H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Sam W. Haynes. *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World.* Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. x + 378 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3068-8; ISBN 978-0-8139-3080-0.

Reviewed by John Craig Hammond (Pennsylvania State University)
Published on H-SHEAR (May, 2011)
Commissioned by Caleb McDaniel

The Early Anglophobic Republic

This important book offers a comprehensive reinterpretation of the early American republic by focusing on Anglophobia and the quest to create a national identity in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The Anglophobia analyzed by Haynes is familiar enough to historians of the early American republic. What's new here is Haynes's demonstration that Anglophobia informed and structured all aspects of American cultural, political, social, and economic life in the quarter century between 1825 and 1850. Familiar controversies and issues–everything from the quest to create an authentically American culture, to partisan politics, economic issues, slavery, sectionalism, and territorial expansion–come across as new and fresh when analyzed from the perspective of an anxious, post-colonial republic living under the shadow of the British juggernaut.

Haynes's analysis rests on his claim that historians have misinterpreted the very nature of the early American republic. Historians typically assume that the United States was "the arbiter of its own fate, a virile, self-confident nation well on its way to establishing itself as a continental power." In turn, historians have tended "to see the challenges that it faced–a volatile marketplace, territorial expansion, slavery–as entirely of its own making." The reality was something quite different. According to Haynes, even in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the early American republic was more of a "developing nation" than the continent-striding colossus it would become. The young, postcolonial republic thus "exhibited a set of anxieties not uncommon among nation-states that have emerged from long periods of colonial rule" (p. 2). Those anxieties fed American efforts to create both a national identity that would be superior to Britain's corrupt and hypocritical imperial monarchism, and a nation-state strong enough to compete with the British Empire. Anglophobia thus became an integral part of an American nationalism forged in a British-dominated world.

As the United States approached its 1826 jubilee, white Americans became increasingly resentful of their dependence on Great Britain and conscientious of their cultural inferiority a full half-century after independence. As various Americans sought to create something of a national identity, they were repeatedly reminded that their material, cultural, economic, political, and geopolitical worlds continued to be shaped by British culture and imperial power. Americans ate on Staffordshire plates. British imports, credit, and markets exerted a continuing influence on economic life. British plays, British actors, British novels, and British letters dominated cultural life. Political life was shaped by national economic dependence on Britain and a continuing battle between the virtues of American republicanism and the subversive values associated with British aristocratical monarchism. Finally, the young republic's geopolitical ambitions were limited by British imperial interests in the Atlantic world and on the North American continent. Adding to a sense of American inferiority and Anglophobia were American proclivities to see British cunning and conspiracies lurking behind every national misfortune, insult, and ill. These suspicions were given more credence by what seemed like the omnipotence of British imperial power and long-standing fears that Britain sought to keep its former colonies in an inferior and subordinate imperial relationship.

By the 1830s, the resulting Anglophobia became central to debates about nearly every important issue in the young republic. After using two chapters to examine the sources of Anglophobia and anti-British sentiment between 1815 and the early 1830s, Haynes devotes the bulk of the book to examining the manifestations of Anglophobia and anti-British sentiment in different aspects of American public life. Organized by topic and chronology, separate chapters examine how Anglophobia structured

American debates about literature and letters, the theatre and commercial entertainment, the Second Party System, politics and political economy, abolitionism and reform, and diplomacy and expansion, culminating in two excellent chapters on Texas annexation and the Mexican War.

Testimony to the book's wide scope, Haynes begins by examining manifestations of Anglophobia and Anglophilia in both high and popular culture. Through the 1820s, British literature, letters, travel narratives, and news filled much of the printed material that circulated ever more widely in the United States. Resentful of their dependence on British literature and letters, American writers, publishers, and editors self-consciously sought "literary independence" from Britain. By the 1840s they had created a uniquely American genre of literature and letters, represented by everything from James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking novels to the literary, political, and commercial clique associated with Young America and the *Democratic Review*.

The theater and "commercial entertainment" became another site of Anglophobic and patriotic politics. As the once elite activity of theater-going became more accessible to the lower and middling classes of the cities, the theater and "commercial entertainment" became more decisively anti-British and patriotic. Theaters were adorned with flags, eagles, and paintings of American victories over the British. Orchestras invariably played patriotic music during intermission. American-penned plays pitted simple but virtuous Americans against cunning English aristocrats; audiences reserved their hardiest applause for the inevitable triumph of the noble Americans over their pretentious British foil. Newspapers widely reprinted the scandals and affronts to American national honor that followed British actors who, on their tours of the United States, invariably commented on the rudeness of American society while violating American morals. The scandals and insults just as quickly led to public scorn followed by a mea culpa to placate the host country. The intersection of the theater with politics and public life, Anglophobia and patriotism, reached a head in the 1849 Astor Place riot. A dispute between the leading American and British thespians turned into New York City's largest pre-Civil War riot. Involving everyone from Tammany Hall politicians, to Mike Walsh, New York Working Men, and New York toughs, the Astor Place riot nearly destroyed the theater district in a fit of patriotic and anti-British fervor.

Haynes's examination of Anglophobia in high and low culture is matched by his revealing analysis of politics and the Second Party System. The Second Party System was born in no small part out of John Quincy Adams's and Andrew Jackson's efforts to position themselves as the defenders of American values, interests, and institutions against British power and influence. Once the Second Party System hit its stride, Anglophobia became a central part of politics and policy. Whigs celebrated banks and tariffs as policies that would free American workers and merchants from British dependence. They also decried Democratic free trade doctrines as a boon for British mercantile interests. Democrats responded that Whig banking and money policies were an even greater sop to British financial interests, interests that sought to keep the United States in a dependent, colonial relationship. Anglophobia and allegations of Anglophilia also defined the personal attributes of candidates. The obsession with defending republican values led politicians and the partisan press to label their opponents as foppish, aristocratical, monarchical, tyrannical, and corrupt, epithets associated with the catch-all cry of British influence. Thus, the Whigs identified themselves by their opposition to Andrew Jackson's monarchical despotism, while Martin Van Buren was labeled a Walpoleon manipulator, a "lavender dandy," and a "fawning courtier" (pp. 152, 153). Democrats just as quickly characterized their opponents as the aristocratic tools of British interests and imperial power. Accordingly, the Whigs responded with presidential candidates of impeccable patriotic and anti-British credentials such as William Henry Harrison. Stung by defeat in the 1840 election, Democrats alleged that British gold had financed the entire log cabin and hard cider campaign. More than a rhetorical tool occasionally employed in political campaigns, Anglophobia sat at the core of political discourse.

Beyond informing campaigns, Anglophobia structured how Americans framed and understood the issues that informed politics. American economic dependence and British economic power fed disputes over tariffs, manufacturing, banking, and markets. The hostile, violent response to the abolitionists owed at least some of its character to the deep ties between American and British abolitionists; steeped in appeals to Union, anti-abolitionism carried an even deeper resonance because it drew on Anglophobic fears that John Bull was using the abolitionists to foster sectional discord as a means to subvert the Union. Boundary disputes and deep-seated suspicions of British imperial ambitions gave credence to allegations of British meddling in Texas, Mexico, and California. For the expansionists such as James Knox Polk who came to prominence in the 1840s, Texas annexa-

tion and war with Mexico were as much about defeating British designs on the North American continent as they were about fulfilling America's manifest destiny or satisfying the demands of southern slaveholders. Representative of the subtle and nuanced analyses that fill every chapter, Haynes concludes that the decline of Anglophobia after 1850 forced Americans to recognize that the problems which had divided them over the previous quarter century were both intractable and of their own doing. Worse, a quarter-century of Anglophobia only fueled divisions within the United States, internal divisions that would become more manifest with the absence of an external scapegoat.Like any good monograph, this one raises more problems and questions than it can answer. Haynes effectively demonstrates that Anglophobia and insecurities ran deep in American public life. However, by focusing mainly on public discourse, Haynes has to overlook the larger material forces that made both the young republic and its institutions weak, insecure, and anxious–in short, "postcolonial"–in the first place. Given the limits of any monograph, Haynes's claim that the United States was a postcolonial, developing nation–whatever those terms might mean–is assumed rather than explained and demonstrated. Nonetheless, this is a wide-ranging book that provides a novel and valuable interpretation of the early American republic. Historians will be able to employ its main interpretive point with great value. In addition, the book adds to the growing body of literature that treats the young republic as a postcolonial nation whose sense of aggrievement and paranoia informed everything from its aggressive expansion to its inability to address the enormous problem of slavery. It deserves a wide audience among historians of the early American republic.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the list discussion logs at:
http://h-net.msu.edu/cgi-bin/logbrowse.pl.

Citation: John Craig Hammond. Review of Haynes, Sam W., *Unfinished Revolution: The Early American Republic in a British World.* H-SHEAR, H-Net Reviews. May, 2011.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=32955

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.