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Their Clothes Spoke Louder Than Their Words:
How Three Founding Fathers Used Clothes to Convey Their Patriotism



Fig. 1 Portrait of Benjamin Franklin Joseph Siffred Duplessis
Fig. 2 Benjamin Franklin, engraved by Martin Will

Throughout his life, Benjamin Franklin used clothing to convey his status and political identity. In the first portrait (figure 1), painted upon Franklin's entrance into colonial gentry, Franklin sat wearing a dark green velvet suit and a pure white linen shirt. Franklin would never wear an outfit so regal while working at his printing press; this type of dress would be impractical around the heavy machinery. With his entry into genteel society, however, Franklin chose to make a statement with his dress. The velvet suit and white linen shirt worn in the first portrait were symbolic of the luxury of English gentility. However, in the second portrait the viewer is presented with a completely different Franklin, dressed in a leather coat

and fur hat (figure 2). Where are the ruffles and velvet? Although Benjamin Franklin was still considered a member of the social elite in post Revolutionary War America, he chose to show his identity in a completely different way. In the second portrait, Franklin is dressed in American clothing. By wearing fur and leather Franklin showed an international audience the patriotism he felt for America, “perhaps because of the freedom of old age, but more likely because he knew he had become a symbol of agrarian, freedom-loving Americans.”¹ The fur hat and leather jacket are symbols of the fierce wilderness that America was born of. Franklin’s fur hat, made of beaver found near the Canadian border, and the leather worn by Native Americans reflect how pure and organic the American colonies were. Moving from the velvet and ruffles to the leather and fur, Franklin conveyed through his clothing his ideals about gentility and pride for America.

Benjamin Franklin was not alone in using clothes to convey patriotic sentiments during and after the Revolutionary War. American patriots, including most of the founding fathers, used clothing as a politicized symbol of American nationality.

The use of clothing to convey American patriotism began with boycotts prior to the Revolutionary War. The Stamp Act of 1763 required colonists to “print newspapers, diplomas, legal documents, and pamphlets on specially stamped paper that was taxed”² by the British monarchy. The colonists began boycotts protesting the tax. Throughout the 1760s, the boycott movement escalated as more colonial citizens refused to purchase English goods. Textiles were a crucial focus of the boycotts. This new trend of boycotting focused on refusing to purchase and wear

English made clothing as American citizens began to make American homespun clothing. "Thus when in 1774 the first Continental Congress declared a general policy of 'non-importation, non-consumption, and non-exportation,' it was far less concerned with ascetic self-denial than with encouraging American arts and manufactures, 'especially that of wool.'" ⁴

During this time, many patriotic Americans advocated homespun clothing. "In a 1765 pamphlet, John Dickinson [...] urged his fellow Americans to follow the example of the Swiss, and resist English and French taste: 'their coarse clothes and simple furniture enable them to live in plenty and defend their liberty.'" ⁵ This sentiment was widely shared by colonial citizens who, in Abigail Adams' words, "would wear canvass, and undressed sheep skins, rather than submit to the unrighteous, and ignominious Domination [of Britain]." ⁶ With the urging of such prominent figures as Adams, colonial citizens began making and wearing homemade clothing. Thus, in December of 1769, the *Virginia Gazette* reported that at a holiday ball, "the patriotic spirit was most agreeably manifested in the dress of the Ladies [...] who in the number of near one hundred, appeared in homespun gowns." ⁷ These women dressed in homespun attire were emphasizing much more than frugality; they were showing their American patriotism, unwilling to quietly endure the abuse of a foreign government.

Homespun clothing became the ideal of what would later be known to foreign states as American clothing. The clothes were usually made from coarser material such as wool and leather. Although these were common goods in the American colonies, they did not exude luxury like European style clothing. European dresses

were most often made from very fine cotton or expensive silk. And, unlike the homespun garments of patriotic Americans, European, especially English, garments were heavily embroidered with fine details. Compared to the American homespun dress in figure 4 and the homespun jacket in figure 5, the English dress (Figure 3) manifests luxury and regality. To the English eye, the American dress would appear cheap and like a simple working dress, more fit for English servants.



Fig 3- Gown, Chinese textile, worn in New York, Courtesy Daughters of the American Revolution Museum.

Fig 4- Women's short gown, America, Originally discovered in New England, Baumgarten page 119

Fig 5- Homespun boy's Jacket, 1775-1786, brown linen with pewter buttons. Connecticut Historical Society. Museum Purchase.

Though most American colonists may have wanted to continue wearing the fine fabrics and adornments of the English, they chose not to. Instead they chose to exhibit their pride for their nation and their freedom by wearing the poorer quality fabrics. However, as more and more colonists began making their own clothing for the patriotic cause, a shift occurred in homespun dresses and suits. Compared to the first garments produced by American manufacturers, usually women in individual families, there was an increase in the decoration and embellishment of American dress. Since American homemakers and tailors could not use fine silk and linen to embellish dresses and suits, they found other means.



Fig. 6- American Clothing, Rhode Island, Baumgarten, pg. 77

Although there is still a striking difference between the dresses of the English, seen in figure 3, it is evident that homespun American-made clothing was evolving and adopting a style all its own. American spinners began using their own

materials to adorn their garments, mimicking English styles. The dress pictured in figure 6 is adorned with cotton embroidery that looks like a vine with flowers blooming throughout the dress. The suit, made of cotton and wool, is made with a higher quality material and embellished with buttons, which became the signature adornment for homespun suits and dresses in America.

“Good buckles were necessary, and buttons were apparently an obsession. Eighteenth-century storekeepers stocked buttons by the thousands; large bags of them turn up in their inventories. But brocade trim rarely appeared in portraits, and buttons did not usually glitter. The principle of restraint operated in these details too.”⁹

As the adornment of homespun American made clothing improved, the popularity of homespun clothing increased. William Nelson, a Virginian colonist, remarked:

“I now wear a good suit of Cloth of my Son’s wool, manufactured, as well as my shirts in Albemarle and Augusta Counties, my shoes, Hose buckles, Wigg, and Hat etca of our own country, and in these We improve every year, in quantity as well as quality.”¹⁰

As the “quantity as well as quality” of American homespun clothing improved, there was an emergence of patriotic emblems sewn into clothing. The eagle, along with the emblem of the United States, became popular motifs to embroider on dresses. Also, the depiction of pastoral scenes “emphasizing the rural nature of the young country” were displayed on dresses and suit jackets.¹¹ The use of rural scenes appears on the dress in figure 6. The flowers on the dress are meant to be a portrayal of American wild flowers. This simple feminine dress was used as a

patriotic emblem. In all these ways colonial Americans could manipulate their clothing to project a political ideal.

Another striking way in which home spinners and tailors used their clothing as a patriotic declaration was in depicting military and political heroes on their ensembles. For example, in figure 7 is a detailed image of the embroidery of a dress: Washington is depicted driving a chariot and Benjamin Franklin is seen in his “American” fur hat. These women and tailors who set images of pastoral scenes, eagles, emblems and heroes were doing their part to fight for liberty. In their minds, wearing an image of George Washington or Benjamin Franklin on their dress proved that they supported the cause of these American heroes.



Fig. 7- “Apotheosis of Benjamin Franklin and George Washington”, Baumgarten, 87.

However, wearing patriotic emblems on their clothing or making American homespun goods was not only for the working-class of American colonial society. Homespun became a movement that involved members of all social classes in America, including the elite. The political message of patriotism was most evident when political figures chose to wear homespun clothing instead of foreign luxurious goods. Since the elites in American colonial society were generally affluent enough to afford the imported goods from Europe, refusing to wear those international luxurious items sent an especially strong political message. Most profound were the founding fathers that chose to stop wearing foreign clothes and instead push for homespun clothing. As we have seen, Benjamin Franklin was one founding father who made a point of buying and wearing homespun clothing. Franklin, along with George Washington and Thomas Jefferson were three political figures who publicly advocated wearing homespun clothing, and were also criticized by foreign nations for wearing the lower quality goods when they could afford luxury. However, no matter how much criticism they received, it was necessary for these men to convey that they were advocates for freedom who would give up everything, especially style, to be out from under the thumb of Britain.

For his inauguration on April 30, 1789, George Washington wore a homespun American suit, made from brown wool with American eagles on the buttons (figure 9). Unlike Franklin's, Washington's homespun suit did not hold such stark contrast to his usual attire (figure 8). Although this suit was homespun, it was said to have all the elegance and stateliness of a foreign made suit, "for Washington's 'complete suit of homespun clothes was of 'so fine a fabric and so handsomely finished that it was

universally mistaken for a foreign manufactured superfine cloth,” thus set an example for the quality and potential of American homespun clothing.¹³ However, it was not customary for Washington to wear homespun garments. The majority of Washington’s portraits, like that in figure 8, show Washington wearing the finest of suits, presumably of foreign manufacture. Like most gentlemen in colonial gentry, Washington frequently chose to be depicted in a dark velvet suit and crisp linen shirt. These types of garments could not have been made in the American colonies and would have to have been bought from a European tailor.



Fig. 8- "Portrait of George Washington" by Gilbert Stuart
1795



Fig. 9- Inauguration of George Washington by Ramon de Elorriaga from about 1899.

So why would Washington choose to wear a homespun suit to such a public and important event? Washington took the opportunity to wear an American made homespun outfit to show his devotion to the nation of which he was taking leadership, wearing this suit as a symbol of American independence from foreign manufactured goods. Washington believed that the Stamp Act had changed the

American people's attitude toward homespun clothing. In a letter to Francis Dandridge, a London loyalist, Washington mentioned how he knew,

“The eyes of [the American] people, already beginning to open, will perceive, that many luxuries, which we lavish our substance in Great Britain for, can well be dispensed with, whilst the necessaries of life are (mostly) to be had within ourselves.”¹⁴

In his letters it is evident that Washington promoted the homespun movement and boycotting English textiles. This was also evident in Washington's devotion to Royall Tyler's comedic play, *The Contrast*. Pitting American made goods against English goods, Tyler depicted American products as “natural versus artificial, sensibility versus appetite, masculine versus effeminate, virtue versus corruption.”¹⁵ Washington's fondness of the play demonstrates his belief in patriotic ideals, and the representation of those ideals through fashion.

On the international stage Washington was a popular figure, highly regarded for his taste in style and decorum. Though elegant, Washington's brown wool suit was regarded internationally as a shocking choice to wear for an inauguration. Yet because Washington possessed the role President of the new republic, so recently freed from Britain, he knew that he had to present himself as an emblem of liberty. Washington's clothes declared to all nations that America was independent, and in that independence powerful and beautiful, an ideal that his brown suit with gold eagle buttons embodied. The values projected in Washington's brown suit spoke also sent a message to Americans, calling on them to continue their patriotism in making homespun clothes and to also further their support of the nation as a whole.

Washington did not advocate homespun clothing just for himself. During the Revolutionary War, he ordered his troops to adopt clothing that was American-made and also suitable for the American climate. As the fight for independence progressed, it became apparent to Washington that his soldiers were in dire straits. In a letter to Congress, Washington argued for better supplies for his soldiers, especially with regard to clothing. Although he did not place blame on the Clothier General, he argued:

“Ought not each state to be called upon to draw such supplies from the Country Manufactories as can be afforded? Particularly of shoes, stockings, shirts, and blankets; articles indispensably necessary and of which scarce too many can be provided.”¹⁶

In his letter, Washington asked specifically for American made clothing for his troops. He routinely called on Americans to donate money for homespun uniforms, or to make uniforms on their own to support the cause. Washington’s men would continue to request aid throughout the remainder of the war, but his letters show that there was an increase in the donations made by individuals spinning from home.

However, Washington had a specific design in mind for his uniforms when asking for the spinners at home for help. Believing his uniforms should have a natural aesthetic, he pushed for the soldiers to wear uniforms like that of the Native Americans. This was due in part to the fact that Washington realized the natives wore clothing that was more suitable for the harsh winter climate in North America. “In May 1758, he sent to Philadelphia for ‘one thousand pair of Indian stockings

(leggings), the better to equip [his] men for the woods.”¹⁷ Although the stockings of the English military were of a better quality, the new American stockings were made of leather, a Native American material better suited to American climates and terrain, allowing soldiers to protect themselves “against the bite of serpents and poisonous insects, but likewise against the scratches of thorns, briars, scrubby bushes, and underwood.”¹⁸



Fig. 10- Example of Leggings worn by American Soldiers, Baumgarten, 68



Fig. 11- Jacket, United States, from the Collection of Ed Charol.

Washington’s Indian-style uniforms were not limited to leggings; they also included shirts and “some regiments wore Indian-style breechclouts, or loincloths, as well.”¹⁹ He was very specific as to the shirts he chose for his soldiers to wear. Since textile trade with Britain had been cut off, Washington found it very hard to acquire quality shirts for his soldiers. So in 1775 he sent to Connecticut and Rhode Island for

their coarse tow linen “for the purpose of making of Indian or Hunting shirts for the men, many of whom are destitute of clothing.”²⁰ Along with this correspondence Washington “enclosed a pattern shirt to copy,” in the hopes that the shirts, although made from a cheap material, would resemble uniform quality. “Washington’s hunting shirt was not only cheap and convenient, but also symbolically appropriate for the newly independent states.”²¹ Using the dress of the Native Americans as a model for his uniforms, Washington embedded the uniforms with the ideal of the American spirit. The men conveyed patriotism, “fitted for a tough and tight defense of the liberties of their country.”²² Once again, by dressing his soldiers, Washington used clothing to portray patriotism during the Revolutionary War. This image of men dressed as the wild, free, American natives did not only instill patriotism in the soldiers, but in the hearts of American colonists all over the New England coast.

“The modesty with which American leaders, particularly America’s first president, arrayed themselves poses a stark contrast to European courtly fashions. Washington was most often depicted wearing either his general’s uniform or a plain homespun suit.”²³ At a young age Washington set desired simplicity and practicality in his personal style. Requesting a new suit in a letter to his father in October of 1761, Washington stressed that he did not want luxurious items full of English frills. He wrote, “I want neither lace nor embroidery. Plain clothes, with a gold or silver button, (if worn in genteel dress), are all I desire.”²⁴ And again, many years later, when ordering a suit as commander-in-chief, he asked for simplicity. He again rejected the frills of lace and embroidery, although he did have certain specifications for the patriotic symbols to be fixed on his suit, requesting cuffs “with blue flaps

passing through them,” reminiscent of the blue coats that the American soldiers wore during the Revolution. He also asked that eagles and stars be incorporated to the suit, because they had “become part of the American cockade.”²⁵ Washington wanted to dress in a suit that embodied, with color and symbols, the ideals of patriotism.

In all these ways George Washington used clothing to convey his patriotism. His brown wool suit with eagles on the buttons was a perfect choice to show his devotion to the free nation at his inauguration. His insistence that his soldiers wear homespun suits mimicking the dress of Native Americans showed his respect for the frontier on which America was founded; he wanted to instill fear in the hearts of British soldiers upon seeing the American army. And also his modesty in dress, and respect to the homespun movement showed his adoration for America. All of his homespun suits, whether they were for battle or ceremony, showed the public that George Washington was a true American patriot, who understood how to portray his ideological beliefs through dress.

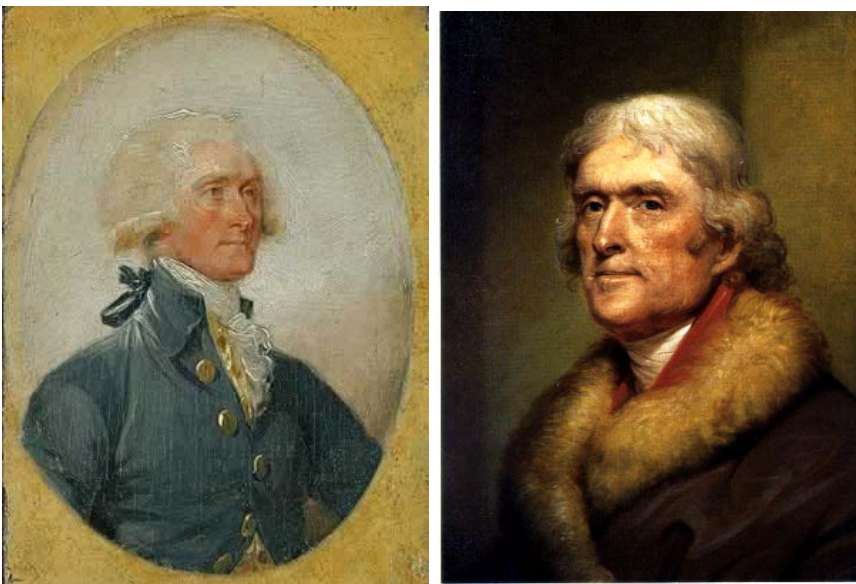


Fig. 12 Thomas Jefferson by John Trumball, 1788

Fig. 13- Portrait of Thomas Jefferson by Rembrandt Peale
1805

Another founding father who believed whole-heartedly in liberty and the end of British tyranny was Thomas Jefferson. Clothing and dress always played an important role in Thomas Jefferson's life. As a young man, Jefferson regarded his own clothing as outdated and plain, often complaining in letters that his clothes did not have the degree of style and embroidery of his colleagues'. As Jefferson's stature grew, he improved his style. During his years in politics he often spent a great deal of money on fine suits, stockings, and hats.²⁶ Yet in 1769, in his first recorded public act, Jefferson signed a non-importation agreement boycotting eleven types of British cloth, as well as hats and stockings.²⁷ How could a man, so devoted to style, especially that of the English and the French, openly refuse to wear cloth from England? Like Washington before him, Jefferson had learned how to use clothing to project a political message.

Although clothing and high fashion were important to Jefferson, American freedom and the pursuit of liberty meant far more. Jefferson knew that in order to convey to the American public that he shared their devotion to American freedom, he would have to wear and promote homespun clothing.

"A focus on Jefferson's personality makes him look like a sphinx, if not a hypocrite, for his obvious love of fashion and simultaneous refusal of it. A wider view of his sartorial politics reveals a politician in search of constituencies and a public man particularly sensitive to the accretion of political and economic meaning to clothing since the 1760s."²⁸

Jefferson's abandonment of style and high fashion show how savvy he was as a politician and devoted as a patriot.

The homespun movement was dear to Jefferson's heart. During the years prior to and during the Revolutionary War, Jefferson played a significant role in clothing boycotts. In a letter to George Washington, Jefferson told Washington of his hope to send aid not only in men but also in clothing. Jefferson said he was embarrassed by his inability to send aid immediately: "It is mortifying to suppose that a people, able and zealous to contend with their enemy, should be reduced to fold their arms for want of aid."²⁹

Jefferson's support for boycotting stemmed from more than a desire to promote his public image. Jefferson possessed a true hatred for the British. Jefferson believed that Britain was slowly reducing the citizens in the American colonies into slavery. In a letter to John Randolph, Jefferson wrote that although he wished to be live in a peaceful environment withdrawn from the public stage, he could not ignore the tyranny inflicted upon the colonies.³⁰ Jefferson knew that in order to gain independence from Britain, Americans had to stop importing British products.

This hatred for Britain and devotion to freedom pushed Jefferson into the sphere of boycotts and homespun clothing. However, it was not just publicly that Jefferson pushed for homespun; he also encouraged it in his home life. When Jefferson visited France in 1787, he wrote to his wife Martha, in response to her complaints of boredom, encouraging her to continue the "good" of spinning clothes from home. Although Jefferson and his wife could afford to buy manufactured clothing at this time, Jefferson thought that spinning textiles from home would be

beneficial for the growth of American made clothing and also cure his wife of boredom. He wrote, "No person will have occasion to complain of the want of time who never loses any. It is wonderful how much may be done if we are always doing. And that you may always be doing good, my dear, is the ardent prayer of yours affectionately."³¹ Jefferson's letter encouraging her to spin was a lecture for her to do her civic duty, "good to all."

Jefferson also personally requested homespun garments in a letter to his friend Abigail Adams, complaining that although the quality of cloth in France was nicer than a homespun American suit, he not attend the parties of French gentry wearing anything other than homespun.³² This request for American cloth and refusal of the higher quality French cloth symbolizes how Jefferson was using clothing. Jefferson was choosing to wear the cloth in front of French gentry, a foreign power on the verge of democracy, to make a statement about his beliefs and patriotism for America.

Like Washington, Jefferson wore a homespun suit for his inauguration in 1801, reinforcing his devotion to American ideals. "The domestic fabrics and colors Jefferson wore in office, such as his green and brown inaugural suit, represented the American people."³³ As President, Jefferson's attire became a frequent subject of controversy in American political circles. On many occasions Jefferson's colleagues regarded him as unfashionable and under dressed for such an important political figure.

This was the type of image that Jefferson created for himself while in office. His colleagues continually remarked on the "undress" in which Jefferson presented

himself. The same man who valued high French fashion and designed his home in elegant classical architecture, furnished with fine art and furniture, would dress down for his political appointments. Jefferson dressed with a political mindset. “[He was] was partaking of and adding to American mythology: this was a land of equality, homespun values, and agrarian simplicity.”³⁵ Jefferson knew the importance of clothing way to project an identity in the public eye. He knew that in order to show his devotion to America he would have to be a President of moderation, devoted to American made products. All of this is why Jefferson chose wisely when dressing in “undress” during his presidency.

Like Washington, Jefferson is yet another perfect example of how political figures during the late eighteenth century knew how to use clothing. Clothes for these men were much more than the adornment for the body. Since Jefferson was such a public figure he used his clothing to show his patriotism. As portraits were made, and ceremonies performed, Jefferson’s image was brought to the public eye. Thomas Jefferson made the same conscious decision that Washington had made before him; he chose to use clothing while he was in the public’s eye. Through clothing, Jefferson was able to relate to his constituents and send a patriotic message to international elites. Both these influential Presidents were able to use clothing to show their patriotism for the newly freed republic of America.

Presidents weren’t the only figures to use their clothing as a symbol of patriotism. Although never President, Benjamin Franklin, as stated in the beginning of this essay, was one of the most important contributors to the forming of the American republic. He purposely chose to wear a fur cap and fur trimmed jacket

while having his portrait made. However, this outfit was not just for a portrait. Franklin caused a considerable stir by wearing his famous leather and fur suit and fur hat during his second trip to France after the American colonies had announced their independence from Britain. "Franklin arrived in clothes-conscious Paris wearing a brown suit, his famous spectacles, and the marten fur cap he had picked up on a trip to Canada the year before."³⁶ To his French friends and colleagues this came as a shock, for years before, Franklin would not have had the audacity to dress in such a manner. In his previous visit "Franklin displayed his knowledge of correct clothing and behavior when he appeared before the French court of Louis XV in 1767," where he was "transformed," looking like a Frenchman in a fine European suit and a powdered wig.³⁷ On this previous visit Franklin dressed the part of a Frenchman to show respect and to gain recognition in the French court. However, on this second trip, Franklin took the opportunity to emphasize his connection to the wilderness of America.

Franklin found the reactions of his French hosts humorous, telling his friends in letters home to "figure for yourself an old man, with gray hair appearing under a martin fur cap, among the powdered heads of Paris." He also noted how much he wished that everyone else in Paris would dress in his fashion because it would save the Parisians money and provide for more comfortable dress.³⁸ At this point in American history Franklin's attire was made up of American-made suits so it is not odd that he wore this suit. However, on this specific occasion he employed his dress as a performance. Franklin's dress before the French court was intended to cause a

scene, part of a performance that would place America at the center of international conversation and promote the freedoms of American democracy.

Franklin did not dress in this manner just to seek attention and have a few laughs. Franklin purposely chose to dress in what he thought was the American style. Franklin took the opportunity of visiting France for a second time to show what America looked like through his dress. Franklin believed so much in the homespun movement that when put on trial by the British Parliament in 1776 for his involvement in creating a bill to repeal the Stamp Act for its infringement on the rights of colonial citizens, he fiercely advocated American homespun clothing over English imports. When asked by Parliament whether he agreed that Americans needed English textiles because they constituted “necessaries of life,” Franklin answered, “I do not know a single article imported into the northern colonies, but what they can either do without, or make themselves.” Asked by Parliament if Americans would be able to even find wool to replace British textiles, Franklin again assured them that the Americans would survive independently; he said, “[Americans] have taken steps to increase the wool. They entered into general combinations to eat no more lamb; and very few lambs were killed last year.”³⁹ Again and again throughout the trial, Franklin argued that America need to be dependent on Britain.

Franklin’s devotion to the homespun movement defined his public life. But, the movement also had an affect on his home and private life in the same way that it did Jefferson’s. In a letter to his wife while in London in 1772, Franklin thanked her for sending him homemade silk to give to his British hosts. He wrote that he would

“honor much every young lady, that I find on my return dressed in silk of her own raising.”⁴⁰ Franklin was proud to carry finely made American silk to a British home. That pride for American made goods was made more evident in a letter to his daughter. In this letter he scolded her for asking for linen, lace, pins, and feathers from France: “your sending for long black pins, and lace, and feathers! disgusted me as much as if you had put salt into my strawberries. The spinning, I see, is laid aside, and you are to be dressed for the ball!”⁴¹ Although this scolding may be humorous, it shows Franklin’s insistence that his family be dressed in homespun American clothing. These letters show how devoted Franklin was to the homespun movement and how he wanted his family to dress, like him, to portray patriotism.

In another humorous incident, Benjamin Franklin concerned the wealth of American made goods. In his letter to his friend Peter Collinson, a loyalist, in 1764, Franklin wrote about discovering a beach on a bay near Philadelphia, “the pebbles of which are all in the Form of Buttons, whence it is called *Buttonmold Bay*.” He sent in with the letter a “specimen of coat, waistcoat, and sleeve buttons” from the bay, adding that he believed England would be jealous of the natural commodity: “And where in your little Island (England) can you feed the sheep? Nature has put bounds to your abilities, tho none to your desires.”⁴² Though the tailors in England would want for those materials, England could not provide them. America, Franklin argued, naturally provided all the materials necessary for fine clothing. This story of Franklin boasting about American materials and goods is yet another example of his devotion to American made clothing and the homespun movement.

Benjamin Franklin proved to be devoted to the cause of the new republic and continued American freedom. This was made evident by his devotion to the homespun movement. Franklin embodied the movement in his dress in front of the French court. He defended the movement in his trial against Parliament in 1776. He also took the homespun movement into his personal life, praising his neighbor for making homespun silk, and lecturing his daughter against buying foreign made clothing. Also, he argued with a loyalist friend over the bounty of American materials for clothing. Throughout his life Benjamin Franklin used clothing and the homespun movement to portray his patriotism for his nation.

“Exploring clothing’s meaning and symbolism helps people today better understand those of the past, not just great and learned men who wrote most of the histories, but women who donned corsets and hoops, the illiterate slaves, Native Americans, children, and working people.”⁴³

In exploring early American clothing I have uncovered how the meaning of clothing changed during the period of the Revolutionary War. Although textile trade with Britain resumed when the years of war and struggle were over, American textile production was forever changed by the development of the homespun movement. The boycotts prior to the Revolutionary War and the homespun movement produced the first American made clothing products. For many years after the war influential figures would continue to use their American made clothing to make statements about American independence. For colonists during the revolutionary period this is especially true. The founding fathers of the American republic were especially conscious of using dress. The growth of the homespun

movement was due in part to the overwhelming control being imposed on the colonies by the British. Although the boycotting of tea seems to be the most popular of the Revolutionary boycotts, the textile boycott shaped American costume forever. As colonial families were aroused by the boycotts they began the work of independent manufacture. This independent production was a large enough display of patriotism, but the colonists went further. By embroidering national symbols, by using American made fabrics, dyeing materials earthen colors, the colonists used clothing to show patriotism.

This essay delved into how the founding fathers conveyed their patriotism through their dress. Washington, Jefferson, and Franklin were involved in a growing trend of using clothing as a political broadcast of their patriotism, instilling early American clothing with ideals representing the American public, and the voice of freedom.

Notes

¹ Linda Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).100.

² Leora Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions: Everyday Life and Politics in Britain, North America, and France*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009). 84.

⁴ Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions*, 83.

⁵ Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions*, 84.

⁶ Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions*, 86.

⁷ *Virginia Gazette*. (Purdie and Dixon), Dec. 14, 1769.

⁹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America Persons, Houses, Cities*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 71.

¹⁰ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 96.

¹¹ Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions*, 104.

¹³ Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth Century America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 214.

¹⁴ "George Washington to Francis Dandridge, Sept. 20, 1765, in Letters and Addresses of George Washington, arranged by Jonas Viles, hereafter cited as GWL, (New York, New York: Unit Book Publishing, 1908),37.

¹⁵ Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth Century America*, 208.

¹⁶ "George Washington to the Committee of Congress, July 19, 1777, GWL, (New York, New York: Unit Book Publishing, 1908), 133-135.

¹⁷ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 68.

¹⁸ John Ferdinand Dalziel Smyth, *A Tour in the United States of America...*(Dublin, Ireland, 1784), I, p. 115.

¹⁹ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 69.

²⁰ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 69.

²¹ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 97.

²² Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 74.

²³ Auslander, *Cultural Revolutions*, 103.

²⁴ "George Washington to Richard Washington, Oct. 20, 1761, GWL, (New York, New York: Unit Book Publishing, 1908), 36.

²⁵ "George Washington to James McHenry, Secretary of War, Jan. 27, 1799, GWL, (New York, New York: Unit Book Publishing, 1908), 439-440.

²⁶ David Waldstreicher, "Why Thomas Jefferson and African Americans Wore Their Politics on Their Sleeves: Dress and Mobilization between American Revolutions," *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History or the Early American Republic* (2004),8227

²⁷ Waldstreicher. *Why Thomas Jefferson and African Americans Wore Their Politics on Their Sleeves*, 88.

²⁸ Waldstreicher, *Why Thomas Jefferson and African Americans Wore Their Politics on Their Sleeves*, 84.

²⁹ "Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, Oct. 22, 1780, in Thoughts on War and Revolution: Thomas Jefferson Annotated Correspondence, arranged by Brett F. Woods, hereafter cited as Thoughts on War, (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Hale and Company), 22-23

³⁰ "Thomas Jefferson to John Randolph, Aug. 25, 1775, in Jefferson's Letters, arranged by Willson Whitman, hereafter cited as TJL, (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Hale and Company), 11.

³¹ "Thomas Jefferson to Martha Jefferson, in TJL, (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Hale and Company), 70.

³²"Thomas Jefferson to Abigail Adams, in TJL, (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Hale and Company), 38-39

³³ Waldstreicher, *Why Thomas Jefferson and African Americans Wore Their Politics on Their Sleeves*, 84.

³⁵ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 102.

³⁶ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 99.

³⁷ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 98.

³⁸ “Benjamin Franklin to Mrs. Mary Hewson, Jan. 12, 1777, in *The private correspondence of Benjamin Franklin, LL.D.: comprising a series of letters on miscellaneous, literary, and political subjects, from Sabina Americana 1500-1926*.

³⁹ “House of Commons Hearing, The examination of Dr. Benjamin Franklin, in *Life and Letters*, arranged by Benjamin Franklin, hereafter cited as BFL, (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Hale and Company), 136- 157.

⁴⁰ “Benjamin Franklin to his wife, Jan. 28, 1772, in BFL, (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Hale and Company), 190.

⁴¹ “Benjamin Franklin to Mrs. Sarah Bache. Passy, June 3, 1779, in BFL, (Eau Claire, Wisconsin: Hale and Company), 263.

⁴² “Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, April 30, 1764, in *The Portable Benjamin Franklin*, arranged by Larzer Ziff, (New York, New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 343-345.

⁴³ Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 52.