



Zachary McLeod Hutchins, ed.. *Community without Consent: New Perspectives on the Stamp Act. Re-Mapping the Transnational: A Dartmouth Series in American Studies Series.* Lebanon: Dartmouth College Press, 2016. 264 pp. \$40.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-61168-882-5.

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In 1765, the British Parliament imposed a direct tax on the empire's colonies in North America. Titled the Stamp Act of 1765, the tax drew massive protests in the colonies until its repeal a year later. Conventional accounts of the American Revolution have treated the Stamp Act Crisis as an integral part of the Imperial Crisis which ultimately led the colonists to declare a rebellion in 1775. In 1953 Edmund and Helen Morgan published the last thorough study devoted to the Stamp Act Crisis. Their thesis is encapsulated in the book's title: *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution*.

The present volume, edited by Zachary McLeod Hutchins, aims to avoid this teleological account. Instead the chapters analyze aspects of the Stamp Act Crisis within their immediate historical context. The volume contains four parts, each with two chapters. The first part examines performative expressions of the protest in public. The second part turns to print culture and analyzes two poetic reactions to the Stamp Act Crisis. The second half of the book focuses on themes in transatlantic debate over the Stamp Act. Part 3 examines the analogy between taxation and slavery. Part 4 examines the image of Native Americans in the debate.

The book's most prominent theme concerns the fluid and highly contested identity of the colo-

nial subject. In the recent literature on the American founding, scholars have emphasized the formation of racial identity during the revolutionary era. Robert G. Parkinson and Mitch Kachun, for instance, examined the exclusion of African Americans from the collective story of the American Revolution. Peter Silver and David J. Silverman examined the increasing construction of Native Americans as "others" and "savages."^[1] The writers in the present volume demonstrate that exclusion played a prominent role in the development of the protests. As Molly Perry demonstrates, the leaders of the colonists' protests made a conscious effort to tie their public reaction to a shared British identity. Protesters thus hanged provincial officers in charge of enforcing the act in effigy from trees. This was an allusion to Whig protests in seventeenth-century England. However, public opinion in metropolitan Britain largely viewed the protests as the act of a violent mob. Perry argues that as a result, the protests' leaders excluded blacks, Native Americans, itinerant sailors, and women from their descriptions of the rituals.

Alexander R. Jablonski examines the contest over the meaning of British subjecthood. Like Perry, Jablonski finds an increasing exclusion of "others" in the colonists' propaganda. The analogy be-

tween taxation and slavery aimed to illustrate the real identity of the colonists, proud and equal British subjects who deserved the rights of Englishmen. Hutchins similarly focuses on the analogy between taxation and slavery. He juxtaposes John Dickinson's *Letters from a Farmer* (1767-1768) and J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). Hutchins argues that Crèvecoeur was partly responding to Dickinson's equation of the Stamp Act to slavery. Crèvecoeur, who came to support the Loyalist position, ridiculed Dickinson's analogy. As a means to do so, Crèvecoeur offered a form of a "slave narrative." His motive, however, was purely to refute the Patriots' position. Ironies abound: in later years Dickinson refused to sign the Declaration of Independence, although he later reembraced the revolutionary cause. A Quaker and a slaveholder, Dickinson manumitted his slaves following American independence. Conversely, Crèvecoeur's *Letters* are best known today as a celebration of the American of European descent. [2]

In addition to the emphasis on the fluidity of national identity, the volume further challenges the teleological account of the Stamp Act Crisis that the Morgans' study implies. Such accounts have read the radical break of 1775 back to 1765. Conversely, several chapters demonstrate that in 1765 violent rhetoric or unquestioned loyalty were not the only choices. Thus, J. Patrick Mullins examines clergyman Jonathan Mayhew's August 25 sermon protesting the Stamp Act and its causal connection to a Boston mob that broke Lieutenant Governor Thomas Hutchinson's home the next day. Mullins argues that there was no such causation, and notes Mayhew's moderate stance on the Stamp Act Crisis. The American Revolution's "Sons of Liberty," Mullins argues, were "birthed long before the August 25 sermon" (p. 30).

Two poems similarly offered a moderate alternative to the popular protests against the Stamp Act. Gilbert L. Gigliotti examines a Latin

poem published in the *Boston Gazette* in 1765. The poem, calling for restraint, shows how far the colonists of 1765 were from the bickering partisans that would go to war a decade later. Caroline Wigginton analyzes Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson's poem "The Dream." Like the *Boston Gazette* poem, "The Dream" portrayed an alternative, moderate opposition to the Stamp Act, in an attempt to assuage the public fervor.

Fergusson's case also brings us back to the theme of exclusion. Historians have focused on a homogenous depiction of the Patriots, as a prelude to the homogenous depiction of "the American" after 1776. Fergusson was marginalized as well. Described as "the most learned woman in America," Fergusson ultimately sided with the British Empire during the War of Independence (p. 90). Future accounts of the founding excluded both Loyalists and women from the story of independence.

The first six chapters read the crisis as "not so much the beginning of American nationalism as the decline of British nationalism in the Americas" (p. xii). Conversely, the final two chapters suggest that the crisis might have been a "prologue to revolution" after all. Todd Nathan Thompson analyzes Benjamin Franklin's essays in 1766, and argues that Franklin mocked metropolitan Britons' condescending view of the empire's creole subjects. By doing so, he influenced the colonists' growing pride in their creole identity. In the following two decades, Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson would come to celebrate creole identity as superior. In the final chapter, Clay Zuba focuses on the place of Native Americans as "others" in the debates between metropolitan Britons and the colonists. British metropolitans compared the colonists to Native Americans in an attempt to ridicule their claim to political equality. In the following decade, Zuba argues, this allegory would become "so integral a figure for transatlantic debate over imperial policy as to be employed in prints produced by the colonists themselves" (p.

213). This development foreshadowed the rise of a racialized American empire in the following century.

The volume ably demonstrates that the new “American” nationality was, to a large degree, fictitious, as it excluded women, non-Europeans and members of the lower classes. However, the new American nation was arguably fictitious in another sense, which the volume all but ignores. The chapters treat the North American colonies as one unit, hardly in need of definition or explanation. By 1775 it was indeed clear which British colonies declared themselves independent and “American,” but this was not the case in 1765.

Scholars such as Jack Greene and Matthew Mulcahy have noted that the seemingly natural division between the thirteen “mainland colonies” and Britain’s colonies in the West Indies came as a result of the American Revolution. Throughout the eighteenth century, the Chesapeake colonies had much more in common with the Caribbean colonies than they did with New England’s colonies, grounded in a Puritan culture that was anathema to commercially driven colonies that thrived due to the plantation system. The Caribbean colonies protested the Stamp Act as well, although in a tamer fashion. As Jablonski comments, the Barbadian protest was similar in language to that of the mainland colonies. Jablonski goes on to comment that “North American” colonists rejected the Barbadian attempt to align with their cause. This is likely true for the New England colonies, and indeed, Jablonski cites newspapers from Boston and the reaction of Pennsylvanian Dickinson.

Finally, the volume greatly contributes by illuminating the significance of the crisis as a contest over the meaning of British subjecthood. As Jablonski notes, this interpretation goes against another strand in modern literature that analyzes the Imperial Crisis in narrower terms, as a contest over constitutional theory. Scholars who posit the latter theory, most notably Eric Nelson, ultimately

treat the change brought by the American Revolution as more symbolic than profound. Nelson, for instance, characterizes the new federal government as a “monarchy without kings.”[3] This assertion implies that the shift from imperial monarchy to republic was a shift in form more than in essence. Conversely, like T. H. Breen, Brandon McConville, and Sophia Rosenfeld (among others), the chapters in this volume suggest that a genuine revolution occurred in the late eighteenth century.[4] As Hutchins points out in the afterword, while the crisis “fractured more than fomented national identity,” it was also an event that created a nation, albeit fictitious (p. 223).

Notes

[1]. Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Mitch Kachun, *First Martyr of Liberty: Crispus Attucks in American Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W. W. Norton, & Co., 2008); and David J. Silverman, “Racial Walls: Race and the Emergence of American White Nationalism,” in *Anglicizing America: Empire, Revolution, Republic*, ed. Ignacio Gallup-Diaz, Andrew Shankman, and David J. Silverman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 181-204

[2]. See Alan Taylor, “The American Beginning: the Dark Side of Crèvecoeur’s ‘Letters from an American Farmer,’” *New Republic* (July 18, 2013): <https://newrepublic.com/article/113571/crevecoeurs-letters-american-farmer-dark-side>.

[3]. Eric Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 231-232.

[4]. Brendan McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Williamsburg: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the*

People (New York : Hill and Wang, 2010); and Sophia A. Rosenfeld, *Common Sense: A Political History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

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