

Poseidon's Curse

British Naval Impressment and Atlantic Origins of the American Revolution

Poseidon's Curse interprets the American Revolution from the vantage point of the Atlantic Ocean. Christopher P. Magra traces how British naval impressment played a leading role in the rise of Great Britain's seaborne empire, yet ultimately contributed significantly to its decline. Long reliant on appropriating free laborers to man the warships that defended British colonies and maritime commerce, the British severely jeopardized mariners' earning potential and occupational mobility, which led to deep resentment toward the British Empire. Magra explains how anger about impressment translated into revolutionary ideology, with impressment eventually occupying a major role in the Declaration of Independence as one of the foremost grievances Americans had with the British government.

Christopher P. Magra is a prize-winning Early American historian, specializing in the Atlantic dimensions of the American Revolution. He is an associate professor in the Department of History at the University of Tennessee.

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*To Elizabeth Magra,
for supporting me.*

*To Maryann Magra,
for raising me.*

*To Ryan Magra,
for pushing me.*

*To Colette Magra,
for inspiring me.*

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Abbreviations

Archives

JDPL	The James Duncan Phillips Library, Salem, Massachusetts
LOC	The Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA
BBD	Benjamin Bangs Diary, 1742–65.
CDP	Caleb Davis Papers, 1684–1826.
JMP	Jasper Mauduit Papers, 1760–67.
SGJ	Samuel Graves Journal, 1774–76.
SRGP	Samuel Russell Gerry and Samuel Russell Gerry Jr. Papers, 1756–1895.
WPP2	William Pepperrell Papers, 1664–1782.
NMM	The National Maritime Museum, Caird Library, Greenwich, England
ELL	Elliot Family Papers.
HAR	Hartwell Papers.
TRN	Transcripts.
SOTCL	The Society of the Cincinnati Library, Washington, DC.
TNA	The National Archives, Kew, England
HCA	High Court of Admiralty Papers.
PC	Privy Council.
SP	Records assembled by the State Paper Office, including papers of the secretaries of state up to 1782.
T	Records created and inherited by the Treasury Board.
ADM	Records of the Navy Board and the Board of Admiralty.

CO Records of the Colonial Office, Commonwealth
and Foreign and Commonwealth Offices, Empire
Marketing Board, and related bodies.

Eighteenth-Century Newspapers

AWM The American Weekly Mercury, Philadelphia, PA
BC The Boston Chronicle, Boston, MA
BEP Boston Evening Post, Boston, MA
BG The Boston Gazette, Boston, MA
BWN The Boston Weekly Newsletter, Boston, MA
BPB Boston Post Boy, Boston, MA
CC Connecticut Courant, Hartford, CT
CG Connecticut Gazette, New London, CT
CJ Connecticut Journal, New Haven, CT
CnJ Continental Journal, Boston, MA
EG Essex Gazette, Salem, MA
FJ Freeman's Journal, Portsmouth, NH
LC The London Chronicle
LG The London Gazette
MS Massachusetts Spy, Boston MA
NEC New England Chronicle, Boston, MA
NEWJ New England Weekly Journal, Boston, MA
NHG The New Hampshire Gazette, Portsmouth, NH
NM The Newport Mercury, Newport, RI
NP Norwich Packet, Norwich CT
NYG The New York Gazette, New York, NY
NYJ The New York Journal, New York, NY
NYEP The New York Evening Post, New York, NY
NYM The New York Mercury, New York, NY
NYWJ The New York Weekly Journal, New York, NY
NYJ The New York Journal
PC The Pennsylvania Chronicle, Philadelphia, PA
PEP Pennsylvania Evening Post, Philadelphia, PA
PG The Pennsylvania Gazette, Philadelphia, PA
PP Pennsylvania Packet, Philadelphia, PA
PRG The Providence Gazette, Providence, RI
VG Colonial Virginian newspaper, the Virginia Gazette
WR The Weekly Rehearsal, Boston, MA

Mariners' Diaries, Journals, and Memoirs

- AB** Phillip Chadwick Foster Smith, ed., *The Journals of Ashley Bowen (1728–1813)*, Vols. 1–2 (Portland, ME: Anthoensen Press, 1973).
- CP** Michael J. Crawford, ed., *The Autobiography of a Yankee Mariner: Christopher Prince and the American Revolution* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, Inc., 2002).
- EC** Ralph D. Paine, ed., *Elijah Cobb, 1768–1848: A Cape Cod Skipper* (Yale University Press, 1925).
- GO** Gideon Olmsted, *The Journal of Gideon Olmsted: Adventures of a Sea Captain during the American Revolution*, facsimile edition (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1978).
- JC** R. Reynell Bellamy, ed., *Ramblin' Jack: The Journal of Captain John Cremer (1700–1774)* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1936).
- JD** James Durand, *The Life and Adventures of James R. Durand, From the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and One, Until the Year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Sixteen. Written by Himself. His First Leaving His Parents: How He Was Cast Away, and the Hardships He Underwent; His Entering the American Service; Together With the Particulars of His Impressment and Service On Board a British Man of War, Seven Years and 1 Month, Until 1816* (Bridgeport, CT: Printed by Stiles Nichols & Son, 1817).
- JH** James L. Howard, *Seth Harding, Mariner: A Naval Picture of the Revolution* (Yale University Press, 1930). Including the "Private Journal of Captain Joseph Hardy," Captain of the Marines on board the American frigate *Confederacy*, 1779–81, Seth Harding Commander, while at St. Pierre Island in the West Indies. Note that St. Pierre and Fort Royal are both located on the French island of Martinique.
- JN** Tim Flannery, ed., *The Life and Adventures of John Nicol, Mariner* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1997; orig. pub. 1821).
- JS** Memoirs of John Stradley. NMM TRN/38.
- OE** Olaudah Equiano, "The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African," in Henry Louis Gates Jr., ed., *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Signet Classic, 2002), 15–248.

Online Databases

- AA** American Archives, documents of the American Revolution, 1774–76, <http://amarch.lib.niu.edu/redirect>
- BFP** The Papers of Benjamin Franklin, <http://franklinpapers.org/franklin/>
- BHO** British History Online, www.british-history.ac.uk/Default.aspx
- CHOP** Calendar of Home Office Papers.
- CSP** Calendar of State Papers Colonial, America and West Indies.
- CSPD** Calendar of State Papers Domestic.
- CTB** Calendar of Treasury Books.
- HLJ** House of Lords Journal.
- JBT** Journals of the Board of Trade.
- EAI** Early American Imprints, Series I: Evans, 1639–1800
- EAI2** Early American Imprints, Series II: Shaw-Shoemaker, 1801–19
- ECCO** Eighteenth-Century Collections Online
- EEBO** Early English Books Online
- JADE** The Papers of John Adams, Digital Edition. Founding Families: Digital Editions of the Papers of the Winthrops and the Adamses, ed. C. James Taylor. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 2007.
- SA** Sabin Americana, 1500–1926.
- SPD** The Diary of Samuel Pepys. www.pepysdiary.com/archive/

Published Manuscript Material

- NDAR** William Bell Clark et al., eds. *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*. 11 vols. to date. Washington, DC: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1964–.
- RP** David Syrett, ed., *The Rodney Papers: Selections from the Correspondence of Admiral Lord Rodney* (London: The Navy Records Society, 2005).