

Cabinet of Monkeys:
Dancing Politics in Anglo Culture,
from Jacobite to Jacobin and Royalist to Republican

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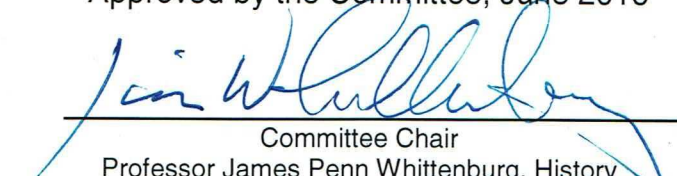
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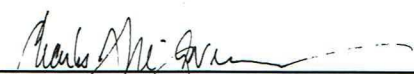
Doctor of Philosophy


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ABSTRACT PAGE

Dance has long been known to play a significant role in the social life of colonial British America. What historians have largely failed to note is the integral nature of dance to the realm of politics and the formation of national identity. From the earliest days of its dissemination in print, English country dance served a political purpose. In 1651, under Oliver Cromwell's Protectorate government, Royalists like John Playford used dance as a subtle form of resistance. Urging the public to remember the monarchy fondly and join together in a quintessentially English pastime, Playford's *English Dancing Master* created an imagined community of political dissenters. The Playford manuals set the standard for the politicization of dance in Anglo culture, both in the politically-charged dance titles they contained and in the intended function of dance performance itself. Ballroom politics spread across the Atlantic to England's North American colonies.

In the years preceding the American Revolution, as well as during the war itself, the ballroom became a political space to a heightened degree. While minuets established a clear social hierarchy, country dances broke it down into more democratic forms. Codes of conduct at assemblies allowed attendees (especially women) to publicize their political allegiances through their dress, behavior, and dance selection. British and Americans sought to politicize the ballroom for their advantage; spectacular fetes such as Howe's Mischianza won local populations to the British cause, while the Philadelphia Assembly prohibited Loyalists from subscribing to its events. Partially in response to British pomp, the Continental Army characterized its festivities as orderly, economical, and virtuous.

In the Federal era, political rivals again used dance as a form of propaganda, warring over the legacy of independence. International tensions ran high, with France embroiled in a bloody revolution that sent a new wave of emigres fleeing abroad, many to America. Pro- and anti-French feeling spilled over into the ballroom. As the rise of the middle class rendered dance an understandable language across a wide swath of the voting population, two major themes arose: that of dance as a wholesome rustic activity in keeping with lauded classical virtues, and that of the social-leveling, chaotic frolic, imbibed with vice and dangerous Jacobin principles. An analysis of dance metaphors reveals growing discomfort with race relations and with the political aspirations of the lower classes, suggesting the gradual closure of the window of opportunity that independence had proffered.

English country dance persisted into Jacksonian America, despite the rise of French cotillions and quadrilles. Though it was a tool of reconciliation after the War of 1812, the longways set's association with egalitarianism made it a target for anti-Jackson feeling by the 1820s. Changing styles in dance and politics also undercut the role of the ballroom. Women assumed a more public role in rallies and social movements, and small-set and partner dances allowed dancers to self-segregate, hindering large-scale communication on the dance floor.

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I will forever be grateful to the English country dance community, firstly, the English Country Dancers of Rochester, New York, and subsequently, the Williamsburg Heritage Dancers. They have helped me to understand the techniques and importance of social dancing in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries by allowing me to experience these dances brought back to life in the present.

Likewise, I owe many thanks to the Jane Austen Society of North America—specifically, to the Western New York, Southeastern Virginia, and Central Virginia Regions, at whose meetings I gave early versions of the papers that became this dissertation.

My family has been endlessly supportive throughout the long ordeal of graduate school. They think more highly of my talents than I deserve, but I hope I can make them proud. Thanks Mom, Dad, and David for accompanying me on research trips, actively taking an interest in my subject matter, listening to some very long monologues about colonial dance as I worked through my findings.

And thanks to tea and ice cream for existing and being my gastronomic pillars of strength, morning, noon, and night, and quite often in between.

Finally, I must acknowledge that my high school history teacher, Mr. Feldman, was right after all. When I took his class at age fifteen, he predicted that I would become a historian. I flatly denied it. In retrospect, I realize he couldn't have come to any other conclusion about a student who was so animated at the sight of a portrait of Caesar Rodney. He can now say "I told you so."

All the ills of mankind, all the tragic misfortunes that fill the history books,
all the political blunders, all the failures of the great leaders have arisen
merely from a lack of skill at dancing.

~Molière, *Le Bourgeoise Gentilhomme*, 1670

Introduction

On the Right Foot

I ought to have recollected, that under the close inspection of two such watchful salvages, our communication, while in repose, could not have been easy; that the period of dancing a minuet was not the very choicest time for conversation; but that the noise, the exercise, and the mazy confusion of a country-dance, where the inexperienced performers were every now and then running against each other, and compelling the other couples to stand still for a minute at a time, besides the more regular repose afforded by the intervals of the dance itself, gave the best possible openings for a word or two spoken in season, and without being liable to observation.

~Sir Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet*, 1824¹

When my adviser first suggested to me that I research dance in the colonial and early Federal periods, I'm sure I stared at him skeptically. What on earth could I expect to learn about dance that would be worthy of a dissertation? Even if I did find something, whom could I expect to read it? Was it possible that something I enjoyed so much—English country dancing—could actually form the basis for a powerful historical argument?

A longtime admirer of the works of Jane Austen, I already recognized the importance of the dance floor in facilitating social encounters; and it was Miss Austen, unsurprisingly, who led me toward one of my central themes. In *Northanger Abbey*, published posthumously in 1818 but written during the closing years of the previous century, Austen's hero Henry Tilney teases heroine Catherine Morland by drawing a parallel between dancing and marriage: "You will allow, that in both, man has the advantage of choice, woman only the power of refusal...." Catherine repeatedly objects to the comparison, and Henry at last acknowledges some dissimilarity: "In marriage, the

man is supposed to provide for the support of the woman; the woman to make the home agreeable to the man; he is to purvey, and she is to smile. But in dancing, their duties are exactly changed; the agreeableness, the compliance are expected from him, while she furnishes the fan and the lavender water.”²

Though Mr. Tilney speaks—as he usually does—half in jest, his notion of the ballroom as a sphere of female power captivated me. In this unique space, women were *expected* to speak to men and men to be obliging. It is, in part, Mr. Darcy’s refusal to concede power to Elizabeth Bennet at the Meryton Assembly that establishes their adversarial relationship in Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. In the words of Dr. Jenna Simpson, Darcy’s dismissal of Elizabeth as “not handsome enough” to dance with “[robs] Elizabeth of her power to choose [or] refuse a partner, to make decisions for herself. [It] robs her of social status in her territory, among her friends, where she’s well-regarded and can expect to be treated with respect, affection, even deference. He is treating it as *his* territory.”³ Later in the novel, it is again in the context of a dance when Elizabeth is able to exact a sort of revenge. Though frustrated when Mr. Darcy resists her attempts to provoke conversation, she trades on the power structure of the ballroom to impose her will:

They stood for some time without speaking a word; and she began to imagine that their silence was to last through the two dances, and at first was resolved not to break it; till suddenly, fancying that it would be the greater punishment to her partner to oblige him to talk, she made some slight observation on the dance. He replied, and was again silent. After a pause of some minutes she addressed him a second time with—“It is *your* turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy—I talked about the dance, and *you* ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number

¹ Sir Walter Scott, *Redgauntlet: A Tale of the Eighteenth Century* (Paris: J. Smith, 1832), 139.

² Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, in *The Complete Novels* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981), 847.

³ Jenna Simpson, e-mail message to author, June 19, 2016.

of couples.”

He smiled, and assured her that whatever she wished him to say should be said.

“Very well. That reply will do for the present. Perhaps by and by I may observe that private balls are much pleasanter than public ones. But *now* we may be silent.”

“Do you talk by rule, then, while you are dancing?”

“Sometimes. One must speak a little, you know. It would look odd to be entirely silent for half an hour together; and yet for the advantage of *some*, conversation ought to be so arranged, as that they may have the trouble of saying as little as possible.”⁴

In a room full of men and women in conversation, Elizabeth reminds Darcy, silence is bound to draw notice; and, if Henry Tilney is correct about the duties of the male on the dance floor, silence from a gentleman would be particularly rude. This very feature of country dancing works in Elizabeth's favor in this scene in another way; partners might, as Walter Scott notes in the quote that heads this section, speak in confidence during a longways dance, their *tête-à-tête* protected by the fact that everybody else in the line is either speaking as well or concentrating on the steps. Thus, Elizabeth is able to broach the delicate subject of Mr. Wickham's promised living, supposedly denied him by Mr. Darcy, with no apprehension of being overheard. Mr. Darcy cannot effectively challenge her bold assertions without disrupting the whole group of dancers and drawing attention to himself. Handicapped by the form of the dance and the rules of politeness that governed the ballroom, he has no choice but to leave Elizabeth coolly in command of the exchange.

And what was the form of the dance? The prevailing style of social dance from about 1650 to 1820 is known as English country dance, performed in two long lines, one of men, and one of women—together, the lines formed the “longways set.” Because of the mechanics of the longways set, an individual dancer could not abandon the floor without

throwing the entire line into disarray, an action considered not only unmannerly, but uneducated. When the hero of Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* simply commits an error in a country dance, an onlooker critiques him harshly: "He has just put the set into great confusion...I am surprised, that, with his air and figure, he has not taken more care to accomplish himself in dancing."⁵ No well-bred gentleman would willfully enable others to regard him in this light.

As couples moved up and down along the longways set, the dance demanded that partners interact not only with one another, but with every other couple they met. Thus, speaking or *not* speaking to someone in the line might carry great significance. "Polite" society does not invariably live up to its moniker. If a public snub might have social consequences, a matter not in dispute, why could it not also—or instead—have political ones? What sorts of conversation might transpire at a dance where people with widely disparate political loyalties mingled? Could women wield political influence in a ballroom when almost no other public space afforded them such free expression? A 1986 film adaptation of *Northanger Abbey* showed Catherine, albeit uncharacteristically, cautioning Henry not to underestimate the power of a woman's refusal. My research has taught me the same lesson, consistently demonstrating what many women of the late eighteenth-century would have known: the ballroom was every bit as much a venue for political as it was for physical maneuvering, and this was facilitated by English country dance.

It has long been held that early American women had little political voice. "Those few scholars," notes Elizabeth Varon, "who have tried to integrate political history and

⁴ Austen, *Pride & Prejudice*, in *Complete Novels*, 221.

⁵ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (London: J. Limbird, 1824), 65.

women's history have not challenged the historiographical impression that the realm of antebellum party politics was a male preserve."⁶ Evidence for female political muteness can be found even in Jane Austen, when Henry Tilney, his sister Eleanor, and Catherine Morland walk together on Beechen Cliff, above Bath.

Henry suffered the subject to decline, and by an easy transition from a piece of rocky fragment and the withered oak which he had placed near its summit, to oaks in general, to forests, the enclosure of them, waste lands, crown lands and government, he shortly found himself arrived at politics; and from politics, it was an easy step to silence. The general pause which succeeded his short disquisition on the state of the nation was put an end to by Catherine, who, in rather a solemn tone of voice, uttered these words, "I have heard that something very shocking indeed will soon come out in London."⁷

Really, this is Henry's conversation with himself—the women are seen to take no part.

Thus, not only does the passage confirm that politics is a poor choice of subject for a pleasure outing, it also recognizes that women had absolutely nothing to say about it. But is this latter assumption actually correct?

Continuing on, the reader finds that it is not. Eleanor Tilney has been listening intently to what her brother has to say and assumes that Catherine has as well. When Catherine then announces that she expects "murder and everything of the kind" to appear in London at any moment, Eleanor quite rationally assumes that she is speaking of popular discontent, the fomenting of a riot, perhaps even a political assassination. "You speak with astonishing composure!" Eleanor exclaims, "But I hope your friend's accounts have been exaggerated; and if such a design is known beforehand, proper measures will undoubtedly be taken by government to prevent its coming to effect." It is then Catherine's turn to be shocked, for she has been talking of "nothing more dreadful than a

⁶ Elizabeth R. Varon, "Tippecanoe and the Ladies, Too: White Women and Party Politics in Antebellum Virginia," *The Journal of American History*, 82, No. 2 (Sept. 1995): 494-495.

new publication," a novel. Catherine, a naive, seventeen-year-old parson's daughter from the country, is not sufficiently conversant in the nation's woes to contribute to a conversation on politics; however, Eleanor, a twenty-two-year-old whose father is a retired army general with a keen interest in political matters, has more than enough background to pronounce an informed opinion on the subject. The comparatively few women whose political expressions have survived were not necessarily unique in their day; nor should silence in public be taken as evidence of ignorance or indifference to political issues. There was a time and place for certain topics.

And there were, indeed, locations and company in which it was not inappropriate for women to voice their political opinions. Tobias Smollett's 1771 novel, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, provides minute descriptions of the geography and social activities of Bath as it began its ascendancy to become the premier spa town in England. "Hard by the Pump-room, is a coffee-house for the ladies," one of its characters writes in a letter home to a friend, "but my aunt says, young girls are not admitted, insomuch as the conversation turns upon politics, scandal, philosophy, and other subjects above our capacity."⁸ So, the topics that men discussed at their coffee houses were the same topics raised in the domains of women; they were reserved for more mature females, and in this case only in the company of other females. Frances Trollope, an Englishwoman visiting America in the late 1820s and early 1830s, made similar observations of the situation in America. Numerous citizens of the proud young United States took it upon themselves to boast of the excellence of the American government, and the ladies were as vocal as the gentlemen. "On the subject of national glory, I presume I got more than my share of

⁷ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, in *Complete Novels*, p. 864.

buffeting [from women]," reflected Mrs. Trollope, "for [my] being a woman, there was no objection to their speaking out."⁹ Had she been a male foreigner, she implies, the subject would not have been raised.

However, in private settings, the supposed rule that women should not talk politics in mixed company might fall away completely. In her home in Halifax, Nova Scotia, in 1783, teenager Mary Robie Sewall felt confident enough to debate a French soldier on the subject of religion. Though piety was expected of young ladies, she reached beyond expectations to verbally engage an ideological foe who was not only male, but a foreign visitor, and presumably formally-educated. She even confided to her diary that she thought she had defended her point very ably against him.¹⁰ In the fictional world, even timid, ultra-feminine Fanny Price in Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* has the courage to inquire of her uncle—Sir Thomas Bertram, a member of Parliament—how matters stood with regards to the slave trade, abolished in England and her territories in 1807. During the period of *Mansfield Park*'s composition and publication, Britain was exerting pressure on other European nations to follow its lead in abolishing the trade, though the abolition of slavery itself was still to come. This passage has sometimes been misinterpreted to paint Sir Thomas as tyrannical and pro-slavery and his family as complicit in the evil. While it is true that the family's wealth derives from the West Indies, and that Sir Thomas undoubtedly runs his plantation with slave labor, he is perfectly willing to discuss this subject with his niece. The full passage, a conversation between Fanny and her cousin

⁸ Tobias Smollett, *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, in *The Miscellaneous Works of Tobias Smollett* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1844), 804.

⁹ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, Vol. 1 (New York: Whittaker, Treacher & Company, 1832), 134.

¹⁰ Mary Robie, *Mary Robie Sewall diary, May-October 1783*, Ms. N-804, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

Edmund, reads in this way:

“Your uncle is disposed to be pleased with you in every respect; and I only wish you would talk to him more. You are one of those who are too silent in the evening circle.”

“But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did not you hear me ask him about the slave-trade last night?”

“I did-and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of farther.”

“And I longed to do it—but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like—I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by shewing a curiosity and pleasure in his information which he must wish his own daughters to feel.”¹¹

The silence in the room is not from shock that Fanny would ask a political question, but from an utter lack of interest. It reflects poorly on the education and intelligence of the other young women present that they do *not* engage in conversation on the subject. Far from being affronted by their audacity in daring to have an opinion, their father would be better pleased with them if they demonstrated some intellectual and emotional investment in the issues of the day. Instead, once again, the conversation moves from politics to silence. The ballroom was just one context wherein women might step in the opposite direction—from silence to politics—with comparative immunity. Though a relatively public space, it was also a relatively safe one, a unique liminal zone where women might be partisan under the guise of being sociable and therefore have little fear of repercussions. Already allotted a degree of power in the ballroom, women asserted themselves in that environment to a greater extent than has been recognized previously. The involvement of women in this non-traditional political discourse is a special case of the intersection of the ballroom with politics and merits particular attention.

¹¹ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, in *Complete Novels*, 453.

Less surprising is the notion that, if women took advantage of the ballroom's political possibilities, their partners did the same. Men, though visibly active in politics in many venues, might employ the ballroom as a more subtle means of advancing their agendas. Social connections forged on a dance floor might translate easily into political connections on the floor of Congress. Men sought out these connections themselves, but also capitalized on their partners' feminine graces to secure the allegiance and alliance of other men. The British Army was noted for such persuasive activity during the American Revolution, believing that the loyalty of male rebels might be obtained through the loyalty of their wives and sisters. In the Federal era, male leaders in Washington inherited this tendency, deploying the poise and charm of their female relations to calm troubled political waters. How much initiative the women themselves took in this effort is difficult to determine, but it was surely significant.

Dance was steeped in politics to a degree that nobody who perused a dance manual or attended a regular assembly could have avoided making the connection. Under British rule, balls regularly commemorated special events in the lives of the royal family or the dates of key military victories. In the young America, these dates were shifted to mark the birthdays and inaugurations of presidents and to celebrate the new nation's military and political achievements. Just as the American system of government and law borrowed heavily from the mother country, so too did the national amusements. For years afterwards, political figures and patriotic milestones would be remembered through the publication of dances bearing names relevant to them, such as "Mount Vernon," or "The Defeat of Burgoyne." At some assemblies, such as those held in Philadelphia, the dances to be performed at each gathering would be pre-planned, giving the managers of

the ball the opportunity to insert into the program whatever political spirit suited their taste via the dance titles. At less structured parties, when the honor of naming each dance fell to the couple at the head of the line—and often to the female—a light-hearted evening might quickly turn into an ideological conflict, wherein participants battled by proxy through the dances they chose to call.

In the second chapter of the book *The Chesapeake House*, Cary Carson advocates for what he calls “architecture as social history.” He proclaims:

“Instead of style (how buildings look), we now study function (how buildings work). In place of landmarks (enduring monuments), we see landscapes (animated social settings). The moral center of our scholarship rests squarely on the conviction that architecture, intentionally or not, gives physical form to the way people treat other people who share their space.”¹²

My intent is to apply a similar framework to the ballroom, examining not only what steps dancers traced on the floor, but what messages those steps conveyed to the company; not only who shared the space, but how those people interacted within it to create new understandings of political culture. How did the disparate elements of dance, such as its music, movement, costume, and terminology, exist and reverberate outside of the ballroom? What did they mean to the broader population, even to those whose economic or social positions did not permit them to take part in the dance itself? Under what circumstances did the political world and the world of entertainment mingle like the couples in a longways set, and how was this interaction consciously and unconsciously shaped by the environment of the ballroom?

It is my hope that this fresh perspective on ballroom culture in the English tradition will illuminate dance as an integral part of the lived political experience of the

seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. The ballroom was an area of constant potential chaos, kept under control by a set of polite expectations. It might be a tool for encouraging unity or offer an opportunity to provoke conflict. It afforded its occupants certain freedoms of expression and behavior, but did so within a setting of relative security. It was a unique place where the discipline of regular rules and the malleability of the dance form met and allowed men—and more especially, women—to renegotiate their political identities and their relationships to one another.

This dissertation cannot provide as many direct, traditional sorts of evidence as I would like to prove the scope and frequency of political strategizing in the ballroom. There are almost endless possibilities and likelihoods, but a scarcity of concrete documentation in the usual text sources. In the interests of conciseness, I have sometimes selected only a few examples of the politicization of dance from the many that exist, and analyzed those as a sample of the whole. Including more would not go further toward creating an airtight argument. Of necessity, I have relied on journals, letters, and other sources surviving from the literate segment of the population. While the illiterate certainly danced in their leisure time, they could not themselves report their conversations in print. Nor did the lower and upper classes often mingle at assemblies; commonly, ball attendance proved cost-prohibitive for anyone not relatively well-to-do, and for those living in remote areas, wealthy or not, attending urban gatherings was impractical. Nevertheless, the degree of social and economic openness that characterized assemblies varied throughout the period of this study, sometimes in ways that suggest a political motive. The ballroom was increasingly accessible to the middling classes as the

¹² Cary Carson and Carl Lounsbury, eds., *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2013), 12.

eighteenth-century progressed, whereas the nineteenth-century reintroduced elements of exclusion. Despite the natural limitations of my sources, I feel it is a safe assumption that wherever communities gathered to dance, particularly during periods of national crisis, political statements were made even if they went unrecorded.

As far as proofs go, "believe them to be stronger than I have declared."¹³

I certainly do.

¹³ Jane Austen, *The Complete Novels* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981), 11.

Chapter 1: “Begin the Dance”¹

It was not till the middle of the second dance, when, from some pauses in the movements, wherein they all seemed to look up, I fancied I could distinguish an elevation of spirit different from that which is the cause or the effect of simple jollity. In a word, I thought I beheld *Religion* mixing in the dance: but, as I had never seen her so engaged, I should have look'd upon it now as one of the illusions of an imagination which is eternally misleading me, had not the old man, as soon as the dance ended, said, that this was their constant way; and that all his life long he had made it a rule, after supper was over, to call out his family to dance and rejoice; believing, he said, that a cheerful and contented mind was the best sort of thanks to heaven that an illiterate peasant could pay....

~Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, 1768²

Throughout history, dance has been integral to the human experience. Whether performed in a rural village as part of a seasonal celebration, in a stately palace ballroom after a coronation, aboard ship in WWII to ease the stress of combat and confinement, or in a pink tutu on a makeshift stage at the age of five, dance has woven its way into rituals of all sorts—fertility, army recruitment, religious ceremony, rites of passage, and more. In Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey*, though dance is not used in a ceremonial function, it nonetheless generates the feelings of a profound religious experience, demonstrating gratitude for continued life and binding family members to one another and to their God.

William H. McNeill advances just such a hypothesis in his *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (1995). McNeill attaches considerable importance to the power of dance to forge community and identity:

moving rhythmically while giving voice together is the surest, most speedy, and efficacious way of creating and sustaining such communities

¹ Whenever in quotation marks, my section headings are the titles of English country dances published between 1651 and 1830 in either Britain or America.

² Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (Goettingen; I.C. Diederich, 1779), 191.

that our species has ever hit upon. Words and ideas matter, and are always invoked; but keeping together in time arouses warm emotions of collective solidarity and erases personal frustrations as words, by themselves, cannot do.³

He credits dance and calisthenics with the power to subtly impose conformity through "muscular bonding." However, he restricts the relevance of dance in politics to this same "muscular bonding," and then only in modern times.

Popular emotion and the rhythmic muscular expressions of group excitement...seldom affected politics before modern times. Instead, court ceremonies supported the status quo by using a variety of muscular actions that were calculated to express the dignity and power of rulers, and to reinforce appropriate subordination on the part of everyone else... Rhythmic movements sometimes figured in courtly ceremonials but seldom mattered much.⁴

Unfortunately, McNeill fails to appreciate the variety of ways in which dance interacted with the political world. Dance need not always "[support] the status quo," even in the twentieth-century examples he cites. For instance, swing dance provided a community-building shared experience for German youths as they fought the tide of the Nazism that eventually engulfed them. "Playing and dancing to the enemies' music was an act of rebellion," writes Matthew Hughes in *Inside Hitler's Germany* (2006). "Even the dancing involved, which became more freestyle and spontaneous, was an affront to the regimented Germanic folk dancing favoured by the Hitler Youth." The "ringleaders" of the *Swing-Jugend* movement were later sent to concentration camps.⁵

But that spirit of rebellion did not originate with twentieth-century jazz, as an increasing number of scholars have set out to prove. Only since the rise of the new social

³ William H. McNeill, *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 151-152.

⁴ McNeill, 101.

⁵ Matthew Hughes, *Inside Hitler's Germany: Life Under the Third Reich* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's Inc., 2000), 65.

history have historians sought to illuminate human agency through the study of entertainment. To earlier generations, balls, concerts, plays, and parades seemed little more than sideshows, unimportant ornaments to the personalities and policies that truly drove change in the western tradition. However, the new social history, with its determination to recover the stories of forgotten and marginalized people, began to search for evidence of empowerment in nontraditional activities. For example, David Waldstreicher, in his *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes*, demonstrated how in 1836 a mixed-race army veteran transformed the anniversary of victory at New Orleans into a poignant lament over disregarded Indian rights. Speaking at the Odeon Theatre in Boston, William Apess, “retold New England and American history from a native American point of view,” challenging his listeners to reframe their notions of heroism and American-ness based not on Andrew Jackson, but on the culture that Jackson was instrumental in suppressing.⁶ Waldstreicher, Susan G. Davis, Sean Wilentz, and others have interpreted public festivities as sites of conflict over the legacy of the Revolution and the meaning of citizenship in a racially and economically divided America. Waldstreicher shows how long-held traditions of public celebration became a means of creating symbolic—and fictive—unity in the early Republic, with accounts of major festivities printed throughout the United States.

Yet, at the same time, popular celebrations also provided an outlet for the citizens’ political feelings that could not be expressed in actual houses of government. By encountering and engaging with other philosophies within the context of national commemorations, Americans were better able to realize the ideals of popular

⁶ David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997),

participation in their political system. Though patriotic festivities might accentuate partisan feeling, they could also mitigate it. In a somewhat complementary study to Waldstreicher's, Davis argues persuasively that early civic rituals in Philadelphia were not representative of a unified sense of patriotism, but involved power-plays, counter-protests, and the conflicting ideologies of special interest groups, even when the end result was a celebration that seemed to suggest social cohesion.⁷ Simple on the surface, collective celebrations such as parades, ceremonies, and—as the evidence will show—dances, often hide tensions over current political issues and contests over the control of historical memory.

Despite the upsurge of research on entertainment as a form of political expression, there has yet to appear a full-length critical examination of dance and its music. Dance historians such as Kate Van Winkle Keller have published extensively on the social implications of the ballroom, but, like McNeill, tend to treat this function as separate from politics. True, dance held connotations of class that may have served a unifying purpose, and in the court of Louis XIV to which McNeill refers, social and political hierarchies were practically indistinguishable. Nevertheless, rivals hardly left their quarrels at the ballroom door, whether in France, Britain, or America, and political factions could exploit the medium of dance to serve their own ends.

One historian who has recognized the political function of dance is Cynthia Kierner in "Genteel Balls and Republican Parades," an article for the *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* in 1996. Her account of these entertainments suggests that, although the ballroom accorded women an unusual degree of social and even political

power, women of the time often failed to recognize the fact and found themselves increasingly excluded from civic rituals in the post-revolutionary period. Kierner sees the ballroom as an elite, genteel space, a province of Federalists, that gave way to the more raucous populist celebrations of the nineteenth-century.⁸ The following study, by contrast, will show that the ballroom—although an exclusive space—was not so isolated as formerly believed, that the dances performed there, in particular English country dance, possessed inherent political elements, and that dance's practitioners, male and female, shared a consciousness of their political clout. In times of national and international turmoil, politics spilled over into every facet of life, influencing dress, music, speech, and gender roles in ways that could not go unnoticed by participants.

Records of balls and assemblies during these volatile periods provide tantalizing hints—and sometimes outright declarations—of conflicting loyalties and political maneuvering. When dancing took refuge in private homes during the Puritan Commonwealth in England, it created a powerful subculture devoted to preserving "traditional" English amusements against a government that—though equally English—sought to quash amusements it viewed as leading to moral degeneracy. Later, dance reflected the democratizing impulses of the late eighteenth-century amid the American and French Revolutions and provided a scene for power plays between foreign armies and local populations. The continued popularity of dance made it equally relevant in the post-revolutionary era: it repeatedly featured in written propaganda, transformed into an image of nationhood or profligacy as the author saw fit.

⁷ Susan G. Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 13-15.

⁸ Cynthia Kierner, "Genteel Balls and Republican Parades: Gender and Early Southern Civic Rituals, 1677-1826," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 104, No. 2 (Spring, 1996), 185-210.

There has been no better scholar on the intersection of the social and political spheres, in the manner that this paper will examine them, than Catherine Allgor. Her work illuminating the covert political power women wielded through entertainment has been an inspiration. She has added new dimensions to this story with her detailed study of government wives in early nineteenth-century Washington, *Parlor Politics*. In it, she explores the creation of “polite society” in the nation’s capital, placing women at the center of this process as they made visits, established networks of patronage, and hosted regular soirees and dances. More than simply forging community, women effectively campaigned for their husbands through social activities. Politics and the social world became so intertwined, argues Allgor, that one could not function without the blessing of the other. As evidence, she points to the infamous “Petticoat Affair,” wherein society ladies refused to associate with a suspected adulteress whose husband was appointed secretary of war. The debacle eventually resulted in the resignation of President Andrew Jackson’s entire cabinet.⁹ In *Parlor Politics*, Allgor devotes several paragraphs to dance as it pertains to the forging of political and community alliances in 1820s Washington D.C. “The ball had subtle effects, taking the electioneering process to a new plane,” she asserts.¹⁰ *Cabinet of Monkeys* will complement her meticulous research, delving deeper into the world of social dance and demonstrating its comparable importance to Allgor’s “parlor.”

This dissertation will attempt to seal the apertures in our historical understanding of dance’s role in politics, with a focus on its impact from the approximate era 1750 to 1840. Working from newspaper articles, dance manuals, diaries, letters, and sheet music,

⁹ Catherine Allgor, *Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 202.

it will interrogate the role of music and dance in the formation and perpetuation of political ideologies both in public and private settings.

This study will begin by placing dance in its social context in everyday life in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. A basic literacy in dance terminology, customs, and etiquette is essential for analyzing the material that will follow. For this, the best resource is the research of Kate Van Winkle Keller, whose reconstructions of dance figures and manners constitute some of the finest current scholarship on the subject. As at Versailles, dance's social function and its political function were intertwined in America, and additional discussion of this will recur throughout the essay.

The first section will introduce the origins of English country dancing as it is known today, with its transition from a "folk" form into a printed resource in the seventeenth century. John Playford, the man responsible for some of the earliest and most renowned collections of dances, incurred great personal risk by publishing dance manuals under a government ideologically opposed to frivolity of all sorts. His very success and the evolution of his manual into a series points to a population eager to use dance to sustain their perceived cultural identity and to quietly thumb their noses at Oliver Cromwell. Here, I will explain why the particular dance form known as English country was entwined with political protest from its earliest hour.

And from England, thence to America, where I will pick up the story around 1750, one hundred years after English country dance's first appearance, and at about the time when organized dancing assemblies emerged in various colonial capitals. It was a period when many influential Americans still cherished close ties to the mother country, whether ties of birth, of education, or simply of inclination, and sought to imitate Englishmen

¹⁰ Ibid., 182.

whenever possible—including and perhaps especially in their leisure activities. During the Seven Years' War, an influx of military personnel from Great Britain re-introduced English culture and, perhaps, reminded some colonists of just how different life in North America had become. But all Englishmen, wherever they called home, faced a common enemy in the French and their native allies, allowing them to draw upon their similarities, including their dance traditions, to strengthen their camaraderie.

Subsequently, I will turn my pen to the American Revolution, both the events that led to it and the war itself. This time, the English and the Americans found themselves deploying their common language of dance against one another. Of note in this section will be the supposed British effort to control the American public with entertainment, which helped enable women's participation in the struggle through their conduct in the ballroom. Women, as well as men, made their political sentiments visible with their dress, their choice of dances, and their choice of partners. Some assemblies took a distinctly unfriendly attitude towards members of the opposing viewpoint and sought to shut them out of what had formerly been a public entertainment.

The post-revolutionary period brought a decline in the number of political ballroom anecdotes in newspapers, but the influence of dance continued through other avenues. A heavy French presence in America during and after the war contributed to a rise in the number of professional dancing masters. With competition in the urban centers, dance spread further into rural communities, affirming a connection between dance and republicanism.

As the new nation debated its own character, the French Revolution erupted across the Atlantic. The dangerous and divisive overthrow of Louis XVI and the split in U.S.

politics between Federalist and Anti-federalist rendered foreign policy increasingly problematic. As Americans took sides on international issues, they frequently recorded their values in dancing metaphors that could now reach a broader swath of the citizenry. These metaphors might imagine an idyllic rustic revel that symbolized the nation or present a lawless frolic that threatened established social order. Simultaneously, as the American Revolution slipped further into memory and Americans increasingly became apologists for the institution of slavery, the language of dance took on previously unseen racial connotations.

In the early nineteenth century, these trends continued. What transpired at a dance could be expected to reflect the political persuasions of the dancers, and how these events were subsequently reported often related to popular political and cultural stereotypes. Contrary to its reputation, the “Era of Good Feelings,” extending from the conclusion of the War of 1812 to the contentious election of 1824, witnessed the disturbances of factionalism and competing notions of liberty. The recognition of dance as a shared language and a vehicle for national characteristics makes it far more important than McNeill acknowledges with his “innocuous...folk dancing.”¹¹ At the same time, however, several trends began to weaken the grip of large group dance forms: a series of religious “awakenings” re-cast dance as a danger to personal holiness, threatening to dissolve the bonds that made dance a democratic and widely-understood language; also, an upsurge in interest in the dance forms of non-Anglo cultures sawed away at the ties between nineteenth-century dancers and the United States’ Anglo-centric dance history. Lastly, other forms of political expression, such as party rallies and social justice movements, re-shaped the bounds of acceptable political involvement, especially for

women. This made ballroom politics only one of many channels for political energies, and more direct action could be taken in alternative environments. Once dance ceased to carry its messages to diverse classes and geographical areas, dance became less effective as a means of spreading politics or reinforcing alliances.

Of necessity, and because they, too, were relevant, I will sometimes discuss the significance and role of types of dance that do not fall under the umbrella term “English country.” Minuets, in particular, will feature in my text, but also quadrilles, cotillions, reels, and jigs—these last two sometimes indistinguishable from English country dance in historical documents. Some dance forms developed organically alongside English country and had died away or metamorphosed by the time country dancing dwindled in popularity. Country dance itself underwent some significant stylistic changes. However, for the most part, the functions of each dance form remained relatively constant, and it is useful to compare or contrast these functions and ways of interacting with the political sphere.

Because I aspire to include the entire colonial community—and subsequently the new nation—I have derived much of my evidence from colonial newspapers, which began to proliferate in the second half of the eighteenth-century. There is no more comprehensive resource for the study of public entertainments than the surviving publications in which they were regularly advertised and occasionally described at length. Only with the assistance of digitized newspaper databases was I able to consider not only the entire eastern seaboard at once, but even locate instances of dancing in the “frontier” areas that garnered little attention in America’s metropolises. Newspapers have enabled me to give due attention to all regions and to compare the social experiences in each more

¹¹ McNeill, p. 151.

effectively. Journals and letters add crucial detail to the general accounts provided in print, but the comparative volume of extant periodical sources make them indispensable research tools.

Many colonial newspapers have been amassed into useful and searchable collections. Mary Jane Corry's *The Performing Arts in Colonial American Newspapers, 1690-1783* (1977) is available on CD-ROM, and contains every reference to music, dance, and theatre to be found in an array of papers over the course of almost a century. It proved an invaluable resource for the period from the Seven Years' War to the Treaty of Paris. A second database, *America's Historical Newspapers*, can be accessed online through a number of libraries, and covers the time span of 1690-1922. Even more exhaustive, it includes facsimiles of more than one thousand publications in English, German, and French. I have also drawn upon the *Burney Collection Newspapers*, *Nineteenth-Century British Library Newspapers*, and *America's Historical Imprints* for broadsides, ephemera, and periodicals. The Library of Congress's excellent database of dance manuals, *An American Ballroom Companion*, offers not only an overview of dance trend from the colonial era through the modern day, but also scans of more than two hundred dance manuals over that extended period, many of which would have been available in America. These manuals, paired with the dance indexes for English country dance and American country dance manuscripts compiled by Robert Keller, give as inclusive an overview as possible of the social dance climate in America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While none of these collections is perfectly complete, each offers a remarkable treasure trove of information and an unequalled window into the print culture

of the past.¹²

In an effort to supplement the diaries, letters, and newspaper accounts of early America, I have turned to eighteenth and early nineteenth-century novels for further observations of ballroom practices. It is sometimes in the arts that tidbits of the past survive where the historical record fails. Archaeologists search for evidence of period ceramics and material culture in Dutch genre paintings, even locating images of items almost identical to the artifacts they unearth from the ground. Paintings can help illuminate the uses for such artifacts, the class of people to whom they commonly belonged, what other objects might be associated with them, and how the shards of a vessel might have appeared when intact as a bowl or a pitcher.¹³

Similarly, though fictional, the works of authors such as Fanny Burney, Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott, and the above-mentioned Austen and Smollett preserved the details of everyday life that were sometimes too universally-acknowledged to find a place in diaries and letters. Their characters make embarrassing mistakes, experience important revelations, and astutely remark on the behavior of others on the ballroom

¹² *19th Century American Newspapers* by Infotrac, via The College of William and Mary Swem Library, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>>, accessed 16 December, 2009; *America's Historical Newspapers* by NewsBank, via The College of William and Mary Swem Library, <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wm.edu>>, accessed 16 December, 2009; *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals Ca. 1490-1920*, The Library of Congress, September 17, 2005, <<https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/dihtml/dihome.html>>; Robert M Keller, *Dance Figures Index: American Country Dance 1730-1810* (Sandy Hook, CT: Hendrickson Group, 1989), <<http://www.cdss.org/elibrary/DFIA/index.htm>>, accessed 16 December, 2009; Robert M Keller, *Dance Figures Index: English Country Dance 1650-1833*, (Sandy Hook, CT: Hendrickson Group, 1989), <<http://www.cdss.org/elibrary/DFIA/index.htm>>, accessed 16 December, 2009; Robert M. Keller, *The Dancing Master, 1651-1728: An Illustrated Compendium*, University of New Hampshire Library, <<http://www.izaak.unh.edu/nhltmd/indexes/dancingmaster/>>, accessed 16 December, 2009; Mary Jane Corry, *The Performing Arts in Colonial American Newspapers, 1690-1783: Text Data Base and Index* (New York, NY: University Music Editions, 1997); *17th and 18th Century Burney Collection*, by Infotrac, via The College of William and Mary Swem Library, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>>, accessed 23 June, 2016.

¹³ Julia A. King, "Still Life with Tobacco: The Archaeological Uses of Dutch Art," *Historical Archaeology* 41, no. 2 *Between Art & Artifact* (2007): 6-22.

floor, providing insights for the modern historian into the sorts of situations that were commonplace, and when someone's actions fell outside of normal parameters. They likewise provide context, representing the cultural environment of the day, the trends and attitudes that influenced all forms of art, including dance. Novelists draw upon their observations of real people, places, and situations and then infuse them into fictional scenarios, gifting modern readers with a slice of life during the eighteenth or nineteenth century that transcends the experience of any single individual. In this way, period novels, like the ballroom itself, are transformed from simple entertainments into valuable repositories of information and truth. In academic history, novels have been under-used as primary source material, and I have found them to be incredibly fruitful and revealing when paired with non-fictional forms of evidence. If this interdisciplinary approach ventures beyond tradition, then, as Jane Austen herself said at the conclusion of *Northanger Abbey*, “the credit of a wild imagination will at least be all my own.”¹⁴

¹⁴ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, in *Complete Novels*, 926.

Chapter 2: “The Hobbies of the Times”

During the eighteenth-century, English country dancing became one of Anglo culture’s most widespread and socially-significant activities. Early in the century, it was not uncommon to find all ranks of people mingling in the dance at festivals and special occasions.¹ By mid-century, the gentry began to separate themselves with private parties and select assemblies that were ostensibly public, but nevertheless catered to the leisured classes. Dance came to be considered a mark of elegance and good breeding, but it might also have been a means of social mobility for the skilled practitioner. It was often through dances that young people met prospective marriage partners and aspiring politicians forged personal connections with important men. This political function of the ballroom, though it took different forms through time, had been an attribute of English country dancing in particular for several generations already.

An outgrowth of folk dances of the sixteenth-century, English country dancing was adopted into aristocratic and then into yeoman circles, truly spanning the social ladder with its accessible steps and popular music. However, the political upheaval of the English Civil War, 1640-49, imbued it with nationalistic character and turned pastime into protest, dance into defiance. Noted Royalist John Playford, by printing his groundbreaking *English Dancing Master*, provided Englishmen and women with the tools they needed to flout the ascetic doctrines of Puritan rule and form an imagined community of dancers across England.² Even as the Restoration allowed dancing to become public again, Playford’s work continued to offer subtle comment on current affairs, an ongoing

¹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 49-50.

narration that became part of the fabric of this dance form. With the power to reach many people in terms they all understood, English country dance was in a perfect position to be tapped for political ends.

“Step Stately”

Indiana could with difficulty keep to the figure of the dance, from the exulting, yet unpractised certainty of attracting all eyes; and Camilla perpetually turned wrong, from the mere flutter of fear, which made her expect she should never turn right.

~Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 1796 ³

This rather charming passage from Fanny Burney's novel, *Camilla*, highlights the visibility of young ladies just coming out into society. And nowhere might they be more universally observed and their degree of "accomplishment" weighed than in a ballroom. By the same token, the ballroom offered an unprecedented stage for other forms of display. In order to interpret the usefulness of English country dance as a political force during the century and a half it dominated ballrooms, it is first imperative to examine the structure of the dance itself. A solid understanding of its purposes in the social lives of middle- and upper-class Americans forms the groundwork for an appreciation of its potential as a scene of political rivalry and exchange.

The “country” dances, epitomized by Playford’s *Dancing Master*, are most recognizable in the present day as those that appear in the works of Jane Austen. Few sources better illustrate the opportunities dance offered for courtship, class tensions, and misbehavior than her novels. As previously mentioned, Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*

² “Facsimile of John Playford’s 1651 *The English Dancing Master*,” Greg Lindahl, *SCA Renaissance Dance Homepage*, <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/playford_1651/>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

³ Frances Burney, *Camilla, Or, A Picture of Youth* (London: T. Payne, 1796), 141.

provides a clever dialogue that characterizes the ballroom as a reversal of the outside world, a unique space where women are the active parties and decision-makers and gentlemen are expected to cater to them. In the context of the novel, the exchange serves to assure Henry Tilney of Catherine Morland's fidelity, but it contains much information for modern readers. Henry's tongue-in-cheek descriptions notwithstanding, dances and other public assemblies occasionally permitted the female to take the initiative in a relationship. A striking example of this appeared in the *Virginia Gazette* in 1736:

Advertisement. Whereas a gentlemen, who, towards the latter end of the summer, usually wore a blue camlet coat lin'd with red, and trim'd with silver, a silver-lac'd hat, and a tupee wig, has been often observ'd by Miss Amoret, to look very languishingly at her the said Amoret, and particularly one night during the last session of assembly, at the theatre...; the said Miss Amoret desires the gentleman to take the first handsome opportunity that offers, to explain himself on that subject.

N.B. She believes he has very pretty teeth.⁴

Dances headed a relatively short list of activities wherein men and women interacted in a social environment. Miss Amoret seems to have been fortunate enough to attend regular assemblies in town, but those who lived in rural areas eagerly anticipated balls that would reunite them with friends, family, and prospective marriage partners from the surrounding area.⁵ And female initiative was no less prominent in the country than in town. In 1772, a minister named David McClure officiated a wedding along the Youghiogheny River, in what became western Pennsylvania but was then considered the backcountry of Virginia and a wilderness. At the celebrations, McClure noted, the guests

⁴ *Virginia Gazette*, Williamsburg, 29 Oct 1736 in Corry, *The Performing Arts*

⁵ "Assembly" is a term often used to describe a ball, concert, or similar gathering for entertainment. Urban areas in particular featured subscription assemblies where, for a fee, interested parties could become members of a group which would meet on a regular basis—usually weekly or bi-weekly—to dance and/or enjoy live music or theatre. Often, the male head of household would purchase a subscription which would then be extended to all female dependents of his household. Strangers and visitors could also be admitted for an evening if properly introduced and paid for by an existing member.

hailed primarily from Virginia and exhibited the fervor for dancing commonly attributed to inhabitants of that colony. Although they danced in a rustic log house, they clearly had been trained in the art, as the minister—who disapproved of their noisiness—was to learn. "While I sat wondering..." he recorded, "The Lady of a Mr. Stevenson, sent her husband to me, with her compliments requesting me to dance a minuet with her. My declining the honor, on the principle that I was unacquainted with it, was scarcely accepted. He still politely urged, until I totally refused."⁶

While Mrs. Stevenson made her husband her messenger, it seems beyond doubt that this conversation took place at her own instigation. Not only was she bold enough to attempt to lay claim to a partner rather than waiting to be asked, but she also requested a minuet—the most socially significant and the most *public* of dances in the sense that she and her partner would be observed closely by everyone else in the room. It speaks not only to Mrs. Stevenson's perception of her own social class, but her perception of McClure's, that she sought him out as soon as the wedding ceremony was over and the dancing resumed; the first couples to perform the minuet at this time traditionally would be the most prestigious individuals in the room, in this case probably the bride and groom due to the nature of the event. However, as a stranger of distinction, McClure might well occupy the second place, and Mrs. Stevenson was putting herself forward as the second most significant female in attendance.

Unfamiliar though he is with both the minuet and his larger surroundings, McClure, curiously enough, seems no more surprised to be applied to by a woman than by anything else he experiences in the course of the evening. Indeed, though he spends plenty of time

⁶ David McClure, *Diary of David McClure, doctor of divinity, 1748-1820* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1899), 105-106.

denouncing the general frivolity of the company, he makes no remarks to indicate that Mrs. Stevenson's action was at all out of place. Rather, he seems to save his most respectful language for this "Lady" and her "polite" husband, even referring to "the honor" of dancing with her. It may be that in a dance whose parameters were strictly dictated, it would not be out of place for a woman confident of her rank to approach a male unsure of his, especially if accomplished through an intermediary. She was not over-stepping her bounds so much as enforcing the proper order of things. Alternatively, it may be that the rules that governed assemblies in urban areas were not observed so precisely in rural ones or, as was also the case here, at special celebrations. It is also possible that women were able to claim more agency in the ballroom than the accepted historical narrative indicates. Early nineteenth-century author Maria Edgeworth hints that even in such vaunted locations as Bath, women occasionally had recourse to initiating ballroom partnerships. In her novel *Patronage*, she writes,

"Young ladies must now go a great deal farther," said Mr. Percy, "before the discourteous knights will deign to take any notice of them."

"Ay, indeed, it is shameful!" said Lady Jane sighing. "I declare it is shameful!" repeated she, indignantly. "Do you know, that last winter at Bath the ladies were forced to ask the gentlemen to dance?"

"Forced?" said Mr. Percy.

"Yes, forced!" said Lady Jane, "or else they must have sat still all night like so many simpletons."

"Sad alternative!" said Mr. Percy; "and what is worse, I understand that partners for life are scarcely to be had on easier terms..."⁷

While it is clear that such an outcome is not the preferred mode of dancing, Edgeworth's fictional scenario strongly suggests real-life precedents for such female boldness.

Women would do what was necessary to ensure that their object was met.

In many communities, dance was a centerpiece of social interaction. Even in a time

⁷ Maria Edgeworth, *Patronage*, Vol. 1 (London: R. Hunter, 1815), 380-381.

of comparatively slow travel speeds, eager dancers would not allow distance to be a hindrance to them if they could help it. In March of 1788, John Quincy Adams confided to his diary some astonishment at the behavior of his friends: "The lads who dined at Davenport's warm'd themselves so well with Madeira, that at about seven o'clock this evening, they all set out upon an expedition to Cape-Ann, to attend a ball there this night. Twenty seven miles in such weather and such roads after seven o'clock at night, to attend a ball, would look extravagant in a common person; but it is quite characteristic of Amory."⁸

It might have been supposed that gentlemen were freer to travel than ladies, and while it is certainly the case that there were fewer considerations of propriety to deter men from travel, determined women also found ways to get where they wished to go. In 1794, a man aboard a public stage from Philadelphia to New York seemed unphased by the entrance of two young ladies into the coach, apparently unaccompanied by servants: "Took into our vehicle two very smart young women, who were going to a country dance, about ten miles off," wrote visiting Englishman Henry Wansey. "They were charming company, very facetious, innocent, and modest withal, and we were very loath to part with them."⁹ This instance supports the assertion of historian Cathleene B. Hellier, whose research into the adolescence of gentry girls in the late eighteenth-century has overturned some of popular culture's favorite myths about "proper" female behavior: "In contrast to the close supervision of young adolescents," says Hellier, "older teenagers were permitted to go about unaccompanied by adults. They could attend the neighbors in

⁸ John Quincy Adams, March 19, 1788, *Diary of John Quincy Adams, Founding Families: Digital Editions of the Papers of the Winthrops and the Adamses*, ed. C. James Taylor, (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2016), <<http://www.masshist.org/apde2/>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

pairs or groups, but occasionally they went alone, or perhaps accompanied only by a servant.”¹⁰ If Wansey did not regard this incident as peculiar—and there is no indication that he did—there is reason to suspect that norms in England may have been comparable to those in the United States.

It seems that difficulty of travel did not present the obstacle that modern culture often assumes it did, but it is also true that a dance might be an important social occasion, particularly for families who were more geographically removed from town centers. The prospect of amusement, of seeing friends and neighbors, not to mention the potential for finding future marriage partners, made it worth expending the extra effort to attend. While Wansey's and Adams's experiences both occurred in the more densely-populated northeast, the settlement of many southern states was dispersed over wider areas of farmland, driven by differences in terrain and staple crops. In this environment, scattered plantation homes might serve the gentry as waypoints on a journey to town, or as sites for celebration in preference to town. Around the Christmas season, Phillip Vickers Fithian, tutor to the Carter boys at Virginia's Nomini Hall, reported that the entire family gathered round to observe the strict dance lessons that dance master Mr. Christian provided for their children and those of neighboring planters. Other parents likewise attended, and Mr. Christian periodically invited the adults to join in the dances. Between two long sessions of practice, they repaired to the dining room to share a meal. Evening balls and games characterized the rest of the holiday season: “Nothing is now to be heard of in

⁹ Henry Wansey, *The Journal of an Excursion to the United States of North America in the Summer of 1794* (Salisbury: J. Easton, 1796), p. 192.

¹⁰ Cathleene B. Hellier, “The Adolescence of Gentry Girls in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” *Colonial Williamsburg Foundation*, 2009, <http://research.history.org/Historical_Research/Research_Themes/ThemeFamily/GentryGirls.cfm>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

conversation, but the *Balls*, the *Fox-hunts*, the fine *entertainments*, and the good *fellowship*, which are to be exhibited at the approaching *Christmas*.” Even in the privacy of country homes, dance sparked a whirl of social activity, with multiple generations and distant neighbors joining together.¹¹

In America, dance gained importance in the mid-eighteenth-century as consumerism led at once to class differentiation and to the imitation of social betters on the part of the rising merchant class. Dance masters’ advertisements increasingly offered evening lessons for adults whose professions prevented them from attending during the day, and some inserted revealing asides, such as “the utmost secrecy shall be kept till they are capable of exhibiting in high taste.”¹² The art of dance became another arena in which to display good breeding, particularly in the minuet, an invention of the French court. Fithian expressed his astonishment at Mr. Christian’s perfectionism when the dance master reprimanded several of his students for faulty performances, but in a society where bungling a minuet might have negative repercussions on one’s social standing and marriageability, such severity must have seemed justified.

Contrasting with the formal, showy minuet—a single-couple dance which began with the highest ranking couple and progressed downwards through the social stations—English country dances did not conform to the pre-existing social hierarchy; they were, as Keller has put it, “democratic.” Balls traditionally commenced with a minuet and then introduced various other more lively formats, including country dance. Fithian records the order in his diary: “first Minuets one Round; second Giggs (sic); third Reels; And

¹¹ John Rogers Williams, “Journal of Philip Fithian, Kept at Nomini Hall, Virginia, 1773-1774,” *The American Historical Review*, 5, No. 2 (Dec. 1899), 296-297.

¹² Kate Van Winkle Keller and Charles Cyril Hendrickson, *George Washington: A Biography in Social Dance* (Sandy Hook, CT: The Hendrickson Group, 1998), 18-21.

last of All Country-Dances.”¹³ A country dance usually takes the form of two long lines, one of each sex. This is the “set.” Partners face one another and number off as first or second couples from the head of the set, near the music, to the foot. They “take hands four from the top,” meaning that each first couple joins hands in a circle with the second couple below it. These subsets—or “minor sets”—of four people will be the first to dance together, but as the dance progresses, the first couples will move down the set; the second couples up it, dancing with new faces each time. When they reach the end, a couple will wait out one repetition and then rejoin as the opposite number, the interim providing an excellent opportunity for conversation, flirtation, and the like. In many dances, the steps involve the neighbors or corners more than the partners, assuring that each participant has an opportunity to interact with every other member of the set. Those not inclined to “foot it”—that is, to dance—might take their leisure at card tables or with refreshments. Fithian recorded this behavior with refreshing candor: “all did not join in the Dance for there were parties in Rooms made up, some at Cards; some drinking for pleasure; some toasting the Sons of america; some singing ‘Liberty Songs’ as they call’d them, in which six, eight, ten or more would put their Heads near together and roar, and for the most part as unharmonious as an affronted-----.” We may supply the final word ourselves!¹⁴

The modern manner of dancing may differ slightly from its historical counterparts. Evidence suggests that, in a category of three-couple dances called “triple minors,” a neutral couple stood below each group of three active couples in the set. Neutrals, behaving as inactives in a fictive four-couple dance, would be free every fourth time

¹³ Williams, “Journal of Philip Fithian,” 296-301.

¹⁴ Williams, “Journal of Philip Fithian,” 301.

through the dance to spend an entire repetition of the figures engaged in conversation.¹⁵

The early nineteenth-century, the period Jane Austen wrote about so eloquently, saw a preponderance of such dances in its ballrooms, ideal for protagonists to get acquainted and for antagonists to grow fatiguing! Similarly, it seems that in some cases, the couple at the very top of the set would work its way down, and only after it had passed by were other couples permitted to initiate the dance independently. While this allowed those less familiar with the figures to observe them before having to perform them, it also contributed to the dance's length—to ensure that everybody had a reasonable length of time to dance, it was expected that the couple who had begun at the top position would arrive at the top *again* before the musicians ceased playing. Austen observes, again through Catherine Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, that a single dance at a large venue—such as the Assembly Rooms in Bath, or the renowned Almack's in London—might sometimes occupy half an hour.¹⁶ (See Fig. 1)

Participation at these affairs symbolized not only gentility, but affability as well, and it was upon both qualities that attendees would judge each other. Hence, in Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, the townspeople of Meryton take offense when wealthy visitor Mr. Darcy refuses to dance with anyone but Caroline Bingley and Louisa Hurst, who are members of his own party and even more insufferable snobs than Darcy. Because of his exclusivity, “His character was decided. He was the proudest, most disagreeable man in the world, and everybody hoped he would never come there again.”¹⁷ Philip Fithian encountered comparable sentiments at a Virginia ball in 1774. When several of the company urged him to dance, he politely declined, having been raised in a household that

¹⁵ Keller and Hendrickson, 32.

¹⁶ Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, in *Complete Novels*, 847.

frowned upon such entertainments; although he greatly admired the performance, he had never learned. One man continued to provoke him on the subject, and Fithian turned the tables, retorting that his antagonist “was ill qualified to direct my Behavior who made so indifferent a Figure himself.” However much he may have objected to being construed as unsociable by virtue of his reluctance to dance, he nonetheless assessed his companions using the same criteria. With some relief, Fithian later remarked that he felt “exceeding happy that I could break away with Reputation” after the events of the evening--that is to say, he felt fortunate to have retained the esteem of the company.¹⁸

Many eighteenth-century dances, particularly subscription assemblies, operated under a given and fairly consistent set of rules. Broad­sides of the Providence Dancing Assembly, the Baltimore Amicable Society, the Richmond Assembly, and the Dancing Assembly of Savannah, all published between 1790 and 1792, testify to the universality of these rules all along the Atlantic seaboard. When the ball began, partners were assigned by lots with a position in the set inscribed on a piece of paper. Those who lost their numbers suffered demotion to the bottom of the set. Usurping another couple’s spot or partner was considered an anathema and just cause for prohibition from further dancing: “If any Lady or Gentleman should refuse to dance with the one they draw, the Managers shall not permit them to dance during the Evening,” cautioned the Providence Assembly.¹⁹ At certain assemblies, partners might be expected to dance multiple dances together, or even spend the whole evening in one another’s company. Some sources indicate that, though many of these same rules existed in the Revolutionary period, they

¹⁷ Austen, *Pride & Prejudice*, in *Complete Novels*, 183.

¹⁸ Williams, 296-302.

¹⁹ “Amicable Society,” (Baltimore, 1791), *Early American Imprints*, (First Series, no. 46111). <<http://infoweb.newsbank.com.proxy.wm.edu>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

were not always enforced. Differences always existed between practice at established assemblies and practice at privately-sponsored functions, but there was also variation from assembly to assembly as well as change over time. The diary of German traveler Johann David Schoepf seems to indicate that, in 1783, the practice of drawing lots may have been a new one in Virginia, inaugurated along with the new country to symbolize the meritocracy that the United States sought to create. "New of the definitive treaty just arrived in America was the occasion at Richmond [Virginia] of illuminations, fire-works, banquetings, and finally, a ball," he reported,

"at which the honor of the first dance fell by lot to the very honorable daughter of a very honorable shoemaker. That the distinction should have been awarded by lot was the cause of great displeasure to the ladies of the Governor's family...but the unanimous opinion was that the lot should be valid as against any claims of rank, and that no exception to the generally allowed equality should be granted even the fair sex..."²⁰

Cynthia Kierner, in "Genteel Balls and Republican Parades," interprets this account as an early instance in which a public assembly included a significant cross-section of society. However, as previously mentioned, both the advertisements of dancing masters and anecdotal evidence from the pre-Revolutionary period support the idea that American ballrooms were already witnessing more economic diversity.²¹ Families in trade were gradually gaining prominence and means and, with the aid of the mid-century "Consumer Revolution," were able to partake in goods and activities that the upper echelons had hoped to reserve to themselves. Though the dancing assembly in Philadelphia was noted for its exclusivity, even it was coming under assault from "middling sorts" on the make. It is also unclear from Schoepf's language whether the "first dance" indicates a country

²⁰ Johann David Schoepf, *Travels in the Confederation*, trans. Alfred James Morrison, (Philadelphia: W.J. Campbell, 1911), 63-64.

²¹ Kierner, 185.

dance or a minuet; this is a matter of tremendous importance for interpreting the reaction of the governor's family. While it was common for the most notable lady, an out-of-town visitor, or a distinguished guest of honor to occupy the top position in a longways set—and this might well have been the governor's wife or daughter—it was not generally a country dance that opened a ball. Though minuets were in decline, they were still, in 1783, deeply-rooted in tradition. It seems unlikely that a shoemaker's daughter would be called upon to step a minuet in this fashion, but without more detailed evidence, it is impossible to totally discount.

There may be another instance of this happening, when General George Washington was rumored to have opened a ball with the daughter of a local merchant in Newport, Rhode Island in 1781. However, Charles Hendrickson and Kate Van Winkle Keller doubt the accuracy of this story for similar reasons, because the dance supposedly performed—"The Successful Campaign"—was not a minuet. The tale seems to have passed down through the family of the woman, Miss Champlin, who was Washington's partner. While some version of the anecdote may really have occurred, Hendrickson and Keller conclude that it must have transpired after dinner, when the country dances began. They remark with curiosity that, "for some reason Washington allegedly chose not to honor a ranking French officer's wife if she were present, but rather one of the leading merchants of Newport, by selecting as a partner, not his wife but his daughter." This decision, like the random choice of a shoemaker's daughter, would have risked causing offense among the prominent persons who expected, due to their position, to be extended this honor. Historians can only speculate on why Washington might have led out Miss Champlin first, but there are certainly contemporary witnesses to his habit of treating all

attendees at a ball with equal respect: "[Washington] answered our politeness in a perfect manner," recorded a French lieutenant at around the time of the Newport ball: "Our generals gave feasts and balls, where he danced with everybody indiscriminately."²²

To upend the long-standing practice of minuets danced in order of descending social standing would cause quite a stir indeed, one worthy of the commentary Johann Schoepf ascribes to the event he saw in Richmond. On the other hand, to determine places in a country dance by lot, while annoying to anyone who aspired to the first position, was hardly a radical departure from the past. The most upsetting outcome for the average dancer was probably suffering through an evening opposite an incompetent or obnoxious partner. What may have been novel in Virginia in 1783 was ordinary enough elsewhere. The rule that ladies would draw their places in the set had featured at the Philadelphia Assembly, at least periodically, since its beginnings in 1748-49. In that year, two aspects of the provision are pertinent to this discussion. Not only did the assembly regulations proscribe that "every Set of Ladies [is] to draw for their Places," but also that "only the first Ticket of each Set is to be reserved by the Directors to present to a Stranger if any, or any other Lady who is thereby entitled to lead up that set for the night."²³ Similar rules were also in force in 1781, when Allied soldier the Marquis de Chastellux observed that among the ladies at the Philadelphia Assembly "each of them [had] her partner, as is the custom in America," indicating a well-established and wide-ranging practice rather than a new innovation. He went on to describe the function of dance in words eerily similar to those later used by Henry Tilney in Austen's *Northanger Abbey*:

Dancing is said to be at once the emblem of gaiety and of love; here it seems to be the emblem of legislation, and of marriage; of legislation,

²² Keller and Hendrickson, 66-67.

²³ Thomas Willing Balch, *The Philadelphia Assemblies*, (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane, and Scott, 1916), 41.

inasmuch as places are marked out, the country dances named, and every proceeding provided for, calculated, and submitted to regulation; of marriage, as it furnishes each lady with a partner, with whom she dances the whole evening without being allowed to take another.²⁴

Readers of either Chastellux's or Schoepf's remarks should keep in mind that neither gentleman was steeped in the history and culture of English country dance in the way that Englishmen or many Americans would have been. Schoepf, for instance, had no reason to assume that what he seems to have experienced in Richmond—the inaugural application of drawing partners by lot—was not representative of dancing assemblies across America. Given the evidence, the most reasonable interpretation of the 1783 occurrence, perhaps, is that the drawing of lots was expected, but that the ball's directors failed to reserve the first position in the set for any person of prominence, thus not acting out the second portion of the rule as specified in Philadelphia in 1748/9. Perhaps, too, in the larger history of American dance, the supposed affront to the governor's family was not very significant. The governor, after all, was Benjamin Harrison, former member of the Continental Congress and signer of the Declaration of Independence—not some unknown aristocrat installed by the king. The only surviving newspaper accounts of the ball in question make no mention of the lottery or the shoemaker's daughter, despite Schoepf's assertion that her selection provided much fodder for gossip; "The incident was the subject of every conversation the next day," he relates.²⁵

It may be true that the lottery system was not as regular a feature in English ballrooms as it was in American ones; it is certainly true that European ballrooms were more driven by spectacle and hierarchy than by democratic impulses. Nevertheless, the lottery was far from unknown in Britain, further undermining any argument that the practice was tied

²⁴ Balch, 85

to a burgeoning spirit of egalitarianism in the new United States. More likely, it is simply another indicator of the shared language of gentility between the mother country and her colonies. Renowned English dancing master Thomas Wilson, in his various treatises on dancing appearing in the 1810s, repeated some variation of the lottery rule, giving advice on the etiquette "of such public and private Balls, where the persons composing the company take their places in the Dance according to their Number. At Court," he added, to make the distinction more obvious, "and some other select Balls and Assemblies, places are taken according to precedence. A very full Treatise on the Etiquette of these Assemblies will be given in a future publication."²⁶ This need for this addendum suggests that his intended audience were more familiar with being partnered by lot than by social status, and thus routinely were attending regional, less elite assemblies. Jane Austen, some twenty years earlier than Wilson, also commented on the practice. "We shall all go together to [the ball at] Ashe," Austen wrote to her sister on January 15, 1796. "I understand that we are to draw for partners."²⁷ In one of her short "Moral Tales," published in 1825, Maria Edgeworth recounted an assembly where, faced with several women's very equal claims to higher positions in a longways set, the company resorted to drawing lots: "The contest was now, which should stand the lowest, instead of which should stand the highest, in the dance: and when the proofs of seniority could not be settled, the fair ones drew lots for their places, and submitted that to chance which could

²⁵ Schoepf, 64.

²⁶ Thomas Wilson, *The complete system of English country dancing, containing all the figures ever used in English country dancing, with a variety of new figures, and new reels*, (London: Sherwood, Neeley and Jones, 1815), *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals*, The Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/musdi.168>>, accessed 19 June, 2016, 259-269.

²⁷ Jane Austen, letter to Cassandra January 15, 1796, in Deirdre Le Faye, ed., *Jane Austen's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4.

not be determined by prudence."²⁸ This may hint that even within a single evening, dancers might order and re-order their positions using various sorting systems.

The random assignment of partners was far from universal, but it did serve valuable purposes where it was present. Of the lottery practice, dance historian Allison Thompson says, "These customs worked to prevent the gentlemen from picking only the prettiest girls to dance with, and it also prevented the ladies from scrambling to be first in line (and thus the first to call a dance)."²⁹ It was a measure designed not so much to encourage new republican ideals but to ensure order and, like a good master of ceremonies, allow everybody who wished to dance an opportunity to do so. That so many American assemblies are known to have adopted the rule by the 1790s dovetails conveniently with the principles the young nation was meant to embody; although this is partly coincidental, it is possible that the lottery was embraced with greater fervor as a symbol of the revolutionary spirit.

In facilitating dance as a political activity, the free choice of partners was perhaps more effective. That way, dancers might better forge social and political alliances, or rebuff a potential partner for political reasons. However, the form of English country dance allowed interaction between all members of the set, not merely with one's partner, as couples moved up and down the line of dance. It also involved simple, repetitive steps so as not to preclude conversation. Taken together, these characteristics mean that no matter how partnerships were formed, there was a degree of freedom that promoted dialogue. This ease of communication, so particular to English country dance, became

²⁸ Maria Edgeworth, *Works of Maria Edgeworth*, Vol. IX, (Boston: Samuel H. Parker, 1825), p. 86.

²⁹ Allison Thompson, "The Rules of the Assembly: Dancing at Bath and Other Spas in the Eighteenth Century," online *Persuasions On-Line*, 31, No. 1 (Winter 2010), *Jane Austen Society of North America*. <<http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol31no1/thompson.html>>

one of several key features that allowed it to assume political purpose.

Another key aspect of English country dance was its penchant for adapting popular music to the ballroom and for creating new dances to capitalize on current events. Dance was malleable, in that the figures that survive in publications like Playford need not have been wedded to the tunes printed with them. Tunes were re-used for multiple sets of figures, and in social situations, the company might decide on their own figures and then request that the musicians play a particular tune whose measures would fit them. These characteristics allowed for greater creativity in the way that dance steps and tunes might be used to make a political point. To reduce confusion, however, this study will generally refer to dance tunes and dance figures as though they were more firmly tied together than was actually the case.

Dance tunes fell into a number of different categories. Some, written or choreographed by particular dance masters, took on the titles of their creators; many other dance tunes borrowed place names or otherwise alluded to locations, be they grand houses or battlefields; some reflected on the romantic entanglements that so often proceeded from dance; the names of hobbies and professions also made their appearance, though sometimes in veiled form. "The Maid Peeped Out the Window," a common dance in the Playford *Dancing Master*, had the alternate title of "The Friar and the Nun," from the ribald anti-Catholic folksong that served as the dance's tune. Abundant in this last group of profession-themed dances were references to the army or navy and their various duties and exploits; for instance, "The Dressed Ship," "Soldier's Joy," "The Soldier and the Sailor," and numerous others. Often, dances were composed specifically to commemorate a triumphant occasion, whether a royal birth, a diplomatic visit, or a

battle. As political crises arose and opposing armies took to the field, dances of this variety prevailed and became intrinsic to both sides of the conflict. This pattern was nothing new, but the tradition behind it in no way diminishes its importance as a means of achieving or promoting unity in each successive instance. Indeed, it may strengthen the psychological connection dancers felt between their actions in the ballroom and the actions of troops on a battlefield, for the roots of dance-as-protest ran deep in England's proud heritage.

Philip Vickers Fithian, in what is perhaps his most oft-quoted statement, once remarked of Virginians that "they will dance or die."³⁰ They were known for throwing large parties that only drew to a close as dawn neared. The 1769 ball held for the queen's birthday at the Governor's Palace is a perfect illustration, numbering no fewer than two-hundred forty attendees: "Yesterday," wrote Robert Fairfax, "we kept the Queens Birth day at the Palace, there was about Sixty Couple of Dancers, and about as many lookers on, at twelve an excellent supper, broke up about five this morning, every body pleas'd with my Lords Polite behaviour, his Lordship & several of us dine to day with the Attorney-General, you se we live merrily."³¹ Beyond its sheer entertainment value, however, dancing served both to divide and unite society: divide, because it revealed the gentility and education of its participants through their manners, deportment, and clothing; unite, because the ballroom, as much as the battlefield, served as a venue to boldly display political affiliations, and did so with little regard to gender and, in some instances, rank.

Though as a political statement, "to dance or die" is melodramatic, dance was

³⁰ Williams, p. 315.

³¹ Robert Fairfax to UNK, May 20 1769, *Fairfax Family Manuscripts*, private collection.

sometimes infused with politics to a degree that engaging in it became a political act. This was especially true in England during the 1650s and America during the 1760s and 70s, but the threads of meaning that become so pronounced in times of intense conflict were always present, even in peace. In the ballroom, like minds exchanged ideas and rallied around common causes while foes engaged in verbal sparring or passive resistance. An entertainment that crossed class and gender lines, dance had a voice in the political dialogue that could be heard and understood by the whole culture.

Balls often reflect, as much as they create, a shared experience. Throughout history, dance has lent its celebratory character to all sorts of events and entertainments, and in eighteenth-century America these included spinning matches, meetings of the Sons and Daughters of Liberty, peace treaties, alliances, repeals of offensive taxes, and royal birthdays.³² These invoked the common ground of participation in the homespun movement, membership in special societies, or simply of being or not being British subjects. Numerous small events held in private homes favored attendees who shared ties of kinship or friendship. Dance already possessed political overtones by virtue of the experiences it was used to observe, and it was only a small step to transform it from pastime to political activism. In some cases, it served as a sort of corollary to the various non-importation and non-consumption agreements that characterized the decade prior to revolution. Like such agreements, dance could function as a cross-class and cross-gender demonstration of solidarity and lend itself to public policing of one's neighbors. More clearly, perhaps, it allowed for political discussion and debate among many parties within

³² "Spinning matches" were gatherings of women in the community for the purpose of conspicuous public participation in the Homespun Movement. The women would compete to see who could spin the most skeins of yarn in a given length of time while their neighbors looked on, not unlike a sporting event. The contest would sometimes be followed by a dance in the evening.

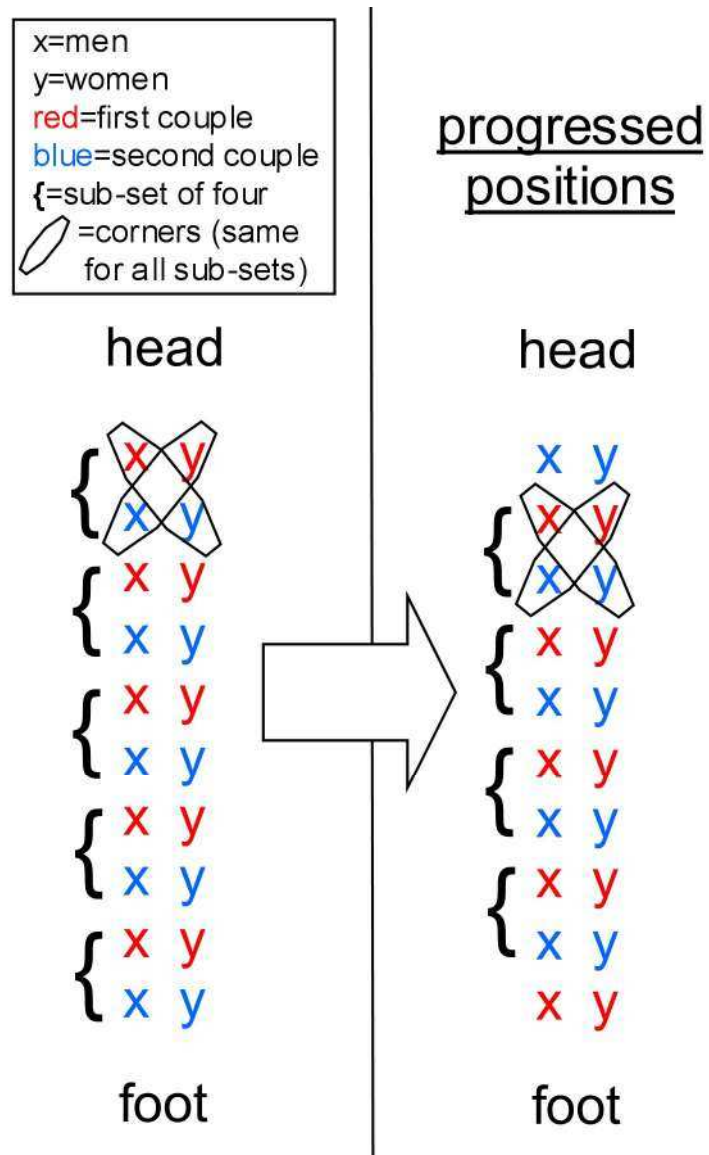
a controlled environment or pressured nonconformists by denying them social interaction. Even when intended merely to express relief or joy, dance reinforced alliances, consolidated power, and provided a fresh starting point for people with common goals. By the same token, individual or group action which may or may not have been directly motivated by politics, nevertheless assumed political significance.

Americans would, in diverse ways, follow both the approach of non-participation in dance as well as the flagrant politicization of the music and steps themselves. If, as historians such as John Shy have suggested, dueling armies and parties in wartime “contend less with each other than for the support and the control of the civilian population,” dancers-along with those who voiced opposing political positions at similar public events such as theatre and parades-performed important work for the war by debating, cajoling, and upbraiding their partners in the name of political ideology.³³

On the succeeding page is a diagram (Figure 1.) that offers a helpful visualization of a longways set and its progression.

³³ John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor, MI: 1990), 219.

Fig. 1:



“A Parcell of Rogues in the Nation”

Do you quarrel in England every time you change partners in a country dance?

~Maria Edgeworth, *Leonora*, 1806 ³⁴

Taken in the context of her novel, Maria Edgeworth's question is rhetorical, meant to suggest precisely the opposite—that every change of partner at a ball does not incite an argument. However, there is no doubt that arguments, both spoken and unspoken, could and did transpire at dancing assemblies both in England and abroad. As a venue where diverse sorts of people might come together, a ballroom could be fertile ground for conflict based on social interests, romantic interests, or, crucially, political interests.

Today's society has few occasions to associate dance directly with political activism. More often, it tends to look to music, film, or theatre as the artistic mediums through which political agendas can be distributed to the general population. None of these formats is inherently political, but all, because of their creative qualities and their reach, can be turned into powerful political weapons. Popular dance, it seems, carries implications for social more than for political movements. Styles of dance varied wildly in the twentieth century, from the “Cakewalk,” to the “Charleston,” to the swing era of the Second World War, to the “Jitterbug,” the “Stroll,” the “Hustle,” all the way through to the “Macarena.” Changes were comparatively quick and hence closely associated with a single decade or even a few years. Many styles involved a single couple rather than a group, or encouraged individual creativity rather than relying on interactive choreography. The focus of the dance turned inward, and contact with others on the dance floor, save for with one's partner, was minimized. The more private nature of

³⁴ Maria Edgeworth, *Leonora* (London: Baldwin & Craddock, 1833), 207.

dance and the rapidity of its permutations meant that detractors could easily equate each new style with an increasingly distinctive youth culture. Dance might be related to political matters, but only indirectly, through the culture of which it was but a small part. Now, in the twenty-first century, the record-smashing Broadway production *Hamilton* has fused hip-hop music and dancing to political history, re-connecting dance and politics and bringing it to the attention of the masses in a manner never before seen. Each component of the choreography has a meaning directly inspired by the political events being represented on stage, from the Battle of Yorktown to the election of 1800.³⁵

Dance's link to social change is also of long standing; only witness the introduction of the "scandalous" waltz in the 1810s. However, the connections between dance and class, dance and race, or dance and moral standards should not obscure the equally-important political function of the ballroom in times past. Colonial Americans and their descendents in the new United States employed dance both subtly and overtly to express their views. Perhaps more surprisingly, though, they were by no means the first to harness this specific type of dance for the purposes of protest and nationalism.

Dance of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries need not be imbued with political meaning in and of itself in order to have been used in a political manner; the ballroom may be simply a ballroom that, due to its capacity, sometimes supplied the space for political meetings. Even so, the dominant style of the time, English country dancing, seems ideally-suited for political expression. English country dancing evoked a simplicity and stability that reflected well on England. Compared to the court dances of France, such as the seventeenth-century courante and minuet, or the complex steps of

³⁵, Nick Shakra, *Gotta Dance! Hamilton Broadway Ensemble Dancers*, The Broadway Channel, 2016, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XowAQMoBueA>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

Elizabethan galliards and voltes, English country dances were accessible and egalitarian. Couples progressed either up or down the long lines of the set, interacting with every other couple as they went. Though it was preferable that the patterns (called figures) within the dance be executed using ballet-like steps, they might also be done at a walk, allowing those without the benefit of formal dance training to participate. The “fashionable” patterns of steps may have changed more rapidly, but this amounted to stylizing; the dances themselves continued to be popular for longer periods. In fact, the forms and patterns of English country dancing remained sufficiently constant that a dancer of 1776 would understand the figures of a dance from a century earlier quite readily.

These characteristics created unusual potential for social mingling across class boundaries. This became especially true in the eighteenth century, with a number of commentators in England and America remarking on the phenomenon. In St. Albans, England, in 1740, actor Charles Macklin attended a ball flanked by two expensively-dressed women. The ladies were generally admired until one became embroiled in a dispute over precedence in the dance, at which point “her *language* and *temper* soon discovered her profession, and she, with her companion, were instantly handed out of the room and the gentlemen desired to follow.” The “ladies,” Macklin recounted amusedly, were in fact prostitutes, and it was not their attire or their dancing capability that gave them away, but their mouths.³⁶ The definition of a “gentleman” was also in doubt: “A gentleman,” wrote Britain’s Lord Chesterfield of the social milieu at Bath, “is every man, who with a tolerable suit of clothes, a sword by his side, and a watch and a snuff box in

his pockets, asserts himself to be a gentleman, swears with energy he will be treated as such and that he will cut the throat of any man who presumes to say the contrary.”³⁷ As T.H. Breen posited in *The Marketplace of Revolution*, the abundance of material goods available to a wide range of classes rendered social barriers porous in the eighteenth-century.³⁸ Those who could look and dance the part could become the Eliza Dolittles of their day, sharing space and, more importantly, ideas with the wealthy and powerful.

English country dance survives in the twenty-first century as a specialized form, practiced among history enthusiasts and advocates of folk culture. In its heyday, however, its popularity extended from royal courts to rural barns. Dance manuals outlining figures and their accompanying tunes enjoyed long runs of publication and reached an increasingly broad swath of the population. None has left more lasting a legacy than John Playford’s *English Dancing Master*, which first appeared in 1651 and contained 105 dances. The manual chronicled as well as defined the early history of a dance form that dominated ballrooms until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Country dances originated in or around the mid sixteenth-century, when they featured in Elizabeth I’s court, but few if any instructions remain that pre-date Playford’s efforts, which made both steps and music accessible to the wider public.³⁹ His manual, now often known simply as “Playford,” was issued in seventeen revised editions and even more reprintings over nearly eighty years, until 1728. Playford’s success, as well as the restoration of the monarchy, touched off a flurry of other dance publications and new

³⁶ William Cooke, *Memoirs of Charles Macklin, Comedian*. 2nd ed. London: Asperne, 1806. Quoted in Thompson, “The Rules of the Assembly.”

³⁷ Lord Chesterfield, quoted in *ibid*.

³⁸ T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 153-155.

³⁹ Kate Van Winkle Keller and Genevieve Shimer, *The Playford Ball* (Northampton, MA: The Country Dance and Song Society, 1994), viii.

compositions, but rather than replace Playford's volume, they supplemented it; by its final edition, the *Dancing Master* had expanded to include more than 350 dances.⁴⁰

Though there was a significant amount of continuity among the editions—most dances featured in two-to-five editions, and some persisted for the entire run—a number of tunes and titles changed to reflect popular trends or current events.

The period of Playford's publication was an especially tumultuous one for England; it began just after the English Civil War and the introduction of the Puritan Commonwealth and lasted through the Stuart Restoration, the plague and the Great Fire of London, the Glorious Revolution, the Act of Union, and the First Jacobite Rising. Outside of England, English and Continental forces contended in a series of Anglo-Dutch Wars, the War of the Grand Alliance, and the War of the Spanish Succession. For the first nine years of the *Dancing Master's* publication, England's Puritan government looked upon dancing and revelry with some degree of suspicion. Viewing Playford through the lens of this mercurial and often dangerous environment provides insight into the political and religious significance of dance; additions, modifications, and telling omissions in the repertoire reflected developments within the state at large, particularly ongoing conflicts between Protestant and Catholic contenders for power.

The timing of the *Dancing Master*, to say nothing of its contents, immediately suggests political motives. John Playford, a publisher and bookseller by trade, had a reputation as a royalist during the English Civil War and, after the execution of Charles I in 1649, published a political tract in the late monarch's defense. As a result, the Puritan Commonwealth issued a warrant for his arrest, and he disappeared from the historical

⁴⁰ Keller and Shimer, ix.

record—either in hiding or in prison—for a year.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the government, determined to stamp out impiety and popery from England, prohibited or restricted activities it considered sinful: theatre, dancing, and celebrations of Christmas were among these embattled pastimes. While Oliver Cromwell’s daughter famously included English country dancing as part of her wedding celebration in 1657, this proves only that Cromwell’s suspicion of dance did not apply to his own family.

On the occasion of the controversial wedding, scholar William Dugdale notes that “mixt dancing” was “a thing hitherto counted profane,” suggesting that it was a curious and perhaps one-time departure from standard Puritan values.⁴² Dancing was, after all, banned on Sundays, days of fasting, and days of thanksgiving, as per a 1650 act of Parliament. In 1654, citing “scandalous, ignorant and insufficient Ministers and Schoolmasters” throughout the nation, the Puritan authorities named commissioners for each county and sent them forth to examine and charge local leaders for a variety of “scandals.” Any minister or teacher was punishable by law who “[did] incourage and countenance by word or practice any Whitson-Ales, Wakes, Morris-Dances, May-poles, Stage-plays, or such like Licentious practices, by which men are encouraged in a loose and prophane Conversation.”⁴³ While this act neither explicitly outlawed country dancing nor punished its practitioners, it left room for interpretation, and its larger message was clear: dancing and public celebrations threatened men’s souls and the stability of society, and those who promoted them must be either malicious or

⁴¹ Julie Anne Sadie, *Companion to Baroque Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 301.

⁴² Oliver Cromwell, in Charles Harding Firth, ed., *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell* (London, Methuen & Company, 1904), 146.

⁴³ “An Ordinance for ejecting Scandalous, Ignorant, and insufficient Ministers and Schoolmasters,” August 1654, *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (968-990), *British History Online*, <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=56576>>, accessed 19 June 2016.

incompetent. Thus, for Playford to issue the *Dancing Master* in 1651 was for a convict or fugitive to encourage a dangerous activity publicly. At a moment when traditional English dances might have been lost, the volume gathered and preserved them for the population to perform in the privacy of their own homes, where the eyes of the law could not reach. English country dancing, then, at least from the moment of its formalization in print, represented a reaction against the standards of the political body in power. It was a tool of solidarity and a form of rebellion, albeit of an innocuous kind.

Although he acknowledged that “these Times and the Nature of [the *Dancing Master*] do not agree,” Playford attempted to justify the manual’s appearance in his preface to the first edition. Nothing would have induced him to publish, he claimed, except that he had found at the printing press a copy of a dancing manual so riddled with errors that “if it had been published, would have been a disparagement to the quality and the Professors thereof, and a hinderance [sic] to the Learner: Therefore, for prevention of all which, having an Excellent Copy by me...I have ventured to put forth this ensuing Worke....” By alleging to have discovered and edited rather than authored the manual, he deflected the actual responsibility for it onto unknown parties. He further insisted that a concern for preserving the integrity of the country dance form motivated his actions rather than any anti-establishment sentiments. This literary conceit probably fooled no one, but in establishing plausible deniability, it offered a degree of protection from government disapproval.

Careful to present dance as an art form with practical functions rather than as mere frivolous amusement, Playford also provided a list of classical and illustrious persons who had encouraged dancing as an aid to graceful deportment and bodily strength. Even

this list, however, incorporated subversive statements: “[Dance] is a quality,” he wrote, “that has been formerly honoured in the Courts of Princes, when performed by the most Noble *Heroes* of the Times!”⁴⁴ This reference to past royalty, though non-specific, suggested a certain nostalgia for the days of the ousted Stuart dynasty. The emphasis on “*Heroes*” was his, and very telling. To associate heroism with dancing and princes with heroes in this manner implied that the elimination of both dance and royalty under Puritan rule might also have extinguished heroism. Whereas the royal court had been expressive, benevolent, and honorable, the Puritan Commonwealth, according to Playford, was autocratic and stifled the human spirit.

Despite the boldness of publishing a dance manual in Puritan England, Playford, or his contributors, largely avoided including dances that smacked of treason. Despite the prevalence of other profession-themed dances, only one dance title used the word “King,” “Royal,” “Prince,” or “Princess” for the duration of the interregnum, the period before the restoration of the Stuarts to the throne in 1660. This exception was “Prince Rupert’s March,” listed in the original 1651 manual. It subsequently disappeared from the second and third editions of 1652 and ’57, only to return in the fourth edition of 1670 and remain a constant feature through all further printings. Clearly a popular dance, given its longevity, the march referenced the military hero Prince Rupert, nephew of Charles I and noted royalist strategist of the English Civil War. The presence of pro-royalist material in the *Dancing Master* might have provoked the ire of Puritan leaders, and it is a tantalizing possibility that the manual was hastily revised and reissued because of political pressure. The one-year interim between the first and second editions of

⁴⁴ “Facsimile of John Playford’s 1651 *The English Dancing Master*,” Greg Lindahl, *SCA Renaissance Dance Homepage*, <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/playford_1651/>, accessed 19 June 2016.

Playford's first volume is the shortest gap in its publication history. The subtitle to the new edition read "The second Edition Enlarged and Corrected from many grosse(sic) Errors which were in the former Edition;" and while ten dances were added for the second edition, only two were removed, one of them "Prince Rupert's March."⁴⁵ One wonders, if Playford's first printing was full of "grosse" errors, just how appalling were the errors in the original dancing manual he "discovered" at the press!

Immediately after the Stuarts returned to power, dances with royal titles proliferated, and they continued to do so for the remainder of the manual's publication. In 1665, Playford reprinted his third edition, the first new printing since the Restoration; to this volume, he added an appendix of music only, with no steps provided. The appendix included "The King's Delight," "The Queen's Delight," "The King's Borce," "Duke of York's March" (the Duke of York being James Stuart, future King James II), "The Queen's Corant," "Princesse Orleans," and "Corant La Princes." Most of these seem to be tunes for court dances, not the sort that the citizenry would perform in their homes or even at informal public gatherings. Perhaps this accounts for the lack of figures. Kate Van Winkle Keller has suggested that the manuals of the Restoration period reveal a conscious attempt on Playford's part to appeal to the court and to a monarch—Charles II—remarkable not only for his extravagance but for his patronage of the arts. The introduction in the 1670s of dances beginning with the figure "honor the presence" is evidence of this, Keller proposes, because it implies that the dance was meant to be executed with the monarch or some royal representative in attendance. In publishing the above tunes, Playford both catered to the nobility and gave the public a small taste of life

⁴⁵ Probably, the other, "Rufty Tufty," was already dated in 1651 and, unlike "Prince Rupert," it never reappeared.

at court, encouraging them, as he could not have done ten years earlier, to identify with king and country through music.

The dances of the Restoration mark a transition from private houses to public spaces as Puritan prohibitions gave way and fun and frivolity became acceptable and visible once again. Keller points to the increasing proportion of dances done in longways sets as opposed to circles, squares, or sets of two or three couples. Similarly, the late seventeenth-century saw an increase in dances wherein all couples might participate at once, rather than the head couple working its way down and back up the set while the rest of the line stood waiting. “Between 1651 and the 1720s, the small set dances declined in favor and were replaced by longways duple or triple minor dances, suitable for performance in large public spaces by many dancers of varying experience and without previous rehearsal,” she writes.⁴⁶ When dance was restricted to domestic gatherings under Cromwell, it was a tool of personal resistance to Puritan ideology, subversive, but quiet. Smaller sets may have been a spatial necessity. With the re-opening of the public arena in 1660, dance could become a more effective instrument of social mixing and display, a device for proclaiming messages as well as reinforcing cultural solidarity. The Playford *Dancing Master* had not existed the last time English men and women were free to dance; but then, it took what was once a folk genre and formalized it in print, making it possible to perform the same version of a dance to the same tune anywhere in England or the colonies, whether someone lived in a palace or in a farmhouse. Paired with the flourishing of entertainment during the Restoration period, Playford’s work would form the foundation and common denominator of a widespread and politically-sensitive dance

culture.

Because English country dances often took their titles from current events, it is possible to trace, in some detail, the history of England from the popular dances found in Playford's manuals. For instance, the near-constant state of warfare is reflected in "Buff-Coat," a dance that debuted in 1670 and remained a standard until Playford ceased publication. A "buff-coat" was a leather garment about five millimeters thick, noted for its yellow color and characteristic of English soldiers throughout the seventeenth-century, but especially from the period of the Civil War.⁴⁷ "De'il Take the Wars," printed from 1695 onward (excepting the 1718 edition) took its name from a popular song that communicated a distinct distaste for the perpetual conflicts in which England was engaged:

How happy's she whose love is not for fighting,
nor in the Wars oblig'd to be,
But for to stay with her he takes delight in,
if mine did so then happy me;
But my love runs threw many dangers
all for Honour that empty name...
He here would fly to *Flanders* for to dye,
and thus for to leave me lye alone⁴⁸

It is unlikely that anyone dancing "De'il Take the Wars" would have been unfamiliar with at least the spirit of its lyrics, and the frequent reprinting of the dance may be indicative of war-weariness over several generations. One can imagine that a ball during wartime might have a severe gender disparity that would make dancing "De'il Take the

⁴⁶ Kate Van Winkle Keller, "Social Change as Reflected in *The Dancing Master*," *The Colonial Music Institute*, 2015, <<https://colonialmusic.org/colonial-music-resources/essays/social-change-as-reflected-in-the-dancing-master.html>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

⁴⁷ "Buff Coats and Baldricks," Royal Armouries, <<http://www.royalarmouries.org/learning/online-learning/littlecote-house-module/explore-littlecote-house-without-flash/great-hall-in-littlecote-house/buff-coats-and-baldricks>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

⁴⁸ "An Excellent New Scotch Song," (A.M., 1696), *English Broadside Ballad Archive*, University of California, Santa Barbara, <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/22094/image#>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

Wars” at once a humorous and a genuine response to a real situation: “Where have all the young men gone?” to borrow the sentiment from a twentieth-century anti-war song.⁴⁹ Even so, a multitude of titles referencing wartime victories appear alongside evidence of discontent: “Audenard Battle,” “Churchill’s March,” “News from Tripoly,” “Siege of Limerick,” and “The French King’s Mistake” are just a few such examples. In an age when the exploits of the military were matters of daily discussion, numerous dances also evoked these concerns on a personal level; more than recalling battles or poking fun at the enemy, they cited soldiers, sailors, and even “The Volunteer” in their titles, appealing to citizens at home whose relatives and friends comprised the ranks abroad.

The prevalence of such titles suggests a feeling of pride in the superiority of the English military, and this pride also instills the more overtly political dances. The dance “29th of May,” first published in the 1686 edition, recalled Charles II’s triumphant arrival into London in 1660, the momentous Restoration of the Stuart monarchy. Charles represented the very antithesis of the Puritan ethic that preceded him. Respected for his handling of the Great Fire of London, if not for his rather self-indulgent lifestyle, he had died the previous year, 1685. Thus, the dance served as a celebratory retrospective on the late monarch’s quarter-century of rule and, perhaps, an unspoken hope that the new king, James II, might prove a worthy successor. In 1726, another dance on this same theme, “The Restoration of King Charles,” made its way into the Playford manual (then, and since 1706, being published by John Young). The tune employed was a variation on the popular Royalist ditty of the Civil War, “When the King Enjoys His Own Again,” a firm endorsement of traditional monarchy, mastery, and Anglicanism. Among its many

⁴⁹ The correct answer to this question, of course, is “Gone for soldiers—every one,” in “Where Have all the Flowers Gone?” by Pete Seeger.

verses, it declared

Full forty years this Royal Crown
hath been his fathers and his own;
And I am sure there's none but he
that hath right to that Sovereignty:
Even who better may the Scepter to Sway
than he that hath such right to reign?
The hopes of your peace, for the wars will then cease,
when the King comes home in peace again.⁵⁰

While war had not ceased with the return of the Stuart line to the throne, the Restoration still held deep emotional power. More than sixty-five years' removed from the event, it had left popular memory and entered national lore, its supposed glories helping shape a national identity that was no longer merely English, but British. Reinforcing a sense of stability and illustrious ancestry formed part of this effort to firmly integrate more far-flung areas of the kingdom.

In 1706, an Act of Union made Scotland, previously a separate kingdom, part of a new political entity: "That the two Kingdoms of England and Scotland shall upon the First day of May which shall be in the year One thousand seven hundred and seven and for ever after be united into one Kingdom by the name of Great Britain," read the text.⁵¹ Though the kingdoms had been ruled by a single monarch since the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the Act of Union sought to ensure their continued solidarity. In this case, the government seems to have lagged behind the populace, because no document issued by Parliament used the term "Britain" until the Act of Union. However, beginning in 1695, a number of dances in the Playford manual began to reference the terms

⁵⁰ Martin Parker, "When the King Enjoys His Own Again," (1660-1665), *English Broadside Ballad Archive*, University of California, Santa Barbara, <<http://ebba.english.ucsb.edu/ballad/30967/image#>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

⁵¹ "Union with Scotland Act 1706," *The National Archives*, <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/aep/Ann/6/11>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

“Britain,” “British,” and “Briton,” clearly signifying a shift in notions of identity. This shift may have been a positive one, that is to say, a growing sense of similarity among Britons; or it may have been a negative one, a clinging together in response to an external threat—war abroad—or a hidden “other”—Catholics or Jacobites perhaps—within the nation itself. The heaviest concentration of nationalistic titles appeared in the 1718 and 1728 editions of the manual, but the longest lived of the dances was simply called “The Britains,” and remained almost constantly in print from its introduction in 1695. In particular, the editions of 1710, ’14, ’18, and ’28 contained a broad selection of Union-related titles, including “Scotch Union,” “The Union,” the “Union Jigg,” and “Confederacy.” Possibly in reference to the newly-incorporated Scots, the dance “North Britains” also appeared at this juncture, again suggestive of an expanded national pride. Those who engaged in dancing any of these selections would be celebrating the increased power and prestige of the new Great Britain and enacting fraternity among its members with each step.

During the first quarter of the eighteenth century, the close of the War of the Spanish Succession, the eruption of the War of the Quadruple Alliance, and the persistent threat of Jacobite rebellion made it especially desirable to encourage loyalty to British ways. The dances “Brittain’s Glory” and “Brittain’s Success” [sic] both strengthened the ties of union by including all Britons in the celebration of military victory. However, loyalty extended to taking pride not only in the military, in the monarchy, and in territorial gain, but also in a more abstract concept of Great Britain. Several dances lauded Britain for its humanity, generosity, and moral superiority. “The Generous Conquest,” first published in 1718, has a title more enigmatic than first glance would suggest. Playford’s dancers

and readers would have understood it in the historical context of the 1710s, likely associating it with the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht, which concluded the War of the Spanish Succession. Actually a series of agreements over the course of two years, the Peace of Utrecht is rather notorious for its transfer of the *asiento*—the monopoly of the slave trade in Spanish colonies—to Britain; however, the treaty also turned over numerous French possessions in the New World, leaving Britain with a significant international advantage in terms of both geography and economics.⁵² Thus, “The Generous Conquest” functioned as propaganda, hailing Britain despite or perhaps because of its recent acquisitions and rich spoils of war. Likewise, the dance “The Golden Age,” in the same edition, seems to promote similar ideas of Britain at a height of both power and culture.

Yet, might “The Generous Conquest” allude to something besides foreign policy, and might this enhance its message? Possibilities are maddeningly elusive, but alluring. It could be related to a passage of Cicero’s “Concerning the Moral Duties of Mankind,” when Pyrrhus delivers a speech on the ransoming of captives. The earliest surviving translation to include the phrase “generous conquest” dates to 1755, but a similar interpretation of the Latin may have appeared earlier, whether in direct translation or as paraphrased dialogue in a theatrical production. Pyrrhus was a familiar figure to Englishmen of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, with several plays of his life and exploits appearing on the London stage in 1695, 1709, 1712, and 1717.⁵³

⁵² “Treaties of Utrecht”. *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016, <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/treaties-of-Utrecht>>, accessed 22 Jun. 2016.

⁵³ Charles Hopkins, *Pyrrhus, King of Epirus a tragedy* (London: Samuel Briscoe, Peter Buck, and Daniel Dring, 1695), online, *Early English Books Online*; Morselli, Adriano. *Pyrrhus and Demetrius. An opera. As it is perform'd at the Queen's Theatre in the Hay-Market*. London, 1709. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, via College of William & Mary, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>>, accessed 10 Feb. 2014; Ambrose Philips, *The distressed mother. A tragedy. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane. By Her Majesty's*

Connections between popular dances and stage pieces abounded throughout the eighteenth century, with many dances taking their titles from theatrical songs or dialogue. Suppose, for a moment, a connection to Pyrrhus, whose speech in 1755 read as follows:

In War not crafty, but in Battle bold,
No Wealth I value, and I spurn at Gold.
Be Steel the only Metal shall decree
The Fate of Empire, or to you, or me.
The generous Conquest be by Courage try'd,
And all the Captives on the Roman Side.
I swear, by all the Gods of open War,
As fate their Lives, their Freedom I will spare.⁵⁴

If an earlier version of Pyrrhus—whether Cicero's or an English playwright's—delivered lines comparable to these, the application to the Treaty of Utrecht is striking. The dance paints the Britain in a positive, benevolent light, as a nation and an empire that had not sought glory, but whom fate had favored, perhaps on account of superior virtue.

No obvious verbatim sources for “generous conquest” exist in the early 1700s, but a variation of the expression, “generous conqueror,” was common at the time. Not only does it appear in the dialogue of several plays, but it serves as the title to one, widely available from numerous merchants in London for several decades.⁵⁵ *The Generous Conqueror; or, The Timely Discovery*, by Bevill Higgons, opened in 1702 only to draw the scorn of much of London. “Above half the Town condemn'd it as Turbulent and Factious,” wrote one observer, because of its perceived Jacobitism, favoring the restoration of the deposed James II's Catholic heirs instead of the more distant Protestant

servants. Written by Mr. Philips, London, MDCCXII. [1712]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, via College of William & Mary, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>>, accessed 10 Feb. 2014.

⁵⁴ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *His Offices*, (London: T. Waller, 1755), p. 25

⁵⁵ *The Wife of Bath. A Comedy. As it is Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane, by Her Majesty's Servants*. By Mr Gay (London: Printed for Bernard Lintott, 1713), Brad Pasanek, *The Mind is a Metaphor*, University of Virginia, <<http://metaphors.lib.virginia.edu/metaphors/22316>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

claimants.⁵⁶ Whether or not an allusion to this play was part of the design of “The Generous Conquest,” the similar titles would have made the comparison almost inevitable.

This invites speculation about John Young’s or his contributors’ politics, but no other dances during his years as publisher confirm any Jacobite sympathies. The only other dance that may approach Jacobitism is “Whig’s Folly,” printed in 1718 and ’28, because the Whig party stood against France, against Catholics, and against heirs of James II. However, it also opposed the Treaty of Utrecht, and it is impossible to draw a conclusion as to what the Whigs’ particular folly may have been in this instance. Two other dances in these years, “Jockey Rejected,” from 1718 and ’28, and “The Pretender’s Trip,” from 1728, seem to indicate an anti-Jacobite position. While a jockey in this era could and often did mean a rider of racehorses, the term was also used generically, like “John” or “Jack,” usually to describe a Scotsman. Thus, an advertisement at the end of a 1716 Joseph Addison publication described a new play: “Just Publish’d, The Earl of *Marr* marr’d. With the Humours of *Jockey*, the *Highlander*.” Likewise, *A collection of old ballads*, in 1723, included three songs that linked a stock character named “Jockey” to Scotland.⁵⁷ Building on this association, “Jockey Rejected” may poke fun at the failed Scottish uprising of 1715 that sought to put the so-called “Old Pretender,” James Stuart, on the throne. Although a number of other editions contain multiple dances with

⁵⁶ *A comparison between the two stages, with an examen of The generous conqueror; and some critical remarks on The funeral, or Griefalamode, The false friend, Tamerlane and others. In dialogue* (London, 1702), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, via College of William & Mary, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>>, 10 Feb. 2014.

⁵⁷ Joseph Addison. *To Her Royal Highness the Princess of Wales, with the tragedy of Cato, Nov. 1714. To Sir Godfrey Kneller, on his picture of the King*. (Dublin, 1716). *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, via College of William & Mary, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>>, 5 Mar. 2014; *A collection of old ballads. Corrected from the best and most ancient copies extant. With introductions historical and critical*.

“jockey” in their titles, in both instances where “Jockey Rejected” appears, it is the only dance in the volume to apply the term. Its uniqueness within the 1718 and 1728 manuals, combined with the presence of “The Pretender’s Trip” strengthens its claims to political significance.

While they were not the only dance manuals Englishmen and women turned to for instruction, the three volumes of Playford’s *Dancing Master* set a precedent that all subsequent manuals had to meet; Playford cast English country dancing as a responsive art form, one that remained politically relevant through time even as its basic structure solidified. Its folk origins appealed to the idea of a national British character, while its adoption at court provided a connection to the most sensitive political issues. These factors combined to encourage a relationship between the common man and the figures in power, a relationship expressed through dance. The circumstances that surrounded its development, its widespread popularity, and—perhaps most of all—the role of the *Dancing Master* all suggest that, even in its nascent form, English country dance was closely entwined with politics, nationalism, and resistance. The ballroom was a place wherein citizens might promote their political agendas or actively (and consciously) participate in the agendas of others—much of this accomplished with their feet. Dance’s established history thus made it not only a logical, but indeed a natural outlet for political passions in colonial and early Federal America. Politics did not simply seep into all aspects of American life, including entertainment; rather, colonists, and later Americans, took part in an established English tradition that continued to persist as long as did the English country genre. The early history of English country dancing left Anglo culture primed to

Illustrated with copper plates. Vol. II (London, 1723), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, via College of William & Mary, <<http://infotrac.galegroup.com>>, 5 Mar. 2014.

employ dance as a political tool, and even as a weapon.

Fig. 2. Title page from the 10th edition of the Playford English Dancing Master, 1698, showing men and women learning to dance in a longways set.⁵⁸



⁵⁸ H. Playford, *The Dancing Master; or, Directions for dancing country dances, with the tunes to each dance, for the treble violin* (London: J. Heptinstall, 1698), *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals*, Library of Congress, <<https://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=musdi&fileName=004/musdi004.db&recNum=0>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

Chapter 3: Dance, Dance, Revolution

The Anglo population of America was accustomed by the mid-eighteenth century to the regular coexistence of dance and politics. English country dance, like all consumer goods from the mother country, was one means of maintaining a sense of identity, of demonstrating one's Englishness. Thus, dancing assemblies became key features of social life and personal expression even in areas that were barely more than military outposts. In times of national struggle, such as the Seven Years' War, these were more than refuges of familiar Anglo entertainment—they might serve the additional purpose of imprinting cultivated Englishness onto the "wilderness." The shared traditions of Anglo culture gave Americans a common language and a common arsenal of metaphorical weaponry.

Never was this weaponry better employed than in the unrest that characterized the 1760s and 1770s. In their resistance to supposed British tyranny, Americans mobilized their ballrooms; some employed techniques of exclusion and public humiliation to undermine their Loyalist neighbors, while others closed ranks in more positive ways, displaying their Patriot allegiances on their persons and in the dances they chose to perform at assemblies. Female power was in evidence up and down the eastern seaboard, as women exploited the unique environment of the ballroom and its customs to give voice to their ideas and resist attempts to woo them into compliance. Only in the ballroom, in a dance that required interaction with every other couple in the set, could women enjoy such a platform to be heard while remaining entirely within the bounds of propriety.

Simultaneously, the Americans sought to differentiate themselves from Britain without sacrificing major elements of British culture. The language with which they

characterized themselves began to emphasize frugality and a new-found pride in the appearance of humble origins—the popularity of homespun, even for those who could afford superior cloth, was an attempt to show solidarity against Britain. The influence of the French, America’s allies, also manifested itself in American consumer life. Though the French cotillion was known in America already, it, along with French hairstyles, French dancing masters, and especially French soldiers, became all the rage. An American identity began to coalesce that incorporated both English and French ideas and expressed them in uniquely American ways.

“Nobody’s Jig”

We were not company enough for country-dances: but music having been ordered...Lord G. began by dancing a minuet with his bride; she danced charmingly! But on my telling her so afterwards, she whispered me, that she should have performed better, had she danced with her brother.

~Samuel Richardson, *Sir Charles Grandison*, 1753¹

The minuet was perhaps the most mentally-taxing dance performed socially in the eighteenth century. It challenged both the participants and the audience. "I sat a couple of long hours," complained a character in Tobias Smollett's *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*, "half stifled, in the midst of a noisome crowd; and could not help wondering that so many hundreds of those that rank as rational creatures, could find entertainment in seeing a succession of insipid animals, describing the same dull figure for a whole evening, on an area, not much bigger than a taylor's shop-board."² Though

¹ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Sir Charles Grandison in a Series of Letters*, Vol. 4 (London: J. and F. Rivington, 1770), 129.

² Tobias Smollett, *The Miscellaneous Works of Tobias Smollett*, Vol. 6 (London: J. Mundell & Co., 1796), p. 67.

choreographed minuets existed, these were reserved for dancing school exhibitions or theatrical events. Records of these sorts of minuets appear in America in the advertisements of dancing masters for their "practicing balls." Long after the minuet's reign as a social dance had ended, these performance pieces were still being taught for the sake of imparting grace to human movement and flaunting a mastery of intricate footwork. Even in 1810, some dancing masters in prominent cities like New York insisted upon including the minuet in their repertoires: "the new Step and Figure, Gavottes, Minuet de Lacour, and Waltz—New Cotillions lately from Paris, will be danced at his school," announced numerous advertisements for Mr. Louis Sansay of New York.³

By contrast, the minuet familiar to the crowds in assembly rooms was improvisational, between partners who may never have danced together before and who certainly had no time to practice. As Smollett implied, the figures followed basic patterns—formal honors, "S" curves, right-hand turns, left-hand turns, two-hand turns, and honors again—but the degree of complexity and the number of these figures was up to the discretion of the dancers, and more precisely, the man. Using his hat, he wordlessly signaled to the musicians his desired tempo; similarly, with hat and hand positions, he signaled to his partner what steps he planned to execute as the dance progressed. Clarity was vital, and neither dancer could afford to let his or her attention wander, or it could result in mis-steps and embarrassment. Thus, readers of Samuel Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison* would have sympathized with the new bride when she admitted that she danced better with her brother than with her new husband. Her brother likely would have been her practice partner, the person whose signals and style

³ *New-York Gazette & General Advertiser*, Nov 15 1810, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

she understood best and with whom she was most comfortable. To her credit, she was skillful enough that, when opposite her spouse for the first time, she could execute a nerve-wracking dance with great charm. Reality was not always so kind to minuet dancers. Lucinda Lee, a young lady from Westmoreland County, recorded in her journal that one unfortunate fellow gave the company much amusement at a dance in 1787: “I don’t think I ever laugh’t so much in my life as I did last night at Captain Grigg’s minuet...It is really the most ludicrous thing I ever saw; and what makes it more so is, he thinks he dances a most delightful one.”⁴ Those who danced poorly frequently became the butt of jokes and put their social standing in jeopardy, which made competence on the dance floor a positive necessity for ladies and gentlemen who aspired to positions of power or influence.

In 1749, in front of the mayor and the best society that Philadelphia had to offer, one of the city’s leading women made the governor of Pennsylvania look a fool. One imagines him standing in the middle of this glittering company, intensely aware of being regarded by the whole room, shifting his weight in confusion, uncertain how to rescue his dignity. At last, when the situation grew too uncomfortable, the mayor’s wife stepped in graciously and performed the rescue herself.

This moment of potential social disaster—produced by a woman, resolved by a woman—occurred on the floor of a ballroom. It was probably the only place where such an interaction *could* have occurred, a place where women wielded the power of refusal, where interaction between the sexes was encouraged, and where even those not dancing intently observed the proceedings. In their published rules, assemblies sometimes

⁴ Kate Van Winkle Keller, *Dance and Its Music in America, 1528-1789* (Hillsdale, NY: Pendragon Press, 2007), 217.

included the stipulation, “no person to interrupt the view of the dancers,” stressing the extent to which dancing was viewed as a communal activity.⁵ Those who did not participate, if they chose to remain in the ballroom rather than removing to the card room or elsewhere, were encouraged to take part vicariously through their eyes and to allow others the same privilege. As a result, anybody who was anybody in Philadelphia was likely to witness the scene and to judge the key players accordingly. What a shame that the surviving account of it comes not from the women directly involved, but from one such observer, a gentleman named Richard Peters:

The Governor would have opened the Assembly with Mrs. ----- but she refused him, I suppose because he had not been to visit her. After Mrs. --- refusal, two or three Ladies out of modesty & from no manner of ill design excused themselves so that the Governor was put a little to his Shifts, when Mrs. Willing now Mrs. Mayoress in a most genteel manner put herself into his way & on the Governor seeing this instance of her good nature he jumped at the Occasion & they danced the first minuet. ⁶

Customarily, of course, the first minuet of the evening involved the highest ranking person of each gender in attendance at the ball. If he was unmarried or his own wife was absent, the governor—at the time actually Lieutenant Governor James Hamilton—would have partnered the wife of a wealthy and prominent citizen, someone whom everybody knew and whose example would set the tone for the evening. Generally, his choice was considered a tremendous boon to the husband of the female selected, as when Virginia's Governor Spotswood opened a ball with Lucy Byrd in February of 1711. "About seven o'clock," wrote her spouse William Byrd II, "the company went in coaches from the Governor's house to the Capitol where the Governor opened the ball with a French dance with my wife." William later crowed to his diary that the governor had done him great

⁵ Wansey, 133.

⁶ Balch, 48.

honor because his choice of Lucy recognized William's status as the next-most important male in the room after Spotswood himself. This had undeniable political connotations, and none of them escaped William Byrd or, in all likelihood, Lucy.⁷

No such honor seems to have been felt in Pennsylvania. The governor clearly had no idea how to proceed after his appropriate partner snubbed him. It is a bit surprising that his choice was not the mayor's wife in the first place. Richard Peters stressed that he was not privy to the actual cause of the slight. If the governor had neglected to visit his prospective partner and had therefore not been formally introduced, it is possible that she might have declined to dance; however, one of the ball's managers would have been qualified to provide an introduction and rectify the situation, if only for the sake of averting embarrassment. Why, then, would the lady choose to disrupt the ball? Thus, it seems unlikely that the root of the conflict was a simple mistake or *faux-pas* on the governor's part. The fact that he had failed to visit her must have carried weightier connotations, at least from the point of view of the injured party: connotations such as a lack of respect for the social position and, by extension, the political authority of the lady's husband.

Many of the subscribers to the Philadelphia Assemblies held political office or wielded political influence. In addition to the then mayor of the city, Charles Willing, and the governor himself, two subscribers had served as mayors in 1745 and '46, and two was elected mayor in 1749 and '50. One more had married into the family of a former mayor, the powerful Edward Shippen. Another, previously mayor in 1735, was soon to

⁷ William Byrd II, Feb 6, 1711, *William Byrd of Westover in Virginia His Secret Diaries for the year 1709-1712*, ed. Louis B. Wright and Marion Tinling (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), 128.

be appointed chief justice of the province.⁸ Any number of political interests involving any number of these men and their families might have been in play. The modern reader could wish that Peters had been a little more explicit in his theories and in his description of what followed, but he seems inclined to sympathize with the governor, so perhaps he felt that the less he said, the better. It is also unclear from his account whether the two or three other high-ranking ladies absented themselves from the room or simply refused to figure the minuet with the governor. If the former, their retreat could easily be construed as acting out their support for "Mrs. -----." Probably, though, they took the latter course of action; and, rather than being innocuous, it may indicate that more was at stake than Peters recognized, or that he purposely down-played the incident as "a little mistake...which at some other times might have produced disturbances."⁹

Peters' invocation of "disturbances" seems to show an awareness of the potential broader repercussions of decisions made at a dance. What sort of disturbances had he in mind? Social ones? Political ones? As the political involvement of the subscribers demonstrates, these two categories might easily blend into each other. Perhaps it was not modesty that motivated the women, but distaste for the governor or, again, solidarity with "Mrs. -----," or even some quarrel more political in nature. If so, their actions bear a strong resemblance to the strategies employed both during the American Revolution and by the women of Washington, D.C. during the Jacksonian period, in what became known as the "Petticoat Affair." Whatever the case, their excuses further confused the question of whom the governor ought to partner for the minuet. Whether this was their object or not, the ladies left him floundering. The most prominent man in Philadelphia, for all

⁸ Balch, 37-39.

⁹ Ibid., 48.

purposes the king's representative in the colony, who ought to be regarded with deference equal to his station, had now applied to at least three women and found himself rebuffed at each turn before the elite of the city. It would be regarded as humiliating for any man to be refused so consistently, and for a man of such influence, even more so. He might wield the power of English church and state in America, but he could still be crippled by non-compliant women in the ballroom.

Non-compliance, especially by females, featured prominently in the ballrooms of the 1760s and 1770s, when opposing political factions and opposing armies brought their quarrels into the ballroom more directly than ever. Such antagonism in a social setting was made all the more possible because both sides of the conflict shared a culture and a language, and deployed the same social weaponry in mutually understandable ways. Communication of this kind could not be so rampant during the mid-century Seven Year's War due to cultural barriers, but this is not to say that dancing and politics never mixed—they were simply more one-sided. The Seven Years' War brought together British and American forces, male and female, and thrust them into the frontier to combat enemies both old and entrenched—the French—and new and fearsome—the Indians. It was, for many, literally unfamiliar territory, with fear of the unknown adding its weight to the very real, known sufferings of fatigue, hunger, and disease. Under such circumstances, cooperation and fellowship were necessities. Activities such as dancing could boost morale and remind the troops and civilians alike of their shared cause. Similarly to the long era of English wars with various nations of the European continent, politicizing dance in the 1750s meant inculcating British patriotism and enhancing the familial bonds between the mother country and the peripheral colonies. It became a

question of projecting a cohesive identity, a united front against the enemy. Not only were longways English country dances employed for this purpose, but also other traditional dances of the British Isles that might be more conducive to smaller gatherings or to all-male contexts—dances like jigs and reels.

Charlotte Browne, an English widow, traveled to the American colonies at the outset of the Seven Years' War to serve as a nurse and described some of the leisure activities she encountered. Dancing featured on a number of occasions, probably more often than she recorded it, and while it always served to enliven the grim task of war-making, it sometimes failed to unite *her* to the army she followed. On the fourth of May, 1755, Browne reported that she and her brother were "oblig'd to quit our grand Parlour the Man of the House being at a loss for a Room for the Soldiers to drink Cyder and dance Jiggs in." This incident seems to have occurred at Bellhaven, now called Alexandria, where Mrs. Browne and her brother had rented lodgings. General Braddock and his 44th and 48th Regiments had also arrived, as had a number of colonial governors, to discuss financing the coming campaign. Her remarks imply that the soldiers were dancing jigs among themselves rather than inviting local ladies or female camp followers to join them, but the evidence is inconclusive. Jigs—as the word is strictly applied—often did lend themselves to solo or duo performance, being improvisational and dependent on the dancers' skills. It was probably this sort of jig Mrs. Browne noted in Frederick, Maryland. "I had an Invitation to go to a Ball," she confided on September 20th, "which was compos'd of Romans, Jews, & Hereticks who in this Town flock together. The Lady's danced without Stays or Hoops & it ended with a Jig from each Lady."¹⁰ They

¹⁰ Charlotte Browne, May 4, 1755; Sept. 20, 1755, *Charlotte Browne diary 1754-1757, 1763-1766*, New York Historical Society.

might also be performed by one couple at a time, with other dancers cutting in as their fancy took them.¹¹ This style, although sometimes referred to as a "Virginia Jig" or "everlasting jig," extended beyond modern-day Virginia into the Ohio Valley and Pennsylvania, and would likely have been known in those areas during the French and Indian War.¹²

However, many longways English country dances used the words "Jig" or "Hornpipe" in their titles more as a reference to the style of music than to the form of the dance. Also, "to jig" might simply imply "to dance," as in the oft-reprinted Playford title of 1713, "Jigg it [On] Foot," or the dance that titles this section, "Nobody's Jig." Depending on their own backgrounds, the soldiers might also have performed reels, dances associated with Scotland but increasingly popular in England as the century progressed. These involved three or four dancers in a line and were ideally suited to impromptu performance. As with jigs, though, a "reel" was also a style of music to which a variety of dance forms might be set—such as the three-couple English dance "Six Hand Reel"—*and* an alternate term for the dance figure known as the "hey." The malleability of dance terminology creates further confusion about what dance was actually performed in Mrs. Browne's parlor, but all the possibilities have a common purpose.

Especially if this impromptu dance was, in fact, an exclusively male affair, it served several martial functions. Most obviously, it lightened the soldiers' moods. Military officer Adam Stephen, writing to George Washington from Fort Frederick around Christmas time in 1755, attested to this: "We...amus'd ourselves with acting part of a Play, and spending the Night in mirth, Jollity and Dancing, we parted very affectionatly

¹¹ Keller and Hendrickson, 22.

at 12 O'Clock, remembering all Absent Friends."¹³ Away from home and loved ones, with battle looming in the near future, they probably welcomed the familiar and joyful activity of dancing as a means of reviving their spirits—if fortified beverages failed to do so first! More than this, however, dancing gave the soldiers an outlet for their nervous energies and reinforced the trust and camaraderie that was crucial to their performance on the field of battle. Like marching in formation, English country dancing required soldiers to hear and obey commands, interpret musical cues, move as a unit, and rely on one another to be in the right place at the right time. Bonds forged on the dance floor translated well to combat.

On another occasion, Charlotte Browne provided some insight into the unitive properties of dancing as the soldiers and their company experienced it;

The Soldiers desired my Brother to advance them some Whisky for they told him he had better kill them at once than to let them dye by Inches for without they could not live. He complied with their Request & it soon began to operate they all went to dancing & bid Defiance to the French my Friend Gore (a Quaker) began to shake a Leg I ask'd him if it was consistant as a Member of his Society to dance he told me that he was not at all united with them & that there were some of his People who call'd themselves Quakers & stood up for their Church but had no more Religion in them than his Mare I then told him I should sit him down as a Ranter.¹⁴

In this scenario, which took place as the soldiers crossed the Blue Ridge Mountains at Vestal's Gap, the circle of dancers was evidently a little wider and may have drawn in camp followers, such as Browne, and locals. Such inclusiveness would certainly be true of garrison activities during the American Revolution. Holly Mayer has remarked that "officers not only courted and called upon the female relations accompanying their

¹² Joseph Doddridge, *Notes on the Settlement and Indian Wars of the Western Parts of Virginia and Pennsylvania*, (Albany, New York: Joel Munsell, 1876), p. 155.

¹³ Adam Stephen to George Washington, Dec. 26, 1755, in Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), 162.

colleagues but mixed with the women in the communities through which they passed." Continental soldiers in Morristown in 1780—most prominent among them General Washington himself—even contributed their funds to organize a dancing assembly there.¹⁵ Though Mrs. Browne recounted soldiers on the move, unlikely to subscribe to an assembly, it would be consistent with the historical record for them to interact with both the women in the baggage train and any nearby residents. In Mrs. Browne's telling, the men took advantage of the relative freedom of the dance floor (and lowered inhibitions due to the whisky) to join voices in a rallying cry against their French enemies. Mr. Gore, and perhaps other bystanders, could not resist the draw of the music and the thrill of the soldiers' enthusiasm. The evening is part dance, part political rally, and the two blended seamlessly into one.

It is curious and possibly politically significant that Mrs. Browne chose to compare her friend to a seventeenth-century "Ranter," a member of a short-lived religious movement. The Ranters and the Quakers were often erroneously conflated, although Mrs. Browne seemed to recognize a difference. Eschewing established traditions such as scriptural authority and even—at their most extreme—clothing, the Ranters challenged everything for which the Puritan Commonwealth stood. Considering that English country dance was first widely disseminated during the Commonwealth era and, like the Ranters, consciously opposed the rigidity and austerity of that government, a Ranter engaging in English country dance would probably be Oliver Cromwell's worst nightmare. The fame of the Ranters far outstripped their small numbers and limited relevance. Indeed, the "rant" infiltrated dancing in two forms: as both a vigorous,

¹⁴ Browne, June 6, 1755.

syncopated hopping step popular in the north of England and Scotland and, by the early nineteenth century, an entire category of dance. The word itself predated the religious group, but after the 1650s the term always carried an implicit reference to the perceived wildness of the antinomian sect.¹⁶

At Fort Pitt—on the frontier, but beside the growing town of Pittsburgh—balls were held every Saturday evening, bringing beleaguered soldiers and settlers together to remind them of their Englishness, to lend a degree of refinement to an unforgiving environment. Captain Ecuyer, the commandant there, wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet on January 8, 1763, that the balls were attended by "the most beautiful ladies of the garrison," and that the refreshments included punch and whiskey. Interestingly, in the same letter, he remarks on trade relations with passing Six Nations warriors, who sought powder and shot to combat those Indians who did battle for the Spanish. "Sometimes I refuse," he explained, "at other times I give a little, and at other times I do not know on which foot to dance." Even after flooding wreaked havoc on the fort in late winter, some celebrations continued. Ecuyer noted to Bouquet on March 19th that "We had St. Patrick's fetes in every manner, so that Croghan could not write by this express." The punch and whisky must have been very strong indeed!¹⁷

Distance from the centers of English colonial power did not equate to a dearth of culture or a forgetfulness of the people and important dates that brought Englishmen and women together throughout the empire. Even further into the hinterlands by English

¹⁵ Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community During the American Revolution* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 55.

¹⁶ G.E. Aylmer, *Rebellion or Revolution: England from Civil War to Restoration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 137-139.

¹⁷ S. Ecuyer to Henry Bouquet, Jan. 8, 1763 and March 19, 1763, in *Fort Pitt and Letters from the Frontier* (Pittsburgh: J.R. Weldin & Co., 1892), 111, 118.

calculation—at Detroit—Captain Donald Campbell reported to Bouquet on June 1, 1761 that he was "preparing to celebrate the Kings Birthday with a Ball to the Ladys. You Would be surprised to see them turn out soe Gay on those Occasions."¹⁸ Campbell speaks with assuredness, indicating that he has witnessed these same ladies in their finery at previous dances. These were not likely to be women clad in the homespun gowns or outdated fashions that sometimes characterize the frontier in popular imagination. Despite the war that had been raging for five years, they had the means and the desire to dress well, even in Detroit.

As in Pittsburgh, there seems to have been some sort of regular dancing assembly whenever the soldiers were in winter quarters. Writing to Fort Sandusky, Campbell enclosed the following message to Elias Meyer on October 5th, 1761: "Les damoisselles du detroit font bien leur Compliments a le Commandant D'Sandusky, ils se flatter d'avoir L'honneur de danser avec lui cet hyver. *Trans. The young ladies from Detroit, send their compliments to the Commander at Sandusky. They flatter themselves to have the honor of dancing with him this winter."¹⁹ The assumption that there would be a ball or a series of balls during the winter of 1761-62 suggests that there may have been a similar social calendar during the previous winter. As the area had only passed into British hands in late November of 1760, it seems that the introduction of English customs and culture was very swift. Whether the ladies who attended these gatherings were exclusively English settlers, or a mixture of English and French, is, disappointingly, unclear. Worth noting is the fact that Campbell composed this message to Meyer in

¹⁸ Donald Campbell to Henry Bouquet, June 1, 1761, in *The Papers of Col. Henry Bouquet*, Vol. 7 (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1940), 184.

¹⁹ Donald Campbell, Oct. 5, 1761, in *The Papers of Col. Henry Bouquet*, Vol. 8 (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1940), 152-3.

French, though the rest of the letter was in English. The disparity is a powerful indicator that it was the lingering French population of Detroit rather than newly-arrived English ladies who longed for the company of Lieutenant Meyer. Colonel Bouquet, whose files eventually preserved this missive, was Swiss and often corresponded in French, despite being an officer on the British side of the fight.

It is tempting to conclude that the rapid traction that English dancing gained in the freshly-captured Detroit was more than an effort to keep the frontier population entertained. It may have served as an actual tactic for imposing English rule, reinforcing the idea that English culture was dominant and, through regular dances, literally inviting the lingering French presence to submit and become part of the new order of things. If this was the case, the message conveyed by Campbell to Meyer hints that the measure was a rewarding one, as the ladies were looking forward to the prospect of a new round of balls sponsored by their conquerors. British forces might bear this success in mind for the future.

What cannot be determined satisfactorily is the degree to which the physical setting and the military opposition determined the style of dancing the soldiers and their social circle performed. There seems to be a distinct contrast between Mrs. Browne's reports and those of officers in more permanent abodes. Special celebrations would certainly entail the familiar structure of an English ballroom; similarly, any messengers traveling between the backcountry and the metropole might still have opportunities to attend traditional assembly balls. So, too, would the inhabitants of Pittsburgh and Detroit, where a concerted effort clearly was made to imitate the social life that characterized more established cities. Soldiers and officers gathering in the east, waiting to be

dispatched—such as the "270 Men at Alexandria" whom Daniel Campbell mentioned to George Washington in 1754—certainly took advantage of opportunities to dance before they went on the march.²⁰

But what about the outbursts of dancing that occurred on the spur of the moment, the sort that Charlotte Browne described? These appear to have had minimal structure, a "catch as catch can" attitude to steps and music. In part, of course, the difference is a function of the available space and time and the presence of significant numbers of women. But might there be an underlying psychological difference as well? Once trekking through the Virginia backcountry, a region long associated with the threat of Indian attack, and primed to encounter Indian warriors in the field of battle, did these Englishmen feel the need to pluck up their courage a little more with "wild" Irish and Scottish dances instead of "civilized" English ones? It would make a certain kind of sense, but records are too few to draw a conclusion. And what of the occupants of Frederick, Maryland, where the women apparently discarded the encumbrance of hoops and—far more unusually—stays? In an era where even indentured and enslaved women were often described in runaway ads as wearing a pair of old stays, to go without this basic and, frankly, necessary garment was indeed a move towards "savagery," as some of the only females in colonial America who would have danced without them were the natives.

Far more frequent than detailed descriptions of British soldiers dancing are accounts of the loud, long war dances that the native populations held in the evenings. There was no shortage of opportunities for the Anglo forces to witness these demonstrations.

²⁰ Daniel Campbell to George Washington, 28 June, 1754, in Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers*, Vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1898), 16

Indeed, Sir William Johnson, the British Superintendent of Indian Affairs, was particularly noted for participating in them himself: "Hither, too, came a swarm of Johnson's Mohawks..." wrote Francis Parkman of a meeting in 1755; "They adorned the general's face with war-paint, and he danced the war dance." Englishmen also applied their own cultural terms to what they saw, as in 1751 when trader Christopher Gist recounted that a "feather dance" among the Miami "was performed by three dancing-masters." The appropriation of space and terminology could, and did, work in both directions. The aforementioned General Johnson hosted councils with the Iroquois—including the war-dances that accompanied them—at his own home. These meetings juxtaposed English and native cultures, Indian dance and English politics in curious ways: "Stevens, the interpreter, began the war-dance, and the assembled warriors howled in chorus. Then a tub of punch was brought in, and they all drank the King's health," read the report, quoted in Parkman.²¹ The dance conveyed a promise of alliance to the English onlookers, just as the the sharing of punch conveyed the same message to the Iroquois. Further, we do know that a native population took advantage of a public ballroom on at least one occasion to showcase their own form of political dancing.

During wartime, when national affairs might have disrupted entertainment, the Philadelphia Assembly remained operational. In fact, by 1757, it occupied distinct Assembly Rooms rather than gathering in the State House (the future Independence Hall). The assembly space was rendered more overtly political than ever by the presence of at least one army general hosting events for the public in 1759. In 1755, a detachment of Mohawk warriors, with the "antient King of the Mohawks," arrived in Philadelphia

²¹ Francis Parkman, *Works: Montcalm and Wolfe: France and England in North America, Part Seventh, Vol. I* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1901), 299-300.

with a diplomatic purpose; namely, to reassure the colonial government that, while many of the younger generation had “gone over to the Enemy,” the chief remained allied with Britain. Significantly, the warriors attended the Philadelphia Assembly while in the city, performing there their own “Scalping Dance” to the apparent horror of the ladies (or so said the reports).²² Yet, this demonstration was no doubt calculated to impress upon the citizens of Philadelphia the advantage of having Mohawk allies and their proficiency in war. To communicate their political purposes through dance, the Mohawks chose an appropriate setting, a ballroom where the English colonists likewise expressed their political biases and allegiances. Whether the warriors participated in any English country dances is not reported, unfortunately. Nevertheless, their presence at a distinctly English form of entertainment confirms that the ballrooms of colonial America functioned as political meeting spaces where diverse individuals might share ideas.

Strangely enough, the state of dancing on the frontier may have been an improvement over some of the more populated areas to the east. In 1758, George Washington was standing for a seat in the House of Burgesses for Frederick County, Virginia, although he was encamped near Fort Cumberland. The election season brought with it all sorts of attempts to convince and entice potential voters to cast their ballots for a particular candidate. Col. Bouquet granted Washington permission to return to Virginia for the election, but Washington declined, leaving the campaign in the hands of Colonel James Wood instead. According to his secretary, John Kirkpatrick, the environs of Winchester held “dull barbacues and yet duller dances,” presumably to promote various candidates. “An election causes a hubbub for a week or so,” he went on, “and then we are dead a

²² Balch, 54.

while."²³ Though opportunities for dancing may have been offered, they did not have the desired draw—even, Kirkpatrick seems to indicate, when associated with elections, though in other respects elections stirred up plenty of public interest. For whatever reason, the attempts to politicize dancing in Winchester failed to make an impact.

Although the adversaries in the conflict of 1756-63 may not have used dance against one another as much as within their own ranks, they all understood the potential of the ballroom as a political space. There was a private ball near Paris on November 2nd, 1763, the day when the earliest portions of the peace treaty were signed. An unknown friend of Henry Bouquet's wrote a brief but telling account of it to the Colonel. Hosted by the Rolas family, the patriarch of whom "was in the secret cabinet of Versailles," the party included both French dignitaries and English ones, including Lord Mont-Stuart (the son of the British Prime Minister) and Mr. Fox (presumably Stephen Fox, son of the future 1st Baron Holland and elder brother to future Whig politician Charles James Fox). The writer commented on the gathering's magnificence, the attendance of seventy people, and the fact that the two prominent Englishmen remained as guests at the Rolas' home for a week. The young Mr. Fox apparently had been a close friend of a young man of the Rolas family for a number of years, demonstrating the interconnectedness of the interests of French and English diplomats. The elder Mr. Fox, the future Baron, was among the members of the Cabinet who were instrumental in seeing the Treaty of Paris approved. Well did this unnamed correspondent confide of the peace treaty that "all who were invited [to the ball] desired [the peace] so strongly that we always upheld it to Rolas."²⁴

²³ John Kirkpatrick to George Washington, 21 July, 1758, in Stanislaus Murray Hamilton, ed., *Letters to Washington and Accompanying Papers*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1899), 379

²⁴ Unknown to Col. Henry Bouquet, in Sylvester Stevens and Donald Kent, eds., *The Papers of Col. Henry Bouquet*, Vol. 11 (Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1942), 50-51.

They may have earned their invitations through their counsel to Rolas, or they may have used the occasion to congratulate him on his success after heeding their advice. With this mixture of French and English guests, one wonders what form the dances took that evening. Certainly, formal minuets, French in their origins and reinforcing existing power structures; but perhaps then followed by English longways dances, for the visiting Englishmen whose repertoires would not yet have included French *contradances* and cotillions. The accords that had just been reached at the macro level were very likely mirrored on the micro level.

While the assemblage of luminaries at the Rolas' home seemed to indicate cooperation between the English and French and painted the Treaty of Paris as mutually desirable, the same could not be said of more public celebrations in London. Shortly after the agreement was finalized, a ball was scheduled in London to bring together French dignitaries and their English social counterparts in a demonstration of forgiveness. Not a single French guest attended. In taking this action, they had not only expressed their collective indignation but in fact staged a sort of protest or boycott against the unfavorable terms of peace. The newspaper that humorously reported the incident went on to state that the English took advantage of the French absence by opening the ball with a tune dubbed "Canada Is All Ours."²⁵ The publication of the incident in the press added to the insult. The two events, taken together, demonstrate two very different tactics that could be employed with equal effectiveness in the politics of the ballroom.

²⁵ *Boston Evening Post*, 9 May 1763, in Corry, *The Performing Arts in Colonial American Newspapers, 1690-1783: Text Data Base and Index*, (New York, 1997).

“De’il Take the Wars”

"The dancing, for which mutually they languished, as the mutual means of reunion, seemed not to be the humour of the evening...."

~Frances Burney, *Camilla*, 1796²⁶

The close of the French and Indian War brought a new set of troubles to English colonists in North America. During the 1760s and early 1770s, the colonists and the English government engaged in a tug-of-war over a series of new taxes and regulations the colonists viewed as impositions; though the adversaries did not come to blows until 1775, and until that point considered themselves very much one people, ballrooms once again reflected the bitter political debates of the day and the solidarity that colonists hoped to create among themselves.

The homespun movement, which advocated abandoning English goods and relying on cloth produced in America, allowed countless women to participate in the Revolution by spinning, knitting, or wearing homespun. Although the gowns that resulted were often suitable for everyday use, the wealthier members of society could make more dramatic statements by substituting the coarse, drab cloth for the silks and jewels that normally characterized dress at formal balls. “At a ball held at New London on the 1st instant, the gentlemen and ladies appeared dress'd in apparel manufactured in that colony,” announced the *Boston Evening Post* in 1768.²⁷ In so doing, these dancers made a tangible rather than merely ideological commitment to resistance. Spinning bees gained popularity mostly in New England, but the southern colonies too experienced the effects of the movement, as an article from the *New York Journal* demonstrates: “Williamsburg,

²⁶ Burney, *Camilla*, 279.

²⁷ *Boston Evening Post*, 25 Jan 1768, in Corry.

Dec. 7. At a grand ball given by the General Assembly, most of the ladies appear'd in dresses of Virginia manufacture.”²⁸ In 1765, the *New York Gazette & Weekly Post Boy* published a highly doubtful but illuminating letter from a young lady in town to her friend in the country. Its authenticity aside, the scenes it describes beautifully encapsulate the political implications of ballroom displays, and they ultimately proved to be not far from the mark:

I dreamt...I went to a ball dressed in the prettiest and richest brocade that ever your eyes beheld, sure...of carrying all before me...When I found Miss---, and Miss ---...and many others dressed in homespun, surrounded by all the prettiest fellows...I saw those that were in homespun placed nearer the top of the dance...and myself addressed by the manager in these terms: You cannot be surprised madam, that in an American assembly, we should give the highest place to such ladies, as have the greatness of soul, to prefer their country's interest to the vain desire of dazzling the eyes of fools...²⁹

Even prior to the formal break with the mother country, the antagonists recognized balls and entertainments as important components of a larger strategy of politicization that also included bribery and patronage. In May 1775, a Connecticut newspaper responded to British legislation with the following claim: “A proclamation is to be given out that it is only the four governments of New-England: But depend upon it, all the colonies are to be treated in the same manner. General Burgoine says, that he will not let New-York know his intentions; but dance and sing with the ladies, and coax the inhabitants to submit....”³⁰ By flirtation, by camaraderie, by nonchalance, an invading force might lull Americans into complacency, or worse, win their allegiance.

Indeed, the British army did host a wide array of fêtes and assemblies in occupied New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston. Newspapers advertised bands, dances, and

²⁸ *New York Journal*, 11 Jan 1770, in Corry.

²⁹ *New York Gazette & Weekly Post Boy*, 7 Nov 1765, in Corry.

theatrical presentations starring military officers. In New York, Rivington's *Royal Gazette* notified its readers that, due to space constraints, subscription assemblies would be limited to members of the British army and navy, royal government officials, and other prominent socialites: gentlemen non-subscribers and non-residents might apply to attend through "Major Brigade Amiel," at the cost of half a guinea.³¹ The balls and parties held by British troops after the captures of New York, Philadelphia, and Charleston were no less political rallies than they were celebrations. Their popularity among the Tory elite did not exclude dissenting guests, however, who might be swayed through sustained interaction with loyal circles. The rumor of Burgoyne's plan was no fleeting accusation. It had a lasting impact and became inscribed in American memory permanently when John Trumbull recalled seven years later in his epic poem "M'Fingal," that Burgoyne had entered the country with just that intent: "by songs and balls secure obedience/and dance the ladies to allegiance," apparently assuming that their husbands would follow.³² "M'Fingal" enjoyed a wide readership in the post-Revolutionary era, and continued in subsequent printings through the nineteenth century.³³

If Burgoyne did indeed have such a scheme in mind, he made a critical error of judgment which newspapers perpetuated. He indicated that the army would seek to subdue the colonies by launching an insidious assault on its weakest link—the female population. Trumbull, in his relevant note to a later edition of "M'Fingal," sets the record straight, quipping "this pleasant mode of warfare" did not meet "with the expected

³⁰ *Connecticut Courant*, 1 May 1775, in Corry.

³¹ *Royalist Gazette*, 13 Mar, 1782 in Corry.

³² John Trumbull, "M'Fingal," (Boston, 1785), *Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639-1800*, no. 19277, <<http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-imprints-series-i-evans-1639-1800>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

³³ Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1976), 296.

success.”³⁴ Contemporary reports also bolster the contention that the effort largely failed; women could, and did, upset the balance of power in the ballroom through both speech and manners.

Whether rabble-rousers or royal apologists, men recognized and sometimes encouraged female non-compliance to undermine the political opposition. As early as 1768, the *Boston Evening Post* published an entreaty to young women from a writer unflinchingly loyal to the Crown. It is so rich that it deserves to be quoted at length:

Plays, balls, and concerts, are agreeable and amusing entertainments; but will you gratify yourselves at the expence of your reputation? For such certainly will be the case when you are conducted to them by persons. . . whose principal character is the love of gallantry and intrigue. Nay, some of whom are profest enemies to the country which gave you birth, and who are even now endeavoring to rob you, your friends, relations and country, of the invaluable blessings of the best constituted government upon earth. Can you know this and yet give them your hand at a ball? Impossible! . . . Leave to the few, very few daughters of interested and designing men, the pleasure of gracing an assembly compos'd of such persons and their slavish abettors....³⁵

This author, “Homosum,” evidently doubted the willingness of ladies to forego pleasure in the interest of politics and thus appealed to their sense of decorum and concern for their reputation. What sort of reputation, though, was at stake? Was it strictly their personal virtue which they would besmirch by associating with gallants? Or was it perhaps, as the second half of the passage seems to suggest, likewise their status as loyal English subjects? In veiled terms, “Homosum” warns that dancing with “interested and designing men” threatened above all to pollute the female political identity. He asserted that women, with the simple choice of refusing to participate, can become defenders of their *political* virtue. Importantly, his chastisement proves that at least some

³⁴ Trumbull, “M’Fingal,” in *The Poetical Works of John Trumbull*, (Connecticut, 1820), p. 139.

men in the eighteenth-century believed that women *had* a political identity—it must have existed, or it would not have been possible to compromise it.

Whether Boston's loyal ladies took the hint, it is difficult to determine, but additional articles from November 1768 through February 1769 may represent the rebel ladies' retort. In the first, a Connecticut publication printed news from Boston, relating the amusing circumstance of a failed dance there the previous month: "It is said the officers intended a grand assembly this evening, but the ladies of the town could not be persuaded into the propriety of indulging themselves in musick and dancing with those gentlemen who have been sent hither in order to dragoon us into measures, which appear calculated to enslave and ruin us." As had Homosum, this unnamed author invoked notions of propriety to help justify the political activism of women, but his words leave no doubt of these ladies' motivations or conviction.³⁶

Nor was this an isolated incident. "Same evening [last Wednesday]," read the next example, published in the Tory-leaning *Boston Chronicle* and referring to an entirely different event, "the Assembly for the winter began at Concert Hall; at which, were present, the honourable (sic) Commissioners of the Customs," and diverse officers of the army and navy.³⁷ These commissioners, the London-appointed collectors of hated Townshend duties and similar taxes, earned the loathing of multitudes of Bostonians for what were seen as shady practices and self-aggrandizement: searching vessels, hiking fees, tightening England's hold on commerce, and being generally disagreeable.³⁸ Earlier that year, the Massachusetts House of Representatives had execrated them in a list

³⁵ *Boston Evening Post*, 30 Jan. 1768, in Corry.

³⁶ *Connecticut Gazette*, 25 Nov 1768, in Corry.

³⁷ Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution* (New York: 2005), 97.

³⁸ Charles M. Andrews, *The Colonial Period of American History, Vol. 4* (New Haven, CT: 1938), 220-221

of grievances circulated for approval to the other colonial legislatures:

. . . [We] take notice of. . . the commission of the gentlemen appointed commissioners of the customs, to reside in America, which authorizes them to make as many appointments as they think fit, and to pay the appointees what sum they please, for whose malconduct they are not accountable; from whence it may happen that officers of the Crown may be multiplied to such a degree as to become dangerous to the liberty of the people, by virtue of a commission, which does not appear to this House to derive any such advantages to trade as many have supposed.³⁹

Clearly, Whiggish misses would be discouraged from mixing with such individuals, and they made their sentiments known. The following February, *The American Gazette* reprinted from the papers of the Massachusetts government another account of the same assembly, much at variance with the first. “Dec. 14. . . The Commissioners expected they would have been able this evening. . . to have opened an assembly at Concert-Hall, for the winter season,” it read, tongue-in-cheek, “but the virtue and discreetness of the young ladies of the town, occasioned a disappointment.”⁴⁰ In other words, the expected bevy of females either declined to appear or chose not to oblige the commissioners by dancing. The article continued, predicting that the assembly would reconvene the following week “with a small number of matrons of their own core. It must ill become American ladies to dance in their fetters.” These parting shots serve a twofold purpose. First, they conveyed the impression that the core of Tory feeling contains only a few matrons, married women presumably of middle age and limited spirit. By contrast, they portray patriot women as youthful, unattached, politically-canny, and capable of influencing events. More importantly, they directly relate the act of not dancing to political protest, delivering the inferred ultimatum that the ladies will abstain from dance

³⁹ “Massachusetts Circular Letter to the Colonial Legislatures; February 11, 1768,” *The Avalon Project at Yale Law School*. <<http://avalon.law.yale.edu>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

⁴⁰ *The American Gazette* (London: G. Kearsly, 1770), 309.

until freed from the chains of taxation and oppression of which the commissioners are the embodiment.

Judging from yet another reprinted article, dated December 23 but appearing in the February 13 *Boston Evening Post*, the commissioners struggled even to recruit women of their own political temperament the following week: “Never were the gentlemen concern'd more liberal in their invitations, even those ladies who declin'd subscribing had their cards, the neighbouring towns were reconnoitred for females, and the good natured S----r of the B----d was so complaisant as to offer to go to Salem to bring two damsels from thence.” If accurate, this raises the possibility that the commissioners expanded their search beyond its usual bounds of gentry and middling society and urban geography, and extended it to those who could neither pay for a ball subscription nor easily convey themselves to the venue. Whatever their strategies, they “were finally so successful as to procure from among themselves and their connections, about ten or twelve unmarried ladies, whose quality and merits have been since related with the sprightly humor of a military gallant,” but “the ladies of all ages and conditions [were] so few, that the most precise Puritan could not find it in his heart to charge said assembly with being guilty of the crime of mixt dancing.”⁴¹ Again, the closing remarks stress the undesirability of those dozen who did attend, implying the presence of women too young, too old, or of questionable character and circumstances. Though the account is comic, it seems clear that the patriotic ladies of Boston had made their point.

Recognizing themselves to be at a disadvantage, the commissioners and other Tory

⁴¹ *Boston Evening Post*, 13 Feb 1769, in Corry. By “mixt dancing,” the author meant the mixing of men and women together in the dance, which many sermons and religious tracts of the period opposed as contrary to the Bible. For a discussion of religious objections to dancing, please see Oliver Hart’s “Dancing Exploded,” *Early American Imprints*, first series no. 15848.

officials sought to reconcile the population. In a distinctly ironic move, they appear to have adopted the format of a ball to accomplish their ends several years later in 1771. “Boston, Jan 24,” began an extract from the *Connecticut Courant*, “On Friday evening last, an assembly was opened at Concert Hall, for the winter season. It is said a large number of the principal gentlemen of the town who have been of very different sentiments in the last party disputes are subscribers, and that the assembly was proposed, in order to restore peace, harmony and the blessings of social life.”⁴² Tactfully, these remarks maintained the anonymity of the attendees and employ very hopeful language. However, it is possible to extrapolate from the phrase “restore peace, harmony and the blessings of social life” that in addition to the political machinations of the intervening years, the recalcitrance of the Boston ladies had done its bit to create discord and social isolation for the commissioners and their allies—the same deprivation reserved for violators of non-importation agreements and other individuals seen as enemies to liberty.⁴³

Likewise suspect were those whose extravagance marked them as unsympathetic to the perceived plight of the oppressed colonies. Dancing might have played a part here, too. Patriots frequently compared their own events to those of the British and their allies, condemning the latter for ostentation, lasciviousness, and general misbehavior at balls. Their attacks provoked a rebuttal in the *Boston News Letter* in June, 1771:

As an introduction to the last Monday's *Boston-Gazette*, we are favoured with a fresh variety of scandal, discharged at the first magistrate of this province. . . The public are. . . told that, not only his Excellency the G-----r, the Hon. the Com-----rs, of the C-----ms, Commodore G--b--r, the

⁴² *Connecticut Courant*, 22-29 Jan 1771, in Corry.

⁴³ For more on the use of social isolation with regard to non-importation violators, please see Barbara Clark Smith, “Social Visions of the American Resistance Movement,” in Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *The Transforming Hand of Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996).

officers of his Majesty's A--y and N--y, and all the gentlemen and ladies, who celebrated the birth of the King on the evening of the 4th instant at Concert-Hall, were a sett of revellers; + lascivious, lustful, and excessive wine-bibers.⁴⁴

The governor and his companions could, of course, have been licentious drunkards at any time, but the occasion of a ball allowed critics to conjure images of a Dionysian frolic and use them as a propaganda tool. In this way, they might damage respect for disliked authority figures and simultaneously claim the moral high ground by painting themselves as righteous, virtuous everymen. It is significant that the complaint arose from a commemoration of the king's birthday, which provided a psychological link between shameful excesses and British tyranny. After defending the innocence of both the royal officials and the dance itself, the governor's champion sought to expose patriot political maneuvering in the conclusion of his piece: "This is sufficient to convince the world, to what pitiful shifts, the enemies of the fairest character in the province are driven, in order to sully his reputation and destroy his influence."

Years later, another Boston patriot condemned dance not merely as the delight of the rich and frivolous, but as the activity of the politically indifferent or inactive. "Blush, B[oston]! Blush," he lamented, "That dance and song oe'r patriot zeal prevail/That whigs and tories. . . Should hand in hand, lead on the sprightly dance." However, his verse belies his own intended message-identifying the participants as belonging to both Whig and Tory factions, he acknowledges the presence of bitter political rivals at public assemblies.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Boston News Letter*, 13 June, 1771 in Corry.

⁴⁵ Silverman, 394.

“The Wrangling Patriots”

"The gentlemen, as they passed and repassed, looked as if they thought we were quite at their disposal, and only waiting for the honour of their commands...I thought it so provoking, that I determined in my own mind that, far from humouring such airs, I would rather not dance at all, than with any one who would seem to think me ready to accept the first partner who would condescend to take me."

~Frances Burney, *Evelina*, 1778⁴⁶

The seeming powerlessness of women in the ballroom can be an exercise in frustration. Fanny Burney captured this perfectly in her novel *Evelina*, and certainly experienced similar situations in her own life. Unless the assembly rules dictated that partners be chosen by lot, ladies are at the mercy of the gentlemen and cannot dance until asked. Even if asked, they must assure a proper introduction to their prospective partners, or to stand up for a dance would be considered unseemly. And gentlemen then, as is also true today, were often in the minority. It was hardly uncommon for ladies to resort to dancing together in the absence of male partners, and this certainly afforded them a degree more freedom: "The room was very thin," Miss Burney reflected in her journal in 1782," and almost half the ladies danced with one another, though there were men enough present, I believe, had they chosen such exertion...Some of the ladies were in riding habits, and they made admirable men."⁴⁷ In this instance, it was not entirely the absence of men, but also their unwillingness to ask the ladies to dance that occasioned some gender-bending! But clever women might turn their apparent weakness into a strength, as Burney's character, *Evelina*, intended to do when confronted with a room full

⁴⁶ Fanny Burney, *Evelina, or The History of a Young Lady's Introduction to the World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852), 30.

⁴⁷ Fanny Burney, *The Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay: 1778-1787*, Vol. 1 (London: Frederick Warne and Co., 1892), 244.

of unfamiliar and self-important faces. Women empowered themselves and sent distinct messages to the rest of the assembly in a variety of ways: by attending a dance where they might not be welcomed, by refusing to dance once there, or by selectively refusing certain undesirable partners—though to do so was considered rude. There could be far more to a ball than mere entertainment.

“Take care what you are about; Do you think you come here for your pleasure?” Thus, rumor has it, bellowed the manager of the Philadelphia Assembly to an unlucky dancer who had forgotten her turn.⁴⁸ Clearly, manager Colonel Mitchell viewed the evening’s diversions as something more than a series of pre-set figures stepped by well-dressed pillars of society. But what, besides pleasure, might Mitchell suspect had tempted the chastened young lady to the ballroom? Why, politics and patriotism, surely! The observations of the Marquis de Chastellux, who traveled in America between 1780 and 1782, as well as evidence from newspapers and letters, demonstrate that assemblies and dances during the years of Revolution became perhaps more political than they had ever been in history.

Committed Whig ladies might encounter more political friends than foes in the ballroom during these years, as some major assemblies adopted the same policy as Philadelphia: “tory ladies [and gentlemen] are publicly excluded from this assembly.” They were so publicly excluded, in fact, that the following sarcastic article appeared in a Philadelphia newspaper in 1780:

A HINT. It is expected that no man, who has not taken a decisive part in favour of American Independence, will in the future intrude on the Dancing Assembly of the city: such characters are either too detestable or too insignificant for Whig Society. The company of those who were so

⁴⁸ Francois Jean de Beauvoir, Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in North America, in the years 1780-81-82*, (New York: N.P., 1828), p. 147.

insensible of the rights of mankind and of personal honour, as to join the enemies of their country in the most gloomy moment of the revolution, cannot be admitted. The subscription paper, thro' accident, has been handed to some characters of this description. [signed] W.⁴⁹

For some Philadelphians, this was no doubt a severe blow to their pride; for others, a cause for concern, lest their past deeds under the occupation be seen by their friends and neighbors as treasonous. This was by no means an irrational fear, since at various pro-American assemblies throughout the new states, one's presence was taken to be a sign of one's patriotism. To be conspicuously absent would arouse suspicion. In 1777, for instance, the press described a Boston gathering thus: "On Friday evening the rejoicings were crowned by a brilliant company of ladies from Cambridge, Boston, and Watertown, who testified their joy and patriotism, by their presence, at an elegant assembly."⁵⁰ Massachusetts, too, saw a debate over the exclusion of subscribers based on political affiliation. "The managers of the Assembly, who opposed and voted against inviting the British officers to it," read one editorial in 1778, "are requested to oblige the publick with the names of those who proposed and voted for it, that we may know who and who are together...."⁵¹ This practice bears a striking similarity to tactics employed during periods of non-importation, when violators often found their names listed in the paper as a warning to them and a discouragement to their clientele.⁵²

At the close of the Revolution, citizens of New York entered the fray with a number of printed references to the politics of the dancing assembly. The first claimed "that a coalition is forming in this city between certain Whigs, and some of the most atrocious

⁴⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, 12 Dec 1780, in Corry.

⁵⁰ *Continental Journal*, 30 Oct 1777, in Corry.

⁵¹ *Independent Ledger*, 14 Dec 1778, in Corry.

and obnoxious Tories, for the purpose of promoting the Dancing Assembly,” and decried the cooperation as “wantonly dancing on the graves of our brave officers, and fellow citizens.”⁵³ No true patriot, the author continued, could stand for such a measure, which would allow traitors to partake of the same privileges as faithful Whigs. The invective provoked a prompt response:

The publication which appeared in Mr. Holt's paper of the 20th instant...is without foundation in fact, and an infamous attack upon the characters of gentlemen, who have been as uniform and steady, made as large sacrifices of property, and run as many personal hazards in the pursuit of the happiness and freedom of their country, as the designing knave who dared give birth to that infamous publication. The greatest care has been taken to exclude every character, whose admission could possibly give a pang to a real Whig;--and the author of that publication may be assured, that there are Whigs concerned in promoting the Dancing Assembly, who dare think and act for themselves.....⁵⁴

A few days later, another contributor provided his probably disingenuous opinion that “In order to assist Mr. Whig Refugee in effecting a reconciliation of parties,” a number of known Tories should be elected to the legislature, and that “The innumerable benefits we shall derive therefrom, are too conspicuous to need particularizing; a very material one would be giving a precedent to the dancing assembly....”⁵⁵

Did the social pressure exerted by these prohibitions pull indifferent or even Tory-leaning assembly subscribers into the patriot fold, at least superficially? In Philadelphia, the case of one Miss Footman suggests so. Of her, Chastellux remarked, “[she] was rather contraband, that is to say, suspected of not being a very good whig....” He applied this term as though it had been adopted as the standard pejorative for disingenuous

⁵² Barbara Clark Smith, “Social Visions of the American Resistance Movement,” Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *The Transforming Hand of Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia 1996), 27-57.

⁵³ *New York Gazetteer*, 24 Dec 1783, in Corry.

⁵⁴ *Independent Journal*, 22 Dec 1783, in Corry.

attendees (and probably citizens in general). Miss Footman may not have been alone in her political persuasion.

Forthright ladies found in the ballroom an arena for expression, not merely a place to see and be seen, but to be seen to adhere to a cause. There, a “staunch whig”—like Chastellux's "Miss Viny" of Philadelphia—might “set no bounds to [their] liberty.” The very bold might display their allegiance on their person. Miss Viny seems to have done so; while Chastellux described her as a ridiculous coquette painted in “all possible colors,” he curiously only specified “red, white, [and] blue.”⁵⁶ Upon the occasion of the alliance with France, an agent of Congress in Martinico (Martinique) hosted a ball at which ladies adorned themselves in a manner consistent with the celebration: “Their head dress, a la independence, was composed of thirteen curls, seven on one side and six on the other.”⁵⁷ In January 1782, the *Connecticut Courant* published a selection from a letter supposedly written by an officer in Charleston, in which he detailed the style of ladies' attire. “Even in their dresses the females seem to bid us defiance,” he wrote. “The gay toys which are imported here they despise; they wear their own homespun manufactures, and take care to have in their breast-knots, and even on their shoes, something that resembles their flag of the thirteen stripes.”⁵⁸

A humorous anecdote from New York related how one ball in 1782 was disrupted by a pert young woman, and whether true or not, illuminates ballroom politics. As the *Boston Evening Post* reported the tale, Sir Henry Clinton requested a dance to the martial tune “Britons, Strike Home.” His partner, the ironically named Miss Franks, retorted,

⁵⁵ *New York Gazetteer*, 31 Dec 1783, in Corry.

⁵⁶ Chastellux, 147-148.

⁵⁷ *New York Packet*, 10 Sep 1778, in Corry.

⁵⁸ *Connecticut Courant*, 8 Jan 1782, in Corry.

"Indeed, may it please your Excellency, I think if he was to play—Britons go home! it would be much more pertinent and suitable to the present time."⁵⁹ When Clinton approached the girl's father the next day to complain, he found no sympathetic ear. Mr. Franks' defense of his daughter—"if you will dance with her, you must e'en put up with her jokes"—attests to a breakdown of deference on two levels: that of an occupied population to British military authority, and more importantly for the purposes of this paper, that of a youthful female to a mature titled male. In a conspicuous role reversal, Miss Franks took full advantage of the freedom afforded women in the ballroom, and Clinton was expected to submit or—according to the custom of the assembly—forfeit the privilege of dancing, perhaps for the entire evening. And the anecdote contains one additional slap in the face for the British Army, in that the Franks family were actually Loyalists—clearly, they had become sufficiently disillusioned with the British cause as to poke fun at it in public. That a number of colonial newspapers reprinted the story implies that its effect would be widespread; up and down the Atlantic coast, readers understood the political function of dance.

"By a Lady, hearing a gentleman say, he would never dance with a Plain Woman," read a poem published in the 1790s.

Young Damon vows, nay, hear him swear,
 'He'll dance with none but what are fair,'
 Suppose we Girls a law dispense,
 We'll dance with none but men of sense,
 Suppose you should--pray, Ma'am, what then?
 Why, Sir, you'd never dance again.⁶⁰

Women employed this alternate strategy—social snubbing—in South Carolina, where

⁵⁹ *Boston Evening Post*, 19 Jan 1782, in Corry.

⁶⁰ *Carlisle Gazette*, 22 Feb 1792, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

according to the *Connecticut Courant*, British officers fared no better than in New York. The same letter from Charleston quoted above complained that at “[t]he assemblies which the officers have opened, in hopes to give an air of gaiety and chearfulness to themselves and the inhabitants, the women are seldom or never to be persuaded to dance...An officer told Lord Cornwallis not long ago, that he believed if we had destroyed all the men in North-America, we should have enough to do to conquer the women.”⁶¹ The men of Charleston likewise did their part, entrenching themselves at the card tables to avoid having to speak to the British.

It was not only the Patriot women who exploited the ballroom as a political space. One unusual group of Loyalist ladies made a splash in Charleston when they hosted a ball for British soldiers at a stately home on New Year’s Day, 1782. A splendid affair, it began with the ladies and their gentlemen, adorned in finery, processing through the streets in carriages; it continued with a banquet whose cost was reckoned at £80 sterling and ended at four in the morning after hours of dancing. Pomp and ostentation aside, the celebration can be seen as a clear political, social, and economic statement and a truly revolutionary usurpation of power because all the ladies involved-and none of the men-were black fugitives and slaves. Referred to in the press as the “Ethiopian Ball,” it generated outrage among the white population of Charleston and abroad, gaining attention as it was reprinted by newspapers in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.

While the ball reinvigorated loyalist feeling among the fugitives involved, it repulsed other segments of society by demonstrating a level of unreason white colonists could not fathom, likely adding to the disaffection of formerly ardent Tories. “Many of those

⁶¹ *Connecticut Courant*, 8 Jan 1782, in Corry.

wretches were taken out of houses before their mistresses faces, and escorted to the ball by these British tyrants,” fumed the popular account. The women were “drest up in taste, with richest silks and false rolls on their heads, powdered up in a most pompous manner.”

⁶² Not only did these women mix freely with their white, male, social “betters,” they assumed authority within the ballroom—three of them served as the managers of the assembly, roles held simultaneously in Philadelphia by high-ranking Continental Army officers. Hagar Roupell, Isabella Pinckney, Chloe Fraser, and all other ladies present had appropriated the role of socialite from their former (or current) white masters and mistresses and made it their own, declaring in no uncertain terms their freedom, their equality, their power, and their allegiance to the British cause. Another deeply meaningful point to note is that all three of the managers had surnames, a distinction that suggests free status—either legal or psychological—and a growing sense of free identity.⁶³ What better way to express the new possibilities life seemed to hold for these women than by partaking in entertainments that had come to symbolize the refined urban world from which they had been so long excluded? Whether mocking or sincere, their efforts, and their success, represent a dramatic entrance into white symbolic politics.

The British Army again came under American scrutiny, from both patriots and loyalists, during General Howe’s occupation of Philadelphia and similar occupations elsewhere. The British troops seemed to be following the directive attributed earlier to Burgoyne, to “dance and sing with the ladies, and coax the inhabitants to submit.”⁶⁴ In Philadelphia, Howe and his men presented numerous plays and entertainments for the

⁶² *New Hampshire Gazette*, 27 Apr 1782, in Corry.

⁶³ For a thorough discussion of the significance of surnames, please see the works of Ira Berlin, in particular *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1998).

population, as did their counterparts in New York, where Clinton's thespians later earned an amazing £5000 in the 1782 season. In this case, as with Boston, the strategy met with mixed results, enticing some inhabitants while disillusioning others. Evidently disgusted with Howe's antics—particularly the extravagant pageant and ball called the *Mischianza* in May, 1778—many loyalists complained that the General and his men wasted precious time treading the boards when they ought to have been subduing the Continentals encamped at nearby Valley Forge. Howe's secretary predicted that patriots would “dwell upon the Folly & Extravagance of it with Pleasure,” and indeed they did.⁶⁵

Howe's poor handling of his campaign left him open to satirical commentary through one of the very same pleasures in which he over-indulged in Philadelphia: dance. “London, November 1. [1776] In the country dances published for 1777, there is one called ‘Lord Howe's jig,’ in which there is ‘cross over, change hands, turn your partner, foot it on both sides,’ and other movements admirable depictive (says a correspondent) of the present war in America.” so a colonial newspaper, reprinting news from England, captured the political spirit of dance.⁶⁶ To the best of their ability through fitting titles and steps, dance masters composed new dances that responded to current events, in this case deflecting an uncertain, changeable political and military situation with humor. The political world, as the above statement suggests, is full of sidesteps, turnabouts, runarounds, and handshakes, and in this way lends itself to a ballroom parody. In post-Howe Philadelphia, the dances performed reflected current, especially military, events, often directly maligning the British. “These dances,” wrote Chastellux, “like the *toasts* we drink at table, have some relation to politics: one is called *the success of the*

⁶⁴ Trumbull, “M’Fingal.”

⁶⁵ Silverman, 412.

campaign, another, *the defeat of Burgoyne*, and a third, *Clinton's retreat*.”⁶⁷ Thus, while attendees might have chosen to engage in political discourses with their lips, they would have been compelled to do so with their feet.

At this time, all America's formal dance publications arrived from Europe, where a composer of sympathetic sentiments or astute marketing instinct might create a product he knew would appeal to the colonists—politics in the form of entertainment, not unlike the production of the famed "No Stamp Act" teapot produced in Staffordshire in 1766. And Americans were still eager to consume dance publications from England, which flowed into the former colonies throughout the hostilities. A manual published in London, purporting to collect "Twenty Four Country Dances for the Year 1782, With proper Directions to each Dance as they are performed at Court Almacks Bath Pantheon and all Public Assemblies," was in American hands within the year, and was copied into a commonplace book in New England.⁶⁸ This may sound like a speedy transatlantic crossing, especially during wartime, but there is no reason to believe it was unusual. In 1789, John Griffiths advertised that he could teach his students "new cotillions, which have been but four months since invented in Paris."⁶⁹ Imported manuals circulated among the population to be copied out by hand into the personal journals and manuscripts of soldiers and civilians alike; thus, their reach went far beyond the libraries of the gentry. In the course of being transmitted, these dances could be modified easily, and the same tunes used for different sets of figures, sometimes making it difficult to pinpoint where a particular combination originated.

⁶⁶ *Continental Journal*, 27 Feb 1777, in Corry.

⁶⁷ Chastellux, 147.

⁶⁸ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

⁶⁹ *Massachusetts Centinel*, January 3, 1789, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Denying what was so obviously still a shared culture, the Continentals drew a pointed contrast between themselves and the British, emphasizing their own restraint. At General Nathanael Greene's entertainments, one officer wrote, there were "no *levées* or formal *soirées*, as with the Enemy in the City, only conversation over a cup of tea or coffee. No dancing or amusement of any kind, except singing." Yet, as Holly Mayer has found, "hundreds of gatherings enlivened camp life throughout the war and up and down the social chain of command." General Green apparently was not averse to dancing, despite the selective reporting of those under his command, as he sponsored a small ball in 1779. At the camp hospital in Albany in 1778, Dr. James Thatcher recorded hiring a dancing master to instruct him and the hospital personnel in the hopes of eventually learning to "figure in a ball room."⁷⁰ Whatever the stated purpose of taking on dance master John Trotter, Dr. Thatcher no doubt recognized the potential of dance to re-energize and reunify a struggling military force desperately in need of both physical and mental stamina to confront what lay ahead.⁷¹ To look forward to a ball while suffering severe cold in the midst of death and disease called for steadfast faith in the patriot cause, a faith that dance might help to promote through a sense of community and singleness of purpose. Despite the Continentals' protestations over British extravagance, they too turned to dance to meet their political and pragmatic needs. Indeed, during winter quarters the following year, Thatcher wrote that there was "not a night without amusements and dancing."⁷²

To distinguish themselves from the British without eliminating dance and revelry, the rebel Americans stressed the politeness and frugality that attended their *fêtes* as compared to the debauchery and ostentation they perceived among their adversaries. Chastellux

⁷⁰ Silverman, 335-337.

⁷¹ Mayer, 112, 150.

noted that an evening spent at the Philadelphia Assembly in the wake of the occupation had taken on a character of military precision, in stark contrast to the wildness of Howe's festivities. Mitchell and the other managers won selection to the position by virtue of their "distinguished" ranks in the Continental Army, and Mitchell at least approached his duties as manager no differently than he did his commission. Mentions of order and decorum had appeared describing dances previously, but now they did so with greater frequency, and to these terms patriots added "œconomy." Since the non-importation and non-consumption agreements of the 1760s and in keeping with jeremiad strains of religious thought, "œconomy," "industry," and their variants had become watchwords of patriotic devotion. A spinning match held by twenty ladies of the "best families in Providence" constituted "A laudable example for all ladies in Newport and elsewhere, who purpose to promote industry, and retrieve from ruin a sinking country," proclaimed the *Connecticut Gazette*.⁷³

Careful spending—or at least careful phrasing—deflected charges of mismanagement of time and money. Thus, at a ball thrown at the Williamsburg, Virginia Governor's Palace in her honor in 1780, Elizabeth Ambler noted, "the entertainment itself was like most of the entertainments of the present time simple and frugal in its viands..." At a celebration of the victory at Yorktown in 1781, patriots found "preparations for a ball in the most beautiful œconomy. After tea the evening was past in one of the most innocent, graceful and pleasing amusements." French nobles and the wife of General Greene graced a Newport assembly which displayed both "elegant[ce]" and "decent gaiety."⁷⁴ Records of a ball attended by the allied forces in New Hampshire employed similar,

⁷² Keller and Hendrickson, 61.

⁷³ *Connecticut Gazette*, 15 Mar 1766, in Corry.

politicized language: "The company was brilliant and numerous-harmony, politeness, and cordial friendship, seemed visible in every countenance. A cold collation was provided, which was neat and elegant (altho' not costly)-plenty was mark'd with propriety and œconomy."⁷⁵ The next year, citizens of Richmond remembered the birth of General George Washington with an assembly, "the œconomy, decorum, and propriety of which could only be exceeded but by the festive mirth and social happiness, which appeared in every countenance...."⁷⁶

In reality, it may be that American festivities did not differ very much from British ones. In 1778, a ball at General Washington's Headquarters to mark the second anniversary of the Declaration of Independence reportedly was conducted with "great pomp." Similarly, early in 1779, Thatcher recorded a ball comprised of "the first ton in the state" and opened "by His Excellency, General Washington, having for his partner the lady of General Knox."⁷⁷ Despite the presumed cost, fireworks also featured in this affair, which was intended to celebrate the alliance between France and America. Amusingly, given Thatcher's description, the *Pennsylvania Packet* printed a letter in March of 1779 recounting the same event: "As it was a festival given by men who had not enriched themselves by the war, the lights were cheap and of their own manufacture...through the whole, there was a remarkable stile of looks and behavior, undebauched by British manners or British entertainments."⁷⁸ Real sacrifices combined with rhetorical strategies allowed American dancers to prove that they, unlike the British, could entertain and be entertained without compromising their personal or political

⁷⁴ *Connecticut Gazette*, 16 Feb 1781, in Corry.

⁷⁵ *New Hampshire Gazette*, 19 Oct 1782, in Corry.

⁷⁶ *Connecticut Courant*, 11 Mar 1783, in Corry.

⁷⁷ Keller and Hendrickson, 61.

virtue.

Sometimes, however, restrictive legislation aimed at achieving this "œconomy" got in the way of political statements instead. In 1774, well before formal hostilities began, the Continental Congress enacted a measure that discouraged "every species of extravagance and dissipation," and left it in the hands of a committee of inspection to determine whether any given event—be it an elaborate funeral or a grand ball—overstepped its bounds. In November of the following year, 1775, Martha Washington visited Philadelphia, an occasion which the Virginia delegates to Congress felt deserved a celebration. They scheduled a ball in her honor for later in the month. On the very day it was projected to occur—and presumably after great expense had been incurred, in preparing the New Tavern visually, obtaining sufficient refreshments, and probably adding to wardrobes—the committee discovered the plan and took immediate action. Committee member Christopher Marshall approached Samuel Adams with concerns that the public would take the ball amiss. It would seem as though Congress was not limiting its own entertainments while expecting the populace to give up theirs. As a result of these discussions, John Hancock visited Lady Washington to urge her against attending, and Marshall had the satisfaction of seeing the entire event cancelled. He reported, after calling on Martha Washington himself, that she received the news agreeably and even thanked him for providing "such timely notice" of the change. While it is not difficult to imagine Lady Washington being polite, it stretches credulity to believe that she found the notice as timely as Marshall claimed. Though General Washington is more often regarded as the avid dancer of the pair, his lady was by no means deficient in either talent or enjoyment, and the ball had been some weeks in the making already. One wonders if

⁷⁸ Keller and Hendrickson, 61.

Marshall took as perfectly frank a remark that was spoken ironically.

The turn of events sparked controversy among members of the Continental Congress, with the Virginia delegation's pride understandably wounded. Benjamin Harrison of Berkeley Plantation took particular umbrage at the ball being thwarted, and interrupted Marshall and Adams at dinner that evening to excoriate them verbally. It seems clear that any violation of the principles of "œconomy," if they were to be violated, had been accomplished already—the money was irrevocably spent. All that remained to salvage was any negative impact the proceedings might have on public opinion. Thus, rather than the prohibition being made in the spirit of patriotism, of conserving resources, it was made in the spirit of fear, and possibly of partisanship. A letter from Harrison to Washington recently had been intercepted and published by the British with a spurious passage inserted that portrayed the general as a womanizer. This paragraph, though since proven fraudulent, only compounded the feeling among New Englanders that Virginia gentlemen were a self-indulgent, unwholesome lot.⁷⁹ Congress bore no ill-will towards Martha, but much of it did towards men like her husband. The cancellation of the ball may have been a protest against perceived Virginian dissipation, a challenge to the fitness of the Washingtons and Harrisons of the world to lead an emerging nation.

⁷⁹ Flora Fraser, *The Washingtons: George and Martha, "Join'd by Friendship, Crown'd by Love"* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), 125-127

Chapter 4: “News From America”

In the post-revolutionary period, beneath the façade of unity that victory and George Washington’s fame lent the new nation, Americans continued to debate their national identity. The dances of the 1780s and 90s, though in large part celebratory, did not lose their political edge. Many focused on Washington, some maligned the British or the Loyalists, and still others managed to do both at the same time, drawing upon English popular songs and setting American themes to them.

But there were serious questions facing the American people as they vaunted their classically-inspired government system, and then privately wondered whether it would succeed at all. How far could democratic principles be taken before they became social leveling, that bugbear of established gentry families? How was America to react to the discontent that exploded into revolution in France in 1789? Was this the legacy of liberty that American Independence had unleashed on the world? And at home, was the backbone and emblem of America to be found in the character of the traditional rural farmer or that of the ambitious urban mechanic?

Though dance could answer none of these questions, Americans used it to convey their personal opinions, whether in action on the ballroom floor or symbolically, through metaphors and imagery. Two distinct philosophies emerged. The first associated English country dance with the democratic ideal, with innocent leisure, hard-won at the end of a working day; the other saw in the longways set the potential for social disorder, for racial mixing, and for incipient Jacobinism after the model of the French “Carmagnole.” The vocal presence in America of French émigrés from across the political spectrum, the sudden proliferation of dancing schools, many of them run by Frenchmen, growing racial

tension in the wake of the Haitian revolution, and the contest between monarchical and democratic trends in American government—all provided ample fodder for political battles waged under the guise of dance.

“Successful Campaign”

But had I been a prince, (to be sure I should have made a most noble prince!) I should have led up a military dance equal to that of the great Macedonian.

~Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*¹

In the wake of the War of Independence, a variety of elements complicated the use of dance as a vehicle for political opinion. Americans, having shed the label of “subject,” now confronted the question of who would be considered a “citizen,” a word that acquired dangerous connotations during the blood-soaked French Revolution. Although Americans still largely looked to Europe for their dance trends, the number of American-authored dance manuals and manuscripts increased. Newspapers proliferated in a way unknown in colonies before, and print culture and an increasing number of foreign dance masters helped America combat accusations of cultural backwardness. In this new atmosphere, questions of class, gender, and race were equally, if not more important than they had been prior to independence. There was much in the developing psyche of the free nation that dance could make visible. Following the tradition already over a hundred years old, many dances referenced current political events and partisanship. As with the Playford manuals, they illuminate the changing character of the state in the early years of an experimental government. However, despite the boom in pamphlets and newspapers, no single dance manual came to dominate and represent trends in American politics in the

way that Playford had for England. Thus, the attempt to trace American history through dance publications becomes a more haphazard task of pairing disparate elements to suggest an overall theme.

The dance title "Successful Campaign" appeared first in England in 1764, long before it could bear any relationship with the American Revolution. Another dance of that name, but with different figures, was published in 1769 and again in 1773. The associated music appears in the manuscript of Continental soldier Captain George Bush, stationed in Pennsylvania in 1779, so it seems likely that some form of the dance was still current in American circles. The version of the figures printed in America, though they underwent a number of changes over time, never once matched either of the English publications. They made their debut in American sources as early as 1781 and continued to recur in manuscript and published forms into the early nineteenth-century. The timing of the first American rendition of the dance coincides neatly with the moment when things began looking up for the Continental Army and Patriots might reasonably hope for a successful campaign! Some first-hand accounts report that George Washington danced "Successful Campaign" at a ball in Newport, Rhode Island in 1781, adding to the dance's renown. The title's persistent popularity well after the conclusion of war was, in a way, only made possible by the American victory. The dance may have begun as a wish, but it continued as a celebration. Meanwhile, its star in England waned after 1773, and it was seldom—if ever—published again, further cementing its association with the Patriot cause. This puts it in much the same category as dances such as "The Defeat of Burgoyne" from 1781 or "British Sorrow," from 1807/08, both of which appeared solely in America.

¹ Samuel Richardson, *The History of Clarissa Harlowe*, Vol. 5 (London: Harrison and Co., 1784), 640.

Not all political dances written in America, however, can be quite so easily analyzed, nor were they uniformly pro-independence. "British White Feathers" is a perfect illustration of this complexity. The dance first appeared in a volume published in London, but titled *Twenty Four American Country Dances as Danced by the British during their Winter Quarters at Philadelphia, New York, & Charles Town*. This throws the ultimate origin of the dances into some confusion—were they devised by Americans or by the British occupying forces? If by Americans, which Americans, and what were their political allegiances? Most of the titles clearly favor Loyalist ties, name-dropping a variety of prominent generals and battlefields. But were the dances freshly-composed for the British during the occupation, or might they have been common among the Patriots, and appropriated and rechristened to celebrate British victories instead? Both possibilities are equally plausible.²

That "British White Feathers" went by two titles does little to resolve the issue; it was also known as "The Monckton," a reference to Robert Monckton, a renowned officer in the British army. Monckton's fame pre-dated the Revolution, as he had served in the French and Indian War, been appointed governor of New York, and was also responsible for the removal of the Acadians from Canada to Louisiana. Monckton had, in 1764, been court martialed (and acquitted) for "wrongs and deliberate acts of oppression" committed in 1762 against a corps of men under his charge in Martinique; however, this incident did little to damage his reputation.³ Indeed, after his time as New York governor, Monckton was considered a "friend of America" in the British House of Commons. His young brother Henry served with the British during the American Revolution and died at the

² Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*; and Robert Keller, *English Country Dances*.

Battle of Monmouth in 1778. Robert's case was different; although the decision may have had nothing to do with principles, he declined an offer to command the British army in North America, choosing to remain in England, where he died in 1782.⁴

Ultimately, "The Monckton" commemorated a man who did more good for America than ill, but who might just as easily be lauded for his many services to the Mother Country. Also puzzling is the alternate title, which to modern ears implies cowardice—"British White Feathers." But would dancers in the 1780s have had this same negative association? White feathers, in this context, probably refer instead to the plumes that sometimes adorned a military hat—plumes that Cyrano de Bergerac, in the nineteenth-century play of the same name, referred to as his "panache." In the Continental Army, for instance, Major Generals and Brigadier Generals were both directed to wear a white feather.⁵ Regardless of whether the "white feathers" were meant to represent timidity or courage, or whether Monckton was celebrated as a "friend" of America or of the Crown, it is indisputable that the dance made a statement about British leadership during the era of the American Revolution. And that statement was just sufficiently imprecise that either Patriots or Loyalists might have bent it to their own purposes.

The end of the war brought celebrations of all kinds—honoring patriotic citizens, renowned generals such as George Washington, foreign dignitaries, and the French forces whose assistance in the conflict had been so instrumental. Such celebrations, whatever their other features, often included a dance. A multitude of new dances appeared whose

³ Sir Robert Monckton and Colin Campbell, *Proceedings of a general Court Martial* (London: James Robson, 1764), 4.

⁴ I.K. Steele, "Monckton, Robert," in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. 4, University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003, <http://www.biographi.ca/en/bio/monckton_robert_4E.html>, accessed 13 June, 2016.

⁵ "Notes and Queries," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 30, No. 2 (1906), 248.

titles commemorated the victory and its principle players. Most of these centered on General Washington.⁶ Other tunes lauded his wife Martha, Lafayette, the Continental Congress, and Baron Von Steuben, among others. Even Bostonians, with their puritanical reputation, earned a mention in a New Jersey paper for their construction of a theatre and their weekly dancing assemblies. In 1784 they performed such pieces as “Push About the Loyalists,” “Saratoga Jigg,” “Sir Henry’s [Clinton’s] Minuet,” and “Mrs. [Lighthorse Harry] Lee’s Fancy.”⁷ The first of these was blatantly partisan, and could well have been employed to annoy lingering adherents of the Loyalist cause, continuing to make them feel unwelcome at the public assemblies that had banned their participation outright during the war. While American dance tunes retained the old tradition of alluding to figures in power, and while references to British royalty did not disappear entirely, a new character of leader emerged in the ballroom: American presidents.

George Washington was fêted and fetishized instantly as an embodiment of the collective American character. The general suffused popular culture, becoming a rallying point for the masses; at a time when former colonists pondered their identity as citizens, Washington provided the answer to Hector St. John de Crevecoeur’s now-famed query, “What, then, is the American, this new man?” During the immediate post-Revolutionary period and the subsequent Federal period, dances relating to Washington abounded. One of the earliest was “Saw You My Hero, George” (1779). Transcribed, like “Successful Campaign,” by Captain George Bush, it was an adaptation of “The Grey Cock,” a popular sentimental song with a dance published six years earlier in London under the title “Saw

⁶ Keller and Hendrickson, 132-136.

⁷ *The Political Intelligencer*, March 9, 1784, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

You My Father.” The appropriation of familiar tunes was a common practice that allowed for a wider dissemination of material, as performers had no need to learn and perfect new music, nor did they need to be professional musicians. In this case, the romantic lyrics of the original piece have little bearing on its incarnation as a patriotic song, save for the reference to a paternal figure. Still, the parallel construction of the two titles effectively presents Washington as a father to the nation, years before he would be elected president.

Use of a pre-existing tune could also be employed as a more explicit political statement, as when Jonathan Sewall penned “A New Favourite Song, at the American Camp,” titled it “Gen. Washington,” and set it to the tune “British Grenadiers.” The original British lyrics read:

“Some boast of Alexander, And some of Hercules,
Of Hector and Lysander, And more such blades as these:
But all the world acknowledge, true courage most appears
In the tow, row, row di, dow di dow of the British grenadiers.”⁸

It continued in this vein. The American revision directly supplanted things British with things American in its opening verse:

“Vain Britons boast no longer, with proud Indignity,
By Land your conquering Legions, your matchless Strength by Sea,
Since we your Sons incensed, our Swords have girded on;
Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza, for War and Washington.”⁹

Other compositions to hail Washington included “The Washington Country Dance” (1785), “Washington’s Resignation” (from the army and the presidency, in 1788 and

⁸ *The Court of Comus: a new collection of three hundred songs, medleys, and cantatas* (Dublin: J. Potts, 1763), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.wm.edu>>, accessed 13 June, 2016.

⁹ Jonathan Sewall, “A New Favourite Song, at the American Camp,” *Early American Imprints, Series 1: Evans, 1639-1800*, no. 14918, <<http://www.readex.com/content/early-american-imprints-series-i-evans-1639-1800>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

1796, respectively), “George Washington’s Favorite Cotillion” (1793), “City of Washington” (1795), Washington’s birthday “The Twenty Second of February” (1799), and sixteen different dances called “The President,” most of which probably refer to Washington.¹⁰ The first instance of a dance called “The President” occurred in 1794, and was included in a collection published in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. At that time, of course, there had been only one president, George Washington, so every iteration of this title until his term ended in 1797 must refer to him. Other volumes in 1795 and 1796 also list it, although pairing it with different figures each time. Even after Washington’s retirement, it is possible that the title was too closely associated with him to be interpreted as recalling any other man. Whatever the case, dances by this name continued to appear regularly until 1808, and then one final time around 1820. Another dance in the c. 1820 broadside is “The Adams,” following immediately after “President,” and clearly distinguished from it. This may be slight evidence to suggest that, although others succeeded him, Washington remained, even posthumously, the President in the American mind. The dance named for his estate, “Mount Vernon,” did not even appear until 1798, the year before his death, and was reprinted as late as 1810.¹¹ But Adams, the next man to hold the office, clearly earned his share of recognition on the dance floor as well, as did his successor Thomas Jefferson.

Interestingly, a number of dances on American themes also appeared in two volumes in London, both published 1785. Some purported to be American, but others claimed British origin. Prominent among these is “The Washington Country Dance,” apparently composed by James Fishar, ballet master at the King’s Theatre. At least some of his

¹⁰ Keller and Hendrickson, 132-136.

¹¹ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

work was well-known and well-loved in America, so it is reasonable to believe that the feeling was mutual. Dance master John Griffiths adopted one of Fisher's tunes in his 1788 dance manual, calling it "Fisher's Hornpipe." Similarly, he advertised in Boston that his classes featured "a Solo-Minuet which was never before danced in America--the Music by the celebrated Mr. Fisher."¹² Fisher seems to have found American subjects appealing, but it is impossible to ascertain whether he intended his publication to have political resonance.¹³ Given the international nature of dance manual publication, particularly traveling from London to America, it is more probable that Fisher included his "Washington Country Dance" and other American references simply as a strategy to widen his market.¹⁴

In the absence of life-or-death political factions, dance was no longer a vehicle for conflicting sentiments to the same degree. There is no reason to suppose that dance ceased to send political messages, though—the practice certainly remained strong in Britain. In 1789, for instance, among celebrations of the restoration of King George's sanity, both the Tories—who had opposed installing the Prince of Wales as Regent—and the Whigs—who had championed a Regency—were expected to exude the same degree of joy at the King's recovery. The London clubs associated with these vying political parties each threw a ball distinguished by being conspicuously decorated in that party's colors. Even wearing blue and buff might be taken as a signal of Whiggish allegiances.¹⁵

In the new United States, many of the colorful ballroom anecdotes that had rallied

¹² Keller, *Dance and Its Music*, 402-403.

¹³ Keller and Hendrickson, 17, 83.

¹⁴ Kate Van Winkle Keller and Charles Hendrickson's invaluable *George Washington, A Biography in Social Dance* deals extensively with a variety of Washington-related dances, from minuets to cotillions, and masterfully places each in the context of the events of his life.

Americans during the war years disappeared from the press in the Federal era, leaving mostly mundane advertisements in their wake. As ever, disagreements arose over the morality and usefulness of dance, but given the overwhelming number of notices for assemblies and dancing masters that newspapers published, it seems evident that most Americans continued to embrace the pastime and incorporate it into their developing sense of national identity. In that respect, dance retained all of its previous political overtones and acquired some new ones. In many cases, it was the *idea* of dance and what it represented, rather than what transpired in the ballroom, that made it a crucial component of political life.

The thirteen new states had formed a legal entity that required a national character, and popular entertainment could serve this need well. Even as it imitated Europe, the new nation harkened back to the classical age, imagining itself as the successor to the wisdom and politics of democratic Athens and republican Rome. Music and dance-as well as art and architecture-followed suit, playing upon classical themes and looking to the ancient world for inspiration. In his lengthy “Defence of the Constitution of the United States of America,” John Adams proclaimed that, while Spartan society had its flaws, Americans ought to imitate its forms of physical activity:

Exercises like those established by Lycurgus, running, wrestling, riding, swimming, scating [skating], fencing, dancing, should be introduced into public and private education in America, which would fortify the bodies and invigorate the minds of youth; instead of those sedentary amusements which debilitate, and are taking entire possession of society all over the world. The ladies too might honour some of these entertainments...with their presence and participation, to the great advantage of their own health, and that of their posterity....¹⁶

¹⁵ “Request for a ticket to Boodle’s Fete, May 1789,” *Hoare’s Bank Manuscript of the Month*, May 2013, <<https://www.hoaresbank.co.uk/sites/default/files/styles/Documents/May%2013%20-%20Boodle's%20Fete.pdf>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

¹⁶ *Pennsylvania Mercury and Universal Advertiser*, Aug. 31, 1787, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

According to Adams, then, dance served to improve the vitality of the individual person as well as the body politic. Dancing was accessible to both men and women, to children and adults, and helped guarantee the continued wellbeing of the nation in future generations. As such, it did not represent the dissipation of the European aristocracy, but the virtues of the classical period.

Whether through the rousing parades that celebrated democracy and craftsmanship, the patriotic theatrical presentations, or the inaugural balls that marked the installation of Washington as president, popular festivities sought to unite Americans under a propagandistic, almost paradoxical banner—prosperity, yet simplicity; refinement, yet rustic charm. Favorable accounts of dancing from this period conform to one or the other of each divergent pair. Often, the invocation of dance was not meant literally as in Adams's work, but figuratively. One of the unmistakable examples of this took the form of poetry in Stockbridge, Massachusetts.

Such merriment does us no harm,
Whatever some bigots advance;
If life has an innocent charm,
'Tis when we unite in the dance.
This cannot religion disgrace,
Its votaries well might attend;
Intemperance here hath no place,
While mirth with morality blend.
So civil and social are we,
In such society join'd,
All are, as observers may see,
By music and dancing refin'd.¹⁷

“The contradiction between republican simplicity and genteel elegance was a general problem for many American men of letters trying to conceive a consistent American

¹⁷ *Western Star*, Feb. 26, 1798, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

character,” writes Richard Bushman, in *The Refinement of America*.¹⁸ The figure of Washington perfectly embodied these contradictions, being an accomplished dancer and avid theatre-goer as well as a self-proclaimed farmer and disciplined manager of an estate. Hence, the numerous dances that bear his name invoke not only the heroic figure of the Revolution, but the industrious and educated persona he had cultivated since youth.¹⁹

Especially in the 1790s, as a familiarity with the social customs of dance spread, authors adopted dancing metaphors and allegories to make political statements. Some required little background knowledge and thus are as intelligible to the modern reader as to the eighteenth-century, such as this clever tidbit “On the distinction of WHIG and TORY”:

O WHAT is a Whig, Sir,----
O what is a Whig?
O what is a Whig and a Tory?
In search of preferment they’ll dance the same jig----
And both tell the very same story.

Jigs, unlike country dances or even minuets, were presentation dances that often involved only one individual. He or she completed a series of intricate steps, often specifically choreographed to correspond to his or her skills, but sometimes freeform and improvisational as might befit the ambiguities and shifting loyalties of politics.²⁰

The idea of dance played a role not just domestic, but in also international politics. Dance symbolism could be widely understood and, as it had for years, it provided the populace with a visual representation of the mysterious political process. What rendered

¹⁸ Bushman, 193.

¹⁹ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Meaning of Independence* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976), 30-31; Judith S. Britt, *Nothing More Agreeable* (Mount Vernon, Va: The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, 1984), 12.

it more important than ever was the newly-independent status of the United States, which assumed a perilously neutral position in a sea of global conflicts: namely, the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon. Some Americans viewed the uprising as a tragedy and the demise of Louis XVI as the loss of an important ally. Others saw in the French Revolution the continuation of the American, a domino effect of republicanism freeing mankind one country at a time. Even as they borrowed their ideals and habits from the Old World, Americans wrestled with the questions of what made them distinct and often resorted to defining themselves in opposition to a European other, whether France or Britain. Through dance imagery, rival factions sought to misrepresent each other's policies and constituents, often by drawing parallels between them and those of whichever foreign nation seemed most threatening.

For instance, a columnist in the *Massachusetts Centinel*, identified as "Plain Truth," criticized Tories for their behavior both during and after the Revolution, accusing them of "form[ing] connexions with the British parties, and laugh[ing] at the whigs. As soon as the danger was over they *figured* in the political *dance*, have got near the head of the *set*, and think they have a right to call for what tune they please. They have truly made an awkward figure at dancing *yankey-doodle*, and therefore are calling for the *British Grenadier*." ²¹ "The British Grenadiers" was one of many country dances derived from the genres of traditional or popular music. As such, it had lyrics that would have readily sprung to mind:

Then be you Whig or Tory,
Or lukewarm worthless thing,
Be sure that you give glory
To GEORGE our gracious King.

²⁰ Keller and Hendrickson, 22.

²¹ *Massachusetts Centinel*, March 7, 1787, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

For if you prove rebellious, he'll thunder in your ears
The tow, row, row di, dow di dow of his British grenadiers.²²

His readers might also have been familiar with the Revolutionary-era revision of these lyrics penned by Jonathan Sewall at the Continental Army camp and published in the highly accessible broadside format. Sewall had turned British imagery directly on its head and including the following verse:

Still deaf to mild intreaties, still blind to England's Good,
You have for thirty Pieces, betrayed your Country's Blood,
Like Æsop's Cur you'll gain, a shadow for your Bone,
Yet find us fearful shades indeed inspired by WASHINGTON.²³

Thus, "Plain Truth" selected this particular dance for his metaphor not only because of the value of its title, which referenced a fearsome branch of His Majesty's armed services, but for the accompanying words and their political message. At once, he conveyed his sense of the traitorous, milquetoast character of the Tories and the boldness and patriotism of their opponents.

As nascent political parties devised platforms favorable to either England or France's welfare, the welfare of the domestic population was also at stake. The Constitution ratification controversy, Shays' Rebellion, the Whisky Rebellion, and other belligerent incidents exposed weak seams in the fabric of the Republic, while controversial measures such as the Jay Treaty in 1794 divided a populace that previously had seemed united behind a bipartisan president. Despite Washington's entreaties, two distinct philosophies coalesced. Among other aspects of their platforms, Federalists tended to ally themselves with English mercantile interests, while Anti-Federalists or Republicans—with Jefferson

²² *The Court of Comus: a new collection of three hundred songs, medleys, and cantatas* (Dublin: J. Potts, 1763), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <<http://galenet.galegroup.com.proxy.wm.edu>>, accessed 13 June, 2016.

²³ Sewall, "A New Favourite Song."

and Madison at the helm—championed France’s cause. The added factor of the French Revolution made these characterizations all the more potent as propaganda tools.

“Rural Felicity”

At a little distance, were benches for the elder peasants, few of whom, however, could forbear to join the jocund dance, which began soon after sun-set, when several of sixty tripped it with almost as much glee and airy lightness, as those of sixteen. The musicians, who sat carelessly on the grass, at the foot of a tree, seemed inspired by the sound of their own instruments, which were chiefly flutes and a kind of long guitar. Behind, stood a boy, flourishing a tamborine, and dancing a solo, except that, as he sometimes gaily tossed the instrument, he tripped among the other dancers, when his antic gestures called forth a broader laugh, and heightened the rustic spirit of the scene.

~Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794²⁴

Throughout its long reign in the ballroom, but especially in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century, the term “country dance” lent itself to what was perhaps willful misinterpretation. In the passage above, Ann Radcliffe described the innocent pleasure associated with peasantry and picturesque nature in the 1790s. Though her novel's setting is Continental Europe during the Renaissance, the feelings she described are completely consistent with the English impulse to romanticize the rustic. In the wake of the French Revolution, the idealization of country life, even among the aristocracy, found its way into many art forms—painting, literature, architecture, and landscaping. This was the great age of the “improvement” of country estates to mimic the sublimity of nature through their forcible reshaping by man; of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads*, rhapsodizing about the countryside, and of Burns, ennobling the common man on the strength of his very commonness; of guides to painting composition that insisted upon a

grouping of three cows in a field as the most natural and pleasing to the eye. In an era when a wealthy man could create a ruined folly on a hill and a grotto in the woods and hire a "hermit" to live in them and dispense wisdom to curious visitors, the idea of well-to-do folk sharing in the innocent joys of a peasant dance was an appealing one. Wrote Paul Gemesage for the *Columbian Herald*:

We have a species of dancing amongst us, which is commonly called *country dancing*...by which we are led to imagine that it is a rustic way of dancing, borrowed from *country people or peasants*; and this, I suppose, is generally taken to be the meaning of it. But this is not the case, for as our dances in general come from France, so does the country dance, which is a manifest corruption of the French *contredanse*, where a number of persons placing themselves opposite one to another begin a figure.²⁵

This was not entirely correct, as the longways form had indeed originated in English folk dancing before gaining the notice of those better-positioned in society. But regardless, Gemesage failed to attract much audience for his clarification; in an America ready to embrace the pristine, hopeful, fruitful countryside, as well as tout the worthiness of the ordinary citizenry, an identification of country dance with simple, rural pleasure was something to encourage.

A romanticized vision of pastoral life equated the country with virtue and fit perfectly with the new nation's desired self-image; dance could be employed as a messenger to spread this image. One dancing master, presumably an immigrant from France, both instructed pupils in the French language and advertised the following pageant-like recital: "On the 3d of September next...will be performed *The Queen of the Rose, or the Reward of Virtue*; being a Pastoral Divertissement, such as is executed annually at Salency, a

²⁴ Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Vol. III (London: G.G. and J. Robinson, 1799), 433.

²⁵ *Columbian Herald*, June 22, 1785, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

small Village of France.”²⁶ In another “divertissement,” M. Desforges scholars danced two quadrilles, “the first of Pâtres with Garlands, and the second of Shepherdesses with Cerceaux, adorned with flowers.” Also included were a minuet, French cotillions, and a “Theatrical Country-Dance.”²⁷ Similarly, Mr. St. Aivre at the City Tavern in New York offered a series of concerts and operas with dancing components, each followed by a grand ball. He and his associates performed “Le Devin du Village” (The Village Seer), “Les Deux Chasseurs” (The Two Huntsmen), “Le Tonnellier” (The Cooper), “La Latiere” (The Milk Maid), a dance entitled “Le Sabottiere” (The Shoemaker), another called “La Jardinier Italienne” (The Italian Gardiner), and even featured “PETER the Indian” whose “performance will be intermixed with curious and striking steps, according to the nicest taste of the French stage dancers.”²⁸ The professional backgrounds of these men and their choice of material contributed to a rise of conscious theatricality in American ballrooms. The same sentimental trends that, in France, produced Marie Antoinette’s cottages and perfumed sheep could, in America, be manipulated to unite the refinement of Europe with the suggestion of a virtuous working and middle class.

Newspaper articles also trumpeted the bucolic pleasures of country gatherings, seeming to equate them with the nation itself. The “country” in “country dance” held a double-meaning. This picture of a country dance appeared in New York, Philadelphia, and several other cities: “On a spacious lawn, bounded on every side by a profusion of the most odoriferous flowering shrubs, a joyous band of villagers were assembled; the

²⁶ *The Providence Journal, and Town and Country Advertiser*, Dec. 18, 1799, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

²⁷ *The Providence Gazette*, Aug. 25, 1798, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

young men dres't in green; youth, health, and pleasure in the air...." America stretched westward for unknown expanses, overflowing with nature's bounty. The vigor of its young men filled it with promise for the future: "Between the arbors seats of moss for their parents...who seem to live anew again...in their children with the benevolent looks of the noble bestowers of the feast...." The nation provided rest for the aging and weary whose valiant deeds had birthed it, and the venerable swelled with pride and hope as they bequeathed their work to a new generation. The author concludes, "[It] filled my eyes with tears, and my swelling heart with a sensation of pure, yet lively transport, to which the joys of the courtly belles are mean."²⁹ With one sentence, the account encourages patriotic sentiments and dismisses monarchism as shallow and frivolous. In addition to its allegorical value, this piece serves as a defense of dance. Innocent revels such as those described were surely appropriate to a republic and in no way indicative of courtly decadence as some might claim. Indeed, country dances could be held high as an embodiment of those qualities that made America great.

It is, perhaps, significant that this piece circulated at the turn of the century, the dawn of a new age in several ways. Not only did the world embark upon a fresh era, but 1800 marked an election year-what would come to be regarded by many as a "Revolution" in American government. After its first printing in 1794, "The Country Dance" was resurrected at least nine times between 1796 and 1801 as tensions mounted over divisive presidential elections, the second of which, in 1800, would be the most contested for two centuries. Thomas Jefferson, candidate of the Democratic-Republican Party, favored agricultural interests and hoped to be considered an advocate for the common man, the

²⁸ *New York Daily Gazette*, Nov. 20, 1790; Feb. 18, 1791; Mar. 10, 1791; and Mar. 30, 1791, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

“people’s friend,” as one song phrased it. Adams, on the other hand, advocated trade with Great Britain against French interests, a powerful navy, and other measures consistent with a strong centralized authority. The nation held its breath, uncertain until the last moment of which philosophy would capture the laurels of victory. After the electors’ votes were tallied, Federalist Adams went down in clear defeat, but Republicans Jefferson and Aaron Burr still vied for the office of President. Thirty-five ballots in the House of Representatives could not break the tie, but the thirty-sixth, with some political maneuvering, favored Jefferson. Power had passed from the Federalist Party to the Republican Party without violence or significant domestic unrest, and Jefferson would later tout the event as the “Revolution of 1800.”³⁰

Throughout this process, the propaganda war between Jefferson’s supporters and those of his incumbent opponent took on an unusually vicious character, especially in partisan newspapers. Though most papers leaned Federalist, Republicans benefited from a loosely-organized network of printers who shared materials and perpetuated information (and misinformation) with a rapidity that alarmed their Federalist adversaries.³¹ If widely circulated, even a benign portrait of halcyon rural existence might impress upon voters the need to protect and preserve the farms and village communities in which resided-supposedly-the true American spirit. Indeed, the symbolism of “The Country Dance” could have served either party equally well, presenting each as the protector of traditional values regardless of their actual policy. Though it is unclear whether its publishers intended their “Rural Picture” to serve such a

²⁹ *The Philadelphia Minerva*, March 25, 1797, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

³⁰ James E. Lewis Jr., “What is to Become of Our Government?” The Revolutionary Potential of the Election of 1800,” in James Horn, Jan Ellen Lewis, and Peter S. Onuf, eds., *The Revolution of 1800* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 3, 13, 21.

propagandistic purpose, there is no question that it *could* have. *The Centinel of Freedom*, which printed the piece after the fact, in 1801, was unabashedly Republican. Elijah Russell initially vowed that his publication, *The Mirrour*, would remain unbiased, but he briefly reneged and re-titled it *The Federal Mirror* from April 10, 1795 to sometime in early 1797.³² His justification for the change leaves some room for interpretation, however, as he claimed to represent “REAL Republicans” and “Friends of THE PEOPLE.”³³ Samuel Trumbull, editor of the *Journal of the Times*, declared his paper impartial, despite rumors to the contrary at its inception, and abided by that promise.³⁴ Presumably, he was able to draw readers from the full range of the political spectrum who might have read into the vignette what they saw fit.

To some observers, there did seem to be a startling democratization of dance around the turn of the century. While "country dance" was often treated as innocent and healthful, Philadelphia's *Gazette of the United States* regarded its popular flourishing as a loss.

[L]ittle advantage can be derived from the modern style in which this accomplishment is taught. The minuet is entirely laid aside, at least in public...In its stead a new and vulgar style has been introduced. The graceful movements taught by Gallini and Noverre, eminent professors of dancing in Europe, have been exchanged, in compliment, I presume, to the *Democratic rage* of the times, for the *partridge ran*, the ungraceful jig of the *highland clown*, and the clumsy shuffle of the *Irish bogtrotter*.³⁵

Interestingly, the writer of this piece used terms that appear in English country dances, though only "Democratic Rage" was of recent publication, dating to 1794, but still published as late as 1810. There had been a dance called "The Partridge" in the 1750s,

³¹ Jeffrey L. Pasley, "1800 As a Revolution in Political Culture," in Horn, Lewis, and Onuf, 126, 138-142.

³² *The Mirrour*, Sept. 6, 1792, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

³³ *The Federal Mirror*, April 10, 1795, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

³⁴ *Journal of the Times*, Oct. 10, 1798, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

and "The Irish Trot" had been a consistent feature of the Playford manuals from 1675 onwards. "The Clown" had appeared on the eve of revolution, in 1775, and numerous dances invoked the "Highland" something or other. The complainant did not choose his language haphazardly. All of these terms, in the context of the article, characterize dance as rustic, backwater, ungenteel, and leveling; these dances were performed for amusement rather than for the development of agility and grace, and thus were unworthy of being part of a good education. Thus, the contrary message of the country bumpkin emerged again as something not to imitate.

Satirical writers used the medium of dance to ridicule not only unpopular political positions, but the behavior of those who held them. In the aftermath of the Jay Treaty controversy, an "ode, composed for the Fourth of July, calculated for the meridian of some Country Towns in Massachusetts, and Rye in New-Hampshire," made the rounds of newspapers in the northeast. The *Mohawk Mercury* made its mockery two-fold, presenting it as an "Euterpean Rill," or that which relates to Euterpe, Greek muse of song and lyric poetry. America's classical pretensions looked foolish when the "Herald of the United States" went on to discuss a rough and rowdy rural dance with startling political overtones:

To day we dance to tiddle diddle;
-Here comes Sambo with his fiddle.
Sambo, take a dram of whisky,
And play up Yankee Doodle frisky.
Moll, come leave your witched tricks,
And let us have a reel of six...
Sambo, play and dance with quality
This is the day of blest equality.
Father and *mother* are but men,
And Sambo-is a *citizen*
Come foot it, Sal-Moll, figure in

³⁵ *Gazette of the United States*, Oct. 1, 1801, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

And, mother, you dance up to him;
Now saw as fast as e'er you can do
And, father, you cross o'er to Sambo.³⁶

The democratic attributes of country dance that corresponded so well to revolutionary principles twenty years before take on a more dubious role in this excerpt; no other form of dancing could have expressed it so clearly or been so broadly understood. The author stresses the bridging of gender and racial boundaries that logically accompany “blest equality”: mother has become a man, and a slave musician and a patriarch stand together. “There is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female,” as Paul wrote to the Galatians.³⁷ Ironically, this highlights the continued inequality and limitations of American society, for these interactions can only take place on Independence Day.

Whether the author considered this lively celebration a dream or a nightmare, however, is ambiguous due to the satirical nature of his poetry. Later in the “ode,” the dancers give a series of toasts, drinking to the French, the guillotine, anti-Federalist Representative Albert Gallatin, Jacobins, James Madison, “southern Demos [Democrats], who represent our brother negroes,” and “confusion to the [Jay] treaty.”³⁸ Together with the generally uproarious nature of the gathering, these toasts support an interpretation of the piece as Federalist in sympathies. The dancers ride “blundering” beasts and drink themselves “blind,” probable metaphors for their unthinking political lives. Though not portrayed as despicable for their Republicanism, they are figures of fun for whom independence carries none of its nobler connotations. A different portrayal of country life emerges here: a life that is ignorant, inebriated, and disorderly, its democracy bordering on the anarchy of the French Revolution.

³⁶ *The Mohawk Mercury*, Nov. 22, 1796, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

³⁷ Galatians 3: 28 (KJV).

Sambo's description as a "citizen" is a particularly revealing moment. The French republican government had recently abolished slavery, its decision ratified in February, 1794. This decision may have altered significantly the course of the famous slave revolt in San Domingue, which had begun in 1791 and developed into a conflict between French, Spanish, and English forces over control of the island. Supplying uniforms and weapons, Spain and England encouraged the insurgents, among them General Toussaint Louverture, in their rebellion against the established authorities. After France committed itself to abolition, however, Louverture reconsidered, and allied himself with the Republic. A number of other revolutionary leaders did the same, although it is possible to make too much of this shift. "The policy of arming slaves probably ensured slavery's destruction," as European powers courted black allies, believes David Geggus. "Thereafter, the international conflict continued to...promote the formation of a black military that would defeat attempts to restore slavery and finally would take the colony to independence."³⁹ In America, newspapers and French émigrés continuously refreshed this prominent, ongoing image of slaves as citizens and soldiers.

Sambo's bow is of the musical, not the armament variety; his steps form a dance, not a march. Nonetheless, his and Moll's active and equal participation in the dance with their presumable masters suddenly takes on a much more imminent character. Though the piece cloaks its commentary in heavy satire, its comical scene was no laughing matter to Americans in the 1790s. Many of them owned slaves themselves, and many others interacted with émigrés and observed the results of the San Domingue clash in their daily

³⁸ *The Mohawk Mercury*, Nov. 22, 1796, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

³⁹ David Geggus, "The Arming of Slaves in the Haitian Revolution," in Christopher Leslie Brown, ed., *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 226-229.

lives: displacement, loss of property, loss of livelihood. Usurpation of place—whether physical or social—lent itself well to representation as a dance. The immediacy of the scenario presented in this poem must have left readers feeling threatened and willing to embrace the party that would prevent such upheaval.

Two months later, a similar poem appeared whose political purpose was less blatant, but which again confirmed the leveling effect of country dance and lampooned America's invocation of the classical. It imagined a "rustick" ball managed "with formality/We'll not have any but the quality," but then achieved comic effect by extending invitations to practically everyone: "the Squire and Lawyer," "Dick Dapperwit the Lady's man," "Benny Bumpkin," "Miss Betty Bilbo...the heiress," "Macaronies" (with mild contempt), and most surprisingly, "Peter Grievous with his black wife." An element of violence surfaces here as the narrator makes an aside to the effect that said wife "ought long since to've had the Jack knife," or presumably, been murdered. The name "Grievous" reflects the couple's miscegenation, and it is only their substantial income that secures an invitation. Despite this unsettling passage, the narrator continues with assurances that the most stoic Greek philosopher would declare this company akin to the angels: "a most seraphick circle!"⁴⁰ It is an opinion that the author of the piece would certainly not have shared. Once again, truth hides within the caricatures: simple, primitive country folk do not abide by refined social forms, a fact adeptly illustrated through their interactions in a dance that renders everyone an equal. Comparing *these* Americans and their principles to those of the lofty Greeks is a laughable exercise.

During an era that modern Americans tend to view rosily, political tensions spilled over into every facet of life. Even without the literal battles between Tory and Patriot,

dance remained politically-charged with metaphorical wars between Federalists and Republicans. They crossed swords over important ground: nothing less than the character of the new nation that both sides had sacrificed to create. As Americans re-imagined themselves, the French added a new dimension, representing at first the best and then the worst of European culture in a revolution whose lofty principles were spattered with gore. Advertisements for popular French dancing masters, published almost alongside depictions of dancers espousing Jacobin anarchy, highlighted the profound split in American sympathies.

The struggle to define oneself often begins with defining what one is *not*, and this principle held true for Federal America. Amid what might be termed a cultural "cult of rusticity," America could not operate in quite the same way as England. "Peasantry" evoked different images in each locality. England had no substantial enslaved population, whereas battles over the personhood of those in bondage had nearly derailed the Constitutional Convention; the matter was resolved in a compromise that skirted the question of humanity, adding insult to injury by counting every slave as three-fifths of a person for calculating a state's allotted seats in Congress. It was only so long before rosy descriptions of poor but oddly cheery "peasants," frolicking in their leisure time were elided with depictions of the real underclass in America—the enslaved, whose dance traditions were both highly visible and markedly unlike their masters'. Racial animosity began to creep into dance rhetoric in a new way. Whereas complaints about the Ethiopian Ball in Charleston in 1782 had conveyed indignation and a sense of betrayal, the language employed in descriptions of Sambo and Mrs. Grievous suggested something more sinister. Sambo was a caricature of ignorance and a warning against social

⁴⁰ *The New Hampshire Journal*, Sep. 6, 1796, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

leveling; Mrs. Grievous provoked repugnance, violence, and hints of sexual perversity. The confusion, discontentment, and fear in American politics found release and expression through the medium and symbolism of dance.

Came Ye O'er From France?

She did not dance well enough to bear comparison with French dancers; Ormond was in the same situation. The dancing which was very well in England would not do in Paris—no late lessons could, by any art, bring them to an equality with French nature. "Ah, il ne danse pas!—He dances like an Englishman."

~Maria Edgeworth, *Ormond*, 1817⁴¹

The term "country dance" is related to the French "contredanse," meaning a dance performed by multiple couples at once—eventually coming to signify a four couple square, or cotillion formation. However, English country dance as a form preceded its French homophone, in one of the few historical instances of England exporting high fashion to France rather than the reverse. But the French mastered English techniques and re-exported them, making French dancing masters a much-desired commodity. When he visited the Philadelphia Assembly, the Marquis de Chastellux judged the dancers' proficiency as inferior to that found in Europe, though he conceded that the Americans were "more lively."⁴² Though demonstrating ample energy, they lacked technique and form, which just so happened to be what French dancing masters offered. After the American Revolution--with the added impetus of the French Revolution making their homeland dangerous—émigrés from France found particularly fruitful

⁴¹ Maria Edgeworth, *Harrington, a Tale; and Ormond, a Tale*, Vol. 2 (New York: Kirk and Mercein, 1817), 206.

⁴² Chastellux, 72.

markets for their skills in the new United States.

Despite the pride they clearly took in their new-found heritage, citizens of the fledgling nation ironically reverted to their pre-Revolution habit of imitating Europe to prove themselves cultured. Indeed, the 1790s were particularly notable, according to one contributor to the *Philadelphia Minerva*, for the surfeit of dancing schools springing up like mushrooms. "It is melancholy to observe the prevailing rage for dancing schools," the author protested, horrified to see young ladies sent to learn dancing before they mastered reading and writing.⁴³ This makes a comic contrast with a passage from Henry Fielding's 1749 novel, *Tom Jones*, in which a barber informs the protagonist that his father "was a dancing-master; and because I could read before I could dance, he took an aversion to me, and left every farthing among his other children."⁴⁴

Yet, education in genteel accomplishments, as well as in academic subjects, had suffered for many young people during the Revolution. Even a gentry family such as that of Elizabeth Ambler Brent Carrington of Yorktown suffered deprivations, leading a peripatetic existence for much of 1781. In later years, she reflected on the changes that war had wrought, recalling that she and her sisters had exchanged embroidery for sewing homespun garments, and abandoned the harpsichord to march to the sound of trumpets. In about 1780, when the Ambler girls were invited to a ball at which they would be introduced to the much talked-of young John Marshall, Eliza was determined to make a favorable impression. Not as determined, though, as her younger sister Mary! "It is remarkable," wrote Eliza, "that my Sister, then only fourteen...declared that we were giving ourselves useless trouble, for that she for the first time had made up her mind to

⁴³ *The Philadelphia Minerva*, Dec. 10, 1796, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁴⁴ Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, Vol. 2 (Paris: Fr. Amb. Didot, 1780), 218.

go to the Ball, tho' [she] had not ever even been at dancing school, and was resolved to [set] her cap at him and eclipse us all."⁴⁵ Despite her inexperience at dancing, Mary triumphed and later became Mrs. Marshall. The accessibility of English country dance may have made it possible for her to have learned by watching her elder sister practice at home, or even by imitation at the event itself. It may be that families whose children had lacked proper instruction during the war, or those children, now grown, having youngsters of their own, sought to make up for the years of disruption by acquiring genteel skills in the 1780s and 1790s.

In an effort to address common concerns about what constituted appropriate education, Alexandre Quesnay de Beaurepaire insisted of his Richmond, Virginia fine arts Academy, "I do not mean to introduce the LUXURIES, manners or fashions of Europe, but only to support a proper decorum...."⁴⁶ As before, Americans adopted new dance steps and fashions from Britain, but an increasing number of experts and amateurs took additional material from France. The presence of so many French soldiers and sailors in America during the years of the Revolution had sparked a mania for all things French and reinvigorated an appreciation for fancy dances. "French hair dressers, milliners, and dancers are all the *ton*," a visitor to Philadelphia had observed as early as 1778. "The *Virginia Jig* has given place to the *Cotillon* and minuet-de-la-cour."⁴⁷ Many dancing masters, both French and English, advertised excitedly that they would teach steps and dances lately seen in Paris, or never before seen in America. "In addition to the dances, usually danced in Baltimore, Messrs. Francis and Warrell...will introduce a new

⁴⁵ Eliza Ambler to Ann Fisher, 1810, Elizabeth Jacquelin Ambler Papers, Manuscript DMS 54.5, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA.

⁴⁶ *Independent Journal*, Jan 1, 1785, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Keller and Hendrickson, p. 60.

Quadrille, with a variety of new Cotillions and Country Dances,” one advertisement proclaimed in 1798.⁴⁸ When Philadelphians proposed the construction of a new set of Assembly Rooms, they agreed that one of the two card rooms be adaptable to a “Cotillion Room,” as the square shape of the dance made it awkward in the traditional long room setting.⁴⁹ Cotillions and other dances on French themes continued to be published through the 1790s, with titles such as “Lafayette Forever,” “City of Paris,” “Spirit of France,” and “Quesnay” (whether named after the aforementioned Academy director or the French economist is unclear).⁵⁰

It seemed that the French had succeeded in achieving what the British had only hoped to do: win American hearts and minds through politeness and pleasure. A number of influential and dynamic French officers, Quesnay among them, moved in the highest ranks of American society. Washington looked upon Lafayette almost as a son, and Washington’s approval guaranteed approval of the young Frenchman in many American circles. A Frenchman played an instrumental role in what became a family tragedy for the Shippens of Philadelphia, when Nancy Shippen and Louis Guillaume Otto, Comte de Mosloy, formed a mutual romantic attachment only to be thwarted by her parents’ desire for a profitable connection with local influence. During their ill-fated courtship, when Otto composed a piece of music for his sweetheart, he chose to write a minuet—an exclusive dance involving near constant eye contact and unspoken communication.⁵¹

Other diarists throughout America also commented on the prevalence of French trends

⁴⁸ *Federal Gazette*, Nov. 29, 1798, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁴⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, Dec. 23, 1786, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁵⁰ Keller and Hendrickson, 97; John Fitzhugh Millar, *Country Dances of Colonial America* (Williamsburg, Va: Thirteen Colonies Press, 1990), 74, 136.

⁵¹ Anne Home Shippen Livingston, *Nancy Shippen, Her Journal Book: The International Romance of a Young Lady of Fashion of Colonial Philadelphia*, (New York: B. Blom, 1935), 80.

and people.

In Virginia, the Comte de Rocheambeau and his men made a splash in the parties and social functions in Yorktown, associating with state officials and more particularly their female dependents. During the winter of 1779-1780, French officers from the men of war anchored in the harbor enlivened the cold evenings with entertainments that "were magnificent at least they appeared so to persons unused to french style."⁵² Eliza Carrington's recollections of that time, though made many years later, concur with letters she exchanged with her friend and fellow Yorktown resident Mildred Smith in 1780. "[T]here is something so flattering in the attentions of these elegant French officers, and tho' not one in them can speak a word of English, Yet their style of entertaining and their devotion to the Ladies of Y[or]k is so flattering that almost any girl of 16 would be enchanted," wrote Mildred. Rochambeau and his men offered the town "every sort of amusement...to enchant the Young, and even the Older," such that even those with Tory sympathies "almost lost sight of their being French, a people who till then [they] had viewed with national horror."⁵³ Although Rochambeau returned to France, other officers remained in America.

With the outbreak of the French Revolution and Toussaint L'Overture's 1791 uprising against French sugar planters in St. Domingo, this influx of foreigners to the United States only increased. It has been estimated that between 1790 and 1800, the number of French men and women in the United States may have been as great as twenty-five thousand. During the same period in Philadelphia, the most cosmopolitan of

⁵² Eliza Ambler, *Variety, or the Vicissitudes of Long Life*, n.d., Elizabeth Jacquelin Ambler Papers, Manuscript DMS 54.5, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA.

America's cities, about one in ten residents was French.⁵⁴ Beginning even earlier, however, in 1780, major U.S. cities saw the publication of French newspapers: the *Gazette Francoise* in Newport, the *Courier de Boston* in that town, *Le Courier de L'Amerique* in Philadelphia, and the *Gazette Francaise* in New York.⁵⁵ Eventually, there were between sixteen and twenty such papers. Other, English-language newspapers contained announcements for French and English lessons and printed pieces in both languages. Mr. Curley in Baltimore headed an "Academie pour la Dance, et pour les Langues Francoise et Angloie." The latter half of his advertisement, he addressed to recent émigrés: "L'Auteur de cet Ais, en qualité de Professeur de Langue Angloise, prend la Liberté d'offrir ses services a ceux de ses compatriots qui désirent d'apprendre cette Langue." He further promised to put his students in a position to better manage their affairs in an English-speaking country "en trois mois de tems...qu'un maitre Anglois ne le peut faire en huit mois de tems." *Translation: The author of this notice, in his capacity as Professor of the English language, takes the liberty of offering his services to those of his compatriots who desire to learn the language...[and can achieve] in three months, that which an English-born master could not do in eight months."*⁵⁶ One can conclude that the émigré presence made itself known and visible in the early days of the American republic. Both the novel form of government and the fresh French population that added to its citizenry altered American society.

Among the Frenchmen who made the United States their new home were a flock of

⁵³ Quoted in Catherine Kerrison, "By the Book: Eliza Ambler Brent Carrington and Conduct Literature in Late Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 105 (1997), 37, 45.

⁵⁴ John L. Earl III, "Talleyrand in Philadelphia, 1794-1796," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 91, No. 3 (Jul., 1967), 283-284.

⁵⁵ A number of issues of all these papers are available in the database *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁵⁶ *The Baltimore Evening Post*, Dec. 17, 1792, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

dance masters like Mr. Curley. Some counted among their credentials previous service to members of court and vaunted aristocrats; others, the Paris Opera or Ballet. The dance masters' advertisements further indicate the growth of a French-speaking community in American cities. Baltimore sported a "Frenchtown" according to the *Federal Intelligencer*, which contained news of dancing classes held in "L'Hotel de la Patrie" in that neighborhood.⁵⁷ Pennsylvania had its own French community too, the town of Asylum, some sixty-five miles north of Northumberland. Its founder was the Vicomte de Noailles, a French politician and soldier who had been present at several pivotal battles in the American Revolution and advocated for the abolition of feudalism in France. Despite being sympathetic to the Third Estate, he, like his associate and brother-in-law the Marquis de Lafayette, found that the radicalism and brutality of the French Revolution outstripped his more moderate tendencies. Established in 1793, Asylum became home to a number of France's now defrocked clergy and religious, as well as political exiles, formerly of high status; an archdeacon now kept a shop, and a baron superintended the clearing of land; cosmopolitan Parisians turned to tilling rural American soil. Even the likes of Talleyrand and Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans and future King Louis XVIII, visited Asylum in 1795-96.⁵⁸

There is no doubt that Francophones were aware of each other's presence, communicated with each other, and supported each other's efforts, easing the transition from Old World to New. Frenchmen who had succeeded in business offered their establishments for the lessons and gatherings of their newly-arrived countrymen. Mr. and Mme. Gautier, who rented or owned an assembly room in New York, allowed

⁵⁷ *Federal Intelligencer*, Feb. 24, 1795, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

several others to make use of it: a Mr. Gervaise operated a dancing and fencing school there, and the dancing masters Bellevue, Brumand, and Barbotteau utilized the space for balls.⁵⁹ Also in New York, Mr. Dupart, self-styled as a “Professor of Dancing” and “pupil to the celebrated Gardale at Paris,” set up his dancing academy in a room owned by one Mr. De la Croix.⁶⁰ Likewise, Mr. Berault took the ballroom “chez Mr. Lafitte,” and promised satisfaction to all those who put themselves under his tutelage in the art.⁶¹

Some of these men rose to great prominence in their new abodes. Idealistic and ambitious, Alexandre Quesnay taught for four successful years at an academy in Philadelphia before shifting his efforts to New York, and finally, to Richmond, Virginia. The former army officer expressed some disdain for the public, who were “rather inclined to DANCING in preference to any of the more useful branches proposed in [the] ACADEMY,” that is to say music, painting, foreign languages, and eventually science. Nevertheless, he managed to attract the patronage of individuals as lofty as John Page of Virginia and Sarah Bache (daughter of Benjamin Franklin).⁶² Several men in his employ later became prominent dancing masters in their own right: Louis D’Orsière and John Griffiths. Even before the treaty with Britain was concluded, Quesnay’s students had demonstrated their skills before General Washington and the French ambassador. After returning to France to seek additional funding, Quesnay became embroiled in the revolution as a Jacobin, and his efforts in America floundered. Nevertheless, for five

⁵⁸ Joseph Washington Ingham, *Short History of Asylum, Pennsylvania*, (Towanda, PA: Towanda Printing Company, 1916), 47-48.

⁵⁹ *Commercial Advertiser*, Nov. 25, 1797, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*; *The Daily Advertiser*, Feb. 23, 1798, in *ibid*.

⁶⁰ *Commercial Advertiser*, Dec. 5, 1798, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*; *State Gazette of South-Carolina*, July 3, 1793, in *ibid*.

⁶¹ *Gazette Française*, Nov. 16, 1798, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁶² Lou Powers, *Dancing Masters in Eighteenth-Century Virginia: A Compilation* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library Research Report Series, 1983), 41.

years, he exerted a significant influence on the development of the arts, spreading a taste for ballet and spearheading the first French play ever performed in the United States.⁶³

Quesnay's countryman Pierre Duport, who fled France after the fall of the Bastille, sprang from high musical stock; his father had instructed dance at the French court, and he himself served as dance master at the Paris Opera for six years. Setting up a school in Philadelphia, Duport promptly published a collection of dances that must have commanded considerable attention. He enjoyed the distinct honor of having at least two of his compositions performed for President and Lady Washington in 1792, probably when the couple attended a recital or an assembly at his school. Both these pieces were fancy minuets, utilizing complex and theatrical steps in keeping with Duport's established style.⁶⁴

The explosion of dance academies such as these, particularly in urban areas, had the inevitable effect of inciting rivalries. Accordingly, some dance masters based in populous American cities expanded their clientele by traveling what was effectively a dance circuit through outlying towns. "For the accommodation of the young *Ladies* and *Gentlemen* that wish to patronize this School," wrote renowned dance master Mr. Griffiths to the residents of Newburyport, "he will come from *Boston* once a week, and give two lessons in each week."⁶⁵ Later, he also held schools at Pittsfield and Williamstown, and invited clients from Stockbridge and neighboring towns. Others, still rooted in urban settings, welcomed a more significant rural patronage by accepting "all kinds of country produce," or "provisions at the market prices," in payment for their

⁶³ John G. Roberts, "The American Career of Quesnay de Beaurepaire," in *The French Review*, Vol. 20, No. 6 (May, 1947), 463-470.

⁶⁴ Keller and Hendrickson, 98-99.

services.⁶⁶ This facilitated a further democratization of dance that, as it coincides nicely with the principles of the new republic, can be construed as political even though it originated partially from economic motivations.

From an article in the *Providence Gazette*, one may surmise that some sought to profit unfairly from the demand. A few unscrupulous souls operated a swindle, traveling through the region posing as dance masters, only to disappear once they had collected subscriptions. This practice was evidently prevalent enough that dance-master Mr. Nugent saw fit to provide references when he canvassed support in Providence: “As he understands this town has had Reason to distrust Strangers who profess to teach Dancing, he is happy to have it in his Power to produce satisfactory Testimonials of his Character, and Abilities in the Line of his Profession.”⁶⁷ Not only did dancing masters vie for pupils, but they also argued over locations. The aforementioned Mr. Bellevue submitted an advertisement to *The Daily Advertiser* in which he lamented his inability to procure the rooms “where he formerly kept his School,” and inserted a dig at Mr. Duport’s monopolization of the space: “Mr. Duport’s conditions with the owner being that no other dancing master shall teach there.”⁶⁸ Mr. St. Aivre apologized to his subscribers for the postponement of his opera after “Mr. Picken, to whom the Assembly-room belongs every Monday, having found it necessary to give a ball yesterday evening, prevented [me] from arranging the theatre and decorations.” St. Aivre proceeded to reschedule his entire season of operas to conflict with Picken’s events. They would henceforth take

⁶⁵ Mr. Griffiths published the earliest surviving American-produced dance manual in 1788. See Keller and Hendrickson, 16.

⁶⁶ *Connecticut Journal*, Dec. 9, 1789, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁷ *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, May 21, 1796, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁸ *The Daily Advertiser*, Nov. 28, 1799, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

place “at Corre’s Hotel...successively on every Monday.”⁶⁹

Competition between dancing masters took a fascinating turn in Schenectady in 1798 in an incident that betrays intense professional jealousy. The unrest began when dance master Mr. Danglebert attempted to persuade a collection of gentlemen to register for his school. Evidently, Mr. Danglebert shared his facilities with another dance master, the Mr. Nugent previously encountered in Providence. At Mr. Angus’s rooms, Danglebert instructed pupils in ballet and other dance, and may also have provided music lessons and items for sale, as he did later at a different venue.⁷⁰ Much to Mr. Danglebert’s dismay, the gentlemen whom he approached as potential clients debated whether they should learn from him or from Nugent. One witness, Reuben Squire, reported the exchange:

Mr. Danglebert speaking in a foreign language, his interpreter, Mr. McDougal, told the company in his name...that he had challenged Mr. Nugent to dance against him for 100 dollars, and that tho’ he had offered to dance in boots against Mr. Nugent wearing pumps, Mr. Nugent was so conscious of his inferiority that he had refused to contend with him. He likewise said many other things tending to depreciate Mr. Nugent, by which I believe he has injured him in his profession.⁷¹

Mr. Nugent apparently retaliated in print, but while Squire’s report makes reference to this refutation, the letter does not seem to have survived. Nugent inspired extraordinary loyalty in Squire, however, who ended his complaint with the assertion that, “tho’ I do not pretend to much skill in dancing, yet having been for some months a scholar of Mr. Nugent’s, I am willing to dance against Mr. Danglebert for one or two hundred dollars.”

⁶⁹ *New York Daily Gazette*, Feb. 17, 1791, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁷⁰ *The Albany Gazette*, March 4, 1799, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*; *The Albany Gazette*, July 29, 1799, in *ibid*.

⁷¹ While it is not specified that Mr. Danglebert’s foreign tongue was French, I consider it a safe and appropriate assumption. The article refers to Mr. Nugent’s reply as concerning two men: Danglebert and Le Couteulx, who were perhaps together at the time of the incident. This is probably Louis Le Couteulx, a distinguished Frenchman with mercantile connections who had settled in Albany in 1795. See Frank H. Severance, ed., *Publications of the Buffalo Historical Society, Volume IX* (Buffalo: Buffalo Historical Society, 1906).

⁷² Indeed, Nugent had a stellar pedigree, having been a principle dancer at theatres in Boston and Philadelphia and an instructor for at least three years. Despite Squire's worries, Danglebert's *faux pas* did little damage to Nugent's career or, it seems, to his own; both dance masters continued to advertise heavily in the New York/Albany area.

“France In An Uproar”

They give a very unpleasant account of Madame de Genlis...or Brulard, as she is now called. They say...they keep a botanist, a chemist, and a natural historian always with them. These are supposed to have been common servants of the Duke of Orleans in former days...but, to make amends in the new equalising style, they all dine together at home...They have been to Bury ball, and danced all night--Mlle. d'Orleans with anybody, known or unknown to Madame Brulard. What a woeful change from that elegant, amiable, high-bred Madame de Genlis I knew six years ago! There are innumerable democrats assembled in Suffolk; among them the famous Tom Paine, who herds with all the farmers that will receive him, and there propagates his pernicious doctrines.

~Frances Burney, *Diary and Letters*, Vol II⁷³

The spirit of leveling was abroad in the world, and Fanny Burney noted it on the eve of its most dramatic expression, the French Revolution's Reign of Terror. Madame de Genlis was a prolific writer herself, one of the leaders in the field of modern theories of education, and, although in exile, she had several young women in her care, as well as the professionals Burney noted. Even former aristocrats such as Genlis had begun to break through class divides as well as the strictures of propriety, dancing at local assemblies with anyone who asked. It is unclear from the rumors Burney recounts whether Mlle.

⁷² *The Albany Centinel*, Dec. 21, 1798, in *America's Historical Newspapers*. The wager proposed is so exorbitant that one is tempted to conclude that the challenge was issued in jest or with absolute conviction that Danglebert would decline. Perhaps the dance master did not have that amount to lose, and Squire decided to call his bluff.

⁷³ Frances Burney, *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, Vol. III (London: Bickers and Son, n.d.), 408.

d'Orleans and company had also dispensed with the idea of a formal introduction, but the wording certainly leaves that possibility in play. Though English country dance may have been democratic by nature, Mlle. d'Orleans made it more so by choice. Indeed, one cannot help wondering if Burney had this anecdote in mind when in 1796, she wrote in *Camilla*, "Certainly...there's a great want of regulation at balls, to prevent low people from asking who they will to dance with them. It's bad enough one can't keep people one knows nothing of from speaking to one."⁷⁴

The fear that the ballroom might allow for the pernicious spread of social leveling was a factor in England as well as in America. Burney's observations and her undisguised chagrin suggest that a democratic spirit was confused (or conflated) with all sorts of laxity of behavior, and that its promulgation was at once a bottom-up and a top-down process. In her opinion, democrats both high and low-born were under the influence of Thomas Paine's rhetoric—though Paine himself soon fell victim to the turmoil unleashed in France. He was arrested and imprisoned in 1793. Pre-existing social phobias found their expression in negative attitudes towards France, while idealists like Paine and their followers harnessed the power of French symbolism to give force to their hopes. One particular symbol is of special interest.

Among the most common and memorable images of the French Revolution, aside from the guillotine and the Phrygian cap, was a dance. Seeming formless and wild, and often associated with popular celebration and Liberty Trees, this dance epitomized the disorder and social leveling that many associated with the revolution. It has infiltrated both historical and literary accounts of the era. "There could not be fewer than five hundred people, and they were dancing like five thousand demons," wrote Charles

⁷⁴ Frances Burney, *Camilla: or, A Picture of Youth*, Vol. I (London: T. Payne, 1796), 163.

Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

They danced to the popular Revolution song, keeping a ferocious time that was like a gnashing of teeth in unison. Men and women danced together, women danced together, men danced together, as hazard had brought them together... No fight could have been half so terrible as this dance. It was so emphatically a fallen sport—a something, once innocent, delivered over to all devilry—a healthy pastime changed into a means of angering the blood, bewildering the senses, and steeling the heart... This was the Carmagnole.⁷⁵

For the French, the dance and the song to which it was performed became emblems not only of republican spirit, but of military conquest and subjugation. Newspapers across Europe and America published bold French declarations such as “Our victory will be complete, if we can succour and disengage Landau from the vile slaves that still exult under its walls... You may judge from their position that we can hardly fail, and that for once they will dance the Carmagnole.”⁷⁶ Similarly, “Everything is arranged, my friend—they shall dance to their own air of the Carmagnole. Strasburgh will be in our hands in three days....”⁷⁷ And “The greatest activity reigns in the Port of *l’Orient*... the superb vessel the *Dix Aout* will be launched—We hope she will make PITT’S slaves dance the Carmagnole,” a mocking condemnation of the British forces under the administration of Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger.⁷⁸ English and American newspapers adopted this same phrasing, even when citing no French source: “The information received by this fleet,” reported *Greenleaf’s New York Journal*, “is... that so rapid were the successes of the French arms in that quarter, there was little doubt but that by this time the Carmagnole dance was performing in the environs of Madrid.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities* (New York: Vintage Classics, 1990), 283.

⁷⁶ *General Advertiser*, Feb 20, 1794 in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁷⁷ *General Advertiser*, Feb 25, 1794 in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁷⁸ *Sun*, (London, England), May 8, 1795, in *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers*.

⁷⁹ *Greenleaf’s New York Journal*, March 1, 1794 in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

Particularly interesting, of these varied references, is the statement that "they shall dance to their own air of the Carmagnole." The Carmagnole is reputed to have originated among the Piedmontese, the people who resided in the extreme southeast of France and the northwest part of modern-day Italy. By contrast, this account seems to attribute the tune to the Alsace-Lorraine area, the oft-disputed territory between France and Germany. Curiously, it was in Strasbourg that the "Marseillaise" was composed, rather than in Marseilles—the association with that city was still to come, in 1795.⁸⁰ Was the author confusing the two tunes, or simply mistaking the origin of the Carmagnole? Or, perhaps, is his statement to be taken in another way, remembering that the version printed in English newspapers was a translation? Might he be saying, instead, that the people of Strasbourg would be forced to dance the Carmagnole not to its original tune, but to the tune of one of their own folk songs? That would be a species of ideological subjugation even more powerful than simply performing the dance as written. It would embody, quite literally, the conquering of the territory—symbolized in the Strasbourg tune—by the French army—symbolized in the Carmagnole dance. This was the reverse of the practice common to the day of the victorious army allowing the defeated one to march off the field playing the tune of the victor, retaining dignity even in defeat; this was the stripping of dignity from even the feet of a vanquished people.

In early 1793, American newspapers followed as closely as they could the dramatic trial of the former king of France, Louis XVI. The outcome, people thought, might sound the death-knell for monarchy everywhere. "Great apprehensions of the approaching dissolution of monarchy, are entertained by its warmest advocates," insisted a Boston

⁸⁰ "La Marseillaise". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016, < <https://www.britannica.com/topic/La-Marseillaise>>, accessed 13

paper. “So confident is poor George himself, of soon losing his Crown, that he frequently starts from his slumbers, to inquire of his Wife—if his head is on?”⁸¹

Across the channel in Paris, Louis had been beheaded already, but the news did not reach America until March, and in the meanwhile newspapers printed and reprinted every scrap of information on his fate. Some presented abridged coverage of the debates in the Convention on whether to try, then whether to execute, the king.⁸² Incorrect reports of Louis’s acquittal and escape flew through the American press, appearing in Philadelphia, Wilmington, New York, Boston, and other significant urban centers.⁸³ Extracted letters from Paris reported that,

the drum was beaten...inviting the Citizens to signify their wishes for the death of Louis XVI. The drum was followed by a great number of incendiaries, who were stirring up the people against the National Convention.... The Section of Marseilles...went still further. They were so audacious as to declare themselves in a state of insurrection.⁸⁴

In this atmosphere, simply the use of the word “Citizen” carried disconcerting connotations of French rebellion against the very monarch whose funds and troops had won American independence. The rallying point of common dance and rhythm was crucial to maintaining the spirit of rebellion; so much so that any attempt to curtail these activities could result in mass hysteria. According to a reviewer of his work, French republican J.B. Leclerc expressed this sentiment in an essay “on the propagation of music in France.” “He supposes,” reads the review, “that were a tyrant to deprive the Paris people of their public shows, their play-houses, concerts, dances &c. any bold genius

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⁸¹ *American Apollo*, Feb. 22, 1793, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁸² *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser*, Jan. 17, 1793, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁸³ *The New-York Journal, & Patriotic Register*, Feb. 6, 1793, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁸⁴ *The Diary or Loudon’s Register*, Feb. 22, 1793, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

might, on that account, raise an insurrection, and draw about him 30,000 men, ready to obey his orders. In this opinion he is well founded.”⁸⁵

The violence and romanticism of the French Revolution echoed across the Atlantic, not merely figuratively in newspapers, but literally in American ballrooms. Dancers in Charleston, South Carolina performed the “Carmagnole,” and its lyrics were printed in translation in a variety of American sources, including Philadelphia's *The Independent Gazetteer*, Greenleaf's *New York Journal & Patriotic Register*, and the *North-Carolina Journal*.⁸⁶ The translation bore little resemblance to the original words, and may have been taken from a later revision that better suited the evolving political struggle. Its mentions of “Dumourier” and “Brunswick” place it securely in the context of 1793-94, a period rife with terror and conspiracy theories. Career army officer Charles-François Dumouriez's French forces had vanquished the Austrians at the Battle of Jemappes, but allegations of disloyalty later resulted in his exile. Supposedly, he promoted one of two royalist plots to place foreign dignitaries on the French throne, the other of which involved the English Duke of Brunswick.⁸⁷ It may be significant that the carmagnole was thought to have been danced at Jemappes in celebration of the Republican victory.

However, the translator may also have consciously tailored his work for an American audience. Its language would likely appeal to their particular sense of liberty without discomforting them with references to brutality and bloodshed. The widely accepted French lyrics to the carmagnole involved throat-slitting, burning, and mildly lewd imagery. Considering the high percentage of French immigrants to America, it is reasonable to presume that the correct French lyrics were known, at least to some people.

⁸⁵ *Virginia Herald* (Fredericksburg), Oct. 14, 1796, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁸⁶ *North-Carolina Journal*, Aug. 7, 1793, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Indeed, the French lyrics had accompanied the sheet music printed by James Hewitt in New York City in 1794, as well meriting inclusion in *The Democratic Songster* in Baltimore, where "La Carmagnole" was the very last song in the volume.⁸⁸ The English version, however, recalled the heroism, justice, and personal liberty of a struggle that was at once classical and divinely-sanctioned.

Loud thundering cannons rend the air,
To march ye warlike sons prepare
Heroes of patriot flame
While rushing on to fame,
Dance oh the Carmagnole...
In vain those millions of our foes
In impious union leagued, oppose;
But dangers, death and fire
No slavish fears inspire⁸⁹

Readers in any state of the union would have responded emotionally to the invocation of slavery that concludes these verses; their own Revolutionary propaganda regularly had charged King George III with enslaving his people through taxes and laws, and ironically, Americans may have feared slavery most because they knew best just what it entailed. Further mentions of laurels neatly tied the translation to notions of classical virtue prevalent in both the American and French republics, presenting those nations as heirs to glories past.

With the French population on the rise and the Revolution debated in the press, it would have been impossible for Americans to dance the Carmagnole in ignorance of its political connotations. That it *was* featured in ballrooms in the United States—and greeted with a spirit of jubilation, according to some sources, indicates the power of the

⁸⁷ Simon Schama, *Citizens* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 642, 713, 753, 808.

⁸⁸ "La Carmagnole," (New York: James Hewitt, 1794), in *Early American Imprints, Series I*, no. 51670; *The Democratic Songster: being a Collection of the Newest Songs*, (Baltimore, Keating, 1794), in *Early American Imprints Series I*, no. 2687, 34-35.

Revolution to sweep along even foreign populations, not merely with rhetoric, but with physical participation. More than when perusing a newspaper editorial, an American who valued the abstract principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity could feel at one with a larger cause in a ballroom. There, he and his companions could express their solidarity with the Third Estate through rousing song and dance, their gathering as much a demonstration as are today's many marches on Washington. Collective actions of this kind would carry all the more importance when the actual reform effort was inaccessible.

Interestingly, the word "Carmagnole" took on further political significance in America beyond the dance and popular song. At least in New York, it came to represent a Frenchman with republican sympathies. "Last Wednesday evening, about 7 o'clock," read a report, "as M. De La Croix, a planter of Hispaniola, was walking very peaceably through Rutger Street, three French Carmagnoles, perceiving he had no cockade in his hat, came behind him with drawn swords, swore they would kill him, struck him on the head and very dangerously wounded him." It is entirely possible that the unfortunate De La Croix mentioned here was the same man who later rented his rooms to dancing master Mr. Dupart.⁹⁰

New, original dances related to France also found a place in America's ballrooms, some seeming to laud and others to mock the republican efforts of the French populace. John Griffiths—most famous for being the first American to publish his own dance manual rather than relying on imports from Britain—produced another volume of cotillions and country dances in 1794, the second year of the Reign of Terror. Among the dance titles he popularized were a number that related directly to the political turmoil

⁸⁹ *The Medley*, Dec. 19, 1794, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁹⁰ *Vermont Gazette*, Dec. 27, 1793, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

in France. The first cotillion, “Ça Ira,” took its title from a song of the same name, a revolutionary battle cry that, although it began as a general endorsement of republicanism, soon transformed into a call for the lynching of aristocrats.⁹¹ Often, the tune was mentioned in the same breath as the “Carmagnole,” as when Thomas Carlyle, in his 1838 history, reprinted the words of the *Paris Moniteur*: “then occasionally...we ‘defile through the Hall, singing *ça-ira*,’ or rather roll and whirl through it, ‘dancing our *ronde patriotique* the while,’-our new *Carmagnole*....”⁹² A longways version of “Ça Ira” had predated even Griffiths—“Ah: Caira,” surely a misspelling of the French expression, was recorded in manuscript form in 1790. Further longways dances followed, at least six slightly different sets of figures between 1795 and 1808.⁹³

Other dances in Griffiths’ collection included the self-explanatory “La Guillotine,” as well as “La Pantaloon.” The latter may have been a reference to the trouser-wearing “sans-culottes,” the lower sorts of Paris whose lack of elegant knee-breeches was to them a mark of dignity and equality. Most entertaining of the selections, perhaps, was “The Jacobin Club,” an allusion to the political society to which Maximilien Robespierre and other formidable revolutionary leaders belonged. Beneath the instructions for this dance, Griffiths noted “the second part of the tune must be repeated or played four times, and end with a *decapo*.” This double entendre was, foremost, an instruction for musicians to return to the beginning of the tune; however, it was also a pun on decapitation, the mode of execution the Jacobin leadership employed almost as often on its own members as on its enemies!

⁹¹ John Griffiths, *A collection of the newest cotillions, and country dances, principally composed by John Griffiths*, (Northampton, 1794), E187, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

⁹² Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution*, Vol. III, (New York: Scribner, Welford and Company, 1871), 203.

For the whole decade through to the rise of Napoleon, American dance manuscripts and publications continued to invoke French politics. Some, like "Ca Ira," seemed to celebrate the promise of freedom that the early stages of revolution offered. Also among these was "De La Bastille" (alternately spelled "Bistille"), which made its appearance on paper well after the fact, in 1796. Its figures mostly were consistent from publication to publication, with the exception of a variation in 1803. "Spirit" and "Spirits of France," variant dances appearing from 1798 to 1808, certainly suggest approbation for the ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity, if not necessarily with the means employed to attain them. Another dance probably inspired by events in France was 1794's "Democratic Rage," with "rage" in this context meaning "the latest popular thing." However, the title is cheekily non-committal as to whether this rage should be regarded as a passing fad, a thrilling new possibility, or a truly damaging mania. The double-meaning of "rage" reinforces the suggestion that too much democracy—as exemplified in France's so-called Republic of Virtue—might translate to a loss of control and violence. On the other hand, the title may have developed meanings more directly relevant to America, as dances under this name continued to appear through 1810, ten years into a long dominance of the Democratic-Republican Party in the executive branch.⁹⁴

The popularity of so many titles inspired by the French Revolution reflects the excitement of the American populace in relation to it and the tension they felt between liberty and anarchy. While following developments in France with interest, Americans recognized the dangers of sudden and uncontrolled social leveling. Griffiths' timely pun on beheading suggests that, at least among his target audience, France's methods met

⁹³ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

⁹⁴ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

with more ridicule than approval. And yet, many accounts of the day reveal how opinion might be deeply divided. The previous year, two newspapers had published a peculiar, politically symbolic “matrimony notice.” What was, for the initial participants, a sincere attempt at unifying two nations could easily be re-interpreted as a satire or a warning of the unnatural consequences of pro-French attitudes: “Married. On Monday last,” read Charleston’s *City Gazette*,

Two celebrated widows, ladies of America and France, after having repudiated their husbands on account of their ill treatment, conceived the design of living together in the strictest union and friendship; the said amiable ladies, in order to give a pledge of their fidelity, requested that their striped gowns should be pinned together, that their children should be looked upon as one family, while their mothers shewed them an equal affection. Mr. Lee officiated with dignity as their proxy, and explained the reciprocal obligations these two ladies promised to confer on each other, inviting their children at the same time to imitate their mothers; Mr. Samuel Prioleau acted as the sponsor of the American lady, with that dignity, which such a deserving ward required; Mr. Huger, Ramsay, and Burke, three of her faithful guardians, assisted at the feast given on this occasion. The brave artillery signed that contract by the fire of their guns, and all their brothers in arms by thousands of huzzas; the merry guests waited for his Excellency in an anxious solicitude, they lamented his absence, but they rested assured of his patriotism; the representative of the gallic lady, M.A.B. Mangourit was so feelingly touched at this so noble a scene, that...he only lamented the absence of the President and all those of his colleagues that are true friends to those ladies, to join with the French Americans, in order to celebrate the Carmagnole, and sing Ça Ira.

The event, taking place the day after Bastille Day, urged French emigrants in South Carolina as well as their American allies to consider the shared revolutionary heritage of their two nations as a familial bond. Fittingly, the persons named in this piece were affiliated with either the French government—M.A.B. Mangourit served as consul from the French republic—or with pro-French and Francophile societies in South Carolina. Thomas Lee was a member of the French Patriotic Society, which likely hosted the gathering. Also in this newspaper issue, Lee published an oration by Mangourit that

credited America with having inspired the French Revolution.⁹⁵ Eighteenth-century depictions of sovereign nations imagined them as independent female figures, and the same held true for the spirit of Liberty, a spirit to which America and France both laid claim. These newborn republics had divided themselves from their male monarchs and had assumed the legal rights of a woman alone—a widow or *feme sole*. Yet, they could choose to recognize a similar past and forge a common future by pinning their “striped gowns,” or flags, together. American and French citizens, all children of Liberty, were thus rendered siblings, committed to supporting each other in times of trial. Like families, the nations ought to join their fortunes, both figuratively and literally. Two days earlier, the French Patriotic Society had authorized David Ramsay to collect free-will donations from the public to be sent overseas to support the cause of revolution.⁹⁶

And yet, for those who viewed the French model for revolution with scorn, this political “marriage” fulfilled their worst fears. It promised that Americans who allowed themselves to be wooed by French overtures of love and equality would soon be embroiled in a mad dance growing madder by the moment. Dickens later depicted the “Carmagnole” as exemplifying the worst excesses of the French Revolution in microcosm, a dance that ignored the natural order as women partnered with women and men with men; the gathering in Charleston, then, was the carmagnole on a ceremonial scale. Not only did it promote supposedly chaotic entertainment under the guise of patriotism—the carmagnole itself, and the singing of “Ça ira”—it sanctioned an alliance between women as a marriage. These ladies, though anthropomorphized nations, might just as easily represent a false Liberty, one that sought to seduce the public and even the

⁹⁵ *City Gazette*, July 20, 1793, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁹⁶ *City Gazette*, July 18, 1793, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

American president; they might, too, embody a false Virtue, ensnaring the unwary in its cycle of self-destruction. Because the announcement was published under the heading of “matrimony notice,” it moved a profane relationship onto sacramental ground, threatening to pollute religion in America as the revolution had done already in France. The close association between the “Carmagnole” and conquest by the French army would have rendered the dance particularly distasteful for many who now witnessed or read of it being performed on American soil. With French Patriotic Societies across the United States hosting Bastille Day celebrations and toasting “The guillotine to all aristocrats!” as happened in Philadelphia in 1793, such concerns did not seem unfounded.⁹⁷ “We have heard,” recounted the appalled *Daily Advertiser*, “of printed caricatures circulating through Philadelphia representing the President of the Union, and a Judge of the Supreme Court, with the guillotine suspended over their heads.”⁹⁸

In contrast with Anglo-Americans, it seems that some French emigres were intent upon repudiating any association with the levelling tendencies of their birth country. “Lundi soir 11 du courant,” read an announcement for a public ball in Baltimore, in February of 1794,

Il y aura BAL chez le Sieur Stewart, a L'ENSEIGNE de la New-Inn. L'on previent Mess. les ETRANGERS qui se proposent d'y assister, qu'on ne danse qu'a L'ANGLOISE et *chacun* a son tour, selon les USAGES du pays. On pourra se munir de Billets a la Barre de la dite New-Inn, ou les REGLES qu'il y'a a observer au BAL son en ecrit.

*Translation: Monday night, the eleventh of this month, there will be a ball at Mr. Stewart's, at the sign of the New Inn. We forewarn foreign gentlemen who are proposing to attend, that we will dance only the English style, and each one in its turn, according to the customs of the country. Tickets may be obtained at the bar of the said New Inn, where the rules that one is expected to observe at the ball are written.*⁹⁹

⁹⁷ *General Advertiser*, August 14, 1793, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁹⁸ *Daily Advertiser*, Dec. 30, 1793 in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁹⁹ *Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*, Feb. 8, 1794, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Although there is also an English language announcement of the same ball just above, it contains none of the warnings of the French rendering, suggesting that it was specifically recently-arrived Frenchmen whose presence was thought to endanger the proceedings. Moreover, the advertisement contains hints that the "proper" order was to be maintained; perhaps the evening began with a minuet, though its origins were French and it was beginning to fall out of favor in English circles. Still, it was the dance that most proudly signaled decorum and social distinctions, which the organizers of the ball were clearly eager to maintain. There would be no wild "Carmagnole" permitted here. Then, "each one in its turn," some other dances would follow—perhaps the jigs and reels and, at last, the country dances, as Fithian had once described. Importantly, in the context of this event, all these dances may have qualified as "English," with no clear distinction drawn between the number of dancers involved or the shape of the set. This draws a sharper contrast between them and whatever "French" dances or behaviors were so feared. But how well could a ball featuring so egalitarian a dance form as English country effectively negate that equalizing potential?

Curiously, just below the French rendering of this ad is another announcement which may be related, submitted by Mr. Robardet regarding his dancing school. It was now open, he informed the public, at Mr. John Starck's; and, in fact, "A Practising BALL will be given This Evening.... N.B. None but genteel persons will be admitted." This dancing master, with his suspiciously French surname, gives a very different account of the event in the French "translation" underneath: "Un Bal Republicain sera donee aujourd'hui...chez Monsieur Starcks a la Raine des Sauvage." Not a "genteel" ball, but a "republican" one, at a historical juncture when the word "republican" carried connotations of social leveling

and disorder, and never more so than when written in the French language. Even the name of Mr. Starck's establishment, "The Indian Queen" (misspelled in the article), might have suggested a variety of meanings to French speakers. "The Indian Queen" was not an uncommon phrase, being among other things the title of an early Playford dance; to an American, it probably signified native roots, and a certain nobility and distinctiveness to the new nation's history. To a Frenchman, the juxtaposition of "royalty" and "savagery" might have drawn in royalists and republicans alike.

Robardet was a well-traveled individual. He first appeared in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1784, proclaiming himself a French dancing master who taught minuet, cotillion, and country dance. The following year, he removed to Litchfield to open a new school there.¹⁰⁰ By late 1787, he had continued on to Albany, New York. There, he taught not only in Albany proper, but offered his services to "the ladies and gentlemen of Lansingburgh and Schenectady" on his three leisure days, and even made himself available to any ladies who wished to receive private instruction in their own homes rather than in the dancing school.¹⁰¹ In September of 1789, he proposed to open a school in New York City, and continued to publish similar ads for over a month in both the *Daily Advertiser* and the *New York Daily Gazette*. During that period, he either changed his mind about the location of his school, which was at first meant to be at "Mr. John Fraunces's Tavern," or opened a second school "in a genteel Private House in Dock-street." In January, he began holding regular subscription balls at Fraunces's Tavern. For a few months, he seems to have divided his time between Albany and New York City, where he was patronized (according to his own account) by "the first characters in

¹⁰⁰ *New-Haven Gazette*, Nov. 18, 1784 and May 5, 1785, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁰¹ *Albany Gazette*, Jan. 31, 1788, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

America," the members of Congress.¹⁰² By November, however, he had once again relocated: an advertisement in the Philadelphia newspaper the *Pennsylvania Packet* announced, "James Robardet, Lately from Europe, but last from New-York, most respectfully informs the citizens of Philadelphia, that he proposes to open a Dancing School in this city." The spring of 1792 found him in Annapolis.¹⁰³

To a certain degree, these contradictory attitudes towards France could co-exist; as a young nation itself, America might regard France as both an heir to its revolutionary heritage and a proof of American economy, restraint, and moral superiority. In an era that might logically have witnessed a reemphasis on English country dance rather than French styles, the cotillion actually gained ground. Still, both styles featured at most gatherings, and even the presence of the cotillion incorporated America's ambivalence towards French politics. Returning to Griffiths' manual, the cotillion titled "Lafayette Forever" communicates this pride in America's more moderate revolution by hailing the French general who served as Washington's aide-de-camp and who became almost his adopted son. Despite his whole-hearted support of American interests against Britain, the Marquis de Lafayette opposed the radicalism of his own nation's revolution and endured years of imprisonment as a result. By 1794, when the dance appeared, he had spent nearly two years incarcerated.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the cotillion that took his name not only recognized his service to America, but made a powerful statement against the French republic by upholding one of its political prisoners as an enduring hero.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² *Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 22, 1789 and Jan. 27, 1790, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁰³ *Pennsylvania Packet*, Nov. 5, 1790 and *Maryland Gazette*, May 17, 1792, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁰⁴ Keller and Hendrickson, 97.

¹⁰⁵ John Griffiths, *A collection of the newest cotillions, and country dances, principally composed by John Griffiths*, (Northampton, 1794), E187, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

The romanticization of the French Revolution faded in the southern states as the decade drew to a close, if the paper *The Medley* gave an accurate assessment. “The current of public opinion is taking a new direction in the southern States. In places where but a few months since every throat vociferated *ça ira*, and every “fantastic toe” shuffled to the *Carmagnole*: nothing is now heard but execrations against the whole French nation and government.”¹⁰⁶ While this piece gives no hints as to the cause of public fickleness towards France, other editions prove enlightening. Several failures of diplomacy had characterized the Franco-American relationship during the early months of 1797. America’s pro-England Jay Treaty had rankled French authorities for years, while the U.S. had objected to the non-recognition of its ambassador to the Directory government and the seizures of American commercial vessels by the French. In early July, *The Medley* reprinted a letter from France’s Minister of Justice that had further impeded amicable relations: “Let your Government, return to a sense of what is due...to its true friends...and let it break the incomprehensible treaty, which on the 19th Nov. 1794, it concluded with our most implacable enemies, and then the French Republic will cease to take advantage of this treaty which favors England at its expense.”¹⁰⁷ The resulting rupture became known as the Quasi-War, an undeclared conflict conducted at sea. Clear celebration of the existing French government, through word, music, or dance, would understandably decline.

The same attitude prevailed in New York, and news of it reached as far as London. In 1798, the London *Sun* re-printed an article from *The Western Star*, under the heading “Female Patriotism.” During the July 4th celebrations of that year, a number of

¹⁰⁶ *The Medley or Newbedford Marine Journal*, July 21, 1797, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁰⁷ *The Medley or Newbedford Marine Journal*, July 7, 1797, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

gentlemen planned a ball in Stockbridge, to which they invited the town's women.

Apparently, the young men made light of the international unrest, joking that "we had better try to have a good Ball, because this might be the last Anniversary of American Independence." The ladies took umbrage at their beaux flippancy, and composed a letter for the paper, objecting to such diversions while the cloud of war seemed to hover menacingly:

If there be a prospect that we must lose the fair gem of Independence...is it proper to divert these prospects by the gaiety of Balls?...Surely we should rather spend our time in working for your Standards, or embroidering your Uniforms. The pleasures of the world may have place in their season. But when the duties of life, and the invaluable interests of our country call, will you sink down into effeminate lethargy?¹⁰⁸

Though this account is not definitive proof, it seems likely that the ladies of Stockbridge declined the invitation to dance, when it was offered in a manner so offensive to their national pride. It is worth noting that the ladies' use of the word "effeminate" does not seem to accuse the men of behaving like women. The women have already resolved to dedicating their time and energy to preparing for war by every means available to them and further vow that, "like the Heroines of Carthage, we will cut off our hair, to make hang-ropes for the Enemies of our Country." Such women certainly could never be charged with "lethargy"! Rather, in this context, for the men to be "effeminate" is for them to indulge in thoughtless frivolity and merriment rather than steeling themselves soberly for military service. By participating in a dance at a moment when they ought to be training to march, they show themselves not to be women, but to be less than men, which is something far worse.

Several dances that reflected on the political progress in France, if it could be called

¹⁰⁸ *Sun*, Sept. 27, 1798, in *17th-18th Century Burney Collection Newspapers*.

such, appeared in America in 1799. One, "Tallyrand's Jig," took its name from the famed emigre and diplomat Charles Maurice de Tallyrand-Perigord, who had spent two of his years of exile in Philadelphia, largely dining in other people's homes and entertaining abortive dreams of becoming governor of Louisiana. The most memorable episode of his stay in the United States was being refused an audience by President George Washington, who feared that such a meeting would damage relations with the French minister, Joseph Fauchet. Tallyrand returned to France in 1798.¹⁰⁹

Another dance, "Tallien's Taste," may have been intended to skewer the shifting loyalties of Jean-Lambert Tallien, who had entered the Revolution in favor of executing the king, had then shown lenience to aristocratic prisoners under his jurisdiction and angered Robespierre, had then supported Thermidore, had fallen from favor again after overseeing the execution of a number of emigres, had been taken to Egypt with Napoleon, and had just recently been transported to London after the British navy captured his ship.¹¹⁰ He was, as Ronald Schechter has said, a "distasteful [figure] who preferred power, connections and comfort to the principles [he] proclaimed."¹¹¹ In other words, his "taste" changed to suit the political climate, making him the very antithesis of the sort of politician America wished to celebrate—but he might be represented accurately by the turns and cross-overs of the dance!

¹⁰⁹ Earl, 283-284.

¹¹⁰ Amy Freund, "The 'Citoyenne' Tallien: Women, Politics, and Portraiture during the French Revolution," *The Art Bulletin*, 93, No. 3 (September 2011): 325-344.

¹¹¹ Ronald Schechter, Review of David Andress, ed. *Experiencing the French Revolution, H-France Review*, 14, no. 72 (May 2014): 2.

Chapter 5: “Rival Candidates”

Political partisanship intensified in America around the turn of the century. The factions of Anti-federalist and Federalist gave way to Democratic-Republican and Federalist, and bitter rivalries between candidates and parties leeches into popular culture. Victories were marked and defeats lamented by the public in song and dance as much as in print. John Adams and his supporters sought to align his public image with that of his predecessor, George Washington, in a bid to convince voters that America would thrive on political continuity. But Washington’s reputation was no promise of prosperity in the eyes of Thomas Jefferson, who strove instead to court the agrarian vote by ennobling the average yeoman farmer. Beyond their respective images, however, were starkly different policies—Adams, former ambassador to Britain, touting his pro-English convictions; Jefferson, former ambassador to France, more tender towards that nation, even to the point of approving its recent bloody revolution. Political songs, poems in newspapers, and dinners and balls all commented on the candidates through symbolism that often incorporated dance.

Meanwhile, the nation had a chance to create a capital after its own image when the seat of government was moved to the formerly swampy terrain of Washington City. In this frontier-like environment, social structures could be built anew from the ground up, and the wives of Washington’s politicians took the lead. Dolley Madison and her compatriots carved out a new political space for females, capitalizing on women’s pre-existing role as facilitators of social engagements. In the young republic, where wives and mothers were charged with the task of guarding the moral virtue of their husbands and inculcating political virtue in their children through education, women had the

opportunity to marry their accepted responsibilities to subtle political activism. Mrs. Madison's parties became the new standard for Washington society—where political foes met and mingled, and the hostess charmed them into agreement.

But if conflict at home was assuaged by the presence of an elegant female, international affairs still tested the American experiment, and France and England carried their mutual enmity overseas. Though the War of 1812 ended in what amounted to a draw, its conclusion was no less celebrated in America. Public festivities commemorated the peace in Boston, New York, and even Washington, despite famously having been set alight during the war. The Americans seem to have welcomed the company of their recent enemies, the British forces, at several of these events, perhaps as emblematic of the peace. In some areas of the British Empire, such as the Caribbean island of Dominica, peace was hard to come by, as racial and cultural tensions surged. There, with the specter of social revolution firmly implanted in popular memory, breakdown of deference on the dance floor could result in unwarranted punishments.

“Cabinet of Monkeys”

In watering-places, as in other congregated assemblies of the human species, various kinds of government have been dictated, by chance, caprice, or convenience; but in almost all of them, some sort of direction has been adopted, to prevent the consequences of anarchy. Sometimes the sole power has been vested in a Master of Ceremonies; but this, like other despotisms, has been of late unfashionable, and the powers of this great officer have been much limited even at Bath, where Nash once ruled with undisputed supremacy. Committees of management, chosen from among the most steady guests, have been in general resorted to, as a more liberal mode of sway, and to such was confided the administration of the infant republic of St. Ronan's Well. This little senate, it must be observed, had the more difficult task in discharging their high duties, that, like those of other republics, their subjects were divided into two jarring and contending factions, who every day eat, drank, danced, and made merry together, hating each other all the while with all the animosity

of political party, endeavouring by every art to secure the adherence of each guest who arrived, and ridiculing the absurdities and follies of each other, with all the wit and bitterness of which they were masters."

~Sir Walter Scott, *St. Ronan's Well*, 1823¹

In 1823, there were only a handful of republics in the world that Walter Scott could have taken as his models in this passage: most prominent among them were the island of Haiti, a variety of freshly-independent nations in South America, and the United States. Yet, countries like Paraguay and Argentina were republics only in name and not in practice. While Scott phrases his simile in general terms, allowing comparison with any and all republics, most readers would have thought of the United States—still active—and the First French Republic—a failed attempt at rule by the people. Both these republics had, like the managing committee of Scott's dancing assembly, splintered into at least two parties seemingly determined to destroy the credibility of the other. The comparison is as apt a description of the conduct of politicians in society as it is of social power mimicking politics.

As the nineteenth-century dawned and the capital of the United States moved to the newly-founded and sparsely-populated Washington City, the opportunity arose to rebuild society alongside politics. Politics was Washington's first function, meaning that it lacked the embedded structures of family and business that influenced the social environment elsewhere. It was, essentially, the equivalent of a frontier town, salvaged out of a swamp and awaiting the cultural imprint of the men and women whose political roles led them there. As the United States admitted more states to the union and the national population grew, representatives became literally more representative of the

¹Sir Walter Scott, *St. Ronan's Well*, Vol. 1 (Zwickau: Brothers Schumann, 1824) , 62-63.

economic and social makeup of the nation: former tradesmen and merchants rather than exclusively landed elites. Diverse in their experiences and ideologies, all these men somehow had to be drawn together to form a society.

Catherine Allgor has written the best account of the ways in which Washington's women—the wives and daughters of her politicians—went on to shape the city's social rules and political dealings. From instituting the practice of calling-cards, to walking through the streets and attending events without male chaperones, these women took an increasingly active and visible role in forging new standards of behavior for the capital.² At times, they facilitated cross-party communication by assuring that political opponents met at balls and parties; at others, they expressed their disapprobation by failing to extend invitations to citizens who had committed political and social faux-pas. Thus, as Scott described, the political parties of Washington really "eat, drank, danced, and made merry together, hating each other all the while," and yet taking advantage of these common social activities to press their own views and attempt to make allies of their enemies.

Though dance could be construed as making a republican statement and certainly was used to bring all classes together in the capital, it could also be regarded as carrying monarchical messages. This was never more true in America than during the 1790s, as the United States attempted to puzzle out its republican principles and apply them, at the same time avoiding the brand of self-destruction underway in the regicide French Republic. When an assembly ball in Philadelphia was delayed in 1793 so that it might coincide with the birthday of President Washington, the change sparked a brief but colorful battle in *The General Advertiser*, the newspaper of Benjamin Franklin's anti-federalist grandson. "Will this monarchical farce never have an end?" wrote a subscriber,

comparing the celebration of Washington's natal day to those of bygone years held for the King and Queen: "Must freemen again be insulted with the pageantry of royalty? If the managers of the dancing assembly are to be amused with the baubles of a Russian or a Prussian court, let them enjoy it, and indeed monopolize it to themselves, but they are certainly not licensed to impose their follies upon the subscribers."³

An almost cryptic rebuttal appeared in a subsequent issue. Its author, self-identified as (but possibly not) an Englishman, adopted a satirical, narrative tone as he detailed popular reaction to "subscriber's" claims. "My sister laugh'd outright at being supposed to intend insulting freemen *by dancing*," he wrote. Rhetorically, he turned average Americans into judicial bodies: "This same publication being canvass'd this evening at a Barbers shop, *the citizens of the comb* declared unanimously (while I was getting shav'd) 'that 'twas a very improper attack.'" He went on to attribute the following opinion to this company of men:

He thought that the present managers of the Dancing Assembly were as free from servility or sycophancy as any set of men, and that the situations in life and known independence of most of 'em put such a thought out of sight, except in the opinion of those who were sorry to see success attend what merit had obtain'd... "Sir," says he, "we have been for some weeks tormented with pieces in the newspapers, under different signatures, all tending to make us dissatisfied with the government under which we are so fortunate as to live, one which we contributed to form... Yes, Sir, every freeman in this happy land in the year 1787 assisted to form the present federal constitution... and by his voice he assisted to send members to Congress to found those laws, those happy laws which have from chaos brought forth the present prosperous state of our country... There are amongst us... men who have nothing to lose, are aiming at innovation and hope, by alarming the ignorant, to create doubt, jealousy and disorder, and in the general ruin to reap the spoil."

The company greets the completion of this speech with "a general shout of applause,"

² Allgor, 86-87.

³ *The General Advertiser*, Feb 16, 1793, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

for the words “equally mark[ed] the lover of his country and the industrious tradesman.”⁴

If the writer of the original article sought to curb the celebration of George Washington's birthday as a civic holiday, his efforts were a bit belated. As early as 1779 and 1780, Continental troops stationed at Winchester and Fredericksburg, respectively, marked February 22 with parties and balls. The trend had only snowballed after the General's success at Yorktown. The ball in 1789 in Philadelphia was perhaps the most notable for its elegance, and for the raised seating around the perimeter of the room that effectively rendered the dance floor a stage.⁵ Yet, the author of the rebuttal may have protested too much to be taken at his word. By evoking the French Revolution with his emphasis on the "citizens," and setting his tale in a barber shop at a time when aristocrats in France were bowing their heads to an oversized razor, the author suggests quite the opposite of what his words mean literally. There *was* a hint of the monarchical in how the nation's early leaders were styled, and it was a frequent criticism of the Washington administration with the explosion of the partisan press in the 1790s. Though Washington took care to mingle with the people as president, his and his wife's formal receptions usually positioned them on a dias or made them the focal points of the room, giving rise to the ironic appellation "Republican Court."⁶

Echoes of the older system reverberated even in the dances composed about the presidents' wives. "Lady Adams' Fancy," which appeared in 1794, while Abigail Adams was still the wife of the vice-president, and "Lady Washington's Reel" both followed in the tradition of titling dances after English nobility. Even the aforementioned "Saw You

⁴ *The General Advertiser*, Feb 21, 1793, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁵ Keller and Hendrickson, 102.

⁶ Allgor, 19.

My Hero, George" went by the alternate title, "Lady Washington."⁷ Astonishingly, given her celebrity, Dolley Madison does not seem to have inspired a country dance in her honor. However, local dance master Mr. Francis prepared "Mrs. Madison's Minuet" for an entertainment presented on occasion of Madison's inauguration. The choice of a minuet seems uncharacteristically courtly for a woman whose famed "squeezes" at the President's House accommodated hundreds of people, some of them distinctly middling sorts. Her social prominence, rather than any regalness in her attitudes, sometimes earned her the moniker "Queen of Washington;" even so, that she was referred to not as "Lady Madison" but as "Mrs.," even in so formal a setting as the inauguration, suggests that the monarchical overtones of the Federalist 1790s had given way to a new republicanism by 1809.⁸

Although the nation had presented a united front—at least on the surface—during the early Washington presidency, factions began to emerge during his second term. In part, they actively opposed such perceived monarchical tendencies. Even as late as 1805, the *Raleigh Register* in North Carolina published an allegory called "Republicanism and Federalism," in which these "sisters, the offspring of Union and Liberty," grew apart due to the influence of "the gentleman named Monarchy, who presented himself in all his splendor at the levee of Miss Federalism." Thus, from the very dawn of her day, "Monarchy" drew "Federalism" into vice.⁹ In addition to this claim, anti-Washington spokesmen also deplored his administration's pro-England bias that supposedly damaged American-French relations. One of the most vitriolic critics was a former ally, Thomas

⁷ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

⁸ Allen C. Clark, *Life and Letters of Dolly Madison* (Washington, D.C.: W.F. Roberts Company, 1914), 100-103.

⁹ *Raleigh Register*, May 20, 1805, in *19th Century American Newspapers*.

Paine, who had spent much of the Reign of Terror languishing in prison and faulted America for not coming to his aid. In *A Letter to George Washington*, he vented all of his spleen before the eyes of the reading public:

Mr. Washington owed [aid] to me on every score of private acquaintance, I will not now say friendship; for it has some time been known by those who know him, that he has no friendships, that he is incapable of forming any; he can serve or desert a man, or a cause, with constitutional indifference; and it is this cold hermaphrodite faculty that imposed itself upon the world, and was credited a while by enemies, as by friends for prudence, moderation, and impartiality.¹⁰

Under such suspicions as these, Washington's reputation suffered both at home and abroad. Though the General always commanded the affection of much of the populace, it was only on Washington's death in 1799 that the press returned whole-heartedly to their deification of him.

In the years surrounding the turn of the nineteenth century, America's population splintered even further. The Constitution had sown seeds of discontent from its inception, and by the time Washington stepped down, any vestiges of amicable spirit had disintegrated. The two rival camps of Federalist and Anti-Federalist vied for power, and the age-old techniques of slander and backstabbing soon came to characterize national elections. Succeeding Washington in the office of president was John Adams, a Federalist who distrusted the French and favored closer ties with Britain, policies that soon caused friction with his vice-president, former ambassador to France Thomas Jefferson. The famous "XYZ Affair" and subsequent Alien and Sedition Acts only heightened the partisan rhetoric. Four years later, in the most bitter and contentious election until modern times, Adams and the Federalists went down in defeat. After

¹⁰ Thomas Paine, *A Letter to George Washington, on the Subject of the Late Treaty Concluded Between Great-Britain and the United States of America* (London: T. Williams, 1797), 7.

thirty-six ballots, the House of Representatives finally broke a tie in the Electoral College between Republicans Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr, handing the presidency to Jefferson. The election of 1800 has come to be recognized as a watershed moment in American history: the “Revolution of 1800,” the first transfer of power from one political party to another, and a peaceful one—if by “peaceful,” one means simply without the tarnish of armed rebellion. As ever, music and dancing brought warring political ideology into the public sphere in propagandistic ways, with Federalists and Anti-Federalists both eager to prove themselves the proper keepers of America's heritage and future.

Adams himself, unlike Washington, may not have embodied the ideal of the cultured, accomplished gentleman, but his supporters spared no effort to reassure the nation that they had chosen the right man to lead. Self-consciously associating Adams with his predecessor, they cultivated the image of as stalwart a guide and guardian in the political realm as Washington had been in the military. Indeed, the study of the music of Adams's era serves almost as an extension of its study in the Washington era, so closely did composers connect the two. Songs continued to paint Washington as larger than life, and tunes appropriated the patriotic melodies of the revolutionary age, particularly “Yankee Doodle” and “George Washington's March.” A rosy nostalgia for the glorious Washington years is also evident, as the public was once again free to mythologize the man who no longer held the reins of government.

Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to fellow Republican politician John Taylor in 1798, credited the Federalist victory of two years before and their subsequent popular support to the myth of an ideological succession from Washington to Adams:

“It was the irresistable influence & popularity of Gen’l Washington, played off by the cunning of Hamilton, which turned the government over to anti-republican hands, or turned the republican members, chosen by the people, into anti-republicans. He delivered it over to his successor in this state, and very untoward events, since improved with great artifice, have produced on the public mind the impression we see.”¹¹

He might well have indicted America’s music shops instead of Hamilton. “Adams and Washington,” a song probably published the same year Jefferson made his remarks, concisely illustrates this trend:

Columbia’s brave friends with alertness advance
Her rights to support in defiance of France
To volatile frubbles we never will yield
While John’s at the helm and George rules the field.¹²

While the title of the song uses their surnames, Adams and Washington are referred to in the text simply as "John" and "George." This unusual informality seems to re-imagine the men as “people’s” presidents and balances glorification with a sense that they are nothing more than average Americans. The message is twofold: firstly, the president is not a distant monarch seen only on currency, but a familiar and approachable figure; secondly, that American stock is innately heroic, the average farmer equally capable of victory in fields of wheat or fields of battle. Washington, of course, had long since left the latter field, though the song recalls his military leadership; Adams had never commanded a battleship, but his insistence on enlarging and outfitting America’s infant navy made the naval association appropriate, in addition to the traditional metaphor of the ship

¹¹ Thomas Jefferson to John Taylor, “Patience and the Reign of Witches,” June 4, 1798. *Jefferson, Thomas, 1743-1826, Letters*, Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library, 1995, <<http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefLett.html>>, accessed 29 April, 2009.

¹² P.A. von Hagen, Jr. “Adams and Washington,” (Boston: P.A. von Hagen Jr. & Co., undated), *The Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music at Johns Hopkins University*, <<http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:003.001>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

of state. The melody even contains an allusion to the earlier tune, "General Washington's March," further cementing the association of Adams with his predecessor.

As Adams took a stand against the perceived machinations of the French government, initiating the undeclared "Quasi-War," American popular culture adopted similar rhetoric to what the French had employed during their early military conquests in Europe—"to dance" became a euphemism for "to succumb to military might" or "to bend to political influence." The phrase might be employed to cast suspicion on anti-Federalists and Jefferson adherents, as was the case in a poem that appeared in New Hampshire's *The Mirrour* in 1798.

There's Jef-- 'tis said is full as bad
And many more of late run mad;
Besides there's Logan gone to France
Perhaps to learn a Gallic Dance;
But what care we for Jef-- or Log--
Or any Antifed'ral rogue,
Who would involve our happy land,
To purchase Peace of Tallyrand.¹³

There was no trusting anyone sympathetic to France, the poem's Federalist author cautioned, for they might easily be hoodwinked by French overtures; "learning a Gallic Dance" symbolized being thus won over, becoming more French than American and so incapable of serving America's best interests. George Logan, one of the poems targets, was a Pennsylvania Senator and Jeffersonian politician. His visit to France was an unauthorized attempt to negotiate with the French government, an action which resulted in the passage of the Logan Act the following year, prohibiting private citizens from

¹³ *The Mirrour*, December 10, 1798, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

engaging in unofficial diplomacy.¹⁴

Also in 1798, the *Norwich Courier* in Connecticut published a song that seemed to respond to the common French idiom of the Carmagnole with a distinctly American twist. Titled "The American Tar," the song proclaimed in its opening verse, "To the standard repair, each jolly bold Tar, our Country calls loudly to arms; Teach the bullies of France the fam'd Yankee dance."¹⁵ Similarly, the *Ostego Herald* published a list of toasts drunk at a July 4th celebration; among them was "the Militia of the United States--may the glorious Campaign of '77 inspire them with heroism, and may their enemies be initiated *Sans Ceremonie*, into the mystic dance of *Yankee Doodle*."¹⁶ The use of the French language, as well as the pro-Adams, pro-Federalist toasts that fill out the list, leave no doubt that this message is directed at the French Republic and her adherents in the wake of the XYZ Affair.

This is not simply the metaphorical substitution of generalized dance language for warfare, victory, or punishment; rather, the dance referenced is specific, with cultural and political connotations, a dance that embodies the character of its nation of origin. From the French perspective, it is the fearsome "Carmagnole," so closely entwined with bloodshed and social leveling; from the American, it is the upstart Yankee—sometimes Yankee Doodle himself—brash, hardy, and determined. Unlike the practice of allowing a defeated army to march off the field playing a tune associated with its opponents, the notion of forcing an adversary into a dance closely associated with the victor's culture and government suggests cultural domination--and possibly the humiliation of the losing

¹⁴ Francis S. Drake, *Dictionary of American Biography, Including Men of the Time*, (Boston: Houghton, Osgood & Company, 1879), 558.

¹⁵ *Norwich Courier*, Sept. 13, 1798, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁶ *Otsego Herald*, July 5, 1798, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

side. The triumphant nation is cast as the leader of the dance and the male, the figure in whom power resides. The Oswego paper included as its final toast one further allusion of interest, the invocation that "French partizans" be tarred and feathered like "the great M'Fingal," the Scottish antagonist of Trumbull's epic poem in 1775. The poem, with its threats of dancing the American patriots into submission, left a legacy beyond the revolutionary moment it inhabited.

A more positive spin on the same theme appeared in the *Newburyport Herald*. The overall thrust of the "Patriotic Independent Song"—as its author Mr. Williams titled it—was unapologetically martial and anti-French; one verse proclaimed "'Gainst Gallic insolence and pride/Our utmost measures have been try'd/Let's curb their rage by force of arms/Dispise their insults and their charms." But, using dance more in the vein of a mocking gesture than an overt act of war, the author encouraged spirited young citizens to "join the dance/and shake the foot 'gainst haughty France."¹⁷ Importantly, he included both male and female Americans in his call to action, characterizing them as "youth and beauty," respectively. While the women might not take up arms, their patriotic zeal and Federalist persuasion were recognized as valuable supports to undergird any war effort. Though all these songs and poems were regional and amateur, they fed into powerful streams of national thought as America attempted to define its character against the other powers of the world.

National commemorations continued to incorporate dancing and to use both visual and musical cues to reinforce nationalistic themes. The "President's Ball" of 1799 marked the anniversary of John Adams' birth with literal fanfare and, appropriately, took place in a theatre. "The Pitt was flooded over as far as the Stage doors, so as to admit

three country dances," read the report in the *Philadelphia Gazette*, presumably meaning that three sets of dancers might form in the enlarged space. Sponsored by the subscribers of the Philadelphia Dancing Assembly, the ball was a popular rather than a state occasion, but accounts of the evening suggest that it would have been difficult to tell the difference. Adams himself "was conducted to the centre box and the band, which was placed immediately over him, struck up 'President's March.'"¹⁸ The decor for the grand event used images of an eagle carrying thunderbolts and the American flag, with the popular rebuttal to the XYZ Affair, "millions for defence, not one cent for tribute"; at eleven in the evening the dancing ceased and the curtain on the stage rose to reveal classical representations of justice, plenty, and liberty behind the overflowing dinner tables. The first toast given at supper, according to *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser* of Philadelphia, was "The Government, and its supporters."¹⁹

Public celebration was not merely a weapon for the Federalists and anti-Federalists, pro-French and pro-English to wield against one another, but for entire states to employ to woo the government. "When President Adams," complained Virginia's *Alexandria Advertiser* in October of 1797, "went through New-York before, there was no parade, no public dinner, nor any exclusive honors: But now, whilst [the capital] Philadelphia is afflicted with the yellow fever and the inhabitants of New York are in expectation of Congress sitting there, every attention is paid to gain him to their interests."²⁰

Those people who disparaged Adams, his policies, or his supporters, were subject to the same treatment in due course. When the election of 1800 put Thomas Jefferson into

¹⁷ *Newburyport Herald*, July 27, 1798, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁸ *Philadelphia Gazette*, Jan. 17, 1799, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁹ *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, Jan. 19, 1799, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

²⁰ *Alexandria Advertiser*, Oct. 24, 1797, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

office, it was after one of the most vicious and contentious campaigns of early American politics. During his candidacy, both in 1796 and 1800, Jefferson portrayed himself as the friend of the people, invoking the rustic farmer as the bastion of American liberty. His backers even hailed him as such in song, in "The People's Friend," penned by "a citizen" in an undeniable dig at Federalists' pro-British policies. Uninterested in riding the tide of Washington's fame, the lyrics never reference Jefferson's predecessors, but make a clean break with the past. With a new party came a very new sort of man, the song seemed to proclaim. This was no casual publication for home or even theatre consumption; rather, it was written and performed as part of Jefferson's inaugural festivities. To ensure that all would join in the celebration, it included a clearly-marked "Chorus" on a separate page, "founded on a favorite air," to make it swiftly recognizable and easily sung.²¹

The most famous pro-Jefferson dance to appear in the wake of his presidency likewise took its name and tune from a popular song: "Jefferson and Liberty," which in turn had appropriated an older tune. The melody is a matter of a little debate, but widely is believed to have been a reel called "The Gobby O," making it an excellent example of the fluidity of dance tunes, folk music, and popular broadside ballads throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.²² What came to be known as "Jefferson and Liberty" probably had evolved from a dance to a song or vice versa on multiple occasions already—in fact, it was likely also the tune to a dance called "Washington and Liberty," which appeared in 1807, though whether it was to be taken as a comment on the relative success of the two presidents is unclear. Most likely, it was meant as a retrospective

²¹ A Citizen. "The People's Friend," (Philadelphia: G. Willig, 1801). *The Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music at Johns Hopkins University*, <<http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:003.089>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

salute to Washington, but in an environment where Jefferson had actively sought to unite exclusively *his own* name with liberty, it certainly might have been used to convey an anti-Jefferson message! The "Jefferson" version of the tune was one of several known country dances published about the sage of Monticello. Close to the end of his tenure, in 1808, two more appeared together in the same volume: "Jefferson's Hornpipe" and "Jefferson's Whim," to another repurposed traditional tune.²³

"Jefferson and Liberty" could itself be used in a mocking fashion—the song most certainly was, and why not the dance as well? In March of 1802, just over a year into Jefferson's presidency, a Federalist-leaning Philadelphia paper printed a rather wicked satire, purporting to be an account of a dinner held by the Democratic-Republicans. "The 4th of March being the anniversary of Mr. Jefferson's accession to the government, a number of patriots agreed to have a dinner at Stelle's dancing room," the article began. "To this, we were specially induced by a dinner the Feds had at Stelle's Hotel, on the 22nd of February, the birth day of Washington." Thus, the piece establishes the political parties as engaged in a war of entertainment over the legacy of the American Republic, with one party continuing to hail the dead Washington and the other taking up the cause of the newly-elected Jefferson. The article then proceeds to list the evening's toasts, as was usual in reports of formal patriotic dinners. After many of the toasts follows a song title supposedly played to underscore the message of the toast. Several of these songs were also associated with dances. For example: "Buonaparte the *friend* of liberty and our sister Republic France. (Music, *ca ira*)," and most significantly, "*The public will*, always to be found in the president's messages. (Song, *Jefferson and Liberty...*)." The

²² "Jefferson and Liberty," Robert B. Waltz and David G. Engle, *The Ballad Index*, 2016, <<http://www.fresnostate.edu/folklore/ballads/SBoA100.html>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

author of the satire also takes a swipe at opportunistic Vice-President Aaron Burr, naming him as the proposer of a toast to "St. Paul's motto, all things to all men—with honest men on the 22d of February, with [rogues] on the 4th of March."²⁴

All told, the author uses dance music and other popular tunes to demonstrate how misguided, laughable, and downright dangerous he finds the toasts (and the Republicans). If not outright embracing Napoleon, these fictionalized "patriots" at least fail to see him as a threat, despite the power vacuum from which he emerged; the tune of "ca ira" ought to evoke the bloodshed and upheaval of the Reign of Terror less than ten years before, and perhaps portend strife still to come, but it is shown to hold no horrors for them. Further, the writer portrays Jefferson's followers as far more loyal to party than to common good, with the exception of Burr, who is not loyal to anything. Party members blindly accept as "the public will" whatever the president declares, ignoring the existence of a rational opposition. Then, they are unconscious of the irony of pairing Jefferson's name with "liberty" in the song that follows. Indeed, Napoleon and Jefferson are put somewhat in an even balance by these two toasts: in both cases, the leaders are characterized as claiming to be advocates of freedom, but they remain in power only because their supporters cannot or will not think freely.

More common than dances taking the president's name were dances commenting on political events or factions more generally. As when dances memorialized battles or fallen heroes, dance titles of this type can be read as endorsements or condemnations designed for all to understand. Quite obvious among these titles are "New Constitution," "United Americans," and the like. This category also encompasses dances such as

²³ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

²⁴ *Gazette of the United States*, March 23, 1802, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

"Pickering is Removed," "Pinkney's Remove," "Genet's Recall," "The Successful Candidate," "Sham Truce," "Tallyrand's Jig," and possibly "Hamilton's Rant," "Bank Scrip," and "Swinish Multitude." Describing just a few in greater detail will suffice to explain the trend as a whole.²⁵

Preceding the Panic of 1792 was a fevered atmosphere of financial speculation. The value of bank scrips skyrocketed in July and August of 1791, only to drop abruptly at mid-month. It was quick thinking on the part of Alexander Hamilton, Secretary of the Treasury, that salvaged the situation. He quietly appealed to the private Bank of New York to purchase U.S. debt, which eventually amounted to \$200,000, while his subordinate did the same in Philadelphia to a sum of nearly \$150,000. Though Hamilton had to borrow money for this purpose, the action soothed the public's nerves, and the market recovered.²⁶ The dance "Bank Snip" appeared first in 1795, a similar dance called "Bank Scrip" being reprinted in 1807. In 1798, a dance also titled "Bank Scrip" was published, reprinted in 1803. A third dance under the same title was included in the same volume as the other in 1807. It seems probable that the first instance of the dance may refer to the events of 1791-92. At very least, the continued occurrence of similarly-titled dances indicates a keen awareness on the part of the public of the controversy over the Bank of the United States and a willingness to carry that controversy into the world of entertainment. Similarly, "Hamilton's Rant," published in the United States in 1800, although it had first appeared in Ireland five years earlier, could easily have been used to cast aspersions on the Bank, the Federalist party, or Alexander Hamilton himself by

²⁵ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

²⁶ Richard Sylla, Robert E. Wright, and David J. Cowen, "Alexander Hamilton, Central Banker: Crisis Management during the U.S. Financial Panic of 1792," *The Business History Review* 83, No. 1, (Spring, 2009): 61-86.

pairing his name with a term that was not merely a dance step, but a suggestion of either bombast or insanity—or both!

The 1802 impeachment of New Hampshire judge John Pickering, though it has not garnered the same attention as that of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Chase, was nonetheless a landmark decision in its day. The very first impeachment of a federal official under the Constitution, it resulted in Pickering's dismissal from office on charges not of criminal activity, but of drunkenness and mental disturbance. It also created suspicion among Federalists that the Federalist justice had been targeted by a hostile Jefferson administration, who would use the case as a stepping-stone to further impeachments. Neither political party could question the necessity of removing the once-respected Pickering, especially after his alcoholism made a travesty of the case of *United States v. Eliza* (a ship), but the matter forced both parties into positions that seemed inconsistent with their platforms; the Republicans, noted for a fairly strict construction of the Constitution, had to argue that instability fell somehow under the umbrella of "misdemeanors" as legal grounds for impeachment. New Hampshire Federalists were reluctant to recommend Pickering's resignation because it would be a Republican judge who took his place, but the national Constitution provided no convenient means of replacing a federal employee who had simply lost his mind. Despite ample evidence of his imbalance, Republicans refused to approach the case from that angle and attempted instead to convict him of crime. This created a backlash among Federalists, who were thus justified in defending a strict construction of the Constitution's language, arguing that the word "misdemeanor" could not be assumed to include intoxication. Though intent on voting for an acquittal, Federalists actually did not exert much effort to defend

Pickering. The case swiftly became a vehicle for political agendas rather than a very personal matter of an aging patriot's weaknesses. The witnesses at the impeachment trial were all Republicans, many with ties to Jefferson's administration.²⁷

The proceedings raised wild emotions on both sides of the political aisles, but in the end, Pickering was removed, much to the chagrin of Federalists who were appalled by the form of the removal. The precedent, had it not been overshadowed shortly by Chase's trial, might have turned impeachment into a tool for removing political opponents.²⁸ And in a quick turnaround, someone wrote a dance commemorating the event the very same year. "Pickering's Remove" appeared first in Boston, followed the next year by a completely different dance called "Pickering Is Removed," published in Dedham. The earlier title was reprinted as late as 1807—always in Massachusetts, a state more noted for its Federalist adherents. However, there can be no doubt that the inclusion of either dance in an evening's entertainments was a pointed endorsement of Republican aspirations and possibly even a veiled threat to Federalists.

It is a little unclear to what "Pinkney's Remove" refers. It might allude to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, one of the statesmen involved in the XYZ Affair and thrice an unsuccessful candidate for the presidency. As a Federalist candidate with John Adams in 1800, he had lost to Jefferson and Burr. In 1804, he had been soundly trounced again by Jefferson. His younger brother Thomas, also in politics, had negotiated a treaty with Spain in 1795 and was an unsuccessful Federalist candidate for the presidency in 1796. Though it seems unlikely that a dance published more than a decade later would refer to

²⁷ Lynn W. Turner, "The Impeachment of John Pickering," *The American History Review* 54, No. 3 (April, 1949): 485-507.

²⁸ Jeremy D. Bailey, "Constitutionalism, Conflict, and Consent: Jefferson on the Impeachment Power," *The Review of Politics* 70, No. 4 (Fall, 2008): 579-580.

Thomas Pinkney, it is not impossible. Alternatively, the dance might easily be a response to the ill-fated Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806.

The treaty proved a divisive issue in Jefferson's term, with its polarizing effects rippling into the era of the War of 1812. Negotiated between America and Britain, the treaty sought to resolve issues that had emerged (or re-emerged) since the then-expired Jay Treaty of more than a decade earlier—primary among them, the question of the rights of neutral nations on the high seas. President Jefferson had appointed James Monroe and William Pinkney for the task personally. However, though most of the final provisions were satisfactory to Federalists, Republicans like Jefferson felt that much was still wanting. The agreement failed to obtain a British promise of an end to impressment, restricted American exports to the British East Indies, and it allowed Britain to retaliate economically against Napoleonic threats, a permission that had negative impact America's trade relations with France. Although the negotiators had hurried the document along specifically so it would arrive while Congress was in session, Jefferson adamantly declined to submit the treaty to the Senate for a discussion and vote. Sent back to London for revision, the document eventually came to nothing. Some Federalists ascribed the growing conflict with Britain in part to Jefferson's refusal to consider the Treaty and his marked reluctance to reveal to the public, or to the rest of government, what had been its terms. A fair-minded evaluation of the treaty suggests that, despite Republicans' objections, it would have put the United States on a strong international footing.²⁹

Some dances—such as “The Overthrow,” found in a volume compiled in New

²⁹ Donald R. Hickey, “The Monroe-Pinkney Treaty of 1806: A Reappraisal,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 44, No. 1 (Jan., 1987): 65-88.

Hampshire in 1799—have no obvious national counterpart and may refer to more localized events. This raises the distinct possibility that smaller communities throughout the United States were writing dances in order to reflect on regional partisan squabbles. Thus, on both a micro and a macro level, Americans deployed dances as political weapons as well as to explore contentious issues in the comparatively regulated and safe environment of the ballroom.

Dances performed in America reflected international as well as national events, of course. Although it did not appear until 1809, "Sham Truce" was very likely a response to the 1801-1803 Peace of Amiens, regarded—both in its time and historically—as nothing more than a temporary ceasefire between two nations exhausted by a decade of war. When conflict resumed between Britain and Napoleon in 1803, Bonaparte in particular had had time to reorganize and develop his strategy, allowing the treaty's detractors to proclaim that breaking the agreement had always been the general's intent—thus the entire peace had been a sham.³⁰

There is no proof at all that the dance whose title heads this chapter and, indeed, this entire work was ever intended to do with politics. It references a popular traveling entertainer, Seignor Leonardi, who presented a "Cabinet of Monkeys" performing a variety of acrobatic tricks such as walking tightropes. However, it appeared in 1808—an election year—and after Jefferson's reputation as a president had been dealt several blows. His Francophile attitudes, long a subject of scrutiny, came under fire again in the wake of the Louisiana Purchase, when he authorized the vast expansion of United States territory by means not strictly constitutional. That the deal was concluded with the

³⁰ Rafe Blaufarb, Review of John D. Grainger, *The Amiens Truce: Britain and Bonaparte, 1801-1803*, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 34, No. 3/4 (Spring Summer 2006): 397-398.

notorious self-proclaimed emperor of France, Napoleon Bonaparte, only added to the measure's impropriety in the eyes of its opponents. To slander a man as being similar to a monkey had been popular practice for years, and though the epithet was applied to every shade of the political spectrum, it was not uncommonly coupled with the slander of being French. In 1802, the *Pittsburgh Gazette* printed the following politicized anecdote:

Mr. Moore tells us, that while he resided in France, in the first years of the revolution, a thousand tricks were played to fool the understandings of the people into the favorite doctrines of the day. Among the rest...there was a fellow who diverted the populace, by exhibiting a monkey of singular manners. When the fellow called the monkey 'an Aristocrat,' the infuriated animal flew at his throat...But when he called him 'un Bon Patriote,' the long-tailed gentleman caressed his master with much apparent...satisfaction. Think not, reader, that these things are known only in France. You may see in America a great many monkeys every day, who affect to be thought Bon Patriotes.³¹

Were these American monkeys, one wonders, Francophile politicians such as Jefferson himself, adopting the stratagems of their favorite European power? In 1803, as Napoleon made preparations to invade England, the *Gazette of the United States* printed a scathing, satirical denunciation of pro-French sympathizers: "The tender hearted, human, honest Jacobins, who present our fellow citizens...with a daily dose of politicks a la Francaise, and piety a la Tom Paine, are really to be pitied." The editorial continues, describing pro-French lamentations that England should abandon its business and agriculture in order to prepare for war, as though the nation ought to simply welcome its prospective conqueror in. In reality, the author argues, English women "will gladly throw life itself into the contribution with their pecuniary mite rather than run the risk of being the violated slaves of a *brood of monkies*, mewling and chattering from the

³¹ *The Pittsburgh Gazette*, July 30, 1802, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*

wilderness of France.³²

Rather than standing with Britain, the American president saw fit to negotiate with France's power-hungry usurper in order to expand the size of his *own* nation. Shortly after the deal for Louisiana was first struck, several papers, including one in Washington, bemoaned the ignorance of Jefferson's Democratic-Republican constituency in putting into office a man who would approve such a scheme. "A point respecting the extent of Presidential prerogative has lately been agitated on the floor of Congress," it complained.

When federalists opposed the [C]onstitution to these anti-republican tendencies, the prerogative of the SOVEREIGN LORD AND KING OF GREAT-BRITAIN was adduced as a precedent, justifying the resigning of a similar power to the wisdom and moderation of Mr. Jefferson. Pretty language for a Democrat! How would this be received from the top of a hogshead amidst a mob of the sovereign people...on an election day? What a pity that so few of those liberty men can read. Like the monkey who had seen the world, they would despise their own folly.³³

This editorial compared Jefferson's supporters to the monkey from John Gay's poem, who travels the world and returns to his species to teach them "refined" European manners, including flattery, deceit, bullying, and exploitation. It further sneered at the purported illiteracy of the country farmers and ordinary folk whom Jefferson so proudly claimed to represent. Having never read the poem, they were unable to draw any lesson from it that might serve them in the realm of politics.

Thus, although the original intent of the dance may have been cultural rather than political, its political applications would have been evident, especially in an election year when the pro-French head of state had already lost much of his support. It is almost impossible to believe that anti-Jefferson Americans would not have leapt at the opportunity to use "Cabinet of Monkeys" as a statement of their personal views.

³² *Gazette of the United States*, Nov. 17, 1803, in *America's Historical Newspapers*

“Peace & Plenty”

At this hour Colonel Pembroke was in the midst of a gay and brilliant assembly at Mrs. York's, in a splendid saloon, illuminated with wax-lights in profusion, the floor crayoned with roses and myrtles, which the dancers' feet effaced, the walls hung with the most expensive hot-house flowers; in short, he was surrounded with luxury in all its extravagance.

~Maria Edgeworth, "The Dun"³⁴

The scene Edgeworth describes easily could have come from a newspaper column in any major city in the young United States. But Americans took care, as they had during the Revolution, to present their ballrooms as patriotic rather than Edgeworth's "luxur[ious]"—even if "luxurious" was what it really was. Like Europeans, they used chalk or crayon to draw elaborate pictures on the floor, even though the images would not last through the first dance, smudging as soon as they were walked upon. In 1824, for instance, the floor of a ballroom in Washington, D.C. was chalked with an eagle and the slogan "Welcome to the Hero of New Orleans," honoring General Andrew Jackson, the evening's guest. Louisa Catherine Adams, the second lady of the United States and the ball's hostess, brought her experience of European ballrooms to the planning process. She even hired the same artist who had chalked the floor at a dance thrown by the British minister in Baltimore the previous year; but in this case, Mrs. Adams designed the artwork herself.

From the flowers that adorned the more immobile pieces of furniture, to the steel-colored gown she wore, Mrs. Adams had mastered the craft of projecting elegance and power within the humbler, democratic parameters her nation espoused.³⁵ Not less

³³ *The National Intelligencer*, Feb. 1, 1804, in *America's Historical Newspapers*

³⁴ Maria Edgeworth, *Tales and Novels* (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1832), 305.

³⁵ Allgor, 178-182.

important to a ball's political significance than the dances actually performed, the decor of a ballroom often served to remind attendees precisely what they celebrated on a given evening. Alternatively, elegant additions such as transparencies, flowers, and chalked floors impressed upon the assembly either the worthiness of the occasion or the means of the event's sponsors. This was certainly true of the balls that commemorated the climactic events of 1815.

As the War of 1812 concluded in that year, celebrations of peace erupted across the nation. Advertisements echoed the triumphal attitude, promoting “sky rockets,” “fire crackers,” “lamps for illumination,” “peace ornaments,” and luxury items for personal adornment. Many trims and fabrics were of British origin, and the cessation of hostilities had rendered them more affordable. “Ball Dresses” trumpeted one such ad from the *Boston Gazette*, printed just a few days before the city held its commemorative ball, “an elegant assortment of Jaconet, Cobweb and Cambric MUSLINS, suitable for Ball Dresses, at the lowest peace prices.”³⁶ While most women were unlikely to commission a ball gown to be ready in only three days’ time—though such a feat was unquestionably possible—many were eager to discover bargains that had been unavailable for years. The fact that these goods derived from their recent enemies mattered no more in 1815 than it had in 1783.

The momentous occasion of peace surely justified *a little* extravagance. Eliza Quincy, the sixteen-year-old daughter of a prominent Boston family, witnessed the city’s festivities and reflected on them in her diary. She remarked upon her trepidation at attending a public ball in light of her youth; as Jane Austen might have written, Eliza was not yet “out,” that is to say, not yet participating fully in social engagements. Whereas

Eliza might have been comfortable at a small dance in a family home, the prospect of a grand gala such as Boston's "Peace Ball" intimidated her. Nevertheless, she decided that the historic reason for the celebration warranted her attendance. Had the occasion not held such political significance, she might not have deemed it proper to take part, but Eliza recognized the unique opportunity before her; in attending the Peace Ball, she would join not only with the people of Boston but with the citizens across the United States in a demonstration of national pride and identity.

"The Hall was decorated with transparencies from the State house," Eliza reported, "representing pillars between the windows. The building illuminated within & without & decorated with flags & flowers....The effect was beautiful." Though the décor for the evening bespoke American patriotism, it apparently did not deter America's former enemies from enjoying themselves alongside her citizens. Nor did the young women of Boston object, somewhat contrary to expectations. As Eliza wrote, "several British officers in full uniform were actively employed in flirting & dancing not in the most graceful manner--but still seemed favorite partners among the young ladies." Curiously, though Eliza may have regarded the officers with distaste and surprise, it seems to be their awkwardness and not their allegiance that was the strongest strike against them. The American military was better represented, most prestigiously so in Colonel W. H. Sumner, one of the ball's managers, well-respected in the late war and a son of the former Massachusetts governor. A thirty-five-year-old bachelor in 1815, he surprised Eliza Quincy by asking her to dance.³⁷

Surviving newspapers give some accounts of what Eliza refers to as the "Peace Ball."

³⁶ *Boston Commercial Gazette*, Feb. 20, 1815, and Feb. 23, 1815, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Primarily, however, they concentrate on the room's decoration: "the flags of different nations [were] tastefully exhibited. At one end of the hall was a marble bust of Washington, at the other a transparency, exhibiting a female figure representing Peace, under her feet the sun of peace rising, on her left the daemons of war retiring, and on her right fanciful figures scattering plenty." While remarking that "the guests were very numerous," and that the occasion "brought together many who...had not met for many years," the newspapers leave the character of the assembly itself largely to the imagination.³⁸ Eliza's description provides more detail in this regard, and it is also valuable in what it suggests about the inadequacy of the historical record: paired with the limited newspaper evidence, Eliza's journal demonstrates how easily major celebrations, important to participants at the time, slip into the shadows of history, reduced to a catalogue of a room's ornamentations.

A peace ball held in Buffalo, New York—decidedly on the frontier—also found its way into the newspapers with a brief, but suggestive description. "The blue and red coats mixed in the dance with great satisfaction," reported the *Daily National Intelligencer*. This seems especially unexpected because, as the article continues, the English evidently had been preparing to mount an attack against the American forces with up to seven thousand troops; only the timely peace spared them. Considering its particular description in the paper, despite being one of "frequent balls" on the Niagara Frontier, Buffalo may have been an anomaly.³⁹ Still, the apparently welcome presence of the British during celebrations in multiple venues and in highly localized festivities marks a

³⁷ Eliza Susan Quincy, Feb. 1815, *Eliza Susan Quincy Journal Extracts*, Manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

³⁸ *Boston Daily Advertiser*, Feb. 25, 1815, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

³⁹ *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington, D.C.), Apr. 4, 1815, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

departure from the time of the Revolution. The only comparable instance from the earlier conflict may have been in Yorktown, Virginia, where the officers from the opposing forces socialized together after the siege. Rochambeau had led the way, giving a dinner for General O'Hara and other high-ranking prisoners of war. General Washington and his retinue then followed suit. The kindness and inclusiveness of the French and Americans drew favorable comments from Cornwallis, who wrote that he hoped their conduct would "make an impression on the breast of every British Officer," and be a model for future conflicts.⁴⁰ Perhaps the festivities in 1815 were, to some extent, a fulfillment of Cornwallis's hopes.

Sacket's Harbor, New York, had, from the outset of the war, stationed both warships and troops in an effort to command the Great Lakes and invade Canada; now, on March first, a ball transpired aboard the USS Superior, anchored there. Awnings formed sloping walls upon the upper deck, creating a giant tent, with candles placed strategically near artillery and weaponry to catch the light. The company consisted of about one hundred ladies drawn from the nearby towns and as many as two hundred and fifty gentlemen—primarily, one presumes, military men.⁴¹

Washington City—which had seen the destruction of war first-hand in the burning of the President's House—lagged behind, not holding its "Ball in Celebration of Peace" until the first of May, 1815. Advertised in late April, it was apparently sponsored by a local dancing master, Mr. Generes, at Mr. Crawford's Assembly Rooms, and promised a full band to provide the music and refreshments to delight the attendees.⁴²

In some locations, such as Raleigh, North Carolina, the papers reported public dinners

⁴⁰ Robert Arthur, *The End of A Revolution* (New York: Vantage Press, 1965), 157.

⁴¹ *Maryland Gazette and Political Intelligencer*, Mar. 30, 1815, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

rather than balls, but even on these occasions, music and dance featured significantly in the progress of the evening. After each of eighteen pre-planned toasts, the column reads, a patriotic tune provided an interlude and in some cases, an opportunity to dance. Some of these dances would likely have been choreographed and performed by a select group from among the company; others may have involved as many attendees as wished to participate. For instance, “Dance in Tekeli,” which followed the toast to “Our gallant brethren in captivity,” was surely the longways style English country dance variously called “Tekeli” and “Pandean Dance in Tekeli.”⁴³ Though its title can be traced to James and Theodore Edward Hook’s c.1800 ballad opera, *Tekeli*, and was first published that same year, it later appeared as a dance in Wilson’s *Treasures of Terpsichore*, both the 1809 first edition and the second edition of 1816.⁴⁴

An alternate title for the opera is *The Siege of Montgatz*, and the story follows an attack on the Hungarian fortress of Montgatz by Austrian troops under the leadership of an unprincipled emperor. Meanwhile, the Montgatz’s noble count, Tekeli, attempts to evade capture as he makes his way to the stronghold through enemy lines. Though the tale was almost certainly in reference to the Napoleonic Wars and the need for Britain to stand firm against despotism, it carried widespread and lasting appeal. Both Alexina, Tekeli’s warrior wife, and Tekeli himself make impassioned patriotic speeches that Americans would have found as appealing as Britons had. Act III opens with Alexina alone, playing an air on her harp, the lyrics of which would have been a fitting toast for the event in North Carolina:

⁴² *Daily National Intelligencer*, Apr. 20, 1815, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁴³ *Raleigh Register*, Mar. 3, 1815, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

Peace be to those who nobly bleed,
In freedom and their country's cause,
Protecting in the hour of need
Their charter, liberty, and laws.
Loud swell the dirge-the anthem swell,
Fresh vivid wreaths fair maids entwine,
That may to future ages tell,
Their lives heroic, and their fate divine.⁴⁵

Other songs featured between toasts relate not to theatrical pieces, but to renowned individuals in American history. "Forsythe's March" was presumably a tribute to Benjamin Forsyth, a North Carolina native and the heroic commander of a company of rifleman, who had been killed in action the previous year. "Washington's March" and "Madison's March," recalled the icon of the Revolution and the current president respectively. A recent addition to the annals of military history was General Andrew Jackson, the victor of New Orleans, and "'Jackson's New March,'" composed by Mr. Goneke for the occasion" surfaced during the toasts in recognition of his new-found celebrity.⁴⁶

Several tunes dubbed "quickstep" also appeared, but there is no indication of who, if anyone, danced to them; however, one instance of dancing undeniably occurred. After a toast to "The new mode of settling National disputes...the principle of Arbitration....," the company was instructed to "All dance to the fiddle and tabor." The song to which this dance was performed was not named, but since the wording seems to emphasize inclusiveness and harmony, it seems likely that an English country dance "for as many as will" would have been the most suitable choice. A dance with a formal and limited scope

⁴⁴ Robert Keller, *English Country Dances*; Thomas Wilson, *The Treasures of Terpsichore* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1816), 97, *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals*, Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/musdi.168>>, accessed 22 June, 2016.

⁴⁵ Theodore Edward Hook, *Tekeli; or, The siege of Montgat* (New York: D. Longworth, 1807), 28, *Early American Imprints*, Series 2, no. 12779, accessed 19 June, 2016.

could not have conveyed as powerful a political meaning at this unapologetically political gathering.

The heritage of dance as political resistance was not exclusive to Britain and her eastern seaboard colonies, and the ongoing conflicts between Britain and France between 1756 and 1815 spread to all areas where those two nations vied for commercial and political dominance. A fascinating incident in Dominica in 1814 demonstrates the universality of the ballroom as political space within the British Empire, or at least anywhere in that empire where English country dancing formed a component of social life. Too, it provides an interesting counterpart to the growing concerns about race and rebellion also prevalent in the United States. There are immediate overtones of British patriotism in the tale—the ball in question was a celebration of the Prince Regent, and it was held in the Wellington Rooms, very likely named such in recognition of military hero and political figure Arthur Wellesley, who had just been conferred the title of "Duke of Wellington" in March. The newspaper account of the altercation is so interesting as to make it worth quoting at length:

Gov. Ainslie stated, that he was at the ball giving (sic) on the anniversary of the Regent's birth on the 12th of August, at the Wellington Rooms, and about ten o'clock having just gown down a country dance, was standing at the bottom of the set, when Mr. Rand walked up to him, with his hands stuck in his sides, and thrusting his face close to his Excellency's, asked him in an insolent menancing (sic) tone, if he had insulted his wife...Mr. Hobson...asserted that the assault was one of the consequences of the factious spirit of resistance to the Government which prevailed in the colony for some time past.

The two exchanged blows, and Rand drew blood from the governor. Despite the apparent motivation for the fracas—an insult to Mr. Rand's wife—the court was told that the confrontation was symptomatic of the colony's recent political unrest. Mr. Rand, it

⁴⁶ *Raleigh Register*, Friday March 03, 1815, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

was argued, was taking advantage of the social mixing of the ballroom and the governor's inactive position at the foot of the set. The governor maintained that, in contrast to Rand's claims, he had been nothing but polite to his wife. Rand was convicted swiftly, and the Chief Justice passed a heavy sentence. He had some stern words as well, involving "the enormity of the offence, and...the baneful effects it might produce, if not timely checked, upon the moral policy of the country."⁴⁷ The judge clearly felt that what transpired in a ballroom could ripple out beyond its walls, infecting the general populace. With what, though? With a penchant for violence, with freedom of expression, with the breakdown of deference that a ballroom sometimes afforded?

Interestingly, this encounter occurred amidst the spectre of slave uprising, when Maroon communities formed of escaped slaves, often living in the mountains, took action in cooperation with enslaved populations to resist the power of the plantation system. If they required any further inducement to violence besides the inhumanity of having been enslaved, there was also the power of cultural overhaul. Dominica had transitioned from a French to a British possession in 1763 after the Seven Years' War; the pre-existing slave population, formerly the property of Jesuit missionaries, were sold to new masters and their plantations re-organized to cultivate sugar cane, one of the most brutal agricultural processes in the Caribbean. They supposedly decamped en masse for the interior, becoming a "nation within a nation" and a constant threat to the white settlers for the next forty years. In addition, the English began importing increasing numbers of Africans for bound labor, with the population of Africans on the island rising by almost ten thousand within a decade. Contact with the French did not entirely cease, and in fact the island was recaptured in 1778 and held until 1784. Further French attempts to claim

⁴⁷ *Repertory* (Boston, Mass.), February 14, 1815, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

the island in 1795 and 1805 were unsuccessful, but had the power to re-ignite both hopes and hostilities. As a protective measure, during the unrest of the French Revolutionary Wars, Dominica's government had banned the entry of slaves, free black refugees, and even most white refugees from the French West Indies. Anybody thought to have absorbed revolutionary principles was regarded with suspicion.⁴⁸

Dominica faced considerable home-grown threat without the influence of French politics. The Maroons were a formidable foe, striking swiftly and fiercely if, for instance, they heard that one of their number had been captured, but also maintaining ties with those still in bondage to encourage rebellion and maronnage. They were successful in this aim too, and in the early years of the nineteenth-century, some plantations saw their workforce severely depleted. Whether by this "exciting a mutiny" among the still-enslaved, or simply opposing efforts at recapture by force of arms, many Maroons left a record of their struggles in the court system of Dominica in 1813 and '14.⁴⁹ Governor Ainslie was installed in 1813 and soon enacted measures to subdue the Maroons, including imposing martial law. In May, he delivered an ultimatum promising pardon to Maroons who gave themselves up by June; those who refused this offer of mercy could guarantee they would be shown none (or such was the threat). Ainslie's subsequent campaigns into the mountains—aided by captured Maroons who had shared information to obtain leniency—brought unprecedented victories and ended with the almost total capitulation of Maroon communities.⁵⁰

Despite his apparent successes, Ainslie's methods and his personality were divisive.

⁴⁸Bernard A. Marshall, "Marronage in Slave Plantation Societies: A Case Study of Dominica, 1785-1815," *Caribbean Quarterly* 54, No. 4 (December, 2008): 102-104.

⁴⁹Polly Pattullo, *Your Time is Done Now, Slavery, Resistance, and Defeat: The Maroon Trials of Dominica, 1813-1814*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015), 2.

They drew scorn among subjects of his former governorship in Grenada and lent him a reputation as a tyrant. They also came under criticism from prominent members of Parliament who sought to have the governor removed; he departed for London in November of 1814 to defend his behavior and was formally recalled in 1815.⁵¹

If this was Ainslie's reputation, who was his attacker, Mr. Rand? David Ferguson Rand, Esq., was a member of the House of Assembly in Dominica and had served as an acting Attorney General. Rand, in fact, had been acting in the capacity of Attorney General at several of the Maroon trials in the autumn of 1813.⁵² He was thus a man of both political and legal clout. Rand appears in other records in 1815 and '16 as having made charges of despotism against Dominica's Chief Justice Mr. Archibald Gloster, who, as noted above, had tried and sentenced Rand for his assault on the governor. Gloster also served as President of His Majesty's Council, so the men knew one another in both political and legal spheres, and they seem to have had a long-standing dispute with one another; Rand had been among the members of the Assembly who voted to impeach Gloster in 1814.⁵³ A London publication, *The Political Examiner*, loudly championed Rand's cause against Gloster two years later and made reference to the assault trial in its pages, shedding some additional light on the case.

The paper reported Gloster as saying, during the sentencing, "You wished, perhaps, by thus treating the head of our political society, to invite the rude rabble to trample under foot the component parts...." This is much clearer language than was recounted in

⁵⁰ Marshall, 107-108.

⁵¹ Pattullo, 19, 95-97, 119-120.

⁵² Ibid., 32-34.

⁵³ Archibald Gloster, *The Answer of the Hon. Archibald Gloster, chief justice of the supreme courts of judicature of the island of Dominica, to the charges of D.F. Rand, Esq.* (Roseau, Dominica: Wm. F. Stewart, 1816).

the American periodical, and it becomes progressively clearer later in the quote:

Recollect, Sir, against whom was your aggression in a public assembly room...and the more improperly too in a community, wherein shades of colour exhibit palpable inequality—wherein slavery exists, and in which distinctions are marked, and must be sedulously cherished. Yet, Sir, you did not forbear audaciously striking the Administrator of the power of this Government openly before a large company, to lessen the exalted dignity of his station, to humiliate him in the opinion of every white person, of every free man, and of every slave that walks this unfortunate colony....⁵⁴

This passage reveals a direct connection between government's zealous pursuit of Maroons and Gloster's harshness to Rand. In an environment of fear, Rand became a stand-in for the very men and women whose trials he had witnessed, and he was punished for disturbing the established order, lest his act of defiance serve as inspiration to others lower on the social ladder.

But "Probus," the anonymous author of this series of anti-Gloster letters, goes farther than simply claiming that Rand's conviction was born of a desire to silence political opposition. In addition, the writer hints, the events at the ball made possible a rise in Gloster's salary by providing the Governor with a convenient excuse to dissolve the sitting Assembly. "Probus" stops short of proposing that the incident might have been orchestrated for that purpose, viewing it instead as a happy coincidence for Gloster. However, he sets up a scenario in which his readers might form suspicions of their own. He first asserts, based on his sources, that Mr. Rand struck the governor in the process of resisting rather than initiating an assault, and that not only had the Governor genuinely insulted Mr. Rand and his wife, but "the whole company assembled." How the Governor had so provoked the ballroom at large, the writer does not explain. He gives a detailed analysis of Gloster's hopes for a higher salary and speculates that he colluded with some

⁵⁴ *The Political Examiner*, Oct. 12, 1816, in *19th Century British Library Newspapers*.

members of the assembly to attempt to procure it, but that the Governor would not agree to call for a new election because it would damage his popularity. Finally, "Probus" concludes,

I can with confidence assert, that your wishes for the dissolution of the new Assembly would never have been realized, had not an unexpected and singular occurrence happened about this period, which produced what your machinations had not been able to accomplish. This event was no other than a rude assault committed in a ball-room by the Governor upon Mr. Rand, which was immediately returned by a blow in the face. This affray furnished you at once with the means of putting the additional 300l. in your pocket...and of revenging yourself upon Mr. Rand....⁵⁵

The fist-fight between Governor Ainslie and Mr. Rand may well have been unpremeditated. It seems extreme that a governor would invite a physical assault for the purpose of obtaining a salary hike for a Chief Justice whom he apparently openly reviled. Even so, "Probus" proposes such a complex and twisted web of political interests and political fallout surrounding the event that it is impossible not to regard the incident as a political use of a ballroom. Nowhere else would the encounter have produced precisely these results: the reason for the dance, a triumphant recollection of imperial authority; the venue, named after England's most potent weapon against the ascendancy of the French; the audience present, women and the general public rather than solely government officials; all these factors combined to allow for, and perhaps even necessitate, the scapegoating of Mr. Rand. Even the form of dance played a role, as it was when the Governor was waiting out at the bottom of a longways set that Mr. Rand had the chance to approach him. Only with the help of a traditional English country dance—and the period of inactivity it provides at the foot of the set—could this encounter

⁵⁵ *The Political Examiner*, Oct. 6, 1816, in *19th Century British Library Newspapers*.

have occurred on the ballroom floor at all.

Chapter 6: “Time Wheels Us Round”

As the United States continued to develop and icons of America’s colonial days began to fade away, the legacy of the Revolution had to pass into new hands. Whose hands these should be was as fraught a question as ever, but a prominent contender for power was Andrew Jackson, hero of the War of 1812. Despite his military service, which immediately created parallels between him and George Washington, his history was a chequered one, and the spirit that he roused in the populace seemed to threaten older notions of order. As longways country dances lost ground to cotillions and quadrilles, the language of dance shifted too, favoring an interpretation of “country” that denoted roughness and rowdiness—qualities not fit for polite company, but which Andrew Jackson personified. After a long run of Republican domination of the presidency, the resurgence of a viable opposition candidate may have prompted Louisa Catherine Adams to choose dances for her Jackson Ball that limited potential conflict. Jackson’s conduct and company at social events, even events long past, would feature in one of the major political attacks he suffered during his 1828 campaign. The American public understood that back-room political dealing was, not infrequently, ballroom political dealing.

In the midst of Jackson’s rise to power, Americans began to consider what their revolution had meant to the wider world. In 1824 and 1825, an earlier American hero returned to the shores he had helped to liberate: the Marquis de Lafayette. His visit reinvigorated the War of Independence in popular memory, evoking rosy reveries of a time when Americans and Frenchmen had united under one banner for the cause of human freedom. He was met with celebrations in every quarter, with dinners, processions, theatrical spectacles, and dances, most of which painted him as both a

successor to Washington and something of a second-class holy relic. Almost simultaneously, American citizens were living out their ideals vicariously through the Greek Revolution. The already romantic tale of an oppressed people's throwing off the yoke of tyranny gained new luster when it transpired in the ancient cradle of democracy. Americans raised funds through a variety of means, including charity balls. With the living memory of their own Revolution dwindling, Americans searched for the lasting meaning of their forefathers' cause, and they found it in supporting new fights for freedom abroad.

“Jackson's Favorite”

Should England dare to send again
Her scoundrel red-coats o'er the main,
I fear some sad disaster;
Each soldier wears an epaulett;
The Guards have turned a capering set,
And want a dancing master.¹

On January 23, 1815, General Andrew Jackson and his lady attended a victory celebration in New Orleans that conflated the birth of George Washington with more recent glad tidings. On the eighth of that month, Jackson and the men under his command had soundly trounced the British force with whom they had been sparring since December. The fact that the battle transpired after the Treaty of Ghent had officially made peace did nothing to dampen exultant American spirits-indeed, they did not yet know of the treaty, and even if they had, they would not have stopped dancing.

¹ This humorous verse used dance to mock the supposed ineptitude of the British army during the War of 1812. Equating the ballroom with the battlefield, it proposed that the British required the services of a better commander (“dancing master”) in order to best the likes of Andrew Jackson. Its irony increases with the knowledge that, during this period, most of America's dances came from Britain. *National Advocate*, 12 March, 1819, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

According to the memoirs of a European attendee, the musicians played “Possum Up a Gum Tree” while the General and Mrs. Jackson “bobb[ed] opposite each other” humorously.²

English country dance competed with several other types of dance during this period. In the battle for dominance, English country dance had the advantage of accessibility: British dance master Thomas Wilson claimed that anyone who read his book on the subject, even “persons of the meanest capacity,” might “in a short time acquire (without the aid of a master) a complete knowledge of that rational and polite amusement.”³ In the second decade of the nineteenth-century, however, the style began a slow decline, gradually supplanted by waltzes, cotillions, and other couple and square-formation dances. The eighteen-teens saw the rising popularity of the Quadrille, a dance “entirely...French” according to Wilson, and one that required a fair amount of instruction to perform. “Besides the Directions for the performance of each Figure, in both French and English, an explanation is given of several technical Terms and Figures that have various meanings, and may be performed different ways; with a variety of Observations and Instructions on Quadrille Dancing, not understood by Quadrille Dancers in general,” he wrote in the introduction to his circa 1818 treatise on the Quadrille.⁴

Considering the colonial history of New Orleans, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of the dances performed during the victory celebration derived from French

² Vincent Nolte, *The Memoirs of Vincent Nolte* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 2007), 239.

³ T. Wilson, *An analysis of country dancing*, 1808, Library of Congress, *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals Ca. 1490-1920*, <<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=musdi&fileName=170/musdi170.db&recNum=2>>, accessed 15 Dec., 2009.

⁴ T. Wilson, *The quadrille and cotillion panorama*, c. 1818, Library of Congress, *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals Ca. 1490-1920*, <[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/musdi:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(musdi167\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/musdi:@field(DOCID+@lit(musdi167)))>, accessed 15 Dec., 2009.

traditions. Nevertheless, the spectator quoted above, Vincent Nolte, chose to recount a dance that followed a distinctly American tradition. Written long after the fact, his account may be inaccurate, but there was more at work than a faulty memory. A well-traveled and sophisticated man, Nolte began with irony, employing the French term *pas de deux* to describe the General and Mrs. Jackson's dance. Though it was indeed a dance for two, the phrase conjures images of elegance and culture at odds with Nolte's subsequent observations. "To see these two figures," he continued satirically, "the general a long, haggard man, with limbs like a skeleton, and Madame la Generale, a short, fat dumpling...endeavoring to make a spring into the air, was very remarkable, and far more edifying a spectacle than any European ballet could possibly have furnished." Even more curiously, he suggested that the couple's gambols resembled "half-drunken Indians."⁵ Upon hearing these words, it is impossible not to recall Jackson's complicity in several massacres and his controversial Indian policies while president.

The entire scenario offers tantalizing interpretive possibilities. It is significant that the Jacksons danced to "Possum Up a Gum Tree," a rustic American tune, in an age when many dance manuals--and all the "rules" for dancing--still originated in Europe. Customarily, the task of naming the tune to be danced fell to the lady in a position of honor. Presuming that Mrs. Jackson selected "Possum Up a Gum Tree" or an equivalent American folk song, was her choice a deliberate nose-thumbing at the defeated British, whose tunes and steps more usually graced the ballroom? Did she mean to associate the hero of New Orleans with democratic, homespun principles, presaging his later political career? Clearly, the effort did impress the audience as definitively American, but Nolte upended all the positive connotations of republican virtue by painting the general and his

⁵ Nolte, 238-239

wife as simple, undisciplined bumpkins. He may also have meant to dishonor the general by alluding to his own savagery, as earlier references to Jackson represent him as a “barbarous” “destroyer of Indians.”⁶ Locating such censure within the context of a dance, Nolte portrayed Jackson as doubly hypocritical; rather than “civilizing” the Indians, the general showed himself to be equally-or more-in need of cultivation. Thus, this one vignette demonstrates multiple ways in which popular entertainment can serve as a vehicle for political ideology. The same dance might even be employed to champion opposing viewpoints.

Unfortunately, the New Orleans newspapers from January of 1815 seem not to have survived, so it is impossible to corroborate Vincent Nolte’s account of the festivities. Jackson’s reputation in that city did, however, prompt resident Phillipe Laroque to compose a multi-movement pianoforte piece entitled “The Heroe of New Orleans: Battle of the memorable 8th of January 1815.” Historical military pieces, epitomized by Frantisek Kotzwara’s “The Battle of Prague,” but also including American James Hewitt’s “The Battle of Trenton,” commanded quite a following during this period. Through music, they strove not only to capture the progress of armies and sounds of combat, but also to reproduce the emotions of the common soldier. Thus, civilians might experience the terror and glory of warfare vicariously, often in a theatrical setting that provided shared patriotic ebullience. Laroque published his contribution to the genre in Philadelphia, through the prolific printer George Willig, and dedicated it to “the Fair Sex of America.”⁷ Both strategies indicate that Laroque intended this piece not merely for

⁶ Nolte, 235, 226.

⁷ Phillipe Laroque, “The Heroe of New Orleans: Battle of the Memorable 8th of January, 1815,” *The Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music at Johns Hopkins University*, <<http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/levy-cgi/display.cgi?id=002.012a.000;pages=16;range=0-15>>, accessed 15 Dec. 2009.

mass consumption, but for home use, despite its technical difficulty. His specific appeal to women recognized their dual roles as domestic moral guardians, the inculcators of patriotic virtues, and as the family's likeliest musicians. Along with the score, narrative remarks such as "the enemy presses his March" appeared in both English and French; this recognition of New Orleans' French culture also injected the work with an attractive flavor of European refinement. Its cover page even provided a visual image of Jackson, albeit an inaccurate one; he rose from a crescent of clouds like a home-grown Napoleon, with a bicorn and a cocked eyebrow that seemed to level an unimpressed "oh, really?" at the enemy. The convenient publication date of December 26, 1815 gave the public just enough time to purchase and practice "The Heroe of New Orleans" before the first anniversary of the victory. Many local and family celebrations no doubt included it as part of their revels in that, and later years. For those who perhaps did not attend dances, sheet music brought Jacksonian politics into the domestic sphere.

Meanwhile, cities across the United States lauded the general in more extravagant ways. Washington, D.C. congratulated itself on having produced the finest entertainment on December 7, 1815 with a dinner and ball. Not only did Jackson and his family attend, but the manager decorated the supper and ballrooms with American flags, some of which had flown over battlefields at New Orleans and Niagara. Government officials and their wives mingled in this setting of ostentatious patriotism, presumably putting aside their differences for the sake of a larger cause.⁸ In several newspapers, a clever verse punned on the proceedings (*italics original*):

Three cities strive each other to excel,
In *treating* major-general Jackson *well*;
Two *Dinners* give; the third, with wiser care,

⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 9 Dec. 1815, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

Provides the warrior more efficient fare.
Rations are good; but skill and courage-all
Would fail the *soldier* if he had no *ball*.⁹

In eighteenth-century political discourse, it seems worth mentioning, “treating” did not merely signify an innocent pleasure, nor did it necessarily refer to making peace. Rather, the term also applied to the practice by which political candidates sought votes through extraordinary hospitality—“swilling the planters with bumbo,” in the memorable phrase of eighteenth-century Virginia politician Theodorick Bland, Jr. Lavish picnics for freeholders became a regular feature of election time, as did, significantly, balls.¹⁰ Thus, the italicized “treating” in the verse above was a loaded word indeed. Though the entities in competition here are ostensibly cities, one wonders how the worthies of Washington conducted themselves on that evening. Did they attempt to curry favor with the general, each, perhaps, hoping for prestige by association and recalling that the coming year would bring a new election?

Since his success at New Orleans, many Americans viewed Andrew Jackson as akin to George Washington. At that first day of jubilee, January 23, he had processed into the city in a manner echoing Washington’s inaugural tour; young women in white gowns, decorated to represent individual states, strew his path with flowers and crowned him with laurels as he passed under a triumphal arch.¹¹ In the years that followed, similar occasions reinforced the association. His presence at a New York ball in 1819 drew adulation from the press: “the anniversary of the birth of now a *departed* Hero, graced

⁹ *The Telescope*, 26 Dec., 1815, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹⁰ Charles Sydnor, *American Revolutionaries in the making: Political Practices in Washington’s Virginia* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), 53.

¹¹ Robin Reilly, *The British at the Gates: The New Orleans Campaign in the War of 1812* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1974), 323; Vera Brodsky Lawrence, *Music for Patriots, Politicians, and Presidents: Harmonies and Discords of the First Hundred Years* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1975), 210.

with the presence of a *living* one, could not fail to excite sensations grateful to every Patriotic breast.” In the ballroom, the Governor’s Guard had erected a model fort which saluted Jackson upon his entrance, and a conspicuously-placed military band provided the music.¹²

Fayetteville, North Carolina in 1826 produced an even more extravagant dinner and ball which featured a portrait of Washington surrounded by flags and evergreens at one end while a succession of pictures and descriptions of national events extended to the other. Jackson was thus incorporated as the latest in a series of venerable defenders of American liberty, all of whom looked to Washington as their model.¹³ Like Washington, too, Jackson may have had a dance composed with his fame in mind. "Jackson's Favorite" was a title that had been used before in an 1809 publication by Willard Blanchard; but the dance by that name that appeared in *The American Lady's Pocket Book for the year 1818* had entirely different figures from its predecessor, and it likely referred to the Hero of New Orleans, whose name had then acquired household status.¹⁴ Anyone performing "Jackson's Favorite" thereafter could not have failed to consider the political implications.

Indeed, by 1824, direct allusions to Jackson had become explicitly political, and some celebrations were rechristened in response to complaints: “It was erroneously stated in the *Beacon* of yesterday,” read one such apology, regarding a ball in Norfolk, Virginia, “that the Ball was given ‘in honor of the Hero of New Orleans.’ It is due no less to the citizens themselves than to their respected guests, that this should be promptly corrected.

¹² *Orleans Gazette, and Commercial Advertiser*, 25 Jan., 1819, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹³ *Carolina Observer*, 12 Jan., 1826, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

¹⁴ *The American Lady's Pocket Book for the year 1818*, (Philadelphia: A. Small, 1817), *Early American Imprints*, Series 2, no. 51643, 139, accessed 22 June, 2016.

And we have the permission of the editors to state, that it originated in a misconception of its object, on their part, (induced by the particular day selected [January 8],)....We make this explanation from no political feeling," it then assured readers, unconvincingly.¹⁵ By contrast, Fayetteville's affair had marketed itself as a commemoration of the Battle of New Orleans, without direct reference to the commander who had won such laurels with his victory there—though the room's bold military and historical decorations were unquestionably intended to bring Jackson to mind. In appropriately democratic fashion, a few days after the event, the ballroom was opened to the public with all its splendid transparencies, garlands, and miniature history lessons still intact. This, the newspaper made plain, was to "afford those who did not attend the Ball an opportunity of witnessing what every one so much admired. Even on this second occasion, the room was filled to crowding." The ballroom thus became a sort of museum or theatrical stage where all could absorb and partake in national glory.¹⁶

Nearly every president or presidential candidate after Washington had promoted himself and his policies (or his advocates had) with comparisons to that near-mythic figure. Such comparisons frequently took the form of music, setting new political lyrics to a familiar tune or composing a piece whose themes resembled "Hail, Columbia!" Whoever best embodied Washington in the public mind, according to this logic, was the deserved heir of the Revolution and would govern the nation with wisdom. From 1815, Jackson's Washington-like image made him, potentially, a very powerful man. His continued prominence via the Seminole War, his seizure of Pensacola from the Spanish, and his acquisition of land grants from various native tribes confirmed his heroic status

¹⁵ *U.S. Telegraph and Commercial Herald*, 13 January, 1827, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. The strange comma placement is original.

for many Americans, even though in the process he had appropriated undue authority.¹⁷ He was elected senator from Tennessee in 1823. But would he follow in Washington's footsteps from commander on the field to commander-in-chief? National politics first tested the question in 1824, when Jackson received a nomination for president.

In 1820, Secretary of War John C. Calhoun and his wife threw Jackson a ball to commemorate January 8; in 1824, the Adamses, vice-president and lady, assumed the task. John Quincy and Louisa Catherine Adams had aspirations to the presidency and, with caucuses approaching, they determined to impress Washington with their virtue and generosity. By creating a spectacle that would out-do all previous celebrations of the military hero, they might even win the endorsement of Jackson himself. The first effort succeeded so brilliantly and the second so poorly that, four years later during the campaign of 1828, both Jackson's and Adams' promoters referenced the evening with some irony. Through their affiliation with Jackson, the Adamses wished to be construed as friends of "the people," albeit also their leaders. As it happened, Jackson departed the ball early to mingle with "the people" at the Washington Dancing Assembly's gathering; he purportedly found few guests there, as they had all congregated at the Adamses'.¹⁸ Mrs. Adams practically choreographed the entire proceeding, from the five hundred hand-delivered invitations to the artistically chalked ballroom floor, from the French cuisine to the particular selection of dances (the hostess's prerogative). "Louisa Catherine deliberately did not choose the controversial 'valse' or any of the trendy Spanish country dances," writes Catherine Allgor. "Instead, she favored cotillions and...reels: dances that required group attention, group participation, and group

¹⁶ *Carolina Observer*, 12 Jan., 1826, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁷ Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson & His Indian Wars* (New York: Viking, 2001), 156, 160-163, 182.

cooperation.”¹⁹

Allgor sees these selections as accentuating ranks and shoring up existing power structures, even while enforcing cooperation. It is certainly true that, compared to traditional English country dance, cotillions admitted fewer individuals, and these the most accomplished. And again, compared to a longways set, more people were liable to be left on the sidelines, as each set required eight dancers--merely having an even number would not suffice. A cotillion was a non-progressive dance performed by four couples facing each other in a square formation. Structurally, it consisted of a series of fairly predictable “changes” alternating with a unique chorus, “ABCBDB” for example. However, the number of changes could vary according to the whim of the company, making the cotillion a lengthy and involved dance of up to ten changes.²⁰ A book of cotillions published in 1798 demonstrates this complexity and the inadequacy of words to convey the desired visual image:

German Spa: All round, the two opposite couples take your partner’s hands, and change places; chasse four only five steps, so back again, balance in the middle, set, half cross hands that you may be in your places, the same couple turn contrary partners opposite, then turn your own with your right hand half way, balance with your partner, set, half right and left with the opposite couples, which brings you to your former places; the other two couple do the same.²¹

The diagram on the succeeding page was part of the French publication, *Plaisirs de l’Arquebuse: Contredanse Allemande*, which appeared in Paris in the latter part of the eighteenth-century. Although not all the dances included are traditional cotillions, the

¹⁸ Allgor, 177, 181.

¹⁹ *ibid*, 176-181.

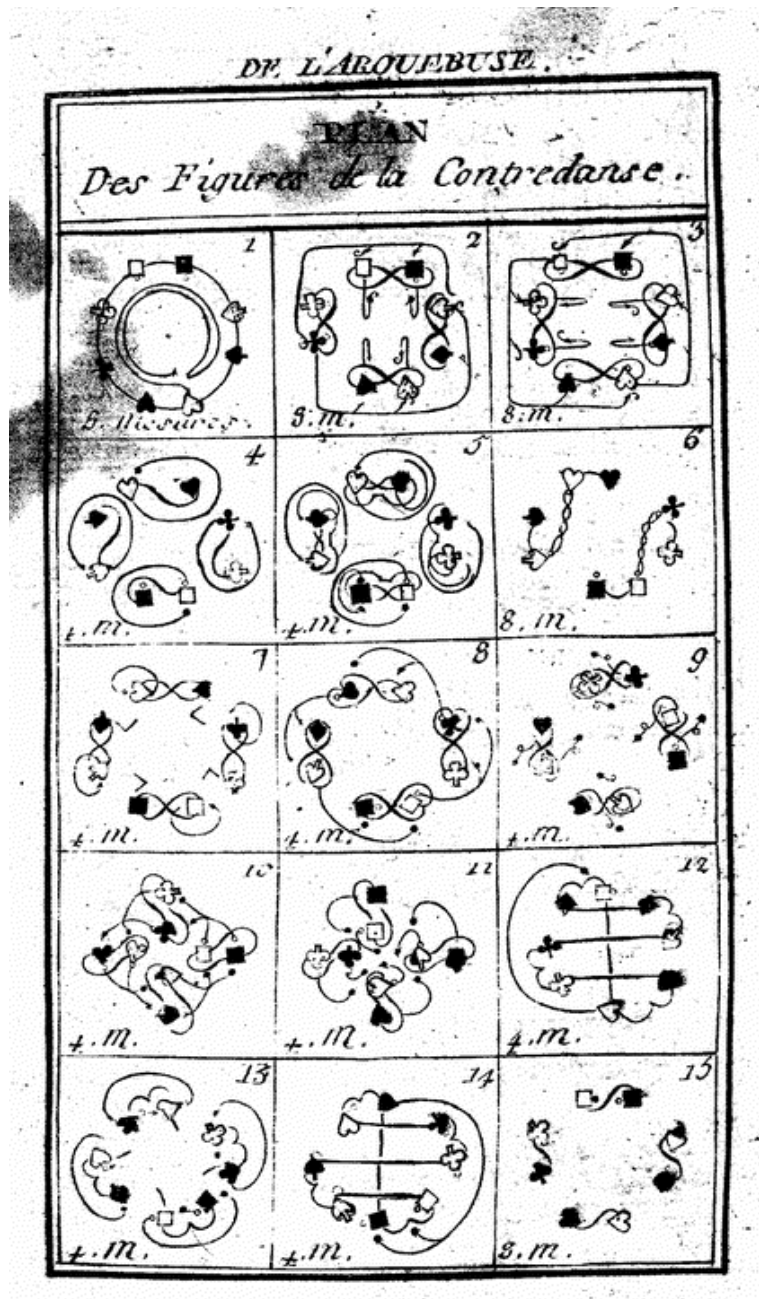
²⁰ Keller and Hendrickson, 21-22.

²¹ *The Gentleman & Lady's Companion*, 1798, Library of Congress, *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals Ca. 1490-1920*, <[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/musdi:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(M1148\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/musdi:@field(DOCID+@lit(M1148)))>, accessed 15 Dec. 2009.

diagram provides some sense of how confusing a cotillion might be for the uninitiated.

Whereas English country dances employ significant straight-line figures, there are almost no direct paths taken in the figures below.

Fig. 3. Showing figures of a cotillion²²



²² Mr. Dusuel, *Plaisirs de l'Arquebuse: Contredanse Allemande*, (Paris, n.d.), *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals*, The Library of Congress, <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.music/musdi.096>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

The *New York Statesman* exploited the cotillion's difficulty to mock the maneuverings of all four presidential candidates in September, 1824:

“Presidential Cotillion”
One Adams led first Miss Diplomacy out,
And Crawford Miss Money-an heiress no doubt-
And Jackson Miss Dangerous, a tragical actor,
And Clay, Madam Tariff, of home manufacture....
Some kick'd and some floundered, some set and some bounded,
Till the music was drowned--the figure confounded,
Some danc'd *dos a dos*, and some danc'd *contreface*,
And some promenaded-and all lost their place.²³

In order to perform a cotillion properly, then, most dancers would have required the instruction of a master. While access to dancing lessons was on the rise, some teachers were considered more prestigious, and true virtuosity usually belonged only to the gentry. It is also entirely possible that Mrs. Adams' program included quadrilles, a similar genre of four-couple dance often mis-labeled a cotillion in America. Though quadrilles might use more familiar figures, they would still require prior knowledge and practice to perform. The history of either of these dances thus bears out Allgor's analysis.

Reels, on the other hand, though they involved only three to six people, were not so exclusive. They derived from the Scottish tradition, with ample room for improvisation and spontaneity. Dancing moved along a single line, employing weaving “heys” and arm turns familiar to anyone with English country dance experience. This pattern of simple figures, flexible footwork, and adaptable numbers became the most popular style at public assemblies and private parties alike.²⁴ They assured, for one thing, that almost anyone who wished to “foot it” could be accommodated without incommoding the others. In the nineteenth century, more proficient dancers complained of the lack of

²³ Lawrence, 226.

²⁴ Keller and Hendrickson, 23.

variety in reels, and thus fashioned “new reels” which maintained the basic form of the old but posed more challenge to performers. Thomas Wilson remarked that his new compositions “become more difficult, and yet, pleasing, from their possessing a much greater variety of nouvelle movement; and are calculated for persons more advanced in the art.” He nevertheless proposed that they “may occasionally be used as pleasing substitutes for petite cotillions, and so much the more easily to be attained....” As was not the case with cotillions, “tolerably good Country Dancer[s]” should quickly apprehend reels with minimal instruction.²⁵ Thus, the usefulness of reels for imposing social order is less apparent than that of cotillions. While this does not disprove Allgor’s explanations, it does raise the possibility of alternatives.

One may deduce several motives underlying Mrs. Adams’ selection of dances for the Jackson Ball. It seems curious, at first, to reflect that cotillions had passed the apex of their popularity in urban areas already. The peak had occurred between about 1780 and 1810, concurrent with almost constant French immigration and influence from soldiers and political exiles. It was the quadrille form, also French, that was on the rise at the time of the ball. Also during this period, settlers crossed the Appalachian Range in large numbers, transporting cotillions westward, where they flourished throughout the nineteenth century, eventually transforming into square dancing.²⁶ This persistence in the wilderness gave the dance a peculiarly American connotation, associated with the rustic yet dogged personality of pioneers. Mrs. Adams may have considered the cotillion’s French roots and its popularity in the West as representative of both New Orleans and the

²⁵ T. Wilson, *The Complete System of English Country Dancing*, 1815, Library of Congress, *An American Ballroom Companion: Dance Instruction Manuals Ca. 1490-1920*, <[http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/musdi:@field\(DOCID+@lit\(M16815\)\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/musdi:@field(DOCID+@lit(M16815)))>, accessed 15 Dec. 2009.

²⁶ Keller and Hendrickson, 21-22.

gritty Tennessee general. Familiar cotillions and reels-rather than new-fangled dances such as the waltz-not only averted controversy but permitted a large number of attendees, including Jackson, to take part.

If cotillions and reels, though, why not country dances? A longways dance for “as many as will,” with repetitive steps and constant interaction, would have served many of the same functions. It was the most democratic form of dance then practiced. Perhaps it was too much in decline by 1824. But these were crucial days for the Adamses’ political reputation, and country dance had another strike against it that may have carried more weight in the mind of Louisa Catherine: it facilitated conversation. She had pointedly invited both her husband’s supporters and his adversaries so as to avoid the appearance of favoritism, and it would be counter-productive if politics disturbed the dance. From its inception, English country dance had served as a centerpiece of courtship ritual, and in recent years the figures had become increasingly rudimentary, requiring little attention. It was designed, instead, to offer stolen moments to converse with a variety of people as one moved through successive groups of four. Couples stood out at the top and bottom of the set, chatting for one rotation before rejoining the action.²⁷ Conversation was not merely an option, but an obligation, and could quickly turn contentious in politically-mixed company.

As Allgor stated perceptively, cotillions and reels “required group attention.” They left dancers little luxury for discussion, even when standing still to catch their breath. The square formation of the cotillion placed partners beside one another, facing an opposite couple across an open space twice the size of the channel that ran down the middle of a longways set. Partners looked at each other only occasionally, and not for

sustained periods. Both the orientation and the space between dancers made conversation awkward. Reels, although performed in closer quarters, required almost perpetual motion, and no conversation could be reasonably sustained. These types of dances also allowed the company to segregate itself if it thought it prudent to do so. Rather than the whole room, they interacted only with two to seven others among the hundreds of guests. This was ideal; so constructed, the Adams Ball preserved the appearance of political unity and noble republicanism without ever risking disorder.

Some guests, in retrospect, viewed the event cynically. It had not brought Adams Jackson's support, but quite the opposite; Jackson had won the popular vote running against Adams, Henry Clay, and William Crawford in the presidential election. Only through a dubious "gentleman's agreement" with Clay did Adams prevail when the decision fell to the House of Representatives. Always sensitive to personal insult, an incensed Jackson denounced this "Corrupt Bargain" as a betrayal of popular sovereignty; its rankling spurred him on into the extraordinarily acrimonious 1828 campaign.²⁸ In March, 1828, several papers complained, "the ever memorable 8th of January...has furnished the minions of Mr. Adams with a fresh opportunity to open anew the floodgates of calumny and detraction." Said "minions" had criticized pro-Jackson celebrations in light of the general's unsavory character; he came under a new kind of fire, controversy swirling around his Indian Wars, the legitimacy of his marriage, and his execution of several British soldiers in Florida.²⁹ Adeptly, the celebrants threw the charge back at their accusers, reprinting a letter praising the Adams ball four years before. Even this

²⁷ Keller and Hendrickson, 20-21.

²⁸ Harry L. Watson. *Liberty and Power: the Politics of Jacksonian America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 81-83.

²⁹ Watson, 97-100, 107-109.

long after the fact, the ball became a political weapon in the hands of editors who recognized that politics had been its purpose all along. “In the observance of that day we are at least in the line of ‘*safe precedents*,’” the newspaper continued snidely. “Andrew Jackson was then, if ever, a *murderer*, and receiving the smiles and homage of the beauty, chivalry, and talent of the country, in the house of Mr. Adams.”³⁰

Balls of an even earlier date came into play during the bitter rivalries of 1828. Reports raged that in the fall and winter of 1806, shortly before Aaron Burr’s arrest for treason, General Jackson had been his intimate friend in Nashville. After rumors that a ball would be given in September to honor former Vice-President Burr, the gentlemen of Nashville “to shew their disapprobation of Burr, determined that Col. Burr should not attend the ball, and so informed [him].” Some witnesses claimed that Jackson had subsequently introduced Burr at the ball, walking arm in arm with him.³¹ While this event is unproven beyond a doubt, such an action would have been consistent with Jackson’s mischievous sense of justice.

Stories abounded in Salisbury, North Carolina, where he had once studied law, that Jackson was rather riotous as a young man and had loved a practical joke. According to tradition, when the dancing school in Salisbury had hosted a Christmas Ball, Jackson, serving as one of the managers, had sent tickets of admission to several conspicuous prostitutes in town. When they arrived, dressed according to their custom, the company ceased dancing in shock, and eventually escorted the women off the premises. Confronted later by the town's respectable ladies, Jackson apologized for upsetting the established order, claiming he had invited the prostitutes merely to "see what would come

³⁰ *Louisiana Advertiser*, 24 March, 1828, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

³¹ *The Berks. and Schuylkill Journal*, 26 July, 1828, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

of it."³² Regarding the incident in Nashville, Jackson's defenders responded immediately, reminding readers that at the point in 1806 when the ball supposedly took place, Aaron Burr's treasonous activities, such as they were, had not yet come to light. Thus, if Jackson was guilty by virtue of attending the same ball as Burr, a number of prominent Whigs and worthy men were likewise culpable.³³

Despite their protestations, the pro-Jackson faction launched a counter-offensive against Clay employing nearly identical material. Jackson had denounced Burr in November of 1806, they maintained, while Henry Clay did not abandon the traitor until his arrest. Indeed, even then Clay had defended the man's innocence and, according to the *Lexington Kentucky Gazette*, "got up and acted as manager at a ball...in honor of [Burr]." ³⁴ "...Some of the Jackson party in Kentucky," responded Clay in a widely-circulated letter, "for the purposes of withdrawing public attention from the alleged connexion between Gen. Jackson and Col. Burr, have gotten up a charge against me, of participation in the [treason] schemes of the latter." Clay denied all allegations, asserting, "It is not true that I was at the ball given to Col. Burr in Frankfort."³⁵ The seemingly undue attention granted the ballroom in this political battle speaks to a larger reality: dances may have been the scene of underhanded dealings and covert power plays, but their utility for such purposes was generally recognized. As with so many political games, the dishonor was not in playing, but in being caught. Regardless of whether they had ever studied with a master or danced anywhere more distinguished than a barn, the literate public spoke this language; they knew enough about the operations of a ballroom

³² James Parton, *Life of Andrew Jackson*, Vol. I (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), 107-108.

³³ *Richmond Enquirer*, 1 Aug., 1828, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

³⁴ *Richmond Enquirer*, 12 Sept., 1828 and 30 Sept., 1828, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

³⁵ *Baltimore Patriot*, 20 Oct., 1828, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

to understand how they implicated Jackson and Clay, even at twenty years' remove.

Ultimately, it was Jackson who triumphed over the sea of slanderous remarks, winning a clear majority in an election with the highest voter turnout to that date.³⁶ Preparations for the general's inaugural ball set off a miniature battle in Washington, D.C. that provides an amusing complement to the ideals of Jacksonian Democracy. The Jackson Central Committee in the capital, an organizational body composed of the socially elect, endeavored to micromanage the inaugural celebration.³⁷ "The whole court of the National Hotel is to be floored and covered in," predicted the newspapers, "and the galleries and rooms are to be fitted up for the *fete*...Twenty thousand dollars for a single ball!"³⁸ Breaking with custom, the committee appointed managers for the ball without applying to the subscribers of the dancing assembly or holding a public meeting for discussion. In retaliation, the assembly threatened to form a rogue commission or even boycott the inaugural. "If the [Committee] do not abandon their object, and unite with the citizens generally...another meeting will be held for the purpose of paying this tribute of respect to General Jackson...[M]any persons will refuse to subscribe to the ball...and if the Committee obstinately pursue their course, the number of subscribers will be sensibly diminished...."³⁹ Such an outcome could have been disastrous. Fifty years earlier, patriot boycotts of dances had been an effective irritant in British-occupied areas. Refusing to attend—or attending and refusing to dance—robbed an event not only of its social function, but of its political persuasiveness. Instead, it transformed a ball into an indictment of the hosts and their principles.

³⁶ Allgor, 196.

³⁷ Claude G. Bowers, *The Party Battles of the Jackson Period* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1922), 37.

³⁸ *New Hampshire Statesman and Concord Register*, 3 Jan., 1829, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

Fortunately, in this instance, the committee appeased the people, and the ball had no shortage of guests—twelve hundred, to be precise, and all of the best society, unlike the uproarious gathering at the White House earlier in the afternoon.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, among these guests were Margaret Bayard Smith, Floride Calhoun, and other beacons of virtue, along with Margaret Eaton, a woman with seductive beauty and a questionable past. Her meteoric rise from barmaid to wife of the secretary of war invited suspicion and prompted most government wives to snub her at the most public celebrations Washington had ever seen. Though this decision did not arise from political so much as moral opinions, it culminated in a complete overhaul of Jackson's cabinet.⁴¹

The ladies of Washington were not the only obstacles that plagued his administration from the outset. In the summer of 1828, Congress had passed the so-called “Tariff of Abominations,” which protected the production of western farmers at the expense of New England manufactories and left Southern planters in the unenviable position of receiving no benefits and paying higher prices. The intent was to quell sectionalism by strengthening party allegiances, and to further Henry Clay's protectionist “American System,” but if anyone felt placated, the sensation was temporary. After Jackson's election, Southerners who had voted for the general out of sheer distaste for the policies of Adams and Clay broke their silence. They expected an ally in Jackson, himself a planter and defender of slavery, but they were to be disappointed. Talk of secession and states' rights bubbled over in South Carolina, reaching a dramatic climax in 1830 with a Congressional debate over the meaning of the Constitution. The event exposed the widening rift between Jackson and his Palmetto State vice-president, Calhoun, when the

³⁹ *Daily National Journal*, 27 Feb, 1829, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁴⁰ Marszalke, 73.

general endorsed the supremacy of the federal government. Jackson mistakenly believed that the Eaton controversy had been concocted by the Calhouns to discredit his administration.⁴²

For their part, the public made their displeasure known through entertainment, denying Jackson the attentions due so lofty a figure. While on an official trip, the president declined an invitation to a dinner in Nashville, apologizing that “Having, since my departure from Washington, declined various invitations to partake of public dinners, I hope...that my fellow citizens of Nashville will pardon the same course on this occasion.” The Washington, D.C., *Daily National Journal* offered its less-than-generous perspective, intimating that Jackson had invented these engagements as a blind for his waning popularity: “It will be observed that Gen. Jackson takes special care to advert to ‘various invitations to partake of public dinners’ (alleged to have been given him on his journey,) by way of set off to the unequivocal manifestations of coldness on the part of the public with which it was attended.”⁴³

As party spirit resurged over this and the national bank question in the 1830s, so did old rhetoric contrasting true republicanism with aristocratic privilege. Foes of Jackson—Federalists, National Republicans, Anti-Masons, and disgruntled Democrats—coalesced as the new Whig party. The Whigs held grand festivals in 1834 in Salem, Massachusetts, as well as in New Orleans, no longer so impressed by its savior. “How characteristic it is of the old Federal party,” chided one report of the proceedings,

to do every thing with an imposing air of courtly parade and magnificence...The FEDERAL MUSIC of the BOSTON BAND, has scarcely died in our ears...Like plain republicans they cannot with

⁴¹ Allgor, 202.

⁴² Watson, 88-89, 114-117, 120-122.

⁴³ *The Daily National Journal*, 24 July, 1830, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

sobriety and decent demeanour (sic) attend a public convention in a season, (as they say,) of ‘deep distress’ but must move to the sound of music,-and with the other accompaniments of a...Bank worshipping NOBILITY. We hope the PEOPLE will notice with marked attention... what might in time be enabled to sustain itself AGAINST, and ABOVE THE LAW!⁴⁴

Recognizing a national hero such as Andrew Jackson through music and dance cloaked politics in an acceptable mantle of patriotism; openly recognizing a faction in the same manner was construed as illegitimate, courtly, and contrary to the principles of frugality and simplicity which America professed as its foundation.

Predictably, the Whigs declaimed against another nightmare of usurpation and tyranny in the person of Andrew Jackson. Salem’s Whig festival in August did indeed move to music—specifically, a comic ditty titled “King Andrew,” to the simple folk tune “Dame Durden,” a slight in itself, since it equated the president with a female busybody. Published that same month in Boston as music for voice and piano, the song appealed to a large audience of limited musical skill. The left hand doubled the rhythm of the right, usually playing a third above or below, except during the refrain when the hands played individually. The structure invited group participation, featuring a melody and two lines of harmony within a comfortable singing range, and lyrics divided among the three lines for the refrain. “King Andrew had five trusty Squires,” began the song, “Whom he held his bid to do.” It went on to assign derogatory nicknames to members of Jackson’s cabinet and concluded, nursery-rhyme fashion, “Now was not this a medley [motley] crew As ever a mortal knew?”⁴⁵ Rather than harnessing music and dance to enhance their own prestige and divide themselves from the populace, as Democrats charged, Salem’s Whigs did the reverse; they reached out to the common man (or woman), the

⁴⁴ *Eastern Argus*, 11 August, 1834, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

quintessential Jackson supporter, and influenced him through a lively, well-known tune that might be part of anybody's parlor entertainment.

Jackson left the presidency in 1837 in favor of Martin Van Buren, and in 1840 another ball wrote a melancholy epilogue to the aged hero's political career. Traveling south, he faced a mixed reception; Jackson, Mississippi welcomed him, but some citizens of New Orleans fell afoul of his legendary temper by implying that he had come to campaign for Van Buren. Though the general denied it hotly, he reportedly revealed that Van Buren had recommended the southern journey in a letter; Jackson's former vice-president may have sought the same approval by association that John Quincy Adams had pursued in 1824. This news caused some chagrin, even within Jackson's own Democratic Party. The same evening, at a ball held in Jackson's honor, a newspaper correspondent counted barely fifty ladies in attendance. "A society ball," he wrote in astonishment, "is nothing here without two-hundred ladies!"⁴⁶

This was a new era of party politics, according to Elizabeth Varon, one in which the Whig party proudly trumpeted that the majority of American women favored their candidate, William Henry Harrison, over the Democrat Van Buren. "Whig womanhood," writes Varon, "embodied the notion that women could—and should—make vital contributions to party politics by serving as both partisans and mediators in the public sphere." In an outgrowth of the female role as guardian of national virtue, a woman's endorsement of a candidate signaled that person's moral uprightness and fitness for office. Thus, the dearth of women choosing to attend the ball in New Orleans may not

⁴⁵ Lawrence, 248-249.

⁴⁶ *Cleveland Daily Herald*, 12 Feb, 1840, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*. It is worth mentioning that this report came from a newspaper in Harrison's adopted home, Ohio, and that it is likely to be biased against Van Buren as a result. It does not seem to have been overtly anti-Jackson, however.

have been coincidental, but rather a conscious indictment of Jackson and, by extension, of the Democrats. The fact that the newspapers were surprised by the poor turnout bolsters this interpretation of events. The snub wounded the general's pride and compounded his frustration with the city that had sung his praises and set him on a course to the White House a quarter-century before. Jackson had lost his place and his influence to another military hero from the War of 1812: William Henry Harrison, "Tippecanoe." Harrison vanquished Van Buren in the 1840 presidential election.

The battle of the ballroom was not as intense as might have been expected during the factious "Age of Jackson," for a variety of reasons. With the advent of mass political rallies, campaign trails, and debates in the 1830s and 40s, party members found other venues through which to forge group identity and engage the adversary. Women gained new access to the public sphere, with Whigs especially courting them as a moral sanction for policy; Democrats lagged behind somewhat in appealing to the female public.⁴⁷ Yet, even before the crucial year of 1840, women had made inroads into the political arena previously thought to belong to men. At the inaugural ball for Martin van Buren in 1837, the ladies "were permitted to usurp the seats of the diplomatic corps and the Senators, both at the ball and inauguration."⁴⁸ In the interests of courtesy, men symbolically relinquished their political power and allowed women to assume the most prominent and visible positions, watching over the ball and inauguration like guardian angels of America's virtue. But women took active roles, as well as figurative ones. The Whig Party's gatherings in New Orleans as early as 1834 had included women, some of whom defied the views of their companions: "There was nothing to mar the pleasure of the day,

⁴⁷ Varon, 495-496.

⁴⁸ *Arkansas State Gazette*, 4 Apr., 1837, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

except the wo-begone faces of some few *Tories* who gained admission under the smile and protection of the fair ladies who escorted them,” quipped one newspaper.⁴⁹ Though they never forfeited their power over music and dance, women channeled their political energies into a variety of streams, including reform movements.

The simultaneous decline of English country dance in favor of more recent European imports reduced the potential for cross-class, bi-partisan interaction in the ballroom. Dances demanded closer attention and more exact footwork, and the formation no longer forced political enemies to interact with one another. Although the rise of waltzes and quadrilles appears to be mere correlation, it is possible that there was an element of design involved as society’s leaders kept a step ahead of the democratic “rabble” rumored to be Jackson’s power base.

Nevertheless, the average citizen of the early nineteenth century, as in the eighteenth, would have found it impossible to separate the worlds of entertainment and politics. Daily life mixed the two constantly. The use of ballrooms for public meetings—convenient by virtue of their capacity and acoustics—created a natural elision between social and political expression. Beyond such coincidental junctures, dances were the sites of purposeful propagandizing, canvassing, and pandering, not just in Washington, but in towns and country houses across America. Accessible forms of music and dance lent themselves to politicization, especially for a nation embroiled in intense debate over the meaning of democracy. Jackson’s victory at New Orleans laid the groundwork for a revolution in politics as profound and divisive as that of 1800, and as with that earlier transfer of power, citizens used dance to project their allegiances and interpret the changing world. Observers such as Vincent Nolte judged Jackson and his constituents on

⁴⁹ *Salem Gazette*, 22 Aug., 1834, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

the basis of dance, while Louisa Catherine Adams manipulated her husband's image via the Jackson Ball. Candidates eager to discredit one another regarded dances as evidence of collusion, even as managers retreated unsuccessfully from the specter of celebration as partisanship.

"Lafayette Forever"

The dancing was not quite like, yet not very unlike, what we see at an assize or race-ball in a country town. They call their dances cotillions instead of quadrilles, and the figures are called from the orchestra....

~Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 1832⁵⁰

Frances Trollope, English novelist and mother of another brilliant novelist, Anthony Trollope, observed American culture at a point when it had developed into something that mimicked England while being perhaps inordinately proud of the ways in which it differed. The 1820s had witnessed a growth of democratic spirit epitomized by the character of Andrew Jackson, the new President. And while political parties had diverged and grown antagonistic again after the breakdown of the Federalists, Mrs. Trollope observed that all Americans held one particular mindset in common—a seemingly-unconquerable distaste for England. This was not grounded in any real truths about England, but it may have sprung instead from the need to distinguish "America" as a legitimate nation, despite its having such an abbreviated political history. Clearly, Mrs. Trollope felt that the dances of America were reminiscent of what might be found in any English ballroom, even if the level of skill in their execution did not meet European standards. Interestingly, however, Americans referred to their popular dances as "cotillions," while Mrs. Trollope was more familiar with the term "quadrilles" for the

⁵⁰ Trollope, 210-211.

same type of dance.

Cotillions were introduced to Anglo culture beginning in the 1760s, though they had existed in France throughout the eighteenth-century, and involved only eight dancers at a time, arranged in a square. The steps, though similar to those in an English country dance, tended to be complex and require practice; quadrilles, by contrast, came to the English-speaking world in the early nineteenth-century, and are sometimes regarded as a fusion of cotillions and longways dances. Square in form like cotillions, they tended to involve more repetition of figures, making them, like country dances, easier and more accessible to a broader population. If performed traditionally with an established series of figures, one quadrille was very like the next; whereas each cotillion had a chorus figure unique to that dance. Thus, Jane Austen wrote to her niece in 1817, of a present of sheet music, "Much obliged for the quadrilles, which I am grown to think pretty enough, though of course they are very inferior to the cotillions of my own day."⁵¹ On the other hand, if an assembly felt creative, they might substitute other country dance figures for the generally-accepted ones, resulting in a dance that was actually neither a standard quadrille nor "a cotillion," as Americans deemed it. Why would Americans continue to refer to a quadrille by this earlier terminology, as Mrs. Trollope discovered? Among Europeans, the terminology seems to have been malleable only at an earlier date, as the Baron von Closen said in 1781 that the women of Williamsburg, Virginia "like our French quadrilles," when they were almost certainly engaged in a cotillion.⁵²

Among Americans, however, "cotillion" was the overwhelming label used for either square formation dance until the 1830s or later. In 1829, a letter to the Georgia paper,

⁵¹ Jane Austen to Fanny Knight, Feb. 20-21, 1817, in Le Faye, 330.

The Macon Telegraph, from a New York correspondent seemed to report an early usage of the proper label: "one amusement was introduced; it was...a dance, called a quadrille—Now I was really so unfashionable as not to know any thing about a quadrille."⁵³ The man's puzzlement seems to demonstrate either that the "quadrille" was a recent fad or that it was more common in northern cities than southern towns, or perhaps both. It seems impossible that he would have expressed so much astonishment had the dance been introduced as a "cotillion," a word then in use for nearly sixty years.

"Cotillion" had even become a general term applied to balls and parties, regardless of whether the dances involved were exclusively cotillions, adding to the difficulty of interpreting historical evidence. For instance, a "Cotillion Party" announced in the *Daily National Intelligencer* in 1823 cites "the newest fashionable Cotillion and Sett Dances" rather than longways dances as its program; while a "Cotillion Party" given by the same dance master in 1821 described the upcoming gathering as a place to learn the "new cotillion and country dances, which have been so much admired." Even more confusing, as early as 1813, the paper had advertised a cotillion party that would "open at 7 o'clock, with a new dance called the Spirit of Seventy Six—the *Fair Sex* will be danced as a cotillion."⁵⁴ Thus, popular dances in other forms—probably longways—were being adapted into cotillions to suit the latest tastes. In the case of "The Fair Sex," the resulting dance was actually a quadrille under the wrong name, using the figures of the original longways dance performed by the two head couples of the square and the two side couples, alternating. Thus, rather than the cotillion/quadrille being an entirely new dance

⁵² Ludwig Baron von Closen, *Revolutionary Journal, 1780-1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958), 169.

⁵³ *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, 12 Sept., 1829, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

trend, in America at least, it actually represented a conscious modification of the longways set into a more exclusive shape.

Young America's need to define its national character by manipulating the memory of the Revolution may be the source of both the attitude Mrs. Trollope encountered and the curious mis-application of "cotillion." The rage for all things French persisted in America despite opposition to French politics, and repeated influxes of French-speaking immigrants created a small but active French sub-culture in eastern cities. Accordingly, there was no lull of popularity between one form of French dance and the next. By the early 1810s, just before the quadrille shot to fame, Americans were accustomed to holding "cotillion parties," even in New England, where the longways dance form had greater staying power. Mehetable Amory, belonging to a prosperous family of Boston merchants, noted many instances of dancing in her diary. Though she often entered the activity simply as "dancing" without any further explication—which may indicate English country dances—she just as commonly mentioned the cotillion parties she or her daughters attended.⁵⁵ Thankfully, a Washington, D.C. advertisement in 1822 proves that the forms of dancing at cotillion parties were not so uniform as the name would imply. "Cotillion Party," it announces, "at Mr. Brown's Assembly Room," and ends with the statement, "[Mr. Masi's] new Cotillion and Country Dances will be danced, and, at the close of the evening, La Monfree"⁵⁶ Country dances also featured prominently alongside cotillions in dance publications throughout the 1790s, and even into the first decade of the 1800s, before the advent of the "cotillion party" muddled the issue.

⁵⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 11 Jan. 1823; *Daily National Intelligencer*, 29 Jan. 1813, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁵⁵ Mehitable Amory, *Mehitable Sullivan Cutler Amory diaries*, Manuscripts, N-2024, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

Did cotillions, coincidentally arriving on American shores at around the same time as the Revolution erupted, come to hold a patriotic significance similar to songs like "Yankee Doodle," or names like "Washington" and "Lafayette"? If they did, it would add another layer of meaning to the prevalence of cotillions during the long visit that the Marquis de Lafayette made to America in 1824. It suggests a conscious effort not only to celebrate a Frenchman by displaying a command of this aspect of French culture, but also to reiterate to those engaged in the dance just how important the French military had been to the founding of the United States.

In the days after the triumphant victory at Yorktown, no Frenchman was more lauded than the young Marquis. It had been partially through his efforts that King Louis XVI had dispatched an army to America in 1780. His early devotion to the cause, the respect that he commanded among other officers, his close relationship with Washington—all contributed to his popularity and his elevation to the position of an icon in the post-war period. Dances composed in his honor, or at least with his name attached, began appearing almost immediately. John Griffiths included one in his publication in 1788, the first known published dance manual written by an American. Other examples joined these in 1799, one in Delaware and another in Brookfield, Massachusetts. Still others were printed in Massachusetts in 1800 and 1801.⁵⁷ After a lull, an explosion of Lafayette-related popular culture accompanied his eagerly-awaited visit. This journey by one of the last surviving military heroes of the American Revolution spurred the populace to re-invigorate its sense of unity and national pride. Cities all along his proposed route—which eventually encompassed all twenty-four states—prepared lavish

⁵⁶ Daily National Intelligencer, 12 Feb., 1822, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁵⁷ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

ceremonies and parties to receive him, many using music and dance in politically-significant ways. Multitudes of marches, waltzes, patriotic songs were composed to welcome him, and cotillions featured prominently in several of the celebrations. Indeed, nothing to rival the outpouring of affection for Lafayette had been seen since the most triumphant days of General Washington.⁵⁸ For instance, "See the Conquering Hero Comes," a tune strongly associated with Washington in his later years, was played repeatedly for Lafayette during his visit, effectively equating the two men in the popular mind.

Though the Marquis landed in August in New York, he traveled to Boston shortly, then to Connecticut, and Providence, Rhode Island. At this last stop, composer Oliver Shaw greeted him with a piece of music not unlike the military pieces written by Kotzwara for Prague or Laroque for Andrew Jackson. A piano "divertimento" titled "Welcome the Nation's Guest," Shaw's work incorporated written directions describing Lafayette's progress through the town, and the music changed styles to reflect the mood of each moment. Accompanying a quick step is the text "The General approaches the town," setting a tone of anticipation for his arrival. Similarly, after a trumpet fanfare comes a grand march as "The General enters the town escorted by the military and citizens;" and a pastorello renders into bucolic music the General's procession to the State House "while the Misses strew his path with flowers." Overall, the imagery is on one hand that of adulation and respect, and on the other of peace and plenty. These ideals of honor, innocence, and fruitfulness matched well with the image most civic celebrations sought to promote about the American character. As a solo piano piece readily available

⁵⁸ J. Bunker Clark, "American Musical Tributes of 1824-25 to Lafayette: a Report and Inventory," *Fontes Artis Musicae*, 26, No.1 (1979 Jan-Mar): 17-35.

to the public, "Welcome the Nation's Guest" allowed the American public to bring Lafayette into their homes in the same way that they had domesticated George Washington in the 1790s. Though rhythmically complex, it was composed in the key of "C" with minimal accidentals and would make an inviting prospect for any accomplished or aspiring pianist.⁵⁹ The parallels with Washington continued in another piece by Shaw eight years later, which, although written for the centennial of Washington's birth, was "composed & inscribed to his friend & compatriot in arms, General LaFayette."⁶⁰

October brought the French hero to Philadelphia, where he was treated to a splendid dinner at the Mansion House Hotel and a ball at the New Theatre. Following the dinner were a number of toasts, as usual, accompanied by music. The ninth toast honored "The ancient Cadmus," a classical hero credited with founding Thebes and bringing an alphabet (and hence eloquence) to Greece; after this, the orchestra played a country dance called "The New-Rigged Ship," first published in 1795 and recurring in a variety of European (but never American) dance manuals through 1816. There is no obvious connection between the toast's subject and the dance, but the following toast was also on the subject of Greece, drawing a line of comparison between the ancient Greek form of government, the American Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Greek Revolution then underway. Also featured in the toast was a recently-composed piece, "La Fayette's March," also known as "Honour to the Brave." It was played again at the ball, along with more new material, a series of cotillions written specifically for the occasion.

The highly-choreographed Baltimore ball reinforced Lafayette's traditional

⁵⁹ Oliver Shaw, "Welcome the Nation's Guest: A Military Divertimento for the Piano Forte," (Providence: Shaw), *The Lester S. Levy Collection of Sheet Music at Johns Hopkins University*, <<http://levysheetmusic.mse.jhu.edu/catalog/levy:085.085>>, accessed 19 June, 2016.

⁶⁰ Clark, "Musical Tributes," 22.

association with George Washington. As General Lafayette descended the staircase to the reception room, the plan of arrangements directed the band to play “Washington’s March.” To follow, as the honored guest received the male citizens of Baltimore, the band introduced the “President’s March”; the ladies filed past to a rendition of “Lafayette’s March.” Through these musical cues, Lafayette became the Washington for a younger generation at a moment when the Revolution was beginning to pass out of living memory. Dancing proceeded with first a longways “Contra Dance” in sets of twelve couples each, then a series of cotillions, all unspecified in this newspaper account. However, at about this time, Christopher Meineke, a renowned musician and composer, published "Three Sets of Cotillions, as danced at the Grand Ball given in Baltimore in honour of Genl. LaFayette." It seems the ball's organizers had recruited only the finest contributors to the evening's festivities. The cotillions were regimented, with no more than four changes (sets of distinct figures, followed by a chorus) permitted per dance. After supper, dancing would resume until the Assembly Rooms closed at three in the morning. Newspapers reported that the mayor enjoined Baltimore’s citizens to illuminate their homes in celebration of Lafayette’s arrival. This gave even private homes the air of important public spaces, like the government buildings and assembly rooms that were often illuminated during celebrations.⁶¹

Augusta, Georgia received Lafayette in March of 1825 with a celebration that rivaled Baltimore’s in pageantry. After a public dinner involving various political and military officials, a ball followed at the Planter's Hotel. The *Augusta Chronicle* noted that the ladies of the town oversaw the decoration of the ball room, and that each lady present enjoyed an introduction to and conversation with the General himself. Of particular

⁶¹ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 17 Sept., 1824, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

interest to Augusta's citizens was the illumination of the room's windows with the letters of Lafayette's name, one letter to a pane. Any passersby on the street below could harbor no doubts of whom and what the ball was meant to honor. The Saturday following the ball, the room remained lit and decorated, presumably for the general public to observe. Thus, even those without the means to attend the ball itself might experience a taste of its visual imagery and witness the association between dance and politics.⁶²

In June of 1825, Lafayette made his way to New Hampshire, where the town of Concord received him with equal acclaim. Processions, dinners, military bands, and dancing characterized the celebrations. According to the *New Hampshire Statesman*, Lafayette attended the ball after a full day of other engagements-meeting members of the government, veterans of the American Revolution, and others. His presence was a matter of great excitement for the ladies of Concord, who "amid the bustle of the day...could hardly enjoy an opportunity of introduction to their Country's early Friend, except in the retirement of the Ball-room." The ballroom, in this account, was a space specifically designated for interaction between women and a renowned political figure. It was a semi-private setting, unlike the street processions that preceded the ball; it was not an overtly political setting, unlike the addresses given in the houses of legislature. The ballroom, therefore, allowed women to approach political figures or subjects with minimal risk of social disruption.⁶³

One of the most telling events was the proposed ball in the nation's capital at Washington, D.C., discussed at a public meeting in January of 1825. While some of their plans seem to have fallen through, the citizens of the District of Columbia set out a

⁶² *Augusta Chronicle*, Mar. 26, 1825, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁶³ *New-Hampshire Statesman*, June 20, 1825, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

number of lofty goals for the celebration. They scheduled the event for February 22 to coincide with George Washington's birthday, cementing the sense of continuity between Washington and Lafayette. Topping their list of preferred venues for the ball was the Rotunda of the Capitol Building; this time, rather than politics infiltrating a social space, dancing and socialization infiltrated a political space. Members of Congress were invited to participate as a show of gratitude for their services to the nation. Lastly, it was suggested that the ball have twenty-four managers—the number of states then in the union—and thirteen masters of ceremonies—representing the thirteen original colonies/states. The newspaper announcement that called citizens to this meeting concluded with the phrase, “One, with the concurrence of Many,” in large script, promoting a strong, amicable image of democracy that was rarely true in practice. The piece placed no obvious limits on attendance at the meeting, implying that it was all-inclusive. However, the suggested price of tickets—ten dollars, if the motion carried—would have meant that not all citizens who planned the ball would have been financially able to dance at it.⁶⁴

However, dwarfing all these subsequent celebrations was undoubtedly the first, a grand fete at Castle Garden, New York, in September, 1824. Newspaper accounts can only attempt to convey the magnificence of the scene:

It is certain, that nothing in this country, or in modern Europe, has surpassed or even equalled it. Persons who were present at the Coronation of the Emperour Napoleon, and of George IV, say, that neither of those pageants could be compared with this. All the ornaments of the Castle were allegorical--The central pillar was designed to represent the centre of the Union; and the thirteen transparent pilars, as well as the thirteen original States, which united in the declaration of independence, and with which the Revolutionary services of General Lafayette are associated...Over the entrance was a bust of Washington, designed to

⁶⁴ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 5 Jan., 1825, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

represent him as the presiding spirit of the fete, given to his illustrious friend....⁶⁵

There was also a bust of Hamilton featured, among other portraits of Revolutionary figures. As happened elsewhere, an entire volume of new "cotillions" were composed for the ball by Louis Benoit, the director of the City Assembly's Orchestra. Apparently, the dances were called, a method not yet adopted in Europe. It seems, however, that the signals for each figure may have been given by military bugle, rendering the dancers themselves rather like an army in the field instead of a gaggle of party-goers. According to the account in the *Rhode Island American*, the floor laid down could easily accommodate eighty sets of cotillions at once, or 640 dancers, frolicking to the music of two orchestras in the gallery above. The massiveness of the venue was owing to its having been previously a circular fort some 170 feet in diameter, now appropriated as a pleasure ground. In addition to the guests, the orchestra members, and Lafayette and his entourage, there was also space enough for two hundred servants clad in white shirts and trousers, with blue coats, and red capes and cuffs.⁶⁶

Everything about the occasion was devised to elevate Lafayette to the pantheon of American heroes and out-do (in a more democratic fashion) the ostentatious ceremonies of Europe. Though Lafayette was an aristocrat, he is referred to exclusively as "General" in the reports of this and almost every other event he attended. Indeed the only "Marquee" mentioned at Castle Garden—and it was capitalized, perhaps as a subtle pun—was the blue and white tent, flanked with brass artillery and military accoutrements, designed to seat the guest of honor and his party.⁶⁷ This insistence on

⁶⁵ *Rhode-Island American*, 17 Sept., 1824, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁶ *The Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, 18 Sept., 1824, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

⁶⁷ *Newport Mercury*, 18 Sept., 1824, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Lafayette's military title rather than his social one parallels George Washington's most common appellation and reinforced the idealized notion of America as a classless society.

For some observers, it seemed that Lafayette shared Washington's ability to unite a divided nation in the same great cause—though the cause might be nothing more than the celebration of former glories. The aforementioned comic poem, “Presidential Cotillion,” described politics as a self-interested dance wherein contenders to power touted their own agendas to the great confusion of all participants and spectators. Meanwhile, newspaper editors fiddled the musical accompaniment, probably eager to compose their own variations of the tune. It seemed as though money, melodrama, foreign policy, and trade regulations could not possibly coexist in harmony, either figurative or literal. However, just when the dance fell apart—“all lost their place”—in strode Lafayette to completely re-write the scene:

“The dancers all bowed, and the fiddlers chang’d tune,
Like Apollo’s banjo to the man in the moon.
How sweet were the notes, and how bold was the strain!
O when shall we list to such concord again!
The hall was sky covered with Freedom’s bright arch,
And it rang to the tune of Liberty’s march.”⁶⁸

Nearly fifty years after the American Revolution, a relic of that conflict reinvigorated the spirit of liberty and pride that was all too easily lost amid political wrangling. He was truly, as many papers proclaimed him, “The NATION’S GUEST,” welcomed with unified hospitality. While the display of peace and concord may have been designed to impress, and while it may have dissipated swiftly after Lafayette’s departure—(“when shall we list to such concord again?”)—it demonstrates Americans’ eagerness to develop a positive national identity rooted in the country’s perceived founding principles and

⁶⁸ *Augusta Chronicle*, 9 Oct., 1824, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

distinctive character. Although adopted as a child of America, Lafayette also embodied a connection to the Revolutionary spirit the world over, from his native France to those nations, like Greece, still struggling against tyranny's strong arm.

“The Arcadian Contest”

...He
Perceived it was the Pyrrhic dance so martial,
To which the Levantines are very partial.
And further on a group of Grecian girls,
The first and tallest her white kerchief waving,
Were strung together like a row of pearls,
Link'd hand in hand, and dancing

~George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto III, 1821⁶⁹

Lord Byron, one of the most renowned poets of the Romantic period, recognized the utility of art for inflaming political passions. In *Don Juan*, published between 1819 and 1824, he interrupts his larger story to pen a moving lament for the noble people of Greece, living under the oppressive rule of the Ottoman Empire. More than mere sentimentality, it was also a call to arms: "You have the Pyrrhic dance as yet/Where is the Pyrrhic phalanx gone?" he asks later, challenging his listeners to adopt a martial attitude. Dance was one marker of the legacy of ancient times, but it also served as a reminder of lost glories and stimulated the people to regain them. It is, in Byron's usage, both the innocent country dance of romantic fiction and the fearsome war dance of more "primative" civilization. When first Byron composed his plea, the Greek Revolution had not yet erupted, though there had been unrest for some time, and a number of

⁶⁹ George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Don Juan*, *Cantos III, IV, and V* (London: Thomas Davison, 1821), 18.

conspirators, the Philiki Etaireia, hoped to join their forces together in revolt.⁷⁰ The publication of Canto III, however, occurred after Greek rebels had defied their Ottoman rulers and engaged the Turkish army in Moldavia and Wallachia, drawing the eyes not only of Europe, but of the world. The insurgents' hopes of Russian aid were disappointed, and their situation was precarious at best.⁷¹

In 1827, the British consul to Patras, Philip James Green, published his impressions of the insurgency, seeking to balance the accounts given in the British press, which he protested had been supportive of the rebels exclusively. "It must not be thence inferred," he clarified, "that I am prejudiced against the Greek Cause. On the contrary, it is impossible...not to wish the liberation of any people from a state of thralldom so degrading...." Yet, his impression of Greece was a far cry from Byron's idealized study of a Grecian maiden; indeed, he described the Greeks as of proud heritage, but at present scarcely more advanced in intellect or principles than the Ottomans. Despite his doubts about the fitness of the rebels, though, he painted a grim portrait of their adversaries, recounting tales of prisoners impaled alive and sacks of noses and ears kept as trophies.⁷² The Greeks successfully seized control of the Peloponnesus, but their numbers were fraught with in-fighting, and no leader emerged who could maintain extended control. It was around this time, in July of 1823, that Lord Byron traveled from Italy to Greece as the agent of the London Committee, a relief organization committed to aiding the rebels. Having invested some four-thousand pounds of his own money into repairing the Greek

⁷⁰ "Philiki Etaireia". *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016, <<http://www.britannica.com/topic/Philiki-Etaireia>>, 10 Jun. 2016.

⁷¹ John L. Comstock, *History of the Greek Revolution: Compiled from Official Documents of the Greek Government* (New York: WM. W. Reed & Co., 1829), 146-149.

⁷² Phillip James Green, *Sketches of the war in Greece, extracts from correspondence, with notes by R. L. Green* (London: Thomas Hurst and Co, 1827), iii-v, 163.

fleet, Byron then took command of a brigade of soldiers and attempted to promote unity among the rebellion's factions. Falling ill, however, he died in the spring of 1824, his visions for Greece unfulfilled.⁷³ The next year, Egyptian forces overran the Peloponnesus, clearing a path for the Turks to recapture the territory.

Thus, in the mid-1820s, the eyes of America were not merely trained on the progress of Lafayette's visit. His person might have reanimated America's revolutionary heritage, but this new American consciousness sought broader expression. International events, such as the Greek Revolution, captured Americans' attention and motivated them to action. As a young country searching for a distinctive national character, a solid foundation, and a future legacy, America might view the war for Greek independence with both pride and sympathy. It might even regard the patriots of Greece as direct heirs of the American cause, as the Greek National Assembly had published a Declaration of Independence in 1822 and pronounced themselves the Hellenic Republic.⁷⁴ The language this document employed pointedly echoed that of its American predecessor: the Greek nation was "resolved to break its yoke," it being "impossible for us any longer to bear...the cruel scourge of Ottoman rule." The declaration justified revolution as the last resort of a long-suffering people against tyranny and claimed that, far from a mere uprising among the rabble, the current effort was "a national war, undertaken for the sole purpose of reconquering our rights, and securing our existence and honour." Like the American declaration, it sought to set before foreign nations the factors that impelled the Greek people to war and to anticipate objections, using the premise of natural rights as its

⁷³ "George Gordon Byron, 6th Baron Byron". *Encyclopædia Britannica*. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2016, <<http://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Gordon-Byron-6th-Baron-Byron>>, 14 Jun. 2016.

foundation. Towards the end of the piece, the assembly delineated the type of government it sought to establish, composed of an executive power and a senate, with an independent but supportive judiciary branch. It further pronounced that "this government, founded on justice, instituted by universal consent, is now the only legitimate and national government," and formally dissolved the seated assembly so that the new system could be erected in its stead.⁷⁵

This national effort, built on the universal rights of man, struck a chord with many western nations, whose own fashions and politics had drawn on the Classical world for inspiration so recently. And no nation had more reason to watch with eager interest than the United States. Thus, in the Fayetteville *Carolina Observer* of 26 Feb., 1824, the mention of a military ball held on January 8 shares a page with entirely political and economic news. This ball was more than a social gathering with covert political connotations—it was consciously and publicly political, and treated as such in the press. This ball united the causes of commemorating the Battle of New Orleans and aiding the Greeks, conveniently tying America's most recent effort to maintain its own independence with the current plight of the Greek people. This union might have evoked sympathy by emphasizing the legacy of the American Revolution and challenging citizens to see in the struggles of others the echo of themselves. "We are informed," reads the article, "that Gen. Jonas Mapes has paid to the Treasurer of the Greek Fund, two thousand and ten dollars, being the nett [sic] proceeds of the Military Ball given in New York on the 8th of January last."⁷⁶ It must have been a memorable occasion indeed,

⁷⁴ David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence, A Global History* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press), 148.

⁷⁵ Comstock, 499-500.

⁷⁶ *Carolina Observer*, 26 Feb., 1824, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

for when Lafayette visited the Park Theatre in New York eight months later, a newspaper described the interior of the theatre as “decorated in something similar to the Greek Ball.”⁷⁷ Any number of dances, theatrical presentations, and other fundraisers took place over the course of 1824, the profits destined for a distant country in its efforts to throw off the Ottoman Empire.

Crucial, too, were those events that did *not* transpire. The *Maryland Gazette* of January 8, 1824, published a poem in praise of the young female population of Annapolis; these ladies had requested specifically that the subscription money that would have gone toward an annual ball be instead sent to the Greek war effort. By turning the power of refusal—easily construed as a passive power—into the active support of a political issue, women had reminded all patriotic Americans of the sacrifices necessary to maintain liberty: “The pride of the ball and the revel shall cease/Whilst thinking of you and of hard struggling Greece.” These “Daughters of Freedom,” according to the verse, had united themselves in spirit with the suffering population of Greece and highlighted the universality of natural rights across the family of mankind. “In your bright example, the patriot shall read/That Liberty’s Daughters are sisters indeed,” it proclaims, transforming the real women of Annapolis into allegorical figures of Liberty.⁷⁸ Just as supporters of France had done in the 1790s, advocates for Greek independence now drew parallels between that effort and the Americans’ own struggle for freedom. Portraying the American and the Greek revolutions as siblings, this poem implies that America bore some responsibility for the fate of Greece; that a younger sister, imitating the accomplishments of an elder, deserved assistance and guidance in her efforts to

⁷⁷ *Richmond Enquirer*, 17 Sept., 1824, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

⁷⁸ *Maryland Gazette and State Register*, 8 Jan., 1824, in *America’s Historical Newspapers*.

overthrow tyranny. Because of the association of Greece with democracy and philosophic thought, many Americans saw in the conflict a rejuvenation of the very ideals that had inspired their own war of independence—Greece was at once communing with its past and forging its future, and America, as the beacon of liberty to the world, had an obligation to assist. Here was an opportunity for a younger generation to participate vicariously in the battles of its forefathers by spreading the benefits of liberty across the globe. Total funds raised in the United States ultimately topped \$40,000.⁷⁹ Through their contributions abroad, Americans reinforced the notion of exceptionalism at home.

What makes these contributions particularly significant is the fact that the American government never formally intervened in the conflict, some naysayers citing the provisions of the 1823 Monroe Doctrine. Though the British had supported the rebels monetarily since 1823, Parliament did send British naval forces into the fray eventually, in 1827. A number of European powers collectively declared Greece an independent state in 1830 and vowed to protect it.⁸⁰ But however much its people felt akin to the Greek rebels, however many newspapers celebrated the spread of republican principles or touted foreign aid as a Christian duty, and despite the impassioned words of many prominent politicians, the United States took no official action. The *people* of the United States, on the other hand, participated for the first time in an international humanitarian endeavor that would set a precedent for future generations. In doing so, they wedded popular entertainments to global crises, dancing to doing good on a grand scale; and, in

⁷⁹ Angelo Repousis, "The Cause of the Greeks': Philadelphia and the Greek War for Independence, 1821-1828," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 123, No. 4 (Oct. 1999): 333-335, 351.

their minds at least, they contributed to the realization of America's political destiny.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 361.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

“Dance for Ever”

"I declined all invitations to dance, declaring that it was so long since I had tried an English country dance, that I dared not expose my awkwardness. French country dances were mentioned, but I preferred conversation. At last L—persecuted me to try a Polish dance with him... We ended by *waltzing*, first in the Polish, and afterwards in the Parisian manner...you know the sensation I was accustomed to produce at Paris; you may guess then what the effect must be here, where such a style of dancing has all the captivation of novelty."

~Maria Edgeworth, *Leonora*, 1806¹

In *Leonora*, Maria Edgeworth introduced her readers to some of the dance trends in Continental Europe that soon captivated the English-speaking world. Dances of a more "folk" variety, identified with specific nations or peoples, suddenly seem to have been held more dear amid the revolutions, imperial struggles, and political unifications of the nineteenth century. The repercussions of the American and the French Revolutions, the unrest that their examples fomented in other European colonies, meant that the necessity of inventing or consolidating a national character was a widespread phenomenon. In 1836, the New York *Herald* watched the European situation closely, crediting America with instigating a trend: "All western Europe," it read, "from the Mediterranean to the Baltic, and on both sides of the Rhine to the very heart of Germany, is filled with the political ideas generated by the example of this country."² Solidifying national identity entailed not only proclaiming what attributes gave a country its distinctiveness, but also defining what a country was *not*. Dance was one means by which this could be accomplished. The changes that dances underwent and the regard in which they were

¹ Maria Edgeworth, *Leonora*, Vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1806), 186-187.

held as they spread across the globe reflect the simultaneous impulses of curiosity towards the exotic and yearning for the security of the familiar.

In a nation that, by the 1830s, prided itself on egalitarianism and opportunity, English country dance would seem a logical national pastime, something to embrace as symbolic of the spirit of America. And yet, as the country increasingly constructed its image as a place without hierarchy, exclusivity on the dance floor surged once again. Frances Trollope documented the phenomenon, much to her surprise, in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1829, at a ball held on the anniversary of George Washington's birth. Having met, earlier in the journey, a young woman who much impressed her, she inquired of a gentleman present why the girl was not in attendance, though she had "been educated at the same school as these, I see here." He replied that Mrs. Trollope did "not yet understand our aristocracy," and explained that "the family of Miss C. are mechanics," making the goods they purveyed. By contrast, merchants, as the rest of the girls' relatives were, sold what was produced by others, and were therefore acceptable to higher society. "It must not be supposed that there is no distinction of classes," Mrs. Trollope concluded of America, despite the fact that the same education and consumer goods might be available to great and small.³ The 1807-08 dance "Jolly Mechanic," which appeared only in America, seemed to bridge the gap between the "happy peasant" trope of Europe and the image of a similarly contented, industrious American public; yet, many assumed that the mechanic in question would be jolly somewhere else rather than on the floor of the assembly room.⁴

Elitism could not be maintained, however, as easily as its proponents wished. Dance was accessible even to the western frontier regions such as Cincinnati or Logansport,

² *The Herald*, New York, NY., 31 Dec., 1836.

³ Trollope, 209-210.

Indiana, where a French dancing master named Brouillett ran a school and published a collection of cotillions, Scotch reels, and waltzes in 1834.⁵ A fictitious anecdote from a Washington, D.C. newspaper implies that even a "plain unlettered man from the back country...of Alabama," was familiar with dance language. When a gentleman asked him to relinquish his place in a church pew for a lady, he mistakenly believed that "a cotillion, or French *pour a contra dance*, or some other dance, was intended." Declining apologetically, the backcountry fellow admitted that he did not dance.⁶ Though the tale was meant as a comedy of manners, it assumed that a basic knowledge of dance terminology was common to all Americans, whatever their social class, regardless of whether they had studied the art, regardless even of whether they were literate.

More traditional notions of "aristocracy"—that gentility was the province only of those who possessed leisure—were at war with new democratic jargon that would gladly have admitted poor Miss C. in Cincinnati to its pleasures. In 1838, the newspaper *The Mississippian* reprinted an article from Poughkeepsie that elevated honorable mechanics above merchants. The tale it told transpired in a ballroom, as the self-important daughter of a merchant refused to dance with a sensible young mechanic and then ridiculed him for aiming above his station when he subsequently danced with the daughter of a judge. The moral of the story, of course, was that goodness, honesty, and wisdom are not bound by class. The young mechanic rose to become a state representative in Indiana, while the flighty merchant's daughter ended the unhappy wife of a bankrupt clerk who had aimed at social climbing and missed. "There are distinctions in society," the piece solemnly

⁴ Robert Keller, *American Country Dances*.

⁵ "Pharos Flashes." *Logansport Pharos-Tribune* (Logansport, IN), 31 May, 1985.

⁶ *United States' Telegraph*, 21 Sept., 1832, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

proclaimed, "but they are too often drawn by ignorance or erring judgment."⁷ What the author had in mind, it seems, was a meritocracy, built on the idea that America offered all the opportunity to live virtuously.

Unfortunately, fiction mimicked reality in this case, and not all dance attendees lived by such a lofty maxim. It is a mark of the accessibility of dance culture that mechanics and merchants shared the ballroom floor in Wormsdsorf, Pennsylvania; but a tobacco merchant named Olmstead displayed a distinct lack of virtue by murdering the "industrious" mechanic John Whitman with a butcher knife through the head after an unspecified "slight quarrel."⁸ If only the account had seen fit to include the subject of their dispute, it might have provided additional insight into whether conflicting notions of class and worth were in play. A full-blown riot was reported on New Year's night, 1835, in Sudbury Massachusetts, which may also have originated in class conflict. The newspaper described "about 100 young gentlemen and ladies...assembled for a Ball at a public house...when 6 young men from Framingham came...." The "rude and noisy" behavior the six men then exhibited caused them to be expelled from the premises, but they returned "armed with heavy clubs and commenced a general assault upon the company, and were resisted by the gentlemen of the company." The repeated linguistic distinction drawn between "gentlemen" and "young men" is potentially an important one, implying that the late arrivals occupied a different rung of the social ladder than the original ball invitees. Their access to the ball was not restricted, although they "intruded themselves;" it was their rowdiness, possibly portrayed here as a *function* of their low

⁷ *The Mississippian*, 7 Dec., 1838, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

⁸ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 21 Apr., 1828, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

class, that provoked the managers to send them away.⁹ Were these "young men" of dubious origin attempting to assert their right to share the ballroom with their social betters, or were they merely drunken thugs?

The styles of dance that came into vogue in the 1820s and 1830s tended to restrict participation in a way that English country dancing could not. So, while it may have flown in the face of America's "democratic" principles to exclude certain classes of people from the ballroom, it became increasingly possible to avoid interacting with them if they were present. Cotillions and quadrilles, involving only eight people, could be arranged in advance to keep friends and associates—and economic equals—grouped together. Fanny Burney observed as much in *Cecilia*, when the heroine "chanced to be seated just by Miss Leeson, and two other young ladies, who were paying one another compliments upon their dress and their looks, [and] settling to dance in the same cotillon."¹⁰ Louisa Catherine Adams may have used this characteristic to her advantage when she prudently planned a program of cotillions for the Jackson Ball. Even more exclusive were the partner dances, such as the waltz, mazurka, and gallopade.

The mazurka had originated in Poland, the waltz in Germany and, subsequently, France; both were characteristic of the growing trend towards adopting dance styles from areas of Europe that previously had gone comparatively unnoticed by Anglo dance culture. Many of these dances evolved into something very unlike their original form. The "German Waltz," according to Thomas Wilson in 1816, involved springing steps that later passed out of use. It was the French variation that survived, though it too developed away from its roots as it spread. Said Wilson, "its performance has, not only been greatly

⁹ *The Daily Atlas* (Boston), Jan. 7, 1835, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁰ Fanny Burney, *Cecilia, Or, Memoirs of an Heiress*, Vol. 1 (Dresden: C. and F. Walther, 1790), 235.

improved, but such considerable additions upon its primitive principles have been made to it, so to render it the most fashionable and agreeable species of Dancing." A note of nationalism crept into his analysis as he reasoned that "its partaking of the *manner* peculiar to the *foreign countries*...has been a reason for its not being preferred to *English Country Dancing*."¹¹ However, the Napoleonic conflicts, which had brought English soldiers into regular contact with various Continental traditions, as well as the flight of some of these peoples to England, served to introduce the waltz into the English-speaking world (along with "every other species of Dancing," according to Wilson). Despite its popularity, early waltzing was a shocking enough departure from English country dances that even the notorious libertine Lord Byron harbored some doubts about the dance, writing,

Endearing Waltz!--to thy more melting tune
 Bow Irish jig and ancient rigadoo.
 Scotch reels, avaunt! and country-dance, forego
 Your future claims to each fantastic toe!
 Waltz--Waltz alone--both legs and arms demands,
 Liberal of feet, and lavish of her hands;
 Hands which may freely range in public sight
 Where ne'er before--but--pray "put out the light"
 ...And true, though strange--Waltz whispers this remark,
 'My slippery steps are safest in the dark!'"¹²

Once a complex and youthful dance itself, the waltz had by 1836 become safer for public consumption and more appropriate for all ages. The New York paper, *The Herald*, remarked of a ball in December of that year that "the gallopade is a dance that none but delicate, graceful, young girls should attempt. The waltz is different, and may be

¹¹ Thomas Wilson, *A Description of the Correct Method of Waltzing* (London: Sherwood, Neely, and Jones, 1816), 88-92, Walter Nelson, *Mass Historia*, <<http://walternelson.com/dr/sites/default/files/Waltz.pdf>>, accessed 19 June, 2016. (italics original)

¹² George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Works of the Right Honorable Lord Byron* (Philadelphia: M. Thomas, 1820), 123.

participated by all." Interestingly, the same article documented the process of change that many of these "regional" or "folk" dances underwent once they were adopted or appropriated by Anglo society. "In the course of the evening, the dancing was variegated with the waltz, the gallapode, and something that *was* [italics mine] but is not, the mazourka." ¹³

But ballroom politics did not take its final bow alongside the gradual disappearance of English country dances. Another piece in *The Herald*, the same month as the above, contained some valuable commentary on the connection between dance and nationalism. Whatever alterations were made to their steps, foreign dances retained some association with their purported countries of origin, sometimes to their detriment. "The slow German waltz is now decidedly the most engaging," observed the article. "The gallopade is too rapid, and the mazourka is touched with barbarism and the Russ." In other words, Americans may choose to dance foreign dances, but they ought to keep in mind the character and politics of the people of that country, and take such matters into account when deciding whether the dance is worthy. This piece, from a Whig-leaning paper, was blatant about its politics. The ball it describes was an event attended by the "most distinguished, political and commercial fashionables." It makes a point of lauding a particular young lady whose recent travels through the courts of Europe had left a favorable impression abroad while they had not "stained the freshness, the grace, and good sense of her native American soil." The trappings of monarchy, the *old* way of the world, had failed to win over this beacon of new American virtue, this "spirit of light and of love." In addition to offering its opinion on European political institutions, the paper closed its report of the evening with an outright political endorsement. "Such was this

¹³ *The Herald*, 31 Dec., 1836, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

soiree," it summarized, almost dismissively considering the amount of ink it had just spilled describing the function, "Meantime we wonder who is to succeed the present Collector of the Port. Will the Kitchen Cabinet please to tell us if our worthy candidate has any chance?"¹⁴

Taking cues, perhaps, from the world of Dolley Madison's Washington City, the ballroom tended to be a place of more subtle machinations, of purported reconciliation, or of charming foes into submission. Some newspaper announcements took care, in fact, to distinguish the entertainments they promoted from any similar gatherings that might be infused with a spirit of political rivalry. "The Concert and Ball will take place this Evening at the Theatre, in honor of our recent City Elections," proclaimed one such ad in 1834. "It is not intended as a party celebration, but to bring together the friends of our two very worthy fellow citizens who were competitors for the Mayoralty, and to do away with any unpleasant feelings that may have been engendered during the canvass."¹⁵ The ballroom was a place where ruffled feathers might be smoothed by the judicious application of the balm of popular culture, reminding adversaries of what they held in common. A report in 1838 of a ball held at Tammany Hall began by decrying the politicking that was the location's usual fare, but observed that the effects of a ball were distinctly salutary: "The Erina Ball made amends for all. When the last public assemblage met there, the room looked gloomy, dark, and dismal—long faces and longer speeches, spouted by miserable, rabid, raving politicians...But 'A change came o'er the spirit of the ball.'" The author goes on to relate how the Irish community—more usually identified with the Democratic Party or the Equal Rights faction, the so-called "Loco-

¹⁴ *The Herald*, 26 Dec., 1836, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁵ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 5 June, 1834, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

Focos"—had used this opportunity to win over the Whig mayor, Aaron Clark. In the words of one of the ladies at the ball,

Was it not nobly done of the Irish...to return him good for evil—to invite him to so rich a treat, who has suffered himself...to be advised into such harsh treatment of his unfortunate countrymen?...But his hostility to the Irish dates its death from this evening.

The lovely Irish girls have converted him to the true faith. He has meandered through the mazes of the waltz with the beautiful Miss O'N—...and his politics are turned as completely round as his dapper little person, wig, and all, were in the waltz.¹⁶

Here was an inversion of the eighteenth-century claim that British soldiers would conquer America by dancing with its ladies! Now, Irish-American women, through the one-on-one encounters prevalent in the 1830s ballroom, danced a prejudiced male government official into submission! What had been viewed as underhanded when attempted by men fell more naturally into the arena of acceptable female behavior in a culture that increasingly looked to its women as purveyors of political and personal virtue.

Not every dance with a political component was a means of bridging ideological divides, however. One ball on the occasion of Andrew Jackson's inauguration in 1829 took a rather ambivalent tack that might have achieved the reverse of its unifying aim. Styled by the paper as "a mixed Ball," referring to the mixing of political parties, it was designated the "Union Ball" by those who arranged it. It intended "that all party feeling, as relates to the late Presidential Election, shall be extinguished," and *The Daily National Intelligencer* printed the invitation in its pages, "for the benefit of those who suffer their political feelings to interfere with the duties which they owe their neighbors and friends." The peculiar arrangement of this ball designated twelve men as the managers of the ball until midnight, listed under the heading "Adams," and twelve more who would succeed

¹⁶ *Morning Herald*, 27 Jan., 1838, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

them at twelve, listed under "Jackson." This transition of managerial power mimicked the larger one of presidential authority occurring almost simultaneously.¹⁷ Whatever the stated purpose of the "Union Ball," it is easy to imagine that its format would effectively rub salt in the wounds rather than bandage them. Other gatherings were blatantly partisan, more in keeping with the anti-Loyalist legacy of the Philadelphia Assembly during the Revolution. In early 1833, as the National Republican Party was on the verge of reinventing itself as the Whig party, a Washington paper announced a "Republican Citizens' Inauguration Ball."¹⁸ Although the Republican candidate, Henry Clay, had lost the election, some of his supporters in the capital city evidently wished to mark the beginning of Andrew Jackson's second term by associating only with each other and having no part of any unifying celebrations.

In Baltimore in January, 1836, a "Military Fancy Ball" took a stance on international relations in its decor—in both what it incorporated into its design and what it consciously omitted. In December of 1834, Andrew Jackson had made demands that the French hasten their payment of twenty-five million francs to the United States, terms to which the French King, Louis-Phillipe, had agreed in an 1831 treaty. The treaty was intended to provide reparations to the United States for spoliation of American commercial vessels by French forces during the Napoleonic Wars, which had been boarded on the pretext that they had *previously* been boarded by English naval officers, or on suspicion that some of the sailors might secretly be Englishmen.¹⁹ Jackson accompanied his demand with a worrying appeal to Congress for additional military funding. Historians have speculated that this action may have been an effort to unite the fractured American people

¹⁷ *Daily National Intelligencer*, 2 Mar., 1829, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

¹⁸ *The Globe*, 27 Feb., 1833, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

in opposition to a common enemy. However, the most notable effect of the "Spoilations Crisis" was to provoke a potential international incident; rumors of war abounded, and a strong French reaction only heightened fears.

Matters were still unresolved when, in December of 1835, Jackson delivered yet another message professing that he had not intended to menace the French government. Even so, before he heard that France had accepted his non-apology, Jackson once again approached Congress with the request that he be allowed to enact reprisals against French commerce. That occurred in January, shortly before the aforementioned ball.²⁰ "It is worthy of remark," wrote a ball attendee, "that not a single French flag was to be seen...though I remember that at the Firemen's Fancy Ball, last year, the tri-colored ensign of that country was closely entwined with...ours....we hear nothing now of the spirit-stirring 'Marseilles Hymn;' twenty-five millions of francs have changed the *tune* as well as the *tone* of public sentiment." In addition to snubbing France by not including its flag among the many flags of other nations stationed around the room, this particular ball made a rather startling declaration of loyalty to the United States above all else. Over the orchestra pit hung a picture of an American eagle sporting the motto, "Our Country, right or wrong."²¹ The military thus proclaimed its willingness to fight and die in a war that only Jackson seemed eager to prosecute.

Fictionalized and fear-mongering uses of the ballroom also appeared from time to time for strictly partisan purposes. In 1830, a contributor to the *Mechanics' Free Press* of Philadelphia claimed that he had witnessed the forcible seduction of a very young,

¹⁹ Parton, 563-564.

²⁰ Robert Charles Thomas, "Andrew Jackson Versus France: American Policy toward France, 1834-36," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, 35, No. 1 (Spring 1976): 52.

²¹ *The Herald*, 14 Jan, 1836, in *America's Historical Newspapers*.

virtuous mechanic's daughter at a masquerade. Though the venue was a "*dance* room," which the author announced with great disdain, the event had been falsely presented to the young lady as a private ball. After she had been lured inside, a man of substantial means and excellent reputation in society approached her and threatened her with public shame if she did not submit to his licentious will. After a protracted denunciation of such practices, the locations where they are perpetrated, and the public officials who wink at them, the author presented his solution: "How can these evils be remedied—how? Place Mechanics in office—men who are upright and moral—men who will do their duty,—and all this and more shall be done. Unite heart and hand, and at the ensuing election vote for your regularly nominated candidates."²² Thus, what had begun as a seeming jeremiad against society's moral ills closes abruptly as a piece of partisan propaganda. While the author claims that he will expose the rich and poor equally when they misbehave, there are classist overtones as well; the tale champions the virtue of the ordinary, middle-class American as the antidote to public evil. Wealth, like the costumes at the masquerade ball, is a cloak that its possessors wear to hide intemperance of all kinds.

As with other fashions, such as dress and music, it can be next to impossible to pinpoint a driving reason behind the change in dance. The shift from longways sets to squares and partner dancing was a function of many separate impulses over a span of perhaps twenty years. The religious revivals of the Second Great Awakening may have had some part in it, as in many religious jeremiads dance was tied with debauchery and vanity and an obsession with outward show rather than inward virtue. Leaving off the trappings of gentility became a focal point in many conversion narratives, both factual

²² *Mechanics' Free Press* (Philadelphia), 30 Oct., 1830, in *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*.

and fictional, in the early-to-mid nineteenth-century. *The Cleveland Observer* published one such account in 1838, in which a young man recently persuaded of the truth of Christianity was torn between his father's expectation that he would attend a ball and his own conviction that the ballroom was a scene of dissipation. To resolve his dilemma, he went to the ball, but before leading off the first cotillion, invited the room to pray with him. This prompted all the occupants to depart in shame or disgust—with the exception of his partner, who became both a convert and his wife.²³ Many such tales employed the ballroom as a dramatic device to symbolize turning away from earthly pleasures. Though they did not condemn dancing so much as the extravagance and temptation that might accompany it, they did encourage readers to question the importance of gentility. Thus, it is possible that the apparent move toward exclusivity in the ballroom from the 1820s onward was less an effort to *create* a genteel space than it was a response to a change that was already occurring in the makeup of the dancers. Certainly, it is true that the religious fervor of the age was more prevalent among the rising middle class than among the elite.²⁴

Separate from conversion narratives were the pre-existing religious strictures that might be reinvigorated amid waves of immigration or simply the evangelical spirit of the age. Philip Pendleton Kennedy commented on an amusing instance of this in Maryland in March of 1838:

29th-Half past 12 O'clock. Just returned from the Assembly rooms. Shame to say, there were no ladies there to night. Some were sick, others staid away because others did so. But the chief reason is that it is Lent, and the Reverend Fathers make our girls keep it strictly—that is, permit them to do pretty much what they please, provided they don't go to the

²³ *The Cleveland Observer*, 21 June, 1838.

²⁴ Bushman, 315-317; Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (Hill & Wang, 1978), xviii-xix.

Ball and amuse themselves in certainly the most elegant and agreeable of all ways. There were young men enough, but the Jockeys had no Jennys.²⁵

Had the managers of the assembly expected so poor an attendance from the ladies, they surely would have postponed the meeting, or altered the assembly season to better match the liturgical calendar. It is telling that the gentlemen of Maryland were evidently not held to such a high standard of piety as the ladies—there was no shortage of them on account of Lenten observance. This is consistent with historic trends in general, which often rank female virtue as more fragile and more desirable than male; but it corresponds particularly with the nineteenth-century American attitude that women were the guardians of good morality and possessed an innate moral discernment that men would be wise to heed.

There were also an increasing number of benevolent institutions to which the young men and especially the young women of America could direct their energies, contributing funds for the relief of widows, orphans, fallen women, or foreign nations in distress. Although charity balls did still take place, the proportion of monies they contributed to these causes declined as more formal institutions, without the accompanying stigma of frivolity, gained popularity. Again, these organizations often found their most vocal supporters among the middle class, whose rising position in society gave them both the treasure and, perhaps even more importantly, the time to devote to charitable activity. The cancellation of the assembly ball in Annapolis in favor of sending the subscription money to embattled Greece perfectly encapsulated both the trend towards devout Christianity and that towards social reform movements.²⁶

²⁵ Philip Pendleton Kennedy, 29 March, 1838, *Diary, 1838 March 26-30*, manuscript, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond.

²⁶ Repousis, 345.

So, the politicization of the ballroom for various purposes continued unabated, and yet something still was lost with the fading of English country dance. The versatility that the style offered, the number of different dances and dance titles upon which to draw were unmatched, allowing wide and varied political applications. The accessibility of the steps encouraged mass participation over generations and created a common language, whereas the steps and patterns of subsequent dances were not transferable. Knowledge of the polka did not prepare a dancer for the mazurka or the waltz; rather, each had to be learned and remembered separately.

While the waltz still provided couples with an opportunity for intensely private discussion, it did so in the opposite way that a country dance had. Where English country dance had offered privacy by virtue of its inclusiveness—one voice getting lost in a crowd—these new, close-embrace couple dances offered it by their exclusiveness. They did not, however, allow an individual dancer to send a message to the entire assembly in the same way. Without an entire room moving and mixing in cooperation with each other, the ballroom could not be home to the sorts of political activism that had been so prevalent in the days of the longways set.

“The Happy Conclusion”

She had only to rise, and, with Mr. Crawford’s very cordial adieus, pass quietly away; stopping at the entrance-door, like the Lady of Branhholm Hall, “one moment and no more,” to view the happy scene, and take a last look at the five or six determined couple who were still hard at work; and then, creeping slowly up the principal staircase, pursued by the ceaseless country-dance, feverish with hopes and fears, soup and negus, sore-footed and fatigued, restless and agitated, yet feeling, in spite of everything, that a ball was indeed delightful.

~Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park*, 1814²⁷

Dance cannot be dismissed as merely an incidental entertainment, unrelated to broader political intent. Its influence extending far beyond William H. McNeill’s “muscular bonding,” dance has served as a crucial component of socio-political life and political counter-cultural movements throughout history. The literal or figurative ballroom can be creatively adapted to a variety of uses: a public forum for the airing of grievances, or a battleground for competing political factions. If harnessed, dance wields the potential to function as a tool of oppression, coercion, cohesion, or revolution; the uses of English country dance in particular, from its roots in the 1650s to its gradual demise in the second and third decades of the nineteenth-century, are a testament to its many political applications.

In Britain and British America, dance featured prominently in the lives of people of all ranks. No one from the royal court to a peasant’s cottage, from the governor’s mansion to the slave quarters, would have underestimated its social importance. Though the cost and urban location of dancing assemblies may have limited attendance by the middling and lower orders, those admitted to the ballroom gained a rough degree of equality. Balls commenced by reinforcing standing social order as the highest ranking

male and female partnered for the minuet, but this hierarchy crumbled as the evening progressed into country dances. The democratic character of English country dance flattened social distinctions, and additional social leveling occurred through the practice of partnering by lots, which might easily result in the complete mingling of classes—mechanics with the daughters of judges, or future presidents with the daughters of shoemakers.

Each attendee at a ball served dual functions of performer and critic. A proficient (or a disastrous) minuet might raise or lower the performer in the esteem of the company. Rising merchants and tradesmen began to enter into realms of fashion and refinement that had once been associated with nobility, pursuing dance lessons during evening hours and displaying their talents at balls. Lessons were a worthy investment indeed, in a culture where familiarity with dance steps signaled one's sophistication, and a confident performance might open important lines of communication with social superiors. Ballrooms facilitated close, familiar contact and a jury of peers unavailable in any other setting.

Unlike most social arenas, the ballroom accorded women an unusual degree of power. Specifically, they wielded power over their choice of partners, their selection of dances, and their speech. These choices were limited under a number of circumstances, as in the case of partners chosen on the lottery system, or of the lady at the top of the set selecting each dance. Additionally, a woman who refused to partner one man was considered rude if she then stood up with another for the same dance. But the rules that governed public assemblies existed because they had once been violated, and at private functions or special celebrations, they might not apply at all. Because of the role of the ballroom in

²⁷ Austen, *Mansfield Park*, in *Complete Novels*, 492.

courtship rituals, dancers were bound to take some liberties, and women were not only permitted, but encouraged to interact and make conversation with the other members of their set.

The early function of English country dance, specifically the publication of the Playford *English Dancing Master*, served to remind a people of their common culture in a time when that culture was threatened. Defying the political and moral strictures of Cromwell's Protectorate, John Playford sought to do more than justify dancing—he enabled it and galvanized it into an act of political protest. The popularity of the *Dancing Master* made it possible for English men and women across the country to feel tied not only to their heritage, but to one another, to unite not only in movements on the dance floor, but symbolically as a movement nation-wide. It was the Playford manual that first hitched the power of popular dance to the power of the press and created a vehicle for political expression that became a feature of Anglo culture for almost two centuries.

Dance was such a central feature to the creation of English communities that even in rustic military outposts in America—such as Pittsburgh and Detroit after their capture from the French—dancing assemblies regularly brought soldiers and civilians together to enliven winter quarters and celebrate their very Englishness in an environment they saw as foreign and untamed. English country dance became a physical and ideological means of imposing Englishness on the terrain, improving morale for soldiers, and maintaining a sense of connection among settlers and between settlers and the mother country. Using dance titles and political context to their advantage, like Playford had a century earlier, the English were able to gloat over their ultimate victory in ways that everyone in the empire—and beyond it—could understand.

With so many avenues for expression and so much potential for sparring, North American ballrooms on the eve of the American Revolution were ripe for service as staging grounds for political demonstrations. These might be subtle or glaring, individual or communal, active or passive, but whatever the case, their power was widely appreciated. The ballroom was a venue for winning friends and influencing people, so much so that the British approached it as another variety of battleground. Howe's *Mischianza* and Clinton's theatrical troupes exemplify this endeavor. During the Revolution, many Americans strove to differentiate themselves from the Mother Country, claiming attributes such as frugality and order which Britain was apparently without. The realm of dance had come under attack periodically for at least a century, seen by some ministers as the antithesis of these noble qualities, encouraging opulence, irreverence, and lasciviousness. It seems that the British threat achieved what the ministers could not, for accounts of dancing began to stress the simplicity and decorum of the occasions and, whenever applicable, the homespun gowns and coats of the attendees. Through her decisions at a ball, as well as through her dress and speech, a woman could declare her political loyalties boldly. By boycotting an assembly or declining to dance, a group of women might even—for all intents and purposes—shut down the proceedings.

Except for descriptions of inaugural festivities, particularly in George Washington's case, and numerous accounts of Lafayette's visit, balls were not reviewed in the press in the Federal period with their former frequency. The dearth of newspaper accounts reporting the events of real assemblies may reflect a shift in the nature of newspapers as America transformed from a collection of colonies into a nation. Advertisements for dance lessons, after all, were on the rise, and familiarity with dance steps and structure

continued to spread through the countryside. Though political maneuvering undoubtedly still took place in the ballroom, it may be the very ubiquity of dance that made specific reports less noteworthy. Instead, subscribers read of fictitious dances of either a utopian or a lawless bent, depending on the author's politics or nationalist vision. Political propaganda, disguised as poetic or satirical depictions of dance, was now accessible to an even broader swath of the population, especially with the expansion of the newspaper industry.

No shortage of such propaganda circulated as America tried to establish its character both internally and with respect to foreign countries such as France and Britain. Federalists, Anti-Federalists, and later Republicans competed for the role of legitimate heirs to the promise of the Revolution. Unrest in France and the French colonies of the West Indies in the last decade of the century rendered dance unusually potent as a device by which to discredit Republican conceptions of equality and democracy. The fact that a dance, the "Carmagnole," had become an international emblem of the wildness of the French Revolution did no favors to the medium in America. French émigrés of every part of the political spectrum re-ignited their quarrels in the United States, even as like-minded Frenchmen banded together in communities and charitable associations. The visibility of French culture and French dancing masters grew throughout the 1790s, celebrated by some and feared by others. In a nation that increasingly championed industriousness and practicality, the importance accorded learning to dance suffered an ideological blow; it had lost some of its social mooring. Too refined and exclusive, and dancing could be condemned as monarchist; too unstructured and inclusive, and it smacked of radicalism.

Due in part to the slave revolts of San Domingue, which drove many French-born Caribbean planters to the United States, the specter of racial tension also began to arise in Federalist rhetoric. In 1782, shared notions of race had allowed white Britons and loyalists to design the perfect insult for their rebel counterparts: the "Ethiopian Ball" allegorically thumbed its nose at patriot pretensions and lofty principles, piquing colonists from Georgia to New Hampshire. In the wake of the Jay Treaty and the hostility between supporters of Britain and France in the 1790s, race connoted more than an insult: the image of a fiddling Sambo and frisky Moll seemed intended to link race, dance, and the breakdown of society. It is tempting to wonder whether Rome/America burned behind Sambo as he played! Country dance, in this view, became a metaphor for anarchy and miscegenation. The classical simplicity embraced during the war years served as a counterpoint, however, presenting a pure and orderly portrait of dance from the Republican perspective. In this version of events, the farmers and mechanics of America—the average man, in other words—assumed the role of "peasant" in the European cult of the picturesque then in vogue. Despite working for their livelihoods, these Americans were portrayed as light-hearted and eager to partake in simple joys such as dancing; they were also shown to revere family and community ties as young and old, male and female assembled in innocent celebration. This was a fitting idealized portrait of American life in a nation that deified its revolutionary heroes and hoped for an industrious and virtuous future.

This future placed new demands on American females, as they were tasked with raising the next generation of wise and capable citizens and being avid patriots themselves. Though the ideas of republican wifehood and motherhood did not materially

alter women's sphere of influence, it allowed this influence to develop more publicly. Ballrooms were one area where female patriotism and action was already acceptable and could be expanded. In the social realm, in many ways a female dominion, women were expected to speak their minds to men; there they could, like Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice*, literally demand a man's attention: "It is your turn to say something now, Mr. Darcy," Eliza Bennet chides her silent partner, "*I talked about the dance, and you ought to make some kind of remark on the size of the room, or the number of couples.*"²⁸ In these contexts, women could guide conversation in the directions they wished it to go. Women could dress to attract notice and hope to impress with their grace and presence, consciously presenting themselves as embodiments of a political cause.

A woman skilled in all the arts of presentation could become an axis point around which a ball turned. Women who contributed their efforts to the organization of a gathering exerted an even greater power over its attendees, music, and other diversions such as card rooms and refreshments. From the formerly enslaved managers of Charleston's 1782 "Ethiopian Ball" to the new customs and entertainments devised by the ladies of Washington City, women re-shaped their traditional social roles into inventive and powerful political ones. Without overstepping the bounds of propriety, Dolley Madison almost single-handedly created the position of "first lady," as Americans now understand it, blending political advocacy with affability and warmth. As national pride encouraged women to be "republican wives and mothers," an idealized union of virtue and wisdom, these subtle engagements with the political world fit snugly into the framework. Now, rather than being viewed simply as conduits to the opinions of men, as they had been portrayed in "M'Fingal," they were active shapers of men's opinions. What

²⁸ Austen, *Pride & Prejudice*, in *Complete Novels*, 221.

had been regarded as a negative potential—the sly persuasion of their husbands and lovers into the Loyalist camp—was now harnessed as a positive one.

As dance trends began to shift from longways set dances to smaller, four-couple squares and partner dances, the way in which dancers could harness the ballroom for political ends changed. Increasingly, it was possible to be selective about ballroom interactions rather than mingling with every couple on the floor. The variety of dance styles that might appear in one evening's entertainment expanded, reducing the likelihood that all attendees could participate. The common ground that had existed within the long-standing tradition of English country dance dropped away, and with it some of the potential for meaningful political interaction. Though partner dances allowed for extended *tête-à-têtes*, they limited the range over which political dialogue might spread. Cotillions and quadrilles, too, did not lend themselves easily to conversation. Unlike longways sets, which had built-in periods of rest, these new dances made more exacting physical and mental demands. Rather than offering opportunities for debate and conflict, they tended to contribute to a sense of unity within a smaller, exclusive group of performers. Meanwhile, shifting social roles for women gave them alternative outlets for their political opinions and aspirations, and new strategies of political campaigning increasingly brought partisan feeling into the open air. While the ballroom was still the scene of political drama—from charity events to inaugural celebrations designed to soothe wounded egos—it could no longer be a tool of national solidarity, as it had been in England, or of mass-communication, as it had served the American colonies and early Republic.

Modern students of history recognize the prominent position that popular culture and

the fine and performing arts hold as avenues of political expression. Regarding Francisco Goya's evocative painting "The Third of May, 1808," for instance, an observer immediately recognized the political statement that inheres in it: Napoleon's soldiers, faceless and shadowed, level their bayonets at a desperate Spaniard, a Christ-like figure clad in bright white with his arms outstretched.²⁹ Likewise, in the musical realm, Franz Kotzwara's "The Battle of Prague" gave rise to thoughts of patriotism, virtue, and valor among its European listeners in the 1780s.³⁰ Both works were presented to an observant public for their consumption and interpretation. These art forms, along with theatre, have long been acknowledged as vehicles for political communication. More recently, parades and civic ceremonies have also won their place in the historical record as moments that help define a nation's understanding of itself. Dance, though equally deserving of attention, has somehow gone largely unnoticed. The subject merits further study in all eras and in all respects: to uncover the historical influence of dance over politics as well as politics over dance, and to increase our awareness of how the relationship between entertainment and politics continues to evolve even to the present day. What makes dance distinctive is not so much the purpose it served as the way that purpose was executed. Unlike paintings and orchestral masterpieces, where the audience was largely passive, the public actively participated in the creation of ballroom politics. They determined and revised its meaning to suit present circumstances in a way that static art could never accomplish.

²⁹ Rose-Marie Hagen and Rainer Hagen, *Francisco Goya, 1746-1828* (Cologne, Germany: Taschen, 2003), 57-62.

³⁰ Richard James Will, *The Characteristic Symphony in the Age of Haydn and Beethoven* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 190.

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Vita

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