony seemed to have its own sense of its obligations to the empire.¹⁵⁸ This situation became startlingly clear when Britain attempted to requisition funds from the colonies to support the war effort. The colonial governments bickered with one another over the amounts they contributed, worried that they were giving more than their neighbors. Furthermore, smuggling was rife in the colonies, allowing many merchants and consumers to ignore the existing duties on trade, stymieing the government's efforts to regulate commerce. Even during the war, when trading with the enemy might fairly be called treason, merchants and smugglers continued doing business with the French possessions in the West Indies, much to their own personal profit. Even when Parliament imposed the Sugar Act in 1764, which itself aimed to tighten the imperial structure by reforming customs' laws and their enforcement, smuggling ran rampant, blunting the effectiveness of the act's provisions.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ Charles R. Ritcheson, "The Preparation of the Stamp Act," *William and Mary Quarterly* 10, no.4 (October 1953): 543-545; Beverly Orlove Held, "'To Instruct and Improve . . . To Entertain and Please': American Civic Protests and Pageants, 1765-1784," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1987), 7-8, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global; Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 21-22.

¹⁵⁸ Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 4-6.

¹⁵⁹ Ritcheson, "Preparation of the Stamp Act," 545; Shaw, *Rituals of Revolution*, 5. The Sugar Act placed import taxes on sugar, wine, coffee, and fabrics such as silk, calico, linen, and French lawn. The law walked a fine line between the distinction between duties which controlled trade and those meant specifically to raise revenue. While the American colonists believed that Parliament had every right to regulate their trade in order to protect Britain's economic interests, they objected to "direct taxation" to raise revenue because such taxes could only be imposed by the people's representatives. Though authorities in Britain argued that the colonies were "virtually represented" by the existing members of Parliament, who supposedly had the best interest of all of Britain's subjects in mind, they argued that, since they elected no actual members, they had no real representation in the body. Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 94-95, 159. For a summary of the Sugar Act and the colonial response, see Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 21-40.

The next attempt at Parliamentary taxation would garner a more explosive response. In early 1765, Prime Minister George Grenville proposed a new measure for raising revenue in the colonies: a stamp tax. The new law required that a variety of printed materials, including legal documents such as licenses, contracts, and ship clearances, as well as diplomas, newspapers, pamphlets, almanacs, and even playing cards and dice, be printed on officially “stamped” paper, for which the purchaser would pay a fee.¹⁶⁰ These taxes could not be disguised as trade regulation and promised to affect a far greater proportion of the populace than previous legislation. The Stamp Act, set to take effect on November 1, shocked and angered many colonists who now began to reevaluate their understanding of their place in the empire. While Anglo-Americans saw themselves as important trade partners and equal participants in the imperial project, it seemed that the British government was determined to render the colonies subordinate to the mother country, denying their inhabitants the most basic freedoms accorded to all Englishmen.¹⁶¹ Even while colonial polemicists took to writing pamphlets and newspaper editorials outlining the colonial position and encouraging wide-spread resistance, others who objected to the tax turned to more dramatic forms of protest. In doing so, they addressed, not only the political issues at stake, but also the moral, spiritual, and existential threats that submission to Parliament’s encroachments would entail.

¹⁶⁰ Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution: Painting, Music, Literature, and the Theatre in the Colonies and the United States from the Treaty of Paris to the Inauguration of George Washington, 1763-1789* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), 72; Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 96.

¹⁶¹ Shaw, *Rituals of Revolution*, 5-6; Silverman, *Cultural History*, 72-75; Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*, 201-4, 217-18.

Visions of Death: Mock Ceremonies

Colonial funereal culture provided the American colonists with a rich symbolic language and familiar ritual structures to act out their anger, frustration, and grief over Parliamentary actions that they considered unjust and unconstitutional. Though Prime Minister Grenville believed that the Stamp Act might prove more acceptable to the colonists if administered by local men instead of imported British officials, the presence of fellow Americans guilty of both cooperating with and profiting from the act only made the newly appointed “stampmen” prime targets for intimidation.¹⁶² Mock executions of the effigies of stamp distributors and their accomplices provided an effective way to communicate the people’s opinion of the nature of the offenders’ crimes, their assessment of their moral and spiritual characters, and the possible literal consequences of obstinately opposing the will of the people.

The mock executions that took place from Maine to Georgia all followed a similar pattern, which protesters based on actual execution rituals. Though most traditional executions began with a trial, mock executions usually dispensed with that formality, going straight to the hanging. In the rare instances in which a symbolic trial also took place, the purpose was to highlight the unnaturalness and severity of the stamp distributor’s crime—that of betraying his country in exchange for personal gain. Take, for example, the mock trial and execution of Connecticut’s stamp agent, Jared Ingersoll, held in Lebanon, Connecticut, on August 26. Ingersoll met his symbolic fate in towns throughout the colony, but Lebanon’s pageant was the most elaborate. According to the *New-London Gazette*, the citizens of Lebanon held a “special court for the trial of a certain criminal, late Agent for this colony.”¹⁶³ In a play on Britain’s

¹⁶² Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 158.

¹⁶³ *New-London (CT) Gazette*, August 27, 1765.

insistence of the validity of “virtual representation,” the stamp distributor “made his appearance at the bar of said court, in the person of his VIRTUAL representative, and was denied none of the just RIGHTS of Englishmen, being allowed the sacred privilege of a trial by his peers, &c.” After being fully convicted, he was “sentenced to be taken from the tribunal of justice, placed in a cart, with a halter about his neck, carried in procession thro’ the streets of the town, to expose him to just ignominy and contempt, and then to be drawn to the place of execution, and hanged by the neck ‘till dead, and afterwards to be committed to the flames, that if possible he might be purified by fire.”¹⁶⁴

If the sentence itself was not enough to give some sense of the terribleness of Ingersoll’s crime, the tableau that followed made the point more forcefully. Once in the cart, the devil, “the grand seducer of mankind,” stood on the prisoner’s right hand, “offering him a purse. On the other side stood “his injured country, represented as a lady dressed in sable, with chains rattling at her feet . . . pleading with her unnatural child.” When the imaginary Ingersoll refused his country’s cries, she pronounced a “prophetic and parental curse,” condemning him for his betrayal. With that, Ingersoll’s effigy followed the path of most of the others who met their destruction at the hands of an angry populace:

after hanging till he was dead, [he] was cut down and delivered into the power of his false friend and seducer, who, according to his usual practice, chang’d from a tempter to a tormentor, plunging his prisoner headlong into a huge pyramid of fire¹⁶⁵

In this instance, we can discern the central messages that protesters meant mock executions to convey. The chief crime that aroused such anger and violence (even if it was symbolic) was betrayal of sacred relationships, obligations, and principles. The stamp distributor, shown in

¹⁶⁴ *New-London Gazette*, August 27, 1765.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

other pageants as in league, not only with the devil, but also with corrupt British officials, had abandoned his country—the place and people who had given him life, protected and encouraged him, and bestowed him with honors. He had agreed to assist in the figurative enslavement of his fellow colonists and threatened the existence of liberty itself. His greed, shown by the presence of a bag of gold, was the great sin that served as the foundation for his crime.¹⁶⁶ His unscrupulous thirst for personal gain made him both morally and spiritually decrepit. He was, therefore, naturally bound for Hell, where all parricides, traitors, and minions of the Devil belonged.

In some places, the symbolic execution followed real execution rites so closely as to allow the condemned to make a dying speech, further clarifying the nature of the reprehensible deeds that had brought him to punishment. In Westmoreland County, Virginia, the last speech of George Mercer's effigy later appeared in a supplement to the *Maryland Gazette*:

For it is true, that with Parricidal Hands, I have endeavoured to fasten Chains of Slavery on this, my native Country, although like the tenderest and best of Mothers, she has long fostered and powerfully supported me. But it was the inordinate Love of Gold which led me astray, from Honour, Virtue, and Patriotism.

As I am now to suffer the Punishment so great an Offender deserves, I hope my Fate will Instruct Tyranny and Avarice, that VIRGINIA is determined to be FREE.¹⁶⁷

Thus, as with traditional executions, Mercer's "dying speech" confessed his crime, acknowledged the justice of his punishment, and warned others to heed his example.¹⁶⁸ In this

¹⁶⁶ The bag of gold was also meant to evoke the specter of Judas, the arch traitor, who, in the Biblical account of the Crucifixion, betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver.

¹⁶⁷ *Supplement to the Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), October 17, 1765.

¹⁶⁸ Seay, *Hanging Between Heaven and Earth*, 25-26; Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 29-30; 41-44; Daniel A. Cohen, *Pillars of Salt, Monuments of Grace: New England Crime Literature and the Origins of American Popular Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 22-26; Louis P. Masur, *Rites of Execution: Capital Punishment and the Transformation of American Culture, 1776-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 25, 31-39, 41-43.

case, instead of the irreligion, laziness, and disrespect for authority that normally underpinned most published tales of criminals' paths to the gallows, it was greed that corrupted and degraded the character of the stamp distributor, until he was devoid of all "honor, virtue, and patriotism." His fate, like executions for other crimes, was meant to serve as a particularly violent deterrent for others whose greed might tempt them to transgression.

Even though mock executions followed the structure of legitimate exercises of state power, the point here was to play havoc with the presumptions of the British Parliament to legitimate power in the American colonies. When towns held mock trials and then hanged their stampman's "virtual representative," they demonstrated the ridiculousness of the concept of virtual representation. It would be ludicrous to argue that protesters, by trying and punishing a stuffed doll meant to stand in for a stamp official, did damage to the real bodies of the stampmen themselves. The colonists, in fact, had no legal power to hang anyone for doing the duties of their office. By the same turn, those who staged mock executions believed that Parliament had no rightful power over the real lives and property of the colonists because they had the assent of "virtual representatives." As Ann Fairfax Withington has written, "colonists knew that the vertebrae of a virtual representative did not snap when the shoot of the gibbet was released, and they also knew that a virtual representative did not actually represent anybody."¹⁶⁹ The difference, however, was that if Parliament insisted on exercising real, illegitimate authority, the actual bodies and property of the stampmen were, as we shall see, available for real violence.

Those pageants that did not include mock trials conveyed a similar challenge to authority. In the very first mock execution in Boston, the effigy of the stamp distributor appeared somewhat magically on one of the great trees lining the route into the city, alongside a boot, alluding to the

¹⁶⁹ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 160.

Earl of Bute, with a green sole, representing George Grenville, “out of which proceeded the Devil.”¹⁷⁰ In addition to the shock value for audiences who woke to find grotesque figures of hanged men and devils swaying in the trees, the sudden appearance of executed effigies also conveyed a sense that the crimes being punished were so deplorable as to excite universal condemnation.¹⁷¹ In that sense, some might believe that it was indeed the power and disgust of the people that installed the effigies on trees and gallows for everyone to see. In fact, many symbolic executions occurred within sight of the courthouses where legislative bodies met and colonial courts assembled. While the location was certainly conspicuous, and may have even lent an official air to the protest, there can be no denial that colonists conducted mock executions outside of, and even in defiance of, local and imperial authorities.¹⁷² Thus, the real power of the people found expression against the legislative power of colonial assemblies and overarching British policies. The protesters’ message was clear: written fiats like the Stamp Act did not easily translate to realities when the people objected.

Of course, British ministers did not usually appear alongside colonial criminals on real execution days and neither did the Devil. This departure from traditional executions implied a concerted British conspiracy against liberty, in which the stamp master participated, and the unholy nature of the alliance, which could only the Devil himself could have inspired. In many ways, these added characters reflected traditions from Britain’s Guy Fawkes Day, or Pope’s Day in the colonies. Boston, in particular, became infamous for its violent nighttime battles between

¹⁷⁰ *Boston Evening Post*, August 19, 1765. Lord Bute was a Scottish peer who had served as both Prime Minister and tutor and closest advisor to George III. Though his time in office was over, some suspected that he had somehow been behind the Stamp Act. George Grenville, of course, was actually Prime Minister at the time of the act’s passage.

¹⁷¹ It also helped to obscure the identities of those behind the mock hanging. Generally, however, the names of those responsible, or at least strongly suspected, were an open secret that was known locally, even if they were not printed in newspapers or written in subsequent accounts.

¹⁷² Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 155-56.

the North and South End, where each motley band attempted to capture the opposing side's Pope effigy. Other figures who met the noose and the bonfire on Pope's Day included the Stuart Pretender and Lucifer's imps, all symbolizing Catholic conspiracies to ruin liberty both in England and in other Protestant countries.¹⁷³ Just as many colonists associated Catholicism in general with tyranny and even spiritual degeneration, so too did they see the Stamp Act as a tyrannical plot with serious moral and spiritual consequences.

It is after the hanging, however, that we see the most dramatic breaks with traditional execution rituals. The effigies that hanged from trees and makeshift gallows suffered indignities that real criminals usually did not. Colonial officials took pains to avoid conducting executions in a spirit of retribution. Though the condemned had committed a crime worthy of death, they often had opportunities to reconcile themselves with both God and the community. Once the executioner carried out the sentence, town authorities buried criminals swiftly, if simply, and did not expose their remains to postmortem punishments.¹⁷⁴ The audiences at American executions were generally not as raucous as their English counterparts; no matter what the crime had been, crowds did not rejoice at American executions.¹⁷⁵ But the same was not true at mock executions. To begin with, the effigies usually remained hanging all day, both so that large numbers would see them and to evoke the disgrace of a criminal corpse unfit for proper burial. The newspapers reporting the protests made this point clear. In Wyndham, Connecticut, Ingersoll's effigy hung

¹⁷³ Brendan McConville, "Pope's Day Revisited, 'Popular' Culture Reconsidered," *Explorations in Early American Culture* 4, (2000): 260, 268-71, 274-77; Shaw, *Rituals of Revolution*, 12, 15-18.

¹⁷⁴ Seay, *Hanging Between Heaven and Earth*, 28-29, 33-34; Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 157, 164, 168-70. There was, in fact, a panoply of post-mortem punishments available to authorities both in England and its American colonies. These could include drawing and quartering (the hallmark of traitors' executions), dismemberment, gibbeting, and dissection. Aggravated punishments took place more often in England than in the colonies, where criminal corpses were very rarely dissected, dismembered, or gibbeted. The standard exceptions to this trend included traitors, pirates, Native Americans, and slaves. See Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 70-80.

¹⁷⁵ Seay, *Hanging Between Heaven and Earth*, 19, 35; Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 11-13, 24-30.

“suspended between the heavens and the earth, (as an emblem of his being fit for neither).”¹⁷⁶ In Charleston, South Carolina, the back of the stamp distributor’s effigy held the following words: “Whoever shall dare attempt to pull down these effigies, had better been born with a mill stone about his neck, and cast into the sea.”¹⁷⁷ Clearly, these were extraordinary criminals for their executioners to leave their symbolic remains conspicuously exposed to ridicule for hours.

Once the protesters had taken down the effigies, they carted them through town in mock funeral processions, inflicting further insults before they finally launched the stuffed images onto bonfires. Real criminals did not receive funeral processions, though clergymen and public officials might solemnly conduct them to the place of execution.¹⁷⁸ The processions that accompanied mock executions, however, were jubilant affairs, celebrating not only the destruction of diabolical villains, but also the triumph of the cause of liberty over the machinations of tyranny. While the fate of real criminals was a solemn event, mock executions celebrated the symbolic elimination of an individual who, in serving as stamp master, threatened the liberties of the colonists.¹⁷⁹ To exacerbate the insult, crowds often mutilated the effigies as they journeyed to their last destination. In Boston, the mob executed the stamp master’s effigy twice; the protesters saw him hanged and then decapitated in front of the actual official’s house.¹⁸⁰ Other mobs tore effigies apart “and flung their Limbs with Indignation into the Air.”¹⁸¹ By tradition, dismemberment was particularly loathsome postmortem punishment, reserved for the most infamous of criminals, particularly traitors.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ *Newport (RI) Mercury*, September 9, 1765.

¹⁷⁷ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), October 31, 1765.

¹⁷⁸ Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 24; Seay, *Hanging Between Heaven and Earth*, 19, 25-26, 34, 36.

¹⁷⁹ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 157, 160-61, 164-65.

¹⁸⁰ Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 129.

¹⁸¹ *Boston Gazette*, November 4, 1765.

¹⁸² Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 81-83, 86. In Christian theology, the belief in bodily resurrection at the Rapture made it especially important that bodies be committed to burial completely whole. Though most believers would be hard-pressed to say the God did not have the power to reassemble and resurrect disarticulated bodies, the mechanics

Even after the procession, however, there remained one last punishment to suffer. While real criminals had the privilege of burial, the effigies of stamp distributors met their final indignity in the flames. As other scholars have pointed out, burning was punishment reserved for those who society must completely erase from existence—with no physical reminders left of their life or crimes. In Christian culture, burning was a punishment meted out to heretics who had offended both God and man.¹⁸³ In choosing to consign the remains of figurative stamp officers to bonfires, the protesting colonists forcefully underscored the messages conveyed by the rest of the execution tableau: betraying one's country, especially for personal gain, was a sin. Those who aided the spread of tyranny, be they colonial officials or British ministers, were in league with the Devil and their only suitable fate was an eternity in Hell.

As Ann Fairfax Withington has concluded, these departures from traditional execution rituals were ironic: communities did not typically leave real corpses to hang in the sun, sensible people did not rejoice at death, and burning was an outdated, brutal punishment reminiscent of Catholic superstition and tyranny.¹⁸⁴ In labeling these extreme measures as ironic, however, Withington has overlooked the fact that Americans considered dismemberment and immolation as very real, suitable punishments for one segment of the population: enslaved people.¹⁸⁵ The

of such a miracle were hard to imagine. Thus, most preferred to await the Rapture with their bodies complete, undisturbed, and in the presence of family and fellow believers.

¹⁸³ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 171; Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 70-71.

¹⁸⁴ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 157.

¹⁸⁵ Many scholars have detailed the brutality of punishments for slaves. For the purposes of this dissertation, see Betty Wood, "'Until He Shall Be Dead, Dead, Dead': The Judicial Treatment of Slaves in Eighteenth-Century Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 377-98; Paul H. Blackman and Vance McLaughlin, "Mass Legal Executions in America up to 1865," *Crime, History & Societies* 8, no. 2 (2004): 46-29; Erica Rose Hayden, "'Before the Poison Had Been Far Spread': An Examination of Punishments Dealt to Slave Rebels in Two 18th Century British Plantation Societies" (master's thesis, Vanderbilt University, 2009), 7-10, 13, 21-22, <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/11502/HaydenPoison.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; Philip J. Schwarz, *Twice Condemned: Slaves and the Criminal Laws of Virginia, 1705-1865* (Union, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 1998), 1-2, 5-9, 76-78; Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery, and Conspiracy in Eighteenth-Century Manhattan* (New York: Vintage, 2005), xii, 170-171, 174, 192; Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), 60-61, 73-74; Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 71-75.

rhetoric of slavery and freedom was central to colonial objections to Parliamentary encroachments and it would be hard not to associate symbolic burning and dismemberment with the fate of those accused of planning a slave revolt.¹⁸⁶ Anyone who witnessed such punishments retained visceral memories of the barbarity—gibbeted corpses, exposed and left to rot for years; heads, feet, hands, ears, and tongues on posts, meant to serve as a deterrent; the smell of burning flesh as conspirators burned. Though some historians have argued that American patriots were describing political slavery, as opposed to chattel slavery, when they warned of the colonists' impending enslavement, others have pointed out that the presence of actual slavery also informed their visions of what fate might be in store if the British should be successful.¹⁸⁷ At the very least, anyone who saw the mock executions and the treatment of effigies would have known that burning and dismemberment were punishments reserved for enslaved people—men and women who existed in society, but who whites believed to be below it; those whose intellects, moral propensities, and spiritual conditions supposedly made them, either by their nature or by historical circumstance, unfit for freedom and whose cunning, where it could be found, turned toward the diabolical.¹⁸⁸ These same qualities fit the patriot image of the stamp collector. As the newspaper account of George Mercer's mock execution concluded: "LOVE fixt it certain, that whatever Day, Makes a Man a Slave, takes his Worth away."¹⁸⁹ Here was the grand, fatal plot that merited hanging, dismemberment, and burning, if only in effigy. Freeborn Englishmen, as

¹⁸⁶ F. Nwabueze Okoye, "Chattel Slavery as the Nightmare of the American Revolutionaries," *William and Mary Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (January 1980): 3-28; David Waldstreicher, "Ancients, Moderns, and Africans: Phillis Wheatley and the Politics of Empire and Slavery in the American Revolution," *Journal of the Early Republic* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 701-10; Edmund S. Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox," *Journal of American History* 59, no. 1 (June 1972): 5-29; Peter A. Dorsey, "To 'Corroborate Our Own Claims': Public Positioning and the Slavery Metaphor in Revolutionary America," *American Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (September 2003): 353-86.

¹⁸⁷ Waldstreicher, "Ancients, Moderns, and Africans," 710; Okoye, "Chattel Slavery," 1-9, 12-16, 28; Dorsey, "To 'Corroborate Our Own Claims,'" 353-55, 358-61.

¹⁸⁸ Okoye, "Chattel Slavery," 7, 9, 17-18, 20-21; Morgan, "Slavery and Freedom," 9-10.

¹⁸⁹ Supplement to the *Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), October 17, 1765.

the colonists believed themselves to be, would not be slaves and would suffer no conspirators among them. They would treat the images of those who dared to betray them into slavery as they treated the actual slaves in their midst.

In addition to staging mock executions, those who opposed the Stamp Act also drew on colonial deathways to organize mock funerals, particularly as the fatal day when the act was set to go into effect, November 1, 1765, drew closer. As with the earlier execution pageants, mock funerals followed a set pattern based on real funeral ceremonies. In August, the *Boston Evening Post* published the first death notice, announcing that that “Lady N[or]th Am[er]ican Liberty had “died of a cruel *Stamp* on her Vitals” on February 7, 1765.”¹⁹⁰ According to the paper, her body was “embalm’d” pending her funeral on “the First Day of November, 1765 . . . where it is hoped all true Lovers of the deceased, and consequently of their Country, will attend, and it being an extraordinary Case, DEEP MOURNING will be allowed of.”¹⁹¹ Newport followed suit several weeks later, relating that “as the great wisdom of the Astronomers and Astrologers...some Months past, did predict the Exit of North American Liberty” at midnight on October 31, “some few of his friends went a few Days ago to wait upon the poor old gentleman.” They “found him indeed gasping his last, and now find him reduced to a Skeleton.” Accordingly, they “made proper Preparations for the venerable Gentleman’s Interment, which is to be performed on Friday the 1st of November next.”¹⁹² In both of these cases, newspapers printed Liberty’s death notice

¹⁹⁰ *Boston Evening Post*, August 19, 1765. In this instance, “Mrs. Bull” can be understood as Parliament and her husband, “John Bull,” who “was never forward in the Ruin of his Daughter, but was made to acquiesce, thro’ the tyrannical Disposition of his Wife, and the Mildness of his own natural Temper,” as the seemingly blameless King George III.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* The reference to the “extraordinary” allowance of deep mourning referred to the boycotts on mourning accessories that were already taking place in protest to Parliamentary taxation. These boycotts will be explored later in this chapter.

¹⁹² *Boston Gazette*, November 4, 1765.

and provided information for those who wished to attend the funeral in a manner similar to real death notices and funeral invitations that they often printed for eminent citizens.

Charleston, South Carolina, held Liberty's obsequies a little before November 1, carrying out the ceremony in conjunction with the mock execution of the colony's stamp distributor. On October 19, "the bells of St. Michael's rang muffled all day" as protesters staged their execution pageant, forming the usual procession with the executed effigies. This was both an execution and a funeral, however, as St. Michael's also rang a "most solemn knell for the burial of a coffin, on which was inscribed 'AMERICAN LIBERTY.'" The mourners laid Liberty to rest after burning the criminal effigies in the "back of the brick Barracks."¹⁹³ North Carolina followed on October 31. There, "a great Number of People...assembled, and produced an Effigy of LIBERTY, which they put into a Coffin, and marched in Solemn Procession with it to the Church-Yard, a Drum in Mourning beating before them, and the Town Bell, muffled, ringing a doleful Knell at the same time." Fortunately, they did not have to go through with the burial. Apparently, someone "thought it adviseable to feel its Pulse; and when finding some Remains of Life, they returned back to a Bonfire ready prepared, placed the Effigy before it in a large Two-armed Chair, and concluded the Evening with great Rejoicings."¹⁹⁴ Thus, Charlestonians acted out the funeral ceremony until the very end, when they found Liberty to be alive.

Other colonies saw several more elaborate liberty funerals in early November. In Newport, Rhode Island, November 1 dawned with a melancholy aspect as "multitudes" prepared to attend "the approaching funeral of their departed, beloved friend, LIBERTY!" Towards afternoon, the bells began to ring and "the funeral began to move at 12 o'clock" from the coffeehouse to the

¹⁹³ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), October 31, 1765.

¹⁹⁴ Continuation of the *North-Carolina Gazette* (Wilmington), November 20, 1765.

graveyard. The dismay was universal: “The concourse of mourners and spectators was prodigious, consisting of persons of all ranks, from the highest even down to the blacks, who seem’d from a sense of their masters sufferings, to join the mourning course.”¹⁹⁵ The funeral procession “was solemn; and with sullen tread, and heavy hearts, at length they arrived at the place of interment, where the mourners were about taking their last farewell of their old friend LIBERTY.” Amidst lamentations of the mourners, “a son of Liberty, emerging from the horrid gloom of despair, address’d himself thus:--Oh! Liberty! the darling of my soul!—glorious Liberty! admir’d, ador’d by all true Britons!—Liberty dead! it cannot be!” At this exclamation, “a groan was then heard as if coming from the coffin; and upon closer attention it prov’d to be a trance, for old Freedom was not dead—The goddess Britannia had order’d a guardian angel to snatch old Freedom from the jaws of frozen death . . . to remain invulnerable from the attacks of lawless tyranny and oppression.” The resurrection of Liberty caused all clouds of sadness to pass away and “the afternoon was spent in rejoicing, and bells ringing.”¹⁹⁶ Newport’s mock funeral was similar to Charleston’s in that Liberty miraculously revived before the mourners consigned her to the ground. The newspaper report on the funeral, however, emphasized the ability of “a son of Liberty” to awaken the departed with his lamentations.

Through these examples it is clear that, as with mock executions, American colonists used mock funerals for liberty to express their emotional reaction to the Stamp Act. Instead of symbolizing shock and anger, however, these funeral pageants expressed a deep sense of grief and urgency. In the tolling of mourning bells and the black-clad funeral processions, complete

¹⁹⁵ *Newport (RI) Mercury*, November 4, 1765. It is difficult to know what to make of this last expression. To modern readers, it seems highly doubtful that slaves sorrowed for their masters’ supposed troubles and highly ironic that a newspaper report would suggest as much. Either this account of universal mourning is exaggerated, or the slaves present thought it best to assume an air of commiseration and sorrow that they did not actually feel.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

with the beating of muffled drums, protesters employed common symbols of mourning to communicate the sorrow they felt at the deterioration of their imagined relationship with the mother country as well as the loss of what they believed were traditional freedoms granted to all Englishmen.¹⁹⁷ The situation was critical. Liberty was on the very verge of death—so far gone, in fact, as to appear dead. It was only the vigilance of mourners who detected the stirrings of life that saved the poor victim. The intended message of the ceremony was that, while the Stamp Act threatened the very existence of liberty in the colonies, it was not yet time to give up and give over to mourning. Without the efforts of true patriots, liberty would disappear forever.¹⁹⁸

In staging funerals for liberty, protesters engaged in yet more irony. The dead, once in their coffins, usually did not revive again. Funerals did not usually end in rejoicing for a loved one miraculously returned.¹⁹⁹ In resurrecting Liberty, the erstwhile mourners at mock funerals demonstrated their determination to keep liberty alive despite the dire threat posed by Parliamentary policies. In the scenes that they created, goodness and virtue triumphed over evil and greed. Liberty, though on the brink of destruction, was saved and made stronger by her subjects and devotees.²⁰⁰ Though the death notices had gone out, though the funeral trappings were in place, though the grave yawned before them, true patriots would not allow liberty to die. Mock funeral processions, then, allowed for a display of grief to express sorrow and displeasure at the route taken by Parliament, but also to bid defiance to all those who would threaten American liberty both at home and abroad.

¹⁹⁷ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 146-47.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.; Desirée Henderson, "Mourning America: Literature and the Politics of Death, 1765-1865" (PhD diss., University of California, San Diego, 2001), 34-36.

¹⁹⁹ Banner, *The Death Penalty*, 83-86; Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 157.

²⁰⁰ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 157.

In a broader sense, mock executions and mock funerals worked together in several ways to convey protesters' broader message and assist the American cause. Both ceremonies invited participation from all ages and ranks of society. Some accounts even reported children dancing around ad hoc gallows and singing the praises of liberty. As a participatory form of protest, mock ceremonies called together a tangible community of resistance to British encroachments.²⁰¹ Together, they mourned their troubles with the mother country, fretted over the fate of Liberty, and took vengeance on the traitors in their midst. They became the children, the friends, the lovers, and the defenders of liberty. They visibly, and often dramatically, associated themselves with the patriot cause. While the Sons of Liberty and their network became perhaps the most famous patriot group as the colonial crisis deepened, the title "son of liberty" referred to anyone with a passionate dedication to the preservation of traditional freedoms.²⁰² The appellation also served to exclude those with lukewarm feelings about the situation. As one death notice announced, only the "true Sons" of Liberty had a right to appear as mourners and, "if there is any Bastard kin," they were requested not to appear, lest their presence "sully" the memory of the deceased.²⁰³

The structure of real executions and funerals also dictated the sentiments and behavior of those who participated in mock death rituals. Protesters knew from experience that funerals and executions were supposed to be solemn events. They knew what behavior that social convention expected of mourners at funerals and of crowds at executions. They also knew, thanks to reprinted newspaper accounts that spread from colony to colony, the details of other protests. As each locale competed with its neighbors and those farther afield to show their creativity,

²⁰¹ Ibid., 146; Henderson, "Mourning America," 32, 35-36.

²⁰² Henderson, "Mourning America," 35-38, 41-45.

²⁰³ *Boston Gazette*, November 4, 1765.

cleverness, and, of course, their devotion to the cause, they still held fast to the set pattern, as the newspaper accounts proved that others had done. Deviation, especially towards more violent forms of protests, threatened to ruin the funereal metaphors that mock death rituals were supposed to convey.²⁰⁴ The point was to recognize the crimes of stamp distributors and those who rewarded their greed and treachery. It was to cast aspersions on the characters of those who would betray cherished ideas of British freedoms. It was to recognize that Liberty was on the brink of destruction and required heroic methods to revive. Most importantly, these protests had to appear be legitimate and law-abiding. The protesters, after all, insisted that they were acting to preserve their rightful liberties as granted by law and custom. To cross over into illegitimate violence (as defined according to their own sense of morality) was to lose the moral high ground and to be worthy of punishment.²⁰⁵

That is not to say that the threat of violence did not permeate both mock executions and mock funerals. As Ann Fairfax Withington has observed, “seeing an effigy of yourself dangling from the gallows might predispose you to acquiesce in the demands of the crowd that had engaged in this imaginative exercise.”²⁰⁶ So, too, would seeing one’s effigy shoved in a grave and buried. This happened to Maryland’s stamp collector, Zachariah Hood, when townspeople in Frederick staged a funeral for the Stamp Act, which had rightfully suffered “a mortal Wound by the Hands of Justice . . . to the great Joy of the Inhabitants of *Frederick* County.”²⁰⁷ Hood served as the sole mourner in the funeral procession and was so dismayed at the death of the “Dear Object of [his] warmest Wishes” along with all of his “Schemes for advancing [his] Fortune at the Expence of my Country” that he swooned, tumbled out of his carriage, and died.

²⁰⁴ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 151-55.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁰⁶ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 151.

²⁰⁷ *An Apparition of the Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), December 10, 1765.

The audience, overjoyed at the stamp master's demise, saw to it that "his Corpse was deposited in the Earth together with that of his beloved" Stamp Act.²⁰⁸ Certainly, no actual stamp agent loved the Stamp Act so much as to be willing to find themselves at the end of a noose, in a fire, or in the ground.

Sometimes, indeed, the threat of violence embodied in the symbolic protests devolved into actual violence. In Boston, Andrew Oliver, the subject of the city's mock execution pageant, also saw his newly constructed office, which was rumored to contain stamped paper, destroyed and the remains of the building carried to serve as fuel for that night's bonfire. Some members of the crowd also amused themselves with doing damage to Oliver's house.²⁰⁹ Less than two weeks later, Boston again erupted in violence when an angry mob went after Massachusetts's Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson. Though they had intended to confront Hutchinson himself, he and his family caught word of their approach and managed to flee their home just in time. Instead, the crowd spent their rage on the Lieutenant Governor's house, destroying all his furniture, paintings, and papers before levelling the house itself.²¹⁰

Even the most committed members of the resistance generally decried violence of this sort, however. Thereafter, the leaders of Stamp Act protests were careful to distance themselves from the earlier "riots." Even when significant property damage occurred, such as when the governor

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ *Boston Evening Post*, August 14, 1765; Baptist Minister Isaac Backus wrote in his diary entry for Sunday, August 18, 1765: "Mrs. Symonds of Boston came to meeting today and stayed with us tonight; who gave me an account of a strange tumult that was in Boston last Wednesday viz. Secretary Oliver having accepted the place of Stamp-officer to execute the late law which is imposed upon us from home which is very grievous to the people: they made an image of him and hanged it upon the great elm trees till near night: then took it down and dragged it before the lieut. governor's door, then to Mr. Oliver's door, and having met with some resistance they broke into the house and destroyed many household goods; and they took a building that was said to be built for the stamp-business and carried it up to Fort-hill and burnt it. Wild conduct!" Backus's reflection demonstrates that even those who recognized the Stamp Act to be "grievous to the people" were somewhat shocked by the violence that took place. See Isaac Backus, *The Diary of Isaac Backus*, ed. William G. McLoughlin, vol. 2, 1765-1785 (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1979), 603.

²¹⁰ Shaw, *Rituals of Revolution*, 34-35; Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 133.

of New York's carriage was decimated and burned, accounts of protests insisted that protesters had done remarkably little violence.²¹¹ Most commonly, those recounting events averred that the property of stamp distributors only received very "trifling damage" such as broken windows and trampled gardens. They were also careful to insist that nothing was ever stolen and that the actual persons of stampmen, crown officials, and their families were never harmed.²¹² The limits set on real violence, though of little comfort to the victims, nevertheless served to legitimize colonial protests as stopping just short of unlawful—or morally objectionable—activity.

Whatever may have been actual extent of the violence, the mock executions and funerals staged in response to the Stamp Act had their intended effect. By punishing symbolic representations of stamp distributors, the American colonists were able to separate the office from the man, showing their detestation for the one while allowing the other the potential to mend his ways. Thus, upon their resignations, communities reconciled with their former stamp masters and even celebrated them for their restored patriotism.²¹³ Consider again, for example, Massachusetts's Andrew Oliver. Just a few days after seeing his image hanged, beheaded, and burned, as well as having his property assaulted and destroyed, the *Boston Evening Post* conceded that he was indeed a "Gentleman (for so I must now call him, having the next Day honorably resign'd that invidious Employment)" and reported that "the Minds of the People were

²¹¹ *New York Mercury* (New York City), November 4, 1765: *An Apparition of the Maryland Gazette* (Annapolis), December 10, 1765.

²¹² *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), October 31, 1765; Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 152-54. The *South Carolina Gazette* assured its readers that, in the attack on George Saxby's house, "No outrages were committed during the whole procession, except the trifling damage done to Mr. Saxby's house, whose furniture, 'twas said, had been mostly removed into the country ten days before." The *Georgia Gazette* (Savannah) of November 7, 1765, insisted in its account of a mock execution that, "In all the exhibitions here of this kind, private as well as publick property has remained unmolested, and no outrages have been committed." The very first account of a mock execution in the *Boston Evening Post* of August 19, 1765, also noted that "no Violence had been offer'd to any Person and the utmost Decorum had been preserv'd" and that "it is remarkable, tho' they enter'd the lower Part of the House in Multitudes, yet the Damage done to it was not so great as might have been expected, and not one thing missing."

²¹³ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 175-82.

much satisfied.”²¹⁴ In South Carolina, the inhabitants of Charleston met the written and verbal resignations of the inspector and distributor of stamps with “the musick of bells, drums, hautboys, violins, huzza’s, firing of cannon, &c. &c.” and conducted the men to a local tavern, where everyone took their refreshment. In Charleston, the *South Carolina Gazette* insisted that the “small injuries” that locals inflicted on the home of George Saxby, a stamp inspector, were “not owing however to any personal dislike to Mr. Saxby, but their detestation of the office.” According to the paper, Saxby’s obliging resignation ensured that whatever damage had occurred would “be made good.”²¹⁵ Still, in these colonies and elsewhere, no one stepped up to fill the vacant offices and, even though Parliament did not immediately abolish the Stamp Act, nonenforcement made it a dead letter throughout the thirteen colonies.²¹⁶

A Parson in a Red Coat: Boycotts and Funerals

Even as the American colonists turned to mock funerals to protest the Stamp Act, actual funerals provided an avenue for both individual and collective reform as well as a means to exert economic pressure on Great Britain. As discussed in Chapter 1, colonial mourning customs incorporated a vast array of material goods that, while they varied in amount and luxury according to wealth and social status, were nevertheless important elements of a “decent” funeral. Artisans and manufacturers produced most of these items in Great Britain for purchase in the colonies and, because funerals occurred frequently, colonial merchants kept large stocks of

²¹⁴ *Boston Evening Post*, August 19, 1765.

²¹⁵ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), October 21, 1765.

²¹⁶ The only exception to the rule was Georgia, where a strong royal governor managed to see the Stamp Act actually put into effect. See Randall M. Miller, “The Stamp Act in Colonial Georgia,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (Fall 1972): 318-31. On the nonenforcement of the Stamp Act, see Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 165-85.

mourning goods on hand to meet the constant demand. As a result, mourning accessories and funeral trappings represented a significant part of the “empire of goods” which bound the colonies to Great Britain. In shaping their funeral rites to reflect their religious opinions, status, and personal sentiments, colonial subjects also expressed their attachment to Britain and its culture, claiming a political, as well as personal, identity.²¹⁷ As tension over Parliamentary policy grew, however, the colonists found it necessary to reevaluate their relationship to imported manufactures, which they began to believe intensified their dependence on Britain. Some turned to boycotts of British goods both to weaken that dependence and to demonstrate the colonies’ economic importance to Britain’s government and citizens.²¹⁸

New Englanders were the first to hit upon the idea of boycotting mourning goods, turning to a “new style” of pared-down funerals in protest of the Sugar Act in 1764. They then continued mourning restrictions in response to the Stamp Act.²¹⁹ Perhaps rightly, Ann Fairfax Withington has therefore recognized New England as the inspiration behind subsequent funeral restrictions in other regions. It is important to remember, however, that concern about expensive, luxurious funerals was not confined to New England.²²⁰ Nor was the extensive use of British mourning goods, which were incorporated into the funereal culture of all the British American colonies at all social levels. While New England may have given mourning prohibitions particular attention, and while the region may have been the first to boycott funeral goods in protest to government

²¹⁷ This observation, as well as the changing circumstances of colonists’ relationship with British goods, and how their shared experience as consumers allowed them to mobilize against Great Britain, is the subject of T.H. Breen’s *The Marketplace of Revolution*. For a pared-down version of his argument, see T.H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past & Present*, no. 119 (May 1988): 73-104.

²¹⁸ Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, 195-234.

²¹⁹ Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 94-95, 96-99.

²²⁰ This is where this study departs from and adds to Withington’s work. While many of Withington’s conclusions also apply in the southern states, her contention that funeral boycotts were particularly suitable sacrifices for New Englanders to make does not hold true.

policy, the complex issues involved in doing away with the material trappings of death were matters of serious concern throughout colonial society. It was, in fact, colonists' shared understanding of their funereal culture that made mourning boycotts such an effective way to show allegiance to the patriot cause.

Indeed, it is in South Carolina, not New England, that we see one of the most comprehensive discussions of the implications of boycotting mourning accessories. The debate played out in the pages of the *South-Carolina Gazette* in 1769. By this time, Parliament had repealed the Stamp Act (1766), confirmed its power to legislate for the colonies in the Declaratory Act (1766), and introduced a new scheme for taxing the colonists in the form of the Townshend Acts (1767).²²¹ In response, some Americans formed voluntary associations in which they publicly agreed to refrain from importing, buying, or using British consumer items in the hopes of exerting economic pressure on the mother country. Similar boycotts had also appeared during the Stamp Act and many were hopeful that they would again prove successful in forcing Parliament to abolish the offending legislation.²²² South Carolina was slower than other colonies in taking up the banner of nonimportation and nonconsumption, but, by early 1769, some of the colony's inhabitants had begun making political statements by foregoing imported British merchandise, particularly funeral and mourning goods.²²³

²²¹ The combination of public protest and scattered boycotts had been successful in forcing the British Parliament to repeal the Stamp Act in early 1766. At the same time, it passed the Declaratory Act, which asserted Parliament's right to pass binding legislation for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever." See Morgan and Morgan, *Stamp Act Crisis*, 287. The Townshend Acts of 1767 required new taxes on paint, lead, paper, glass, and tea, which, as they were designed to raise an revenue (and to make a point of the Declaratory Act) colonists also considered unconstitutional. See Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 99.

²²² Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, 235-43.

²²³ Robert M. Weir, "A Most Important Epocha:" *The Coming of the American Revolution in South Carolina*, Tricentennial Booklet 5 (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 32. E. Stanly Godbold, Jr., and Robert H. Woody, *Christopher Gadsden and the American Revolution* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 78; Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 211-17; *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), December 14, 1767.

In January 1769, Christopher Gadsden, a veteran advocate of nonimportation measures, suffered the loss of his wife, Mary. While Mary's death undoubtedly devastated Gadsden, he appeared at the funeral, not with the traditional black trappings of mourning, but in clothes made from blue homespun cloth.²²⁴ On February 2, the *Gazette* announced Mrs. Gadsden's death. In the same column appeared a proposed nonconsumption agreement that drew attention to Christopher Gadsden's deliberate political choice. In the fifth provision, the paper encouraged Charlestonians "totally to disuse all kinds of mourning (a recent instance whereof we had last Sunday morning, at the funeral of Mrs. Gadsden)." A month later, the editors of the *Gazette* made another comment on Mary Gadsden's funeral, highlighting her grieving husband's patriotic influence:

MANY of the Inhabitants of the North and Eastern Parts of this Province have this Winter cloathed themselves in their own Manufactures: many more would purchase them, if they could be got; and a great Reform is intended in the enormous Expence attending Funerals, for Mourning, &c. from the patriotic Example lately set by *Christopher Gadsden Esq*; when he buried one of the best of Wives and most excellent of Women. In short, the Generality of People now seem deeply impressed with the Idea of the Necessity and most heartily disposed, to use every Means, to promote INDUSTRY, OECONOMY and AMERICAN MANUFACTURES, and to keep as much Money amongst us as possible.²²⁵

That summer, the inhabitants of Charleston began their first real efforts toward producing a formal non-importation agreement. When the matter concluded in the early fall, mourning goods appeared on the list of prohibited items.

The final agreement on the particulars of the nonimportation association did not end the contention about the prohibition of mourning accessories. For some, choosing to disrupt familiar mourning customs was an inappropriate means of political expression. In September, William

²²⁴ Godbold and Woody, *Christopher Gadsden*, 81. Gadsden had also argued for and practiced non-importation to protest the Stamp Act. See Godbold and Woody, *Christopher Gadsden*, 61.

²²⁵ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), Thursday, March 2, 1769.

Wragg, a loyalist who had refused to sign the agreement, sent a letter to the editor of the *South Carolina Gazette* to argue that the public condemnation suffered by those who did not participate in the nonimportation movement amounted to encroachments upon personal liberties very similar to those that the so-called patriots were protesting. Taking specific exception to the restriction of mourning goods, Wragg wrote that traditional mourning customs displayed “[a] decent external Sorrow for the Death of Relations and Friends” that served to “[recall] the scattering, dissipating Thoughts to a serious Reflection.” Further, as South Carolinians were accustomed to public displays of sorrow at the death of loved ones, discontinuing the usual customs seemed as “awkward” as seeing a “Parson mounting the Pulpit in a red Coat.” To clarify his meaning, Wragg wrote that though “[the parson’s] Discourse might not be the less elegant, manly, argumentative, or forcible in its Application . . . the Novelty would surprise, and take off the proper Attention of his Audience, and fix it upon the Dress of the Preacher.”²²⁶ Wragg’s comments drew attention to the fact that enforcing the ban on mourning goods upset familiar customs that served to comfort to mourners and provided appropriate solemnity at funerals.²²⁷

²²⁶ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), Thursday, September 21, 1769.

²²⁷ Interestingly enough, the friends and family of William Wragg had very little opportunity to display a “decent external sorrow” for his death. In July of 1777, Wragg recorded his will, noting that he been “Compelled to leave the province of South Carolina for refusing to renounce my Allegiance & obedience to his Majesty King George the third.” Later that month, he boarded a ship bound for Amsterdam and drowned trying to save his son when the ship ran aground just off the Dutch coast. He is one of the few Americans commemorated in Westminster Abbey. His memorial “consists of a mourning woman leaning on a sarcophagus and on the front is a relief of the shipwreck, with the Dutch coast shown in the background. Two small figures are shown clinging to wreckage in the water. One was Wragg’s son and the other a slave boy who rescued him - both survived. The carved ornaments include dolphins and shells, with the infant Neptune on a sea-lion and the infant Bacchus on a lion.” His epitaph reads:

Sacred to the memory of William Wragg Esqr. of South Carolina who when the American Colonies revolted from Great Britain inflexibly maintain’d his loyalty to the person and government of his Sovereign and was therefore compell’d to leave his distress family and ample fortune. In his passage to England by the way of Amsterdam he was unfortunately shipwreck’d and drowned on the coast of Holland the 3rd day of September 1777. In him strong natural parts and the love of justice and humanity improved by education formed the valuable character of a good man and left those who have survived him to deplore the loss of a most tender husband, affectionate parent, kind master, and warm friend. His surviving afflicted sister in England caused this monument to be erected 1779.

Instead, funeral guests in homespun would forcibly remind others of sordid political matters when they should be meditating on eternity.

In November, the *Gazette* published Christopher Gadsden's answer to William Wragg's criticisms. Regarding mourning customs, Gadsden wrote that Wragg's insistence on a display of "decent *external* sorrow" would serve to "force the dead to lend a hand, and a very great hand too, to enslave the living." In a thinly-veiled appeal to the lower classes, he accused Wragg of forgetting "a very large body of fellow-subjects, who make no use at all of mourning, and have always been looked upon as *a very decent* people; the more so, *by many, in this particular*; because, by avoiding '*external sorrow*' they escape, together with it, the often too just suspicion of dissimulation and hypocrisy." He also suggested that the elaborate funerals of the wealthy served only to set a ruinous example for those of lesser means. Paraphrasing a verse from 1 Corinthians, he wrote that "the rich good-natured man, ought to say with regard to mourning---if mourning make my poorer brother to offend, when in a weak and delicate situation; against his family, his creditors, himself, and above all, against his country, I will never wear mourning as long as the world standeth, however 'awkward' I may appear, lest I make my brother to offend."²²⁸ Others apparently thought along the same lines, for the nonimportation association promoted by the Continental Congress in 1774 once again restricted the use of mourning goods to "a black crape or ribbon on the arm or hat for Gentlemen and a black ribbon and necklace for

See William Wragg, Last Will and Testament, July 9, 1777, Record of Wills, Charleston County, vol. 19, 3, Charleston Public Library, Charleston, SC, and Chapter Office, "History: William Wragg," Westminster Abbey, accessed March 1, 2011, <http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/people/william-wragg>.

²²⁸ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), Thursday, October 26, 1769. It should be noted that, while the newspaper debate between Gadsden and Wragg touched upon subjects that were particularly contentious among colonists, the two were also political rivals with a history of opposition to one another. The hostility between them may have contributed to the passionate way that they took up the dispute over non-importation. For the beginning of the rivalry between Wragg and Gadsden, see Godbold and Woody, *Christopher Gadsden*, 35-43.

Ladies.”²²⁹ This prohibition, and the alterations that resulted in colonial mourning culture, remained in place for the remainder of the American Revolution.

The debate in South Carolina surrounding mourning prohibitions is worth examining in detail because it articulates many of the issues involved in including funeral customs among those that patriot leaders proscribed in nonimportation and nonconsumption agreements. As William Wragg observed, choosing to forego traditional mourning dress and other funeral items represented a significant disruption to familiar death rituals. But the very reason that the boycotters chose to eschew funeral goods was because of those disruptions. Because colonists shared an understanding of funereal culture and its meanings, they also understood the meaning and potential of giving them up. In essence, while boycotts of funereal paraphernalia entailed potential religious, social, and emotional sacrifice, they also promised the development of a new, more authentic, virtuous, and even patriotic way of conducting obsequies that reflected a laudable dedication to the colonial cause.

The main objection that William Wragg had to boycotts of funeral attire was that the novelty of seeing mourners in homespun would draw attention away from the true purpose of funeral ceremonies, which was to pay respect to the deceased and to promote a solemn frame of mind from which to contemplate the meaning of loss and one’s own mortality. While Wragg’s metaphor of the parson in a red coat seems to place much of his opposition on the religious aspect of mourning rituals, Christopher Gadsden’s answer pointed out that displaying “a decent external sorrow” through wearing imported mourning attire was more a matter of social class than of real piety, respect, and affection. Gadsden argued that those of the lower classes who

²²⁹*South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), Tuesday, May 30, 1771; Continental Congress, *Extracts from the votes and proceedings of the American Continental Congress, held at Philadelphia on the 5th of September 1774, containing an Association, an address to the people of Great-Britain, and a memorial to the inhabitants of the British American colonies* (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, 1774), 5-6.

“made no use at all of mourning” still managed to achieve a proper frame of mind at funerals, both in regard to religious matters and private sentiments. In fact, he went so far as to imply that those who chose to forego the trappings of mourning might have been better Christians and more sincere loved ones than those who made a great show of their loss. Simplified mourning, then, comported very well with religious principle.

Of course, doing away with extravagant, expensive funerals represented a social sacrifice, as friends and family usually advertised both their own status and that of the deceased by the quantity and quality of mourning accessories they employed during the ceremony and afterward. Boycotts represented a new way of expressing social status, however. Gadsden’s admiration for the “*very decent people*” who managed to do without extravagant mourning was not an indication of any bent toward social levelling. Indeed, he went on to write that “the rich good-natured man” had an obligation, nearly religious in character, to set an example for those lower on the social scale. According to Gadsden, the habit of mimicking the obsequies of the rich had led more than one family into ruin. His observation was a common one that concerned authorities had repeated over decades throughout the colonies. As early as 1724, for example, authorities in Massachusetts passed “An Act to Retrench the extraordinary Expence at Funerals” which prohibited giving mourning scarves at funerals. They justified the measure by the pointing out that “the giving of Scarves at Funerals is a great and unnecessary Expence, and while in Practice was to the Detriment of the Province, and the Impoverishing of many Families.”²³⁰ Massachusetts would return to restrictions on extravagant funerals again in 1741, when

²³⁰ *Acts and Laws of His Majesty’s Province of the Massachusetts-Bay in New-England* (Boston: L. Green, 1726), 309.

lawmakers added gloves (except to the minister and pall bearers), wine, rum, and rings to the list of banned items.²³¹

That did not mean, however, that mourning boycotts were only the concern of the rich. Part of the beauty of giving up funeral accessories was that even those among the middling and lower orders could also participate in the protest.²³² In fact, those who organized nonimportation agreements had to take the concerns of all ranks into account if the movement was to be successful. Merchants, for example, bore much of the economic burden of funeral boycotts, as they kept large stocks of mourning goods on hand that would remain unsold. The very sacrifice they made, however, won them membership and recognition in the community of patriots. In the same way, those of the lower orders gave up whatever social benefit that the purchase of mourning goods might have given them in order to participate with others in defending American liberties.²³³

Funeral boycotts also involved a significant amount of emotional sacrifice. Providing a “decent” funeral for a friend or loved one was not simply a matter of maintaining or aspiring to social status. It also involved expressing feelings of affection and respect in what was the last obligation owed to the beloved dead. In addition, observing periods of mourning, complete with all of the sartorial signs of grief, publicly communicated sentiments of love and loss to the wider

²³¹ *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston: Wright A. Potter, 1874), 10:1086. Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, 213-16.

²³² Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, 105. Boycotts of mourning goods also presented a unique opportunity for women to show their patriotism. As women were traditionally responsible for the care of the dead and for the observance of prolonged mourning periods, their refusal of the material trappings of mourning would have been most noticeable. For women’s role in deathways, see Briony D. Zlmoke, “Death Became Them: The Defeminization of the American Death Culture,” (PhD. diss., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2013), 1-19, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/historydiss/60>; Stabile, *Memory’s Daughters*, 15, 178-225.

²³³ Despite Gadsden’s assertion that colonists of the lower classes did not use mourning accessories, some did, in fact, participate in the material aspects of funeral customs in a more limited degree. They might dye old clothes black, buy less expensive mourning trinkets, or even have old jewelry refitted to serve as mourning jewelry. Visibly foregoing these expressions of grief, even though the economic impact was negligible, still allowed men and women of the lower classes to identify themselves with the nonimportation and nonconsumption movements.

community. In some instances, mourning accessories also signaled retirement from public life, visibly requesting that others make allowances of time and space for those who grieved. At the most personal level, mourning goods kept reminders of friends and family close after their deaths. Refusing to wear mourning, distribute funeral gifts, or commission personal tokens denied those who participated in colonial associations whatever emotional comfort the material expressions of grief might have offered.

In 1774, when the First Continental Congress considered the provisions of a general nonimportation and nonconsumption agreement, elaborate mourning materials made the list alongside prohibitions on popular amusements, the slave trade, and luxuries like fancy carriages, wine, and tea.²³⁴ In part, this was because of the very nature of the sacrifice itself. While funeral goods were certainly part of the consumer experience that T.H. Breen identified as uniting the colonies in their resistance to Britain, giving up the material elements of traditional mourning customs involved more than simply foregoing the pleasures of the marketplace.²³⁵ It involved, as we have seen, religious, social, and emotional sacrifices at a time when men and women were at their most sensitive. Because the inhabitants of the colonies shared their mourning culture, they understood the nature of the sacrifices being made and could commiserate with one another in their selfless patriotism. As Gadsden asserted, to insist on extravagant funerals was to ask someone to “offend, when in a weak and delicate situation; against his family, his creditors, himself, and above all, against his country.”²³⁶

During the colonial crisis, it was this last offense that proved to be the most serious. Prohibitions on mourning goods brought political issues to the forefront of colonial funereal

²³⁴ For the full list of prohibited items, see Continental Congress, *Extracts from the votes and proceedings of the American Continental Congress, held at Philadelphia on the 5th of September 1774*, 5-6.

²³⁵ Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, xv-xvi.

²³⁶ *South Carolina Gazette* (Charleston), October 26, 1769.

culture, allowing colonists to transfer the feelings and energy that they had devoted to planning funerals and observing mourning periods to the colonial cause. In addition to fostering both a public and an emotional commitment, sacrificing mourning goods also demonstrated political virtues that were important to the ideal character of the patriot. The problem of luxury was one that had bedeviled political theorists for generations. According to accepted Whig philosophy, it was luxury that led to the dissipation that undermined the political virtue of the Greeks and Romans, causing their republics to fail. Indeed, the writer of the letter to the *Independent Reflector* concerning extravagant funerals wrote that it was “the Dangers flowing from Luxury” that had doomed both “the leading Men of *Athens*” and the “Splendor and Prowess of antient Rome,” leaving both vulnerable to conquest.²³⁷ In general, the colonial boycotts were designed to both foster and demonstrate a spirit of patriotic virtue and self-sacrifice that would, in turn, assure the health of government and liberty in America. The colonists also differentiated themselves from the citizens of Great Britain. In theory, the monarchical structure relied on hierarchy and dependence, where the surest defense against the destructive tendencies of the masses was the authority of the ruler. The crown, in turn, buttressed its power with a web of social institutions and patronage networks. The ideal polity, however, survived with the support of morally resilient, independent citizens who put the public good before their own desires. These genuine patriots scorned the luxurious lifestyle that led to the corruption of individual and civic virtue, preferring instead to maintain a stalwart independence that served as the fundamental support of a truly free society.²³⁸ By disrupting their traditional mourning customs

²³⁷ *The Independent Reflector* (New York City), June 14, 1753.

²³⁸ Gordon S. Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, Modern Library ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 93-94. For more in-depth discussions of the republican ideology behind the American Revolution, see also Wood’s *The Creation of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), especially pages 50-75, and *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 95-213.

on behalf of the political liberty of the colonies, those who participated in nonimportation and nonconsumption agreements proved through their sacrifice that they were worthy of that liberty and able to defend it.²³⁹

It did not hurt that funerals were highly public affairs in which any deviation from traditional customs would be noticed. For those who did not see mourners in homespun for themselves, the newspapers made sure to publicize the new fashion of funerals that occurred in their communities and elsewhere. From the early example of the funeral of one Reverend Mr. Callender in Boston, when “a long Train of Relations followed the Corpse . . . without any sort of Mourning at all,” to Christopher Gadsden who wore blue when he accompanied his wife to the grave, those who refused to buy mourning goods garnered public notice for themselves and the colonial cause.²⁴⁰ It was not that, as Wragg contended, the refusal of mourning paraphernalia focused attention on politics to the detriment of religion and sentiment. Funeral goers were, after all, able to wear less extravagant mourning tokens such as black armbands and jewelry. Instead, simplified mourning broadcasted that the preservation of liberty was at least as important as love and faith. Indeed, as some writers suggested, questions of virtuous simplicity were as entwined

²³⁹ According to T.H. Breen, the colonists who chose to curtail their spending on imported goods located the source of civic virtue, not in Classical Republicanism’s rejection of commerce and luxury, but in the “virtuous [consumer’s]” ability to “forgo private pleasures in order to advance the public welfare.” See Breen, *Marketplace of Revolution*, 210. Whether those planning funerals chose simplicity for the sake of eschewing corrupting luxury or to exercise their power as consumers, the ultimate result was an emphasis on self-sacrifice as a fundamental patriotic value.

²⁴⁰ *Boston Evening-Post*, October 29, 1764; Godbold and Woody, *Christopher Gadsden*, 81. The account of Rev. Callender’s funeral was as follows:

The Town had the Satisfaction of seeing in this Instance, a Funeral conducted conformable to an Agreement lately entered into, by a great Number of the most respectable of its Inhabitants.—A long Train of Relations followed the Corpse (which was deposited in a plain Coffin) without any sort of Mourning at all:—Mr. Andrew Hall, the chief Mourner, appeared in his usual Habit, with a Crape round his Arm; and his Wife, who was Sister and nearest Relation to the Deceased, with no other Token of Mourning than a black Bonnet, Gloves, Ribbons, and Handkerchief.—The Funeral was attended by a large Procession of Merchants and Gentlemen of Figure, as a Testimony of their Approbation of this Piece of [economy], and as a Mark of their Esteem for a Family who have shown Virtue enough to break a Custom too long established, and which has proved ruinous to many Families in this Community.

with piety and sincerity as they were with political principle. Concerns over social status were also answered in the attention given to funerals in the new style. By planning and attending simplified funerals, elites demonstrated and affirmed the qualities that supported their claim to status and leadership. For their part, those lower on the social scale could claim that their own personal and public virtue was at least as great as those who had formerly staged grand, expensive funerals. Though their sacrifice, they could assert their membership among the sons and daughters of liberty.²⁴¹

Conclusion: Towards an American Identity

In the years after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, the inhabitants of the British North American colonies celebrated their ties to Great Britain. After having fought for the crown, most believed that their loyalty and contributions entitled them to enjoy the benefits of the imperial relationship, including participation in an expanding consumer marketplace and political liberties that they cherished as the best and most precious freedoms in the world. From the perspective of British authorities, however, the American colonists still needed to bear their share of the burdens of commerce and expansion. More importantly, they needed to recognize the primacy of Parliament's authority over the entire empire, regardless of the pretensions of

²⁴¹ It should be noted here that, in general, there was no public sanction against those who did choose to wear full mourning to funerals. See Withington, *A More Perfect Union*, 123. One exception can be seen in a short notice in the *Boston Gazette* of February 19, 1770, which reads:

It is reported that a *certain Gentleman* will not attend the funeral of a worthy Sister, lately deceased; and the Reason he does not, ('tis said) is because he would not choose to attend it but in full Mourning; and to do that, he thinks would give Umbrage to *the People*.—We have authority to assure *the Gentleman* that it is at his own Option to attend the funeral in Mourning, or out of Mourning, or just as he pleases, without even the least notice from *the People*, they have long since (upon the most solid grounds) considered him as one who has detach'd himself from the Welfare of the Country that gave him Birth, and that has given him Bread, and therefore a *prudence* of this sort *now* will at best, appear but an ill-timed *affectation* of Conformity to a wise and good Regulation, a principle virtue of which, is its being *voluntary*.

colonial assemblies. As British ministers began to tax the colonies and provide for the efficient collection of those taxes and other duties, Americans began to reconsider their place within the empire. They began to realize that, far from standing as equal partners in the imperial project, Britain would require its colonies to submit to capricious officials and to sacrifice liberties that all Englishmen were supposed to enjoy.

In response, the inhabitants of the colonies mounted protests against the encroachments of Parliamentary policy. In mock executions of stamp distributors and mock funerals for Liberty, protesters turned to their shared understanding of execution and mourning rituals to express their grief and anger at the prospective loss of their liberties. At the same time, they identified themselves as part of a community devoted to liberty and its defense. Colonists' use of morbid imagery, with the occasional outbreak of actual violence, succeeded in intimidating colonial officials into resigning their offices and refusing to enforce government policy, ultimately resulting in the repeal of the Stamp Act. Later, when British ministers tried to impose new taxes on the colonies, economic protest in the form of nonimportation and nonconsumption agreements put pressure on authorities to again repeal the disagreeable legislation. The boycott of funeral and mourning goods, in particular, focused attention on political issues in a very public, emotionally fraught manner. Because the colonists shared common deathways, they understood the sacrifices involved in foregoing traditional mourning customs, allowing them to express their own dedication to the colonial cause and to assess the commitment of others.

Though dramatic protests and boycotts were originally meant to restore "the rights of Englishmen" to the American colonists, some began to suspect that the Americans might have been in fact more dedicated and more deserving of liberty than their British brethren. When crowds hanged and burned the effigies of stamp masters for their treachery and greed, they

understood that officials in Britain were guilty of the same crime—a slavish obsession with self-interest that amounted to moral and spiritual degradation. They did not belong among liberty’s adoring acolytes. Patriots then demonstrated their virtue by denying themselves the luxuries that went along with dependence on Great Britain. Though protesters designed the mock ceremonies and boycotts, in part, to appeal to the British citizenry, it seemed as though it had already been corrupted by luxury and dissipation, leaving the colonists alone to rescue liberty and virtue from mortal danger.

Even though Parliament repealed the Townshend Acts in 1770, the erosion of the relationship between Britain and its colonies continued. With the Tea Act, the Boston Tea Party, and the institution of the Coercive Acts, the situation became steadily more dangerous until, finally, the price of defending liberty became life itself. With the spilling of blood, Americans again turned to their shared understanding of deathways to give vent to their despair and anger in the face of the violent collapse of the filial ties that bound them to the mother country. Eventually, as protests and confrontations evolved into armed conflict, revolutionaries had to decide how to deal with the deaths of those who fell in service to a country that barely existed and reconcile their ideals with the realities of war.

Chapter 3: Sacred to the Memory: Military Funeral Customs in the American Revolution

No scene can exceed in grandeur and solemnity a military funeral.

-Dr. James Thacher, Military Journal

On the evening of May 9, 1780, Brigadier General Enoch Poor met his end, a victim of the “putrid fever” that was then visiting the Continental camp in New Jersey. On the next afternoon, an elaborate funeral procession accompanied Poor’s body to its final resting place. The company included Poor’s regiment of light infantry, in full uniform with feathers of black and red in their caps; Major “Light-Horse Harry” Lee’s regiment of light horse, also in full uniform; and General Edward Hand’s Brigade, carrying their arms reversed.²⁴² Two chaplains, the Rev. Mr. Israel Evans and his colleague, Enos Hitchcock, also walked in the procession. The most affecting sight that afternoon was the centerpiece of the funeral cortege: General Poor’s riderless horse, led by a servant, with the general’s “boots and spurs suspended from the saddle,” followed by the coffin, built of elegant mahogany and covered with a jet-black pall, topped by Poor’s swords and pistols, crossed and tied with black crepe. No less than ten officers accompanied the coffin, with four sergeants serving to shoulder its weight and six general officers serving as pall bearers. After the coffin came the officers of the light infantry, marching in the place of the general’s chief mourners. At the end of the procession came more general officers, including, most notably, “his Excellency General Washington,” paying his final respects

²⁴² Carrying arms reversed means carrying the weapon under the left arm, with the butt of the rifle at the left shoulder and the muzzle pointing down, with the right arm passing behind the small of the back, allowing the right hand to grasp the gun behind the back. While this position is not taught in either the British Army’s *New Manual of Arms* (used by the Continental Army until 1778) or Baron von Steuben’s *Regulations*, it is nevertheless included in most descriptions of military funerals. See Robert K. Wright, Jr. *The Continental Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2006), 141-142; *The New Manual Exercise [. . .] As Ordered By His Majesty, 1764* (Newcastle: Thomas Slack, 1767); Frederick von Steuben, *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States. Part I* (Philadelphia: Styner and Cist, 1779). James Thacher, *A Military Journal During the Revolutionary War From 1775 to 1783*[...] (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1823), 253.

to his comrade and friend. A military band completed the mournful scene, playing a “funeral dirge” on their fifes and drums, with the drums “muffled by black crepe” to deaden the sound from their usual martial tap. At the graveside, “the troops opened to the right and left, resting on their reversed arms.” The procession then passed to the grave, where the Reverend Mr. Edwards delivered a short eulogy. Dr. James Thatcher admired the melancholy splendor of the “weapons of war reversed, and embellished with badges of mourning, the slow and regular step of the procession, the mournful sound of the unbraced drums and deep toned instruments, playing the melancholy dirge, [and] the majestic mien and solemn march of the war horse.” These, he concluded, “all conspire to impress the mind with emotions which no language can describe, and which nothing but the reality can paint the liveliest imagination.”²⁴³

While General Poor’s funeral was undoubtedly impressive, most military burials were humble at best—sometimes even indecent. During the American Revolution, the exigencies of war required Americans, particularly soldiers, to adapt their funeral rituals to accommodate the realities of death in camp and on the battlefield. War disrupted most of the religious, social, and personal dimensions of traditional funereal culture, leaving soldiers to construct new meanings for funeral rites that, in former times, they might have considered unacceptable. While distinctions of rank were the most obvious factor to determine the form and content of military funerals, the “decent burials” of both officers and private soldiers became subordinate to the larger priority of preserving the Continental army and winning the War for Independence. With the encouragement of the public, the clergy, and their fellow soldiers, some of those who fought in the Revolution began to believe that, in addition to the thanks of their countrymen, they would have the grateful memory of posterity and, indeed, the very existence of the nation itself to serve

²⁴³ Thatcher, *A Military Journal*, 253.

as their monuments. Continental soldiers, then, gave not only their lives, but also their deaths, for their country.

The Honors of War

Just as in civilian life, the status of the deceased played an important part in shaping military funeral rituals. Congress, Continental officers, and even some private soldiers widely believed that civilian social status, which was divided between “those who were gentlemen . . . and those who were not,” should naturally support the military hierarchy, with private soldiers showing deference to, and following the orders of, their gentlemen officers. Gentlemen, with their refined feelings, superior educations, and supposedly innate leadership abilities, brought their invaluable talents to the officer corps which, in turn, inspired their men to follow them and brought honor and success to the entire army.²⁴⁴ In Britain, the officer class consisted mainly of aristocrats and their protégées, along with those who were wealthy enough to be able to purchase a commission from the government. As only nobles could hold the highest military rank, the British literally embodied social rank in their officer corps.²⁴⁵ The material trappings of rank, including elaborate military funerals, reflected the history of Britain’s aristocracy and its strict social hierarchy.

Though social status was undoubtedly important in the colonies, the social structure of the mother country did not translate perfectly to the New World. America had no formalized aristocracy to speak of, and the gentry often felt the tenuousness of their position, which relied

²⁴⁴ Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 3, xv, 21.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 28-29; Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army & American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 86.

more on wealth and behavior than on long-established lineages.²⁴⁶ Still, the Continental Army attempted to follow the British example, insisting that only “Gentlemen of Character & Liberal sentiments” become officers.²⁴⁷ If they had not been gentlemen in civilian life, then the army had to treat them like, and hopefully make them into, gentlemen upon receiving their commissions.²⁴⁸ This was important, not only to render the Continental Army respectable in the eyes of its opponents and the public, but also to give credence to the military hierarchy itself, which formed the cornerstone of military discipline and success.²⁴⁹ According to Washington, if the men saw their officers as equals, they would “regard him as no more than a broomstick . . . no order, nor no discipline can prevail.”²⁵⁰ Officers had to gain the confidence to uphold their rank and soldiers had to readily recognize the superiority of those above them. If the soldiers would not follow their officers, the army would be ineffective and might ultimately lose the war.

There was more involved in convincing the soldiers that their officers were gentlemen than simply declaring them so. In addition to “good pay” to “induce Gentlemen, and Men of Character to engage” in the service as officers, everyday distinctions between officers and their men recognized the value of officers, who had supposedly given up lives of ease, domestic happiness, and the pursuit of business interests to offer their services to the American cause.²⁵¹ These distinctions also served to constantly remind the entire army of the importance of “due subordination” to the military hierarchy.²⁵² Visual demonstrations of military hierarchy were particularly important in the Continental Army because the very principles for which the men

²⁴⁶ Cox, *Proper Sense of Honor*, 23, 25; Royster, *Revolutionary People at War*, 86-87.

²⁴⁷ From George Washington to John Hancock, 25 September 1776, *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-06-02-0305>.

²⁴⁸ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 25, 34, 40-41.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 3, 21-23; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 86-96.

²⁵⁰ From George Washington to John Hancock, 25 September 1776, *Founders Online*.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*; Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 45-46.

²⁵² *Ibid.*; 21, 41, 47-71.

fought—those of liberty and inalienable rights—often conflicted with the habits of deference and obedience that were necessary to maintain military discipline.²⁵³ In addition to privileges in life—such as better clothing, food, and quarters—the army also enforced officers’ status in the way that their fellow soldiers laid them to rest.

Ideally, Continental military funerals, like those of British and European armies, emphasized the rank of the deceased in the various honors accorded at death. In his *Military Guide for Young Officers*, the British military author Thomas Simes gave detailed instructions for conducting funerals and outlined the “honors of war” due to officers and soldiers of each rank, “from the Field-Marshal’s to a common Soldier’s.”²⁵⁴ At each grade, he specified which soldiers and officers should attend the deceased to burial, how many volleys to fire at the graveside, and what sort of arms to use for the salute. Thus, a general’s funeral procession consisted of four battalions, six squadrons, and eleven pieces of cannon to fire the final salute. A captain, however, only had his own company “or seventy rank and file,” with only three volleys of small arms fire. “A Corporal, musician, private man, drummer, or fifer” merited “one Serjeant and thirteen rank and file, with three rounds of small arms.” In an echo of civilian funerals, the pall bearers were to be peers of the deceased: “The [pall] should be supported by Officers of the same rank with that of the deceased; if that number cannot be had, Officers next in seniority are to supply their place.” Non-commissioned officers and soldiers, of course, had fellow NCOs and privates to bear their palls. Finally, soldiers were to wear no mourning, even at the funerals of family members. They were to “wear their regimentals and only have a piece of black crepe

²⁵³ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, xii, xvii-xix, 40, 165; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 38-39.

²⁵⁴ Thomas Simes, *The Military Guide for Young Officers* (Philadelphia: J. Humphreys, R. Bell, and R. Aitken, 1776), 1:358. Caroline Cox writes that Simes’s manual gave instructions for officers’ funerals, “but they provided no rules for how the bodies of soldiers were to be buried.” However, Simes clearly includes directions for private soldiers alongside those of a corporal or a musician. See Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 179; Simes, *Military Guide*, 359.

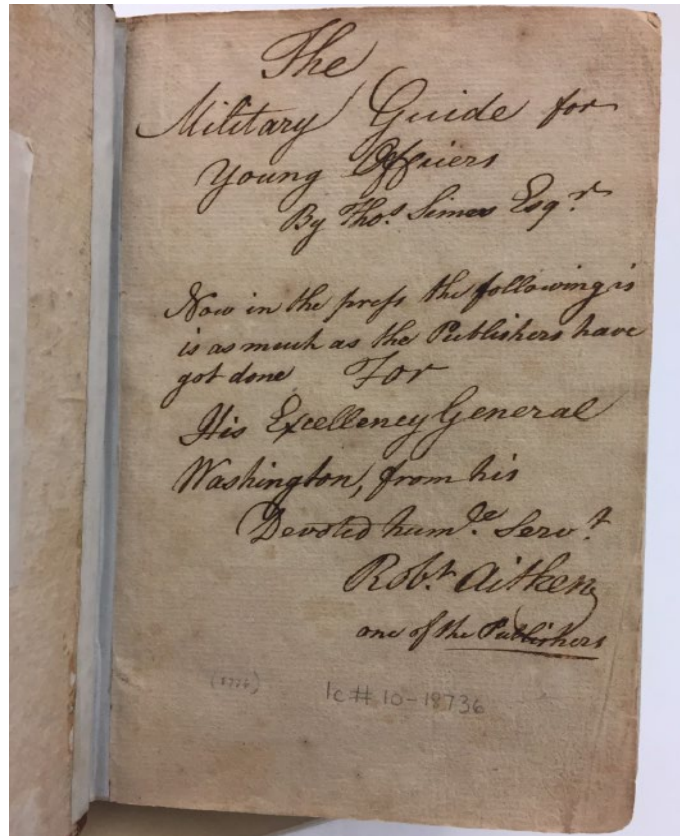


Figure 2. The inscription on George Washington's personal copy of Thomas Simes's *The Military Guide for Young Officers*. Courtesy Loyola Marymount University Special Collections.

around their left arms.” Army musicians were to play music suited to the occasion, with “the drums being muffled, beating the dead march, and fifers playing a solemn tune.”²⁵⁵ First printed in England in 1772, then in Philadelphia in 1776, Simes's work was popular with American officers. Baron Fredrich von Steuben listed it as one of the two most popular military manuals in the camp at Valley Forge, and both George Washington and John Adams owned personal copies.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Simes, *A Military Guide*, 359.

²⁵⁶ Vincent J.R. Kehoe, “1563. The Works of Captain Thomas Simes, 1767 to 1782,” *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 78, no. 315 (Autumn 2000): 214. Interestingly enough, George Washington's copy may have been the first copy ever printed in America. In 1776, the printers literally stopped the presses to present the new commander-in-chief of the Continental Army with the “advance sheets” copy of the military manual. As a result, Washington's copy is incomplete, noticeably missing the last parts of the book, among which are the funeral regulations. It may be that Washington had access to other complete copies. Thanks to Cynthia Becht of Loyola Marymount University (which now holds the original copy) for this bit of information.

Funerals with full military honors were much easier to arrange in the early years of the war, before resources became scarce and the violence of the conflict inured both the army and the public to soldiers' deaths. There was, for example, the elaborate public funeral for Joseph Warren in April of 1776. Still, even when the funerals were far simpler, describing the "honors of war" usually referred to the proceedings of officers' funerals. In October, 1775, for example, the *New York Journal* published the obituary of Captain Michael Cressop, who had commanded a company of Virginia riflemen on their way home from the Siege of Boston and had died of illness in New York. After giving a brief biography of Cressop, the paper included a short description of the funeral as one with "military honours, attended by a vast concourse of people." The *Journal* also gave the order of the funeral procession, providing some insight into who had participated: "Serjeant Major. Grenadiers of the First Battalion with their firelocks reversed.—Two Lieutenants. Drums and Fifes.—Captain of the Grenadiers. Two Serjeants. Two Adjutants, conducting the funeral. Band of Music. Clergymen. THE CORPSE. The PALL, supported by Eight Captains. Chief Mourner. Major with his sword drawn. Second Battalion. First Battalion. Non-Commissioned officers. Battalion officers. Ward officers. Citizens of New-York."²⁵⁷ In addition to having more elaborate funeral ceremonies, officers were also more likely to have the privilege of being buried in a churchyard or designated burial ground. Thus, in January 1777, soldiers brought General Hugh Mercer, who died at the Battle of Princeton, to Philadelphia and buried his remains "with all the honors of war, on the south side of Christ Church Yard." Likewise, the army interred Captain William Shippen, who fell in the same battle, "with military honors in St. Peter's Church Yard."²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ *New-York Journal* (New York City), October 26, 1775.

²⁵⁸ Christopher Marshall, *Extracts from the Diary of Christopher Marshall, 1774-1881*, ed. William Duane, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution. (New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1969), 16-17.

Ideally, enlisted soldiers also received a “decent burial,” though with fewer military honors, at their deaths. In these cases, only a few men, usually those of the deceased’s own regiment or those who knew him personally, would accompany the body to the grave. Early in the war, even privates might hope for a proper funeral procession, a coffin, and an individual grave.²⁵⁹ In rare cases, soldiers might even have family or neighbors bury them close to home, as did those who fell at Lexington and Concord.²⁶⁰ Some of these early funerals were striking for the impression that they left upon observers. In August 1775, Abigail Adams wrote to her husband, John, about attending “the funeral of a poor fellow who fell in Battle as they were returning from the Light house.” She wrote that the soldier “belong’d to Road Island” and that “his name was Griffin.” A Captain Turner had brought Griffin to Germantown and made sure that the young man was “buried . . . with the Honors of War.” The most interesting part of this funeral was that four British Marines, who had also been wounded in the conflict, “desired that they might attend” the ceremony and, according to Mrs. Adams, “appeared affected” by the funeral discourse. She told her husband that they “said they were sorry” and “express[ed] gratitude at the kindness they received” from the Americans.²⁶¹ Such attention to a common soldier’s funeral, not to mention the novelty of the British soldiers’ attendance, would become more difficult as the war progressed.

²⁵⁹ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 189.

²⁶⁰ Samuel Cooke, *The violent destroyed: And oppressed delivered. A Sermon, preached at Lexington, April 19, 1777* (Boston: Draper and Phillips, 1777), 29.

²⁶¹ Abigail Adams to John Adams, July 31, 1775, in *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L.H. Butterfield, Wendell D. Garrett, and Marjorie Sprague, (New York: Belknap Press, 1963), 1:270-271.

The Realities of Death

In 1777, on the second anniversary of the battles of Lexington and Concord, a local minister could assure his congregation that they had “this consolation . . . that our friends, murdered by the enemy, here sleep quietly in the dust with their fathers, while many others lament the loss of those, equally dear to them—whose bones are scattered, at the graves mouth, or have been inhumanly buried, with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth.”²⁶² Indeed, as the conflict wore on from the fateful spring of 1775, battles became larger and more desperate, casualties mounted, and the men fighting far from home could count on few comforts in life or death. Off the battlefield, sickness loomed in camp, sending more soldiers to their demise as hospitals struggled to keep up with the pace. If a soldier was unfortunate enough to find himself a prisoner of war, he was almost certain to witness the deaths of many of his comrades and the shocking manner of their burials, in which he himself might even participate. Though officers sometimes fared better than their men when it came to the disposition of their remains, the demands of war often denied officers and soldiers alike the privilege of decent burials.

There can be no doubt that death on the battlefield was a gruesome experience. As the historian Sarah J. Purcell has observed, commemorations after the war largely downplayed the violence of the conflict, preferring instead to focus on romanticized images of glorious deaths gladly suffered in the cause of liberty.²⁶³ It is easy to forget, then, that Joseph Warren, the celebrated martyr of Bunker Hill, had part of his head taken off by the bullet that killed him.²⁶⁴ Men who fought in the Revolution saw their comrades shot, torn in half by cannon balls,

²⁶² Cooke, “The violent destroyed,” 29.

²⁶³ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 1-3, 12. Roger Hoock has also recognized that violence is often left out of popular memory of the American Revolution and focuses his book *Scars of Independence* on reminding his readers of the violence and bloodshed that gave birth to the new nation. On Revolutionary violence and public memory, see Hoock, “Introduction,” in *Scars of Independence*, 3-22.

²⁶⁴ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 11.

bayoneted, clubbed to death, and even drowned while attempting to retreat.²⁶⁵ After the second battle of Savannah in 1779, one British soldier wrote: “such a sight I never saw before,—the ditch was fill’d with dead, and for 50 yards the field was covered with slain—many hung dead, and wounded, on the abettees, and for some hundred yards without the lines, the plain was strewed with mangled bodies, killed by our grape and langridge.”²⁶⁶ Viewing the battlefield after an engagement in 1780, New Jersey militiaman Ashbel Green wrote that “the whole scene was one of gloomy horror—a dead horse, a broken carriage of a fieldpiece . . . and the unburied dead, covered with blood . . . filled me with melancholy feelings, till I was ready to say—Is the contest worth all this? I was glad to get away from the affecting scene.”²⁶⁷ It is little wonder that Nathanael Greene thought only the most battle-hardened soldiers would be able to cope with such traumatic scenes: “To march over dead men, to hear without concern the groans of the wounded, I say few men can stand such scenes unless steeled by habit or fortified by military pride.”²⁶⁸

After a battle, the task of caring for the dead fell to the victors who occupied the battlefield. Usually, a detachment from the army, either part of a regiment or a designated fatigue party, would be responsible for burial detail.²⁶⁹ These men would generally remove the officers for separate burial and then set about burying the rank-and-file in the most expedient way

²⁶⁵ Samuel Smith, *Memoirs of Samuel Smith, a Soldier of the Revolution, 1776-1786* (New York: privately printed, 1860), 9; John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 50; Joseph Plum Martin, *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier* (New York: Signet Classics, 2010), 24, 79; Robert A. Selig and Wade P. Catts, “‘In the Morning We Began to Strip and Bury the Dead’: A Context for Burial Practices During the American War for Independence,” *Fields of Conflict Conference Proceedings*, vol. 3 (Mashantucket Pequot Museum & Research Center, September 26-30, 2018), 83; Hoock, 114, 146, 158, 160, 256, 258, 265.

²⁶⁶ *The Connecticut Gazette and Universal Intelligencer*, December 1, 1779.

²⁶⁷ Joseph J. Jones. *The Life of Ashbel Green, V. D. M.* (New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1849), 121.

²⁶⁸ Nathanael Greene to Jacob Greene, September 28, 1776, in *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, ed. Richard K. Showman, Dennis Conrad, and Roger N. Parks, vol. 1, *December 1766-December 1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 303.

²⁶⁹ Selig and Catts, “Context for Burial Practices,” 82.

possible. After the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse, for example, Washington issued general orders for “A Party, consisting of 200 Men, to parade to bury the Dead of both Armies.”²⁷⁰ One member of the burial party, James Chambers, wrote to his wife, Kitty, that “during yesterday, our fatigue parties were collecting the dead in piles, and burying them,” while Enos Barnes remembered gathering the dead in wagons before committing them to the ground.²⁷¹ The task of burial, especially when casualties were high, as at Monmouth in June 1778, could be daunting. One soldier wrote that after the Continentals had taken possession of the field, the ground was “covered in dead and wounded.” They found many of the British casualties were “without any wound, but being heavily clothed, they sank under the heat and fatigue.” The work of burial parties was so great that, in the several days after the battle, the army had only been able to move “about one mile from the field of battle, having been since employed in collecting the dead and wounded, and burying the former.”²⁷²

Of course, when victorious soldiers were responsible for burying their enemies, it usually meant that the dead belonging to the losing side received less attention than that which the winners showed for their fallen compatriots. For the British, this question was complicated by politics. If they accorded their American enemies respectable burials, they were in essence acknowledging the rebels as a legitimate fighting force.²⁷³ Resistance to this concession can be seen in the attitude of the officer in charge of burying the dead at Bunker Hill. Upon coming across Dr. Joseph Warren, he reported that he “stuffed the Scoundrel with another Rebel, into

²⁷⁰ *The Providence (RI) Gazette and Country Journal*, July 11, 1778.

²⁷¹ James Chambers to Kitty Chambers, June 30, 1778, in Lewis H. Gerrard, *Chambersburg in the Colony and the Revolution, A Sketch*. (Philadelphia, J.B. Lippincott, 1856), 52. Enos Barnes, “The Journal of Enos Barnes,” DLAR VF Battle of Monmouth: Personal Accounts 86, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia.

²⁷² *The New Jersey Gazette* (Burlington), July 24, 1778.

²⁷³ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 184.

one hold, and there he, and his seditious principles, may remain.”²⁷⁴ Although there is little evidence that either army treated African American soldiers any differently than their white counterparts, racial attitudes could still be reflected in burial practices intended to dishonor the deceased.²⁷⁵ In September of 1781, a letter printed in the *Pennsylvania Packet or General Advertiser* related how the British soldiers under the traitor Benedict Arnold treated the dead of a Continental garrison who had fallen while defending Fort Griswold in Groton, Connecticut. Apparently, “after massacring the living they insulted the dead, by actions too horrid to mention—the bodies were arranged along-side each other for the purpose, and, to shew contempt to colonel Ledyard, they singled out a Negro to place next to him.”²⁷⁶

In most cases, however, soldiers undertook the burial of the dead with more regard to expediency than anything else. There were practical reasons for this, most of which related to the wellbeing and preservation of the army. In some cases, the weather made speedy burials imperative. Heat and exposure led to corpses’ rapid decay, making it necessary, for the health of the army, to be sure that the dead were disposed of in a timely manner. We may get a sense of the hygienic importance of battlefield cleanup from a copy of the general orders that Lieutenant Samuel Benjamin recorded after the Battle of Yorktown: “the Brigade which furnishes their day guard on York will also furnish 3 Sargts & 30 privates to Bury the dead bodies & carkesses & cover the other putred matters in the Town.”²⁷⁷ Extreme cold might also require adjustments in the burial process. While the British interred General Richard Montgomery and his aides with the honors of war after the Battle of Quebec, they carried the other fallen Continentals to a

²⁷⁴ Walter Laurie to Unknown, June 23, 1775, quoted in Sigmund Diamond, “Bunker Hill, Tory Propaganda, and Adam Smith,” *New England Quarterly*, 25, no. 3 (September 1952): 365.

²⁷⁵ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 16-18.

²⁷⁶ *Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser* (Lancaster), September 29, 1781.

²⁷⁷ Samuel Benjamin, Orders for October 29, 1781, in Samuel Benjamin Papers, David Center for the American Revolution, American Philosophical Society, film 691.

“dead-house” to await the spring thaw. One soldier who witnessed the process remembered that “the bodies were heaped in monstrous piles. The horror of the sight . . . principally consisted in seeing our companions borne to interment, uncoffined, and in the very clothes they had worn in battle.” The cold had frozen the Americans’ bodies, leaving their limbs “distorted in various directions, such would ensue in the moment of death.”²⁷⁸

More frequently, the movement of the army, whether in retreat from or in pursuit of the enemy, allowed little time for the burial parties to do a thorough job of interring the dead. Such was the case at the Battle of Kings Mountain in South Carolina. James Collins, who was with the Patriot militia that day, remembered that on the morning after the battle:

We proceeded to bury the dead, but it was badly done; they were thrown into convenient piles, and covered with old logs, the bark of old trees, and rocks; yet not so as to secure them from becoming a prey to the beasts of the forest, or the vultures of the air; and the wolves became so plenty, that it was dangerous for any to be out at night, for several miles around . . . I saw, myself, in passing the place, a few weeks after, all parts of the human frame, lying scattered in every direction.²⁷⁹

Another witness to the battle explained that “the reason that we left the mountain in such haste, before burying the dead, was that a report came to us, that Tarleton . . . was in pursuit of us and would rescue the prisoners.” Yet another said that, as soon as the Patriots buried their dead, “we marched off to regain the upper country for fear of being intercepted by a detachment from the army of Cornwallis.”²⁸⁰ This was also probably the case at White Plains, where Washington conducted a fighting retreat from New York City pursued by British forces under General William Howe. When private Joseph Plumb Martin visited the battlefield two years later, he and

²⁷⁸ John Joseph Henry, “Journal of the Campaign Against Quebec, 1775,” in *Pennsylvania Archives Second Series*, ed. John B. Linn and William H. Egle (Harrisburg, PA: Benjamin Singerly State Printer, 1874), 15:155.

²⁷⁹ James Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary War Soldier*, ed. John Roberts (North Stratford, NH: Ayer Co. Pub., 1989), 50-51, quoted in Robert M. Dunkerly, ed., *The Battle of Kings Mountain Eyewitness Accounts* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2007), 42.

²⁸⁰ Benjamin Sharp’s Account of Kings Mountain, Draper Manuscript Collection, 17 DD 17, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, quoted in Dunkerly, *The Battle of Kings Mountain*, 100-101.

his companions “saw a number of the graves of those who fell in that battle; some of the bodies had been so slightly buried that the dogs or hogs, or both, had dug them out of the ground. The skulls and other bones, and hair were scattered about the place.”²⁸¹

Sometimes, soldiers were simply exhausted and decided to preserve their energy for other duties—making camp, sentry duty, preparing to march—besides caring for the dead. If the commanders of the army decided to stay in place for a few days and other concerns were not pressing, the burial of officers took precedence, leaving less time for the burial of ordinary soldiers. This was the case, for example, at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse in June 1778, when, despite the daunting task of burying hundreds of both British and Continentals, Washington ordered that “the Officers of the American Army are to be buried with military Honors, due to Men who have nobly fought and died in the Cause of Liberty and their Country.”²⁸² As Robert Selig and Wade P. Catts have observed, however, in other circumstances, “when disposing of the dead, any hole in the ground would do.”²⁸³ It was easier for soldiers to appropriate abandoned cellars, tanning vats, wells, ponds, fort trenches, redoubts, and swamps to dispose of bodies than to take the time and energy to dig graves.²⁸⁴ When ready-made receptacles were not available, burial parties dug shallow trenches to serve as mass graves, consigning friends to one and enemies to another.

When the army either failed to bury the dead or did it badly, it was sometimes up to the civilian population to see the task finished. In the days, weeks, months, and even years after battles, civilians encountered the remains of the dead and did the best they could to dispose of them—sometimes respectfully, sometimes less so. Quaker Joseph Townsend remembered that,

²⁸¹ Joseph Plumb Martin, *A Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier* (New York: Signet Classics, 2010), 115.

²⁸² *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal* (Lancaster), July 11, 1778.

²⁸³ Selig and Catts, “Context for Burial Practices,” 82.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82, 84-86. Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 187.

as the local inhabitants returned after the Battle of Brandywine, “they found it necessary to call in the assistance of their neighbors to rebury many of the dead, who lay exposed” and “in consequences of the late heavy rains, had been washed bare, and some few of them had never been interred.” As a member of the burial party himself, he was struck by the “many cases of horror and destruction of human beings that came under our notice in this undertaking.”²⁸⁵ Quakers were also responsible for burying some of the dead after the British ambushed the Continentals at Paoli. While they buried most of the dead in a large trench, the Quakers, at least, saw fit to leave the soldiers their clothing and accoutrements.²⁸⁶ Other civilians did not let religious scruples get in the way of finding the most convenient way to dispose of bodies. In the months after Forts Clinton and Montgomery fell to the British, Dr. Timothy Dwight found “the remains of a fire kindled by the cottagers . . . for the purpose of consuming the bones of some of the Americans, who had fallen at this place, and had been left unburied. Some of these bones were lying, partially consumed, round the spot . . . and some had, evidently, been converted to ashes.”²⁸⁷ Just as with soldiers, then, necessity and convenience sometimes took priority over any concerns there might have been to provide soldiers with traditional burials.

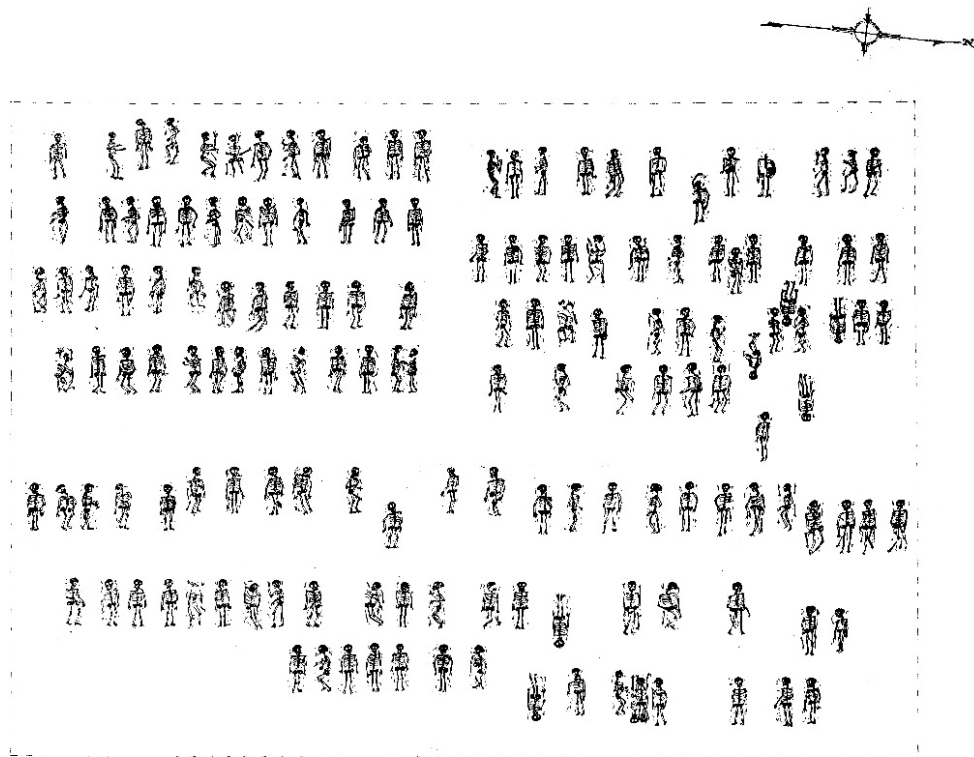
Beyond the battlefield, hospitals frequently had to sacrifice the care of the dead to the more pressing needs of the sick and the injured. During the American Revolution, soldiers died far more commonly from disease than from fighting the enemy, and hospitals themselves were often unsanitary, overcrowded, and overwhelmed.²⁸⁸ While soldiers’ accounts of the deplorable

²⁸⁵ J. Smith Futhey and Gilbert Cope, *History of Chester County, Pennsylvania, with Genealogical and Biographical Sketches* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1881), 77.

²⁸⁶ Selig and Catts, “Context for Burial Practices,” 83. Quakers, of course, would have had no use for military uniforms or weapons.

²⁸⁷ Timothy Dwight, *Travels; in New-England and New York* (New Haven, CT: S. Converse, 1822), 3:435

²⁸⁸ On conditions in military hospitals, see Cox, “Oh the Groans of the Sick: Health, Status and Military Medicine,” in *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 119-62.



ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF REVOLUTIONARY
WAR CEMETERY — WILLIAMSBURG, VA. 1930.
Scale 1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 3. Archeological sketch of the hospital cemetery behind the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg, Virginia. The positions in which the remains were found illustrate the sometimes haphazard nature of burials. Image courtesy of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

conditions in military hospitals are legion, one example will serve to demonstrate how high mortality necessitated changes in standard burial practices. From 1776 to 1778, the Moravian settlement at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, played host to the general hospital of the Continental Army and its buildings, particularly the “Single Brethren’s House,” housed hundreds of sick and dying soldiers. In the first winter of the Bethlehem hospital’s establishment, the Moravian minister John Ettwein recorded at least 110 deaths, with Moravian carpenters

providing coffins and the digging graves of those who passed.²⁸⁹ The following winter, however, the Reverend Ettwein wrote, that “the Directors apparently did not wish us to know how many died (in the former winter the Brethren had made the coffins and dug the graves, 110. being buried then; this winter soldiers attended to it); but according to our observations, about 300. occupants of the Brethren’s House were buried, many Virginians.”²⁹⁰ One of the hospital staff told a visitor that, of the Sixth Virginia Regiment, “*forty* had been admitted, but not three would return to their regiment, all the rest had been buried. He had no hesitation in declaring that we lost from ten to twenty of camp diseases for one by weapons of the enemy.”²⁹¹ Often, the high mortality experienced by both sick and wounded soldiers in hospitals resulted in ad hoc graveyards, some of which are still extant today.

Finally, prisoners of war were likely to suffer the most inhumane burials. British prisons, particularly in and around New York City, were more lethal to Continental soldiers than the battlefield itself.²⁹² As in hospitals, unsanitary conditions, overcrowding, and lack of resources led to malnutrition, exposure, and the spread of lethal disease. Those who managed to survive imprisonment gave horrific accounts of their captors’ treatment of both living and dead soldiers. On land, the British appropriated churches and sugar works to house their prisoners. One soldier remembered that “they were stowed about seven hundred in one old church . . . that they were flogged severely for imaginary faults” and that they were not allowed “a proper place to ease

²⁸⁹ John W. Jordan, *The Military Hospitals at Bethlehem and Lititz During the Revolution* (1896; repr., Wilkes-Barre, PA: 1896.), 5-9.

²⁹⁰ John Ettwein, “A Short Account of the Disturbances in America and of the Brethren’s Conduct and Suffering in this Connection,” quoted in Kenneth Gardiner Hamilton, “John Ettwein and the Moravian Church During the Revolutionary Period” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1983), 180.

²⁹¹ Jordan, *Military Hospitals at Bethlehem*, 16.

²⁹² Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 200. On prisoners of war during the American Revolution, see Edwin G. Burrows, *Forgotten Patriots: The Untold Story of American Prisoners During the Revolutionary War* (New York: Basic Books, 2008). See also Cox, “Onspeakable Sufferings Such As No Man Can Tell: Status and the Treatment of Prisoners of War,” in *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 199-235.

nature,” so that the soldiers lived among their waste. In addition, both the water and the food that the British allowed the prisoners was “poisonous rather than of a nourishing quality.” As a result, “they began to die in heaps.” According to this soldier, a British officer “whose business it was to report daily to the Commissary the number of dead in the church, asked each morning, *How many are dead now?* And on the numbers being given . . . would reply, *Very well, good riddance to so many rebels,*” and hoped “in that manner soon to be rid of them.”²⁹³ The prison ships, the most famous of which was the *Jersey*, were, if possible, even more terrible. In Philip Freneau’s famous poem “The British Prison Ship,” the author wrote of the traumatic experience of living among the rampant death of the ships’ holds:

What frequent deaths in midnight vision rise!
 (Once real) now all ghastly to my eyes,
 Youths there expiring for their country lay,
 And burnt by fevers breath’d their souls away.

 Better the greedy wave should swallow all,
 Better to meet the death-conducting ball;
 Better to sleep on oceans Oozy bed,
 At once destroy’d and number’d with the dead;
 Than thus to perish in this dismal den;
 Starv’d and insulted by the worst of men.”²⁹⁴

Though Freneau’s stay on New York’s prison ships lasted only a few weeks, the horror of his experience remained a vivid memory.

Given the large number of deaths and the contempt of their British captors, it is perhaps not surprising that Patriot prisoners’ burials departed so far from traditional funeral rites. A contributor to the *Boston Independent Chronicle* wrote of the treatment of the dead from the prison ships, saying that “the dead are carried ashore and thrown under a bank, covered with a

²⁹³ Testimony of Thomas Boyd, *The Pennsylvania Post*, May 3, 1777.

²⁹⁴ Philip Freneau, *The British prison-ship: a poem, in four cantoes* (Philadelphia: F. Baily, 1781), 11.

few shovels of gravel, exposed to high tides and rains, and soon left naked.”²⁹⁵ In his account of his time on the *Jersey*, Thomas Dring recalled the experience of being in a burial party:

“The prisoners were always gasping to get permission to go into a boat upon this occasion, not so much upon the principle of humanity . . . but merely to have the satisfaction of once more putting their feet upon their native soil.” Once upon land, the captives “were directed to dig a trench . . . The corpses were there deposited and the sand hauled down over them, which we scarcely had time to accomplish without any more ceremony, and the transaction had no more effect upon our guard than if they had buried any common animal.”²⁹⁶

Even on shore, soldiers’ prospects were not much better. After transferring from a prison ship to a prison hospital on land, Levi Hanford remembered that “on one occasion, I was permitted to go with the guard to the place of interment, and never shall I forget the scene that I there beheld. They tumbled the bodies promiscuously into the ditch, sometimes even dumping them from the cart, then threw on them a little dirt, and away they went.” Hanford was graphic with his description: “I could see a hand here, a foot there, and there again part of a head, washed bare by the rain, and all swollen, blubbery, and falling to decay. I need not add that the stench was anything but intolerable.”²⁹⁷ As Caroline Cox has observed, “the disorder and lack of respect” in the treatment of the dead “was an important part of the degradation of confinement, and the men felt it deeply.”²⁹⁸

Wherever they died, whether on the battlefield, in camp or the hospital, or in a British prison, all soldiers suffered from a lack of religious services and from being far away from their family and friends. Both represented a serious disruption to traditional funeral practices, threatening to undermine the purpose of organized burials altogether. As Chapter 1 explains,

²⁹⁵ *The Boston Independent Chronicle*, January 8, 1782.

²⁹⁶ Thomas Dring, *Recollections of Life on the Prison Ship Jersey*, ed. David Swan (Yardley, PA: Wesholme Publishing, 2019), 52.

²⁹⁷ Charles Bushnell, *A Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Levi Hanford, a Soldier of the Revolution* (New York: privately printed, 1863), 28.

²⁹⁸ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 229.

religious services were an important part of colonial funeral culture because they not only made statements about the deceased's religious beliefs, but also because they provided spiritual consolation for mourners. Religious rituals also enforced the idea that the dead rested in peace. In the Continental Army, however, clergymen who could perform the religious functions of funerals were often hard to come by. In the beginning of the war, local ministers accompanied militia regiments as regimental chaplains, and the several states appointed some to continue in this service as their units were incorporated into the Continental Army. George Washington also strongly advised Congress to grant chaplains the rank and pay of officers, believing that regular religious services were vital to the morale and discipline of the troops. After the Congress reorganized the chaplaincy in 1777, however, it provided only one chaplain for each brigade, nearly doubling the ratio of soldiers to clergy.²⁹⁹

Given the shortage of chaplains, who also had to conduct regular religious services and minister to the sick, it was often the case that soldiers, particularly those of the rank and file, went to their graves with abridged religious rites, or none at all. The army might call upon chaplains to preside over mass burials, allowing them to offer only a few prayers as they watched burial parties inter numbers of the fallen. Others gave words of exhortation to the remaining soldiers, determined to make a religious lesson out of death even if they could not perform other burial services.³⁰⁰ Even when a chaplain was available, they usually ministered to men of different denominations, suggesting that religious rites, when were performed, may not have reflected the faith tradition of the deceased. At least a few Continental chaplains, like Philip Vickers Fithian, were Anglican, which presented a problem for dissenters from New England

²⁹⁹ Howard Lewis Applegate, "Organization and Development of the American Chaplaincy During the Revolutionary War," *Picket Post*, no. 68 (May 1960): 19-21, 37-39.

³⁰⁰ Howard Lewis Applegate, "Duties and Activities of Chaplains," *Picket Post*, no. 61 (July 1958): 12.

and the backcountry.³⁰¹ Conversely, any Anglicans serving with Continental forces would find it difficult to have a dissenting clergyman conduct a funeral according to the Book of Common Prayer. In very rare cases, a soldier's family might intervene to ensure that their loved one received appropriate religious services. This was the case, for example, when Ensign Antony Morris, Jr., fell in the Battle of Princeton. He was buried in January 1777, "in Friends' burial ground in a very heavy shower of rain, and without military honors, it being the request of his relations to the General that he should be so interred."³⁰²

Most soldiers were not as fortunate as Ensign Morris. Even prominent officers like Richard Montgomery, who fell in Quebec, would have to wait years to be reinterred near family, and then only after heroic effort.³⁰³ When soldiers died on battlefields and in hospitals and prisons far away from their families, the fortunes of war denied them the comforts that loved ones could have provided during their last hours. The survivors, likewise, did not have the opportunity to see that their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons had been laid peacefully to rest. Sometimes, fallen soldiers' plight moved strangers to pity. Joseph Plumb Martin wrote of a memorable event in 1776, in which he and his comrades determined to bury a soldier who had died in a recent engagement. The men dug a grave "near a gentleman's country seat, (at that time occupied by the Commander-in-chief,)" and "proceeded, just in the dusk of evening, to commit the poor man, then far from friends and relatives, to the bosom of his mother earth." After they had lain the body into the grave "in as decent a posture as circumstances would admit, there

³⁰¹ Applegate, "Organization and Development of the American Chaplaincy," 37.

³⁰² Christopher Marshall, *Extracts from the Diary of Christopher Marshall Kept in Philadelphia and Lancaster during the American Revolution, 1774-1781*, ed. William Duane (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell, 1877), 115.

³⁰³ After his death in 1776, his widow, Janet Livingston Montgomery, spent the rest of her life in mourning. With considerable effort she managed in 1818 to have her husband's remains brought to New York from Quebec and interred beneath the monument that Congress had erected to his memory. See Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 123-26.

came from the house . . . two ladies, who appeared to be sisters Upon arriving at the grave, they . . . asked if we were going to put the earth upon his naked face.” When the soldiers responded in the “affirmative, one of them took a fine white gauze handkerchief from her neck and desired that it might be spread upon his face, tears, at the same time, flowing down their cheeks.” Martin recognized the impact of the ladies: “Although the dead soldier had no acquaintance present, (for there were none at his burial who knew him,) yet he had mourners, and females too. Worthy young ladies!” He blessed them, asserting that “such as sight as those ladies afforded at that time, and on that occasion, was worthy, and doubtless received the attention of angels.”³⁰⁴

As Martin’s anecdote reveals, however, men of the rank-and-file also sometimes took it upon themselves to provide what final attentions they could to their comrades. As Caroline Cox has argued, enlisted men resisted some of the degrading effects of inadequate burials by attending soldiers’ bodies to the grave, improvising their own religious services, providing impromptu grave markers, and protecting corpses from desecration once they had been buried.³⁰⁵ When the men could not perform these services, however, their memories held on to the shock and sadness they experienced as they saw friends, messmates, and even erstwhile acquaintances pass to the grave without the least notice. Many wartime diaries and other reminiscences, such as those quoted above, give evidence of these visceral reactions to the scenes of death and inhumanity that soldiers witnessed. Thus, when private John Henry recalled the haphazard collection of American bodies after the Battle of Quebec, he also recalled the “horror” and “melancholy sensations” he felt at seeing his “unhappy and lost brethren, though humble of

³⁰⁴ Martin, *Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 38-39.

³⁰⁵ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 173-4, 189-97.

station,” cast into piles to await interment. He pronounced a “curse on these civil wars” that caused such a “flood of tears.”³⁰⁶

As we have seen, military burials during the American Revolution could vary significantly, not just according to rank, but according to the situation on the battlefield, the number of casualties after an engagement, the mortality rate of the hospitals, and who performed the burials. In almost all cases, however, soldiers’ funerals departed significantly from the burials that they might have expected as civilians. Historians have speculated on why Continental soldiers continued to fight under the desperate conditions of both life and death, most of which only declined as the war progressed. For some, the answer lies in the fact that the quality of troops also declined during the war, going from gentlemen and respectable merchants and farmers in the beginning of the war to the very lowest of the poor by the conflict’s middle years. Certainly, studies show that the lower classes increasingly did the majority of the fighting and received bounties in exchange for their service, suggesting that money might have been a motivation to serve.³⁰⁷ Inherited attitudes about the soldiery, in addition, allowed most Americans to expect that only the poor and somewhat degraded members of society would become part of the rank-and-file of the Continentals. Thus, as Caroline Cox has suggested, their previous experiences of social hierarchy conditioned private soldiers to accept the conditions of life, and death, in the army, especially the disparity between the treatment of officers and their men.³⁰⁸ While recognizing the decline in soldiers’ social status as the war ground on, Charles Royster also cites a growing sense of professionalism, and perhaps superior patriotism, as the reason that soldiers continued to fight even as civilians’ support for the army decreased.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁶ Henry, “Journal of the Campaign Against Quebec, 1775,” in Linn and Egle, 15:155.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 3-6, 10-17; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 64-69, 96-97, 127-29, 132-34.

³⁰⁸ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, xiv, xvii, 1-13, 19-21, 198.

³⁰⁹ Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 193-238.

There is some truth to these interpretations. Most of the rank and file would have been used to different living conditions than those of the upper classes. It is also true that death, and lack of friendly attention at death, were part and parcel of the soldiers' profession which they acknowledged when enlisting, accepting recruiting bounties, and receiving their pay, such as it was.³¹⁰ There is more, however, to the way that both civilians and soldiers looked at soldiers' deaths and the meaning of that sacrifice. On a practical level, the burial of soldiers was a matter of military importance. Both the Continentals and the British often tried to ascertain the number of enemy casualties to determine the success of a battle. In a letter from the Continental camp at Morristown in February, 1777, for example, one writer took comfort in the fact that, though General Howe still presented a serious threat, "our loss was 8 killed and wounded. they [the British] came with about 15 or 20 waggons, a considerable part of which were employed in carrying off their dead and wounded; some of the waggons were so piled, that the dead fell off, and were left in the road. A few such affairs will make them sick of foraging at so expensive a rate."³¹¹ Even in the case of defeat, officers and soldiers could point to the enemy's casualties as evidence that the engagement did not represent a total loss. After the Patriot rout at the Battle of Camden, general orders assured the soldiers that "though the action of yesterday terminated unfavourably to the American arms . . . the extraordinary exertions of the cavalry . . . the gallant behaviour of the light infantry . . . and the good conduct of the camp guards, rendered the advantage expensive to the enemy," and "highly merit the approbation of the general and the imitation of the rest of the troops."³¹² The British also noted when Continental casualties were high. The same soldier who wrote of the shocking sight of many who "hung dead and wounded,

³¹⁰ Ibid., 17; Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 13-16.

³¹¹ *Connecticut Gazette and the Universal Advertiser* (New-London), March 28, 1777.

³¹² *Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser* (Lancaster), December 29, 1781.

on the abettees” and the “plain strewed with mangled bodies” at the Siege of Savannah in 1779 further noted that, after surveying the battlefield, “I posted back to my General (who is as brave as Caesar) and gave him the pleasing account.”³¹³

The contending armies could also ascertain the success of an engagement from the number of officers and soldiers who had been left on the battlefield after the fighting was over. When an army left their dead behind, it was a sign either that the battle had been particularly fierce or that the losing side had felt it necessary to make a precipitous retreat. After the Battle of Monmouth, a Continental soldier recalled that they fought the British “‘till they began to retreat leaving their dead and wounded on the field. We then pursued them with martial courage, ‘till night came on which obliged us to end the pursuit, laying down in the field amongst the dead where we slept very comfortably that night being much overcome with the fatigues of the day.”³¹⁴ After-battle reports often stressed the number and ranks of soldiers who had been abandoned by their comrades. Referring again to the Battle of Monmouth, an officer wrote that, in their retreat, the British left “a number of killed and wounded to fall into our hands; among the former was Lt. Colonel Monckton (brother to the general) and several other officers.” He went on to say that “their loss must have been great . . . from the best observation I could make, the proportion of killed was at least six, some think eight, to one of ours . . . the Adjutant General told me that returns had been made by the Officer who had the care of burying the dead, of 247 of the enemy’s killed, which have been found by our people.”³¹⁵

Because casualty numbers were important in determining the outcome of a battle, it is not surprising that both officers and soldiers often manipulated their reports, especially in accounts

³¹³ *Connecticut Gazette and Universal Advertiser* (New-London), December 1, 1779.

³¹⁴ “The Journal of Enos Barnes,” DLAR VF Battle of Monmouth: Personal Accounts 86, American Philosophical Society.

³¹⁵ *Independent Ledger and the American Advertiser*, July 27, 1778.

given to the newspapers. It was also important, however, to try to disguise actual casualty numbers from the enemy. This, in addition to convenience, may have been why armies did not give much attention to individually burying members of the rank-and-file. A single mass grave made it harder for opponents to count the dead. It may also have been the reason that the Moravian carpenters at Bethlehem received orders to stop making coffins and digging graves. Even though Patriot military officials seemed to trust the inhabitants of Bethlehem, Rev. Ettwein thought that “the Directors apparently did not wish us to know how many had died,” possibly because they were trying to conceal the high mortality rate at the hospital from getting back to their enemies.³¹⁶ Joseph Plumb Martin remembered that, after one engagement, “how many of the enemy were killed and wounded could not be known, as the British were always careful as Indians to conceal their losses.”³¹⁷ Clearly, Martin equated the practice of concealing casualties with the cleverness, and perhaps the perfidy, of formidable enemies.

More broadly, accepting death and mistreatment after death as part of earning a wage went against the Revolutionary ideal of the citizen-soldier.³¹⁸ While soldiers were paid, and Patriots fully expected enlisted men to earn their pay by risking their lives, members of the Continental Army were not supposed to be a New World version of the professional soldiers of Britain. Many Revolutionaries, in fact, denigrated British soldiers for fighting their American brethren for pay. Take, for example, the sentiments of the Rev. Nathan Perkins who preached to the West-Hartford soldiers in 1775: “You have everything to inspire you with undaunted fortitude. You fight not for your daily bread—not for four-pence sterling a day, but for your lives, your property, your native land, your dearest friends, your just rights, all you hold dear as

³¹⁶ Ettwein, “A Short Account of the Disturbances,” 180.

³¹⁷ Martin, *Narrative of a Revolutionary Soldier*, 37.

³¹⁸ Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 17, 39-40.

men as sacred as [C]hristians, your ALL.”³¹⁹ Though she was writing of the Hessian mercenaries hired by the British crown, Grace Barclay’s observation applies to both the British army and their German auxiliaries: “What is more melancholy than the trade of a hired soldier? . . . Nothing to ennoble the contest; no homes and hearths to fight for; no country to save; no freedom to bleed and die for. It may be ‘sweet and proper for our country to die,’ as saith the old Roman, but it is bitter servitude to risk life and limb for lucre.”³²⁰ Though the boundary between the rights of the citizen and the duties of the soldier was a question that would continue to be negotiated throughout the war, both civilians and soldiers resisted the implication that serving in the army was just another job and that death was simply an occupational hazard.³²¹ Even though Washington recognized that most men, both officers and privates, would need financial inducement to enlist, he preferred to act as if this was not the case.³²² If popular opinion held that soldiers were not paid to sacrifice their lives and their traditional death rituals, then they, their families, and the public would need another explanation for the thousands of soldiers who were denied a decent burial.

The Patriot’s Promise

One way that soldiers and civilians coped with the disruption to familiar mourning rituals was to accept other ways that the memory of fallen soldiers could be honored. Ministers, orators, and writers encouraged their audiences to believe that the praises of the country as well as the

³¹⁹ Nathan Perkins, *A Sermon, Preached to the Soldiers, who went from West-Hartford in defence of their Country* (Hartford, CT: Eben, Watson, 1775), 13.

³²⁰ Grace Barclay, *Grace Barclay’s Diary, or, Personal Recollections of the American Revolution*, ed. Sidney Barclay, 2nd ed. (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1866), 76.

³²¹ Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, ix-xix; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 38-43.

³²² George Washington to John Hancock, September 25, 1776, *Founders Online*.

memory of posterity would serve as appropriate monuments to soldiers' sacrifice.³²³ This idea was not simply something that Revolutionary ideology implied; Patriots stated it outright. In the weeks before General Warren's public reinterment, an orator on the anniversary of the Boston Massacre told his audience, "when we remember that, destitute of the rites of sepulture, he was cast into the ground . . . we cannot restrain the starting tear, we cannot repress the burning sigh! . . . we will erect a monument to thy memory in each of our grateful breasts, and to the latest ages, will teach our tender infants to lisp the name of Warren, with veneration and applause!"³²⁴ As Sarah Purcell has observed, officers like Joseph Warren were frequently the subjects of memorial orations during the war. However, ordinary soldiers, at least in the aggregate, also found their place in the country's mental memorializing.³²⁵ After the Battle of Bunker Hill, an elegiac poem by Anna Young Smith promised those who fell that, "Your memories dear to every freeborn mind, / Shall need no monument your fame to raise, / Forever in our grateful hearts enshrined; / And bless'd by your united country's praise."³²⁶ What Perez Morton said of Joseph Warren could apply equally to those soldiers who died unknown and unburied:

. . . though thy body has long laid undistinguished among the vulgar dead, scarce privileged with enough earth to hid it from the birds of prey; though not a kindred tear was dropt . . . and though the execration of an impious foe, were all thy funeral knells . . . thy memory has been embalmed in the affections of thy grateful countrymen; who, in their breast, have raised eternal monuments to thy bravery.³²⁷

³²³ Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 7-9.

³²⁴ Peter Thacher, "Oration, Delivered at Watertown, March 5, 1776," in *Orations, Delivered at the Request of the Inhabitants of the Town of Boston, to Commemorate the Evening of the Fifth of March* [. . .] (Boston: Wm. T. Clap, 1807), 78.

³²⁵ Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 11-49; Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor*, 197.

³²⁶ Anna Young Smith, "An Elegy to the Memory of the American Volunteers Who Fell in the Engagement Between the Massachusetts-Bay Militia, and the British Troops, April 19, 1775," in *American Women Writers to 1800*, ed. Sharon M. Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 336.

³²⁷ Perez Morton, "Oration, Delivered at the King's Chapel, in Boston, April 8, 1776, On the Reinterment of the Remains of the Late Most Worshipful Grand Master Joseph Warren, Esq.," in *Orations, Delivered at the Request of the Inhabitants of Boston*, 185-185.

In popular rhetoric, then, spiritual monuments, erected in the hearts and minds of fellow Patriots, served as a substitute for, and perhaps were more important than, traditional funeral rites.

The patriotic service of others could also act as a memorial to the dead. Orators and writers frequently intertwined calls to remember fallen soldiers with appeals to Americans to join the fight and avenge the dead.³²⁸ Peter Thacher told his audience that, in addition to Warren, all the spirits of fallen patriots would inspire American soldiers to deeds of bravery (and death): “The tender feelings of the human heart are deeply affected with the fate of these and the other heroes who have bled and die, that their country may be free.” In battle the soldier would “listen to the voice of their blood, which cries aloud to heaven, and to him for vengeance. he will feel himself animated with a new vigour in the glorious cause . . . and, when engaged in the warmest battle, he will hear them, from their heaven, urging him to action; he will feel their spirit transfused into his breast; he will sacrifice whole hecatombs of their murderers to their illustrious manes!”³²⁹ Likewise, even after the Battle of Yorktown, a thanksgiving sermon rhetorically conjured the spirits of the dead, calling them to “arise, and come from the dead, to behold a large army of your enemies conquered! arise, and animate your countrymen to finish the glorious work of liberty! arise, and lead on your brother soldiers to the dreadful deeds of death and slaughter, until the ruthless hand of Britain shall no more disturb the peace of men.”³³⁰ By providing inspiration for those who remained to carry on the struggle, the loss of fallen soldiers remained symbolically important to the cause regardless of the condition of their burials. In essence, the sacrifice of the dead became a debt that living soldiers could only pay by continuing to fight and winning the war. Thus, the Continental army memorialized fallen soldiers simply by enduring, while victory

³²⁸ Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 100-102.

³²⁹ Thacker, “Oration,” in *Orations, Delivered at the Request of the Inhabitants of Boston*, 79.

³³⁰ Israel Evans, *A Discourse, Delivered Near York in Virginia on the Memorable Occasion of the Surrender of the British Army to the Allied Forces of America and France* (Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1782), 24.

ensured that America itself would serve as a lasting monument to those who gave their lives for independence.

For those who worried over the spiritual implications of dying without a proper burial, Revolutionary speakers attested that, as universal liberty was the cause of God, Continental soldiers were in fact fighting for God himself and would receive eternal rewards after their deaths, no matter what the dispositions of their bodies may have been.³³¹ One poet, imagining a patriotic soldier's death, wrote: "But yet how glorious is the Hero's Doom; / His weeping Country deck his lonely Tomb; / Eternal Sun shines wake within his Breast, and whisp'ring Angels sooth his Soul to Rest; . . . Through Heaven's high Arch loud Hallelujah's ring, / And Song Celestial grace the Eternal King."³³² In General Poor's funeral sermon, the minister assured his hearers that

this intrepid army of patriots . . . shall join a countless multitude of heroes and patriots, and be united *to an innumerable company of angels*, and, *to the general assembly of the first born which are written in heaven*, and *to God the Judge of all*, and *to the spirits of just men made perfect*: where they shall see the blessed Redeemer of mankind, and sit with him *in the throne of his glory*.³³³

While both elegies and funeral sermons traditionally offered mourners visions of heavenly hope, those composed for Revolutionary soldiers, whether individually or as a host, based salvation and heavenly reward on heroic sacrifice for the cause of liberty. This promise provided solace for both soldiers, who contemplated meeting their deaths, and their loved ones, who often lacked the spiritual comfort that funeral rites provided. All could be assured that, whatever the disposition

³³¹ Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 5, 13-17; 31-33.

³³² J.H., "Elegy on the Death of Lieut. David Barber, of Groton," *Connecticut Gazette and the Universal Intelligencer*, March 13, 1778.

³³³ Israel Evans, *An Oration, Delivered at Hackinsack [. . .] At the Interment of the Honorable Brigadier Enoch Poor* (Newburyport, MA: John Mycall, 1781), 21.

of soldiers' remains, God would not forget the soldiers who had fallen in the heaven-appointed struggle for freedom.

Conclusion

Those who fought in the American Revolution knew very well that death might await them on the battlefield, in hospitals, or in an enemy prison. While officers, soldiers, and civilians attempted to mitigate the disruption of the war to their deathways, especially in the beginning of the conflict, the realities of war soon interposed to make military necessity the defining factor in burying the dead. Officers generally took precedence, often receiving funeral ceremonies and individual burials, yet even the distinctions of rank contributed to subordination and discipline with the military goal of establishing an effective fighting force. When battles became desperate and the welfare and survival of the army depended on it, funeral services even for officers fell by the wayside. In extreme cases, both soldiers and civilians might simply dispose of dead soldiers by tossing them into trenches, cellars, or even ponds just to be rid of the bodies. When military burial parties did manage to dig cursory graves, they often left corpses barely covered, subject to the weather and wild animals, and eventually for civilians to deal with. The disruption to traditional funeral customs no doubt disturbed some, as they were forced to confront the ugliness of death without comforting rituals to soften the shock. Families and friends went without the consolation of seeing their loved ones properly laid to rest. Many soldiers even went without the spiritual services that were usually so central to a "decent burial."

Both Continental soldiers and the broader public tried to deal with the fractures in their funeral culture by offering alternative comforts when rituals were impossible. For one, soldiers took the manner of their deaths and the disposition of their bodies as part of their sacrifice for the

country—individual funerals had to be sacrificed for the welfare of the army which protected Americans’ liberties. Some also came to believe that the gratitude of their countrymen and the veneration of posterity would serve as appropriate, even superior, monuments to their memory and patriotism. In all of this, they felt they were following the will of God, whose approval would more than make up for the lack of religious services at their deaths. Ultimately, the very survival of the new nation could be taken as the most important monument to the lives of the soldiers who fought for it. As Noah Smith told his audience at Bennington, Vermont, in 1778, “in fighting, death of some is necessary, even on the side of victory. . . . There is therefore no just cause of lamentation to those whose friends were slain, for by their deaths our country was saved.”³³⁴

Most soldiers, however, fell somewhere in between accepting their leaders’ promises and doing what they could to mitigate the indignities of death in battle, military hospitals, and wartime prisons. They tried to look after their friends and comrades, even if that meant doing as little as overseeing simple burials or erecting crude grave markers. Many were indeed disturbed by the way that the dead remained uncared for even after the war. Many more grieved the loss of loved ones that they had never had the chance to mourn. Judith Sargent Murray told her fellow Americans that, “We must fix our eyes not . . . on the gallant officer dying on the bed of honour . . . but on the private soldier, forced into the service We must think of the uncounted tears of she who weeps alone She does not shed her sorrows over his grave, for she has never learned whether he ever had one.”³³⁵ In the end, Americans would take many more years to work out what final honors would be due to Revolutionary soldiers, most especially the rank and file,

³³⁴ Noah Smith, *A Speech Delivered at Bennington, on the Anniversary of the 16th of August, 1777* (Hartford, CT: Watson and Goodwin, 1779), 8.

³³⁵ Judith Sargent Murray, “A Sketch of the Present Situation of America, 1793,” in *The Gleaner: A Miscellaneous Production* (1798), ed. Nina Bayn (repr. Schenectady, NY: Union College Press, 1992), 33.

who died in the war. In the meantime, however, the return of peace fostered new understandings of death rituals even as the American people contended over the legacies of the War for Independence.

Chapter 4: Liberty and Death: Funeral Customs in the Years after the American Revolution

But Death You know has no respect of Persons. We all must dye, and somebody must carry us to our Graves.

—Charles Woodmason, *Journal*

In the midst of Colonial Williamsburg, with its restored buildings and fife-and-drum parades, stands Bruton Parish Church. Its churchyard serves as the final resting place for both the wealthy and prominent, who lie beneath ornate tombstones, and more humble inhabitants, who now lie in unmarked graves.³³⁶ In the western part of the cemetery, behind the church building itself, sits a low-lying stone slab belonging to Judge John Blair, who passed in November of 1800. Though time and weather have worn down the inscription, a careful reader can just make out the faint text. The epitaph tells visitors that, though Blair was both admitted to the bar and served in the Governor's Council while Virginia remained a royal colony, he resigned his position "at the Commencement of our great Revolutionary Contest," choosing instead to align himself with the patriot cause. The point of pride, however, is not only the judge's revolutionary service, but the distinction he achieved after the war was over. Instead of winning the recognition of a monarch, Blair's "acknowledged talents" and "singular integrity" garnered the approbation of "that distinguished judge of merit, the father of his country, Genl. Washington."³³⁷

John Blair's monument tells the story of his experience of the American Revolution and its aftermath. Like many of his countrymen, Blair went from being a subject and servant of the British Empire, through the turmoil and disruption of war, to find a new identity as an inhabitant of the American republic. Along the way, he and his compatriots came to new understandings of

³³⁶ Many of those who could not afford tombstones would have received wooden grave markers which are no longer extant.

³³⁷ Bruton Parish Church, *Bruton Parish Churchyard and Church*, 66.

their country, their society, and their selves amidst the profound shifts that accompanied the nation's founding. The process was neither easy nor smooth. Conflicting ideas about the meaning of the Revolution and its consequences intruded upon Americans' daily lives, upset tradition, and required compromise and adaptation. Just as Americans' lives changed, so too did the rituals that surrounded their deaths. While many were eager to return to familiar mourning practices once peace returned, changes in the country's religious establishments, social attitudes, and political ideology attached new meanings to their funeral customs. At the same time, practical circumstances, as well as efforts to check the spread of democratic notions, set limits upon innovation. All the while, revolutionary soldiers—alive and dead—presented a special concern as the nation struggled to reconcile patriotic ideals with the reality of their sacrifice.

Religion

For most of those who supported independence, religious liberty went hand-in-hand with political liberty as an important accomplishment of the Revolution. In their new constitutions, several states stipulated the disestablishment of government-supported churches, allowing their inhabitants not just freedom of worship but freedom to decide when and how they supported a multiplicity of religious institutions.³³⁸ Between disestablishment and the first stirrings of the Second Great Awakening, many churches found themselves in competition with other denominations for the management of funerals. In response, some had to adapt their approach to conducting funerals on both a practical and an eschatological level.

³³⁸ Disestablishment proceeded at a different pace in each state. While some legislatures dismantled state-supported churches during the Revolution, others maintained official religious establishments until the nineteenth century. See Carl H. Esbeck and Jonathan J. Den Hartog, eds. *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent*.

This development is best observed in the southern states, where the Church of England had once enjoyed primacy among other denominations. The relationship between the Anglican establishment and local government came apart during the imperial crisis, particularly because of George III's standing as head of the church. After the war, Anglican congregations reconstituted themselves under the name of the Protestant Episcopal Church (formally established in 1784) but could no longer insist on collecting tithes, taxes, and fees from individuals who chose to patronize other churches.³³⁹ It became necessary, therefore, for church vestries to pay closer attention to the income that funeral charges provided. The vestry of St. Philip's Parish in Charleston, for example, decided on standard funeral fees in July of 1783. The vestry minutes for July of that year included a list of fees that stipulated the cost of almost all the different aspects of a typical funeral. The minister, for example, received \$4.00 if the corpse was carried into the church, \$3.00 if only into the churchyard, and \$2.00 if the deceased was among the poor. The clerk and sexton likewise received \$3.50 if the funeral took place inside the church, \$3.00 if the funeral took place in the churchyard, and \$2.00 for funerals of the poor. The clerk received a further \$2.00 for finding a horse and carriage to carry the corpse and three pence for each family he visited to invite to the funeral. The church charged \$3.00 for an organist to provide music, \$1.00 for ringing bells at other places of worship, and \$1.00 for the use of the parish pall.³⁴⁰

As this schedule of fees shows, at St. Philip's the practical business of conducting funerals clearly had implications beyond pastoral care. Because the church had a large congregation and, by custom, usually oversaw funerals for the poorest of Charleston's citizens, the income generated by funeral fees could be considerable indeed. However, those fees

³³⁹ In some of the colonies, at least before the war, the Anglican establishment customarily collected fees even for services, such as marriages and funerals, that did not take place in their churches. This privilege ended with disestablishment. See Esbeck and Den Hartog, *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent*, 7, 183, 222-23.

³⁴⁰ Minutes of the Vestry, St. Philip's Parish, 1761-1795, 171.

sometimes proved difficult to collect. In 1804, the clerk for St. Philip's Church informed the readers of the *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* that as "an ill state of health" had made it necessary for him to give up his post, he had to "close his accounts for Funerals in said Church, under his administration" and would "therefore be thankful such persons who are in arrears for Funeral Fees, to settle the same with him as speedy as possible." For those who did not pay their fees, he hoped they would "not take it unkind to find their accounts placed in the hands of a gentleman of the law to be sued for without distinction."³⁴¹

Part of the concern, of course, was that formerly established churches were also seeing their congregants decamp to denominations that better reflected their religious opinions and taking their financial support with them. The religious freedom promoted by American independence, as well as the onset of the Second Great Awakening, increased the membership of denominations that had formerly stood outside of, and sometimes opposed to, the established church. Baptists and Methodists, in particular, attracted new congregants with their evangelism and emphasis on the importance of emotion to authentic religious experience.³⁴² As always, religious sentiments remained an important element of American funeral culture and many chose to declare their denominational affiliations through their funeral arrangements.

Some might, for example, specify a particular minister to oversee their burial whose religious beliefs better accorded with their own. Such were the instructions provided by Phebe Stoll of Charleston, who requested a Methodist minister to "attend my remains to the Methodist Church, and there perform the Service according to the usual Manner among them." Stoll made

³⁴¹ *South Carolina Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (Charleston), Saturday, October 22, 1804.

³⁴² Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804* (New York: Norton, 2016), 444-52; Nathan O. Hatch, "Chapter Three: Storming Heaven by the Back Door," in *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 49-65; Katherine Carté, *Religion and the American Revolution: An Imperial History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 418-83.

good use of the options available, however, and insisted that, after the Methodist ceremony, her remains should “be decently interred in the Burying Ground of the Baptist old Church.”³⁴³ Her choice of minister almost certainly reflected the inroads that Methodism, a relatively new denomination sprung from the Anglican Church, was then making in South Carolina. While Methodist churches in Charleston only appeared after 1785, the oldest Baptist congregation in that city dated back to 1696.³⁴⁴ Though Stoll may have opted for a Methodist ceremony because of her religious beliefs, she chose to honor older loyalties with her choice for interment. Burial in the Baptist cemetery would permit her to rest next to her “departed Daughter Ann Baker Stoll,” allowing her to demonstrate her personal affections while also satisfying her religious conscience.³⁴⁵

Hannah Campbell of Virginia evinced a similar preference for the Methodist approach to faith when she wrote her last will and testament in 1796. In a special certificate appended to the will, she directed her executor James Webb to pay Methodist minister Benjamin Pace “handsomely” to preach her funeral sermon. She was concerned, however, that Webb might not be “justifiable in giving Mr. Pace anything handsome” and therefore made sure to have the provision put in writing. Whether Campbell’s worry arose from Webb’s possible objections to Methodism or simply his avarice is unclear. What is clear is that she admired the minister, and his religious sentiments, enough to accord him the most prominent role at her funeral and what amounted to a “legacy” from her estate.³⁴⁶ It is also apparent that Phebe Stoll’s will, much like

³⁴³ Will of Phebe Stoll, October 13, 1789, Record of Wills, Charleston County, vol. 23, 561, Charleston County Public Library, Charleston, SC.

³⁴⁴ Richard N. Coté, “South Carolina Methodist Records,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 85, no. 1 (January 1984): 51; J. Glen Clayton, “South Carolina Baptist Records,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 85, no. 4 (October 1984): 319.

³⁴⁵ Will of Phebe Stoll, October 13, 1789, Record of Wills, Charleston County, vol. 23, 51.

³⁴⁶ Beverly Fleet, ed., “The Will of Sarah Campbell,” in *Virginia Colonial Abstracts*, vol. 5, *Queen and King County Records of 18th Century Persons, Second Collection* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1961), 64-66. The

Sarah Campbell's, demonstrates that disestablishment resulted in new options for those planning religious services after their deaths. Their final instructions, which highlighted their preference for evangelical congregations, attested to their Christian beliefs, and claimed their right to patronize whatever denomination they chose without discrimination.

The years after the American Revolution also witnessed the mitigation of some of the harsher beliefs surrounding death and the fate of the soul. While these changes were part of a general softening of death culture that began earlier in the eighteenth century, the rising competition among denominations encouraged some congregations to reevaluate their death rituals.³⁴⁷ Some, like the Protestant Episcopal Church, made efforts to be more accommodating to the feelings of their parishioners. When the leaders of that church met in Philadelphia in 1786, they considered the matter of revising the Book of Common Prayer to better suit Americans' religious views. Among the several changes that they later agreed upon were changes to the Order for the Burial of the Dead. Where the original text had prohibited use of the ceremony for all who died unbaptized, the American version of the liturgy specified that only unbaptized adults should go to their graves without the proper readings and prayers.³⁴⁸ Though the alteration seems small, it served as a comfort to parents who lost their children before seeing them baptized. Thus, the Episcopal Church tempered some of the strictures that applied to the use of the traditional Anglican funeral service, thereby providing a solace to bereaved families who chose to remain in its flock.

estate records for Sarah Campbell also show that her executor paid Benjamin Pace seventeen dollars for performing the funeral sermon.

³⁴⁷ See Chapter 1 and its discussion of the softening of Puritan deathways for one example.

³⁴⁸ The new Book of Common Prayer, along with suggested the changes to the burial service, was officially adopted in 1789. See Marion J. Hatchett, "The Colonies and States of America," in Hefling and Shattuck, 177.

The Second Great Awakening helped Americans to turn their attention to heaven more than ever before, which contributed to widespread changes in funereal culture. Though many of the preachers who led the great revival movement are better remembered for their vivid depictions of the torments of hell, they also thrilled their audiences with reveries on the delights of believers' heavenly abode.³⁴⁹ Timothy Dwight, a Congregationalist minister and sometime President of Yale, rhapsodized that heaven would surpass Eden with its loveliness and serenity. He assured his audience that God would lavish "whatever material beauty, greatness, and glory, can furnish" on the redeemed "with a bounty, becoming the character of God."³⁵⁰ This focus on heaven, which many evangelical ministers encouraged, also began to appear more prominently in funereal art. Angels pointing towards heaven, blossoming flowers, and peaceful tableaux of nature replaced the skulls, spades, and hourglasses that had once dominated cemeteries.³⁵¹ While images of death and decay had prompted viewers to contemplate their own mortality with fear and dread, the new iconography concentrated the mind on more ethereal thoughts of beauty and peace. Such thoughts served the dual purpose of soothing mourners' feelings and inviting them to religious reflection.

Along with heavenly images, tombstones also increasingly depicted the act of mourning itself. These motifs often featured funerary urns, weeping willows, and bereaved women in various postures of grief.³⁵² These carvings encouraged mourners to indulge in their feelings of loss and sadness while also meditating on the nature of life and death itself. Mourning tableaux

³⁴⁹ Gary Scott Smith, *Heaven in the American Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 49-56.

³⁵⁰ Timothy Dwight, "The Remoter Consequences of Death: The Happiness of Heaven," in *Theology; Explained and Defended, in a Series of Sermons* (Middletown, CT: Clark and Lyman, 1818), 5:520-22.

³⁵¹ Combs, "Creating Memorials for a New Century," in *Early Gravestone Art*, 180-210; Daniel W. Patterson, *The True Image: Gravestone Art and the Culture of Scotch Irish Settlers in the Pennsylvania and Carolina Backcountry* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 130-31, 358-59; Stannard, *The Puritan Way of Death*, 171-72, 180-1.

³⁵² Combs, *Early Gravestones*, 182-188.

were also important in the new republic because of a widespread concern for the cultivation of sympathetic feeling. As American society grew and changed, some feared that the weakening of traditional social ties would lead to debased morals and selfish individualism, undermining the very principles of charity and humanity that made social life possible. In response, they began to actively seek to refine their own feelings of sympathy and make them their guide in both public policy and private relationships.³⁵³ Those who visited cemeteries and contemplated the mourning images could more easily imagine the grief of others and feel compassion for them. Many hoped that these fellow feelings would serve as strong bonds to hold society together in the midst of the dramatic changes taking place in the aftermath of the Revolution.

The Problem of Status

Upon the return of peace, many Americans also looked forward to the return of a robust commercial trade, particularly with Great Britain, and the purchasing opportunities that came along with it. Soon, however, their penchant for indulging in luxuries large and small began to worry those who sought to preserve traditional social hierarchies. While people of lower social ranks had always attempted to mimic the fashions of the wealthy and prominent, after the war this tendency seemed less like wishful thinking and more like genuine assertions of a type of equality. After all, revolutionary leaders, orators, and political writers had promised that victory over Great Britain would offer an opportunity to remake both American government and society on the basis of liberty and natural rights. Further, these same authorities had called upon people of all social classes to fight for liberty and sacrifice for the possibilities of beginning anew. After

³⁵³ Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 195-99, 223, 226-36.

the war, it seemed that those who had struggled through the Revolution might actually claim the promises that had sustained their efforts for almost two decades of conflict.³⁵⁴

As the war came to an end, consumer goods once more began to fill American warehouses and shops. Once again, mourning accessories and funeral accoutrements became an important part of the panoply of goods that importers, traders, and merchants offered to eager customers. Soon, imported funeral goods appeared among the long lists of merchandise that storekeepers advertised for sale. In places like New York, Charleston, and Boston, dry goods and hardware stores stocked a number of items necessary for a well-appointed funeral, from coffin furniture to full mourning suits. Those who could afford a little ostentation could have coffins decorated with “large and small gilt Plates, Angels, Flowers, Handles, [and] Lace,” while those of more humble circumstances could have old clothes dyed black “at the shortest notice.”³⁵⁵ Mourning jewelry, especially hairwork pieces, became more popular than they had been before the war, with several artisans advertising their European training and ability to execute the most fashionable and elegant designs.³⁵⁶ Some mourning accessories were even sold by the box or at wholesale, with the intention that country peddlers and storekeepers would make them available to those who lived outside the larger cities.³⁵⁷

Larger numbers of merchants and artisans also began to offer services as undertakers after the end of the war. In most cases, these were the same types of craftsmen—carpenters, cabinet makers, and upholsterers—who had customarily engaged in funeral management during

³⁵⁴ This decade includes the beginnings widespread American protests to Parliamentary policy (roughly 1765), Britain’s attempts to quell those protests, and the war itself (1775-1783).

³⁵⁵ *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), June 22, 1796; *Massachusetts Mercury* (Boston), October 16, 1798.

³⁵⁶ *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), July 15, 1785; *Independent Journal* (New York City), December 8, 1784.

³⁵⁷ *Independent Journal* (New York City), December 22, 1783; *South Carolina Weekly Gazette* (Charleston), October 23, 1784; *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), April 24, 1784; *Salem (MA) Gazette*, May 5, 1797; *Albany (NY) Gazette*, July 14, 1791; *Albany (NY) Gazette*, September 22, 1797; *New-York Gazette*, July 6, 1799; *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), March 31, 1804.

the earlier periods. What was new, however, was that some those who participated in the funeral trade now began to offer more comprehensive services, with the result that the professional designation of “undertaker” began to spread outside of Philadelphia.³⁵⁸ While women still monopolized the private care of the body—washing and dressing the deceased—these men slowly began to take over the public parts of funerals, including providing coffins, hiring porters (the men who actually carried the bier), scheduling the church service, and arranging for the preparation of the burial place.³⁵⁹ Some women fought the encroachment of men upon their traditional duties, and women like Mary Jacobs of Philadelphia even advertised their availability to “atten[d] on funerals,” assuring her prospective customers that “as she has been in that business for a length of time . . . she flatters herself that she will have it in her power to give full satisfaction” to any customer who would entrust their obsequies to her.³⁶⁰ It would be decades into the nineteenth century before men came to exclude women completely from the undertaking trade, and even then they had to compete with long-standing traditions which delegated women to the intimate process of caring for the dead.³⁶¹

As discussed in Chapter 1, undertakers allowed those of the lower ranks in society to arrange a stylish funeral without specialized knowledge of mourning etiquette. Whereas wealthier individuals knew which of a range of merchants and craftsmen to contact for their version of a “decent burial,” many of those in less affluent circumstances lacked a similar understanding of the details of a well-appointed funeral. Hiring an undertaker, then, allowed

³⁵⁸ See Chapter 1 for a discussion of Philadelphia and the undertaking profession.

³⁵⁹ For the progress of the transition of death care from women to men, see Zlomke, “Death Became Them” and Georganne Rundblad, “Exhuming Women’s Premarket Duties in the Care of the Dead,” *Gender and Society* 9, no. 2 (April 1995): 173-92.

³⁶⁰ *Philadelphia Gazette*, May 2, 1798.

³⁶¹ Zlomke, “Death Becomes Them,” vii-ix, 19-41; Rundblad, “Exhuming Women’s Premarket Duties,” 180-82.

individuals and families to rely upon professional expertise to make sure that their loved ones' obsequies were as close as possible to those of the more prosperous members of the community. Some undertakers even stressed the usefulness of their services to those who were unfamiliar with the particulars of local mourning practices. Jacob Sass of South Carolina, for example, assured his customers that "Citizens and others who are unacquainted with the custom of this Country, may be supplied with every necessary for Funerals on the shortest notice."³⁶² Even though Sass advertised his services in the months just after the end of the Revolution, other undertaking professionals would find it necessary, several years later, to emphasize the usefulness of hiring an undertaker to those who lacked either the knowledge or the time to plan an acceptable funeral. In 1806, the owners of Hill's Warehouse in Charleston believed it necessary to observe that "the novelty of an Undertaker's Business, in Charleston," required them to explain just what, in fact, an undertaker did. In this case, the job included planning the funeral "with a friend of the family," procuring "every article of mourning" necessary for the family's use, and ordering a coffin to the family's specifications. By handling all of the funeral arrangements themselves, the proprietors promised to "prevent the feelings of the surviving relatives from being harassed . . . by the hurry and confusion in providing for a funeral."³⁶³ They may also have said that they protected families' feelings by saving them from embarrassing social faux pas in the very public act of burying their dead.

Of course, the material trappings of mourning and the services of an undertaker were available to anyone who could pay for them. As Americans at all social levels began to return to familiar (and sometimes expensive) funeral customs, some became anxious about the potential

³⁶² *South Carolina Gazette and General Advertiser* (Charleston), December 16, 1783. When referring to "this country," Sass likely meant the funeral customs of South Carolina, not the United States.

³⁶³ *City Gazette and Daily Advertiser* (Charleston), October 28, 1806.

ramifications of such conspicuous consumption. To begin with, many states experienced a financial downturn after the war as military spending ceased, wartime debts came due, and prewar trade relationships changed dramatically. To make matters worse, it seemed that Americans spent most of their money on imported goods, thereby impoverishing the local economy.³⁶⁴ To remedy the problem, some towns, especially in Massachusetts, began to call for curtailing spending by returning to the mourning restrictions put into place during the imperial crisis. In 1788, for example, the town of Boston, which had repeatedly tried to encourage citizens to practice economy in their mourning customs, enacted a new law which ordered “that in future no scarves, gloves or rings shall be given at any funeral, nor shall any wine, rum, or other spiritous liquor be allowed or given at, or immediately before or after any funeral in this town,” on pain of a twenty shilling fine. Additionally, any individual who purchased new mourning clothes faced the same punishment. The only exceptions were black armbands for men and black hats, bonnets, gloves, or fans for women.³⁶⁵ At this price point, however, the wealthy could avoid observing the mourning restrictions with relative impunity, while Bostonians of lesser means had to be more circumspect.

If opulent funerals worried some because of their expense, for others they posed a serious threat to American political virtue. Before the war, patriot leaders had tied their appeals for nonimportation and nonconsumption not just to financial motivations but also to the idea that virtuous simplicity was an important part of what separated them from the opulent, but often

³⁶⁴ Douglas A. Irwin and Richard Sylla, “The Significance of Founding Choices: Editors’ Introduction,” in *Founding Choices: American Economic Policy in the 1790s*, ed. Douglas A. Irwin and Richard Sylla (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 2. Economic historian Gordon C. Bjork has pointed out that postwar economic difficulties affected different regions in different ways, some favorably and some negatively. See “The Weaning of the American Economy: Independence, Market Changes, and Economic Development,” *Journal of Economic History* 24, no 4 (December 1964): 541-60.

³⁶⁵ *Columbian Herald* (Charleston), July 14, 1788.

corrupt, government that oppressed them. Americans' virtue, they argued, would ultimately give them the strength to oppose and defeat the British and to create a new, better, society. Now that the conflict was over, the newly-founded American republic depended upon the virtue of its citizens, who, in theory, held and delegated all legitimate power, to continue to guard the liberty they had won. To do this, they had to be willing to sacrifice their own self-interest—their social advancement, their luxuries—on behalf of the public good.³⁶⁶ One writer, who criticized Charleston's "Mode of Conducting Funerals," gave voice to accepted political principle when he identified luxury as "the forerunner of a dying state" and assured his fellow-citizens that "unless speedily checked," it could "demolish the best regulated constitution."³⁶⁷

When laws failed, funeral reformers had to appeal to the patriotism—and, perhaps, the *noblesse oblige*—of the upper classes to set an example with their funeral practices. In 1796, one Boston citizen queried whether "it would not be of public utility, and a saving of expense, to have three or four Hearses kept by persons appointed by, and under the [control] of the selectmen, to be used at funerals."³⁶⁸ As the selectmen could set the rate for hiring a hearse, they could ensure that none of the city's citizens could attempt to outspend one another in conveying loved ones' remains to burial. Boston's authorities had attempted to place similar controls on funeral spending, particularly by regulating undertakers' fees, in previous years, but with little success.³⁶⁹ The writer in 1796 suggested that if the hearses were "handsome; covered with black cloth, and having plumes as in Europe—or with a staff, with a black silk ensign, which may be

³⁶⁶ On republican virtue, simplicity, and the dangers of luxury, see Withington, *Toward a More Perfect Union*, xv, 16; Wood, *Radicalism of the American Revolution*, 104-5.

³⁶⁷ *The Charleston Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, April 24, 1787.

³⁶⁸ *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), May 7, 1796.

³⁶⁹ *Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, May 29, 1786. Other towns followed Boston's example in establishing set fees for funeral services, including Portland, ME, Salem, MA, and Newburyport, MA. See *Cumberland Gazette* (Portland, ME), August 14, 1788; *Salem (MA) Gazette*, January 19, 1790; and *Impartial Herald* (New York), July 18, 1797.

seen at a distance—drawn by black horses,” both the rich and poor might be induced to make use of them.³⁷⁰ A “handsome” hearse would satisfy the dignity of the wealthy, encouraging them to employ it in their funeral processions as an example of economy without compromising their status. More importantly, by being conscious of their country’s wellbeing, those who practiced restraint in their funeral spending were “well worthy of the imitation of every friend of their country” because they willingly sacrificed their own vanity for the public good.³⁷¹ One writer even went so far as to suggest that, as only “*Torries* and their dependents” had initially opposed mourning restrictions during early protests against Great Britain, it must be people of the same sentiments, or even the same people, who clung to expensive funeral observances to the detriment of the country’s virtue.³⁷²

While hints about hearses only went so far, other writers were more direct with their appeals to the affluent to set an example by their mourning customs. One, in Charleston, delivered a blistering critique of the city’s customary funeral festivities, noting “that the grief one felt at the loss of a relation or friend, was a sufficient calamity without encreasing the anxiety about a splendid interment.” Experience taught that “the needless exorbitant expense of funerals” resulted in “a loss to the giver, without any advantage to the receiver.”³⁷³ The fault, however, laid with those who made extravagant mourning fashionable. Indeed, the author of this harangue on funeral spending demanded that his wealthier readers remember that “people in the inferior situations of life daily imitate those in a more elevated sphere; it ought to be the endeavour of the latter to set the laudable example of suppressing this fantastical luxury.” Further, he assured Charlestonians that curtailing their own mourning practices would result in no loss of status to

³⁷⁰ *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), May 7, 1796.

³⁷¹ *Columbian Herald* (Charleston), July 14, 1788.

³⁷² *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), May 1, 1788.

³⁷³ “On the Mode of Conducting Funerals in this City,” *Charleston (SC) Morning Post*, April 24, 1787.

themselves: “Being opulent, their circumstances could not be questioned, and all would agree that it was for discountenancing so absurd a custom.”³⁷⁴

Though these calls for funeral economy encouraged the wealthy to scale back on funeral expenditures, it would be a mistake to conclude that funeral reformers were arguing for any sort of equality in funeral rites, or in society itself. Instead, they highlighted elites’ roles as social leaders and tried to convince them that they needed to demonstrate their own circumspection and patriotism, especially now that democratic notions seemed to be making headway as a result of the Revolution. The democratic potential of wartime rhetoric and experiences threatened to undo traditional social hierarchies, making those of the upper ranks anxious about maintaining their own status and preventing what they believed would be dangerous social disorder.

Funeral reformers, then, aimed to relieve those anxieties by pointing out ways that the wealthier members of the community could display their good judgment and refined tastes in choosing to avoid opulent funeral ceremonies and extravagant mourning. Thus, the South Carolina writer suggested “a genteel present in a private manner.” Perhaps a cask of wine or bottle of port could be given to ministers or physicians who attended on a grieving family, “and being done *secretly* could have no bad influence on the generality.”³⁷⁵ Such discreet appreciation, as opposed to the more ostentatious custom of giving gloves and scarves to funeral participants, evidenced both the giver’s affluence and attention to propriety on solemn occasions. Funeral economy could also demonstrate benevolence, as individuals in poorer circumstances would no longer feel pressured to plan and pay for funerals that they could not afford. Another commenter, this time in Maine, assured his readers that should “the rich lead the lower ranks by

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ “On the Mode of Conducting Funerals in this City,” *Charleston (SC) Morning Post*, April 24, 1787.

their examples. . . . The poorer ranks will be glad of the opportunity of following them, when they can do it without the mortification of declaring their poverty by their dress.”³⁷⁶ Above all, the upper classes’ leadership in arresting the growth of funeral spending would go a long way toward maintaining “a proper subordination in funerals” while “at the same time, every class” would “be buried with decency and decorum.”³⁷⁷

Regardless of how elites and funeral reformers felt, and wrote, about funeral expenditure, middling- and lower-class individuals had their own ideas about the ingredients of a “decent” burial and the propriety of material expressions of mourning. For the most part, many did as they had before the war—they provided their loved ones with “decent” funerals that approximated those they saw among their neighbours. They took advantage of obliging merchants who offered a range of funeral goods at different price points and, when short on cash, even traded their produce for mourning accessories.³⁷⁸ As professional undertakers proliferated, they hired these men to help them manage their funerals. They relied on the benevolence of neighbors and local church congregations to defray some of their burial expenses. They also came up with novel ways to participate in funeral customs normally reserved for the elite.

Take, for example, the practice of sending out funeral invitations. During the colonial period, those who could afford it might distribute printed invitations complete with decorative flourishes and symbols of mortality. After the war, both those of the upper ranks and those of the

³⁷⁶ *Cumberland Gazette* (Portland, ME), March 2, 1787.

³⁷⁷ “On the Mode of Conducting Funerals in this City,” *Charleston (SC) Morning Post*, April 24, 1787.

³⁷⁸ Some merchants advertised their willingness to take “country produce” in exchange for their wares. See *Independent Journal* (New York City), March 24, 1781; *South Carolina Weekly Gazette* (Charleston), October 23, 1784; *Columbian Herald* (Charleston), February 24, 1785; *Carlisle (PA) Gazette*, January 24, 1787; *Albany (NY) Gazette*, July 14, 1791; *Suffolk Gazette* (Sag Harbor, NY), July 8, 1805.



Figure 4. Invitation to the funeral of John Moore (1712). University of Missouri Museum of Art and Archaeology, “Final Farewell: The Culture of Death and the Afterlife,” <http://maa.missouri.edu/exhibitions/finalfarewell/memento2.html> [accessed March 23, 2014].

working classes took to inviting funeral guests by way of the local newspaper. Usually included among the paper’s death notices, these funeral announcements, though simple, provided a cheaper form of funeral invitations while increasing the chance that the number of funeral guests, an important part of any “decent” funeral, would be as high as possible. A typical invitation ran in the *Columbian Centinel* of December 4, 1804. It requested that the “relations and friends” of “Mr. *William Manning*” of Cambridge attend his funeral on the next afternoon “without further invitation.” Below Manning’s funeral announcement came another for “Mrs. *Mary Jepson*,” whose funeral would “proceed from the house of her brother” that very day at four o’clock. Again, Mrs. Jepson’s “relations and friends” were to attend “without a more particular invitation.” Newspaper invitations appeared for the funerals of a wide range of individuals, from

young men, such as Nathaniel B. Green, who died at age twenty-five, to members of particular professions, like Thomas D. Madan, whose anticipated funeral guests included “his friends and acquaintance; the members of the Tammany Society; and the Associated Society of Teachers.”³⁷⁹

Memberships in associations like the Tammany Society and various other professional and fraternal organizations also helped to boost funeral attendance, regardless of the social status or financial circumstances of the deceased. Freemasons had long practiced the custom of attending fellow members’ funerals and performing their own set of funeral rites, but other associations soon joined in making funerals an important occasion to demonstrate their fraternal bonds.³⁸⁰ Many of these societies made ethnic identities the basis of their organizations. The Scots Thistle Society of Philadelphia, for example, “being sensibly convinced of the duty of relieving each other when in distress,” promised that its members could claim assistance from the society “not as Charity, but a just right.” Thus, its constitution provided for visits and financial assistance to the sick, and, should the worst happen, to “send money . . . for funeral charges, should the deceased have no relations.” It was also the duty of the Vice President to “cause notice to be sent to all the members to attend the funeral,” where they would “walk in a body before they corpse.”³⁸¹ Other organizations based their membership on shared professions. Thus, Philadelphia’s Franklin Society, made up of the city’s printers, required members to “attend the funeral of a deceased member, with a crape round his arm, in the same manner as

³⁷⁹ *Columbian Centinel* (Boston), February 12, 1812; *Republican Watch Tower* (New York City), January 2, 1805.

³⁸⁰ For one example of Masonic funeral customs, see Massachusetts Grand Lodge, *The Constitutions of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons* (Worcester, MA: Isaiah Thomas, 1792), 206-13.

³⁸¹ Scots Thistle Society of Philadelphia. *Constitution of the Scots Thistle Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: John Biroen, 1799), 7, 10, 17.

funerals are usually attended by the brethren of other societies.” The penalty for being absent was a fine of “one dollar.”³⁸²

While the organizations mentioned above typically accepted only white members, similar mutual aid societies also became important institutions in African American communities.

Founded and patronized by free Black men in northern cities, these societies became the basis of the insurance companies and funeral homes that would reach their peak in the later nineteenth century and remain important institutions even into the twentieth century. As one scholar writes,

The early benevolent societies, which were inspired by African secret societies, and the fraternal orders, which followed the European tradition of fraternal organizations, were founded primarily to assist fellow blacks through economic cooperation and to offer social support in times of need. The most significant aspect of most black benevolent societies, however, was aid given for burial. In addition to burial insurance, these early organizations promised to provide dignified funeral rites and a cemetery plot.³⁸³

The earliest of these societies, including the Union Society of Newport, Rhode Island (1780), and the Free African Society of Philadelphia (1787), were very much part of the postwar impulse toward associations experienced by whites, but proved, because of their importance in African American communities, much more durable.³⁸⁴ Ensuring decent funerals, then, was a matter of concern—indeed, a matter of asserting what could be called a natural right—even among those who found their claims to the fruits of the Revolution continually challenged.

It is important to understand that, even though those of the middling- and lower-classes participated in the consumer culture surrounding funerals and adopted some of the customs of

³⁸² Franklin Society of the City of Philadelphia. *Constitution of the Franklin Society of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Stewart and Cochran, 1791), 11.

³⁸³ Suzanne E. Smith, *To Serve the Living: Funeral Directors and the African American Way of Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 40.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; Taylor, *American Revolutions*, 440, 469-70. For those African Americans who remained enslaved, their deathways remained subject to the caprice of their white masters, though many found ways to adapt their traditions and continue them in the face of overwhelming obstacles. See Smith, *To Serve the Living*, 25-31.

those above them on the social scale, the meanings behind these activities were very different than the messages that elites intended to send with their own funeral rites. While individuals and families might certainly advertise economic success, and even social advancement, with costlier funerals, it was far more common for working class people to choose comparatively moderate services designed to demonstrate a basic equality with neighbors more than aspirations to join the upper echelons of society. Thus, they assigned their own value to activities like donning mourning dress, using hearses, or entertaining mourners with post-funeral refreshments. Instead of simply mimicking elites or looking to upset the social structure, as funeral reformers feared, they used funereal culture to define a “decent” burial on their own terms.³⁸⁵ The freedom to judge for themselves what their death rituals looked like and meant, even in defiance of elite expectations and funeral reformers’ fears, was one of the ways that ordinary Americans explored the possibilities open to them in the wake of the Revolution.

Washington is No More!

Ironically, the man who, for many Americans, most exemplified republican virtue would also be the man whose funeral ceremonies would be some of the most lavish in the nation’s history. When George Washington died on December 14, 1799, his final instructions directed his family to see him “interred in a private manner, without parade or funeral Oration.”³⁸⁶ From his own perspective, he had good reason to insist on avoiding any elaborate ceremony at his death. His fame, after all, rested on his dedication to republican virtue—particularly his willingness to

³⁸⁵ That individuals of all classes were more successful than the funeral reformers is evidenced by the continuing existence of the undertaking profession, which only grew as the nineteenth century progressed. See Habenstein and Lamers, *History of American Funeral Directing* and Gary Laderman, *The Sacred Remains*.

³⁸⁶ George Washington, Last Will and Testament, July 9, 1799, image 27, Fairfax County Circuit Court Historic Records, <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/circuit/sites/circuit/files/assets/documents/pdf/george-washington-will.pdf>.

sacrifice his own desires for the good of his country. His ability to resist the allurements of power, first as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army and then as President of the United States, won him the admiration of his countrymen and the appellation of “Father of his Country.”³⁸⁷ It only remained for him now, at death, to set the ultimate example of modesty and patriotism by going to his grave as a private citizen with as little pomp as possible.

Given his experiences as Commander-in-Chief and as President of the United States, however, Washington likely knew—or at least suspected—that the American people would have their own ideas about the appropriate honors to pay him at his death. Even his “private” funeral at Mount Vernon, which took place on December 18, 1799, significantly exceeded his wishes for a simple burial.³⁸⁸ On that day, local militia, Freemasons, and citizens of nearby Alexandria joined Washington’s family and household staff to accompany the General’s body to its final resting place. At three that afternoon, as no less than eleven pieces of artillery, joined by guns from a nearby steamboat, fired their salutes, the lengthy procession of mourners made its way down to the family tomb on the banks of the Potomac. The militia came first, carrying their arms reversed, followed by four local clergymen from different denominations, and General Washington’s riderless horse, with his pistols and holsters, led by two enslaved grooms. After the horse came the coffin, covered with the family pall, and attended by six military officers and Freemasons. The principal mourners, twelve members of Washington’s closest friends and

³⁸⁷ Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency George Washington* (New York: Vintage, 2004), 82, 109, 139-43, 147, 183, 197, 233, 273-75; Sandra Moats, *Celebrating the Republic: Presidential Ceremony and Popular Sovereignty from Washington to Monroe* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2010), 12-14, 16; Matthew R. Costello, *The Property of the Nation: George Washington’s Tomb, Mount Vernon, and the Memory of the First President* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2019), 5-6; For an interesting essay on ambition and its role in George Washington’s life, see Peter R. Henriques, *First and Always: A New Portrait of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 144-63.

³⁸⁸ Many thanks to Mary V. Thompson for filling in some of the details of the preparations for Washington’s funeral and for sharing her notes for her talk, “‘In a Private Manner, Without Parade or Funeral Oration’: The Funeral George Washington Wanted, But Didn’t Get,” given at the David Library of the American Revolution on June 13, 2018.

family, followed the body, succeeded by the members of the local lodge of Freemasons, then Washington's overseers, who led a body of local citizens. At the tomb, the Rev. Thomas Davis, the minister of Christ Church in Alexandria, read the Episcopal funeral service and offered a few words of condolence.³⁸⁹ The Masons then performed the brotherhood's ceremonies before placing the coffin in the tomb. According to Tobias Lear, "after the Ceremony the Company returned to the house where they took some refreshment, & retired in good order."³⁹⁰ Thus, Washington's funeral went from "private . . . without parade, or funeral Oration," to a community event, complete with a bevy of soldiers, local citizens, and military salutes.³⁹¹

For all of the ceremony that attended Washington's private funeral, the service itself remained very close to those of other members of the Virginia gentry to which Washington, in his character as a private citizen, belonged. As noted in Chapter 1, southern planters generally preferred burial on their own plantations, and, given Washington's associations during his lifetime, the presence of both the Alexandria militia and the Freemasons were not extraordinary. The Washington family observed the usual custom of going into mourning after the General's

³⁸⁹ Tobias Lear, *Letters and Recollections* [. . .] *Showing the First American in the Management of His Estate and Domestic Affairs* (repr., Andesite Press, 2015), 139-41; *Centinel of Liberty and George-Town and Washington Advertiser*, December 20, 1799. Because George Washington remained a member of the Episcopal (formerly Anglican) Church, it was the rector of Christ Church who served as the officiating member of the clergy. Other ministers included one Episcopal (Rev. Mr. Dulany Addison) and two Presbyterian ministers (Rev. Dr. James Muir and Rev. Mr. William Moffatt). All four clergy had connections to George Washington and his family. See Mary V. Thompson, "Funeral Ministers," Digital Encyclopedia of George Washington, Center for Digital History at the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington, January 16, 2020, <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/funeral-ministers/>.

³⁹⁰ Lear, *Letters and Recollections*, 139-41.

³⁹¹ The amount of food and drink at Washington's funeral gives some clue as to the number of guests who attended. Richard Klingenstein, who has undertaken to research in detail the materials and services provided for Washington's funeral, as well as the local craftsmen and vendors who supplied them, determined that Lear's "refreshment" consisted of four pounds of cake, three large cheeses weighing a total 61 pounds, and 29 gallons of rye whiskey from Washington's own distillery." Estate records indicate that a further 10 gallons of spirits came from George Gilpin, an Alexandria merchant, who usually kept a stock of product from Washington's distillery for resale. Further, George and Judy Edick, also from Alexandria, billed the estate for a 40-pound cake in the months after the funeral. See Richard Klingenstein, "The Burial of George Washington: The Lesser Known Participants," *Alexandria Chronicle* (Spring 2012), 3-4.

death, just as they had for other family members over the years. In keeping with Washington's usual tastes, even the trappings for the funeral—the mahogany coffin (which also bore silver coffin furniture) and the family pall—were more dignified than ostentatious. As Washington had formally belonged to the Episcopal Church during his lifetime, the religious services at his funeral included the funeral service from the Book of Common Prayer. Just about any member of the Virginia elite, particularly those who had served in local offices or in the military, could expect about the same sort of ceremonies at their death. Just as with colonial funeral traditions, George Washington's funeral, even if he had never served as Commander-in-Chief or as the President of the United States, publicly demonstrated his religious affiliation, his social status and associations, and the personal respect and affection of the assembled mourners.

As might be expected, the national funeral honors for George Washington far outpaced the obsequies at Mount Vernon. In Philadelphia, Congress resolved to hold a “funeral procession from Congress Hall to the German Lutheran Church” in Philadelphia on December 26 and to recommend “to the People of the United States to wear crape on the left arm, as mourning, for thirty days.”³⁹² On that morning, the city's inhabitants woke to the sound of cannon—sixteen guns representing the sixteen states fired their salute at daybreak, and the report of one gun would follow at half-hour intervals until sunset, creating what Gerald Kahler has called a “soundscape” for the proceedings of the day.³⁹³ The procession got underway around noon, with

³⁹² United States House of Representatives, *Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States*, 6th Congress, 1st Session, 1799, vol. 3 (Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1865), 541.

³⁹³ Gerald E. Kahler, *The Long Farewell: Americans Mourn the Death of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 31. This salute, along with several other elements of the many funerals for George Washington held throughout the nation, conformed to Alexander Hamilton's detailed orders for the military ceremonies at each army station in honor of Washington who was, at his death, Lieutenant General and Commander in Chief of the armies of the United States. As Washington's second-in-command, Hamilton took over the leadership of the army upon Washington's death. Hamilton's instructions specified that civilian and military funeral processions for Washington should be combined whenever possible, with the army leading the procession and citizens following behind. For Hamilton's orders, which he issued on December 21, 1799, see the *Albany Gazette*,

regiments of both federal and militia cavalry, infantry, and artillery leading the way. Newspaper articles differ on the exact order of the procession, but participants included both military and civilian musicians, playing funeral dirges, the clergy of Philadelphia's several churches, and contingents of both Freemasons and the Society of the Cincinnati. Perhaps the most striking element of the procession was the General's horse, crowned with a plumage of black and white feathers, and carrying a saddle, holsters, and pistols, with the boots in the stirrups reversed, symbolizing Washington, not just as commander of the army, but as a fallen warrior. The bier came next, topped by Washington's hat and sword, echoing the custom of placing a crown and scepter on the bier of a monarch in a royal funeral procession. In another nod to royal tradition, the officers of the House and Senate, including the doorkeepers and sergeants-at-arms, marched in the procession as well, with the symbols of their authority, their white staves and maces, covered in black crepe to denote mourning. Foreign officials, including commissioners from Britain and Spain, demonstrated both their respect for the deceased and their own importance by mingling with the heads of government departments, the members of the national judiciary, and the officers of the army and navy.³⁹⁴

December 30, 1799. For an interpretation of Hamilton's possible motives in arranging for the military to take such a conspicuous role in national mourning for Washington, see Kahler, *The Long Farewell*, 38-54.

³⁹⁴ This account of the Philadelphia funeral procession is taken from *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser* (Philadelphia) of December 27, 1799 and the *Aurora General Advertiser* (Philadelphia) of December 27 and 28, 1799. It is interesting to note the difference between the descriptions of the procession printed in each newspaper, especially given their general political affiliations. The Democratic-Republican *Aurora*, for example, leaves out Alexander Hamilton completely and pays more attention to the militia, which the editor designates "republican" while regular troops are "federal," and to the citizens of the city, who come just before a detachment of infantry in the rear of the procession. Claypoole's paper, on the other hand, features Hamilton and leaves out the citizens. Washington would have been familiar with both papers, as the *Aurora* had published some of the most stringent criticism of his administration, while he favored Claypoole's *Advertiser* by allowing it to become the first paper to print his famous *Farewell Address*. See Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 686, 743-45, 753-54, 757-58, 765, 768. On the Federalists appropriation of mourning activities for Washington (and the surprising lack of overt partisanship involved), see Kahler, *The Long Farewell*, 21-37. For a description of heraldic funerals, which included the participation of the household officers carrying white staves and other emblems of their offices, see Litten, *The English Way of Death*, 173-94. Though royal funerals and the funerals of nobility became somewhat simplified after moving from the aegis of the College of Arms to the control of the Lord Chamberlain,

It is important not to underestimate the challenge that Congress faced as it planned funeral honors for George Washington. The tension between republican principles and the need to foster respect for the national government was one that had bedeviled American politicians since independence.³⁹⁵ Marking the death of a former head of state was a novel prospect for those who had formerly been the subjects of monarchs who reigned until the end of their lives. In this first state funeral of the new republic, Congress needed a ceremony that simultaneously expressed the public's feelings at the loss of "the father of his country" while also bolstering the nation's reputation abroad. Their solution was to adopt long-standing customs for the funerals of eminent figures, trusting a common funereal culture to make a powerful statement of national sentiment that would be understood, not only in America, but throughout the Western world. Very few who had any familiarity with royal ceremony would have missed the monarchical elements in Philadelphia's funeral procession. At the same time, those among the majority of citizens who would not have understood the finer points of royal custom would have understood the importance of the occasion from the impressive pageantry of the funeral procession. The point, then, was not so much to equate Washington with a king as to accord him the highest dignities that Western funeral culture could bestow. They used the symbols and forms that they had always understood, and that they were sure that those from other countries would

several elements remained the same. For examples, see the descriptions of the funerals of Frederick, Prince of Wales, and George II in the *Boston Gazette*, June 4, 1751, and the *Boston Evening Post*, January 5, 1761.

³⁹⁵ On Congress's search for ceremonies and symbols to promote respect for themselves and the nation, see Benjamin H. Irvin, *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty: The Continental Congress and the People Out of Doors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). The Congressional debate over the proper title for the President of the United States is a prime example of the tension between republican principles and the need to dignify national authority. See Kathleen Bartoloni-Tuazon, *For Fear of an Elective King: George Washington and the Presidential Title Controversy of 1789* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2014). For Washington's own efforts to strike a balance between ostentation and necessary ceremony, see Moats, *Celebrating the Republic*, 1-9, 35-62; Ellis, *His Excellency*, 189, 193-97; Simon P. Newman, "Principles or Men? George Washington and the Political Culture of Leadership, 1776-1801," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 480-85.

understand, to assert that the United States, though dedicated to republicanism, could equal the splendor of royal courts when paying their respects to their deceased leader and hero.³⁹⁶

While the funeral in Philadelphia might be considered the official, government-arranged state funeral for Washington, other large cities also held impressive memorial services for the deceased general and statesman. The proceedings in New York, on December 31, 1799, were, if possible, more opulent than those in Philadelphia. Once again, the military led the way, this time carrying with them “eight pieces of Field Artillery, taken in different Battles during the Revolutionary War, from the British.” Major General Alexander Hamilton, “with his suite,” brought up the rear of the ranks, followed by the citizens of New York. Both the Tammany Society and the Freemasons bore conspicuous parts in the procession, with their several standards and banners floating in the air, dressed in mourning and bearing both the symbols of their societies and images of mortality—urns, hourglasses, and scythes. The centerpiece of the pageant was the three-foot urn representing the mortal remains of Washington which were, in fact, in Virginia at Mount Vernon. This striking piece also featured “the American Eagle, four feet high, cloud-borne, with extended but drooping wings,” just behind the urn. Underneath the urn was “a second pedestal . . . covered with black, on the front and rear of which, the laurel wreath was represented, tied together with the American Stripes, and crowned by the American Constellation . . . on a ground of Black.” The procession ended at St. Paul’s Church where, after the funeral oration, spectators saw the bier buried in the cemetery “and the last Military Honors performed over it.”³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ As Benjamin Irvin has written, Congress’s adoption of the symbols and rituals of other Western nations “should not be interpreted as failure of creativity, but rather as a deliberate assertion that the United States now held a separate and equal station among the powers of the earth.” See Irvin, *Clothed in Robes of Sovereignty*, 12.

³⁹⁷ *Daily Advertiser* (New York City), January 3, 1800.

As New York's ceremonies show, Americans staged some of the most elaborate funeral rites that their deathways offered to show their admiration for Washington and their regret at his passing.³⁹⁸ It is also clear, however, that ostentatious ceremonies violated some of the principles that supposedly served as the foundation of the republic. It remained, then, for writers, eulogists, and orators to resolve the tension between the seemingly anti-republican overtones of the obsequies for Washington and the cause for which he had fought. To do so, they turned to Washington's merit—his virtue and patriotism—to justify the extraordinary material expressions of grief that his countrymen indulged at his death.

To begin with, Washington's eulogists stressed the debt of gratitude that the American people owed for his service to the nation. As Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, General Washington put his life in danger, riding "into the narrow space . . . between victory and defeat; between liberty and slavery," to inspire his soldiers to similar feats of valor.³⁹⁹ Forsaking his comfortable life as a Virginia planter, he had undergone "wonderful . . . perplexities . . . distresses . . . perils and discouragements" through the "hard and doubtful contest of eight years," leading "an army imperfectly disciplined, inconsistently supplied . . . and trembling to its dissolution" to victory in the face of the military forces of "one of the most potent and formidable nations on earth."⁴⁰⁰ Even after the return of peace, however, Washington could not retire to his family and estate. He again bowed to the entreaties of his countrymen to lead them

³⁹⁸ New York was distinctive in that it was one of the nation's largest cities with the resources to stage an opulent funeral pageant in Washington's memory. However, other cities and towns also went to great lengths to express their grief his passing. For examples see the observances of Trenton, New Jersey (*Centinel of Liberty and George-Town and Washington Adviser*, January 31, 1800), and Savannah, Georgia (*Georgia Gazette*, January 23, 1800).

³⁹⁹ Jeremiah G. Brainard, *An Oration, Commemorative of the Virtues and Services of General George Washington; Spoken in the Presbyterian Church in the City of New-London* (New London, CT: Samuel Green, 1800), 8.

⁴⁰⁰ Daniel Dana, *A Discourse on the Character and Virtues of General George Washington, Delivered on the Twenty-Second of February, 1800* (Newburyport, MA: Angier March, 1800), 12.

through a time of danger, serving as the first President of the United States for another eight years.⁴⁰¹ As writers and orators described Washington's life and services, they stressed his personal sacrifices and patriotism. For all that he endured, they argued, it seemed just that the nation would accord his memory the most elaborate honors that its funereal culture could bestow.

But the funeral observances for the departed general were not for his own benefit, or a simple reflection of the people's admiration for his patriotism. More importantly, the rhetoric surrounding Washington's funeral obsequies highlighted his virtues, both public and private, as an example for the emulation of both his contemporaries and future generations of Americans. Rev. Nathanael Emmons, for example, encouraged "those who manage the affairs of government" to "imitate his wisdom, integrity, patriotism, and invincible firmness" as they tried to guide the nation. Those who found themselves commanding "in the field" were to remember his "courage, fortitude, patience, perseverance, secrecy, and self-possession." For the young, Washington set an example by despising "vanities" and "vices," while practicing "sober and manly virtues" even in the "morning of his days." In short, Emmons concluded, "whoever wishes to be eminently useful in any private employment, or public station, let him think, and act, and live like Washington."⁴⁰² Thus, the elaborate funeral rites went beyond a mere display of pageantry. The speeches, processions, and periods of mourning, in all their sumptuousness, also served to better impress the peoples' minds, not just with Washington's memory, but with his character, as well.

⁴⁰¹ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 551-52, 559.

⁴⁰² Nathanael Emmons, *A Sermon on the Death of Gen. George Washington, Preached February 22, 1800* (Wrentham, MA: Nathaniel and Benjamin Heaton, 1800), 26-27.

Forgotten Soldiers—Living and Dead

While most Americans had few qualms about paying last respects to the late General and former President, some, at least, began to wonder if the ordinary soldiers who had fought alongside him—the rank and file who had also suffered in the cause of liberty—would ever receive their due rewards from the country that they had helped to found. Even as a few veterans began to make claims on a share of the nation’s military gratitude, it would take years of contesting the traditional narratives of officer-heroes and heroic civilians for ordinary soldiers to take their places in public memory of the war.⁴⁰³ In the meantime, the majority of veterans returned home to straightened circumstances as neglected farms and businesses, rising competition, and the mental and physical toll of their wartime experiences made it difficult to go back to their civilian occupations.⁴⁰⁴ As Congress defaulted on promises of officers’ pensions and backpay for soldiers, many sold what few assets they had—including land certificates and pay vouchers—just to survive.⁴⁰⁵ These impoverished veterans could barely afford funerals comparable to their neighbors, much less to those of eminent citizens like Washington.

It would not be until the late 1790s and early 1800s that public notice began to fall on the humbler heroes of the Revolution. As more soldiers’ biographies, histories, and political rhetoric began to feature the contributions of common soldiers, concerns about the rapidly diminishing numbers of the witnesses to the Revolution made it imperative for the next generation to prove their own patriotism by properly honoring those who had secured the nation’s liberty and

⁴⁰³ John Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 1-10. Sarah J. Purcell does an excellent job of tracing the process of what she calls the “democratization” of public memory to include ordinary soldiers. See Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America*.

⁴⁰⁴ Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 1-2, 47-64.

⁴⁰⁵ Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 32-3, 36-27, 259; Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 1-2.

independence. It was in this spirit that Congress enacted the veteran's pension acts of 1818 and 1820, providing long-overdue financial support to those whose sacrifices had made the American republic possible.⁴⁰⁶

It was also in this spirit that the successors of the Revolutionary generation began to be concerned about the fate of the soldiers' remains that still laid scattered across the American landscape. One of the first efforts to properly inter neglected fallen soldiers happened in New York City, where the daily tides continually revealed the bones of those who had lost their lives on the infamous British prison ships. In 1802, the city's Tammany Society took up the cause of the prison ship dead by beginning plans to erect a monument in their memory. Given the organization's democratic partisanship, the project was no doubt as political as it was patriotic.⁴⁰⁷ Still, the monument found support among like-minded Americans who wished to see the humbler heroes of the Revolution receive long-overdue funeral honors. In the spring of 1808, an impressive funeral parade escorted thirteen coffins containing the last relics of the "prison ship martyrs" to a new place of interment in Brooklyn.⁴⁰⁸ The orator of the day, Benjamin DeWitt, admonished his audience: "Seeing then how glorious is our liberty, and how dearly it was purchased by the blood and sufferings of our citizens, let us not forget to reverence the memory of the patriotic dead—let us entomb their ashes with all the honours they so richly merit."⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ John Resch, *Suffering Soldiers*, 4-10, 65-62; Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 93-132, 170, 192-209.

⁴⁰⁷ Robert E. Cray, Jr., "Commemorating the Prison Ship Dead: Revolutionary Memory and the Politics of Sepulture in the Early Republic, 1776-1808," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (July 1999): 565-90; Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 144-49.

⁴⁰⁸ Tammany Society, *Account of the Interment of the Remains of American Patriots, Who Perished on Board the Prison Ships during the American Revolution* (New York, 1865), 98-135.

⁴⁰⁹ Benjamin DeWitt, "Oration," in *Account of the Interment of the Remains*, 153.

Conclusion

The years after the American Revolution were a time of uncertainty and change. Though the nation had achieved independence, it remained to be seen how the ideals that inspired and sustained the war effort would now apply to politics, society, and individual lives. For their own part, elites attempted to hold on to their status and impose their own ideas about the proper social and political order. At the same time, those of the lower ranks of society also began to make their own demands on the promises of natural equality and the freedom to pursue happiness. In the midst of new religious liberties and opportunities for social advancement, Americans experienced changes, not just in their lives, but also in the ways that they dealt with death. Though many aspects of funeral ritual—the importance of religion, the expression of social status—looked the same on the surface, the meanings behind them changed as religious opinions shifted and conspicuous consumption spread. For many, funereal culture became one of the arenas where they claimed, contested, and redefined the legacies of the War for Independence.

Americans also had to work out what a republican public culture might look like. In particular, they had to decide what sorts of obligations they owed to those who had fought and sacrificed for independence. As former Commander-in-Chief and first President of the United States, Washington received unprecedented funeral rites at his death as his eulogists held him up as an exemplar of patriotism and republican virtue. The humbler veterans of the rank-and-file, however, would have to wait years before they garnered the same kind of attention that other war heroes, such as Washington and his fellow officers, enjoyed during their lives and at their deaths. Despite the best intentions of those who sought to honor Revolutionary soldiers both living and dead, the American public was slow to recognize, and even slower to commemorate, the

contributions of common soldiers. Even with the coming of the War of 1812, when honoring both veterans and the war dead became important to recruiting a new generation of soldiers, officers continued to garner the most public recognition at their deaths and in memorial efforts.⁴¹⁰ At places like Ticonderoga and Kings Mountain, visitors often continued to find the shallow graves and exposed remains of common soldiers into the mid-nineteenth century.⁴¹¹ It would take decades, and the rise of new generations seeking to settle their own relationship to the Revolution, before the public honored these soldiers with “decent burial.”

⁴¹⁰ Purcell, 151-61.

⁴¹¹ For several accounts of how encountering soldiers’ remains played out in different regions, see Thomas A. Chambers, *Memories of War: Visiting Battlefields and Bonefields in the Early American Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012).

Conclusion: Reconciling with the Past

Glory is the only reward which is worthy [for] free states to bestow, or patriots to receive.
—Samuel Stanhope Smith, *An Oration upon the Death of George Washington*

In the spring of 1901, a committee of men in Savannah, Georgia, went on a hunt for the remains of Major General Nathanael Greene. When Greene had died at his Georgia plantation some 115 years before, the suddenness of his death had led family friends to offer their vault in the city's Colonial Cemetery as a temporary resting place for his remains. Unfortunately, as the decades passed, the memory of the exact location of the general's tomb had slowly faded and disappeared. It was not until the turn of the twentieth century, when officials in Rhode Island became interested in reintering General Greene in their own state, that Savannahians made a sustained effort to rediscover his final resting place. After weeks of searching, the committee finally located the correct vault. Inside, they found little more than a skull, some crumbling bones, and a coffin plate bearing a few letters of the general's name. City officials gathered up the bones and dust into a lead-lined box, which they deposited in a bank vault until they could determine the wishes of Greene's living descendants. Ultimately, instead of going to Rhode Island, the mortal part of Nathanael Greene came to rest under an impressive monument in the center of Savannah's Johnson Square.⁴¹²

⁴¹² Joint Committee of the General Assembly of Rhode Island, *The Remains of General Greene: A Report* (Providence, RI: E. L. Freeman & Sons, 1903); Asa Bird Gardiner, *The Discovery of the Remains of Major-General Nathanael Greene, the First President of the Rhode Island Cincinnati* ([Newport, RI?]: The Cincinnati Society, 1901).



Figure 5. *Above left and right*, Nathanael Greene's original resting place; *left*, the Greene Memorial in Johnson Square.

Photos by author.

Though the journey of Nathanael Greene's remains was somewhat convoluted, he was not the only member of the revolutionary generation to receive public attention decades after his death. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, national and state governments, as well as heritage organizations and private citizens, set out to identify and mark the graves of Continental soldiers and officers and, where appropriate, to provide the recognition and funeral ceremonies that they believe these men merited and never got. Even as prominent officers like George Washington and Henry "Light-Horse Harry" Lee have received upgrades to their original burials, the soldiers who rest in hospital cemeteries like those at Bethlehem and Williamsburg, and the soldiers who fell on and around battlefields ranging from New York to Georgia, have also received their own monuments to attest to the sacrifices they made on the country's behalf.⁴¹³ The remains of eleven revolutionary veterans now rest in the national cemetery at Arlington.⁴¹⁴ In addition, tombs for "unknown" soldiers of the war, such as the one at the Old Presbyterian Meeting House in Alexandria, Virginia, now dot the American landscape.⁴¹⁵ Every year, droves of men and women who belong to patriotic societies decorate the graves of those who fell in the conflict with flowers and flags.

⁴¹³ On the debate about Washington's resting place and his reinterment in the "New Tomb" at Mount Vernon, see Costello, *The Property of the Nation*, 21-45. On Henry Lee's original burial and relocation to the chapel at Washington and Lee University, see Charles C. Jones, *Reminiscences of the Last Days, Death and Burial of General Henry Lee* (Albany, NY: Joel Munsell, 1870), 33-37, and Senate of the Commonwealth of Virginia, *Journal of the Senate of the Commonwealth of the State of Virginia Extra Session [. . .] on Wednesday, January 13, 1915* (Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1915), 42-45.

⁴¹⁴ Steve Carney, "The American Revolution at ANC: How Veterans of America's First Conflict Came to Arlington," Arlington National Cemetery, July 4, 2020, <https://www.arlingtoncemetery.mil/Blog/Post/10877/The-American-Revolution-at-ANC-How-Veterans-of-America-s-First-Conflict-Came-to-Arlington>.

⁴¹⁵ "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution," Presbyterian Meeting House, accessed October 13, 2022, <http://www.opmh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/STORY-BROCHURE-UNKNOWN-SOLDIER-TEXT-FOR-WEBSITE-2022.pdf>.

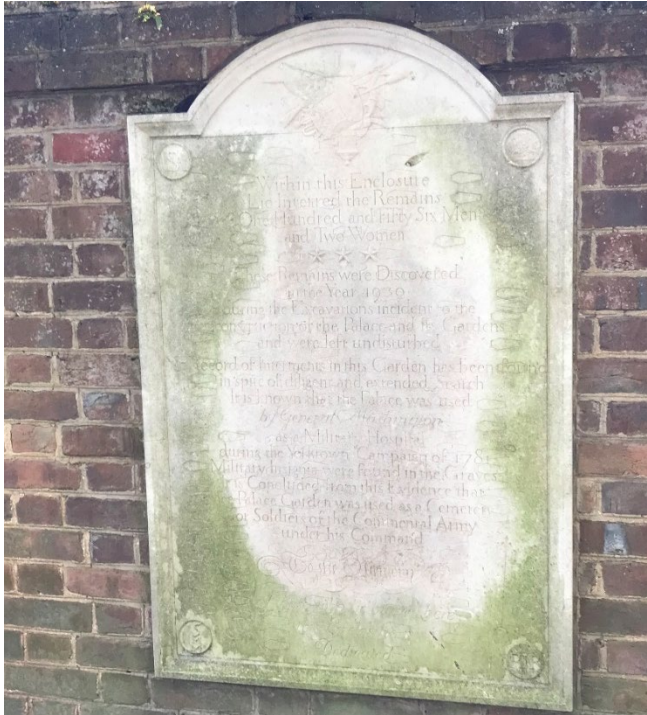


Figure 6 *Left*, memorial tablet, Governor's Palace gardens, Williamsburg, VA. This stone plaque affixed to a brick garden wall behind the Governor's Palace is the only memorial to those who rest nearby; *below*, a view of gravesites of the soldiers who died due to exposure as Washington prepared to cross the Delaware River in December, 1776.

Photos by author.



Our eighteenth-century ancestors would have been very familiar with the ways that their modern countrymen use funeral culture to express complex beliefs about the honor, gratitude, and justice due to revolutionary soldiers. Just as they themselves adapted their funeral rituals to reflect changing ideas about religion, society, politics, and the nature of liberty and equality, so too have subsequent generations of Americans shaped their mourning customs to express their own values and understandings of themselves, the nation, and the world. Just as the war with Great Britain disrupted eighteenth-century burial practices, so too has the experience of war shaped the way that Americans of the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries have approached death rituals, particularly those involving military casualties. Just as funeral rites in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries became a point of contention among those attempting to define and redefine the legacies of the Revolution, so too have modern issues about memorialization inspired conflict over the ways in which Americans view and remember their history.

For those who seek to better understand the lives and struggles of the revolutionary generation, it is not a bad idea to ask, “How did they bury their dead?” As this dissertation has shown, funeral rituals and mourning customs provide important insights into the ways that Americans have understood themselves, their country, and the world. Though the American colonists of the early eighteenth century inherited many of their mourning practices from Britain and other European nations, they also adapted those customs to suit the realities of life in the New World. Thus, while funeral ceremonies and cemetery art reflected common religious beliefs, they also evidenced significant religious diversity. From the Puritans of New England to the Anglicans of Georgia, men and women chose their funeral officiants, final religious services, and tombstone inscriptions to reflect, not just their faith in God, but also their beliefs about how

God should be worshipped. In the process, they also claimed shared religious and ethnic identities with those who dealt with death in the same ways.

In addition, while the aristocratic social hierarchies of England and Europe did not survive intact on the western side of the Atlantic, the inhabitants of the British American colonies nevertheless sought to advertise their claims to social status in their mourning customs. While the mourning accessories that flooded the marketplace helped elites to stage elaborate funeral pageants for their loved ones and friends, those same items also allowed those of lower ranks to express their own aspirations. Still, colonial funeral customs served to remind everyone of their place in the social order. Funeral sermons, death announcements, and even tombstone inscriptions praised men and women, the wealthy and the poor, and the scholar and the laborer according to those traits that were appropriate to their various stations. For the most impoverished members of colonial society, only the charity of others could provide them with a “decent” burial—a shroud, perhaps a coffin, and an unmarked grave.

As this dissertation has also shown, the onset of conflict between Great Britain and its American colonies added a distinctly political dimension to the colonists’ understanding of their funereal culture. Because mourning accessories made up a considerable part of the consumer items that Americans imported from Great Britain, they also became part of the restricted items included in nonimportation and nonconsumption agreements. By forgoing mourning clothes and other accoutrements at their funerals, those unhappy with Parliamentary policy made blatant political statements at times that were religiously, socially, and emotionally important to themselves and to onlookers. Though some balked at the intrusion of sordid political matters in what were supposed to be sacred rites, boycotting funeral goods became an important way for patriots to publicly associate themselves with the colonists’ cause.

Similarly, colonial protesters made good use of their countrymen's understandings of funereal culture to express their anger and grief about Parliamentary encroachments on colonial prerogatives. As they mourned "American Liberty" and executed the effigies of stamp masters and other officials, they used the symbols of grief, criminality, and moral decrepitude that usually accompanied funerals and executions to cast the struggle against Great Britain as one between good and evil and life and death. By subjecting the mock offenders to hanging, dismemberment, and burning, protestors also painted cooperation with British policy as abject slavery, deserving of the most degrading punishments that society could bestow. The connection between submission and slavery—as well as the threat of actual violence—embodied in these mock pageants was not lost on those who viewed them. Thus, by adopting death rituals, angry colonists succeeded in intimidating those responsible for enforcing tax laws, as well as those who might have complied with them. As the Stamp Act and the Townshend Acts became dead letters, Parliament repealed them and looked for other ways to prove its authority over the American colonies.

When the long-standing tension broke out into war in 1775, deathways again became an important way for Americans to understand their place in the struggle. Officially, the Continental Army adopted British burial practices for those who died in camp or on the battlefield. These customs, like most of military life, privileged officers over soldiers in order to maintain the military hierarchy. While officers, who were normally "gentlemen," received elaborate funerals according to their rank, common soldiers, who ranged from merchants and artisans to poor farmers and the indigent, were lucky to have more than a perfunctory burial. However, though social status and military rank were important to the army's deathways, they were not the most important considerations in all situations. When military necessity required the army to move

quickly, such as when it was fleeing from or in pursuit of an enemy, fallen soldiers of all ranks frequently remained on the battlefield. There, their final dispositions became subject to the mercy of the enemy, the attentions of local civilians, or the vagaries of nature. Similarly, when casualties from battle or disease became numerous, those responsible for burying their fellow-soldiers sometimes put very little effort into the task, preferring to use their time and energy for other pursuits. Though some private soldiers did their best to see their comrades decently buried, the funeral customs of the Continental Army were frequently a combination of tradition and improvisation, with the requirements of military strategy always taking primacy over the “decent” burial of either soldiers or their officers. In response, wartime rhetoric attempted to assure the men that both the thanks of the nation and the approbation of God would prove ample recompense for their service. In this way, death and haphazard interment, without ceremony or even much notice, became part of the sacrifice that soldiers made for their country’s liberty.

Upon the return of peace, funeral customs became one way that Americans began to work out the practical meaning of the Revolution’s promises of liberty and freedom. As imported funeral accoutrements and mourning accessories once again flooded the consumer market, some turned to increasingly elaborate death rituals to assert their basic equality with those above them on the social ladder. As purchasing opportunities and a growing number of professional undertakers assisted those who wished to plan fashionable funerals for themselves and their loved ones, some elites became apprehensive about the consequences of a more democratic funeral culture. In addition to setting rates for various funeral services, funeral reformers encouraged the wealthy to set an example by once again adopting the frugal mourning practices that enjoyed popularity before the war. In doing so, they sought to reassert the upper classes’ right to social leadership while curbing the worst tendencies of lower-class emulation. Still, the

religious freedom and relaxed social constraints encouraged by the Revolution presented new opportunities for Americans to express themselves through their funeral customs.

For the most part, the soldiers who had fought and sacrificed to win independence went relatively unnoticed in the early national period.⁴¹⁶ While officers frequently received recognition at their deaths, the veterans of the rank and file had to wait years before they could claim any practical or symbolic rewards for their service. On battlefields across the country, the remains of fallen soldiers still littered the landscape awaiting interment. It would not be until the Revolutionary generation began to pass away that a new generation would make efforts to honor those who served the country during the War for Independence. Even as veterans of the Continental Army began to publish memoirs and collect pensions, public attention turned to the fallen soldiers who awaited their own “decent” burials on the fields where they gave their lives for liberty. The earliest efforts at memorialization, including the relocation of the victims of the British prison ships of New York, represented only a small beginning to the momentous task of commemorating the Revolutionary dead and laying them to rest. It would remain for future generations to continue the work and make good on the promises of national gratitude that writers, ministers, and orators offered to soldiers as they faced the daunting prospect of dying in battle.

In its examination of death customs during the colonial, Revolutionary, and early national periods, this dissertation has proven that, far from being timeless traditions, funeral customs change according to time and place. Just as the American colonists adapted inherited funeral practices to suit the conditions of the New World, so too did the protesters of the Imperial Crisis

⁴¹⁶ This is, of course, with the exception of George Washington, whose prominent positions as the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army and the first President of the United States garnered national funeral observances at his death.

adopt funereal imagery and simplified mourning customs to express their feelings over the political tension with Great Britain. When the conflict turned violent, the Continental Army modified the deathways of the British military to suit its own needs, even while it dispensed with funeral observances when military necessity required. After the war, funereal culture became one of many ways that Americans contended over the promises of equality and freedom that were supposed to accompany victory. These ideals, as well as the nation's debt to its soldiers both living and dead, could only begin to be defined as the Revolutionary generation passed and new generations took its place. In many ways, the possibilities and limits of freedom and equality, as well as the way that Americans remember and honor service and sacrifice, still remain for each generation to decide.

There are also many topics relating to American deathways in the eighteenth century that remain for scholars to explore. Though many impressive studies of African American history include discussions of deathways in their analyses, more work could be done to understand how the disruptions of the Revolution also affected the communities of the free and the enslaved. One thinks, for example, of the "negro woman" Dinah that Christopher Marshall mentioned in his diary in April of 1778. Marshall had moved his household, including Dinah, to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, because of the British threat to Philadelphia in the months before. When Dinah died on April 2, Marshall had some "trouble to get persons to put [the] negro woman into her coffin." Though he blamed the lack of "love or charity. . . in the generality of the German inhabitants" of Lancaster, it is more likely that Dinah lacked funeral services because she was no longer surrounded by the African American community of her home in Philadelphia, who would

have performed final services at her death.⁴¹⁷ It is likely that there are other examples of disruptions to African American deathways that related in some respect to the war and its dislocations.

In addition, historians still have much to do to understand the way that rank-and-file soldiers viewed their service and sacrifice, particularly when they saw their comrades die in battle or in a wartime hospital. While those who had been prisoners of war had much to say about the horrors of seeing the treatment that the British doled out to dead soldiers, there are fewer accounts of the measures that they took to bury and mourn their fellow privates. The sources that inform this dissertation suggest that, when time and circumstances permitted, soldiers did whatever they could to preserve some semblance of dignity and religious sentiment when they buried their brethren. Because these observances may have been done in private, or rushed, or simply forgotten amidst daily encounters with death, they appear less often in the writings of rank-and-file soldiers. Catherine Cox, as well as a few observations in this study, have begun the discussion, but more research is needed, particularly if scholars are to come to a better understanding of how soldiers received wartime rhetoric about the meaning of their sacrifices and the rewards that their service would bring.⁴¹⁸

In a broader sense, it will be important for future research to delve into the ways that men and women of the “middling sort” adapted funeral customs to suit their own conceptions of a “decent” burial. While elite funerals, as well as the charity provided to the poor, are easier to find

⁴¹⁷ Christopher Marshall, *Extracts from the Diary of Christopher Marshall Kept in Philadelphia and Lancaster*, 179.

⁴¹⁸ It should be noted here that some Revolutionary veterans attempted to answer these questions for themselves in their postwar writings. Though this dissertation does not delve much into veterans’ memoirs, they might be a valuable source for understanding what soldiers made of the deaths that they witnessed during the war. Any analysis of these writings, however, must be framed by the personal and political situations of veterans in the early national period. Thus, these opinions might rise more from hindsight, with the knowledge that many wartime promises remained unkept, than from the actual thoughts and feelings of men who were about to enter battle.

in the historical record, there is a sense that those falling between the ranks of the rich and the poor also had their own customs, mourning etiquette, and understanding of the disruptions to traditional funereal culture that arose during the Imperial Crisis and the War for Independence. Certainly, previous historians have shown that a distinctively “middle class” view of death customs arose in the nineteenth century. It would be interesting to see how and when these sensibilities began to develop.

In the broadest sense, this dissertation has shown that American funereal culture has much to reveal about the lives and worldviews of past generations. As we have seen, the rites and rituals that surround death and mourning touch on important questions of religion, social status, personal feelings, political allegiances, patriotism, and the meaning of military service. At times of stress and turmoil, Americans sometimes find that these customs require adaptation to achieve broader goals. At the same time, the ordinary process of changing attitudes and changing technologies are forever redefining the way that we understand death and the ceremonies that accompany it. It is likely that future historians will turn to the funeral culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to achieve a useful perspective as they study our lives, our society, and the events that will come to define us.

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