

A JOHN ADAMS PARADOX:

Provincial Lawyer, Cosmopolitan Reader, Ardent Nationalist

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On the last Saturday evening in January 1768, thirty-two year old John Adams sat down, presumably in his law office on the ground floor of his home in Braintree, opened a new diary booklet, and addressed himself:

To what Object, are my Views directed? What is the End and Purpose of my Studies, Journeys, Labours of all Kinds of Body and Mind, of Tongue and Pen? Am I grasping for Money, or Scheming for Power? Am I planning the Illustration of my Family or the Welfare of my Country? These are great Questions. In Truth, I am tossed about so much, from Post to Pillar, that I have not Leisure and Tranquillity enough, to consider distinctly my own Views, Objects, and Feelings. – I am mostly intent at present, upon collecting a Library, and I find, that a great deal of Thought, and Care, as well as Money, are necessary to assemble an ample and well chosen Assortment of Books. – But when this is done, it is only a means, an Instrument. When ever I shall have completed my Library, my End will not be answered. Fame, Fortune, Power say some, are the Ends intended by a Library. The Service of God, Country, Clients, Fellow Men, say others. Which of these lie nearest my Heart?

Then, without a break or any marking of the verse, Adams quotes fairly accurately six lines from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*:

Self Love but serves the virtuous Mind to wake as the small Pebble stirs the Peacefull Lake, The Center Moved, a Circle straight succeeds, another still and still another spreads. Friend, Parent, Neighbour, first it does embrace, our Country next and next all human Race.ⁱ

This splendid passage, which stands quite isolated in an irregularly kept diary, encapsulates three themes that are central to understanding John Adams, as a leader, as a thinker, and as a man. Beginning with his immediate concerns as a country lawyer early in his career, he proceeds to the foundation of his reading, his growing library, and then broadens his view to the service of “my Country,” which in the current sense of the language and the political situation of 1768 probably referred to Massachusetts rather than to either British North America or the British Empire. He sees a clear life choice before him: whether to serve his own interests and that of his family by acquiring “Fame, Fortune, and Power,” or the interests of others, “Friend, Parent, Neighbour,” then “Country,” and finally all humanity. He is convinced that he will make his choice, if he can ever find the “Leisure and Tranquillity” to make it, through his reading.

Over the next decade the related choices of serving self versus society, and of engaging in local versus national interests, would confront much of the population of British North America in unusually stark terms. We can characterize the choices made by most colonial Americans only by their actions, but a few men, and a few women, left verbal testaments of their decisions, and no American left a fuller testament than John Adams. In his diary, autobiography, letters, and published writings, and in his remarks about his reading in his “ample and well chosen Assortment of Books,” we can see how he balanced his provincial affections, which were strong throughout his life, with his growing national aspirations and humanitarian vision.

The tension between provincial ways of speaking, reading, and thinking and a more comprehensive, “Continental” manner of thinking and acting was central to the internal struggle that transformed thirteen British North American colonies into the

United States of America in the 1770s and 1780s. The markedly paradoxical character of this tension arises from the intensely provincial attachments of nearly all political and military leaders of the American Revolution, before, during, and after that event, and their coexistence with a new, highly effective nationalism that is visible as early as the First Continental Congress, and triumphant just seven years later at Yorktown, and again thirteen years later at Philadelphia.

A broad view of American leadership in the 1770s and 1780s discovers just three prominent figures who were not thoroughly provincial in their youth, and substantially so throughout their lives: the cosmopolitan Benjamin Franklin and the recent immigrants Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Paine. Every other major Revolutionary leader or author, including Washington, Adams, and Jefferson, had to build his own bridge from his local affections to his national aspirations. Washington did this by developing the traditional Anglo-American military culture that he had embraced as a young man in the 1750s into a new American military and then political culture during two decades of national service, first in the Continental Army and then as America's first president. Jefferson's love of the Enlightenment and of French culture became his way to rise above Virginia provincialism to propose an idealistic agrarian national vision for America. John Adams effected his transition from New England provincialism to national aspiration in a quite different way.

Adams progressed from holding a distinctly parochial world view to espousing a national political and cultural vision in several overlapping stages. By entering Harvard College before his sixteenth birthday (the first in his immediate family to do so), he potentially set himself on a road that led out of his birthplace, the still largely rural town

of Braintree, Massachusetts. But neither a college degree nor his decision to practice law prevented his return to Braintree at twenty-two, and for nearly a decade he seemed likely to stay there, as a country lawyer and town leader, for life. In 1768, however, the thirty-two year old attorney, unexpectedly successful in his profession, moved to Boston to take on a higher legal profile and, reluctantly, to participate in that city's rapidly expanding political life at the very point that it was acquiring a notoriously anti-imperial, and hence proto-nationalist, dimension.

This move did not come out of the blue. This "country lawyer's" success as an exceptionally learned, hard working, and rhetorically persuasive attorney had attracted so many clients in Boston's merchant community that it made perfect sense to move to Massachusetts's legal and commercial center. Moreover, since 1763 Adams had contributed political essays to Boston's newspapers, and beginning with the Stamp Act Crisis in 1765, many of his essays had focused on the provincial implications of the rapidly deteriorating bond between Great Britain and its North American colonies. Finally, for a full decade John Adams had been reading, ever more widely and deeply, not only in English and Continental law, but also in political history and what we would call political theory. By 1768 his mind was a ferment of political dilemmas, and of political ideas that promised solutions to those dilemmas.

The next six years were ones of turmoil for Boston, for Massachusetts, and for John Adams. Only in 1774, upon his appointment as a delegate to the First Continental Congress, did he finally accept the full logic of his expanding political views and affections. He became a spokesman for America's nascent rebellion nearly a year before its armed rebellion began, and a leading national voice almost two years before his

nation's formal birth. Thereafter, until his death, Adams thought first in national terms, and as a diplomat in Europe for a decade and then as a federal executive, he paid keen attention to major international questions that affected his country. Yet within this cosmopolitan statesman there still lived a simple Braintree farmer, and upon his retirement, he was able to indulge his fondest desires for agrarian simplicity, while fully retaining his broader intellectual interests.

The Provincial Lawyer, 1758-1774

When John Adams finally decided to become a lawyer a year after his graduation from college, that choice could easily have undercut his devotion to the town of his birth and given his career a more literally "provincial," as opposed to a strictly local character. He was already living in Worcester, some forty miles from Braintree, where he was teaching school, when he made this decision, and following the traditional lawyer's training, reading law for two years with an established attorney in Worcester, he could have opted to practice there, as certain inhabitants urged him to do.ⁱⁱ Or he might have moved to Boston, where the majority of Massachusetts's most prominent lawyers had their practice.ⁱⁱⁱ In 1758, however, Adams chose to return to Braintree, with the explicit intention of becoming the first "country lawyer," that is to say, the first lawyer living and working outside of Boston, in Suffolk County, in which both Boston (the county seat) and Braintree were located. And for nearly a decade, Adams kept his office in Braintree, probably at first in a corner of a room in his parent's home, where he lived for several years, and then in an adjacent house that he inherited from his father in 1761, and which he would make his residence upon his marriage in 1764.^{iv}

At the outset of his career, however, Adams was determined not to be just another country lawyer. He wanted to plead in both the inferior and superior courts and was determined to take on and argue cases based in the common law (in both civil and criminal cases), in admiralty law, and if need be, in the Civil (that is Continental) law. Moreover, he aspired to become a learned lawyer, one who read beyond the daily needs of Massachusetts's farmers and merchants, and was eager to tackle the intricacies of international law. In both his daily diary and in his autobiography, written nearly fifty years later, he casts the learned Boston attorney Jeremiah Gridley as his mentor and inspiration, and memorably records the October 1758 meeting in which the elder attorney agreed to sponsor his young colleague at his first appearance in court, and volunteered to guide him in his readings, especially in Continental and international law.^v But Gridley did not put this intellectual ambition in Adams's head. Wherever he got his inspiration, Adams had already borrowed an edition of Justinian's civil law code from the Harvard College library, and began studying it the day after his return from Worcester to Braintree.^{vi}

Still, for nearly a decade it appeared that Adams would become a legal anomaly, a learned "Justinian in Braintree," as the legal historian Daniel Coquillette has characterized him.^{vii} For six years he lived at home, with both parents until his father's death, and then with his mother and brothers, until his marriage, when he moved to his own house next door. He corresponded with several of his college classmates who lived in other eastern Massachusetts towns, or in New Hampshire or Maine, and with a few professional colleagues, but most of his closest friends either lived in Braintree or had some connection to the town. He records only two courtships in his diary and letters, the

first in Braintree and the second, of Abigail Smith, his future wife, in neighboring Weymouth. And even before his father's death, he began to take part in town politics. After holding several minor offices, he was elected a selectman in 1766, a position held by his father and grandfather before him.^{viii}

In the spring of 1768, however, John Adams changed the course of his legal career, and of his life. Between 1768 and 1774, he moved his young family four times. In April 1768, the Adamses moved into Boston; in April 1771, they returned to Braintree, although John kept a law office in Boston; in November 1772, they returned to Boston; and in June 1774, they moved again back to Braintree. Thereafter, John Adams never lived in any other Massachusetts town, although he would, over the next twenty-seven years, spend many long months in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, and several long years in Paris, Amsterdam, the Hague, and London. He made both moves to Boston primarily for professional reasons. By 1768 his legal practice had become one of the largest in Massachusetts, and was heavily centered in the city. Thereafter, until his public service in the Revolution ended his practice, he always kept an office in the city even when he lived in Braintree.^{ix}

But if Boston is where Adams had to work, it was not where he wanted to live, both as a congested city and as the seat of a radical political movement that he was still struggling to understand and accept. During his first Boston residence, of three full years, he tried to resist the entreaties of his friends that he become involved in public life, but eventually both his spirited defense of the British soldiers involved in the Boston Massacre and his acceptance of a seat in the provincial assembly filled his last year in the

city with stress and turmoil. In the spring of 1771 he returned with his family to the country, and then did something quite extraordinary.

Eighteenth-century Americans did not take vacations. If they were of modest means, as most were, they did whatever work they could every day but Sunday; if they were wealthy, they either worked just as hard or, if they preferred, took their leisure whenever it pleased them. But in the spring of 1771, the hard working John Adams took the first vacation of his life. As he recalled in his autobiography:

The complicated Cares of my legal and political Engagements, the slender Diet to which I was obliged to confine myself, the Air of the Town of Boston which was not favourable to me who had been born and passed almost all my life in the Country; but especially the constant Obligation to speak in public almost every day for many hours, had exhausted my health, brought on a Pain in my Breast and a complaint in my Lungs, which seriously threatened my Life ...

He was soon advised “to take a Journey to the Stafford Springs in Connecticut, then in as much Vogue as any mineral Springs have been since,” and in late May he set off, alone, on a two week excursion into Connecticut as far as Middletown, returning through central Massachusetts.^x

Students of John Adams’s life and career have not been unmindful of their subject’s feelings of stress and uncertainty in and about the year 1770, but they may have both minimized and misunderstood it. Most scholars have portrayed Adams, in the decade before the Revolution, as a reluctant revolutionary, too conservative by nature, and too restricted by the traditions of the legal profession (nearly half of whose Massachusetts members became Loyalists), to feel comfortable with the new, often extra-legal anti-imperial politics of his cousin, Samuel Adams, and the radical caucus in Boston.^{xi} Certain

remarks in Adams's diary and autobiography, particularly his confession of a deep aversion to speaking at Boston's town meeting in 1768, support this view.^{xiii} But his personal feelings in June 1771, just as he felt himself beginning to recover from three years of overwork in both his practice and in public life in Boston, show a different John Adams. One the day of his return to Braintree from his restful vacation, he heard that the Massachusetts legislature and many of the province's patriot leaders had unexpectedly reached a new accommodation with the royal governor, Thomas Hutchinson. A cautious, diffident John Adams should have been both delighted and relieved (if perhaps a bit skeptical) at the news. But in his diary, a different man appears:

I hear much to day and Yesterday of the Harmony prevailing between the Governor and the House. . . . Behold how good and pleasant it is, for Brethren to dwell together in Unity. It seems to be forgotten entirely, by what means Hutchinson procured the Government – by his Friendship with Bernard, and by supporting and countenancing all Bernards Measures, . . . and every other Thing we complain of.

. . . But if this wretched Journal should ever be read, by my own Family, let them know that there was upon the Scene of Action with Mr. Hutchinson, one determined Enemy to those Principles and that Political System to which alone he owes his own and his Family's late Advancement – one who thinks that his Character and Conduct have been the Cause of laying a Foundation for perpetual Discontent and Uneasiness between Britain and the Colonies, of perpetual Struggles of one Party for Wealth and Power at the Expense of the Liberties of this Country, and of perpetual Contention and Opposition in the other Party to preserve them, and that this Contention will never be fully terminated but by Warrs, and Confusions and Carnage. . . . With great Anxiety, and Hazard, with continual Application to Business, with loss of Health, Reputation, Profit, and as fair Prospects and Opportunities for Advancement, as others who have greedily embraced them, I have for 10 Years together invariably opposed this System, and its fautors [supporters – *OED*]. . . .

Read this days Paper. The melodious Harmony, the perfect Concords, the entire Confidence and Affection, that seems to be restored greatly surprizes me. Will it be lasting.[?] I believe there is no Man in so curious a Situation as I am. I am for what I can see, quite left alone, in the World.^{xiii}

Adams need not have despaired at his province's new harmony, which appeared just at this moment in several North American colonies as they ended their contentious boycotts of British manufactures in protest of the Townshend revenue acts. Fresh imperial controversies would soon arise from New England to South Carolina. In Massachusetts, Britain's decision to gain greater political control of its most difficult province by placing the royal governor and lieutenant governor and all superior judges on an imperial civil list, and thus under close ministerial influence, sparked the creation in November 1772 of Samuel Adams's Committees of Correspondence, which quickly escalated the imperial conflict to new heights^{xiv}.

But this anguished diary entry, one of the most intimate and moving political testaments in all of John Adams's writings, signaled the end of an era for its author. Despite his assertion that he had "for 10 Years together invariably opposed this System [the imperial rule of Governors Bernard and Hutchinson]," Adams had tried to distance himself from the Boston radicals' most confrontational tactics and occasionally expressed reservations about their approach to British authority in his diary. Now that he saw peace and harmony seemingly close at hand, however, he rejected them as false. He even imagined that he was alone in doing so (which would have astonished his cousin, Samuel Adams, and other Boston leaders). But whatever he imagined about the mettle of other patriot leaders, Adams's own provincial idyll, his confidence in the prospects for peace

with liberty for Massachusetts within a centralizing British Empire, was coming to an end. In 1772 he delivered a spirited oration on America's liberties at Braintree; in 1773 he applauded the Boston Tea Party; and in 1774 his only doubt about convening a Continental Congress and massively opposing British rule concerned not the rightness of such a policy, but America's ability to execute it. ^{xv}

What remains to be explained is how Adams effected this transition. How could he have progressed in a few short years from being a small town lawyer devoted to his peaceful province within a harmonious British Empire that was governed by a limited monarchy based, he believed, on the world's finest constitution, to becoming an ardent believer in an assertive new commonwealth of Massachusetts within an independent new American nation, both resting on thoroughly revised, newly imagined republican constitutions (one of which he wrote himself)? One answer to this large question lies in Adams's voluminous reading.

The Cosmopolitan Reader as Legal Authority, 1751-1773

John Adams did not begin his political education by reading political theory, and he did not become radicalized – if he was ever truly radicalized – by reading current authors. At Harvard he read in the college's traditional syllabus: the classics, assorted works in natural philosophy (that is, natural science), and a few texts that espoused a relatively liberal Protestant theology, but apparently nothing that we would call political philosophy or political theory. John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was read and perhaps even taught at mid-century Harvard, but his treatises on government were neither formally discussed nor assigned as additional reading^{xvi}. During

his three-year residence in Worcester, Adams is known to have read only one political author, Henry St. John, Viscount Bolingbroke, a popular mid-century English Tory essayist who taught high-minded notions of patriot kings and virtuous Parliamentarians, but had no interest in reforming political structures.^{xvii} Thus John Adams's political education really began in 1758, when he returned to Braintree and began reading in the fields of Civil (Continental) and international law.

A mastery of this challenging literature could make one an unusually cosmopolitan legal scholar, and John Adams, more than any other American lawyer of his generation, achieved this objective in a decade of hard study (1758-1768). But an expansive view of the law was hardly intended to create a radical legal mind, and Jeremiah Gridley, who urged his young colleague to pursue this study, showed no such tendencies. Such learning, however, did supply Adams with new tools and fresh approaches to a host of legal problems he might confront, exactly at the point when he faced a dilemma that he never expected, and which a narrower concept of the law would probably have been unable to comprehend.

Between 1763 and 1768, Adams wrote several series of essays for Boston newspapers under several pseudonyms. These essays mixed appeals for a more ethical conduct in public life with praise for the courage and energy of Massachusetts's Puritan founders as they threw off the last vestiges of feudal rule in England and broke the shackles of a still medieval Church of England. Adams also had occasion in some of his essays to criticize Britain's Stamp Act and several measures of Massachusetts's royal governor, Sir Francis Bernard. None of these essays, however, called for major political

reforms, either in Massachusetts or in Britain, and their brief references to the Massachusetts Charter of 1692 or to the British Constitution were entirely positive.^{xviii}

From the summer of 1768 to the winter of 1773, however, Adams did not place a single essay in Boston's newspapers. He was far from inactive in the patriot movement in these years. In 1768 and 1769 he signed defenses of colonial rights approved by the Town of Boston and spirited letters addressed to British Whig leaders by the local Sons of Liberty, and he drafted several of these texts himself. He also attempted a few political essays for the press, but he did not finish them.^{xix} For well over four years he apparently did not feel ready to confront the growing imperial crisis with fully developed arguments on any subject. But if he was writing less, he was reading more widely, and thinking more deeply.

In the 1760s and early 1770s, John Adams read two quite different types of legal-political literature. The first, in part recommended by his mentor, Gridley, was current Continental literature on legal reform, international law, and political theory. The most important titles were by the Swiss jurist Emmerich de Vattel (*The Law of Nations*, 1758), the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*The Social Contract*, 1764), and the Italian penal reformer Count Cesare Beccaria (*Essay on Crimes and Punishments*, 1770). Adams read each of these works as soon as it appeared in English (he did not yet read French well, and he never read Italian well), and almost immediately incorporated passages from them, quite sparingly but effectively, in his writing and pleading.^{xx}

Adams's other political reading, which he appears to have begun a little later, entirely on his own initiative, was in seventeenth-century English republican literature, first Algernon Sidney's *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698, written c. 1681-83),

and then James Harrington's *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656). As he became immersed in this older literature, which few other colonial Americans were reading, he began to trace the republican tradition back to its roots. He tackled several works by Nicolló Machiavelli, who was also largely ignored by virtually every other American author, and read the political and constitutional writings of the Romans Livy and Cicero, as well as of Polybius, a Greek historian living in Rome, and finally studied the most celebrated political texts of Aristotle and Plato. Adams at first made slow progress in several of these volumes. He records buying Sidney's *Discourses* in 1766, but first mentions reading him in 1769, and did not cite him until his pleadings in the Boston Massacre trials in 1770^{xxi}. He made no use of Harrington's *Oceana* in his writings until 1775, although he probably bought his collected works several years earlier.^{xxii} And while Machiavelli first appears fleetingly in his diary in 1760, Adams did not cite him before 1775, and did not examine his ideas extensively until the late 1780s.^{xxiii}

One could ask why John Adams mastered the literature of the republican tradition, much of it by English authors and the rest readily available in translation, more slowly than current Continental legal and political works. But a better question is why he read the old republican literature at all. In reading, citing, and quoting Vattel, Rousseau, and Beccaria, he was establishing his credentials as a well-informed legal scholar, engaging in the latest issues in European thought, and displaying his cosmopolitan learning. He could readily use these works in his legal practice, quoting the penal reformer Beccaria in the Boston Massacre trials, and appealing to the international legal theorist Vattel in the defense of provincial sovereign rights in a reply to Governor Hutchinson that he helped to draft for the Massachusetts legislature.^{xxiv}

Engaging in the older republican literature was quite another matter. Few Americans of any political persuasion thought there was any point in reading this literature. It was commonly accepted in the eighteenth-century English-speaking world that ancient Greek democracy had been utterly unworkable, that the Roman republic had degenerated into a corrupt empire, and that the Italian republics had been in decline for centuries. The English Commonwealth, too, had failed, to be succeeded by the Restoration of Charles II and then by the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89, which, by settling the terms of Parliament's partnership with the royal sovereign, had perfected constitutional monarchy. In the 1760s, the republican tradition survived only in Holland, Switzerland, and Venice, and all three nations seemed small, weak and irrelevant in international affairs.^{xxv}

There is no reason to think that John Adams did not believe all of this as a young man. Moreover, to openly admire England's seventeenth-century republican tradition in the mid-eighteenth century was decidedly eccentric, if not faintly treasonous. But in the 1760s, John Adams gradually began to take notice of two important developments. First, the Stamp Act, the Townshend Revenue Acts, and other recent imperial legislation showed that Britain's splendid constitution – which Adams admired in the abstract, and even in large measure in the concrete, until his death – was no longer guaranteeing freedom to its subjects, particularly those in Britain's colonies. For several years American leaders asserted that if Britain's government would only respect their constitution, all would be well. But the leaders of Parliament would not respect it, King George III made no effort to persuade them to do so, and the British people seemed incapable of asserting their constitutional rights.

Second, Adams began to understand that the many voices for liberty raised over many centuries, up to and including his own era, had something in common: a republican tradition. In the ancient world every author who defended the rights of individuals and of whole peoples had a close relationship to a Greek city-state or to the Roman republic, in which different economic and social classes participated in government (although seldom on equal terms), and most adult men claimed a basic level of citizenship. In the sixteenth century the most profound advocate of government that balanced the powers and rights of different classes was the Florentine republican, Niccoló Machiavelli. In seventeenth-century England the leading advocates of the rights of Englishmen against government tyranny were all republicans, most notably John Milton, James Harrington (an intellectual disciple of Machiavelli), and Algernon Sidney. In seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, two of the greatest scholars of international law were citizens of republics: Hugo Grotius of Holland and Emmerich de Vattel of Switzerland. Vattel, in his *Law of Nations* (1758), even expanded the contemporary usage of the word republic in order to suggest a framework within which the rights of whole nations, as well as of the people within them, could operate effectively. And it is to just this period, the third quarter of the eighteenth century, that certain twentieth-century historians, most notably R.R. Palmer, have dated the beginning of the era of democratic revolutions, in Holland, in Switzerland, and in North America.^{xxvi}

Immediately following his years of crisis, a new John Adams began to reassess his political world and present it to his countrymen in new terms. In the spring of 1772 he prepared an election day oration for his Braintree townsmen. It survives only in fragmentary notes, but these reveal the broadest consideration of the various forms of

government that he had yet attempted, and look forward to the more finished constitutional writings that he would publish in 1775 and 1776, and finally to his massive *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* (1787-88). In the winter of 1773, in a set of newspaper essays, he raised his first doubt about the protective power of the British Constitution by demonstrating that the independence of judges from executive interference was not an ancient English right, but a quite recent practice in Britain which had not been extended to America, and probably would not be under the current British ministry. This same winter, Adams was asked by the Massachusetts House of Representatives to help draft a reply to Governor Thomas Hutchinson's assertion of absolute Parliamentary supremacy throughout the British Empire. In two learned replies, Adams advanced the most extreme argument for colonial autonomy yet to appear in North America. Massachusetts, he asserted, was connected to the British Empire only through the person of the King of England, and thus had never been legally subject to Parliamentary authority.^{xxvii}

The cosmopolitan reader from Braintree had now become his province's indispensable legal authority. In everything he wrote from 1773 until the end of the decade, he used this position to show his countrymen what the British constitution was not doing, but should or must do, to preserve the liberties of the people. But in no argument that he advanced in 1773 or 1774 did John Adams apply the word republic to any modern state. His Braintree oration instead talked of "mixed governments," which blended elements of democracy, aristocracy, and monarchy. Several of these governments were traditionally called republics, but Adams used the label only for governments in the ancient world; similar contemporary states in the Netherlands and

Italy, he wrote, enjoyed “the Advantages of mixed Governments to this day.” Other mixed governments he quite properly labeled constitutional monarchies.

In tackling the concept of judicial independence in 1773, and insisting on this principle thereafter in many writings, Adams was again advancing toward republicanism by praising a constitutional right that would become central to republican government in America. And in asserting the autonomy of Massachusetts within the British Empire in the legislature’s reply to Hutchinson, he was moving his province away from any dependency on a higher political power. Neither Adams nor America, however, was quite ready to embrace the old word “republic” to denote a new political reality. When Adams was ready, in 1775, he would discover a novel way of defining that word and presenting it to America.

The Cosmopolitan Reader as Constitutional Authority, 1775--1779

Until the close of 1773, John Adams wrote as a legal authority who took up constitutional themes and consulted republican writers in order to advance the immediate legal interests of his province. In early 1775, he became to a constitutional authority and a republican author. The catalyst of this transformation was Parliament’s decision to confront the colonists’ defiance of British authority in the Boston Tea Party (December 1773) by closing the Port of Boston, and then unilaterally altering Massachusetts’s constitutional charter (May 1774). Colonists from New England to South Carolina responded to this escalation of imperial power by organizing massive popular resistance, preparing their militias for armed defense, and convening the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia (May—September 1774). This last measure had been clearly anticipated

in Massachusetts's first reply to Governor Hutchinson (January 1773), although there is no evidence that John Adams, who was delegated to make the legal arguments in the reply, suggested this particular detail.^{xxviii} But from June 1774, when the Massachusetts House of Representatives selected him as one of its delegates to the Congress, Adams was in the thick of national politics, as a congressman, diplomat, and federal executive (1774-1801), and as a writer (1775-1791, and in retirement).

In 1774, the year in which John Adams became a nationalist, he wrote not a single essay, nor did he anticipate any literary endeavors. But shortly after his return to Massachusetts from Philadelphia in November, a local Tory, writing under the awkward pseudonym "Massachusettensis," began a thorough condemnation of both Congress and Massachusetts's Patriot party. Adams soon rose to the defense. From January to April 1775, writing as "Novanglus," he composed the second longest work of his career, a series of twelve letters that was terminated only by the battles of Lexington and Concord. As "Novanglus," Adams did not advocate either independence or rebellion. What he did instead, following a fairly succinct defense of the policies of both Congress and Massachusetts's Patriots, was advance two arguments that would become crucial to America's decision to leave the British Empire.^{xxix}

The first argument was an extension of the line of reasoning that Adams had first developed in the Massachusetts House of Representatives' replies to Governor Hutchinson of early 1773. Marshalling scores of historical and legal precedents that ranged from ancient Greek and Roman colonization to recent works in international law, he made two assertions. Britain's North American colonies, "Novanglus" declared, were founded by the independent efforts of the first settlers, without the slightest support from

or regulation by Parliament. These settlers had, in every case, declared their allegiance to the current British monarch, but only to him (or her). As Britain developed as a commercial power, the colonists had also acquiesced, simply as a matter of practical necessity, to Parliamentary laws that regulated trade throughout the empire. Adams's second assertion was that centuries of English and then British law demonstrated clearly that the unitary, absolute sovereignty of Parliament was limited to the British realm, that is, to Great Britain itself, and never included British colonies. Parliament's supreme authority stopped at North America's shore. If British North America's inhabitants accepted Adams's argument and Parliament did not grant their own assemblies substantial autonomous powers, they would have a powerful legal justification to declare their independence.^{xxx}

But if they took this drastic step, how would they govern themselves? Adams, for the first time in his published work, suggested an answer to this question. In his seventh letter, appearing in March 1775, he declared that in law, Britain was not a unitary empire, ruled by a government with absolute powers. He then explained:

If Aristotle, Livy, and Harrington, knew what a republic was, the British constitution is much more like a republic than an empire. They define a republic to be *a government of laws, and not of men*. If this definition is just, the British constitution is nothing more nor less than a republic, in which the king is first magistrate. This office being hereditary, and being possessed of such ample and splendid prerogatives, is no objection to the government's being a republic, as long as it is bound by fixed laws, which the people have a voice in making, and a right to defend.^{xxx}

John Adams had, at last, become a republican! He may well have been America's first avowed republican. Yet he had reached this position in a characteristically

idiosyncratic manner, by declaring that the British Empire itself, like any truly constitutional monarchy, was in fact a republic. “Novanglus’s” distinctive vision was of the first importance in freeing Adams to embrace republicanism as a general political concept without having to endorse a particular form of republic, or even to renounce his allegiance to the monarchy he had always known and respected.

For America, too, Adams’s conceptual breakthrough would soon bear fruit. Beginning in the fall of 1775, he became the acknowledged constitutional authority in the informal discussions of congressmen who were called upon by their constituents in many colonies to advise them on setting up governments that were independent of the authority of the British Crown (although not yet separated from the British Empire). These discussions led, in April 1776, to the most influential pamphlet that Adams ever wrote, his *Thoughts on Government*.^{xxxii} This brief essay set out general structural guidelines for creating republics, but was quite open to variations among different colonies, and it made only a passing reference to Adams’s belief in the republican character of Britain’s constitutional monarchy. Perhaps because of its very flexibility, *Thoughts on Government* powerfully influenced the drafting of new republican constitutions in half a dozen colonies and became the most succinct expression of American constitutional orthodoxy from its appearance into the 1780s.

Adams’s conception of Britain’s constitutional monarchy as a republic, however, was not neither accepted by Americans nor, in all probability, even noticed by them in 1775. Only a few of “Novanglus”’s letters were reprinted in newspapers outside Boston, and the collected *Letters of Novanglus* did not appear until the early nineteenth century, so that whatever direct influence “Novanglus” may have had on Adams’s countrymen

was quite limited.^{xxxiii} Nor is it likely that Adams's congressional and diplomatic colleagues were fully aware of the distinctive character of his republicanism for more than a decade. The impact of his argument on Adams himself, however, was a different matter. He never abandoned his conviction that a constitutional monarchy could be a thoroughly proper republic, and in 1787 he would return to this argument in the first volume of his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*.^{xxxiv}

In 1776, however, John Adams appeared quite orthodox to his colleagues. In May he persuaded Congress to urge every colony to create new governments that would be independent of British authority, as a crucial step toward severing all connection with the British Empire and mounting an effective war for independence.^{xxxv} By the fall all thirteen former colonies, now independent states, had devised new republican governments, whether through formal new constitutions or ad hoc changes in their old organic laws, and all had terminated any trace of authority that originated from London. Adams himself, after three years of demanding obligations in Congress (1774—1777), accepted a diplomatic commission to France and put aside all thoughts about forms of government until his return to Massachusetts in the summer of 1779.

Following his *Thoughts on Government*, Adams continued to write at irregular intervals on major political and constitutional questions almost until his death, fifty years later. But he made his last important contribution to America's constitutional revolution (which he might be said to have begun, in the Massachusetts legislature's first reply to Governor Hutchinson in January 1773) in 1779, when, on his return to America from his first diplomatic mission, he was elected to his state's constitutional convention and then

chosen to draft a working document for the members. Three distinctive features of his draft were of great importance for his countrymen.

The document's first innovation must have impressed even the most casual reader in 1779. Adams carefully placed every sentence of his long text under hierarchically arranged headings that were labeled, in ascending order, articles, sections, and chapters. For the first time in American history, a citizen reading a constitution could know at a glance the purpose of the passage directly under his gaze, within the larger framework. Second, Adams incorporated a considerable amount of both Puritan contract theory and republican political philosophy at key points in his text, especially in his rhetorical Preamble, in several articles of his Declaration of Rights, and most famously, with a nod to James Harrington's *Oceana*, at the beginning of his Frame of Government: "In the government of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the legislative, executive, and judicial power, shall be placed in separate departments, to the end [as Harrington had said] that it might be a government of laws and not of men."^{xxxvi}

Adams's third achievement is the most widely known, the creation of a strong governor armed with the most potent veto power found in any early American constitution. The strength of America's new republican state executives, which had been at its low ebb in the first new constitutions in 1776, had received its first augmentation in New York's 1777 constitution. Adams was happy in 1779 to create an even stronger executive, and upon his draft's formal adoption, with some reduction in force, in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, his model was followed by nearly every state that wrote either a new or a revised constitution thereafter.

Adams himself, however, wanted an even stronger executive, with an absolute veto, greater appointment powers, and a formally recognized role in exercising legislative as well as executive power. This intention, which he largely incorporated in his draft constitution, existed in a state of some tension with his bold Harringtonian declaration of an absolute separation of powers. It may be questioned to what extent any American executive official, including virtually every American president, has truly favored a strict separation of powers, which (unlike a balance of powers) is probably in any event unworkable. Neither John Adams nor George Washington warmly endorsed it.^{xxxvii} But Adams, in all his theoretical writings over some five decades, went further, advocating that even in a republic the executive needed both strong prerogative powers and a recognized place in legislation. This conviction sat well with his belief, apparently unique among American revolutionaries, that the British monarch was in fact the first magistrate in a republic, as he had declared as “Novanglus” in 1775, and would assert at great length in his *Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States* in the late 1780s.

The Nationalist Abroad and at Home, 1776--1801

Independence began a decade of ceaseless heavy labor and a host of new challenges – and new venues -- for John Adams, as he struggled to make his new nation a reality. After leading the floor fight in Congress for independence itself, culminating in his long and persuasive speech on 2 July 1776, the day on which Independence was actually declared, he accepted two major assignments: to draft a Plan of Treaties (July—September 1776) to guide America’s diplomats who were seeking foreign recognition in Europe; and to chair Congress’s Board of War (July 1776 – November 1777), the busiest

post in the national government.^{xxxviii} In 1777, exhausted by overwork but gratified at America's victory at Saratoga, which strongly suggested that the new nation would survive, he resigned from Congress, fully intending to resume his legal practice and lead a private life. But Congress, concerned over the dysfunction of America's three-man commission in Paris, appointed him to replace the controversial Silas Deane. Adams promptly accepted this assignment, and thus began a decade of nearly uninterrupted diplomatic missions, first to France (1778-1779), then to negotiate peace with Britain (1779—1783), to seek loans in Holland (1780—1788), to negotiate commercial treaties with European nations (1784—1788), and finally, as America's first minister to the Court of St. James's in London (1785—1788).^{xxxix}

In this long decade, John Adams devoted his entire energies to four national objectives. The first was military victory, and as chair of the Board of War he was the principal link between the Continental Army and Congress until late 1777. When he left Congress he lost this formal role, but he never wavered in his belief that his diplomatic effectiveness in Europe and the nation's very survival depended upon the success of George Washington and the Continental Army in America. From 1778 until the conclusion of peace he was unfailingly supportive of Washington and optimistic, in every public and private communication, about the outcome of the war, and this optimism was of crucial importance in all his early diplomatic endeavors.

Adams's second goal was to establish the United States as a worthy nation in the eyes of European rulers and peoples. He began a propaganda campaign to this end in Paris in April 1780, and by July had produced two long essays, which he published over the next two years, that sought to persuade both Britain and Continental Europe that

America would be a worthy member of the international community. A central argument of these essays, and of others that he wrote soon thereafter in Holland, was America's determination to maintain its independence and neutrality among all nations, while cultivating friendly relations with every nation.^{xl} This argument scored its first victory in 1782, when the combination of Washington's victory at Yorktown and Adams's propaganda campaign won Dutch recognition of the United States (April), the first Dutch loan to Congress (June), and finally a treaty of amity and commerce with the Netherlands (October).^{xli}

But Holland was just the beginning. The greater part of Adams's diplomatic decade was spent trying to persuade every European nation that America would maintain its independence -- political, diplomatic, and commercial -- from both Britain and France. Before the peace, Adams expressed this conviction too aggressively for the tastes of many Frenchmen and quite a few Americans, including, at times, both members of Congress and America's minister to France, Benjamin Franklin. But confident, even brash assertion, and a visible independence from the influence of his country's chief ally, paymaster, and arms supplier was fundamental to Adams's third goal, securing a favorable peace with Britain. Adams's joining with John Jay to persuade Franklin to negotiate with Britain quite independently of France was crucial to their securing America's western border at the Mississippi River and extensive Atlantic fishing rights in the final Peace of Paris of September 1783.^{xlii}

Adams's last national goal as a diplomat was to extend American commerce to every European nation (and as events developed, to Morocco as well). This objective, however, ultimately proved to be largely elusive. Few European nations saw sufficient

value in American trade to enter into commercial treaties; in the decade following Independence, only France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Morocco, and Prussia did so. A few nations may also have feared to offend Great Britain by concluding any treaty with America.^{xliii} Great Britain itself, which was the ultimate target of Adams's commercial strategy, was his greatest disappointment. Until the 1790s, Britain was so confident of its dominant commercial position in the Atlantic world that it saw no need for a treaty with America, and John Adams, even as minister to the Court of St. James's for nearly three years, could not overcome this commercial reality.

In the course of his diplomatic labors, however, Adams had several sharp disagreements with his own countrymen. In each case he took an aggressive nationalist position that many Americans were not yet ready to follow. In 1782, Adams and John Jay insisted in ignoring Congress's instructions that they defer to the advice of France in conducting their peace negotiations with Britain, and persuaded Franklin to join them in their diplomatic independence. When some members of Congress, and particularly its foreign secretary, R.R. Livingston, questioned Adams's aggressive stance, he defended his conduct decisively, and on occasion explosively.^{xliv} After the treaty was concluded in 1783, Adams was dismayed to find that many American legislators and merchants, including several in Massachusetts, were balking at restoring certain property to Loyalists and paying old debts to British merchants, as explicitly required in the treaty. And when Britain overwhelmed America with a flood of imports in the late 1780s, Adams thought several of the states were too timid in enacting trade barriers to stem the tide. He was, of course, highly frustrated that under the Articles of Confederation the national government had no power to regulate trade, and thereby support his efforts to persuade Britain to

conclude a treaty. Adams's growing differences with individual Americans, with some of the American states, and with the weak Confederation government finally impelled him to resign his post in London and return to America in 1788.

But John Adams had no intention on giving up on his young nation. In the fall of 1787 in London, he had read and largely approved the new federal Constitution. Its only major defect, he believed, was in granting the Senate the power to approve or reject the President's appointments to executive, diplomatic, and judicial positions.^{xlv} When he returned to Boston in June 1788, the Constitution was just at the point of formal ratification, and by the fall federal elections were in progress. Adams could have resumed his law practice, but he quickly decided to seek federal office. To serve as a congressman or senator had no appeal for him. What he really wanted was the presidency, but he knew he had to wait his turn as long as Washington was willing to occupy the chair. To gain the visibility and status he thought was necessary to advance to the top, he accepted the vice presidency, and held it until Washington retired in 1797. Then, in America's first contested presidential election, John Adams took the office that he thought he deserved for his many years of service, and in which he hoped he could defend his young nation, which was still in a delicate position in the Atlantic world.

The largely empty office of vice president was a bitter disappointment for Adams, made worse by the duty to preside over the Senate without any right to take part in its deliberations. His only consolation was the occasional opportunity to cast a tie-breaking vote. In the small chamber, with just 22 members at its first meeting in April 1789, and only 32 when his vice presidency ended, however, this opportunity did come his way more often than it did to any of his successors. And Adams used every single one of these

votes in favor of the policies of George Washington, with whom he was nearly always in total agreement.^{xlvi}

But Adams went further in his attempt to support the nation's chief executive. As America's strongest believer, since his "Novanglus" letters of 1775, in the necessity of executive power in a republic, the vice president unwisely entered into a Senate debate over the proper term of address for the president, and insisted on adopting an elevated title that struck many senators and much of the public as smacking of European royalty. Both the public and most of the Senate, however, misunderstood Adams's intentions in favoring a grand title for the America's president. He was not trying to overawe America's democratic masses, but to encourage respect for the executive office in the aristocratic Senate, which he always viewed as the most likely seat of discord in any republic. For his pains, however, he earned only a new title for himself, "His Rotundity."^{xlvii}

Immediately upon becoming President in March 1797, John Adams was faced with the greatest challenge to America's future as a nation since the ratification of the Constitution. France's relations with America, which had been deteriorating since the beginning of its long war with Britain three years earlier, now became critical. Frustrated by its inability to gain any support from the United States in its naval and commercial contest with Britain, France began an undeclared war on American shipping. For the next three years John Adams found himself squeezed between his nominal political allies, the Federalists, who favored Britain, and the Republicans, who favored France. Neither party, in his view, was supporting America's true interest, which must lie, as it had under Washington, in firm neutrality. In 1798 Adams gave way to the Federalist clamor for a

vigorous naval defense, a quasi war with France. The ensuing outburst of nationalist zeal led, as episodes of nationalist zeal often do, to partisan excess as the Federalist Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, and Adams unwisely signed them.

But in 1799 the President began to see an opportunity for diplomacy. Over the objections of leaders of his own party, and the recalcitrance of two Cabinet members whom he eventually fired, he directed his envoys to conclude peace with France. In the election of 1800 the Federalists were divided and discouraged, and Adams was defeated. But by the Convention of Mortefontaine with France (October 1800), America returned to the neutrality that Adams had always believed, from his drafting of the Plan of Treaties in 1776, to be its strongest international position.^{xlvi}

Adams Defends His Nationalist Credentials, 1801-1826

John Adams's post presidential years were the longest of any chief executive's before the twentieth century^{xlvi} and, while not the most productive – his son John Quincy Adams has a stronger claim to that distinction – they are full of interest for one reason. Adams now had the time, the freedom, and the will to explain himself at length and in detail, on any matter he chose. And amidst the thousands of pages of his incomplete but fascinating autobiography, his scores of public letters to newspapers, his short book defending his constitutional thought, and his several hundred personal letters exchanged with Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, and other venerable citizens of the republic, one theme stands out, his spirited justification of his conduct as a leader and defender of his nation.

Adams had ample motivation for his repeated quests for vindication. During the presidential campaign of 1800 he had been savagely attacked in print, not merely by Republican newspaper editors, but by the High Federalist leader Alexander Hamilton. For several years into his retirement he nursed his wounds in silence, but when his old, former friend Mercy Otis Warren roundly criticized his political integrity in her *Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution* (1805), Adams snapped – and began snapping back. Consulting a wealth of papers in his possession, he prepared and submitted some 130 letters to the *Boston Patriot* from 1809 to 1812, in which he answered both Hamilton and Warren, and mounted a general defense of his public conduct as a diplomat in Europe and as President.¹

But Adams in retirement did not live and do battle exclusively in the past. The political career of his son, John Quincy Adams, as a federal senator (1803-1807) and later as America's first minister to Russia (1809-1814), and Adams's own lively correspondence with his Republican-leaning friend Benjamin Rush, and later with Jefferson, kept him attuned to current issues and allowed him to see them from the perspective of men who were not regional New Englanders fighting old Federalist wars. Thus when President Jefferson seized the opportunity to acquire the Louisiana territory in 1803 the Adamses, father and son, warmly approved. When John Quincy Adams supported Jefferson's Embargo in 1807, his father, as outraged at the behavior of the British navy as any Republican, understood. And when Mr. Madison went to war in 1812, John Adams supported the measure and condemned every Federalist effort to undercut America's defense. He rejoiced in the nation's escape from harm in that war, took pride in John Quincy Adams's leading role in concluding the Treaty of Ghent

(1814), and looked forward to the continental future that Secretary of State John Quincy Adams constructed for America through the convention with Britain of 1818 and the Adams-Onis Treaty with Spain in 1819. To the end of his long retirement, in which he seldom left his home in Quincy for even a day, but regularly walked every field and road of his birthplace, the nation that he had done so much to create commanded John Adams's highest allegiance.

Conclusion: From Provincialism to Nationalism the Adams Way

During the Revolutionary era, Americans moved from provincialism to nationalism along several different paths. Some were fairly conscious of what was happening to them and a few even wrote about it. Many more remained silent, and undoubtedly some of them gave little thought to their political and cultural transformation. A few prominent patriot leaders, one thinks of Patrick Henry, for example, never quite completed this journey. Loyalists, of course, quickly turned onto a different road, and often ended up in another country. And for a few ardent nationalists, most notably Alexander Hamilton, their birthplace was some distant island, perhaps largely forgotten. But each American who had a colonial birthplace in North America that he (or she) cherished, while embracing the new nation, had a distinctive road to travel between the Stamp Act and the Federal Constitution. The variety in these mental highways is considerable.

George Washington found his way to the Revolution, and traveled from colonial subject to national citizen, through military service. This was less a matter of actual fighting, of a participation in and direction of controlled violence, than it was of living in

a highly organized military manner that affected thought, feeling, and perception. The military life as a deeply honorable existence was perhaps George Washington's highest reality. As a young man, he thought the British army lived this life at least as well as the military force of any nation. As a mature man, he believed, and demonstrated, that he and his comrades in arms could live it even more fully and honorably in their own new nation. The transformation from British subject to American citizen may have had a more profound effect on Washington than on any other prominent American. He opened his last will and testament in July 1799 with the declaration that he was "George Washington of Mount Vernon -- citizen of the United States, -- and lately President of the same." Virginia seemed to have quite disappeared.^{li}

Thomas Jefferson traveled a different road to national citizenship, largely through books, and in this respect his journey resembles that of John Adams. He became a Revolutionary through extensive reading in the European Enlightenment and rounded his education with a deep immersion in the high culture of France. To this writer, however, Jefferson's passage from provincialism to nationalism appears somehow less complete than that of either Washington or Adams. Virginia was always near, if not at, the center of his thoughts, and his allegiance to Virginia, and even to Virginia's peculiar institution of slavery, pulled Jefferson toward elevated concepts of states' rights, fantasies of essentially localized American yeomen, and an increasing denial of the blight of racial slavery, each of which, in its own way, would retard America's growth to maturity as a modern nation for many decades.

John Adams's path to a national identity was also through reading, but it differed from Jefferson's in three important respects. First, his reading was highly focused on law,

history, and political philosophy, with relatively little attention to the cultural world that so fascinated Jefferson.^{lii} Second, his reading was unusually intense; it was not simply reading, but study, with extensive note taking and translating long passages from Latin and French (and comparing Italian and Greek texts, which he could not easily read, with any French, Latin, or English translations and digests he could find). Third, and here Adams differed not only from Jefferson but from virtually every other American reader, his reading was, chronologically, unusually comprehensive. Few Americans read anything first published more than a century before their day, except for Greek and Roman classics and the Bible. Adams, however, after acquiring a thorough mastery of eighteenth-century international law and political theory, moved back, through Locke to Sidney, then to Harrington, then Machiavelli, and finally to complex ancient political texts that were largely ignored in American schools and colleges.

Adams's old-fashioned reading lies at the heart of this John Adams paradox; his turn to the past as a way to the future is a key to his success as a political writer and leader. Because he focused on republican literature of all ages, rather than the more national eighteenth-century British and French literature which, while often advancing political criticism and advocating political reforms, accepted the existence of large, essentially imperial governments without question, he was able to do something quite remarkable. Republics had existed in a wide variety of geographical and historical settings, and at several different levels of scale. By conceptualizing both the British Empire and the Province of Massachusetts as republics (in his "Novanglus" letters of 1775), Adams developed a political science that could fashion strong republican governments for both large and small political units, and for both nations with full

sovereign powers in dealing with all other nations, and for sub-national provinces or states. Every one of these republics rested on the ultimate sovereignty of the people. But each one, in Adams's view, must be able to cope with the pressures of both democracy and aristocracy, which he saw not as transient features of particular populations, but as permanent elements of human society. Republics could do this, Adams believed, by employing strong executives who were committed to the balance of all the major forces that played a role in their governments.

Once Americans had successfully built these republics at the state level, as Adams believed they had made considerable progress in doing by the 1780s, they could construct a strong republican nation. It is fitting, I think, that America's two most ardently nationalistic native born leaders, George Washington and John Adams, were its first two chief executives. And John Adams, despite his strong disagreements with the Jeffersonian Republicans on many points and his forebodings of eventual corruption and turmoil in the American republic – as in all republics -- at some point in the future, could live out his final days in Quincy, Massachusetts, as both a happy provincial New Englander and a proud citizen of a new American nation.

NOTES

Abbreviations used in the notes:

AFC *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L.H. Butterfield, Marc Friedlaender, Richard Alan Ryerson, Margaret A. Hogan, and others, 9 vols. to date [1761-1793], Cambridge, Mass., 1963--2009.

Diary & Autobiography *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L.H. Butterfield and others, 4 vols. [1755-1804], Cambridge, Mass., 1961.

Earliest Diary *The Earliest Diary of John Adams*, ed. L.H. Butterfield and others, Cambridge, Mass., 1966.

Legal Papers *Legal Papers of John Adams*, ed. L. Kinvin Wroth and Hiller B. Zobel, 3 vols. Cambridge, Mass., 1965.

PJA *Papers of John Adams*, ed. Robert J. Taylor, Gregg L. Lint, and others, 14 vols. to date [1755-1783], Cambridge, Mass., 1977—2009.

Works *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States: with a Life of the Author*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols., Boston, 1850-1856.

JA The abbreviation for John Adams in the notes.

ⁱ *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:337; the quotation from Pope's *Essay on Man* is at IV, 363-368. JA's last previous diary entry was in May 1767; his next entry would be in August 1769.

ⁱⁱ *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:44; 3:269-70. Worcester itself was no more populous than Braintree in 1760, and at some forty miles from the coast and from Boston, it was more remote. But it was a county seat and already had one accomplished attorney, JA's first mentor, James Putnam. For JA, a permanent move to Worcester would have given him a less local career than one spent strictly in Braintree, to which he at first appeared to aspire (see below).

ⁱⁱⁱ See Charles R. McKirdy, "Massachusetts Lawyers on the Eve of the Revolution: The State of the Profession," in Daniel R. Coquillette, ed., *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 62, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts* (Boston, 1984) (hereafter, *Law in Colonial Massachusetts*), p. 313-58.

^{iv} *Diary & Autobiography*, 3:270, 276-77; 1:225; *PJA*, 1:33-38, 51-53 (Deacon John Adams's will, and his inventory).

^v See *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:44-45, 54-55; 3:270-72.

^{vi} *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:44; 3:271.

^{vii} Daniel R. Coquillette, "Justinian in Braintree: John Adams, Civilian Learning, and Legal Elitism, 1758-1775," in *Law in Colonial Massachusetts*. p. 359-418.

^{viii} *PJA*, vol. 1, and *Earliest Diary* (JA's early correspondence); *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:66-115 *passim* (courtship of Hannah Quincy of Braintree); *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:71. 108-109, and *AFC*, 1:1-51 (courtship of Abigail Smith of Weymouth); and *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:203; *PJA*, 1:54-57 (local office holding).

^{ix} *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:338; 2:6, 62-64; 3:286.

^x *Diary & Autobiography*, 3:296 (quotation); and 2:15-35 (30 May to 15 June 1771, JA's itinerary through Connecticut and Massachusetts).

^{xi} See McKirdy, "Massachusetts Lawyers on the Eve of the Revolution," in *Law in Colonial Massachusetts*, on the high number of Massachusetts lawyers who became Loyalists.

^{xii} *Diary & Autobiography*, 3:290-91.

^{xiii} *Diary & Autobiography*, 2:34-35. JA was reacting to the printing of cordial exchanges between Massachusetts political and religious leaders and Governor Hutchinson in the *Boston Evening Post*, 3 June, and the *Boston News Letter*, 15 June 1771.

^{xiv} See Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772-1774*, Cambridge, Mass., 1970.

^{xv} See *Diary & Autobiography*, 2:56-60 (1772); 2:85-87 (1773); 2:96-97 (1774); and *PJA*, 2:1-5 (1773); 2:99-110 (1774).

^{xvi} *Diary & Autobiography*, 3:260, 262; *Earliest Diary*, 44-46, 48, 55, 60-64; Samuel Eliot Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard*, Cambridge, Mass., 1936, chap. 5.

^{xvii} *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:35; 3:264; Zoltan Haraszti, *John Adams & the Prophets of Progress*, Cambridge, Mass., 1952, chap. 4.

^{xviii} JA's "Humphrey Plowjogger" and "U" essays of 1763; his *A Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law* (1765), his "Clarendon" essays of 1766; and his "Replies to Philanthrop" essays of 1766-677 all appear, with full annotation, in *PJA*, 1:58-94, 103-128, 155-170, and 174-211

^{xix} *PJA*, 1:214-236.

^{xx} Vattel first published *Le Droit des gens* in 1758; Rousseau published *Du contrat social* in 1762; and Beccaria published *Dei delitti e delle pene* in 1764.

^{xxi} *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:347; *Legal Papers*, 3:82, 270.

^{xxii} *PJA*, 2:230, 311-314, 326. JA had briefly referred to Harrington and several other English republican authors in his *Dissertation on the Cannon and the Feudal Law* in 1765 (*PJA*, 1:127).

^{xxiii} *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:179, 362; *PJA*, 2:267; and *Works*, 4:410, 416-20. And see Brad Thompson, "John Adams's Machiavellian Moment," in *The Review of Politics*, 57 (1995):389-417, which demonstrates that of America's founding generation, only Adams thoroughly read and thought deeply about Machiavelli.

^{xxiv} *Legal Papers*, 3:242, and see *Diary & Autobiography*, 1:352-53 (Beccaria); *PJA*, 1: 320-21, 327, 330, 331, 344, 346 (Vattel).

^{xxv} JA declared how out of fashion English republican writers were in his important pamphlet, *Thoughts on Government* (April 1776; see *PJA*, 4:87). For a survey of the eighteenth century's universally negative

opinion of Athenian democracy – the only ancient democracy that was widely known, although hardly well understood, in the early modern period – see Jennifer Tolbert Roberts, *Athens on Trial: The Antidemocratic Tradition in Western Thought*, Princeton, NJ, 1994.

^{xxvi} R.R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760--1800*, vol. 1, *The Challenge*, Princeton, NJ, 1959.

^{xxvii} *Diary & Autobiography*, 2:56-61 (notes for Braintree oration); *PJA*, 1:252-309 (“On the Independence of the Judges”); *PJA*, 1:309-346 (Replies to Governor Hutchinson).

^{xxviii} In the third to last paragraph of its first reply to Hutchinson, of 26 January 1773, the legislature declared that if the governor wanted the lawmakers to attempt to draw “the Line of Distinction between the Supreme Authority of Parliament, and the total Independence of the Colonies” (which he claimed could not be drawn), they believed that task would not only be arduous, but “of very great Importance to all the other Colonies: And therefore, could we conceive of such a Line, we should be unwilling to propose it, without their Consent in Congress” (*PJA*, 1:329). The tone of this paragraph suggests that the Massachusetts legislature, at least, regarded an intercolonial congress to be a valid and readily available means to consider the imperial crisis sixteen months before several colonies called for the convening of the First Continental Congress, which became the first institutional foundation of the American nation.

^{xxix} *PJA*, 2:216-387, contains the full text of JA’s “Novanglus” letters, including a thirteenth letter left as an unfinished draft, all with full annotation.

^{xxx} JA’s sovereignty argument runs through most of “Novanglus”’s letters 7—12 (*PJA*, 2:307-380). A complete colonial autonomy from Parliamentary control, except for purely imperial commercial legislation, first declared by the Massachusetts House of Representatives in its first reply to Governor Hutchinson (26 January 1773), had since been ably defended, from different perspectives, in Thomas Jefferson’s *A Summary View of the Rights of British America*, and James Wilson’s *Considerations on the Nature and Extent of the Legislative Authority of the British Parliament*, both published in the summer of 1774. The core of Wilson’s argument apparently dated from 1768, but it was not published, or publicly known, until Britain passed its Coercive Acts.

^{xxxi} *PJA*, 2:314. The seventh “Novanglus” letter appeared on 6 March 1775.

^{xxxii} *PJA*, 4:65-93, prints a fully annotated text of *Thoughts on Government*, along with JA’s letters to congressional colleagues that preceded the pamphlet.

^{xxxiii} See *PJA*, 2:223-25 (editorial note to “Novanglus”). The first full edition of “Novanglus” was published in Holland in Dutch, evidently under JA’s supervision, in 1782. The first full English edition appeared in Boston in 1819.

^{xxxiv} Chaps. 1-3 of vol. 1 of the *Defence* contains JA’s survey of “democratic,” “aristocratic,” and “monarchical” republics (*Works*, 4:303-378).

^{xxxv} On 10 May, Congress passed a brief resolve urging the colonies to reform their governments, and on 15 May, JA persuaded Congress to issue a preface that clarified the resolve’s revolutionary purpose. See Richard Alan Ryerson, *The Revolution Is Now Begun: The Radical Committees of Philadelphia, 1765-1776*, Philadelphia, 1978, p. 211-12.

^{xxxvi} JA’s full draft of the Massachusetts Constitution, which he prepared from mid-September to late October 1779, appears, with copious annotation, in *PJA*, 8:228—271. The quote from Harrington is at p. 242, and see p. 264 n. 37.

^{xxxvii} See Jack D. Warren, Jr., “In the Shadow of Washington: John Adams as Vice President,” in Richard Alan Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, Boston, 2001, p. 139 n27, 140 n40 (citing Glenn A. Phelps, *George Washington and American Constitutionalism*, Lawrence, KS, 1993).

^{xxxviii} JA’s Plan of Treaties appears with full annotation in *PJA*, 2:260-302. The beginning of his work as chair of the Board of War (June—August 1776) is summarized in *PJA*, 4:252-259.

^{xxxix} The documentary record of the first half of JA’s diplomatic career, from April 1778 to May 1783, is presented in great detail in *PJA*, vols. 6 through 14. The best narrative account of the work of America’s diplomats is Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers & American Independence*, New York, 1965. See also James H. Hutson, *John Adams and the Diplomacy of the American Revolution*, Lexington, KY, 1980, and Jan Willem Schulte Nordholt, *The Dutch Republic and American Independence*, Chapel Hill, NC, 1982.

^{xl} See “A Translation of Thomas Pownall’s Memorial” (April—July 1780), “Letters from a Distinguished American” (July 1780), and “Replies to Hendrik Calkoen” (October 1780), in *PJA*, 9:157-220, 531-588, and 10:196-252.

^{xli} JA’s diplomatic success in the Netherlands is thoroughly documented in *PJA*, vols. 10—13 (1780--1782).

^{xlii} On JA’s relations with his colleagues Jay and Franklin, and their negotiations with Britain to conclude peace, see *PJA*, vols. 13 and 14.

^{xliii} The nations that concluded early commercial treaties with America (with the treaty’s date and principal American negotiators, in order of importance) were: France, 1778 (Franklin, Silas Deane, and Arthur Lee), the Netherlands, 1782 (JA), Sweden, 1783 (Franklin), Morocco, 1786 (Thomas Barclay, JA, and Jefferson), and Prussia, 1786 (JA and Jefferson). JA and Jefferson were hopeful of concluding a treaty with Portugal in 1786, but this close ally -- almost a client state -- of Britain called off negotiations. Russia, which was also fairly close to Britain at this time, maintained its distance from the United States until the Napoleonic Wars. And Spain, although not close to Britain, had no interest in a treaty with the United States until the 1790s.

^{xliv} JA’s spirited exchanges with Livingston from 1781 to 1783 appear in *PJA*, vols. 12--14.

^{xliv} See JA to Thomas Jefferson, 10 November, and 6 December 1787, in *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 12:334-35, 396-97.

^{xlvi} For a good short assessment of JA’s vice presidency, see Warren, “In the Shadow of Washington,” in *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, p. 117-141.

^{xlvi} On the debate over a title for the president, see Warren, “In the Shadow of Washington,” p.129.

^{xlvi} On JA’s presidency, and the Alien and Sedition Acts, see Stephen G. Kurtz, *The Presidency of John Adams: The Collapse of Federalism*, Philadelphia, 1957; Ralph Adams Brown, *The Presidency of John Adams*, Lawrence, KS, 1975; James Morton Smith, *Freedoms Fetters: The Alien and Sedition Laws and American Civil Liberties*, Ithaca, 1956; and Richard D. Brown, “The Disenchantment of a Radical Whig: John Adams Reckons with Free Speech,” in Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, p. 171-185.

^{xlvi} At twenty-five years and four months, JA’s retirement was the longest until Herbert Hoover’s (1933-1964). On JA’s retirement years, see Joseph Ellis, *Passionate Sage: The Character and Legacy of John Adams*, New York, 1993.

^l See Ellis, *Passionate Sage*; and Herbert Sloan, “Presidents as Historians: John Adams and Thomas Jefferson,” in Ryerson, ed., *John Adams and the Founding of the Republic*, p. 266-83.

^{li} See Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington*, vol. 7, "First in Peace," New York, 1957, p. 584 [the volume was completed by John Alexander Carroll and Mary Wells Ashworth].

^{lii} JA did once lament the necessity of his focusing on politics and law to the exclusion of all other topics, in his celebrated letter of post 12 May 1780, to Abigail Adams (*AFC*, 3:342).