

Stories of Independence: Identity, Ideology, and History in Eighteenth-Century America. By PETER C. MESSER. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005. 258p. Appendices, notes, works cited, index. \$39.)

If the American Revolutionary War had a corresponding revolution in the writing of history, when did it occur? Lester Cohen's *The Revolutionary Histories* (1980) argues that the Revolutionary War ushered in dramatic changes in the writing of history, ending providential history and laying the path towards the romantic. Arthur Shaffer's *The Politics of History* (1975) looks at history writing after the Revolutionary War and the rise of nationalism. But change is a two-way street. If how we perceive ourselves changes the way we write about our past, shouldn't the reverse also be the case? In *Stories of Independence*, Peter Messer argues that the dramatic changes in history writing began long before the Revolutionary War, starting as early as 1705, and these changes both reflected and facilitated the creation of an American identity. For Messer, American historians redefined empire and created an identity for a distinct people that was crucial to "transforming resistance to unpopular imperial policies into a revolution" (p. 73).

History, identity, and ideology are central to this study, which is both more and less than an analysis of fifty histories written by "self-styled Americans" between 1705 and 1818. *Stories of Independence* is divided into three parts: before, during, and after the Revolutionary War. The first two chapters look at the transformation of history writing leading up to the Revolutionary War. Messer argues for two forms of history—one provincial (patriot), the other imperial (loyalist). He argues the imperial model offered more sympathetic characterizations of Native Americans and left greater room for the abolition of slavery. Throughout the book, Messer argues heavily for the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment on American authors, but that causality raises several questions. Messer has Robert Beverley's 1705 history echoing ideas of Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), even though Beverley wrote decades before Hutcheson. Similarly, how could Hutcheson "predict" (p. 23) the ideas of Thomas Prince if Prince wrote before Hutcheson's *System of Moral Philosophy* was published?

During the Revolution, the provincial and imperial styles clashed, and although the provincial style did not cause the revolution, it laid a foundation whereby colonists could imagine themselves as separate from the British Empire. The book raises important issues of intentionality. Messer's middle chapter is entitled "A Revolution in Defense of History." The title symbolizes Messer's focus, as a contrasting chapter could be written entitled "Rewriting History in Defense of a Revolution."

How would you read the statement "I am an Indian" if written by an English colonist in a 1705 history of Virginia? Messer reads this quote by Robert Beverley as "a declaration of independence," the "first step in the redefinition of republican politics that inspired the American Revolution" (p. 3). In fact,

Beverley wrote this “declaration” as an admission of his inferiority, asking readers in England “not to criticize too unmercifully upon my style. I am an Indian, and don’t pretend to be exact in my language.” Reading Beverley’s quote as a declaration of independence reveals much more about post-1775 interpretations than about Beverley’s intentions in 1705. Messer is correct to note in the introduction that “the Revolution led to novel approaches to the writing of history” (p. 5), but it also led to novel approaches to the reading of history. In the early republic, American readers could look back on such a statement as prefiguring independence, but it certainly was not written with sentiments of independence.

These questionable passages come early in this otherwise thoughtful book. In the final two chapters, Messer analyzes the histories written during the early republic. Just as the early histories shaped (and reflected) republican ideology, so were these later histories shaped by it. As these historians struggled to articulate when independence began, Messer looks for similar starting points for American identity, ideology, and politics. Messer asks big questions and admits (rather than ignores) a variety of influences. This means his narrative can get a little messy, but in a way that seems to reflect rather than obscure the realities of the past.

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The First Wall Street: Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, and the Birth of American Finance. By ROBERT E. WRIGHT. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. vii, 210p. Figures, tables, notes, index. \$25.)

The First Wall Street is an outstanding, accessible account of Philadelphia’s status as the nation’s first financial center. Robert Wright has written a breezy, clear, and humorous history of the city’s central role as the American capital of banking and related industries. Wright has created an artful narrative to explain Philadelphia’s success, leadership, and centrality in the early American economy from the early eighteenth century through the early republic. *The First Wall Street* also clearly explains the complex processes by which New York City overtook Philadelphia in financial importance by 1840.

The First Wall Street places the roots of the early republic’s banking expansion in British North America. Colonial Philadelphia’s economy enjoyed advantages such as a tolerant and comparably free Quaker culture, good land, and an effective General Loan Office. These advantages allowed prescient Philadelphians like Thomas Willing, Michael Hillegas, and Benjamin Franklin to create a financial dynamo in miniature, the nearest economic cousin to London on this side of the Atlantic. They created a liquid capital market and positive commercial climate with ground rents and a fledgling insurance industry