

## The American School of Empire

Early American artists and political thinkers wrestled with the challenges of forming a cohesive, if not coherent, culture and political structure to organize the young republic and its diverse peoples. *The American School of Empire* shows how this American idea of empire emerged through a dialogue with British forms of empire, becoming foundational to how the US organized its government and providing early Americans with the framework for thinking about the relations between states and the disparate peoples and cultures that defined them. Edward Larkin places special emphasis on the forms of the novel and history painting, which were crucial vehicles for the articulation of the American vision of empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Edward Larkin is Professor of English and Material Culture Studies at the University of Delaware. He is the author of *Thomas Paine and the Literature of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2005) and the editor of a scholarly edition of Paine's *Common Sense* (2004). He has published essays in journals such as *American Literary History*, *Diaspora, Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, and *Early American Literature*, and most recently, he co-edited, with Ed Cahill, a special edition of *Early American Literature* on the topic of aesthetics. In 2006 Larkin was the recipient of a National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Fellowship at the American Antiquarian Society.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-14020-2 — The American School of Empire

Edward Larkin

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-14020-2 — The American School of Empire  
Edward Larkin  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

# The American School of Empire

EDWARD LARKIN  
*University of Delaware*



Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-14020-2 — The American School of Empire  
Edward Larkin  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10013

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107140202](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107140202)

© Edward Larkin 2016

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.

First published 2016

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

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

ISBN 978-1-107-14020-2 Hardback

Cambridge University Press 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  
978-1-107-14020-2 — The American School of Empire  
Edward Larkin  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

*For John and Cati Larkin*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-14020-2 — The American School of Empire

Edward Larkin

Frontmatter

[More Information](#)

---

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction	I
1 Nation and Empire in the Early United States	15
2 The Cosmopolitan Revolution: Loyalism and the Fiction of an American Nation	40
3 The Painterly Form of Empire: West, Copley, and Late-Eighteenth-Century Anglo-American History Painting	69
4 Between Empires: The Old World, the Frontier, and the Expansion of the United States	104
<i>Bibliography</i>	139
<i>Index</i>	147

# Figures

Colour versions of these figures are available at  
[www.cambridge.org/empire](http://www.cambridge.org/empire)

3.1 Benjamin West, <i>The Death of General Wolfe</i> (1770).	page 73
3.2 Benjamin West, <i>Agrippina Landing at Brundisium with the Ashes of Germanicus</i> (1768).	73
3.3 Benjamin West, <i>The Departure of Regulus from Rome</i> (1768).	74
3.4 Benjamin West, <i>The Oath of Hannibal</i> (1770).	75
3.5 John Singleton Copley, <i>The Death of the Earl of Chatham</i> (1779–81).	89
3.6 John Singleton Copley, <i>The Death of Major Peirson</i> (1782–4).	90
3.7 John Singleton Copley, <i>Watson and the Shark</i> (1778).	95
3.8 John Singleton Copley, “Sketch for <i>The Death of Major Peirson</i> ” (1782–4).	98
3.9 John Singleton Copley, “Study for the Fleeing Woman and Child in <i>The Death of Major Peirson</i> ” (1782–3).	99
3.10 John Singleton Copley, <i>The Copley Family</i> (1776–7).	100
3.11 John Singleton Copley, “Study for <i>The Death of Major Peirson</i> (Fleeing Mother and Child)” (1782–3).	100
4.1 John Trumbull, <i>The Declaration of Independence</i> (1818).	123
4.2 Samuel F. B. Morse, <i>The House of Representatives</i> (1822–3).	125
4.3 Samuel F. B. Morse, <i>Gallery of the Louvre</i> (1831–3).	125
4.4 Samuel F. B. Morse, <i>Marquis de Lafayette</i> (1825–6).	127
4.5 François-Marius Granet, <i>The Choir of the Capuchin Church in Rome</i> (1814–15).	130



## Acknowledgments

I have been remarkably fortunate in my academic career. Over the past twenty-odd years I have been lucky to meet some of the most generous and thoughtful people in the profession. It gives me great pleasure to be able to thank them here in writing. My first debt, as always, is to the late Jay Fliegelman, who was more than a teacher and mentor to me. He was a good friend, and I miss him dearly. Jay was excited about this book during the early stages, and although he never read the later chapters, I know he would have been particularly pleased that I was spending so much time with visual materials. So here's to you, Jay. My chief interlocutors on this project have been Phil Gould and Len Tennenhouse. I began writing this book as a book on loyalism at around the same time that Phil was developing his own work on American loyalists. In typical fashion, Phil shared generously but also challenged me to think harder and deeper about my key terms and about my close readings. I am particularly grateful for the chance to codirect a summer seminar on loyalism at the American Antiquarian Society with Phil, where our conversation intensified and deepened. Phil would go on to publish his wonderful *Writing the Rebellion*, and as my thinking shifted, I wound up with this book. A few years before I began to get to know Phil, another friend introduced to me to Len Tennenhouse, who plugged me into what was at the time an awesome group of smart people gathered at Brown in no small measure thanks to Len and his partner in crime, Nancy Armstrong (what a pair they are!). In many ways Len stepped into the mentoring void that Jay's death had left. It was, as life seems to go, a crucial moment when my career was in the balance, and Len, and Nancy, too, for that matter, helped me to land on my feet. Over the years they

have also provided important intellectual contexts for my developing work and challenged me, in their inimitable way, to grow as a scholar. My thinking in this book developed in important ways thanks to Len's *The Importance of Feeling English*, a book that has set the table for a whole series of recent conversations in the field. Thank you Len, Phil, and Nancy for your humor, your common sense, and your no-nonsense approach to the business of literature.

I came to know that crew at Brown largely thanks to my friend and former colleague John Marx, with whom I began my career at a liberal arts college in Virginia. I owe John for much more than the introductions to Len and Nancy. John is often the first reader of my work, and that was true for several of the parts of this book. He's been an ideal reader for my writing, but he's also been an excellent sounding board for thinking about the profession. Along with John, Tom Allen, another former colleague, helped me to navigate the perilous waters of the crazy culture of that southern liberal arts college. Since our early days on the tenure track, Tom's rigor as a researcher and a thinker has always served as a model for what a true scholar should be. Tom brings that same attentiveness to my work, which he reads with remarkable incisiveness. After Jay, no one has had a greater influence on the way I think and write than John and Tom. But they have been much more than colleagues: Tom and John have been great friends over the years. If I had a posse, Tom and John would be my top deputies!

At the University of Delaware, I have had the pleasure of gaining a new set of wonderful colleagues whose support and intelligence have been instrumental in my progress as a scholar. First among them, Wendy Bellion has patiently guided me as I plunged into the world of art history and visual culture. Peter Feng, Tim Spaulding, Miranda Wilson, Kristen Poole, Matt Kinservik, Emily Davis, Julian Yates, and John Ernest have provided ongoing collegial conversation about careers, theory, administrative challenges, and departmental politics. My fellow early Americanist Martin Bruckner sets a ridiculously high bar as a scholar and teacher that pushes me to do better all the time. I am so lucky to have a fellow early Americanist in my department with whom I can discuss syllabi, think through research challenges, navigate the field, and share graduate students. On the subject of graduate students, I explored many of the key questions in this book in a series of graduate seminars at Delaware over the past few years. I want to thank those students for accompanying me on this journey and challenging me to continually rethink, clarify, and expand key ideas and specific texts. In particular,

## Acknowledgments

xi

I am grateful to Clay Zuba and Emily Casey. More broadly, I am grateful to my colleagues in the English Department at the University of Delaware for showing such faith in me as a scholar and a colleague.

At different moments Ezra Tawil, Sandra Gustafson, and Suvir Kaul read sections of this manuscript and challenged me to refine my thinking in important ways. I am profoundly grateful for their generosity as scholars and warmth as colleagues. I have also benefited greatly from conversations both casual and more serious about specific conceptual questions with Elisa Tamarkin, Russ Castronovo, Marcy Dinius, Betsy Erkkila, Max Edling, Justine Murison, Ed Cahill, Scotti Parrish, Wayne Franklin, Jane Kamensky, and Doug Winiarski. Your scholarship inspires me, and your conversation enlightens me. I also have a mystery reader to thank. Early in the development of this project, I wrote an essay on the subject of empire that appeared in *American Literary History*. Gordon Hutner, who was incredibly patient with me through several revisions of the essay, sent it to an anonymous reader who really pushed me at an early stage to think harder about the issues I was tackling and who in many ways opened the way for that essay to become the nucleus of this book. *American Literary History* does not reveal the identities of its readers to authors, so until now I have not had an opportunity to properly thank that reader. I am also grateful to Lew Bateman at Cambridge University Press, with whom it has been a great pleasure to work on two books now. Your enthusiasm for my work and your skill at finding readers in both literature and history who were able to provide constructive feedback on my manuscripts have meant more than you imagine. And what readers I have had! The anonymous external readers provided thorough, thoughtful, and generous commentary on the manuscript, for which I am profoundly grateful. The reports are models of scholarly engagement that helped me to develop and better articulate this book's arguments and analysis.

This book would not have been possible without the generous support of an NEH grant at the American Antiquarian Society, where I spent a semester developing what would become the first chapter of this book. There I benefited from the remarkable library staff, including Joanne Chaisson, Tom Knoles, and Gigi Barnhill, who encouraged me to incorporate visual materials into my then-incipient project. Several grants at the University of Delaware funded trips to London, where I visited with the paintings I discuss in this book. I am grateful to the curatorial staff at the Tate Gallery and Buckingham Palace, particularly Greg Sullivan and Lucy Peter, who took time to show me the collections

and talk about my project. My work on Morse began when the Terra Foundation and the Yale University Art Gallery took a chance and invited me, thanks to the suggestion of a first-year graduate student (Amy Torbert), to participate in their symposium entitled “The Gallery of the Louvre.” Serendipity! Thank you Amy, Terra, and Yale for believing this student of American literature might have something to say about Morse when previously I had written not a word about him or his paintings.

Chapters 1 and 2 originally appeared in essay form in *American Literary History* and *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*. Thank you to the editors for supporting my work and for permission to print updated versions of those essays here. I had the pleasure of presenting Chapter 3 at the McNeil Center for Early American Studies. Thank you Dan Richter for inviting me to share my work in progress with that audience. And speaking of the McNeil Center, I would be remiss not to thank Michael Zuckerman for inviting me to present early work on this book, when it was a book about loyalism, at his wonderful Salon, where we had the usual lively and engaging conversation. But I owe Mike thanks for much more than inviting me to the Salon because over the years (from when I first showed up in Philly with my Paine dissertation, which he, of course, read and commented on meticulously) I have benefited from his famous generosity on multiple occasions. And while I am thanking long-term supporters of my work, I would also like to express my gratitude to Chris Looby, who mentored me as a young scholar (we also met in Philly around the same time that I met Mike) and helped me to work my way through the profession over the past two decades.

This book would never have gotten written without the love and patience of my incredible life partner Karen Larkin. You have been there for me through both the difficult times and the joyful ones. I am so lucky to have you not only as a wife, a friend, and an ally but also as the mother of our children and the advisor who guides me through the challenges of life and career. My boys, Nicolas and Jaan, can’t possibly know how much they have meant to me over the past decade and a half, but raising them has taught me more about life, love, and happiness than any book possibly could. I am a better scholar because I am a more human one, thanks to them. Lastly, but really firstly, I dedicate this book to my parents, John and Cati Larkin. Your guidance, your example, and your love have provided a steady foundation for my personal life and my career. Words feel completely inadequate to express my gratitude for everything you have done and continue to do for me, but they are what we have, so thank you!