

Journals

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Journal #1

The most substantial difference between what was revealed in the readings this week and my previous knowledge of the colonization in America was the conditions that the majority of the colonists were subjected to. I originally had thought that there were far fewer indentured servants than it appears that there actually were. It seems that there was an even greater separation between the aristocracy and ruling persons than there were laborers. Those that came to America also varied from my original perceptions. The majority of the transatlantic immigrants left to escape convicted crimes (As seen in the poem in Polyphonic Past), or currently held serving positions in England. It's interesting to see the incredible difference between the short term contracts that were in place in England and the longer term contracts required of the indentured servants. Which brings me to another point, as it seems that the indentured servants were treated little better than slaves. Bartered or gambled away by their masters like trinkets. I had always thought that indentured servants were treated much better than slaves, but I suppose that when resources were so scarce and unevenly distributed (Control of land and "tenants" were mainly under the control of the governing body, being supported by far more than even the richest man). the separation between the poor and the rich expands drastically, and the line between servant and slave blurs. With conditions as terrible as they appeared it's a wonder that events continued as they did. Although the Virginia Company was shut down due to problems and issues for the shareholders, I don't think that any changes were made because poor men were practically starved to death and wrote home to their mothers in order to be heard.

Thousands died in establishing the Virginia colony. Yet, it seems that it had little effect on the mindset and general view of the colonies. In fact, if it were not for the efforts of Captain John Smith, George Yeardley, George Sandys and their contemporaries in gathering as many people as possible by playing upon their hopes and dreams; America as we know it today would not exist. Regardless of poor planning, the organizers were faced with a nearly impossible problem. In order to properly support the colonies, vast amounts of supplies were needed (When food was so scarce I wonder how alcohol became such a commodity in the Virginia colony), and in order to make colonization cost effective, the greatest supply became that of the servants, disposable as they were. If the colonies were properly outfitted and supplied, they would not have been nearly as fruitful for the rich. If you couldn't amass a great fortune, what then would be the point of such a huge risk? There wouldn't be one. One last thing: If tobacco hadn't saved the Virginian colony from near destruction would it still have the same influence that it has today? Would somebody else devise a use for it? I suppose at some point somebody would have made the same connection, but I doubt its influence would have grown as much as it has without its role in resurrecting the Virginia colony.

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Journal #2

The examples of a developing society in this week's readings seem to necessarily contradict the assertions I made in last week's journal entry. The idea of a virgin land of plenty and the actions of Captain John Smith and the Virginia Company led me to believe that the *only* way to properly finance and support such an endeavor as colonization would take a powerful motivating force in the form of financial prosperity. The differences between the puritan communities and their vision of success are so wildly different from that of the Virginia Company it seems nearly impossible that the two ideas could coexist. The image of a "City Upon a Hill" is a powerful extension of the idea to lead by example. It is not surprising that we choose the puritans as the poster image of the American colonists. To be honest, I knew very little of the puritans and their customs, even so far that I did not equate them necessarily to the image of turkey-eating, buckle-hat wearing pilgrims that I have known since I was young. What surprises me most is their religious philosophy that separated them from the Church of England in the first place. As they believed that only a certain few were saved by God, it seems that the only natural progression of those thoughts would lead to segregation between the pure and the damned. It's a scary thought, that your actions on earth have absolutely no bearing on your salvation. What if you were damned? Would you then do as you pleased because you knew your ultimate fate? On the other hand the same thing goes for the saved. Even if your actions on earth were supposed to "reveal" your status it seems almost as subject to a social meltdown as when the indentured servants burned Jamestown to the ground. Even with the surprising population rise and high life expectancy, I wonder if there is something other than strong

governing that held this community together.

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Journal #3

The Salem Witch trials seemed to show precisely what I was worried about with the extension of the puritan faith. While I worried that it would take a more ideological stance, it took a much more subtle form in Salem between the accuser and the accused (witch). The question is then, who in this case is saved and who is damned. I would think that it would be the accuser who is damned because it seems that the motivation for bringing their "witches" to trial is fear of social change. Not to mention that their testimony is utterly false, especially as seen in the excerpts from the examination of Susanna Martin. The argument presented by Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum states that the events of the witch trials in Salem were a direct result of social tension, economic unrest, and a cultural division between Salem Town and Salem Village. While I do not agree entirely with the idea, I do believe that these reasons were a large part of the cause of the events. It is stated that the separation is divided between the puritans and the entrepreneurs, or rather those that identify with the communal ideals of the puritans and the individualism of the entrepreneurs. The major factor missing from this really is the major religious aspect of its cause. It seems very simple to blame it on religion, but when the structure of the puritan faith in the new England colonies is based upon separation and individual communities, I think it is a major cause of separating and condemning individuals based upon the "group" they belong to. If this is the case, or if socioeconomic segregation were the only reasons why the Salem witch trials occurred. Then what makes the situation in Salem so unique that it can't be compared to lesser events in New England at the same time? Is Salem the only community to

keep records? Were there other places that we don't know about that utterly failed due to the same stresses?

Journal #5

It's not surprising to see that the most widely held and accepted reasoning for the American Revolution is also the simplest. This reason of joined and united independence from the tyranny of the British Empire is ingrained in our conscious thought from when we are very young. The answer, however, is hardly similar but is extremely complex. This is what surprised me most about the causes for revolution. Both that I was unaware of the more intricate causes, but also that in many cases the simpler line of thinking is taught so far along the education process. In Gary B. Nash's article "Social Change and the Growth of Prerevolutionary Urban Radicalism," he tries to challenge this simplified view of the reasons for the revolution by using Boston as a model for his argument. Nash argues that contrary to traditional thought, the greatest contributions or reasons for the American Revolution were not a unified ideology calling for freedom and liberty, but rather a combination of economic and social upheaval that stems from class tension in urban areas throughout the colonies. Even before reading this article, we were shown several examples of social and economic tension throughout the history of the colonies. The strain between Salem town and Salem village led to disaster. The revolts started by the indentured servants. I agree that there were more factors present in causing the American Revolution. However, I do not agree entirely with Nash's specific choices. I think that he doesn't translate his argument from urban areas to the farms that accounted for a much larger percentage of the population. I think that the propaganda (political cartoon of the Boston Massacre had a huge impact) and general difficulty of transporting accurate information may have been just

as important. What I still don't understand is how we went from disorder to unity. How can we have a bunch of small revolutions and one America?

Journal #6

Last week the idea was presented that rather than one single revolution, there were several that all headed in the same direction. I had issues with this idea and how it could lead to total unification. This week, I think I have my answer, I don't think a true unification happened during the revolution at all. This may be the most surprising change in my view of American History as it centers on the cusp of all that it is built upon.

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*, along with *The Declaration of Independence* are perfect examples for why total unification of the states would have occurred. Both argue that independence from a British ruling state is necessary for the people of the colonies by denouncing the nature of monarchial rule. Thomas Paine argues more from a biblical context denouncing all kings in general, as well as a critical and negative examination of British constitutional law. He focuses more on what is wrong with Britain, whereas the *Declaration* focuses more on how Britain has wronged us.

At first glance, both seem to paint a picture of Americans rallying behind a common goal to fight for their independence. However, as seen in Mary Silliman's War and referenced in Paine's text not everyone will agree with this idea. Many Americans (the Tories) outright opposed this idea, from the start. Paine later makes a renouncement of the Quaker group as a political body because of their nonviolent opposition. Clearly total unification could not have been possible, but even a common goal seems a weak link. With so much difference between the

desires of the individual colonies that supported the revolution, it seems extremely difficult to satisfy or control those needs in the aftermath of the conflict. The biggest question I am left with after reading this week is how the United States managed to stay unified after achieving their independence without splitting into entirely separate entities. Honestly, I think the answer to that would help immensely in today's American society, where diversity of opinion is beginning to undermine the unity that was formed to protect it.

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Journal #7

As a fellow member of this newly independent nation of America, I feel it is my duty to inform you of the necessity of a strong organization to preserve these freedoms that many of us have given our lives and those of our loved ones to obtain. As it stands, the current Articles of Confederation are inadequate in fulfilling this task. Considering recent dangerous economic concerns resulting from the Articles, as well as for fear of the future longevity of our nation, I hereby argue for the ratification of the new Constitution of the United States to preserve unity and order for the people of the states in the face of impending chaos. The strengths of the United States Constitution lie in the representation of the people as a whole, in the safeguards for expansion and decision making, and in better distribution of power to preserve the ideals of the revolution across this nation as a whole.

The Articles of Confederation stand as a contradiction to these strengths, as they preserve the power of individual states and deny the power of the whole to a few dissenting viewpoints (those of the individual states). Whereas the Articles value equal representation for all states, the constitution handles representation by population. This equates to the voice of the people over differences between larger and smaller states.

The Articles also nearly block the possibility for change when it is most necessary for a developing nation by requiring an unanimous vote amongst all states. Especially when considering the possibility of westward expansion, decisions are often blocked when they should be made. The Constitution proposes a vote by a three-

fourths majority of congress, who as earlier expressed, better serve the values of the whole of the nation as representation is based upon population.

Also in opposition to the Articles, a stronger federal government serves to unify the peoples' desires. More than just used to settle disputes between states, a single centralized system of legislation is more efficient in making necessary judgments for the good of the American people.

Should you find yourself in opposition to the ratification of this new United States Constitution, I have three major questions for you. Without a strong singular national identity, how might we represent the wishes of each state within an international community? If individual states hold their own "personal" interests above those of the nation, with a system of unanimous certification can any decisions of national importance ever be made? Lastly, without a federal right to taxation, how can we support ourselves as a whole without making sacrifices of weaker communities and states that find themselves in economic disrepair.

Without the strong sense of national purpose that the United States Constitution provides, we stand to loose everything we have fought for in the face of disagreement between individual states' interests and desires. We must ratify the constitution in order to survive.

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Journal #8

I chose to focus this week's journal upon Benjamin Rush's article "Thoughts Upon the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic" from part II in *Creating an American Culture*, because the ideas he presents are paramount to the development of a unified American identity due to the importance of establishing these ideas from a young age onwards. Rush argues that in order to succeed as a nation, a unified American institution of education must be established to instill a sense of national identity within the youths of America and to ensure the development of the American nation separate from international cultures. Rush claims that in order to succeed in this endeavor, the American education system must be based upon a strong religious foundation (not necessarily Christianity though he does suggest it), and must establish a "SUPREME REGARD TO THEIR COUNTRY" (Kornfeld 111). While I do believe that the education system was important to the success of developing America as a nation I do not necessarily believe that his foundation of a singular religion is necessary. It may be if he wants America to develop as a single nation with one mind, but cultural (religious) diversity is one of America's strongest points.

Immediately surprising, this idea of religion and a supreme regard to one's country still exists in American education today. The pledge of allegiance is a prime example of the lasting effects of Rush's argument.

This idea of education as the primary creator of American ideals in young members of the developing nation falls in line with the Enlightenment's ideals and successes as a result of the American Revolution. What this leaves me with, is with

such a singular unified approach to education, how did the system become so diversified (in comparison), and how did we lose the focus on the strength of the American education system (it is now becoming more popular to study internationally)?

Journal #10

“Frailty thy name is human”

“The earth waits for its ruler”

Good morning gentlemen, I stand with you today as an individual desiring change. I am in agreement with you both that if certain changes are not made within the very fabric of our society, that we will be forever mired in the bog of eternal failure. As you can see, I also stand before you as a woman, as well as an individual, and as a member and victim of male dominance. Mr. Thoreau, I belong to your cherished “minority” opinion. Mr. Douglass, as a member of my sex I am chained to tradition, expectation, and submission. I believe you both can understand that in order to truly make progress in a society, every member of the whole must be given the opportunity, the choice to make an impact. Men as much as women are “members” of this unified whole of human existence. And without equal effort on both fronts, the fate of our society itself is crippled. I do not ask for power, or for control, but rather that the arbitrary limitations imposed upon women be lifted so that we have the opportunity to take advantage of the possibilities and abilities that our *humanity* provides. May I remind you that this alleviation will not produce immediate results; though without the constraints that the accepted female role in society entail, in time women can be expected to make equal contributions to the development and structure of our lives. Let it be that women are freed from necessary male consent of our choices and actions, so that we as a *people* can be strong.

To Mr. Thoreau, I ask that without government protection and regulation can any positive change ever stabilize? Can the rights of women remain freed while society contradicts the very value of it? And do you really believe that we are a nation of individuals with equal power to act, as you seem to believe it as only a matter of choice without consequence?

To Mr. Douglass, if racial equality were attained for the rights of men, what role do “colored” women play in your vision? The same as they do for dominant white males? For there are freed “blacks”, but there are no freed women in the eyes of men.

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Journal #11

The messages presented in both *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Solomon Northrup's Odyssey* are undeniably arguments claiming that slavery is wrong. While neither text explicitly states that slavery should be abolished, the idea is clearly implied. I agree one hundred percent with this claim, but when comparing both narratives I found myself with more questions than answers about the representation of slavery in American History. These questions arise when examining the differences between the texts themselves. Where *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a fictional account written by a woman who lived in a border state, and had questionable personal experience with the nature of slavery itself; *Solomon Northrup's Odyssey* is based upon the autobiographical account *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northrup himself. This is where things get tricky, because it depends upon the accuracy and faithfulness of the film adaptation. Both Solomon and Uncle Tom have similar journeys through their experience as slaves in southern America. Aside from the difference in origin (Solomon was born free, Tom a slave from birth), they seem to share very similar experiences and both narratives highlight similar key points in condemning the nature of slavery. The struggle for freedom of choice, separation of families, facing the demand of beating another slave, and both Solomon and Tom are intelligent, valued workers who seem to stand out among their fellow slaves. There is one key difference: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a far more violent account of slavery than *Solomon Northrup's Odyssey*. Other than the beating that Solomon initially receives, he tends to get out of being beaten more often than not, and to his luck is awarded a much better fate than poor Tom. Unless the film adaptation is missing

significant content in this manner, why then, is the *fictional* account far more violent? It seems to me that it was sensationalized to get a point across. Is it possible that the representation of slavery in a modern historical viewpoint is also to some degree sensationalized? If not, because Solomon and Tom's stories seem to be unique due to their ability, what would the story of the common slave be like? In Solomon's case especially, he is singularly intelligent and talented, and as such can't make a very good example for the slave population as a whole. Was it worse for those who couldn't keep up? What happened to slaves without these abilities? What stories can they tell? Are they as violent as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Or are they more subdued as in *Solomon Northrup's Odyssey*? Or something completely different?