

“Let Us Dare to Read, Think, Speak, and Write”:
John Adams’s Use of Reading
as Political and Constitutional Armory

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John Adams and Thomas Jefferson:
Libraries, Leadership and Legacy

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In 1765, John Adams, a lawyer not yet thirty years old, published his first major political work.¹ Its title, *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law*, would strike modern readers as unbearably dry – yet this pamphlet was no academic treatise. Rather, it was a slashing polemic, with a bite and an immediacy that electrified its readers and helped to make its author’s reputation beyond the narrow confines of Braintree law practice. Adams recounted the ways that tyranny had prevailed over liberty in medieval Europe, and then drew an analogy between past and present as an urgent warning. Adams likened the creeping tyranny of the canon and feudal law to the assertion of Parliamentary supremacy in the 1760s. Both threatened constitutional liberty, and both required active, committed resistance.

Two means were at hand to guard against this resurgent tyranny, Adams maintained – reviving the spirit of liberty and bolstering it with knowledge:

“This spirit [of liberty], however, without knowledge, would be little better than a brutal rage. Let us tenderly and kindly cherish, therefore, the means of knowledge. Let us dare to read, think, speak, and write. Let every order and degree among the people rouse

their attention and animate their resolution. Let them all become attentive to the grounds and principles of government, ecclesiastical and civil. Let us study the law of nature; search into the spirit of the British constitution; read the histories of ancient ages; contemplate the great examples of Greece and Rome; set before us the conduct of our own British ancestors, who have defended for us the inherent rights of mankind against foreign and domestic tyrants and usurpers, against arbitrary kings and cruel priests, in short, against the gates of earth and hell. Let us read and recollect and impress upon our souls the views and ends of our own more immediate forefathers, in exchanging their native country for a dreary, inhospitable wilderness.... In such researches as these, let us all in our several departments cheerfully engage, but especially the proper patrons and supporters of law, learning, and religion!”²

In this thunderous call to action, it is no accident that John Adams put the word “read” first. For him, reading was the first step to take before any political, legal, or constitutional task – whether devising arguments, penning resolutions, framing laws, or making constitutions. This passage from 1765 is emblematic of Adams’s life as engaged reader and political thinker. Beginning in his college days, Adams was drawn irresistibly to books as tools, as refuges, as sources of consolation, and, most important, as avenues into the vast and dazzling intellectual world of constitutional and political argument, a world that spanned the millennia from ancient Greece and Rome through the constitutional agonies of seventeenth-century England up to his own time.³

Adams used his library as a political armory. From his earliest labors in the good cause of Anglo-American liberties to his last days as an American sage, he drew on his books in doing the work of politics, constitutionalism, and law. Adams was among the

most scholarly of that diverse, brilliant, and quarrelsome band of lawyers, politicians, statesmen, military leaders, farmers, jurists, shopkeepers, merchants, and clergymen whom we call the founding fathers. In a useful and unjustly neglected book on Adams as a scholar, Alfred Iacuzzi anatomized Adams's remarkable range of reading, grasp of foreign languages, bibliophilia, and other scholarly attainments. For example, in addition to the classical languages, which formed the basic learning of every college-educated man in the eighteenth century, Adams knew French, Italian, Spanish, and a smattering of Dutch.⁴

Zoltan Haraszti titles the second chapter of his great study *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* "John Adams Among His Books" – and the title is apt.⁵ As a lawyer and then as a public man, Adams could not function without a steady and copious supply of books – books that he owned and books that he sought to acquire. At first, conceiving of a library simply as a tool for a rising lawyer, he saw it with rigorous utilitarianism as a means to advance his standing as a learned lawyer. As the controversy with Great Britain drew him into its gravitational field, he saw a different kind of utilitarian reason for acquiring books – a public-spirited utilitarianism. Books now no longer were purely private resources; for the Adams who was contending with Thomas Hutchinson and Daniel Leonard, books were resources for the forensic combat that the constitutional issues of the day required. Later, when the task had moved from vindicating colonial rights to establishing independence and with it legitimate, sound constitutional government, books became priceless resources for a statesman. As he wrote to Abigail Adams:

“I could fill Volumes ... with Descriptions of Temples and Palaces, Paintings, Sculptures, Tapestry, Porcelaine, &c. &c. &c. -- if I could have time. But I could not do this without neglecting my duty. The Science of Government it is my Duty to study, more than all other Sciences: the Art of Legislation and Administration and Negotiation, ought to take Place, indeed to exclude in a manner all other Arts. I must study Politicks and War that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematicks and Philosophy. My sons ought to study Mathematicks and Philosophy, Geography, natural History, Naval Architecture, navigation, Commerce and Agriculture, in order to give their Children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Musick, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine.”⁶

Recourse to and engagement with printed sources was a hallmark of Adams’s writings. He often structured his most elaborate writing projects as detailed commentaries on and responses to an existing written or printed text. We see that process at work at various stages of his life – in his vigorous series of *Novanglus* essays written in 1774-1775 to defend the American position in the constitutional war of words and arguments with Great Britain and its American apologists;⁷ in his effort after his retirement from politics to vindicate his reputation against a venomous pamphlet that Alexander Hamilton had published in 1800, which led him to write essay after essay for three solid years from 1809 to 1811 for the *Boston Patriot* refuting Hamilton almost line by line;⁸ and in many of his finest letters to Thomas Jefferson.⁹

Most important for understanding Adams’s significance as a political and constitutional thinker, this pattern emerges in four stout volumes written between 1787 and 1791 – books that, ever afterward, Adams saw as his greatest effort in constitutional

and political argument, though he ruefully acknowledged that these books damaged his reputation and nearly ended his political career. The first three volumes are *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States*, written while he was American Minister to Great Britain; the fourth is his abortive series of newspaper essays, *Discourses on Davila*, a continuation of the *Defence* written during the opening years of his time as Vice President.¹⁰

These projects embody a central theme in Adams's life – what, in a future book, I will call *The Education of John Adams*. Like his great-grandson Henry Adams, John Adams had a powerful, insatiable need to know – to know himself, to know the world around him, and to know the extraordinarily rich and challenging record of human achievement and human failure in the realms of politics, governance, and law.¹¹ Complementing his need to know was his need to teach both his contemporaries and posterity the lessons that he deduced from the record of human history. Taken together, these needs to know and to teach constitute the education of John Adams. Unlike Henry Adams, John Adams believed that amassing and distilling knowledge was not a futile, purposeless endeavor. Rather, Adams believed that he had great wisdom to learn and to impart, if his countrymen would only listen to him. This wisdom might well be unwelcome and unpalatable, Adams recognized, but those qualities did not relieve him of the obligation to learn and to teach that wisdom.

Reflecting on Adams's hunger to learn and to teach raises another issue, a common one in the literature concerning John Adams. All too often, scholars who study him fall prey to the “idiosyncratic fallacy” – to see aspects of Adams's life, thought, and writings as peculiar to him, as evidence primarily of his own internal world of thought

and feeling.¹² Given the ways that Adams reveals himself in his diary and autobiography and in his many letters, this conclusion is natural. Further, historians ignore at their peril the distinctive individual features of those whom they study and write about. And yet it is just as dangerous to explain too much by the psychology of the individual under study as it is to ignore what Sherlock Holmes called the “personal equation.”¹³

The careful historian or biographer must strike a balance between these extremes – to acknowledge that although the complexity of such a historical figure as John Adams is rooted in part in his own psychology, parsing that complexity also requires study of the interaction between Adams’s inner world of thought and feeling and the larger intellectual world of his time, in which he strove not only to understand himself and those around him but also to pass on that understanding in ways that he hoped would be of use to his contemporaries and to posterity.

The eclecticism embodied in the extract from Adams’s *Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* with which I began was not unique to Adams, for example, though his mode of expressing it is his own. Like so many men and women of his day, including friends such as Benjamin Rush and Thomas Jefferson and occasional foes such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine, Adams guided himself by a set of intellectual assumptions, habits, and patterns of thought shaped by the trans-Atlantic Enlightenment – that remarkable era stretching from the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, symbolized by Sir Isaac Newton and Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu. Adams was an eager participant in that era’s exploring and sifting of nearly every period and exemplar of human civilization and its effort to distill that rich harvest into general principles of human nature, society, politics, and government.

Adams's writings enable us to trace his intellectual journey through the amassed wisdom of Western civilization and thus his quest to achieve that synthesis of human knowledge that was so characteristic a goal of those influenced by the Enlightenment. One example will suffice. The earliest book from his library that has come down to us is a 1734 copy of a collection of Cicero's selected orations in Latin. He acquired this book in 1749, when he was fourteen and preparing for the entrance examination to Harvard College, and its worn binding testifies that it often rode in his pocket.¹⁴ Adams's admiration for Cicero lasted his entire life – indeed, there is considerable reason to think that he aspired to be, and sometimes saw himself as, the American Cicero, defending the republic with his eloquence of spoken and written word at the hazard of his life and reputation, like his hero.

Adams saw Cicero as a role model in several ways. Not only was the Roman both a Senator and a political observer – he also was a prolific author, seeking to educate himself and his countrymen about philosophy, politics, and government. So, too, Adams strove to enlighten his fellow Americans about the “age of revolutions and constitutions,” as he dubbed it in a March 1815 letter to James Lloyd,¹⁵ or “the age of experiments in government,” as Jefferson called it in a letter to Adams in February 1796.¹⁶ Nowhere does Adams's mission to educate his countrymen fit more neatly with his engagement with books and with his status as an Enlightenment thinker than in his writing of the *Defence of the Constitutions* and the *Discourses on Davila*.

The *Defence* came into being almost by chance. In 1784, the English Dissenting clergymen Richard Price, a longtime supporter of the American cause who counted John Adams among his friends, published a pamphlet, *Observations on the American*

Revolution and the Means of Making It a Blessing to the World, and sent Adams a copy.¹⁷

Adams approved of Price's sentiments almost as much as he approved of Price – but the pamphlet's appendix, reprinting a 1778 letter to Price by the French economist and statesman Anne Robert Jacques Turgot, drew Adams's attention and his ire.¹⁸

Like many other *philosophes*, the theorists of reform at the core of the European Enlightenment, Turgot admired the Americans but scoffed at most of their experiments in constitutional government; he had no use for the carefully-wrought systems of government rooted in the Anglo-American constitutional tradition that so delighted and reassured Adams. Turgot exemplified the *philosophes'* habit of praising the Americans on one hand while criticizing them with condescension on the other. In particular, Turgot reprobated the American insistence on preserving ideas of separation of powers and checks and balances. If the people are to govern themselves, he sniffed, they need not worry about checks and balances or separation of powers. Rather, the first step was to concentrate all authority in one center, a one-house legislature, with such other institutions or offices of government as might suit their needs. Some Americans, Turgot noted (in a passage sure to detonate Adams's explosive temper), had come to recognize these truths – in particular, the great Dr. Franklin, under whose leadership the Pennsylvanians had adopted a state constitution true to the insights of the *philosophes*.

Turgot's analysis of American constitution-making exasperated Adams. He filled the margins of the pages reprinting Turgot's letter with a series of increasingly pointed and angry comments. Once he had finished, he was not content to leave his views strewn on the margins of his copy of Price's pamphlet. The need to refute Turgot publicly was too urgent. Now that Price had exposed Turgot's private criticisms of the American

constitutions to the world, the Frenchman's influence might well impeach the Americans' experiments in government in the world's eyes. Someone had to answer his attack. To disprove a book, Adams decided, it was necessary to write a book. He therefore began to write a defense of American constitution-making, justifying the ideas that he saw as the heart of the Americans' successful experiments, even though the *philosophes* rejected them as stale, outmoded, and useless: checks and balances, balanced government, and a mixed republic.

As Adams was writing his *Defence*, Thomas Jefferson was finishing his own attempt to refute European calumnies against America. In his case, the heresies dealt not with constitutions and governance but with an even more basic question – whether nature in America was fit to sustain civilization on the European model or whether human, animal, and plant life all were destined to degenerate in the New World. To rebut these claims, made most publicly – and damagingly – in books by the great naturalist the comte de Buffon and by the Abbés Guillaume Raynal and Corneille de Pauw, Jefferson wrote *Notes on the State of Virginia*. Adams and Jefferson were waging on two related fronts a war of American intellectual independence from European conventional wisdom. Both men sought to explain America to Europeans and, also, to explain Americans to themselves. This shared battle found visual commemoration in a pair of portraits that Adams and Jefferson commissioned for each other from the artist Mather Brown; these portraits show each man holding a copy of the other's book.¹⁹

Jefferson had one advantage over Adams – he was revising and expanding a book-length manuscript that he had been working on since 1781,²⁰ whereas Adams was starting fresh.²¹ Adams piled his authorities around him and began to copy extracts from

them, stitching the excerpts together with his own bridging observations and commentaries. According to the estimate made by the historian Trevor Colbourn, “three-quarters of volume one, nine-tenths of volume two, and the first half of volume three were made up of excerpts from other authors.”²² Before leaping to the obvious conclusion that Adams was a plagiarist (a conclusion that Colbourn did not reach), we should recall that standards of intellectual responsibility were different in Adams’s day from what they are today. Further, we should heed the wise counsel of historian Stephen G. Kurtz, another astute student of John Adams: “As a lawyer it was [Adams’s] habit to overwhelm his opponents with precedents, just as his master, James Otis, had done before him.”²³ Kurtz also noted, with equal astuteness, that what was remarkable about Adams was his erudition rather than his creativity. He was seeking in the *Defence* to establish that certain principles were true as proved by the record of history, not to establish his claim to having devised or articulated them. Kurtz’s point about Adams’s erudition – and he suggested further that Adams’s contemporaries sometimes confused his learning with creativity in ways that Adams neither sought nor claimed for himself – bolsters a plausible reading of the *Defence*. Well aware that his library was among the best American libraries, and hoping that the information he was compiling would put priceless historical wisdom and guidance at the service of future constitution-makers, Adams may well have intended the *Defence* to be not a coherent, systematic work of comparative constitutional history but a sourcebook for those who otherwise would not have access to the books that were at his fingertips.²⁴

The book that Adams published in early 1787 presented a wide-ranging classification and description of republicans ancient and modern, democratic and

aristocratic. A central theme guided this rich array of examples – that a republican constitution succeeded when its central institutions were a strong executive and a bicameral legislature, and that a republican constitution failed when its architects instead followed Turgot’s misguided advice of concentrating all the authority in one center. It is not clear that Adams envisioned this book as the first of a series while he was writing it. Once it was in press, however, he began writing what ultimately became two further volumes, appearing in 1788. The second focused on the Italian republics of the medieval and Renaissance eras, and the third distilled Adams’s war of words with the seventeenth-century English polemicist and political thinker Marchamont Nedham, lambasting him for his preference for simple democratic government rather than the mixed constitution that classical political thought taught was essential to preserve a republic. (Later, Adams admitted that all three volumes were disfigured by a want of method and a lack of an overarching plan.)²⁵

As previously noted, Adams often undertook a great intellectual project by reacting to an existing text, engaging with it almost paragraph by paragraph and line by line, refuting or developing its large points and small ones, sometimes even keying his argument to his original by page number. It is a lawyerly habit, first evident in Adams’s writings in 1773-1774, when he penned the Massachusetts General Court’s response to the address by Governor Thomas Hutchinson,²⁶ and then in 1774-1775, when as *Novanglus* he answered his old friend and political adversary Daniel Leonard, who began the controversy as *Massachusettensis*. Further, Adams found this method of close-focus commentary and refutation helpful because it enabled him to concentrate on his goal – a problem that he complained about in his diary when he was beginning the study of law.

And yet, as anyone who has tried to read the *Defence* or the *Discourses*, or for that matter *Novanglus* or the *Boston Patriot* essays, can testify, this method has one fatal flaw: it makes the resulting work all but unreadable for any reader who has neither access to nor the desire to read the inspiration of Adams's prose.

Adams's engagement with existing authorities in framing arguments and synthesizing knowledge enables us to dig a bit deeper into another "John Adams" problem that has bedeviled so many would-be biographers, some of whom cast aside as pointless and irrelevant any attempt to explain his intellectual preoccupations to a modern audience.²⁷ If we do that further digging, we begin to discern suggests a guiding, overarching theme in his intellectual life.

Understanding John Adams shows us that Enlightenment ideas worked themselves out in American political culture in a variety of ways. Whereas some contemporaries, such as Thomas Paine, viewed the Enlightenment as a spur and inspiration to challenge conventional wisdom and the ways of the world, Adams was at least as willing to stand up for existing ideas, based on his conviction that the amassed wisdom of human civilization confirmed such ideas as true, valuable, and of enduring significance.²⁸ Adams saw his works as links in a chain stretching back to the world of the ancients and forward to the posterity that he so often and so eloquently invoked. Paine was willing, even eager, to make a clean, abrupt break with the past; Adams insisted on continuity with the past. Thus, Adams turned first to his books in developing the arguments that he advanced in the *Defence* and the *Discourses* because he recognized, even assumed, that he was joining an ongoing discussion and that his work was a new stage, a continuation, of that evolving pattern of argument and counter-argument.

During the turbulent constitutional controversies of the era of the American Revolution, Adams opposed innovation in constitutional structures, insisting that principles of bicameralism and checks and balances were essential to a sound republican constitution.²⁹ In later years, reacting against the French Revolution, Adams even came to argue that the old ways grounded in the long course of Western civilization were the best ways, and to reject any attempts to sweep such things away in favor of what was new.

Another assumption of continuity complemented Adams's assumption of continuity linking past, present, and future – that the core content of human nature was everywhere the same, scoring geographical borders. This assumption, though in many ways a truism of Enlightenment thought, had far-reaching consequences for Adams and his work. For one thing, it helped to spur him to reject the idea of American exceptionalism – a point that Gordon S. Wood has made in his classic and influential chapter on Adams in *The Creation of the American Republic*.³⁰ One reason why Adams insisted that the United States was not exempt from the passions and habits that animated human nature, nor from the social, political, and psychological forces that shaped the fate of nations in general and republics in particular, was that he was too familiar with history,. He could see, and he often pointed out, the resonances and similarities between the Americans and other peoples who had attempted to devise and maintain republican governments throughout the history of the world. As he wrote, “All nations, from the beginning, have been agitated by the same passions. The principles developed here will go a great way in explaining every phenomenon that occurs in the history of government. The vegetable and animal kingdoms, and those heavenly bodies whose existence and

movements we are as yet only permitted faintly to perceive, do not appear to be governed by laws more uniform or certain than those which regulate the moral and political world.”³¹

Though Adams hailed the Americans’ experiments in government as something new under the sun, at the same time he measured the likelihood of their success or failure by their conformity to or divergence from the amassed wisdom of the ages – which, by no coincidence, he had distilled into the pages of the *Defence*. Adams filled his volumes with warnings to his readers to heed the lessons of history: “A science certainly comprehends all the principles in nature which belong to the subject. The principles in nature which relate to government cannot all be known, without a knowledge of the history of mankind.”³²

The *Defence* was controversial soon after its first appearance. Though Adams’s friend Benjamin Rush praised it and predicted that it would have a great influence on both sides of the Atlantic, other readers were not so enthusiastic. James Madison, for example, reported in a gloomy and pointed letter to Thomas Jefferson, “Men with learning find nothing new in it. Men with taste [find] many things to criticize. And men without either [find] not a few things that they will not understand.”³³ The most recent and rigorous student of Adams’s thought, C. Bradley Thompson, has shown that the *Defence* actually was admired and well-received in America – at first. As time went by, however, an increasing number of Adams’s critics claimed to find in the pages of the *Defence* signs that Adams had fallen prey to the seductions of European corruption – that he had forgotten his early commitment to republican government and now believed that a

monarchy with an accompanying aristocracy were both inevitable and desirable for America.

This reading of the *Defence* may have its roots in a tendency both by Adams's contemporaries and later scholars to read the earlier book through the lens of its sequel, the series of essays known as the *Discourses on Davila*. Modeling his work in part on Niccolò Machiavelli's *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livius*, despite his ambivalence about Machiavelli,³⁴ Adams used as the basis for these essays the work of the seventeenth-century Italian historian Enrico Caterina Davila, whose history of the civil wars of sixteenth-century France Adams found unnervingly relevant to the travails of late eighteenth-century France in the first stages of the French Revolution – and to America as well. As he wrote, Adams abruptly shifted from commenting on Davila to analyzing human nature, guided by the widely-read first book by Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Investigating the wellsprings of human thought and conduct, John Adams argued that the passion for distinction is the mainspring that drives human nature; that it inspires a small group in every society to strive for prominence, acclaim, and power over their fellow human beings; and that to safeguard against the great dangers that such aristocracy can pose to the health of the republic, they must be given their own institution, an upper legislative house or Senate, which at once would give them a permanent role in the government and subject them to scrutiny from the other two branches, the executive and the lower house (representing the great body of the people). Again Adams was advising lawgivers and constitution-makers, recapitulating arguments that he had made in the *Defence*, but this time making his views more pointed and basing them on a darker view of human nature than he had shown in the *Defence*. In

sum, Adams counseled the French to model their efforts to create a new republican government on the monarchic republic across the English Channel and not on the American republic.

The closer that Adams got to advocating a model of republican government unnervingly close to King, Lords, and Commons – the distilled formula of the unwritten English constitution – the more it seemed to his critics (especially after his disastrous attempt to advocate an elaborate title for the president of the United States) that Adams had fallen away from republican orthodoxy, that he was (to use the word that Thomas Jefferson used) a “heretic.”

Though *Discourses on Davila* at first attracted little attention or controversy, the publication of another book destined for controversy spotlighted the *Discourses* – and Adams. An American publisher seeking to reprint Thomas Paine’s *Rights of Man* wrote to get Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson’s support; Jefferson wrote a letter endorsing republication of Paine’s book and noting his pleasure that publishing Paine’s pamphlet would counter “the political heresies which have sprung up among us,” only to discover to his horror that the pamphlet appeared with his letter as a preface, thus ranging him against Adams in the public press. In vain Jefferson apologized to Adams and to President Washington; the impression had taken root that the two old friends were dividing over Adams’s having become a monarchist, and the damage was done.³⁵ Adams broke off his series of discourses and noted the political controversies that had led him to take that step.

The *Discourses on Davila* were the last extended writings on constitutional government and political theory from John Adams’s pen – but this does not mean that

Adams stopped reading or writing. He continued to devour books, annotating them in a fashion somewhat different from the purely utilitarian annotations he had previously practiced – his notes were more discursive, more combative, more substantive, and more extensive.³⁶ As did so many of his contemporaries seeking to order their political and intellectual legacies for posterity, he turned to the writing of autobiography and autobiographical and reminiscient letters. He wrote many of them for the use of a rising generation of historians seeking to understand the nation’s founding. Sometimes, he carried on pointed disputes with historians (such as Mercy Otis Warren) who either failed to recognize his achievements or attacked him for views he insisted were not his own.³⁷ And he continued to read widely and deeply. Readers of *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* will recall the enthusiastic and eloquent reports that the elderly John Adams made to Thomas Jefferson of his reading of a mammoth multivolume treatise, *Origine de tous les cultes, ou Religion universelle*, by Charles Francois Dupuis. Indeed, Adams wrote to Jefferson, in a passage that embodies his continuing commitment to “dare to read, think, speak, and write” and that seems a fitting way to conclude this paper:

“I have ... either Friends who wish to amuse and solace my old age; or Ennemies who mean to heap coals of fire on my head, and kill me with kindness: for they overwhelm me with Books from all quarters, enough to offuscate all Eyes, and smother and stifle all human Understanding. Chateaubriand, Grim, Tucker, Dupuis, La Harpe, Sismondi, Eustace, a new translation of Herodotus by Beloe with more Notes than Text. What should I do with all this lumber? I make my ‘Woman kind,’ as the Antiquary expresses it, read to me, all the English: but as they will not read the French, I am obliged

to excruciate my Eyes to read it myself. And all to what purpose? I verily believe I was as wise and good, seventy Years ago, as I am now.”³⁸

NOTES

¹ John Adams, *A Dissertation on the Canon and Feudal Law* (1765), reprinted in C. Bradley Thompson, ed., *The Revolutionary Writings of John Adams* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2000), 19-35..

² *Id.*, 32-33.

³ The finest study to date of Adams's relationship with books is Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1952), but see also Alfred Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar* (New York: S F. Vanni, 1952). I am deeply indebted to both books, despite Haraszti's Homeric polemical duel with Iacuzzi. See, e.g., Zoltan Haraszti, "Book Review: Alfred Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*," *American Literature* 27:2 (May 1955): 277-278; Alfred Iacuzzi, "Letters to the Editor," *American Literature* 28:2 (May 1956): 227-229; Zoltan Haraszti, "Mr. Haraszti's Reply," *id.*, 229-231; Zoltan Haraszti, "Letters to the Editor," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 11:2 (April 1954): 335; Alfred Iacuzzi, "Letters to the Editor," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 13:2 (April 1956), 299. Haraszti took umbrage that Iacuzzi seemed to be copying from his articles and book and concealing the chronology that would have allowed Iacuzzi to do so, even though both books were published in 1952. An impartial review of the correspondence suggests that the problem flowed from the disciplinary divide; Haraszti, a librarian and Keeper of Rare Books at the Boston Public Library, was an active participant in the field of early American history, whereas Iacuzzi, a scholar of Italian and romance languages at Brooklyn College and thus a newcomer to the field, was making his first entry as a John Adams scholar, publishing his book with a publisher that, though cuttingly dismissed by Haraszti as unknown to him, was and remains the leading publisher of Italian-language books in the United States. Without devaluing the extraordinary merit of Haraszti's book, therefore, it seems just to rescue Iacuzzi's book from the heated and probably unwarranted denunciations that Haraszti heaped upon it.

⁴ Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, 3-20.

⁵ Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, 14-25; compare Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, 21-39.

⁶ John Adams to Abigail Adams, post-post 12 May 1780 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

⁷ *Novanglus* is most easily read in Thompson, ed., *Revolutionary Writings of John Adams*, 147-284.

⁸ On this subject, the best recent discussion appears in Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), chapter 3 and notes thereto.

⁹ Lester J. Cappon, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1959), vol. II, *passim*. See also the commentary by Merrill D. Peterson, *Adams and Jefferson: A Revolutionary Dialogue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976).

¹⁰ The thirty-second essay was not included in either the book compilation published in 1819 or in Charles Francis Adams's edition of the *Works of John Adams*, but it does appear in Alfred Iacuzzi's *John Adams, Scholar*, and in Zoltan Haraszti, "Letters and Documents: The 32nd Discourse on Davila," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 11:1 (January 1954): 89-92.

¹¹ William Merrill Decker and Earl N. Harbert, eds., *Henry Adams and the Need to Know* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2005; distributed by the University of Virginia Press), *passim*; on the connection between Henry Adams and John Adams, see Richard A. Samuelson, "Henry Adams's Debt to John Adams," at 18-44.

¹² C. Bradley Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), makes a similar argument with great vigor; two books that he criticizes for this interpretation are John R. Howe, Jr., *The Changing Political Thought of John Adams* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), and Peter Shaw, *The Character of John Adams* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1975).

¹³ Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Musgrave Ritual," in Arthur Conan Doyle (Christopher Roden, ed.), *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press,), 113-133 (quote at 130).

¹⁴ <http://www.archive.org/stream/mtulliiciceronis00cice#page/n3/mode/2up> (consulted online 7 June 2009).

¹⁵ John Adams to James Lloyd, 29 March 1815, in Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1850-1856), 10:xxx.

- ¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Adams, 28 February 1796, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 1:259.
- ¹⁷ See generally Bernard Peach, ed., *Richard Price and the Ethical Foundations of the American Revolution* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1979). The pamphlet appears at 177-214, with the appendix giving the letter from Turgot at 215-228.
- ¹⁸ See the discussion in Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, 139-154.
- ¹⁹ For reproductions of these paintings, see the frontispieces to volumes 1 and 2 of *The Adams-Jefferson Letters*. For a disturbing account of Jefferson's under-the-table sabotaging of the publication of a French translation of Adams's *Defence*, see Joyce Appleby, "The Jefferson-Adams Rupture and the First French Translation of John Adams' *Defence*," *American Historical Review* 73:4 (April 1968): 1084-1091.
- ²⁰ See the superb account in the introduction by Frank Shuffelton to Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1999).
- ²¹ On the writing and publication of the *Defence*, see Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, 155-164; Iacuzzi, *John Adams, Scholar*, 59-134; and Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty*, 91-106.
- ²² H. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1965; reprint, Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998), 122.
- ²³ Stephen G. Kurtz, "The Political Science of John Adams: A Guide to His Statecraft," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d series, 25:4 (October 1968): 605-613 (quote at 612).
- ²⁴ Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty*, 91-106, suggests that Adams intended the *Defence* as a manual for lawgivers. My reading of it as a sourcebook tracks the argument that Thompson makes so well; the difference between "manual" and "sourcebook" may be too arcane for anyone but a bibliographer to care about.
- ²⁵ Haraszti, *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*, 164.
- ²⁶ John Phillip Reid, ed., *The Briefs of the American Revolution* (New York: New York University Press, 1981).
- ²⁷ E.g., David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001).
- ²⁸ On this point, see the classic essay by Douglass Adair, "'Experience Must Be Our Only Guide': History, Democratic Theory, and the United States Constitution," in Ray Allen Billington, ed., *The Reinterpretation of Early American History: Essays in Honor of John Pomfret* (San Marino, CA: Henry E. Huntington Library, 1966), 129-148, reprinted in Trevor Colbourn, ed., *Fame and the Founding Fathers; Essays of Douglass Adair* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998), 152-175. For an interesting investigation of the American Enlightenment on a similar theme, see Darren Staloff, *Hamilton, Adams, Jefferson: The Politics of Enlightenment and the American Founding* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2005). So, too, the late Roy Porter argued that the Enlightenment should be seen in its individual national contexts and that the most significant difference separating the Enlightenment in Great Britain from the Enlightenment in France was that British Enlightenment thinkers were content to justify and even to praise the existing state of government and society, whereas French Enlightenment thinkers were bent on challenging the corruptions of government and society. Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), *passim*; Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, eds., *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge, Eng., and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- ²⁹ The classic exposition is T. H. Breen, "John Adams's Fight Against Innovation in the New England Constitution: 1776," *New England Quarterly* 40 (1967): 501-520.
- ³⁰ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1969), chapter XIV, "The Relevance and Irrelevance of John Adams," reprinted in Gordon S. Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different* (New York: Penguin Press, 2006), 173-202.
- ³¹ Adams, *Defence*, in Adams, ed., *Works of John Adams*, 6:218 (volume III of the *Defence*, chapter 4).
- ³² Adams, *Defence*, in Adams, ed., *Works of John Adams*, 6:118 (volume III of the *Defence*, chapter 1).
- ³³ James Madison to Thomas Jefferson, 6 June 1787, in James Morton Smith, ed., *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison 1776-1826* (3 vols.; New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 1:479.
- ³⁴ See also Thompson, *John Adams and the Spirit of Liberty*, 116, who also posits a link between Machiavelli's *Discourses on Livy* and Adams's *Discourses on Davila*.

³⁵ See the terse discussion in R. B. Bernstein, *Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 82 and sources cited at 213n146.

³⁶ See the fine and illuminating paper for this conference, H. J. Jackson, “John Adams’s Marginalia Then and Now,” http://www.adamsjefferson.com/papers/adams_marginalia_jackson.pdf (consulted online 6 June 2009), which provides a set of valuable correctives to Haraszti’s otherwise magisterial *John Adams and the Prophets of Progress*.

³⁷ R. B. Bernstein, *The Founding Fathers Reconsidered* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 4, “Legacies,” esp. 121-123. For the dispute between Adams and the historian Mercy Otis Warren, see Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Correspondence Between John Adams and Mercy Warren, Relating to the “History of the American Revolution,”* Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections*, fifth series, IV (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1878; reprinted, New York: Arno Press, 1972).

³⁸ John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 19 April 1817, in Cappon, ed., *Adams-Jefferson Letters*, 2:508-509.