

# *Andrew Brown's "Earnest Endeavor": The Federal Gazette's Role in Philadelphia's Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*

**A**S THE NEWSPAPER DEBATE OVER PRESIDENT Washington's Impartiality Proclamation divided the nation into political factions, and 2,000 refugees from the rebellion in Cap François, Santo Domingo, streamed into the city, yellow fever returned to Philadelphia in the fall of 1793 after a thirty-year absence. Half of the inhabitants deserted the city. Those who remained out of financial necessity, compassion, or skepticism watched as the ensuing epidemic claimed 4,000 lives in the nation's capital in a four-month period.

Despite President Washington's initial desire to relocate the federal government, the cabinet met in Germantown in November and Congress assembled in Philadelphia in December after the epidemic had subsided.<sup>1</sup> Although Governor Thomas Mifflin and the state legislature fled the city, Mayor Matthew Clarkson stayed to head the Committee to Attend to and Alleviate the Sufferings of the Afflicted with the Malignant Fever, which governed the city. Without their distribution of food, clothing, and money,

<sup>1</sup> On the controversy, the cabinet debates, and Washington's decision, see Dorothy Twohig, ed., *The Journal of the Proceedings of the President, 1793-1797* (Charlottesville, 1981), 242n; Thomas Jefferson to Washington, Oct. 17, 1793, Paul Leicester Ford, ed., *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson* (10 vols., New York, 1895), 6:436; James Madison to Washington, Oct. 24, 1793, Thomas Mason, ed., *The Papers of James Madison* (Charlottesville, 1985), 15:129; Alexander Hamilton to Washington, Oct. 24, 1793, Harold Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton* (New York, 1969), 15:373-76.

the effects of the epidemic would undoubtedly have been more severe.<sup>2</sup>

The committee, however, was not alone in helping citizens to cope with the epidemic. Remaining in the city to publish the *Federal Gazette*, Andrew Brown professed this "earnest endeavor": to unite Philadelphians in their struggles against the fever by providing a forum in which they could discuss the epidemic.<sup>3</sup> Brown presented his newspaper as an impartial alternative to the partisan press in Philadelphia. But Brown's quest for impartiality during the epidemic failed because in striving to achieve unity he promoted certain medical opinions and suppressed others. Brown transformed his newspaper into a forum for Benjamin Rush, a supporter of Brown's newspaper venture, a Republican, an advocate of a radical plan of treatment, and an opponent of the cure promulgated by the doctors at Bush Hill, the hospital run by the city government. During the crisis, Brown could not sustain the themes of unity and impartiality that so often dominated American Republican rhetoric. Reporting on a controversy without including diverse arguments promotes unity, but it does not foster impartiality.

Like many others in the early republic, Brown tried to convince himself and others that his actions were not divisive, that he was above the growing partisan debate. He was not. In the ensuing years, partisanship increased and the number of editors able to maintain an impartial stance dwindled as the Republican and Federalist organizations expanded. Editorial moderation became dysfunctional when unanimity in dealing with the epidemic—or with a political crisis—seemed essential in the face of perceived threats to the future safety of the republic. Under these conditions editors could not remain impartial despite their intentions or public protests to the contrary. This article will sketch Brown's life prior to 1793, summarize the partisan debates of that summer, elucidate Brown's role in those debates, describe the

<sup>2</sup> During the epidemic, Governor Mifflin was reelected. Harry Marlin Tinkom, *The Republicans and Federalists in Pennsylvania, 1790-1801* (Harrisburg, 1950), 183, notes a sharp decline in voters. The state legislature abandoned the embezzlement case against John Nicholson, comptroller general of Pennsylvania; see Raymond Walters, Jr., "The Making of a Financier: Albert Gallatin in the Pennsylvania Assembly," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter, *PMHB*) 70 (1946), 258-69. Phineas Bond, the British consul general for the mid-Atlantic and southern states, fled the city; see Joanne Loewe Neel, *Phineas Bond: A Study in Anglo-American Relations* (Philadelphia, 1968), 113-53. The French consul, DuPont, was killed by the fever. See Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, Sept. 15, 1793, in Ford, *Jefferson*, 6:429.

<sup>3</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1793.

turmoil surrounding the yellow fever epidemic, and detail Brown's descent into partisanship.

Born in Ireland in 1744 and educated at Trinity College, Dublin, Andrew Brown came to America in 1773 as a British soldier. He defected from the British army and fought with the patriots at Lexington and Bunker Hill. After serving as deputy mustermaster general for the Eastern Department during the Revolution, Brown opened academies in Lancaster and Philadelphia. He boasted that his English, math, and French schools attracted many children of Philadelphia's elites. When those ventures failed, however, he revived the *Federal Gazette*, a newspaper on which he had briefly worked, in October 1788. A supporter of the Constitution, Brown refused to print some anti-Federalist tracts. Supported by letters from Benjamin Rush and William Bingham, Brown procured a State Department contract from Thomas Jefferson for printing the laws in January 1791. By the Third Congress, Brown's policy of publishing the congressional debates led him to hire James Thomson Callender as a stenographer. Brown's publishing career prospered until a fire claimed the lives of his wife and three children on January 27, 1797. Trying to rescue his family and their possessions, Brown was overcome by the flames. He died on February 4, 1797, but his newspaper lived on, continued by his eldest son from his first marriage.<sup>4</sup>

After the ratification debates, Brown attempted to maintain an impartial newspaper by publishing material written by both sides on any political issue. Despite Brown's opposition to the removal of the national capital to the Potomac River and to other Jeffersonian ideas, Alexander Hamilton believed that Jefferson's patronage had swayed the editor against the Washington administration. By his conduct during the debates over the Impartiality Proclamation, however, Brown demonstrated that he sought to place his newspaper above the partisan fray.

On April 5, 1793, Treasury Secretary Hamilton informed President

<sup>4</sup> Biographical information on Brown can be found in the *American Biographical Archive*, fiche 191, 274-79. For additional information on his career and on his newspaper, see *Madison Papers*, 15:155, 157; *Hamilton Papers*, 11:431-32, 15:242; and Julian Boyd, ed., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (Princeton, 1950-), 17:391, 18:700; Andrew Brown to Jasper Yeates, Sept. 3, 1783 in *PMHB* 40 (1916), 378; Frederick Sheeder, "East Vincent Township, Chester County, Pennsylvania," *PMHB* 34 (1910), 368-69; Frederick Tolles, "George Logan, Agrarian Democrat: A Survey of his Writings," *PMHB* 75 (1951), 267.

Washington of the execution of Louis XVI of France and helped Washington to prepare questions for the cabinet concerning American policy. Although the cabinet agreed that a proclamation should be issued, members disagreed as to which branch of government should issue it: the president (as Hamilton argued) or Congress (as Jefferson argued). There was also disagreement on whether the document should contain the word *neutrality*. Despite Jefferson's objections, Washington issued the Impartiality Proclamation on April 22, 1793. Its publication provoked a debate over presidential power. Hamilton, James Madison, and other polemicists raged, and the debates endured into the early stages of the Philadelphia epidemic.<sup>5</sup>

While most Philadelphia newspapers took sides in the political debate, Brown's *Federal Gazette* remained balanced. The paper published Hamilton's "Pacificus" and Madison's "Helvidius" essays. Between May 31 and October 1, the day he published the fifth and final Helvidius essay, Brown also published thirty Republican essays, twenty-three Federalist, and twelve that were moderate in tone. In contrast to Brown's attempt to be evenhanded, John Fenno's *Gazette of the United States* published thirty-three Federalist polemics and ten by Republicans; Philip Freneau's *National Gazette* published six and fifty-three.<sup>6</sup> Because he shared the widely held belief that political parties would doom republican government, Brown believed it

<sup>5</sup> See *Hamilton Papers*, 14:291-92; Twohig, *Journal*, 120-26; Ford, *Jefferson*, 7:436. For the most recent overview of politics in this period, see Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism* (New York, 1993). See also Lawrence Kaplan, *Colonies into Nation* (New York, 1972), 223; Albert Hall Bowman, *The Struggle for Neutrality* (Knoxville, 1974), 51. Moncure Daniel Conway, *Omitted Chapters in History Disclosed in the Life and Papers of Edmund Randolph* (New York, 1888), 202; *Letters of Pacificus and Helvidius* (Delmar, N.Y., 1976); Merrill Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation* (New York, 1970), 494; Joseph Charles, *Origins of the American Party System* (Williamsburg, 1956), 75.

<sup>6</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 25, 1793. *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, the other major moderate newspaper published twenty-nine Federalist polemics and twenty-three Republican polemics concerning the Impartiality Proclamation from April 1793 until it suspended publication on Sept. 14, 1793. Brown's quest for objectivity and impartiality demonstrates that editors sought to remain above the partisan fray before the rise of the penny press. Daniel Schiller, *Objectivity and the News: The Public and the Rise of Commercial Journalism* (Philadelphia, 1981) and Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York, 1978) argue that impartial newspapers first arose in the era of the penny press. See also David P. Nord, "Newspapers and American Nationhood, 1776-1826," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 100 (1990), 391-405; William Sloan, "The Party Press: The Newspaper's Role in National Politics," Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 1981, and Norman Blantz, "Editors and Issues: The Party Press in Philadelphia, 1789-1801," Ph.D. diss., Penn State, 1974. These three pieces challenge the "dark era" notion in American journalism history and examine the role of the press in party formation and the creation of nationhood but do not deal with newspapers that strove to be impartial.

"extremely incumbent upon all Printers to observe a rigid *impartiality* and *independence*."<sup>7</sup>

When Brown published a polemic from one side, he usually balanced it with one from the other. Occasionally, he printed selections from both Fenno and Freneau on the same day. Five days after publishing Hamilton's last *Pacificus* essay, Brown began a series of Republican essays by "An Old Vandalian" who argued that the United States should go to war to help France. For balance, Brown also published "Popicola," who felt it "the duty of every friend to his country, as far as his abilities may extend, to counteract such an evil."<sup>8</sup> Brown's moderate stance in the political debate and his willingness to print materials supporting divergent arguments seemingly made his newspaper the perfect choice for Philadelphians during the yellow fever epidemic. Fenno and Freneau devoted too much time to (and were too bitterly divided over) the political controversy to contemplate evenhandedness. The city needed a newspaper willing to be a forum for news about the epidemic. The *Federal Gazette*, whose motto was "The Public Will Our Guide—The Public Good Our End," filled that need, but in so doing, it compromised the impartiality that had originally made the newspaper so well-suited for the job. An examination of the *Federal Gazette* during the epidemic demonstrates the limitations of the republican notion of open public discourse.<sup>9</sup>

Together with its suburbs of Southwark and the Northern Liberties, Philadelphia in 1793 comprised a geographic region that stretched two miles north and south along the Delaware River. At its widest point, the city was one mile across. Approximately 50,000 people—living, on average, six to a

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Lienesch, "Thomas Jefferson and the American Democratic Experience: The Origins of the Partisan Press, Popular Political Parties, and Public Opinion," in Peter Onuf, ed., *Jeffersonian Legacies* (Charlottesville, 1993), 316–39. For a history of the antiparty tradition in America, see William Chambers, *Political Parties in a New Nation* (New York, 1963); Richard Hofstadter, *The Idea of a Party System: The Rise of Legitimate Opposition in the United States, 1780–1840* (Berkeley, 1969); Ralph Ketcham, *Presidents above Party: The First American Presidency, 1789–1829* (Chapel Hill, 1984); and John Hoadley, *Origins of American Political Parties* (Lexington, 1986).

<sup>8</sup> *Federal Gazette*, July 30, 1793.

<sup>9</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1961; ed. trans. by Thomas Burger, Cambridge, 1989); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), and Michael Schudson, "Was There Ever a Public Sphere? If so, When? Reflections on the American Case" in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1992).

house—were crammed together only a short walk away from the open air of the country.<sup>10</sup> Compounding the cramped living conditions, 2,000 refugees from the revolution in Santo Domingo landed in Philadelphia in July and settled in a compact group between Second and Fourth streets along Front and Walnut streets.<sup>11</sup> Shortly after the arrival of the refugees, several sailors died at Richard Denny's boardinghouse on North Water Street. After a number of his patients died with the same symptoms in early August, Benjamin Rush declared that yellow fever had returned to Philadelphia and advised all who could to leave the city.<sup>12</sup>

Rush identified the cause of the infections: the putrid odor of rotting coffee on Ball's Wharf on Water Street, a narrow, damp street filled with stagnant air along the banks of the Delaware River, where Rush's first patients lived. Other explanations quickly surfaced: poor sanitation, poor ventilation, lack of rainfall, reduced river current because of the docks, the practice of burying the dead within the city limits, and infected Dominican

<sup>10</sup> Philadelphia Committee to Attend to and Alleviate the Sufferings of the Afflicted with the Malignant Fever, *Minutes of the Proceedings* (Philadelphia, 1794), appendix. Mary Schweitzer, "The Spatial Organization of Federalist Philadelphia, 1790," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24 (1993), 31-57; she notes that the population density at the center of the city would have been 70,000 people per square mile and that the population density around the market was three times higher than the density just three blocks away. See also Allen Davis and Mark Haller, eds., *The Peoples of Philadelphia: A History of Ethnic Groups and Lower Class Life, 1790-1940* (Philadelphia, 1973); Richard Miller, *Philadelphia—The Federalist City: A Study of Urban Politics* (Port Washington, N.Y., 1976); and John Cotter, Daniel Roberts, and Michael Parrington, *The Buried Past: An Archaeological History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Frances Sergeant Childs, *French Refugee Life in the United States, 1790-1800* (Baltimore, 1940), 103-65; Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge, 1988), 141-43; John Harvey Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793* (1949; reprint ed., New York, 1970), 1-7.

<sup>12</sup> Benjamin Rush to Julia Rush, Aug. 25, 1793, Dagobert D. Runes, ed., *Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush* (New York, 1947), 406. Benjamin Rush, *An Account of the Bilious Remitting Yellow Fever, as it Appeared in the City of Philadelphia in the Year 1793* (Philadelphia, 1794), 6-12. Rush had witnessed the 1763 epidemic and recalled the symptoms. Saul Jarcho, in "John Mitchell, Benjamin Rush, and the Yellow Fever," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 31 (1957), 132-36, questions Rush's use of Dr. Mitchell's notes and cure. Carl Binger, *Revolutionary Doctor: Benjamin Rush, 1746-1813* (New York, 1966), 203-5. On previous epidemics and on those who could not afford to leave the city in 1793, see Billy G. Smith, *The "Lower Sort": Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800* (Ithaca, 1990), 46-47, 51-56.

refugees.<sup>13</sup> Some Philadelphians spread the rumor that blacks had poisoned the water wells.<sup>14</sup> Members of various religious denominations claimed that God was purging the city of its sinful ways. One poet wrote

O! may thine arm, Lord, now stretch out  
Upon a guilty land  
Make them consider and not doubt  
It's thy almighty hand.<sup>15</sup>

When fatal, yellow fever yields a very painful death. Within a week of infection, the virus attacks the kidneys and the liver, causing fever,

<sup>13</sup> *National Gazette*, Sept. 25, Oct. 16, 1793. See also, "William Penn" in the *Gazette of the United States*, Dec. 12, 1793. Others argued that the British postal ship *Hankey* transported the yellow fever to Philadelphia from Africa by way of Grenada and Jamaica. College of Physicians of Philadelphia, *Additional Facts and Observations Relative to the Nature and Origin of the Pestilential Fever* (Philadelphia, 1806), 77-84. See also Benjamin Rush, *An Enquiry into the Origin of the Late Epidemic Fever in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1793), College of Physicians of Philadelphia, *Facts and Observations Relative to the Nature and Origin of the Pestilential Fever which Prevailed in This City in 1793, 1797, and 1798* (Philadelphia, 1798), appendix; and John B. Blake, "Yellow Fever in Eighteenth-Century America," *Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine* 44 (1968), 673-86. The first responses in the city closely parallel the model offered by Daniel Fox, "History of Responses to Epidemic Diseases in the United States," *Mount Sinai Journal of Medicine* 56 (1989), 223-29.

<sup>14</sup> The rumor was recorded by Paul Preston in "Some Incidents of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793," *PMHB* 38 (1914), 236-37. In response to early (but mistaken) claims that blacks were immune to the fever, Richard Allen, William Gray, and Absalom Jones of the Free African Society volunteered to assist the committee. They and those they hired provided money and supplies to families, comforted the ill as nurses, bled the ill with Rush's instructions, purchased coffins, and dug graves. They spent 378 pounds sterling, although the committee reimbursed them for only 61%. See Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, *A Narrative of the Proceedings of the Black People, during the Late, Awful Calamity in Philadelphia in the Year 1793: And a Refutation of Some Censures Thrown upon Them in Some Late Publications* (1794), reprinted in *Afro-American History Series* 1 (Wilmington, Del., 1972). They were responding to Mathew Carey's claim that blacks overcharged those they cared for and often stole from the dead. See Carey, *A Short Account of the Malignant Fever Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia, with a Statement of the Proceedings that Took Place on the Subject in the Different Parts of the United States* (1794; reprint ed., New York, 1970), 63. See also, Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 122-24.

<sup>15</sup> John Purdon, "Reflections Caused by the Yellow Fever in the Year 1793" in his *A Leisure Hour, or, A Series of Poetical Letters Mostly Written During the Prevalence of the Yellow Fever* (Philadelphia, 1804). On the religious implications of the epidemic, see David P. Nord, "Readership as Citizenship in Late-Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia" (paper presented at the conference entitled "The Public Response to the 1793 Philadelphia Yellow Fever Epidemic," College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Oct. 1, 1993), 23-24. I thank Professor Nord for sending me a copy of his paper.

headaches, nausea, nosebleeds, jaundice, vomiting, and renal failure.<sup>16</sup> The moans of the dying, the stench of rotting corpses, and the terror on the faces of the living provoked many to flee the city. One resident wrote that "the dying groans has filled our Ears all night . . . whole families have been swept away."<sup>17</sup> Mathew Carey added: "Less concern was felt for the loss of a parent, a husband, a wife, or an only child, than, on any other occasions, would have been caused by the death of a servant, or even a favorite dog."<sup>18</sup> Novelist Charles Brockden Brown, whose character Arthur Mervyn "met not more than a dozen figures; and these were ghost-like, wrapped in cloaks, from behind which they cast upon me glances of wonder and reason" as he wandered the city. Human "remains, suffered to decay by piecemeal, filled the air with deadly exhalations and added tenfold to the devastation."<sup>19</sup>

While the terrible scenes convinced many Philadelphians that an epidemic had begun, Rush's declaration of yellow fever failed to convince the medical community, just as Freneau's claims that the Washington administration was demonstrating monarchical tendencies failed to convince the political community. Challenging Rush, some doctors argued that the

<sup>16</sup> In 1901, Walter Reed identified the female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito as the carrier of yellow fever. Philadelphians noticed unusual numbers of mosquitoes in the city that year. The *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 2, contained instructions on how to kill "that most troublesome insect," and *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 29, referred to the multitudes of them. See also Donald Cooper and Kenneth Kiple, "Yellow Fever," in Kenneth Kiple, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease* (New York, 1993), 1100-1107.

<sup>17</sup> Samuel Hodgdon to Isaac Craig, Sept. 21, 1793, in "Notes and Queries," *PMHB* 14 (1890), 329. Dolley Madison lost her first husband, John Todd, Jr., their son, William Temple Todd, and her in-laws. Paul Sifton, "What a Dread Prospect . . .," Dolley Madison's Plague Year," *PMHB* 87 (1962), 182-88. Republicans lost two leaders in the city—Dr. James Hutchinson and Jonathan Dickinson Sergeant. Dumas Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty* (Boston, 1962), 142.

<sup>18</sup> Mathew Carey, *A Short Account*, 23. In contrast to Carey's assessment, Rush wrote his wife: "you can recollect how much the loss of a single patient once in a month used to affect me. Judge then how I must feel, in hearing every morning of the death of three or four!" Benjamin Rush to Julia Rush, Aug. 25, 1793, in Runes, *Selected Writings*, 406.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Brockden Brown, *Arthur Mervyn, or Memoirs of the Year 1793* (1799; reprint ed., Philadelphia, 1889), 130, 140. See also Arthur Thomas Robinson, "The Third Horseman of the Apocalypse: A Multi-Disciplinary Social History of the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Philadelphia," Ph.D. diss., Washington State University, 1993. For other descriptions of the city, see Jacob Cox Parsons, ed., *Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzbeimer* (Philadelphia, 1893), 195, and Paul Preston's letter to his son, Oct. 18, 1793, in "Some Incidents," 233. According to the committee, 2,728 of 6,327 houses (43%) in the Philadelphia metropolitan area were closed, 11,906 of 34,835 whites (34%) fled, and 290 of 2,036 blacks (14%) fled; *Minutes of the Proceedings*, appendix.



outbreak was just a violent case of the fall fevers.<sup>20</sup> To prevent the spread of the disease and panic and to end the controversy over the illness, politicians called for an official investigation. Governor Mifflin wrote to Dr. James Hutchinson, Physician of the Port, asking him and Health Officer Nathaniel Falconer to report on the progress of the disease. Meanwhile, Mayor Clarkson asked the College of Physicians to provide information on the nature of the pestilence and on any cures for it—one of the earliest appeals by an American government to a medical organization. The College of Physicians met on August 25 and released an eleven-point document designed to help citizens deal with the epidemic.<sup>21</sup> The college advocated, among other things, marking the houses of the ill, ending "the tolling of the bells," establishing a hospital, and burying the dead quickly.

The two most political newspapers in the city dealt with the college's proclamation in very different ways. Fenno included neither the caution to avoid the ill nor the recommendations to mark the houses of the sick and to stop the tolling of the bells for the dead.<sup>22</sup> He attempted to quell the belief that the fever was dangerous. Striving for normality, Fenno suppressed the most radical suggestions; instead he published only those he thought would benefit the city, including a letter from Hamilton's personal physician. Freneau, busy defending the actions of French diplomat Edmond Charles Genêt, ignored the college's publication altogether. Of the nineteen issues

<sup>20</sup> Dr. Benjamin Say labeled the disease "*typhus gravior*"; *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 28, 1793. Many used the phrase "the present malignant fever" or "the annual Fall Fevers." Others called it Hospital, Gaol, Camp, or Spotted fever; *General Advertiser*, Aug. 28, 1793, and *Gazette of the United States*, Sept. 14, 1793. Many doctors debated the origin of the disease. See Martin Pernick, "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence: Epidemic Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and the Rise of the First Party System," *William and Mary Quarterly* 29 (1972), 559-86. Pernick argues that Republican doctors believed that the fever was of domestic origin, while Federalist doctors felt that it was imported. He attempts to relate medical opinion on the fever to the developing rift forming in the national government. He provides substantial proof in the case of Rush, but lacks information about a substantial number of doctors. Pernick labels Brown a Republican and admits that many Republican doctors refused to practice the cure that Rush advocated.

<sup>21</sup> See *Additional Facts and Observations*, 5-7. *Federal Gazette*, Aug. 27, *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 27, *Pennsylvania Journal*, Aug. 28, *General Advertiser*, Aug. 28, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Aug. 28, and the *Independent Gazetteer*, Aug. 31, 1793, all printed the college's eleven points. "Question Veritatis" cautioned against marking houses because the procedure "would give sanction to an opinion of the plague being among us" and questioned whether all members of the college agreed. *Federal Gazette*, Aug. 28, 1793. Powell, *Dead*, 19-31.

<sup>22</sup> *Gazette of the United States*, Aug. 28, 1793. On the marking of infected houses, see Smith, *Lower Sort*, 25-26.

that Freneau published between August 24 and October 26, the lead articles of only three concerned yellow fever. Thirteen of the issues opened either with political essays or with news concerning the French Revolution.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to appealing to the College of Physicians, the city established a common hospital. Responding to the complaints about the dying and the dead who lay at the abandoned grounds of Rickett's Circus, the Guardians of the Poor appropriated the vacant Bush Hill mansion and its grounds. They turned it into a hospital for the poor just as the Pennsylvania Hospital began turning away yellow fever cases.<sup>24</sup> Conditions at Bush Hill improved dramatically when committee members Stephen Girard and Peter Helm volunteered to supervise the operations. They hired Ann Beakly and Mary Saville as matrons for three dollars a day each. Michael Leib, Isaac Cathrall, and other doctors visited the mansion daily, each charging the committee two guineas a visit. Although these doctors practiced Rush's cure, the committee also accepted the help of Dr. Jean Deveze, a former medical officer for the French army in Santo Domingo, who employed a milder cure. Girard, who supported the milder cure, provided Deveze a room at Bush Hill to treat those who did not want to be purged and bled. Insulted, Leib, Cathrall, and other doctors resigned on September 21. In less than a week Girard had reorganized Bush Hill and placed the medical care of the patients under a doctor who practiced the cure that Rush was attacking in the newspapers.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> On the day on which Freneau would most logically have published the college's points—August 28—he published Genêt's letter to Washington and Jefferson's reply, "A Whig" who defended Genêt's conduct, a parody of a newspaper in April 1801 in which the "hereditary council" had taken over, and prices current.

<sup>24</sup> For a representative example, see "Medicus," *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 7, 1793. On Bush Hill, see Charles Lawrence, *History of the Philadelphia Almshouses and Hospitals* (1905; reprint ed., New York, 1977), 39–42; Powell, *Dead*, 60–65, and John Alexander, *Render them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760–1800* (Amherst, 1980), 130–32.

<sup>25</sup> See *Minutes of the Proceedings*, 3–29; Powell, *Dead*, 160–68. See also Jean Deveze, *An Enquiry into and Observations upon the Causes and Effects of the Epidemic Disease which Raged in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1794); Harry Emerson Wildes, *Lonely Midas: The Story of Stephen Girard* (New York, 1943), 124–27; John Bach McMaster, *The Life and Times of Stephen Girard: Mariner and Merchant* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1918), 1:216–22; and *Minutes of the Proceedings*, 135, 148. For their services, Benjamin Duffield received \$500, Deveze \$1,500. For a complaint about Deveze's payment, see *Independent Gazetteer*, Dec. 14, 1793. Mary Saville's wages were not supplemented. On the pay of nurses in the era, see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill, 1980), 58–61. Tavernkeeper, committee member, and leading Republican, Israel Israel lost his election to the Pennsylvania State Senate in December 1793, despite a platform for increased aid to the poor. Miller, *Philadelphia—The Federalist City*, 57. John Alexander, "Poverty, Fear, and Continuity: An

Doctors, however, were not alone in prescribing cures for the mysterious illness. In the belief that sharing information was the duty of republican citizens, the laity found editors receptive to their cures as well. To many, the safety of the nation and of the city depended upon such exchanges of information.<sup>26</sup> Publication of unsolicited but well-intentioned proposals demonstrated a willingness on the part of newspaper editors to provide citizens with a forum to engage in public debate. Editors often encouraged their readers to submit material that would benefit others. As one editor urged: "It behooves every friend to humanity, who may possess the smallest knowledge of any means, whereby the present unhappy malady may be checked, or prevented from spreading, to publish such useful hints as may have this tendency."<sup>27</sup> Philadelphians answered these calls. Despite having "no *professional* talents," writers like "W.B." still felt a "duty" to offer a variety of cures.<sup>28</sup> From August 26 to September 14 *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser* published seven different cures for the epidemic that were not signed by doctors. While most of these anonymous cures were herbal, other citizens suggested spreading dirt and exploding gunpowder. As the cures poured in, most editors eagerly published them.<sup>29</sup>

John Fenno was an exception. Rather than print suggestions from any and all citizens, Fenno relied on the authority of Alexander Hamilton, who claimed to have contracted the fever in early September and to have been

---

Analysis of the Poor in Late Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," in Davis and Haller, eds., *Peoples of Philadelphia*, 21-22.

<sup>26</sup> See Richard Brown, *Knowledge Is Power: The Diffusion of Information in Early America, 1700-1865* (New York, 1989), for an elaboration of this argument on a national scale, and Nord, "Readership as Citizenship," 2-5, 8-9, 19, and 28-29, who concentrates on the importance of newspaper readership during the epidemic.

<sup>27</sup> *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 10, 1793.

<sup>28</sup> *General Advertiser*, Sept. 18, 1793. See also "Philanthropos" and "L" in *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 24 and Sept. 14, 1793.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see "W.F.," "A.B.," "Subscriber," "A Friend to the People," "Citizen," and "B.D." in *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 26, 28, Sept. 3, 12, 13, 1793; "A Cure for the Flux," *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Aug. 21; "A Correspondent," *General Advertiser*, Sept. 12-18; "Howard," *National Gazette*, Sept. 14; *Pennsylvania Journal*, Aug. 28, 1793.

cured.<sup>30</sup> While traveling to Albany to stay with father-in-law, Philip Schuyler, Hamilton wrote to Dr. John Redman, president of the College of Physicians, stating that he and his wife had been cured by Dr. Edward Stevens, and therefore the ill should consult him.<sup>31</sup> Fenno printed both Hamilton's and Stevens's letters to Redman.<sup>32</sup> These letters provoked extensive debate within the medical community. Rush, who was already involved in a dispute with Dr. Adam Kuhn, confronted the secretary of the treasury, whose political philosophy and whose proposed cure he despised.<sup>33</sup>

The practice of citizens offering cures and other opinions for public dissemination and the decision by editors to print them exemplifies the free exchange of information appropriate to a republican society. Some Americans, like Fenno, were reluctant to become engaged, instead opting for the advice of an authority figure (Hamilton's personal physician, no less). But most Philadelphia editors willingly published anonymous letters advocating cures. These letters show citizens struggling to discover a cure, as they lamented the fact that their doctors were so divided.

Many who offered cures and who begged doctors to act "*in concert*" preferred anonymity.<sup>34</sup> By advancing anonymous arguments into the public sphere, they felt that their arguments would be judged on their merit rather than on the basis of the person who advanced them. Anonymity was also a symbol of public virtue. "Araetus, Jun.," for example, argued that it was "not

<sup>30</sup> See Fenno to Joseph Ward, Sept. 9, 1793; John Fenno Papers, Library of Congress; and Tench Coxe to William Barton, Sept. 9, 1793, Tench Coxe Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania (microfilm reel 607). I am indebted to Joanne Freeman for these citations. While Rush doubted Hamilton's claim to have had the fever (Rush, *Account*, 304-305), Jefferson was harsher: "A man as timid as he is on the water, as timid on horseback, as timid in sickness, would be a phenomenon if his courage of which he has the reputation in military occasions were genuine. His friends, who have not seen him, suspect it is only an autumnal fever he has." Jefferson to James Madison, Sept. 8, 1793, in Ford, *Writings*, 6:418. On Jefferson's leaving the city, see Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty*, 140-41.

<sup>31</sup> For the Hamiltons' difficulties with Abraham Yates, Jr., the Republican mayor of Albany, see Hamilton to Yates, Sept. 26, and Yates to Hamilton, Sept. 27, in Syrett, *Papers*, 15:343-51. *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 11, 16; *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 13; *Gazette of the United States*, Sept. 18, 1793. For reports of Philadelphians who encountered problems in other cities, see *General Advertiser*, Sept. 18, 20; *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 21, 24; and *National Gazette*, Oct. 2, 5, 1793.

<sup>32</sup> *Gazette of the United States*, Sept. 18, 1793. In this last issue before suspending publication, Fenno, in much smaller type than he normally used—symbolic of his disdain for Rush—noted that Rush's bleedings had been successful.

<sup>33</sup> Rush expressed his exacerbation over the debates in his letters to his family. See Benjamin Rush to Julia Rush, Sept. 5, 1793, and B. Rush to J. Rush, Sept. 15, 1793, in Runes, *Selected Writings*, 410-11.

<sup>34</sup> *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 24, 1793.

arrogant and assuming for an anonymous writer" to deal with a subject that the "medical authority" had already considered.<sup>35</sup> The medical community was far from united, however. As William Currie confessed: "I should think myself criminal if I was to enter the lists of controversy . . . The calamitous situation and disconsolate appearance of the city, ought surely to induce all the physicians who have any claim to humanity, to unite with heart and hand."<sup>36</sup> In an effort to quell debate by supporting a variety of cures, Caspar Wistar was "confident that each of them [Drs. Rush and Kuhn] rendered me very essential benefit" when he was ill.<sup>37</sup> Many believed that disagreements among respected doctors over the nature of the illness—even over its name—caused fear. One anonymous writer blamed the rising death toll on fear: "Dread and apprehension, serve only to prepare and predispose the body for the impression of any disease. Fear of any thing, though it were but of a mere phantom, or a bare idea of the imagination, weakens the nerves, debilitates the constitution, and depresses the mind."<sup>38</sup> Another linked the public's fear to the debating doctors: "No circumstance has added more distress to the present calamity than the disagreement of the physicians about the disease. They at first differed as to the mode of cure, but now it appears they do not yet agree in determining what is and what is not the *yellow fever*."<sup>39</sup> In backing Rush's cure, "W.S." was "sorry to observe so much contradiction in the opinions of our physicians respecting the name, nature, and proper treatment of the fatal disease raging among us," while

<sup>35</sup> See also "A Friend to the People," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 3, 11, 1793. For a poignant example of the importance of anonymity, see Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (1793; reprint ed., New York, 1982), 18. Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Cambridge, 1990), 42, states that arguments, not persons, mattered in the discourse of the public sphere.

<sup>36</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 21, 1793. Currie had publicly doubted Rush's yellow fever diagnosis. A close friend of Rush, Currie later apologized for doubting Rush's cure, but never publicly acknowledged the contradiction between his two letters. See also William Currie, *A Treatise on the Synochus Icteroides, or Yellow Fever, as it Lately Appeared in the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1794), and Nord, "Readership as Citizenship," 18-19.

<sup>37</sup> *General Advertiser*, Sept. 26, 1793.

<sup>38</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 12, 1793. One anonymous writer told Dr. Kuhn to keep "his opinions to himself," while "A By-Stander" said the same to Drs. Thomas Ruston and George Logan, critics of Rush's policies. *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 14, 1793; Dr. Pennington (Sept. 14); Dr. Annan (Sept. 19); Dr. Parke (Sept. 21); Dr. Porter (Sept. 18) all supported Rush's cure. The letters by the doctors were not as blunt as the unsigned letter.

<sup>39</sup> *General Advertiser*, Sept. 19, 1793. The *National Gazette* reprinted this two days later. See also, Robinson, "The Third Horseman," 311-26.

"Benevolus" was fed up with all disagreements: "For God's sake! For the sake of those who daily wait for the publication of the *Federal Gazette*, with anxiety! Let your readers be no more pestered with disputes."<sup>40</sup>

These writers clearly felt that the public disagreements further damaged a city politically divided and ravaged by an epidemic. Many Americans felt the divisions in the political community threatened the future of republican government, which they did not believe could survive the construction of parties. Philadelphians shuddered as their doctors divided over medical policy, and the leader of one of the political factions (Hamilton) entered the lists as a defender of one of the cures. They called on doctors (as they had called on politicians) to end the partisan feuding and establish a sound policy.

In the middle of October, at the height of the fever, Freneau published "A Friend to the People" who argued that "whenever aristocratic sentiments creep into a republic like ours . . . virtue languishes, and of course disease relaxes the body politic . . . the political physician should exert every faculty to strengthen its sinews."<sup>41</sup> Another writer chastised doctors who fled the city: "it is not the day of battle that the *officer* ought to fly. A physician, if he was certain of falling a sacrifice to the disorder, *ought to remain at his post and learn how to die.*"<sup>42</sup>

If physicians were the caretakers of the health of the body, just as politicians were the physicians for the health of the body politic, then dissension among physicians, as among politicians, was very dangerous to the health of both the body and the body politic. "A Citizen" stressed this

<sup>40</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 3, 10, 1793. See also the *Independent Gazetteer*, Sept. 21, Oct. 19, and Nov. 9, 1793, for complaints about disagreeing doctors. Rush also lamented the "contrariety of opinion among the members of our College upon the remedies proper in this disease." *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 13, 1793. Dismayed at the lack of respect shown to him and to his cure, Rush quit the College of Physicians, which he had helped to establish. Attacks against him continued long after the 1793 epidemic. William Cobbett, alias "Peter Porcupine," fled the country, unable to pay the \$8,000 settlement won by Rush in a December 1799 libel suit. See Binger, *Rush*, 239-47, and Winthrop and Frances Neilson, *Verdict for the Doctor: The Case of Benjamin Rush* (New York, 1958).

<sup>41</sup> *National Gazette*, Oct. 19, 1793. Freneau, who made the connections between the ills of the nation and the ills of the city, republished this piece from the *Baltimore Evening Post*. The death toll peaked in October. Carey, *Account*, 113-62, contains a list of those who perished with the fever.

<sup>42</sup> *National Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1793. The "officer" might refer to Hamilton. The comment about physicians remaining at their posts is interesting as this was Freneau's last issue. Although he promised to reopen with new type on Dec. 2, 1793, Freneau folded his paper due to an increasing debt. See Mary Bowden, *Philip Freneau* (Boston, 1976), and Lewis Leary, *That Rascal Freneau: A Study in Literary Failure* (Rutgers, 1941).

problem, criticized the doctors, and urged them to:

consider the perturbation, the extreme anxiety, and distress with which those publications have filled the minds of their fellow citizens—this is no time, Sir, for party disputes, prejudices to the old or new method should immediately give way, and that one be unanimously adopted which experience has proved to be the most eligible, and most conducive to the public good.<sup>43</sup>

"Citizen" appeared in the *Federal Gazette* the same day as Madison's third Helvidius essay, ten days after Brown published Hamilton's letter in support of Stevens's cure, and almost five months after the Impartiality Proclamation. The proclamation debate lingered as the epidemic germinated. As the fabric of the political society rent around them, the citizens of Philadelphia faced their deaths and considered the possibility of the death of the republic. The debates between polemical writers over the preceding five months concerned threats to the continued republican existence of the United States. Many writers had called for unity during those debates, but in the fall of 1793 calls by Philadelphians for unity took on entirely different meanings. Republicanism was not at stake, life was.

By entering the debate, Hamilton exacerbated the conflict between Rush and Doctors Kuhn, Isaac Cathrall, and William Currie who, like Stevens, argued that the cure for the illness should be mild. Even at this early stage in the fever, Rush's system was far harsher than those of Kuhn and Stevens.<sup>44</sup> The medical debate intensified after Rush pronounced that he had the cure for the yellow fever: his famous (or infamous) purging and bleeding system. Not only did Rush believe that his method would be more successful in curing the ill, he also believed that the system was republican in nature.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 20, 1793. The *General Advertiser* published it the following day.

<sup>44</sup> For Rush's discussion of the symptoms of the fever, his beliefs on its cause, and his discussion on its treatment, see Rush, *Account*, 29-78. For a list of other doctors who disagreed with Rush, see Pernick, "Pestilence," 563-65; Powell, *Dead*, 77-78; and Robinson, "Third Horseman," 303-37.

<sup>45</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 11, 1793. Rush directed patients to take ten grams of calomel and fifteen grams of jalap every six hours to produce four or five evacuations from the bowels and to lose between eight and ten ounces of blood. Powell, *Dead*, ix-x, argues that the cures of other doctors helped to save lives, while "Rush unquestionably spent them." Chris Holmes, "Benjamin Rush and the Yellow Fever," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 40 (1966), 246-63, argues that too few records exist to term Rush's cure lethal and that surviving records give Rush between a 54 and a 78 percent success rate. John Duffy, *The Healers: A History of American Medicine* (Chicago, 1979), 96, writes that "Rush's heroic therapy undoubtedly compounded the suffering and mortality."

An ardent opponent of Hamilton's funding system, Rush allowed his republican principles to spill into his medical practice: "it is time to take the cure of pestilential fevers out of the hands of physicians, and to place it in the hands of the people."<sup>46</sup> He sought to teach citizens how to treat the disease because he felt "a greater proportion of sailors who had no physicians, recovered from the fever, than of those who had the best medical assistance."

Rush's political philosophy is evident in these passages on medical practice. He argued fervently against the belief

that the knowledge of what relates to the health and lives of a *whole* city, or nation, should be confined to one, and that a small or a privileged order of men. . . . A new order of things is rising in medicine as well as in government. . . . It is no more necessary, that a patient should be ignorant of the medicine he takes to be cured by it, than that the business of government should be conducted with secrecy in order to ensure obedience to just laws.

Rush's commitment to the Republican cure solidified after he had distributed his directions, for Philadelphians, as he observed, had "no difficulty in apprehending everything that was addressed to them, except what related to the different states of the pulse." It was for this man, espousing a philosophy that was the essence of the Republican movement in the summer of 1793, that Brown altered his previously impartial editorial policy.<sup>47</sup>

Until the epidemic, Brown attempted to steer an independent course

---

Rush felt that Drs. Kuhn and Stevens saw "few" patients who were "slightly affected" and who would have recovered sooner under his care. Rush admitted to trying the Kuhn-Stevens method, and losing three patients out of four. *Federal Gazette*, Sept. 12, 13, 1793. Kuhn's letters can also be found in *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 13, 1793, and in the *General Advertiser*, Sept. 11, 16, 1793. Kuhn contracted the yellow fever and fled to Bethlehem to recover from it. Although his letters ceased appearing after the middle of September, Rush continued to attack Kuhn's cure. Powell, *Dead*, 216.

<sup>46</sup> The following quotes can be found in Rush's *Account*, 325-33, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>47</sup> Years later John Adams praised Rush for his work on the yellow fever and added "the Plague and the Yellow Fever and all other epidemic Diseases, when they prevail in a City, convert all other Disorders into Plague. I cannot help thinking Democracy is a Distemper of this kind and when it is once set in motion and obtains a Majority it converts every Thing good and bad and indifferent into the dominant epidemic." Adams to Rush, Feb. 6, 1805, in Alexander Biddle, ed., *Old Family Letters Relating to the Yellow Fever* (Philadelphia, 1892), ser. A, 62. Adams also maintained that the epidemic saved the nation from violent upheaval by forcing out of Philadelphia supporters of a war to aid France. Malone, *Jefferson and the Ordeal of Liberty*, 141-42. Rush later complained to Horatio Gates that Federalists had tarred his medical reputation because of his political beliefs. Pernick, "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence," 575.



between the political philosophies of Hamilton and Fenno on the one hand and those of Jefferson, Madison, and Freneau on the other. Unfortunately for the citizens of Philadelphia, the escalating political crisis was concurrent with an epidemic; questions about the health of the city's citizens became enmeshed in discussions about the health of the political system. And fear fed both problems. Because of the epidemic, Brown felt that the best way to continue his service to his city was to become a mouthpiece for Benjamin Rush.

Until the middle of September, Brown published letters from a variety of individuals offering cures for the yellow fever. By September 17, he had published seven letters advocating Rush's cure and seven offering a different one. After that date, Brown published thirty-four letters supporting Rush's cure and only six letters critical of the doctor. The letters in support of Rush often came from the doctor himself, but patients he had cured and other doctors weighed in defending his theories.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to Brown, Eleazer Oswald of the *Independent Gazetteer* (the only other newspaper to publish continually through the epidemic) advocated the bleeding and purging system, but he published only two letters from Rush between August 31 and December 14.

Even Brown's coverage of Bush Hill revealed a bias toward the Rush cure. In noting that the death rate at Bush Hill had declined, Brown commented that the change in the weather was the reason for the improving health of the patients who were sent there.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, while Brown occasionally mentioned that Bush Hill was well-organized and not a place to be feared, he never acknowledged that its doctors were adamantly opposed to Rush's cure. In fact, Brown's newspaper mentions Dr. Deveze only once—not for his work at Bush Hill, but for visiting an infected ship. Rather than admit his loyalties, however, Brown disguised his alliance with Rush, relying on rhetoric he might have used during the summer political debates. The impartial coverage of the epidemic that he originally sought proved incompatible with the realities of maintaining public calm.

"At the expense of an immense load of obloquy," Rush later wrote, "I have addressed my publications to the people. The appeal though hazardous, in the present state of general knowledge in medicine, has succeeded. The

<sup>48</sup> Despite noting that Brown published more letters in favor of purging and bleeding than those opposed to it, Powell argues that Brown did not take sides. Powell, *Dead*, 207, 258–59.

<sup>49</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 24 and Sept. 13, 1793.

citizens of Philadelphia are delivered from their fears."<sup>50</sup> Without a willing editor such as Brown, Rush's numerous attempts to address citizens directly would have been much more difficult. As personal contact became increasingly rare, and as the percentage of the ill that he and his associates could visit dwindled, Rush inundated Brown's newspaper with his letters.

Rush's efforts to inform the public were aided by the city's chemists. Hoping to profit from Rush's reputation, a number of them displayed his name prominently in their advertisements. By mid-September, with Rush dominating Brown's newspaper, apothecaries Delany, Goldthwait and Baldwin, and Betton and Harrison added Rush's name to advertisements that they had been running for weeks.<sup>51</sup> The marriage was beneficial to both doctors and chemists. The latter sought increased sales by invoking Rush's authority, while Rush's cure gained further notoriety from their advertisements. Sure that he had identified the cure and dismayed that public discourse had not fully supported him, Rush allowed the chemists to use the weight of his name in an effort to bolster support for his cure.

Not content with the plurality of cures being offered to the city, Rush attempted to thwart the open discussion of treatment (and to cure more ill Philadelphians) by allowing his name to be used. Brown acted similarly. Although his belief in the importance of an open public sphere remained unshaken, Brown willingly curtailed public debate for the sake of unity. In practice, unity meant the suppression of differences of opinion.

Historians have argued that fear dominated this era.<sup>52</sup> Calls for Americans to be vigilant against encroachments by monarchists and by radical democrats reverberated throughout the public sphere in 1793. These calls begat panic and paranoia. Although the source of danger changed, the

<sup>50</sup> Rush believed that "the disease was excited by a sudden paroxysm of fear." Rush, *Account*, 309.

<sup>51</sup> Brown printed "Dr. Rush's Directions for curing and preventing the YELLOW FEVER" on Sept. 11, 1793, using a considerably larger type. *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 13, 1793. See *Federal Gazette*, Aug. 30, 31, Sept. 3-5; *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 30, Sept. 2, 5, 7, 14; and *General Advertiser*, Sept. 11, 17, 18, 1793, for other chemists' advertisements.

<sup>52</sup> For example, Marshall Smelser, "The Federalist Period as an Age of Passion," *American Quarterly* 10 (1958), 391-419; "The Jacobin Phrenzy: Federalism and the Menace of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity," *The Review of Politics* 13 (1951), 457-82; "The Jacobin Phrenzy: The Menace of Monarchy, Plutocracy, and Anglophobia, 1789-1798," *The Review of Politics* 21 (1959), 239-58; John Howe, "Republican Thought and the Political Violence of the 1790s," *American Quarterly* 19 (1967), 147-65.

need for vigilance remained.<sup>53</sup> When the epidemic developed in Philadelphia, citizens who stayed (and those who read Philadelphia newspapers) witnessed debates similar to the political ones. The strife over the epidemic did not resemble the political debates solely because Hamilton was involved in both controversies. Like all Americans during the summer months, Philadelphians debated where authority resided in their society. Rush advocated a cure that any citizen could administer. When others challenged his cure, Rush urged Philadelphians to rely on his name and on his reputation. These debates threatened to rend asunder a city where social relations were already unstable owing to an epidemic and political controversies.<sup>54</sup> The epidemic also threatened to shatter the public sphere by ending public communication.

An impartial participant in the summer political debates, Brown seemed uniquely suited to be the voice of the community during the fall epidemic. Although he printed the debates of the doctors in the early stages of the disorder, Brown realized that the city needed a unified voice. He omitted dissenting voices as the epidemic crested and never acknowledged that city doctors supported two cures. During the height of the fever, Brown opened his columns to the appeals of the committee for funds, for clothing, and for fire buckets. To lift people's spirits, he recorded all of the financial contributions the city received and printed reports that the fever was abating. Although mail service was often interrupted, Brown shipped the *Federal Gazette* to other cities, keeping the network of news and information from the nation's capital intact.<sup>55</sup> Serving as the forum for discussion, Brown's newspaper held the city together in a time when most people were afraid to see or speak with another person.

Although few personal papers attesting to his beliefs remain, Brown's

<sup>53</sup> Calls for Philadelphians to be "vigilant" repeatedly appeared. See *Federal Gazette*, Aug. 30, Sept. 3, 10, 11, 14, 27, 1793; *General Advertiser*, Sept. 4, 18, 1793; *National Gazette*, Sept. 4, 1793; *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, Aug. 30, 1793. Rush to Elias Boudinot, Sept. 25, 1793, *PMHB* 70 (1946), 102-3.

<sup>54</sup> See Isaac Heston to his brother, Sept. 19, 1793, "Letter from a Yellow Fever Victim, Philadelphia, 1793," *PMHB* 86 (1962), 205-6.

<sup>55</sup> On Brown's conception of the importance of newspapers to a community, see *Philadelphia Gazette*, Jan. 1, 1794, and Nord, "Readership as Citizenship," 6-8. In addition to recording the \$34,402.07 in donations the city received, Brown also included European news in an effort to distract people's minds from the fever. See Richard Kielbowicz, *News in the Mails: The Press, the Post Office and Public Information, 1700-1860* (New York, 1989), on transporting newspapers through the mail, and Powell, *Dead*, 295.

editorial comments demonstrate that he fully understood the importance of his publication in maintaining the public sphere. Near the fever's peak he wrote: "It is obvious that, in the present condition of this city, the means of communicating information, and more especially with regard to the prevailing disorder, is of great importance, and this consideration alone has been the principal inducement with the Proprietor of *The Federal Gazette* to continue its publication."<sup>56</sup> Nearly one month later, as the fever seemed to be dying out, Brown assessed his work and stressed his continual publication: "It has kept whole the chain of general intelligence that must otherwise have broken; and it has served as a vehicle for conveying information, with respect to the late calamity, at a time when all other Daily Papers in the city had long since discontinued."<sup>57</sup> Without the regular appearance of the *Federal Gazette* and without Brown's conscious effort to change his coverage of the disease, the panic in Philadelphia could have been much greater.<sup>58</sup> In summarizing his contribution, however, the editor mentioned neither his devotion to Rush in the medical debates, nor his suppression of the alternative cure offered at Bush Hill. In the belief that he was serving the city, Brown transformed his newspaper into a forum for Rush's prescription to end the epidemic. At the same time he masked the shift away from an impartial editorial policy in his role as the guardian of the public sphere.

Like many Americans, newspaper editors were often swept up by the developing partisan alliances. But these editors, also like many other Americans, were reared in an antiparty atmosphere. When the gravity of the contested public issues reached maximum importance (anarchy or monarchy, life or death) people who were raised to believe that parties were inherently evil reluctantly adopted them without being able to admit that they were engaging in partisan behavior. Republican rhetoric stressed the need for unity among citizens—unity that became increasingly elusive in the 1790s as political crises, such as the Impartiality Proclamation, the Jay Treaty, and the Alien and Sedition Acts, divided the body politic. The emphasis on unity

<sup>56</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 1, 1793. Many of Brown's personal papers were undoubtedly lost in the January 1797 fire that later claimed his life.

<sup>57</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 26, 1793.

<sup>58</sup> Mathew Carey claimed 4,041 persons perished and attempted to list them all. Carey, *Account*, 113-63. *Minutes of the Proceedings*, appendix, claims only 3,293 died. Powell, *Dead*, 301-2, puts the death toll at 5,000. K. David Patterson, "Yellow Fever Epidemics and Mortality in the United States, 1693-1905," *Social Science and Medicine* 34 (1992), 855-65, agrees with Powell. On previous epidemics, see John Duffy, *Epidemics in Colonial America* (Baton Rouge, 1953).

led many editors to claim their newspapers were impartial. In times of crisis, however, unity could only be achieved by suppressing diverse opinions—creating partisan newspapers. Andrew Brown serves as an excellent example of this conundrum. When the fever abated, Brown stressed the importance of impartial newspapers for republican government:

A NEWSPAPER under the influence of party (for parties will ever exist in free government) often does more harm than good—Partial representations, by misleading public opinion, impress a wrong bias upon the judgment, and often disseminate error—Whether right or wrong, every measure of the government is either approved or condemned *in toto*. How far this tends to warp public opinion, and divide the people, no one conversant in politics can be at a loss to know. . . . Since, then, newspapers are calculated to form the public opinion; since they are manifestly the vehicles by which the knowledge of political measures is disseminated to the remotest verge of a country; since they may be made the means of much good, as well as rendered subservient to the dirty purposes of intrigue and design; since the public peace, happiness, and safety, in a considerable degree depend on them, how extremely incumbent is it upon all Printers to observe a rigid *impartiality* and *independence*?<sup>59</sup>

In this politically contentious season, the editor of the *Federal Gazette* sought a moderate course. When he perceived that the questions before the public were of paramount importance to Philadelphians, he faltered from his impartial stance, and open debate fell victim to the calls for unity. Like so many other Americans, Brown could not, however, admit that he had succumbed to a partisan position that would soon dominate the political landscape.

The 1793 yellow fever epidemic did not, however, significantly alter the political stance of Brown's newspaper. Because of his desire to stay impartial—and not to be associated with any political movement in the increasingly partisan nation's capital—on January 1, 1794, Brown changed the name of the newspaper to the *Philadelphia Gazette*. Looking for a respected newspaper in which they could first publish the Jay Treaty, the Washington administration selected Brown's newspaper, although Benjamin

<sup>59</sup> *Federal Gazette*, Oct. 25, 1793.

Franklin Bache published it first in the *Aurora*.<sup>60</sup> As he had done during the Impartiality Proclamation debates, Brown presented polemics from both treaty supporters and from those opposed to its ratification. In addition to printing reports of town meetings condemning the treaty and the Republican polemics "Cato" and "Decius," Brown printed over thirty of the "Camillus" essays penned by Hamilton and Rufus King.<sup>61</sup> When yellow fever returned to Philadelphia in the fall of 1795, Brown again remained in the city to print his newspaper. He printed more letters from Rush, but neither the controversy over the treatment nor the epidemic itself was as severe, and the vast majority of Brown's columns concerned the Jay Treaty debates.

Andrew Brown's role in the 1793 yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia demonstrates the difficulties that Americans—especially newspaper editors—experienced as the nation divided into political parties. Although some hoped to stay impartial, most were unable to do so. Some Americans, like Andrew Brown, were unable even to admit that they had crossed the border into partisanship. These editors must be taken into account when we examine the partisan press of the 1790s.

*University of Virginia*

MARK A. SMITH

A version of this paper was presented at the American Journalism Historians Association Conference in Tulsa in 1995. In addition to the participants of that conference, and the editor and referees of the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, the author would like to thank John K. Alexander, J. C. A. Stagg, and Peter S. Onuf for their helpful comments on previous incarnations of this essay.

<sup>60</sup> James Tagg, *Benjamin Franklin Bache and the Philadelphia Aurora* (Philadelphia, 1991), 246–63. For overviews of the Jay Treaty and the debates over its ratification, see Elkins and McKittrick, *The Age of Federalism*, 417–49; Jerald Combs, *The Jay Treaty: Political Battleground of the Founding Fathers*, (Berkeley, 1970); and Samuel Flagg Bemis, *Jay's Treaty: A Study in Commerce and Diplomacy* (New Haven, 1932).

<sup>61</sup> *Philadelphia Gazette*, July 29, 1795–Jan. 15, 1796.