

Americomania and the French Revolution Debate in Britain, 1789–1802

This book explores the evolution of British identity and participatory politics in the 1790s. Wil Verhoeven argues that in the course of the French Revolution debate in Britain, the idea of “America” came to represent for the British people the choice between two diametrically opposed models of social justice and political democracy. Yet the wrangling in the 1790s over the meaning and legacy of the American Revolution was by no means an isolated phenomenon. The controversy began with the American crisis debate of the 1760s and 1770s, which in turn overlapped with a wider Enlightenment debate about transatlantic utopianism. All of these debates were based in the material world on the availability of vast quantities of cheap land in America and on the emergence of print capitalism in Britain. Verhoeven investigates the complex symbiosis that existed throughout the eighteenth century between American soil and the discourse of transatlantic utopianism; between America as a physical, geographical space and “America” as a utopian/dystopian idea-image.

Wil Verhoeven is founding Chair of the American Studies Department and Professor of American Culture and Cultural Theory at the University of Groningen. He is the author of *Gilbert Imlay: Citizen of the World* (2008) and the editor of *Revolutionary Histories: Transatlantic Cultural Nationalism, 1775–1815* (2002); *Epistolary Histories: Letters, Fiction, Culture* (with Amanda Gilroy, 2000); and *Revolutions and Watersheds: Transatlantic Dialogues, 1775–1815* (with Beth Dolan, 1999). He previously served as Associate Dean for Education in the School of Humanities at the University of Groningen. He was the inaugural Charles H. Watts II Professor in the History of the Book and Historical Bibliography, an endowed visiting professorship at the John Carter Brown Library and Department of English, Brown University (2002–2003).

Americomania and the French Revolution Debate in Britain, 1789–1802

WIL VERHOEVEN

University of Groningen



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press & Assessment
 978-1-107-04019-9 — Americomania and the French Revolution Debate in Britain, 1789–1802
 Wil Verhoeven
 Frontmatter
[More Information](#)



CAMBRIDGE
 UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi – 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

We share the University's mission to contribute to society through the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107040199

© Wil Verhoeven 2013

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press & Assessment.

First published 2013

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication data

Verhoeven, Wil

Americomania and the French Revolution debate in Britain, 1789–1802 / Wil Verhoeven, University of Groningen.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-04019-9 (hardback)

1. Great Britain – History – 1789–1802. 2. Great Britain – Politics and government – 1789–1802. 3. United States – History – Revolution, 1775–1783 – Influence. 4. France – History – Revolution, 1789–1799 – Influence. 5. Utopias – United States. I. Title.

DA520.V47 2013

941.073-dc23 2013013367

ISBN 978-1-107-04019-9 Hardback

Cambridge University Press & Assessment has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-107-04019-9 — Americomania and the French Revolution Debate in Britain, 1789–1802

Wil Verhoeven

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

*To Jack P. Greene,
pioneer in Atlantic history*

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
Introduction. Utopianism in Practice: The American Front of the French Revolution in England, 1789–1802	I
1 “The War of Systems”: Print Culture and the Institutionalization of the Political Divide in the 1790s	28
2 “Cultivators of the Earth”: The American Crisis and the Emergence of the Freehold Farmer, 1763–1783	70
3 “Rabies Agri”: Or, Wilderness for Sale	112
4 “The Calculated Rise of the American Empire”: The Radicalization of American Utopianism, 1789–1795	134
5 “The Mania of Emigration”: New Philosophers in the Wilderness	168
6 “The Precious Pearl of Liberty”: From Newgate Prison to Ohiopiomingo	199
7 “Come to These Arcadian Regions Where There Is Room for Millions”: Politics for the People	239
8 “Look Before You Leap”: The Demonization of Jacobin America	270
9 “Parrying the Enemy with Their Own Weapons”: Dystopianism and the Popular Discourse of Fear	307

Postscript. “Mania Reformatio”: The Demise of Transatlantic Utopianism	341
<i>Bibliography of Cited Materials</i>	353
<i>Index</i>	371

List of Figures

1. The Hopes of the Party, Prior to July 14th	<i>page</i> 30
2. New Morality	64
3. Design to Represent an American Settlement or Farm	81
4. View of Bethlem, the Great Moravian Settlement	82
5. View of Bethlem (detail 1)	84
6. View of Bethlem (detail 2)	85
7. View of Bethlem (detail 3)	86
8. View of Bethlem (detail 4)	87
9. Design to Represent an American Settlement or Farm (detail 1)	90
10. Design to Represent an American Settlement or Farm (detail 2)	91
11. Design to Represent an American Settlement or Farm (detail 3)	92
12. Design to Represent an American Settlement or Farm (detail 4)	93
13. Design to Represent an American Settlement or Farm (detail 5)	94
14. Design to Represent an American Settlement or Farm (detail 6)	95
15. Pine Hill Farm, Orange County, New York	100
16. Vente des deserts du Scioto, par des Anglo-americains	121
17. Plan of Part of the District of Main	132
18. Map of the Western Part of the Territories Belonging to the United States of America (detail)	163
19. Plan of the Rapids of the Ohio	164
20. Plan of the Rapids, in the Ohio River	166
21. Map of Kentucke	184

22. Accurate Map of the United States of America (detail)	216
23. Map of the State of Kentucky with the Adjoining Territories (detail)	217
24. Map of the Southern States of America (detail)	218
25. Plan of Franklinville, in Mason County, Kentucky	220
26. Plan of Lystra, in Nelson County, Kentucky	221
27. Plan of the Township of Franklin, in the State of Kentucky	222
28. Map of Part of the State of Kentucky	223
29. Plan of the Township of Grenville, in the State of New York	224
30. Privileges and Immunities for the Township and Town of Ohiopiomingo	229
31. Plan of the Township and Town of Lystra, in Kentucky	236
32. Plan of the Town of Lystra, Kentucky	237
33. The Priestley Home in Northumberland, Pennsylvania	286
34. The First Kiss This Ten Years!	342

Acknowledgments

This book has been a long time in the making, starting from my fascination with transatlantic landjobber, revolutionary, and political writer Gilbert Imlay, and spreading out to encompass a whole host of motley figures who, for a wide range of different reasons, sustained a retrospective engagement in Britain with the American Revolution in the wake of the French Revolution. Given the project's expansive scope, its execution involved a great deal of archival research that took several years to complete. During that time I received invaluable help, support, and suggestions from many individuals in repositories across Europe and the United States – so many, in fact, that it would not only be impractical to even begin to list them, it would also mean that some would inadvertently be left unmentioned. However, I am deeply indebted to all of the people who have assisted me in my research these past few years and want to thank them collectively for enabling me to write this book.

While I researched collections from London to San Marino (California) and from Wisconsin to Paris, much of the primary source material that went into conceptualizing and writing the book was gathered over more than a decade at the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University (Providence, Rhode Island), where I have held two Research Fellowships, served as the inaugural Charles H. Watts II Professor in the History of the Book and Historical Bibliography (2002–03) and was an Invited Research Scholar on several occasions. I want to thank the Library's former directors Norman Fiering and Edward L. Widmer for their role in opening up these research opportunities for me, and the Library's knowledgeable and helpful staff for creating a stimulating and fruitful working environment. I want to extend a special word of thanks to John Minichiello and Leslie Tobias Olsen for helping me find and process much of the artwork that appears in the book.

The extensive research that was required to complete this project was funded in part by grants from the Filson Historical Society (Louisville, Kentucky), the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, and the Institute for Cultural-Historical Research (University of Groningen). The reproduction of the maps and illustrations included in the book was supported by a subvention from the Nicolaas Mulerius Fund at the University of Groningen. I am grateful to all of these institutions for their generous support.

I would also like to thank the following institutions for granting me permission to reproduce images to which they hold the copyright and/or the reproduction right: the British Museum (London), the Filson Historical Society (Louisville, Kentucky), the Rare Books Division at the New York Public Library, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (Harrisburg), and the John Carter Brown Library.

At Cambridge University Press, I would like to thank Senior Editor Lewis Bateman for his sustained support for the project. I am also grateful to the Press's two anonymous readers for recognizing the book's potential and, particularly, for their expert advice on how to turn a sprawling manuscript into the book it has become. Shaun Vigil provided much-needed help throughout the editorial process, while Mark Fox oversaw the project's smooth transformation from text file to book. I thank them both. Finally, I am indebted to Adrian Pereira at Aptara Corp. for maintaining a creative and congenial dialogue in shaping the final appearance of the book.

I thank Terry and Poo White, in whose beautiful house, overlooking Buzzards Bay and the scenic Westport River, I have written and revised much of this book, and whose congenial companionship provided welcome distraction when it was most needed. Inevitably, scholars – and archival scholars more than others – incur debts of a kind that acknowledgments cannot begin to repay. I realize this makes Amanda and Nathan co-owners of collateral they sometimes wish they did not possess. However, it was most definitely an investment that made us find a place and some of the people we have come to love the most.

I dedicate this book to Jack P. Greene, Andrew W. Mellon Professor Emeritus in the Humanities in the Department of History at Johns Hopkins University. Atlantic historian *par excellence*, Jack Greene was an early convert to my thesis. When I was still struggling to break the mold of conventional thinking on the French Revolution debate in Britain, I was fortunate that Jack's gift for lateral, independent thought and holistic historical analysis made him immediately receptive to my project and thereby inspired me to push on with it. Jack's historical vision is a rare commodity and I thank him for being so generous with it.

Westport, Massachusetts
May 2013