LIBERTY'S FOREST: LIBERTY TREES AND LIBERTY POLES DURING THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

by

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Liberty's Forest: Liberty Trees and Liberty Poles During the Age of Revolution

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What was the relationship between local events, national politics, and transnational ideologies during the Age of Revolution? That is the question at the heart of this analysis of liberty trees during the Age of Revolution. Liberty trees were symbolic trees that were planted, written about, and incorporated into the visual cultures of British North America, France, and Haiti from 1765 until 1860. They were important sites of negotiation that peoples in all three places used to map the contours of the revolutionary Atlantic, contemplate the nature of liberty, and cope with political changes. Yet in each context liberty trees took on different characteristics. In the United States, liberty trees emerged during the American Revolution as symbols of opposition to particular British policies. The advent of the French Revolution, however, led some Americans to reassess the symbols. The alteration in symbolic meaning stemmed from the direction of the French Revolution. In France, liberty trees initially represented a revolution aimed at toppling an absolute monarch and reorganizing France under a constitution. Once it became an experiment in democracy that begot a democratic authoritarian republic, liberty trees came to represent state power and state-sponsored terrorism. While events in France led Americans to reinterpret their liberty trees, peoples of African descent in Saint-Domingue, the French colony that would become Haiti, connected liberty trees with emancipation and formed the trees into inspirational symbols. Therefore, this comparative analysis of shared symbolism explains that liberty trees were singularly malleable symbols that Americans, French people, and Haitians constantly reconceptualized for nearly a century as they all worked to define liberty, construct national identities, and delineate the political and cultural geography of a world in flux.

For Mom, who has always been there.
For Dad, who always was.

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INTRODUCTION

LIBERTY TREES, LIBERTY POLES, AND A REVOLUTIONARY AGE

On November 17, 1787, Thomas Jefferson penned words in a private letter that have since become famous. “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” In 1802 another revolutionary, Toussaint L’Ouverture—a man who has become the popular face of the successful slave revolt that created the nation of Haiti—is said to have proclaimed, as he boarded a ship that would take him into exile in France’s Jura Mountains, "In overthrowing me, one has only felled the trunk of the tree of black liberty in Saint-Domingue. It will grow back from the roots, because they are deep and numerous.”[1]

Both men used liberty trees as metaphors, but liberty trees were real as well as symbolic. They were planted, destroyed, written about, and incorporated into the visual cultures of British North America, France, and Haiti during the Age of Revolution. The presence of liberty trees in all three places demonstrates links among quite different revolutionary movements. However, Jefferson and L’Ouverture clearly envisioned two different types of liberty trees. In America, liberty trees emerged during the American Revolution as symbols of opposition to Parliamentary overreach. After independence, plenty of Americans who worried that a powerful national government might threaten liberties won during the Revolution used liberty poles to challenge federal power. In France, revolutionaries merged American terminology and peasant maypole traditions to fashion another version of the revolutionary emblem. Initially used by communities to demonstrate support for the French Revolution, liberty trees became icons of a terroristic state

[1] Thomas Jefferson to William S. Smith, November 13, 1787, manuscript/mixed material, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed June 21, 2016, https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib003123/; Pamphile de Lacroix, *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue*, vol. 2 (Paris: Chez Pillet, 1819), 203–4, accessed May 2, 2017, https://archive.org/stream/mmoirespourser02lacr#page/202/mode/2up.

after 1792. In 1793, in the midst of the French Revolution's radical phase, French officials introduced liberty trees to Saint-Domingue, their most valuable American colony, to celebrate the emancipation of the colony's slaves. But when the French government proved to be a fickle guarantor of emancipation, Saint-Domingue's rebels used liberty poles during their own independence movement and built them into icons of Haiti, a country born from a revolution against race slavery.

Historians of eighteenth-century revolutions, following the recent international turn, now examine the American, French, and Haitian revolutions as interrelated movements rather than as distinct national phenomena. Some scholars note ideological links among revolutionaries while others focus on itinerant groups or individuals to draw more tangible links between revolutionary peoples.[2] Others still have compared the revolutions to expose the relationships between international events and internal developments.[3] However, historians have yet to explore the histories of shared symbolism owing, no doubt, to the fact that few symbols were common to multiple revolutionary movements.

One exception was the liberty tree, yet existing scholarship examines them primarily as national symbols. American historians have debated the origins of American liberty trees, but they have generally argued that they offered important sites for protesting colonists to gather out-

[2] For examples of historians who have focused on ideological links see, R. R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959); Jonathan Israel, *The Expanding Blaze: How the American Revolution Ignited the World, 1775-1848* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). For examples of studies that examine transitory peoples see, Janet L. Polasky, *Revolutions without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); Maya Jasanoff, *Liberty's Exiles: American Loyalists in the Revolutionary World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011).

[3] For a comparative perspective see, Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

of-doors while simultaneously providing a visual icon of colonial unity.[4] Some scholars have at least gestured to the influence of the French Revolution on post-Revolutionary American liberty trees and poles, but none have explored the link in detail. French historians have focused on the symbols' origins in the French countryside and their relationship to the French Revolutionary state.[5] Haitian liberty trees have yet to be studied in any depth, though scholars have acknowledged their presence during the Haitian Revolution and the symbol's inclusion on the Haitian coat of arms, which is an integral part of the nation's flag.[6]

I argue that liberty trees' full symbolic significance is revealed only when their appearance in all three of these upheavals is considered together. Liberty trees developed differently in the contexts of all three revolutions, but their meanings and uses in one location impacted developments in the other places. They were important sites of negotiation where peoples in all three settings mapped the contours of the revolutionary Atlantic, contemplated the nature of liberty, and coped with political changes. This comparative perspective, therefore,

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[4] For works that examine American liberty trees and poles see, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Sr., "Liberty Tree: A Genealogy," *New England Quarterly* 25 (1952): 435–58; Robert P. Hay, "The Liberty Tree: A Symbol for American Patriots 1777-1876," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, no. 55 (1969): 414–24; David Hackett Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 19–49; Alfred F. Young, *Liberty Tree: Ordinary People and the American Revolution*, ed. Harvey J. Kaye (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 325–94.

[5] For the most commonly cited work on French liberty trees see, Mona Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 232–61. The only study to analyze links between American and French liberty trees in any depth is, J. David Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees," *Past & Present*, no. 146 (1995): 66–102.

[6] For works on the Haitian coat of arms and the liberty tree in the center of it see, Philippe R. Girard, "Birth of a Nation: The Creation of the Haitian Flag and Haiti's French Revolutionary Heritage," *Journal of Haitian Studies* 15, no. 1/2 (Spring 2009): 135–50; Julia Gaffield, "The Haitian Coat of Arms," *Haiti and the Atlantic World*, September 15, 2013, accessed March 6, 2018, https://haitidoi.com/2013/09/15/the-haitian-coat-of-arms/. Another analysis relevant to this study is Edward E. Andrews, "Creatures of Mimick and Imitation: The Liberty Tree, Black Elections, and the Politicization of African Ceremonial Space in Revolutionary Newport, Rhode Island," *Radical History Review*, no. 99 (2007): 121–39, which is the only study I know of before this one to consider relationships between African rituals and liberty trees.

highlights important links between transnational events and local processes as well as the circulation of shifting symbols and ideas in the Atlantic world during the Age of Revolution.

Archives and Methodology

The lack of a multinational study of liberty trees until now is likely due to the fact that sources are so varied and dispersed. The recent growth of searchable digital databases, however, has made this work possible. For my research on liberty trees in America I read hundreds of issues of early American newspapers held on microfilm at Norlin Library at the University of Colorado Boulder, but I conducted most of my research using Readex's searchable database of early American newspapers. I searched for "liberty tree," "liberty pole," and "tree of liberty." I turned up hundreds of articles published between 1765 and 1860. I supplemented newspapers with diaries, letters, and visual sources I found in the digitized collection of early American printed material, "Early American Imprints," and in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the John Carter Brown Library, and the Newberry Library.

For information on French liberty trees, I focused on collections in the *Bibliotheque Nationale de France* (BnF) and the *Archives Nationales de France* at Pierrefitte-sur-Seine (AN). The BnF maintains a searchable database of its holdings, Gallica, which I examined using the term "arbre de la liberté." I uncovered hundreds of relevant pamphlets, broadsides, laws, paintings, engravings, and songs. At the AN, I examined pertinent correspondence between representatives in the provinces and the central governing institutions in Paris. The reports offered local perspectives and displayed anxieties among revolutionary officials who struggled to cope with vandalism directed against liberty trees throughout France and occupied Europe.

There does not appear to be a large source base describing liberty trees in Haiti, but sources I found in the BnF proved quite valuable. My analysis also draws examples from the work of the Haitian nationalist historian Beaubrun Ardouin, who published an eleven-volume history of Haiti between 1853 and 1860. Ardouin was a public servant during Jean-Pierre Boyer's presidency and built his chronicle from contemporary documents and conversations with surviving veterans of the Revolution. Ardouin certainly takes a nationalist perspective and often praises mixed-race leaders of the Revolution while criticizing black leaders such as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines. Nevertheless, given his access to relevant oral histories and the thoroughness of his study, modern historians have often used Ardouin's work as a valuable source on Haiti's early history. When possible, I have checked his claims against the accounts provided by primary source documents.[7]

Narrative Structure

Each chapter focuses on liberty trees and poles in a particular country and the chapters proceed generally chronologically to show change over time. Chapter one examines liberty trees in British North America during the American Revolution. I argue that, although liberty trees were ubiquitous in British North America by 1776, they were fundamentally local symbols that primarily reflected local concerns. Yet their diffusion across colonial boundaries allowed American colonists to imagine the geographic contours of a confederation whose members shared fears of imperial power run amok.

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[7] For more about Ardouin and his work see, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Historiography of Haiti," in *General History of the Caribbean: Methodology and Historiography of the Caribbean*, ed. B. W. Higman, vol. 6, General History of the Caribbean (London; Oxford: UNESCO, 1999), 457.

Chapter two analyzes the evolution of liberty trees in France from 1770 until the end of the Reign of Terror in 1794. French liberty trees, in contrast to their American counterparts, developed into national symbols. French revolutionaries fused the American concept of a liberty tree with peasant maypole traditions to create a discernibly French liberty tree tradition. Although French revolutionaries initially used liberty trees to challenge power centralized in the person of the king, when radical Jacobins rose to power in 1792 they made liberty trees iconic of radical political notions like universal suffrage and popular militancy. They also connected liberty trees with the Reign of Terror when the exigencies of war required a new type of national patriotism that blended Revolutionary fervor with the expansion of government control over national culture. Once they accepted liberty trees as emblems of the Revolutionary state, radical officials believed they had no choice but to defend the trees against dissident vandals.

Chapter three analyzes the progression of American liberty trees and poles from 1783 to 1800. In the immediate aftermath of independence, Americans only sporadically used liberty trees, but the passage of the United States Constitution in 1787 and the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789 inspired some Americans to revive liberty trees and poles as symbols of political opposition. From 1792 until roughly 1795, a loose confederation of American "democrats" deployed liberty trees and poles both to challenge Federalists' centralizing impulses and celebrate the democratic aspects of the French Revolution. However, after insurgent rebels in Pennsylvania used liberty poles to justify armed rebellion and French revolutionaries turned liberty trees into emblems of a repressive state, American Democratic-Republicans carefully sheared American liberty poles of their connections to both popular violence and French developments.

Chapter four considers the ways in which the liberal French revolutionaries attempted to redefine French liberty trees after the conclusion of the Reign of Terror in 1794. Moderate republicans hoped that the symbols could be made to evoke memories of pre-Terror French republicanism. Like the Jacobins, liberal officials deployed liberty trees both at home and abroad to encourage patriotic sentiments and gauge enthusiasm for their political and imperial projects. By 1797 the lack of support for the regime was obvious and when Napoleon Bonaparte took power in 1799, he distanced his government from Revolutionary liberty trees, opting instead for symbols that advertised his personal power.

Chapter five argues that peoples of African descent in Saint-Domingue fused French symbolism with African practices to create liberty trees that represented emancipation. French revolutionaries first introduced liberty trees to Haiti in 1793. When France abolished slavery throughout its empire in 1794, freed peoples of African descent in Saint-Domingue deployed liberty trees to represent their alliance with the French guarantors of liberty. However, they did not merely mimic French practices. Over the course of the 1790s, rebel leaders connected liberty trees with African cultural practices to attract followers and articulate their commitments to preserving emancipation. When Napoleon Bonaparte reneged on his promise to maintain emancipation, Haitians banded together to fight for independence from France, which they earned in 1804. After independence Haiti's early political leaders used liberty trees to incorporate peoples of varying cultural backgrounds into a nation defined by a mutual commitment to emancipation.

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Most people who lived during the Age of Revolution lacked both the ability to move around the Atlantic basin and the leisure to engage in high ideological debates. They could,

however, articulate their desires and absorb new ideas by raising liberty trees and liberty poles, gathering beneath them, and reading about them in print publications and private correspondence that circulated around the Atlantic world. The ubiquity of liberty trees in the three main Atlantic revolutions illuminates connections among revolutionary peoples, but those connections are only a part of the story. The trees could at once evoke universal notions of liberty and represent quite specific understandings of the relationship between ordinary people and the state. They thus offer an ideal means of identifying the intersection of transnational, national, and local features in revolutionary change.

CHAPTER 1

AMERICAN SEEDS: LIBERTY TREES AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

The first battles of a British civil war broke out in the spring and summer of 1775. A decade of political crisis had enveloped the British Empire as thirteen recalcitrant colonies on the North American mainland repeatedly refused to defer to Parliament's authority. Beginning in 1765, colonists took to the streets to protest Parliament's attempts to tax and legislate for the colonies. War came in April 1775 when an ill-conceived plan to disarm Massachusetts colonists and arrest the movement's leaders resulted in armed conflict between British regulars and colonial militiamen in the area around Boston. In June, American provincial fighters took pride in a military defeat at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Though they had lost the battle, the inexperienced militias had put the names and ranks of over 1,000 British regulars on British casualty reports.

As word of the skirmish spread throughout British North America, colonists all along the North American eastern seaboard devoured information about the battle and the state of affairs in and around Boston. In Philadelphia, the publisher Robert Aitken included "A New and Correct Plan of the Town of Boston and Provincial Camp" in the July 1775 issue of the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, which was edited by the ardent patriot Thomas Paine. The map was quite rudimentary. It depicted no homes or commercial buildings. It only identified major roads, a few militarily relevant locations, and a few notable natural landmarks. Though the map was intended to offer an outline of the city and illustrate the positions of combatants, Aitken, or whoever originally drew the map, decided to include one landmark that would have been quite familiar to any colonist. A space at the corner of Essex and Orange Streets was labeled "Liberty T" (Figure

1.1). The inclusion of Boston's Liberty Tree on this sparse map demonstrates the hold that the famous tree had on Americans' imaginations in 1775. At the time Aitken published the plan of Boston, trees dedicated to liberty existed throughout the thirteen rebellious colonies and had become emblematic of what was evolving into an American cause. The story that follows explains how liberty trees and their bare cousins called liberty poles became popular icons throughout the thirteen colonies that would declare independence from Britain in 1776.[1]

Figure 1.1: Robert Aitken, *A New and Correct Plan of the Town of Boston and Provincial Camp* (1775). Map reproduction courtesy of the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library

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[1] Robert Aitken, *A New and Correct Plan of the Town of Boston and Provincial Camp*, 1775, Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, The Boston Public Library, accessed February 23, 2016, http://maps.bpl.org/id/10031.

The existing historiography on American liberty trees and liberty poles is rather thin. Although scholars of the American Revolution almost always mention the symbolic trees in their accounts, only a few have explored the histories of these symbols in any depth and no one has created a monograph on the subject. Scholars have noted that liberty trees and poles marked spaces where people could gather out-of-doors to protest Parliamentary impositions and, when necessary, mete out punishment to members of the community who did not back the American cause.[2] While pointing out that liberty trees in American differed from place to place, existing narratives imply that the symbols evolved into national icons as they diffused throughout North America. At the very least, they worked well as metaphors in large part because they were familiar to the majority of Revolutionary era Americans.[3] To the extent there has been any debate about American liberty trees, those debates have revolved around the question of origins, with some scholars suggesting that Anglo-Americans tapped into common folkloric traditions when creating the trees while one claims that the trees were an "invented tradition."[4]

This chapter builds on the existing foundation by examining the tension between liberty trees as local symbols and intercolonial icons. Rather than read American nationalism backward, I argue that a reexamination of American liberty trees illuminates the complex path Americans took from being colonists to being Americans. Although American colonists eventually saw in the trees indications of a shared value system that could form the basis of a previously

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[2] Schlesinger, Sr., "Liberty Tree: A Genealogy." Schlesinger offers a very broad overview of the history of American liberty trees from 1765 until 1848. It provided the foundation for most subsequent studies.

[3] Hay, "The Liberty Tree: A Symbol for American Patriots 1777-1876."

[4] Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, 19–49. Fisher argues that liberty trees and liberty poles evolved from separate folk traditions and thus "represented different visions of a free society." Alfred F. Young focuses on class tensions expressed at the symbolic trees and argues that liberty trees were symbols "made in America" in, *Liberty Tree*, 325–94. Young borrows the idea of an "invented tradition" from E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

unimaginable confederation, liberty trees remained fundamentally local icons during the American Revolution.

Inventing a Name: Boston's Liberty Tree

Boston, Massachusetts. The Corner of Essex and Washington Streets. September 11, 1765.

The old trees that Bostonians had long called "great" bore the colors of the British nation. Patriotic mottos adorned the decorations. Affixed with nails to the trunk of one of these "Great Trees" was a copper plaque with "golden" letters stamped on it that read "TREE OF LIBERTY, August 14, 1765." The decorations drew quite a crowd. Those segments of Boston's citizenry who had enough leisure time to make their ways to the bustling intersection clamored to lay eyes on the gleaming sign and the Union Jacks fluttering from the venerable trees. Guns fired to salute the crowd and liquor flowed freely. Though this was meant to be a celebration, the possibility of disorder meant that the local militia stood guard at the corner ready to quell any disturbances. As the colors were struck at the end of the day the celebrants melted back into the city while the militia patrolled for a little while longer.[5]

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Expressions of joy had been uncommon in Boston throughout the summer of 1765. That summer, Boston remained mired in a post-war economic slump brought about by market contraction after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763. At the same time American colonists struggled to cope with the economic downturn, Britain's government found itself in need of funds. Years of international warfare had depleted the Empire's coffers. Exacerbating the problem further was the fact that Britain had been victorious in the war it had spent so much to

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[5] "Boston News-Letter, September 12," *The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, September 12, 1765.

win. Victory brought the Empire vast new territorial holdings in North America that now needed to be administered, which of course would cost money that the Empire simply did not have. The government decided to replenish the Empire's treasury by raising revenues from the relatively under-taxed colonies in America. The Stamp Act of 1765 was based on a law already in effect in Britain that required any official documents (such as diplomas) and many saleable items (playing cards are the classic example) to bear a stamp. The stamps' cost varied based on the product, but they generally cost very little. By the time manufacturers and retailers passed the cost on to consumers it would, in most cases, be so miniscule for most items that buyers would barely notice the difference in price.[6]

What the ministry had not fully counted on was that colonists scoffed at the precedent, not the price. The notion that Parliament had the ability to directly tax the colonies was unbearable to colonists who were used to being taxed by their elected colonial legislatures. To make matters worse, the majority of the revenue would be diverted to supply and maintain a standing army that had been left in the colonies after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War. To the politically astute—or even just the moderately concerned—Bostonian with a store to run or a trade to maintain, the threat to property posed by the new taxes along with the potential for military oppression from the standing army needed to be challenged.[7]

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[6] For the classic and still one of the best studies of the economic state of colonial seaport cities in the mid-eighteenth century see, Gary B. Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979). In particular, see chapter 11 on pages 292-311 for an analysis of the socioeconomic factors at play during the early Stamp Act protests. For information on the eighteenth-century imperial wars and their effects on the British Empire see, Robert Tombs, *The English and Their History* (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, 2014), 334–54. For a detailed account of the Seven Years' War in North America see, Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000). For an account of the global aspects of the Seven Years' War see, Daniel A. Baugh, *The Global Seven Years War, 1754-1763: Britain and France in a Great Power Contest*, Modern Wars in Perspective (Harlow, UK; New York: Longman, 2011).

[7] For an in-depth analysis of the Stamp Act crisis, its origins and outcomes see, Edmund S. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis: Prologue to Revolution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

In constructing that challenge, Bostonians leaned on the protest rituals they had developed over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Colonial subjects valued their autonomy and most were willing to fight to preserve their political and economic distinctiveness from Great Britain. The penchant for engaging in popular protest had become engrained in Boston's culture between Edmond Andros's expulsion in 1689 and the passage of the Stamp Act in 1765. Andros, as King James II's agent, had attempted to increase the power of the metropole over local affairs in New England by reorganizing several North American colonies into the Dominion of New England in America in 1686. The Dominion undermined local autonomy by centralizing power in the person of Edmond Andros who was a direct representative of the unpopular monarch, Catholic King James II. After three years of grumbling about the new political order, Bostonians took to the streets in the spring of 1689. The Glorious Revolution in England had removed James II from the throne in 1688, costing Andros the support he needed to maintain the Dominion and giving the Boston crowd an opportunity to cast their uprising as a loyal action to remove the suddenly out-of-favor administrator. Over the course of the succeeding decades, Bostonians learned time and time again that they could successfully challenge attempts to subvert local and corporate liberties if they banded together and took to the streets.[8]

Fully aware of the town's ability to stage effective popular protests, a group that called themselves the Loyal Nine created a somewhat macabre display intended to arouse the passions

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[8] Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, 37–44, 76–88, 129–40; For more on the tendency of people throughout the early modern Atlantic world to resist centralization see, Jack P. Greene, "State Formation, Resistance, and the Creation of Revolutionary Traditions in the Early Modern Era," in *Creating the British Atlantic: Essays on Transplantation, Adaptation, and Continuity*, Early American Histories (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013), 33–63. For an overview of the formation and fall of the Dominion of New England within the wider context of early American history see, Daniel K. Richter, *Before the Revolution: America's Ancient Pasts* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 289-294. For a narrative history that effectively analyzes the nuances of the Glorious Revolution in the three kingdoms of Great Britain see, Tim Harris, *Revolution: The Great Crisis of the British Monarchy, 1685-1720* (London: Penguin, 2007).

of the city's populace and prod them into staging a show of mass discontent with the Stamp Act of 1765. On August 14, 1765, the nine men of rather middling means hung an effigy of the tax collector Andrew Oliver from the branches of one of the city's "Great Trees" on the corner of Essex and Orange Streets in the heart of Boston's South End neighborhood. They provided the straw man with some company in the form of a jackboot with a green sole, meant to represent Lord Bute and George Grenville, two men who the Bostonians charged with planning and executing the plan of colonial taxation. For good measure they packed the boot with a stuffed devil. Over the course of the day a crowd gathered and engaged in some potent jeering, laughing, stamping, and general joking all in the name of voicing discontent with the three men represented in the display. In the evening, a segment of the crowd reassembled, cut down Oliver's effigy and marched it around town before decapitating and burning it. The bonfire stoked for the purpose was composed of the flammable remains of a building belonging to Andrew Oliver that the crowd had torn down during their march. The revelers closed the night by ransacking Oliver's house and stealing his liquor.[9]

The protest succeeded in its goal of instilling fear in Andrew Oliver's heart, but it was not at all uncommon when judged against the long history of protests in the English world. Ritual hangings, effigy burnings, street theater, and property destruction were all common ways to voice discontent with authority throughout English history. Like the August 14 protest, early

[9] For the Loyal Nine's role in planning the protest see, Henry Bass to Samuel P Savage, 19 Dec. 1765, December 19, 1765, Massachusetts Historical Society, accessed April 18, 2014, http://www.masshist.org/revolution/doc-viewer.php?item_id=241&mode=nav. In addition, a relevant letter from John Avery to John Collins can be found in Ezra Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D. D., LL. D., 1755-1794 with a Selection from His Correspondence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), 435-437. For newspaper reports on the incidents see, "Boston, August 19," *Boston Gazette Supplement*, August 19, 1765; "Boston, August 19," *Boston Evening Post*, August 19, 1765; "Boston, August 19," *The Newport Mercury*, August 26, 1765. For modern descriptions of the events of August 14 and analyses of their connections to the creation of the Boston Liberty Tree see, Young, *Liberty Tree*, 327–34; Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, 19–23.

modern uprisings were almost always local rebellions intended to reject laws or practices that undermined local traditions and expectations. Indeed most European nations of the era could properly be called composite states where peoples maintained local customs and power structures even as they swore allegiance to a single king or central governing body. The notion of national pride was quite foreign since most early modern Europeans valued their distinctiveness and almost instinctively rejected any attempts to undermine local autonomy. Therefore, although early modern English rebellions did have long-term effects on national social and political structures, they tended to target particular individuals who challenged local norms and practices.[10]

Take, as just one example, Kett's rebellion, a short-lived uprising against land enclosures in Norfolk led by the yeoman Robert Kett in 1549. The protest was famous enough that Boston's governor, Francis Bernard, would claim in June 1768 that protests in Boston reminded him of Kett's sixteenth-century uprising. There were, in fact, some notable similarities. Kett led a band of aggrieved farmers against the landed elite in East Anglia. They opposed the "enclosures," which turned previously common grazing lands into large, private farms. The angry yeomen met just outside Norwich beneath a tree that they called the Oak of Reformation where they set up a parallel legal system, meted out popular justice to any who offended the movement, and crafted a list of 29 demands. Though the insurgents managed to take control of Norwich for a brief time, an army backed by the Tudor state brutally suppressed Kett's rebellion in a matter of weeks. Enclosures continued and Kett's legacy, while embraced by later rebels, was stained in the eyes of many Britons by the perceived illegality, and thus the illegitimacy, of his movement. Rebellions of this sort were so formulaic that both Bernard and a writer in London's *Gazetteer*

[10] Greene, "State Formation, Resistance, and the Creation of Revolutionary Traditions in the Early Modern Era."

and New Daily Advertiser conflated Kett's rebellion with a fifteenth-century popular uprising against corrupt royals led by Jack Cade.[11]

Kett's unsuccessful rebellion highlights the problem of justification facing all rebellious activities. An illegal action against a legal body is unjustifiable in societies predicated upon law and order. This air of illegitimacy is even more pronounced in societies governed by some form of representative elected body. Therefore, illegal actions often failed to gain the support necessary to overturn widely accepted governing structures in the short term. Between mid-August and mid-September 1765 in Boston, partisans of the Stamp Act protest sought to ensure that their bit of street theater would prove more effective than Kett's rebellion. To make the protest meaningful beyond Boston and justifiable in the eyes of British subjects on both sides of the Atlantic, the participants and planners of the Boston uprising needed to find a way to define the protest as more than just another street protest against an unpopular but legally viable law.

The Boston protest on August 14 kept with established norms. The demonstration was a local response to a central government threatening local autonomy. Bostonians targeted a local representative of state power to show their disapproval of Parliament's actions. Choosing Andrew Oliver in 1765 was analogous to intimidating and harassing Edmund Andros in 1689. Andros's attempts to undermine local political structures and cultural norms by forming the

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[11] For a history of Kett's Rebellion and the culture of rebellion under the Tudor monarchs see, Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England*, Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Stephen K. Land, *Kett's Rebellion: The Norfolk Rising of 1549* (Ipswich; Totowa, N.J: Boydell Press; Rowman and Littlefield, 1977). For Bernard's association of "Jack Cade's Oak of Reformation" with unruly, illegitimate rebellions see, Francis Bernard, Thomas Gage, and Samuel Hood, *Letters to the Ministry, from Governor Bernard, General Gage, and Commodore Hood And Also, Memorials to the Lords of the Treasury, from the Commissioners of the Customs. With Sundry Letters and Papers Annexed to the Said Memorials* (Boston: Edes and Gill, 1769), 33, accessed April 19, 2014, *Eighteengh Century Collections Online*. Gale. For an almost identical claim made by an anonymous writer in the London press see, Cotta, "To the Printer of the Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser," *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, October 26, 1770. For a commonly cited collection that addresses protests, riots, celebrations, and rebellions in early America see, Matthew Dennis, Simon P. Newman, and William Pencak, eds., *Riot and Revelry in Early America* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002).

Dominion of New England had a decidedly greater impact than Oliver's willingness to distribute stamps and collect taxes, but they both represented a central state imposing its will on peoples long accustomed to living with only a tangential relationship to a powerful central government.

Yet, although the August 14 protest was in most respects one that followed local tradition and originated from common grievances, it presented two notable problems. First of all, intimidating Oliver did not solve the larger structural problem posed by a powerful central government. In 1689 the fall of the offending government headed by the despised King James II had preceded the revolt against Andros in Boston. That was not the case in 1765 when Bostonians did not rise in response to a revolution in England, but instead directly opposed a sitting government. Second, as a result, the protest created a problem of justification. Since the government that had empowered Oliver by passing the new tax remained in power, the actions of Bostonians were fundamentally illegal and thus unjustifiable. Aggrieved Bostonians seemed to recognize the problem and sought ways to both sustain the movement and justify their opposition to Parliament's policy.

Over the course of the succeeding month the Loyal Nine and their supporters in the streets worked out a solution to the dual problems created by the August 14 protest. The festivities on September 11, 1765 were actually a response to the fall of the Grenville ministry that had proposed the Stamp Act. While the shift in ministries was not akin to the downfall of the Stuart monarchs, the political change allowed colonists to present themselves as good, loyal, patriotic Britons who supported the transition from a corrupt, misguided ministry to a more progressive one. Indeed Bostonians hoped that the known supporter of the colonial position, William Pitt, would head the new ministry. In the event, the Whig Marquess of Rockingham actually claimed the role of Prime Minister from 1765-1766. Viewed in this context, the pomp

and circumstance of the September 11 ceremony was not meant to celebrate a recent protest, but was in actuality an attempt to incorporate that action into a story where Bostonians had successfully defended British liberties from the wrong-headed impositions of a power-hungry Grenville ministry and Parliament. The plaque converted the elm tree that had played nothing more than the minor role of gallows into a tangible symbol of liberty, the value at the heart of British identity in the eighteenth century. The reflective restructuring of the August 14 action through this naming ritual legitimated the recent protest by commemorating it as a defensive, patriotic action rather than an affront to a particular, unpopular tax policy.[12]

The naming ritual turned the Great Tree in Deacon Elliott's yard into a monument to Bostonians' patriotic defense of liberty, but it also turned the site and object into an inspirational symbol. Dedicating a particular location to liberty helped sustain and justify opposition to the Stamp Act by aligning that place with the ideology of so-called "Country" Whigs. Country thinkers wrote pamphlets that argued that power and liberty existed on opposite ends of a political spectrum. They felt that corrupt politicians in Parliament used patronage to increase their influence over the nation. Interested only in amassing power, the corrupt insiders subverted tradition and centralized power in Parliament and the office of the Prime Minister by doling out money and favors to like-minded persons. These self-interested actions illustrated the process by which a central authority could subvert traditional liberties under the guise of legitimate governance. By this logic, if Parliament gained more power (say, the unilateral power to levy taxes on the colonies) then colonial liberty would suffer. Popular vigilance, country thinkers argued, was the primary safeguard against the corrupt, power-hungry legislators who would

[12] "Boston News-Letter, September 12," *The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston-News Letter*, September 12, 1765; "Boston, September 16," *Boston Gazette*, September 16, 1765; "[No Headline]," *Boston Evening Post*, September 16, 1765.

benefit from an increase in state power. Therefore, popular actions that challenged ministerial corruption were not only defensible, but also necessary to the maintenance of individual, corporate, and colonial liberties.[13]

The Stamp Act, a taxation policy that was an obvious affront to localities that had previously set tax policies in the colonies, seemed to presage precisely the sort of power grab that would ultimately result in the complete destruction of local autonomy in the colonies. Although Parliament had broken no laws by imposing a direct tax on the Empire's American colonies, the first actions of a corrupt government were not blatantly illegal according to country logic. They were small, often imperceptible, and apparently justifiable alterations in policy, particularly taxation policies. Though they might seem innocuous at first, these programs would become onerous over time if they remained unchecked. Giving Parliament the unquestioned right to tax subjects, particularly those unrepresented in its body, threatened to strip away popular liberties, especially if those tax revenues could then be used to support a standing army that could in turn be deployed by a corrupt ministry and its pliant placemen to physically oppress the populace. In naming the tree "The Tree of Liberty" Boston Whigs turned a common street protest into a demonstration of Bostonians' required vigilance against corruption. This justified the Bostonians' actions on August 14, but it also implied that Parliament, not just Andrew Oliver, threatened the very basis of British identity.

A symbol-laden image peddled by the Boston engraver and silversmith Nathaniel Hurd in November 1765, and wrongly attributed to John Singleton Copley, incorporated the liberty tree into an expanding dialogue about power and liberty in the British Empire. The caricature

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[13] Bernard Bailyn has argued that "country" Whig ideology played a critical role in pushing American patriots toward rebellion and revolution in Bernard Bailyn, *The Origins of American Politics* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 34-58; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 34-54.

includes a representation of Britannia "who presents a Box to America, telling her it is the St---p A—t; but on it is wrote *Pandora's Box*." Minerva warns America to refuse the box. "Close by is a fair Tree, inscribed to Liberty; at whose Root grows a Thistle, from under it creeps a Viper and infixes its Sting in the Side of Liberty," killing the figure of Liberty at America's feet. All the while, "Boreas…blows a violent Gust full upon the Tree of Liberty; against which Loyalty leans, and expresses her Fear of losing her Support." As the image and reports of Bostonians' actions on August 14 and September 11 made the rounds throughout the British colonies, during the succeeding months, Liberty Tree became a well-known icon of the liberties that loyal British subjects valued. It also identified the individuals that American colonists blamed for the corruption spreading through Parliament. The initial Liberty Tree protest had targeted Oliver, Grenville, and Bute. The thistle in the image and Boreas, the North wind, both suggest the Scot Bute to be the target to American ire.[14]

The Liberty Tree successfully sustained popular opposition to the Stamp Act by giving Boston's populace a place to protest for the designated purpose of defending liberty. When no immediate repeal bill passed the new Parliament, Boston's protestors kept the pressure on by repeatedly targeting specific individuals tied to the passage and execution of the Stamp Act at the Liberty Tree. From August 14 until the end of the year, Boston's Whigs hanged effigies and representations of several key architects of the Stamp Act from Liberty Tree. Those figures included George Grenville, his predecessor the Earl of Bute, the former Boston merchant turned Member of Parliament John Huske (he was erroneously believed to have engineered the Stamp

[14] "[Advertisement]," *Boston Evening Post*, November 4, 1765; "Boston," *The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal*, November 11, 1765. Jane Kamensky, in her new book on John Singleton Copley, *A Revolution in Color: The World of John Singleton Copley* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016) says in note 108 from Chapter 8 that the "presumption that Copley engraved" the cartoon "has since been convincingly refuted." The image is not publicly available for reproduction, but a copy of it is held by the Library Company of Philadelphia and can be accessed on the slideshow on this website: http://www.librarycompany.org/collections/prints/40th/section2.htm.

Act), and, of course, Andrew Oliver. Local miscreants whose crimes were not clear threats to liberty were never hanged in effigy or humiliated beneath the Liberty Tree. The protestors who gathered at the Liberty Tree in 1765 also explicitly avoided questioning the king or making overly general statements that might be seen as separatist or disloyal.[15]

To support claims that the actions at the Liberty Tree were both legal and justifiable, protestors incorporated legal procedures and local officials into some of their activities. In December of 1765, Boston Whigs noticed that Andrew Oliver had not officially and publicly renounced his position as stamp distributor. As a result, he was subjected to what his brother, Peter, called the "tree ordeal," a ritual where Bostonians forced Oliver to resign his commission in public beneath the Liberty Tree. Boston's prominent Whigs first warned the stamp distributor that he would either resign his commission in public at the Liberty Tree, or they would hang another effigy of him from the iconic elm. Seemingly out of options, and fearing for the safety of his life and property, Andrew Oliver marched to the Liberty Tree on a cold, rainy December day and publicly resigned his commission. To make the affair seem legal, local justices of the peace participated in the event by standing beside Andrew Oliver as he swore to resign his commission. Oliver would note years later in a letter to his son that he found little official support on that December day because "the selectmen and a number of the Magistrates were assembled with the People" at the Liberty Tree.[16]

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[15] "Boston, August 19," *Boston Gazette Supplement*, August 19, 1765; "Boston, November 4.," *The Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, November 4, 1765; "Boston, November 4," *SUPPLEMENT to the Boston-Gazette*, November 4, 1765; Henry Bass to Samuel P Savage, 19 Dec. 1765; "Boston (Hanover Square) Dec 18, 1765," *The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, December 19, 1765; "Boston, (Hanover Square) Dec. 18, 1765," *Boston Gazette*, December 23, 1765.

[16] Peter Oliver, *Peter Oliver's Origin & Progress of the American Rebellion: A Tory View*, Huntington Library Publications (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1961), 54; Andrew Oliver to His Son, January 18, 1769, Hutchinson-Oliver Papers Box 1, Massachusetts Historical Society; "Boston, December 16," *Boston Gazette*, December 16, 1765; "Boston, (Hanover Square) Dec. 18, 1765," *Boston Gazette*, December 23, 1765; Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 143–45.

In 1766 Boston's Whigs further justified their resistance to expanding state power by appealing to British history, again using the Liberty Tree as a conduit for their message. The resistance movement in Boston had become so popular that the Loyal Nine's membership exceeded their descriptive name. They began presenting themselves as "Sons of Liberty," and commissioned a second plaque that workers nailed to the Liberty Tree in February 1766. The new signage stated that "This Tree was planted in the Year 1646, and prun'd by Order of the SONS OF LIBERTY, February 14, 1766." 1646 may have been the tree's actual year of plantation, but whether it was or not, that year was also one many British subjects would recognize as the year Parliamentarians defeated Stuart Royalist forces to end the First English Civil War. Though the Parliamentarians and their leader Oliver Cromwell would become quite controversial during the subsequent years, 1646 was something of a high point in the English Civil Wars in the minds of British subjects who wished to illustrate the power of popular governance over a despotic monarch. Just as Charles I had insisted on his ability to lead England free from the opinions of Parliament, Massachusetts Whigs argued that the Parliament of 1765 made decisions without consulting elected colonial assemblies. This savvy use of history aligned the Liberty Tree and those who gathered beneath it with the supposedly loyal Parliamentarians of the First English Civil War who had worked to protect liberty from powerful tyrants.[17]

Boston's Liberty Tree, the first tree to bear such a name, was both an invention of the moment and a necessary accessory to protests that in most respects followed accepted norms. The needs of the moment required some slight alterations to the common modes of protest. The movement needed to move beyond targeting local individuals who threatened corporate rights

[17] "Boston, February 17," *The Boston Evening-Post*, February 17, 1766; "Boston, February 24," *Boston Evening Post*, February 24, 1766. Robert Tombs offers a succinct narrative of the complex English Civil Wars in Tombs, *The English and Their History*, 223–45.

and instead take aim at the state itself, all without straying too far from accepted social and legal practices. By creating the Liberty Tree, Bostonians identified a place where popular passions could be paired with an ascendant ideology of resistance and funneled into productive rejections of imperial threats to traditional liberties. In designating a tree that stood for liberty, Bostonians created a connection between ideas, place, and object that had not previously existed, thus altering the possibilities of protest in the years to come. Other colonies that were equally committed to challenging Parliament's threat to the status quo took notice.

A Multi-Local Tradition in the American Colonies

Norwich, CT. March 18, 1767.

One year had passed since King George III formally approved the repeal of the Stamp Act. Just outside Joseph Peck's tavern "a number of gentlemen in this Town assembled under LIBERTY TREE, to celebrate the Day that His MAJESTY went in his Royal Robes to the House of Peers" and "gave his Assent to the Repeal of the Stamp Act."[18]

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New York, New York. March 18th, 1767.

New Yorkers gathered in the Fields (the common name for the city's commons) and prepared to celebrate the first anniversary of the Stamp Act's repeal. The celebrations were probably a little rowdy, but left no lasting damage on either the participants or the site. The next morning, local passersby noticed, "the Mast erected on the Common inscribed to His Majesty, Mr. Pitt, and Liberty, on Occasion of the Repeal, was in the Night cut down." Given that the pole was, by definition, a temporary object the locals made quick work of procuring and raising a

[18] "Norwich, March 19, 1767," *Supplement to the Boston-Gazette*, March 30, 1767.

replacement. Having learned their lesson they added some protection to the pole: "Iron to a considerable Height above the Ground." The iron guard worked as another attempt to cut the pole down that evening proved unsuccessful. The British soldiers who were perpetrating the attacks decided that a more destructive means would be needed to fell the offensive object. On March 21st, they attempted to blow it up "by Gun-powder, by boaring [sic] a hole, and charging it with Powder." Luckily for the pole and probably for any soldiers in proximity to what essentially became a shrapnel bomb, that attempt also failed.

Having been aroused to the scheme and probably amazed at the lengths to which the soldiers would go to fell the pole, "a strong Watch was set by the Citizens, at an adjacent House" the day after the unsuccessful explosion. When a small band of redcoats showed up in the night, the nearby citizens standing watch ventured out to meet them. When pressed as to their intentions the soldiers at first bristled, but decided against a fight and meandered home. After the events of Sunday night, another band of soldiers passed by the area on Monday evening and fired muskets near and into a nearby tavern, probably the one that had housed the watch. This act aroused the attention of officers who did not want to skirmish with an edgy citizenry over a mere post. When the soldiers returned on Tuesday with a ladder in tow a British officer "stop'd and turn'd them back." The governing powers in the city ended the budding confrontation by taking "effectual Measures" to restrict the recalcitrant military men.[19]

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Charleston, South Carolina. October 1, 1768.

Charleston's mechanics, as people who worked in manual trades were known at the time, had become increasingly active in the city's politics during the 1760s. By the fall of 1768 they

[19] "New-York, March 30," *The New-York Mercury*, March 30, 1767.

wanted to ensure that their interests were represented in the colonial legislature and so they "assembled in order to fix upon six gentlemen to represent them in the ensuing assembly." With that accomplished they celebrated their work by heading to "a large white Oak Tree…which they consecrated by the name of LIBERTY TREE." They sang the Liberty Song, hung 45 lanterns on the tree, and made a number of toasts before parading back into town.[20]

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London, England. Sometime After 1774.

Thomas Hutchinson did not look fondly upon those who had sent him into exile. He had been forced to leave Boston for London in 1774 when the radical politics that consumed the city led to the end of his governorship and a backlash against anyone, like him, who rejected the new notions of liberty and freedom. Bitter about his poor luck, he continued to work on his *History of the Province of Massachusetts-Bay.* The third volume would cover the most difficult period of his life and one of the most tumultuous eras in Massachusetts's history. Many incidents from the era warranted inclusion, but one in particular seemed pertinent to his point about the misguided ideas that had contributed to his expulsion from the colony.

He wrote that in 1768 Harvard students had risen up against the faculty when the school's leaders tried to put an end to repeated chapel violations by students. The students designated an elm tree in Harvard Yard "Liberty Tree," called the faculty's actions "unconstitutional," and stoned some windows. The faculty expelled the student leaders, prompting further protests and a threat from the senior class to transfer to Yale. The faculty reinstated the expelled students, but

[20] Richard Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty: A Study of the Artisans, 1763-1789* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1959), 30–32; "Charlestown, South Carolina, Oct. 4," *The New-London Gazette*, November 11, 1768.

kept the strict chapel rules in place. This incident, Hutchinson alleged, was proof that "the spirit of liberty spread where it was not intended."[21]

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Colonists in other towns along the North American eastern seaboard learned about Boston's Liberty Tree and adopted similar symbolism to legitimate their own protests. During the Stamp Act crisis Boston had not been the only place where popular protests had broken out against the new tax. Residents of plenty of other towns hanged effigies, bullied stamp collectors, and engaged in street theater to voice opposition to the law, but Bostonians were the first to articulate the supposed aims of the city's crowd actions by dedicating a space and object to liberty. Other towns must have found the idea appealing since liberty trees became quite popular during the 1760s. Viewed in hindsight, the rapid dispersal of similarly named symbols seems to illuminate a growing sense of collective identity among American colonists. Yet each town that designated a liberty tree or raised a liberty pole developed a particular set of practices and rituals that reflected local grievances and local social realities. The growing popularity of liberty trees during the 1760s and 1770s shows that opposition to the Stamp Act was neither entirely local nor consciously proto-national, but was instead multi-local.[22]

New England towns were the first to adopt liberty trees during their protests against the Stamp Act. Protestors burned stamped paper at liberty trees in Plymouth and Newburyport,

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[21] Thomas Hutchinson, *The History of the Province of Massachusetts Bay: From 1749 to 1774* (London: J. Murray, 1828), 187–88. Young, *Liberty Tree*, 344–45.

[22] For what I believe to be the most accurate tally of liberty trees and poles see, Young, *Liberty Tree*, 347. The only change I would make to his list is that, contrary to his research, there appears to have been one liberty pole in New Castle County, Delaware by 1776: "[Advertisement]," *Dunlap's Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser*, April 15, 1776. The second part of Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis* describes various local protests against the Stamp Act. David Hackett Fischer suggests that local realities influenced anti-Stamp Act symbolism when he describes differences between Boston's Liberty Tree and New York's Liberty Pole in Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, 19–49.

Massachusetts in February 1766. South of Boston, a Newport, Rhode Island notable named William Reed deeded a buttonwood tree on the edge of town to local protestors in April, mandating that the tree remain a symbol of loyalty to the king and a place "set apart for the exposing to public Ignominy and Reproach all Offenders against the Liberties of their Country, and Abettors and Approvers of such as would enslave her." A month after that, John Adams recorded the planting of a new buttonwood in Quincy, Massachusetts, on May 4, 1766, noting in his diary that an inscription marked the tree as a tree of liberty.[23]

Parliament's repeal of the Stamp Act in 1766 inspired even more towns to create liberty trees and poles of their own to celebrate and commemorate the event. News of the Stamp Act's repeal arrived in North America on May 18, 1766, and seemed to justify the rituals of the preceding year and lend credence to the new connections between rhetoric, ritual, and object. In Boston, the news of repeal led to "the Sons of Liberty, repairing to the ever memorable TREE" where they "regailed [sic] themselves on the Occasion with firing Guns, drinking loyal Toasts, & other decent expressions of Joy." The celebration was another attempt to solidify recognition of the tree as a monument to the defense of British liberties. By tying the Liberty Tree to memories of impactful popular protests, the Sons of Liberty had created a meaningful place and object that could be deployed in the future to signify popular uprisings against apparently corrupt Parliamentary policies.[24]

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[23] Plymouth: "Plimouth, (In Massachusetts Province), Feb, 17," *Boston Gazette*, February 24, 1766; Newburyport: "[No Headline]," *The Boston-Gazette and Country Journal*, March 10, 1766; Newport: "[No Headline]," *The Newport Mercury*, April 21, 1766; For an examination of the connection between Newport's Liberty Tree and the city's "black election" rituals see, Andrews, "Creatures of Mimick and Imitation: The Liberty Tree, Black Elections, and the Politicization of African Ceremonial Space in Revolutionary Newport, Rhode Island"; Quincy: John Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, ed. L. H. Butterfield, vol. 1, The Adams Papers. Series I: Diaries (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1961), 311–12.

[24] "Great and Important News!," *The Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, May 19, 1766.

Inspired by the resistance campaign and cognizant of the effective symbolism deployed by New Englanders, New York Whigs raised a flagpole to serve as the centerpiece of their repeal celebration in "the Fields," as the city's commons were, commonly known. On May 21 revelers attached "a large Board" to the flagpole during the celebration that read "George 3rd, Pitt—and Liberty." The signage and the context for the celebration engendered a lasting connection between the pole and the liberties that American colonists had seemingly maintained. The pole did not come down after the celebration, but instead became the landmark that New Yorkers knew as the "Liberty Pole" during the Revolutionary era.[25]

Further down the coast, a boisterous Whig named Christopher Gadsden had been meeting with like-minded friends and a group of middling artisans to talk politics beneath an oak tree on the edge of the city since at least 1764. The nineteenth-century historian Joseph Johnson claimed that the small group renamed the tree "Liberty Tree" during a meeting held after word of the Stamp Act repeal arrived in 1766. Interestingly, however, the site did not and would not host a celebration of repeal. Johnson's source, George Flagg, who claimed to have been present at the meeting Gadsden called when word of repeal arrived, reported in 1820 that Gadsden had gathered his friends beneath the tree to demand they remain vigilant. Gadsden cited the Declaratory Act, which had arrived along with word of repeal and reasserted Parliament's claim to sovereignty by famously claiming a right to legislate for the colonies "in all cases whatsoever."[26]

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[25] John Montrésor, *The Montresor Journals*, ed. G. D. Scull, Collections of the New-York Historical Society, 1881, v. 14 (New York: Printed for the Society, 1882), 368.

[26] Joseph Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences, Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South Including Biographical Sketches, Incidents and Anecdotes* (Charleston: Walker & James, 1851), 27. For information on the Declaratory Act and its impact on the colonies see, Alan Taylor, *American Revolutions: A Continental History, 1750-1804* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016), 103–4; Robert Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 118–21, 148–49.

After the initial festivities in May of 1766, March 18 became the accepted day of celebration in the following years since that was the day that the king had officially endorsed repeal. Whigs throughout the colonies often deployed liberty trees and liberty poles as centerpieces for March 18 celebrations. As more towns dedicated trees to liberty after 1767, they evolved into emblems of righteous colonial resistance to misguided policies and spoke to the tenuous bonds that linked colonists up and down the North American eastern seaboard. However, Whigs developed different sets of rituals and practices that reflected disparities in the ways that residents of various places experienced perceived threats to liberty. In Boston, Newport, New York, and Charleston, for example, Whigs gave liberty trees different looks, placed them in different locations, and used them to appeal to different social groups as they attempted to mount the most effective local challenges to imperial impositions upon their liberties.[27]

Boston's Liberty Tree was clearly meant to attract crowds in order to illustrate the broad appeal of the movement to preserve liberty. It stood within a busy commercial zone next to the main thoroughfare connecting the Boston peninsula to the Massachusetts mainland. A constant stream of traders, farmers, merchants, and common travelers moving in and out of the city passed the large elm on a daily basis. The tree had also been a fairly prominent place in Boston's

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[27] Boston: "[No Headline]," *The Massachusetts Gazette. And BOSTON NEWS-LETTER*, March 18, 1767; "Boston, March 23," *The New-London Gazette*, March 27, 1767; John Rowe, *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution (New York: New York Times, 1969), 126, 156–57; Bernard, Gage, and Hood, *Letters to the Ministry, from Governor Bernard, General Gage, and Commodore Hood*, 17–18; "Boston, March 23, 1769," *Supplement to the Boston News-Letter*, March 23, 1769; "To the Sons & Friends of Liberty," *Boston Gazette*, August 6, 1770; Newport: "Newport, March 23.," *Newport Mercury*, March 23, 1767; "Newport, March 16," *Supplement to the Boston-Gazette*, March 30, 1767; Ezra Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1901), 6, 42, 95, 217–18, 357, 437; Providence: "Boston, March 19. Journal of Occurrences, Continued," *The New-York Journal or the General Advertiser*, April 27, 1769; New York: "New-York, March 26," *Suppliment to the Connecticut Courant*, March 30, 1767; "New-York, March 30." *The New York Mercury*, March 30, 1767; "New-York, March 26," *The New-York Gazette or the Weekly Post-Boy*, March 26, 1770; "[No Headline]," *The New-York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury*, March 26, 1770; Norwich, CT: "Norwich, March 19, 1767"; Charleston: "Charles-Town, March 23," *The South-Carolina Gazette*, March 23, 1769.

landscape prior to the Stamp Act riots since it had long been known as one of the "Great Trees."[28]

The Liberty Tree was intended to be a place where Bostonians could display strength in numbers, whether they were protesting or celebrating. On March 18, 1767 Bostonians engaged in a very public, seemingly unified celebration at the Liberty Tree when they awoke to see "that venerable Elm the TREE OF LIBERTY was ornamented with a Vail of Colors." By that evening the Liberty Tree was "adorned with 108 lanthorns, beautifully placed." The number 108 represented the repeal bill's margin of victory in Parliament. One newspaper claimed that these festivities "drew as great a Concourse of People in the Streets as scarce ever was seen." Anyone who read reports of this festival was meant to believe that the apparent unanimity of opinion flowed from a shared understanding of the Liberty Tree as a monument to the citizenry's successful popular defense of British constitutional liberties.[29]

Although Boston's Liberty Tree was meant to attract crowds and harness their potential, Whig leaders discovered—if they had not previously known—that they could not control the meanings that various groups and individuals derived from the symbol. Beginning in the fall of 1767, Whig leaders and some members of the Boston public articulated divergent interpretations

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[28] A number of advertisers from the South End identified their shops as being near or across from Liberty Tree between 1766 and 1775. These are just a few examples of those advertisements: John Haskins: "[Advertisement]," *The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, October 17, 1765; Philip Freeman, Jr.: "[Advertisement]," *Supplement to the Boston Post-Boy*, June 23, 1766; John Gore, Jr.: "[Advertisement]," *The Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, October 6, 1766; Oliver Greenleaf: "[Advertisement]," *Supplement to the Massachusetts Gazette*, October 16, 1766; Henry Christian Geyer: "[Advertisement]," *The Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, August 10, 1767; John Greenlaw: "[Advertisement]," *The Boston Evening-Post*, November 30, 1767; Thomas Chase: "[Advertisement]," *The Boston Chronicle*, November 14, 1768; David Sears: "[Advertisement]," *Supplement to the Massachusets-Gazette*, April 3, 1772; Alexander Ralston & Co.: "[Advertisement]," *Supplement to the Boston Evening-Post*, January 11, 1773; William Scott: "[Advertisement]," *The Massachusetts Spy Or, Thomas's Boston Journal*, February 23, 1773; Thomas Crafts, Jr.: "[Advertisement]," *The Boston Evening-Post*, December 5, 1774.

[29] "[No Headline]," *The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, March 18, 1767; "Boston, March 23," *The New-London Gazette*, March 27, 1767; Rowe, *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 126.

of the Liberty Tree. In August, news of the Townshend Duties arrived in Boston. These duties placed a new set of taxes on glass, lead, paint, paper, and tea imported from England while simultaneously increasing Parliamentary oversight of the notoriously porous American customs offices by stationing Parliament-appointed customs commissioners in Boston. Social and political divisions emerged in November when notices posted on the Liberty Tree suggested that the customs commissioners be subjected to the same sort of treatment meted out to Andrew Oliver the year prior. This time, however, the Whig lawyer James Otis described these notices as "a *dirty trick* of some *one* Person, doubtless an Enemy to our civil Rights" whose rash actions threatened to derail colonial resistance "at a Time when ALL depends upon our being *cool deliberate* and *firm*." Whether Otis was correct in blaming Parliamentary supporters or unwilling to concede that the call was a continuation of the street protests launched in 1765, he and his allies feared that further street theater might enflame tensions to the point that Parliament could label Bostonians as recalcitrant rebels rather than British patriots.[30]

The debate among members of the Boston Whig coalition over how to use and depict the Liberty Tree only increased in intensity over time. On March 18, 1768, the second anniversary of the Stamp Act's repeal, the day began with effigies of the customs commissioners swinging from the Liberty Tree. Leading Sons of Liberty, who had begun promoting tactics of economic boycott instead of street theater, disavowed the actions of their more radical neighbors by cutting down the effigies. This did not quell the desires of the city's more radical elements. A group said to be about 800 strong celebrated the repeal anniversary that evening by meeting at the Liberty Tree and along King Street before marching off to intimidate the Governor and Inspector

[30] "Boston, November 23," *Boston Gazette*, November 23, 1767; Pauline Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution: Colonial Radicals and the Development of American Opposition to Britain, 1765-1776* (New York: Knopf, 1972), 123; Dirk Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1765-1780*, Studies in Social Discontinuity (New York: Academic Press, 1977), 153–54.

General. Despite Whig leaders' efforts to preserve the Liberty Tree as a monument to a past victory, radical elements in Boston insisted that it reflected both a legacy of successful popular activism and, as the symbol of continued resistance, made it the center of their demonstrations.[31]

Competing interpretations of the Liberty Tree continued to develop throughout the 1770s as the tension between the tree as a commemorative icon and as a source of inspiration became more obvious throughout the city. Over time, the more moderate elements in Boston would move their celebrations, particularly the uniquely Bostonian fête of August 14, away from the Liberty Tree. In 1769 the town's "gentlemen" began with a celebration at the Liberty Tree before moving to the Liberty Tree Tavern in nearby Dorchester, where the group of 300 mostly middling men dined in private. In 1770 the Sons of Liberty did not hold an August 14 celebration at the Liberty Tree, but tickets to a celebration to be held outside the city could be had from Thomas Chase, who was a founding member of the Loyal Nine and still owned a distillery across the street. In contrast, the crowd continued to demand dissidents prostrate themselves at the Liberty Tree. However, with the Whig interest divided, targets like Inspector General John Williams and local consignees who refused to ship back tea during the tea crisis in 1773 avoided Andrew Oliver's fate.[32]

[31] For a summary of the Townshend Duties see, Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 156–61. For accounts of the events of March 18, 1768 see, Rowe, *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 156–57; Bernard, Gage, and Hood, *Letters to the Ministry, from Governor Bernard, General Gage, and Commodore Hood*, 17–18; "March Meeting. Papers of William Livingston; Letters of Mary Storer; Stamp Act Riot in Newport; Children's Story Books; Hancock's Sloop 'Liberty,'" *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Third Series, 55 (October 1, 1921): 269–70.

[32] For more on the class divides that appeared at and around Boston's Liberty Tree see, Alfred F. Young, "Ebenezer Mackintosh: Boston's Captain General of the Liberty Tree," in *Revolutionary Founders: Rebels, Radicals, and Reformers in the Making of the Nation*, ed. Gary B. Nash, Ray Raphael, and Alfred F. Young (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011), 15–33; Young, *Liberty Tree*. In 1769, articles in colonial newspapers asserted that "Gentlemen" celebrated the March 18 anniversary under Liberty Tree: "Boston, March 16," *The Connecticut Journal and New-Haven Post-Boy*, March 24, 1769; "Boston, March 19. Journal of Occurrences, Continued." *The New-York Journal or the General Advertiser*. By August "gentlemen" were again commanding the proceedings before absconding to Dorchester: "Boston, August 21," *Boston Gazette*, August 21, 1769; Adams, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, 1:341–42; "MHS Collections Online: 'An Alphabetical List of the Sons of Liberty

On the surface, Newport's Whigs created a symbol that exactly mimicked Boston's Liberty Tree. Newport's Sons of Liberty dedicated the town's Liberty Tree in 1766 when a local notable named William Reed bequeathed a suitable tree to the group. Reed asked that the tree serve as a "monument of the spirited and noble opposition made to the Stamp-Act" and "an emblem of *Public Liberty*." Like Boston's tree, Reed hoped that this one would be "set apart for exposing to public Ignominy and Reproach all Offenders against the Liberties of their Country," but would also host "all Rejoicings, on Account of the Rescue and Deliverance of Liberty from any Danger she may have been in, of being subverted and overthrown."[33]

Newport's Liberty Tree did indeed become a monument to the successful rejection of the Stamp Act. After repeal in 1766, Newport's citizens celebrated nearly every March 18 by decorating the city's Liberty Tree, ringing bells, and firing cannons. Dr. Ezra Stiles diligently recorded each year's celebration and did not fail to mention the Liberty Tree in his accounts of those festive days. Stiles's diary is, however, notably mum on the details of these celebrations. While Newport's citizens regularly celebrated the anniversary of the Stamp Act's repeal, Newport's Liberty Tree does not seem to have hosted the large crowds that gathered beneath Boston's Liberty Tree on March 18 and August 14 during the 1760s. Nevertheless, Newport's

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Who Din'd at Liberty Tree, Dorchester,'" accessed March 31, 2014, http://www.masshist.org/database/8; Rowe, *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 191. For the advertisement for tickets to the August 14, 1770 celebration outside Boston see, "To the Sons & Friends of Liberty," *Boston Gazette*, August 6, 1770. For information regarding the unsuccessful attempt to intimidate John Williams see, Bernard, Gage, and Hood, *Letters to the Ministry, from Governor Bernard, General Gage, and Commodore Hood*, 60–62; Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1765-1780*, 186. For the sources regarding the unsuccessful attempt to humiliate the tea consignees see, "Boston," *The Massachusetts Gazette and Boston News-Letter*, November 4, 1773; "Thursday, November 4. Boston," *The Massachusetts Spy Or, Thomas's Boston Journal*, November 4, 1773; Rowe, *Letters and Diary of John Rowe*, 252–54; Robert C. Winthrop et al., eds., "October Meeting, 1877. Tribute to Hon. George T. Davis; Letter of Mr. A. M. Harrison; Journal of Governor Hutchinson; Diary of Mr. Thomas Newell; Memoir of Dr. Appleton; Memoir of Governor Clifford," *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 15 (January 1, 1876): 343–44.

[33] "[No Headline]," April 21, 1766.

tree provided a constant visual reminder that Newport's citizens had successfully fought to preserve liberty in 1765 and 1766.[34]

Although the two trees were similar by design, Newport's tree differed from Boston's in its appearance, placement, and usage. Newport's tree was a buttonwood, more commonly known today as an American sycamore, not an elm like Boston's Liberty Tree. In addition, while Newport's tree was on the corner of well-travelled roads that led into and out of the city, the city's geography meant that the area would not have had quite as much foot traffic as the South End corner where Boston's Liberty Tree stood. The Newport tree was on the edge of town, occupied a space that was private enough that it needed to be donated by an individual, and was not surrounded by shops and offices that attracted people on a daily basis. The space was no doubt easier to control than Boston's tree, which partially accounts for the fact that celebrations at Newport's tree seem to have been less burdened with the social and ideological divisions that affected Boston's Liberty Tree.[35]

The most obvious difference in usage is the notable lack of tree ordeals and effigy hangings in Newport. Despite William Reed's stipulation that the tree be used to humiliate the city's Tories, no one seems to have been subjected to such treatment. If anyone did experience a tree ordeal in Newport, the news was not deemed important enough to warrant mention in the newspapers or in Reverend Ezra Stiles's diary. The closest anyone came to being subjected to such treatment was John Robinson, one of the customs commissioners tasked with enforcing the Townshend Acts. He was rumored to have entered the city in early September 1768. In response to the rumor, a crowd that one report estimated to be composed of a thousand or more people,

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[34] Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 6–7, 42, 97, 217–18.

[35] "[No Headline]," *The Newport* Mercury, April 21, 1766; "Newport, June 2.," *The Newport Mercury*, June 2, 1766; "Newport, March 23," *The Newport Mercury*, March 23, 1767; "Newport, March 16," *Supplement to the Boston-Gazette*, March 30, 1767; Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 6, 42, 95, 217–18, 357, 437.

gathered at the Liberty Tree before setting off to look for the commissioner. They never found him. His presence may have been nothing more than a rumor.[36]

While Whigs in Boston and Newport deployed their liberty trees to challenge Parliament's policies and intimidate local imperial officials tasked with implementing those policies, New York's Whigs used their Liberty Pole to confront British soldiers stationed in the city. This reflects the ways in which New York Whigs felt that the impositions of the British state on their city differed from the burden felt by their colleagues in New England. After the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763, Britain left a sizeable number of troops in the colonies. Most of them were stationed in New York. At the onset of the Stamp Act crisis, the confrontational and fiercely loyal New York Governor Cadwalader Colden had requested that General Thomas Gage's military force be moved from the New York frontier to New York City to thwart possible uprisings. When the soldiers arrived in the city in 1765, the already uneasy relationship between soldiers and the colony's populace became antagonistic. Large segments of New York's citizenry saw the army as a coercive force. For Bostonians the threat to liberty was administrative and distant until troops entered the city in 1768 to enforce the Townshend Acts. In New York the threat was the military and it was marching in plain sight beginning in 1765.

To make matters worse, a Quartering Act (or Billeting Act) enacted in March 1765 harmed New York more than any other colony given the increased military presence in the city. This law was different from the more famous version passed along with the Intolerable Acts in 1774, though for New Yorkers it was still rather intolerable. The 1765 law did not compel New Yorkers to house soldiers in private homes, but it did require the colony to pay for provisioning the troops who would be kept in barracks (of which there were too few), vacant buildings, and

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[36] "Boston, September 5," *The New-York Gazette and the Weekly Mercury*, September 12, 1768.

taverns. These demands only exacerbated the issues raised by direct taxation and led the New York colonial legislature to engage in some rather creative politics to avoid complying with the law. Their lack of compliance would eventually result in the New York Restraining Act, a piece of legislation bundled with the Townshend Duties in 1767 that threatened to suspend New York's colonial assembly until it complied with the Quartering Act. The threats did nothing to assuage New Yorkers' fears that the army was a coercive force maintained by a troublingly corrupt government for the purpose of forcing good British subjects to comply with deeply problematic laws.[37]

This situation structured New Yorkers' protests and symbolism. The city's Whigs, who also called themselves "Sons of Liberty," decided to erect a pole rather than mark a specific tree. The reasons for this are obvious given that the Sons of Liberty placed the pole in the Fields, just across from and in plain view of an abandoned building that served as one of the city's largest army barracks. The pole and the gatherings beneath it were clearly intended to agitate the soldiers. As a result, New York activists were probably expecting soldiers to attack the pole. A replaceable pole proved useful when, in August 1766, just four months after New Yorkers raised their Liberty Pole to celebrate the Stamp Act's repeal, the soldiers stationed in the barracks cut it down. This began an almost yearly ritual where soldiers would cut down the pole and instigate a fight with the Sons of Liberty. Once tempers cooled, the Sons of Liberty would defiantly raise a new pole in the same spot. Despite the colonists' addition of protective devices like iron rings to the pole, the soldiers found ever more innovative ways to fell the offensive post.[38]

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[37] For more on the Quartering Act and the general attitude toward soldiers in New York see, Joseph S. Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries: New York City and the Road to Independence, 1763-1776* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 57–58, 90–91, 108–9. Tiedemann also describes the repeated attempts to cut down the Liberty Pole on pp. 110-112 and 147-149.

[38] David Hackett Fischer explores the origins and uses of New York's Liberty Pole in Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, 37–49.

The yearly Liberty Pole felling eventually ended in bloodshed during the Battle of Golden Hill. In December 1769, Isaac Sears, John Lamb, and Alexander MacDougall—three Sons of Liberty who were not always the best of friends—heard rumors that the colony's assembly might fold under pressure and vote some provisions to the troops. The three men united to challenge the assembly. They called a meeting at the Liberty Pole and invited any interested party from the town to appear and "deliberate on Means to preserve your Liberties." Leading assemblymen were told to stay home. The 1,400 citizens who assembled voted to halt all payments to troops and formed a ten-person committee to communicate their views to the assembly.

Probably in response to this gathering, troops rang in the New Year by successfully destroying the Liberty Pole in January 1770. The next day, 3,000 people showed up at the vacant site. Newspaper articles claimed that the general mood among the spontaneous assembly reflected a belief that the military's "base Conduct is an incontestable Proof, that they are not only Enemies to the Peace and good Order of this City; but that they manifest a Temper, devoted to destroy the least Monument, raised to shew [sic] the laudable Spirit of Liberty that prevails among the Inhabitants." The crowd voted to remedy the situation by pulling down the barracks. Soldiers looking on responded to the vote by drawing swords and bayonets. The forces of order ultimately prevailed, though the combatants were ready for battle.[39]

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[39] Montrésor, *The Montresor Journals*, 382–84. On early confrontations between British troops and the New York Sons of Liberty see, "New-York, March 26," *Suppliment to the Connecticut Courant*, March 30, 1767; "New-York, March 30," *The New-York Mercury*, March 30, 1767. On the January incident see, "New-York January 22," *The New-York Gazette or The Weekly Post-Boy*, January 22, 1770; An Impartial Citizen, "New York, January 15th, 1770," *The New-York Gazette or the Weekly Post-Boy*, February 5, 1770; "New-York, January 31," *Supplement to the Boston-Gazette*, February 19, 1770. On the Battle of Golden Hill see, "Extract of a Letter from New-York, Dated Jan. 22," *The Pennsylvania Chronicle, and Universal Advertiser*, February 12, 1770; Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 199; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 145–49; Michael Rapport, *The Unruly City: Paris, London and New York in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), 20–23.

Events spun out of control when soldiers mounted a slander campaign against the Sons of Liberty in the days after the meeting. They published broadsides claiming that the Sons of Liberty were the true threat to order. The broadside said “those pretended S[on]s of L[ibert]y” were idiots who believed that “their freedom depended on a piece of wood.” When Sons of Liberty caught a small group of soldiers trying to post one of the broadsides in town on January 19, the Sons hauled two of the offending soldiers to the mayor’s office. Soldiers and townspeople converged on the mayor’s office and soon the standoff between soldiers, Sons of Liberty, and local activists became a street battle that left one colonist dead. The scuffle was subsequently dubbed the Battle of Golden Hill. In the wake of the violence, the city corporation denied the Sons of Liberty’s request to build a new pole in the Fields. Unmoved by the city’s rejection of their proposal, the group merely “purchased a Place for it near where the other stood, which is full as public as any of the Corporation Ground” and put up a new pole, still within sight of the barracks. To love liberty in New York was to oppose the military.[40]

The meetings leading up to the outbreak of hostilities in New York show that gatherings at New York’s Liberty Pole tended to be quite legalistic. Although the popular meetings at Liberty Tree in Boston included local justices of the peace during Oliver’s resignation in 1765, the demonstrations in New England had largely lacked any sort of direct democracy. In New York, as evidenced by the formal votes taken in December 1769, meetings led by the Sons of Liberty became in essence alternative assembly meetings that mimicked many of the formal proceedings one would expect to find during gatherings of official elected councils or

[40] Alexander McDougall, *To the Betrayed Inhabitants of the City and Colony of New-York* (New York: James Parker, 1769); A Son of Liberty, *Union, Activity and Freedom, or, Division, Suppineness and Slavery* (New York, 1769); “New-York January 22,” *The New-York Gazette or The Weekly Post-Boy,* January 22, 1770; *To the Sons of Liberty in This City.* (New York, 1770); An Impartial Citizen, “New York, January 15th, 1770,” *The New-York Gazette or the Weekly Post-Boy,* February 5, 1770; Tiedemann, *Reluctant Revolutionaries*, 143–44, 149; Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause*, 150–51, 156–57, 199; Benjamin L. Carp, *Rebels Rising: Cities and the American Revolution* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91.

congresses. In addition to the meeting called in 1769, Sons of Liberty called formal meetings to enforce the various colonial efforts to curb importation of British goods in the 1760s and 1770s. One particularly pertinent meeting took place in early April 1775. Notices posted around the city called interested members of the populace to the Liberty Pole where "they immediately proceeded to the choice of a chairman." The chairman, in this case Isaac Low, raised the issue of illegal sales of nails to British troops. The assembly listened as Low read out a statement detailing the problem and recommending steps to halt the sale of these critical goods to British troops. The popular assembly then voted on three proposals before adjourning the gathering. These structured gatherings comprised something of a parallel legislative system and illustrated the ability of New York's Sons of Liberty to impose some order on gatherings at Liberty Pole.[41]

Charleston's Liberty Tree took on yet another character, though it also hosted more formalized meetings that included votes from those in attendance. For one, it was one of the few oaks to be named a liberty tree. Second, it stood on private land. Third, it was on the very outskirts of the city. Finally, it was tied to the views and practices of a small group of mechanics. The leader of the mechanics who met at Liberty Tree was a merchant, assemblyman, and Seven Years' War veteran named Christopher Gadsden. Unlike the mass meetings at other liberty trees and liberty poles, meetings in Charleston tended to be very legalistic and they attracted much smaller crowds. The meetings at the tree first appeared in the public record in 1768 when mechanics paraded there after electing representatives to the colonial assembly, though a group of mechanics had been meeting beneath a tree to discuss politics since at least 1766.[42]

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[41] "To the Respectable Inhabitants of the City and County of New York," *The New-York Journal or the General Advertiser*, April 13, 1775.

[42] For the early history of Charleston's Liberty Tree see, Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences, Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South Including Biographical Sketches, Incidents and Anecdotes*, 27–29. For more on the mechanics and the intricacies of protest in Charleston see, Walsh, *Charleston's Sons of Liberty*; Pauline

After 1768, meetings at the Charleston Liberty Tree grew in size, but they remained small relative to the mass gatherings in northern cities. The largest meetings seem to have taken place in 1768 and 1769 when the North American colonies adopted a policy of non-importation of British goods to protest the Townshend Acts. The policy was always hard to enforce, but colonial Whigs in Charleston, Providence, New York, and other North American cities hosted meetings at liberty trees where they tried to enforce the policy by publicly identifying violators and voting on suitable measures to address the problem. In 1769 Christopher Gadsden led a particularly well-attended meeting at Charleston's tree that elected a committee to handle the extralegal business of the city. Yet just 268 people attended this announced, public meeting, far short of the reported thousands that coalesced around liberty trees in northern cities.[43]

The First Stirrings of American Liberty

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. January 10, 1776.

A new pamphlet from Robert Bell's print shop in Philadelphia began making the rounds. The anonymous author of *Common Sense* advanced what was then a rather uncommon argument: British politics was hopelessly corrupt. Even the king could not rise above the rot, so the colonies must strike out on their own. Part of his argument was that Americans were already on the path to independence, whether they knew it or not. To prove his point he explained how people transition from a state of nature to a civil society. Every society, he argued, needed "some form of government to supply the defect of moral virtue" and "some convenient tree will afford them a State-House, under the branches of which, the whole colony may assemble to deliberate

Maier, "The Charleston Mob and the Evolution of Popular Politics in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1765-1784," *Perspectives in American History* 4 (1970): 171–96.

[43] "Extract of a Letter from One of the Principle Merchants in South-Carolina, to His Friend in This Town, Dated July 24, 1769," *The Boston Post-Boy and Advertiser*, August 14, 1769.

on public matters. It is more probable that their first laws will have the title only of REGULATIONS, and be enforced by no other penalty than public disesteem." Any American who read those words in 1776 knew that they and many like them had been meeting under trees and deliberating on public matters for nearly ten years.[44]

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The lack of ritual homogeneity among American colonists indicates that liberty trees and liberty poles reflected various local circumstances and traditions, but the symbols' ubiquity from Massachusetts to Georgia after 1765 allowed some colonists to imagine the boundaries of a new nation. Over the course of the 1760s as more cities and towns adopted the symbolic trees to structure their local protests, colonists read about liberty trees in locations all along the eastern seaboard, which provided them with a sense that people who had once seemed different and distant were, in fact, troubled by the same things. A couple of colonial political thinkers saw in liberty trees the first stirrings of an intercolonial American identity. These writers built origin stories that suggested that the residents of the thirteen colonies from Massachusetts to Georgia had more in common with each other than with their fellow Britons in the home islands, Quebec, and the Caribbean. In John Dickinson's "Liberty Song" and Silas Downer's speech dedicating the liberty tree in Providence, Rhode Island, liberty trees became emblems of something new: American liberty.[45]

During the 1760s, some colonists associated liberty trees and liberty poles with the English Whig firebrand John Wilkes whose biting, clever publications portrayed the British ministry as a body full of cynical, corrupt individuals. In the forty-fifth issue of his newspaper

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[44] Thomas Paine, "Common Sense (1776)," in *Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Michael McDonnell and Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1987), 67–68.

[45] Young, *Liberty Tree*, 365–66.

The North Briton, published in April 1763, Wilkes openly criticized the king, which resulted in his arrest and prosecution for libel. Wilkes defended himself by appealing to freedom of speech, leading to an extended movement where the number 45 came to stand for freedom of expression and the civil duty to defend liberty against corrupt power throughout the British Empire.[46]

Wilkes became a hero to Britons who felt that their nation's governing institutions threatened important personal liberties. When American colonists began to feel oppressed by the same government that had tried to silence Wilkes, some began to align their symbols of liberty with Wilkes. In Boston, 45 lanterns hung from the Liberty Tree during the first Stamp Act repeal celebration. In 1768, Wilkes's reelection to Parliament motivated "a Number of the principal Gentlemen" in Norwich, Connecticut to decorate the town's liberty tree with a sign that read "No. 45. WILKES and LIBERTY." In Charleston that same year, during the mechanics' meeting on October 4 where they officially consecrated the Liberty Tree, the mechanics hung 45 lanterns from the tree to pay tribute to Wilkes' defense of British liberties.[47]

The shared reverence for Wilkes spoke to a developing sense of American colonial cooperation. Though Wilkes was an appealing figure for early protestors, a new concept of liberty flowing from American provincialism began taking hold in the late 1760s. Early purveyors of this nascent view incorporated liberty trees into a new founding myth that cast Americans as a people with a shared past. One of the first colonists to align liberty trees with an American origin myth was John Dickinson, a wealthy lawyer and politician from Pennsylvania who had been studying constitutional issues since before the Stamp Act. In July 1768, the *Boston*

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[46] For more on Wilkes and the movement he inspired see, Tombs, *The English and Their History*; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 112. For Wilkes's impact on colonial politics and thought see, Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 110–14.

[47] "Boston, May 26," *Boston Gazette*, May 26, 1766; "Boston, June 20," *Boston Gazette*, June 20, 1768; Maier, *From Resistance to Revolution*, 170; Young, *Liberty Tree*, 330.

Gazette printed Dickinson's "Liberty Song." It was subsequently reprinted in papers across the colonies. The song said that American forefathers "To climates unknown did courageously steer;/ Thro' oceans to deserts for Freedom they came,/ and dying, bequeth'd us their freedom and fame." They found freedom on America's shores and marked it with a tree: "The tree their own hands had to Liberty rear'd;/ They lived to behold growing stronger and revered;/ With transport they cried, 'Now our wishes we gain,/ For our children shall gather the fruits of our pain.'" In other words, liberty was the birthright of all American colonists; their forefathers had sought, found, and bequeathed it to their descendants.[48]

Silas Downer, a largely forgotten lawyer and Son of Liberty from Providence, Rhode Island, further emphasized the connection between liberty trees and an exceptional American history. Downer engaged in what appears to have been a singular event when he dedicated Providence's Liberty Tree with a speech from a platform built up in the elm's branches on July 25, 1768. Downer developed the ideas in Dickinson's song by similarly aligning American liberty with American forbears. "Our fathers fought and found freedom in the wilderness," he claimed, "they clothed themselves with the skins of wild beasts, and lodged under trees and among bushes; but in that state they were happy because they were free." Downer returned to the point to finish his speech: "May all our councils and deliberations under [the Tree of Liberty's] venerable branches be guided by wisdom, and directed to the support and maintenance of that liberty, which our renowned fathers sought out and found under trees and in the wilderness." For Downer, liberty was found not in the British constitution, but in nature. It was reflected not in the

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[48] John Dickinson, *The Writings of John Dickinson Vol. I. Political Writings, 1764-1774*, Memoirs of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, vol. xiv (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1895), 421–25; John Dickinson, "A Song. Now Much in Vogue in North America. To the Tune of HEARTS OF OAK, &c.," *Boston Gazette*, July 18, 1768. Also see, Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 76–81.

political balance preserved by the British constitution, but in the experiences of American forbears.[49]

Shared symbolism and a common origin myth allowed Americans to conceive of the people of the thirteen colonies as different from other British subjects. New sets of laws aimed at those thirteen colonies above all others only confirmed this growing belief. In June 1772, the unpopular governor of Massachusetts, Thomas Hutchinson, declared that he and judges of the Superior Court would no longer receive their salaries from the colony's assembly. The king would pay their salaries directly with money from customs revenues. This increase in executive power put Samuel Adams and other politically astute Bostonians on alert, as it seemed to be yet another attempt to subvert colonial liberties. The colony's elected representatives would have no bargaining power with the governor. In response to Hutchinson's declaration, the Boston town meeting created a committee of correspondence charged with communicating perceived violations of colonial rights to other towns. When Samuel Adams drafted a letter on November 20, 1772, he expressed a belief that colonial liberties came from the sacrifices of American forbears: "The Iron hand of oppression is dayly tearing the choicest Fruit from the fair Tree of Liberty, planted by our worthy Predecessors, at the expence of their treasure, & abundantly water'd with their blood."[50]

While physical liberty trees in America remained rooted in to their localities in the 1770s as the imperial crisis escalated, the rhetoric of American liberty made the liberty tree symbolic

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[49] My research has turned up no other instances of formal liberty tree dedications in the American colonies being celebrated with a speech besides Silas Downer, *Discourse Delivered in Providence in the Colony of Rhode Island, on the 25th Day of July, 1768, at the Dedication of the Tree of Liberty, from the Summer House in the Tree* (Providence: J. Waterman, 1768). For more on Silas Downer see, Carl Bridenbaugh and Silas Downer, *Silas Downer, Forgotten Patriot: His Life and Writings* (Providence: Rhode Island Bicentennial Foundation, 1974).

[50] Samuel Adams, *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, vol. 2 (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), 372–372. Morgan, *The Stamp Act Crisis*, 54–56.

tradition appear more uniform and more American. The notions first advanced by Dickinson and Downer probably seemed more valid to American Whigs each time British and Tory writers disparaged American liberty trees and rejected American movements and symbols. When Tories joined soldiers in vandalizing liberty trees around the colonies they only solidified the distinction between American and British conceptions of liberty. Indeed, as American Whig arguments about the fundamental rights of Englishmen apparently fell on deaf ears in Parliament, American Whigs increasingly believed that liberty trees and liberty poles were icons of an enlightened people at odds with a hopelessly corrupt empire.[51]

By 1775 liberty trees had matured into emblems of American separatism. When war erupted in Massachusetts, British soldiers thus targeted liberty trees and poles as symbols of an American ideological and political position. Upon entering Concord, Massachusetts on April 19, British officers restricted looting to avoid upsetting the citizenry, but allowed their men to cut down the town's liberty pole. After Massachusetts militiamen chased the redcoats back to Boston, one British soldier wrote at the end of April to his parents with an air of pride that British troops "vex the Americans very much, by cutting down their *Liberty Pole* and Alarm Posts." In August, the loyalist Job Williams and a cadre of British soldiers besieged in Boston marched over to the Liberty Tree and sawed it down in order to show their rejection of the American cause that the Liberty Tree had come to symbolize. Liberty trees had become symbols of a separate American nation and the *Connecticut Courant* laid bare that fact when it reported that "the GRAND AMERICAN TREE OF LIBERTY, planted in the Center of the United Colonies of North-America, now flourishes with unrivalled, increasing Beauty, and bids fair, in a

[51] Hoerder, *Crowd Action in Revolutionary Massachusetts, 1765-1780*, 348.

short Time, to afford under its wide spreading Branches, a safe and happy Retreat for all the Sons of Liberty, how-ever numerous and dispersed."[52]

A new song that appeared in colonial newspapers in August 1775 propagated the notion that liberty trees and liberty poles symbolized a supposedly unified American position. It was called "Liberty Tree" and told of the Goddess of Liberty descending from the sky with "a fair budding branch from the gardens above." She planted the branch in the ground and called it "Liberty Tree." When the first free people arrived on America's shore they turned the maturing tree into a temple. In 1775, that liberty planted by a goddess and worshipped by the first American colonists was under threat and needed to be defended:

> Kings, Commons, and Lords, are uniting amain
> To cut down this guardian of ours.
> From the East to the West blow the trumpet to arms,
> Thro' the land let the sound of it flee:
> Let the far and the near all unite with a cheer,
> In defence of our Liberty Tree.

Here was a synthesis of all the various notions of liberty and conceptions of liberty trees that had proliferated throughout the American colonies since 1765. Liberty in this argument was bestowed not by a constitution, but by a goddess. Liberty had been planted on American shores and discovered by America's forbears. Reverence for it had passed to the author's contemporaries who, he argued, must unite to defend American liberty and the trees that represented it from "King, Commons, and Lords." The author of this new song was a little

[52] For an account of Concord's Liberty Pole see, David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 205–8. The quote from the British soldier can be found in, Stiles, *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, 561–62. For reports on the felling of Boston's Liberty Tree see, "Cambridge, September 7," *The Essex Journal or New-Hampshire Packet*, September 8, 1775; "Cambridge, August 31," *The Connecticut Courant and Hartford Weekly Intelligencer*, September 4, 1775.

known Philadelphia resident named Thomas Paine. No wonder he included the tree as a statehouse in *Common Sense* the next year.[53]

When Congress declared independence in July 1776, American patriots read the Declaration of Independence beneath liberty trees and liberty poles in the South, where British troops had not yet cut them down. On August 5, Major Barnard Elliott read the document to an adoring crowd beneath Charleston's Liberty Tree in what was apparently the largest group ever assembled beneath the oak in Mr. Mazyck's pasture. A similar ceremony took place a few days later in Savannah, Georgia. A company of colonial grenadiers led a procession of citizens to the city's Liberty Pole, planted outside a local tavern just a year earlier, where a local official read the Declaration to a crowd whose applause was briefly drowned out by cannons discharged to mark the occasion.[54]

Conclusion

Boston's Liberty Tree maintains an understandably lofty position in both the historiography of the American Revolution and popular memory of the era's symbols. Yet the American liberty tree tradition was not built in Boston. Though the Boston tree provided a model for other colonies that used liberty trees to focus local grievances, each colony experienced the British threat to liberty differently and imbued their trees with different meanings. What Boston had created was a catchy name and a useful association between an object and an amorphous, but central concept in the British-American political imagination. All too often, however, the history

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[53] Thomas Paine, "Liberty Tree (1775)," in *Thomas Paine Reader*, ed. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1987), 63–64.

[54] Johnson, *Traditions and Reminiscences, Chiefly of the American Revolution in the South Including Biographical Sketches, Incidents and Anecdotes*, 35; "Savannah, (in Georgia) August 10," *The Connecticut Journal*, October 30, 1776.

of American liberty trees is told in such a way as to suggest that liberty trees illuminate a unity that was, in reality, largely absent from eighteenth-century British North America.

Even as liberty trees were integrated into origin myths that suggested Americans shared an exceptional past and even as the spread of liberty trees helped colonists mentally define the boundaries of a nascent confederation, depictions of the symbolic trees during the war displayed persistent localism among American soldiers and militiamen. Take, for example, the powder horn of the Massachusetts militiaman James Pike. Pike carved a scene into his powder horn that depicted a pine tree labeled "Liberty Tree." The Bucks of America, a unit of free black soldiers from Massachusetts who used liberty trees on their regimental flags and pins also chose a pine tree as a representation of liberty. Yet most liberty trees were shade trees, not pine trees. Pike and soldiers in the Bucks of America unit knew that nothing represented New England like white pines. In the late 1690s, white pines had become so important to English shipbuilders (they made excellent ship masts) that Parliament had tried to restrict the felling and sale of useful pines. New England loggers had simply ignored most of the restrictions and actively resisted any attempts to enforce regulations regarding the prized pines. American resistance to the central state's attempts to dictate policies regarding the cutting and selling of the trees had long been a source of pride for New Englanders who valued their distance from the crown and fiercely guarded their liberty to cut whichever trees they liked and use them however they saw fit. The depiction of the "New England Liberty Tree" as a white pine indicates that even in the midst of a war for national independence, liberty and the trees that represented it were still regionally specific in the minds of most Americans.[55]

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[55] Eric Rutkow, *American Canopy: Trees, Forests, and the Making of a Nation* (New York: Scribner, 2012), 25–33; Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, 17–19, 87–89; Young, *Liberty Tree*, 354–59.

In 1789 Americans were still coming to terms with the repercussions of their independence. They battled over how much power should be allotted to a central state. British soldiers and loyalists who had wanted to voice their disagreement with American ideology and practices during the war years had destroyed physical liberty trees and liberty poles and Americans rarely took the time to reconstruct poles or rededicate new trees after the war. Americans occasionally wrote about liberty trees and New Yorkers even raised a few liberty poles to celebrate independence, but they tended to conceive of the trees as commemorative icons that had little role to play in post-Revolutionary American political society. Across the Atlantic, however, a new revolution would alter the meaning of liberty trees throughout the Atlantic world. Unlike American colonists, French revolutionaries would incorporate liberty trees into a national civil religion. If Americans had shown that local traditions could be successfully exploited to promote confederation, the French would prove that liberty trees could function as potent national icons.[56]

[56] "New-York, 3d Dec. 1783," *The Independent New-York-Gazette*, December 6, 1783; "New-York. Dec. 13," *The Independent Gazette, or the New-York Journal Revived*, December 13, 1783; "Song for the Fourth of July," *The Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser*, July 13, 1784; "Castalian Fount. Original Poetry. Our Liberty Tree: A Federal Song," *The Massachusetts Centinel*, December 29, 1787.

CHAPTER 2

THE NATION'S TREE: LIBERTY TREES AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION FROM PÉRIGORD TO THE FESTIVAL OF THE SUPREME BEING

Paris, Seine, France. June 8, 1794.

The city buzzes with festivity. The National Convention has planned a celebration unlike any before. All the members of the Convention wear blue uniforms, with great plumes in their hats, and are wrapped in tricolor sashes. They parade through the streets of central Paris behind their leader, the president of the Convention, Maximilian Robespierre. The procession stops for a moment at the Tuileries Garden on the right bank of the Seine. Robespierre stands before a sizable crowd that includes his colleagues in the National Convention and speaks about the virtues and benefits of a new national religious cult that celebrates reason, follows the laws of nature, and worships an amorphous "Supreme Being" that maintains everything. When he finishes speaking Robespierre sets fire to an effigy of Atheism that burns away to reveal a statuette of Wisdom. The procession then sets out from the Tuileries, crosses the Seine, and makes for the Field of Reunion, or as most people know it today, the Champ de Mars.

As the procession approaches the usually flat Champ de Mars, all eyes turn toward the fifty-foot tall column supporting a statue of Hercules and an artificial mountain constructed next to the column that is surmounted by a tree. A red, floppy, conical cap crowns the tree while tricolor streamers fly from its branches (Figure 2.1). Hercules represents the people, the mountain is a physical embodiment of the Montagnards—the radical leftists who ruled the Convention—and the tree surmounted by a red, floppy cap, represents liberty.[1]

[1] This description of the Festival of the Supreme Being is taken from David Andress, *The Terror: The Merciless War for Freedom in Revolutionary France* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 307–10. For more on the symbols of Revolutionary France see, Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French*

Figure 2.1: *Vue de la montagne elevée au Champ de la Reunion: pour la fête qui y a été célebrée en l'honneur de l'Etre Suprême le decadi 20 prairial de l'an 2.me de la Republique française* (1794). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The placement of the liberty tree during the Festival of the Supreme Being is striking. During the American Revolution and the early years of the French Revolution, liberty trees had been sites for communal gatherings and local protests. Yet on June 8, 1794 the symbol was elevated above the populace and it was inextricably linked with the Montagnards who demanded cultural and ideological uniformity. The exhibition suggested that the Montagnards defined French liberty, defended it, and imposed it upon the people.

Revolution, Twentieth anniversary ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). There are quite a few images of the Festival of the Supreme Being. The one included here is, *Vue de la montagne elevée au Champ de la Reunion: pour la fête qui y a été célebrée en l'honneur de l'Etre Suprême le decadi 20 prairial de l'an 2.me de la Republique française*, 1794, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed March 27, 2017, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6950550v. Far-left Jacobin delegates to the National Convention were called "Montagnards" ("Montaineers") because they occupied the highest benches in the National Convention's meeting hall.

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Historians have long noted what French people who experienced the Revolution had always known: liberty trees were everywhere during the French Revolution. Given the symbols' ubiquity, rare is the work on the French Revolution that does not at least mention a liberty tree or two. However, few historians of the Revolution have studied liberty trees in particular. What little scholarship has focused on the trees shows that French *arbres de la liberté* evolved from peasant *mais*, or maypoles, symbolic posts that peasants had long used as centerpieces for community gatherings. Peasants in the southwestern French countryside used maypoles in 1790 to mark the culmination of their protests against feudal rents. Over time, French revolutionaries paired *mais* with Phrygian caps—symbols of freedom linked to the ancient Roman *pileus*, a conical cap that represented emancipation—and supplanted the bare posts with live trees to create *arbres de la liberté*.[2]

While historians have convincingly argued that liberty trees grew from emblems of community excitement into icons of the hegemonic Revolutionary state, the process of that evolution has yet to be studied. This chapter, therefore, builds on existing studies by examining the symbol's developmental trajectory from 1770, when the first references to *arbres de la liberté* appeared in French publications, until 1794, when the Jacobin Reign of Terror reached its apex. Existing studies of French liberty trees note state control over liberty trees increased markedly in 1792, but have said very little about how France's decision to go to war with

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[2] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 232–61; Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees." Erik Fechner built on Ozouf's insights by digging into the Archives parlementaires to examine the evolution of liberty trees from maypoles to symbols and metaphors from 1790-1794 in Erik Fechner, "L'arbre de La Liberté: Objet, Symbole, Signe Linguistique," *Mots* 15, no. octobre 1987 (1987): 23–42. For a history of liberty trees in the Yonne department see, Bernard Richard, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de l'Yonne sous la Révolution et l'Empire," *Bernard Richard, Historien*, accessed January 24, 2018, http://bernard-richard-histoire.com/2014/09/27/les-arbres-de-la-liberte-dans-le-departement-de-lyonne-sous-la-revolution-et-lempire/. For a history of liberty trees in the Moselle department see, Charles Hiégel, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de la Moselle," *Les Cahiers lorraines*, no. 4 (1999): 419–56.

neighboring monarchies in April 1792 impacted Revolutionary symbolism, particularly liberty trees. Yet France's decision to go to war led French revolutionaries to reassess the state's role in defining, propagating, and protecting Revolutionary symbolism.[3]

Liberty Trees, French Communities, and the Revolution, 1770-1792

Ferney, France. Sometime Between 1770 and 1774.

François-Marie Arouet found time to write regularly despite tending to the incessant needs of the lovely château he occupied in Ferney near France's eastern border with Switzerland. In the 1760s he had become particularly intent on using his writings to defend the rights of people oppressed by political and religious institutions in both his native France and throughout the Atlantic world. Between 1770 and 1774, writing as usual under his much more famous *nom de plume*, Voltaire composed and revised his longest work, *Questions sur l'encyclopédie,* a critical analysis of the dominant text of the day, *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*. In the seventh volume of *Questions* he turned his attention to a series of pseudo-histories published in Holland. Voltaire did not approve of inaccurate works of history but, he wrote, "this is, one says, a bad fruit from the excellent tree of liberty." If freedom of expression gave hacks the opportunity to deceive readers, then it also gave the educated and well-intentioned philosophers of the day the opportunity to set the record straight.[4]

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[3] For the ways in which liberty trees' meanings changed as Revolutionary political culture evolved see, Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 52–73, 105–26, 142–43. Mona Ozouf argues that liberty trees came to represent equality more than liberty, but says "the stages of [the transition] are extremely difficult to detect." Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 256–57.

[4] Voltaire, *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie.* vol 7, (Geneva: [Cramer], 1770), 82, accessed January 25, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

In the 1770s and 1780s, before anyone spoke of revolution, literate French people gained familiarity with the concept of a tree representing liberty by reading both popular texts and newspapers. In addition to Voltaire's deployment of the term in the early 1770s, French newspapers informed readers that Bostonians used an *arbre de la liberté* to challenge Parliamentary policy during the British imperial crisis. After the Treaty of Paris ended the American Revolution, the terminology remained in use as evidenced by the fact that the popular writer Louis-Sebastien Mercier used a liberty tree as a metaphor for liberal polities around the world in his 1784 work *Mon bonnet de nuit*. Whether they read the term in one of the popular banned or official publications of the era, or whether they heard stories of the famous trees that had inspired Americans to break from the British monarchy, many French people throughout the realm would have probably been at least passingly familiar with the idea that liberty could be represented by a tree.[5]

Furthermore, prints circulating throughout the Atlantic world during the American Revolution connected capped trees and poles with righteous American uprisings against the

[5] For examples of French newspapers reporting on American liberty trees see, "Angleterre. De Londres, le 2 Janvier," *Gazette du commerce*, January 8, 1774, accessed December 1, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; "De Londres, le 3 Juin 1774.," *Gazette de France*, June 20, 1774, accessed December 1, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For information on the press in Revolutionary France see, Jeremy D. Popkin, *Revolutionary News: The Press in France, 1789-1799*, Bicentennial Reflections on the French Revolution (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990). Would people in the provinces, and illiterate French people have heard the term "*arbre de la liberté*" before the Revolution? Maybe, though the evidence is quite circumstantial. Daniel Roche has shown that news and ideas circulated more widely in France during the late eighteenth-century than has been previously assumed. See, Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, Harvard Historical Studies 130 (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1998). Chapter 13 (pp. 420-448) is particularly relevant because it historicizes the notion of an expanding public sphere in France. Information on the change in reading habits and the distribution of news can be found on pp. 131-139, 237-241, 269-271, 23-285, 327-332. Louis-Sebastien Mercier deploys a metaphorical liberty tree in, *Mon bonnet de nuit*, vol. 2 (Neufchâtel: J. P. Heubach, 1784), 208, accessed March 3, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Works by Voltaire and Mercier were quite popular according to Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 73, and thus the terms they used would have been known throughout literate French society. J. David Harden examines links between French *arbres de la liberté* and liberty tree symbolism in the American colonies by focusing primarily on visual culture in Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees," 80–86. Ozouf assumes that terminology evolved along with the symbols and therefore she does not consider that the term *arbre de la liberté* predated both the first French liberty trees and the Revolution. Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 240.

British Empire. A 1776 engraving depicted America and Britain as female pugilists. Symbolic trees stand in each of the fighters' corners. The British tree is old and falling over while the youthful American tree stands tall and sports a liberty cap (Figure 2.2). The capped pole is featured in a 1778 engraving as well. An avenging angel, representing France, chases the British army out of Philadelphia while the liberated citizens dance gaily around a capped maypole (Figure 2.3). The cap featured in both images was clearly based on ancient Roman caps called *pilei* (singular: *pileus*) that signified freedom from slavery or bondage. Therefore, in these images capped trees and poles represent vitality, freshness, and liberation from oppression. The second figure also links the capped pole with communal joy while the striped flag paired with the pole directs the expression of happiness toward the American cause.[6]

[6] Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees," 73–89; Corbut, *Dedie aux generaux de l'armee de la Grande Bretagne par un zelateur de la liberte*, 1778, The European Political Print Collection, The American Antiquarian Society, accessed March 9, 2017, http://www.americanantiquarian.org/Inventories/Europeanprints/b2f1.htm; *The Female Combatants or Who Shall [Trimmed with Loss of Text]*, 1776, JCB Political Cartoons, John Carter Brown Library, accessed March 9, 2017, http://jcb.lunaimaging.com/luna/servlet/detail/JCBMAPS~2~2~347~100413:The-female-combatants-or-who-shall-. For information of Liberty Caps during the French Revolution see, Jennifer Harris, "The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans 1789-94," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14, no. 3 (1981): 283–312; Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 252. Mona Ozouf's claim that "the decoration was less essential to the liberty tree…than to the maypole, whose very bareness seemed to call for notices and emblems" stems from her assumption that maypoles were bare poles whereas liberty trees were usually live trees, but decorations were critical ways to connect liberty trees with the Revolution. Indeed the Phrygian cap was so central to the liberty tree that a document describing a planned festival in Arras in 1792 said that the liberty cap "must (*doit*) surmount the tree:" *Vivre libre ou Mourir: fête patriotique, plantation de l'arbre de la liberté par les citoyens français d'Arras* (Arras: Leducq, 1792), 7–8.

Figure 2.2: *The Female Combatants-Or Who Shall…* (1776). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Figure 2.3: Corbut, *Dedie aux generaux de l'armée de la Grande Bretagne par un zelateur de la liberte* (1778). Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society.

When the French Revolution began in 1789, French revolutionaries merged the concept of an *arbre de la liberté* with existing maypole rituals to create the French liberty tree tradition. This merging was neither immediate nor necessarily intentional, but it did make perfect sense. Maypole traditions, though ambiguous, provided a useful foundation for the French liberty tree tradition because the poles were emblems associated with the power of communities; they were common throughout the country; and they were, even in their barest forms, vertical pieces of wood that resembled trees. As maypole traditions melded with liberty tree traditions pioneered in America, the resulting symbols retained several important features of peasant maypoles, but none was more important than the connection between maypoles and the power of communities. Like maypoles, liberty trees, at least in their initial forms, derived their power from the overt displays of communal solidarity that accompanied their plantings. Throughout France, liberty tree

plantings were generally well attended and communities complained when administrators conducted plantings without community input.[7]

Yet key decorative distinctions between maypoles and liberty trees directed community support in different directions. Aesthetically, maypoles were rather spare until peasants decorated them with paint, streamers, farm implements, weathercocks, and caps. Some of these decorations carried political messages about the nature of labor or the grievances common to peasants with little hope of upward social mobility, but others were simply intended to spruce up the posts. In 1790, the peasants of southwestern France had directed their frustrations toward places and people associated with the feudal regime. Maypole decorations differed from commune but they either reflected local grievances against particular privileges or made the poles into memorials that reminded erstwhile insurgents of their victorious direct action movement.

Liberty trees were consistently decorated with Phrygian caps and the red, white, and blue of the French tricolor, invented in 1790. The most common decoration adorning French liberty trees was the Phrygian cap or *bonnet rouge*. Though the caps evolved from Roman *pileus,* red, floppy caps were inextricably linked with the French Revolution during the 1790s. After caps, tricolor streamers were the second most common decorative element on French liberty trees. The choice of tricolor streamers was both in keeping with the tradition of enlivening maypoles and an attempt to further connect the symbol with the French Revolution.

[7] Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 250–55. J. David Harden offers a slightly different interpretation of the relationship between maypoles and liberty trees. He argues that liberty trees followed a separate developmental trajectory than maypoles, which challenges Ozouf's argument that liberty trees were evolved maypoles. Harden does admit, however, that liberty trees did resemble maypoles, so "when the liberty tree was transplanted into a field of popular beliefs, it found a sustaining and meaningful niche." See, Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees," 72.

Bedecked as they were in Revolutionary symbolism, *arbres de la liberté* were certainly symbols that were opposed to the Old Regime, but they had not been used to inspire opposition to it in 1789. Although French liberty trees were similar to American liberty trees in that they similarly reflected communal opposition to a central power, the rapid fall of the old regime and the concurrent rise of a new sociopolitical order led French liberty trees down a different path than their American predecessors. When the king visited Paris on July 17, 1789, three days after the storming of the Bastille, sporting a tricolor cockade, he recognized the Revolution and signaled the official conclusion of the Old Regime. Therefore, France's early liberty trees, whether they were still called *mais* or whether they had been adopted as Revolutionary *arbres de la liberté*, signified victory over the Old Regime and acceptance of a new one.

Beginning in 1789 French artists deployed the image of jubilant people dancing around capped maypoles to illustrate communal support for the new order in France. On August 27, 1789, the National Constituent Assembly adopted the Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen and soon after the engravers Michel Picquenot and Claude Niquet used capped trees to illustrate France's transition from the old regime to a new era of liberty (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). While the liberty trees in both images lack the tricolor streamers that would become common to most liberty trees (the tricolor was not widely adopted as the color scheme of the Revolution until 1790), they both depicted joyful men and women celebrating the dawn of the new order by dancing around posts with Phrygian caps. The contrast between liberty trees and the old regime is particularly striking in Niquet's image, where a ruined landscape on the left side of the frame represents the monarchy and the liberty tree surrounded by dancers on the right signifies a

liberated France. Between the two contrasting images of the nation is a large tablet containing the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.[8]

Figure 2.4: Michel Picquenot, *Hom[m]age a la valeur Parisienne* (1789). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[8] Michel Picquenot, *Hom[m]Age a la valeur Parisienne*, 1789, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed March 10, 2017, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6948526d; Claude Niquet, *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen*, 1789, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed February 7, 2017, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69480488. For another example of a capped pole in an early Revolutionary print see, *Hommage a l'Assemblée nationale*, ca. 1789-1792, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed February 7, 2017, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b69481513.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 2.5: Claude Niquet, *Déclaration des droits de l'homme et du citoyen* (1789). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Beginning in 1790 French communities started using liberty trees to show their appreciation for the Revolution. Helen Maria Williams, an Englishwoman travelling through France that year, looked on as citizens in Montreuil gathered in the town square to construct a liberty tree. She recounted that the assembled mass decorated the tree in what had become the customary manner: "a flag, from which streamed the national colours was fastened to the highest branches" and it was "crowned with a bonnet rouge." As she watched, she noted that even the town's youngsters learned how to create liberty trees. "The little boys of the town anticipated the

ceremony by planting a young tree…this young tree had also a bonnet rouge, made of paper, and colours composed of the same materials."[9]

While Revolutionary reforms excited many French people, several reforms, particularly those targeting Catholicism, created disconnects between the Revolution and the populace. After the fall of the Old Regime in 1789, raising liberty trees signified communal acceptance of the Revolution, but the Revolutionary community was not open to all. Royalists, of course, were excluded from the Revolutionary community. In addition, when the National Assembly passed the Civil Constitution of the Clergy on July 12, 1790, conservative Catholics grew hostile to the Revolution. The law dissolved all monastic orders, realigned dioceses, made all members of the French clergy state employees, and made bishops and priests stand for election. The Civil Constitution split the clergy between those who agreed to take their salaries from the Revolutionary government and those who refused to prostrate themselves to any authority other than God and the Pope. In March 1791, Pope Pius VI threatened to excommunicate priests who took the Civil Oath of the Clergy mandated by the Civil Constitution.[10]

Since liberty trees represented the Revolution, Catholics who rejected the state's attempt to direct the nation's religious life—many of whom were concentrated in Brittany and the Vendée—rejected liberty trees. Those who supported the orders dissolved by the Civil Constitution similarly lashed out at the Revolution. In 1791, an anonymous pamphleteer assailed revolutionaries who arrested nuns from the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul (*Filles de la charité*) order. He criticized the increasingly uncontrollable populace that "gathered around

[9] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Written in France in the Summer 1790, to a Friend in England; Containing, Various Anecdotes Relative to the French Revolution; and Memoirs of Mons. and Madame Du F----* (London, 1790), 235–36, accessed April 12, 2014, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

[10] For a quick primer on both the Civil Constitution of the Clergy and Civil Oath of the Clergy see, Paul R. Hanson, *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution*, Historical Dictionaries of War, Revolution, and Civil Unrest, no. 27 (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004) 67-69.

the trees ornamented with tricolor ribbons, surmounted with the red bonnet of liberty, and bearing these inscriptions: *live free or die, the constitution or death*" and argued that the nuns had committed no crime by refusing to blindly follow public opinion. "They do not wish to taste the fruit of the tree of liberty, still less of that of equality," he said, "because they know that liberty which does not rest in the shadow of the laws is unjust, and that true equality is found only in heaven or in our temples, which are the image of it."[11]

As liberty trees in France came to represent the Revolutionary state, they also became contested emblems. While the emergence of liberty trees as symbols of the Revolution and their dissemination throughout the country seemed to suggest widespread support for the Revolution, in reality the Revolution's foundation was weaker than some revolutionaries hoped. Aristocrats and royalists who fled France during the opening stages of the Revolution (*émigrés*), assisted by neighboring monarchs and princes, plotted to overthrow the Revolution. Within France, conservative Catholics who felt increasing state pressure to abandon their beliefs and swear allegiance to the Revolution pushed back against the impositions of the state. As counterrevolutionary forces increased in number and strength, revolutionaries grew concerned by the mounting threat. During the summer of 1791, revolutionaries had to begin facing the forces of dissent both inside and outside France. They used symbols of the Revolution, liberty trees in particular, both to stoke patriotic pride throughout the nation and to gauge support among French communities and foreign peoples for a revolution that considered its values to be universal.[12]

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[11] *Aux filles de la charité, la patrie reconnoissante* (Paris: Crapart, [1791?]), pp. 3-4, 7-8, accessed March 2, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[12] Peter McPhee, *Liberty or Death: The French Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 98–101; William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 130; Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 59–60; Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 247–60.

Liberty Trees and the "Crusade for Universal Liberty," 1792-1793

Metz, Moselle, France. May 20, 1792.

High above the city "la Mutte" issued its thundering call. The venerable bell atop the cathedral that dominates Metz to this day rang at precisely noon, summoning military and administrative officials to a special mass intended to begin this celebratory day on a high note. Upon emerging from the cathedral an hour later, the city's administrative and military elite walked across the Place d'Armes to the town house. They were informed that the town's citizens had gone into the woods to fetch a tree that would be the object of the day's festivities. Seeing no reason to sit around for several hours, the assembly adjourned until later in the afternoon.

At three o'clock, music and shouting reverberated through the city's streets. The citizenry had returned with a suitable tree and now called upon the entire town to assemble at the Place d'Armes. As the procession wound through the streets toward the central square that stood between the centers of civic and religious life, some of the National Guardsmen escorting the tree were burdened by a platform surmounted by a citizen holding a tricolor flag in one hand and a pike with a liberty cap atop it in the other. The column entered the Place d'Armes and immediately descended into a debate. The subject: Where in the square should the tree be planted? Municipal officials decreed it would stand in the center of the square. High-ranking military and administrative officials entered the square to universal applause and cries of "Vive la Nation, Vive la Liberté!" After all the relevant parties arrived, citizens clamored over and around one another for the chance to participate in the raising of the town's new liberty tree. As soon as the tree stood tall, the gathering erupted once more into a cacophonous celebratory racket.

The assistant *procureur* managed to bring the crowd to order before delivering a speech about the new liberty tree and the love for the nation that existed in the hearts of all assembled. "Soon," he hollered, "its branches hovering over all will teach everyone that the French are free, that the French are equal, and that the crown of tyrants must be humbled before the sacred Bonnet that covers a powerful and bellicose nation!"[13]

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Schengen, Luxembourg. Fall 1792.

Johann Wolfgang Goethe did not care much for the intricacies of war, but he had nonetheless held a few positions in the administration of Carl August, Duke of Saxe-Weimar that required him to take at least a passing interest in military matters. In the summer and fall of 1792 he accompanied his patron on the campaign against the French. He watched as German forces wilted in the face of a desperate French offensive at Valmy in September 1792 and accompanied the forces of the First Coalition as they retreated from French territory. The philosopher and writer had always held conflicted views of the Revolution and the ensuing conflicts, but he had followed his patron to war as the campaign's official historian and in the process came to understand that whatever its merits or faults, the French Revolution was a monumental event.

Sitting in Schengen, Luxembourg where an invisible border separated the French Republic from Luxembourg and the many polities of the Holy Roman Empire, Goethe crafted a watercolor that depicted a liberty pole crowned by a Phrygian cap, decorated by tricolor streamers, and bearing an inscription: "PASSANS CETTE TERRE EST LIBRE" (Passersby, this land is free) amidst the rolling hills and vineyards of Schengen. Two men occupy the left side of

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[13] *Procès-verbal de la fête célébrée à Metz, lorsque l'arbre de la liberté y a été planté. Extrait du registre des délibérations du conseil général de la commune de la ville de Metz. Du 20 mai 1792* (Metz: Antoine et fils, 1792), 2.

the image. One points to the pole while the other reclines beneath it. What the two men discuss is left to the viewer's imagination.[14]

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By the summer of 1791 the Revolution was in trouble. The Constitution of 1791 created a constitutional monarchy, but when the king and queen tried to flee France in June 1791 the system became untenable. The Legislative Assembly tried to carry on, claiming that the king remained committed to the Revolution, though few believed the deputies. In order to survive the Revolution would have to become more republican and less dependent on the monarchy for authority. People needed to believe in the Revolution and they needed to see the strength and power of the French people. To that end, Jacques Pierre Brissot and several other deputies began agitating for a war. According to the Brissotins (also called "Girondins" or "the Gironde" after the French region many of the hawkish representatives hailed from) France had enemies in the monarchs who ruled surrounding nations. Those monarchs not only conspired to bring down the Revolution, but they also harbored hostile *émigrés*. Therefore, those monarchs had to be deposed by good French republicans. Such a conflict seemed an ideal method for bringing patriotic feelings to the surface and giving the French people purpose. As an added benefit, it would force the king to choose a side. Would he support the new French regime that severely limited his power, or would he throw his allegiances to his family members readying to attack France?

But what sort of war would it be? Perhaps the better question was what sort of war could it be? Surely it could not be a war aimed at territorial expansion. Monarchs and aristocrats had

[14] To view this image and an description of its creation see, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Liberty Pole (1792)," German History in Documents and Images, accessed September 13, 2016, http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image_s.cfm?image_id=2941. For an exploration of the Age of Revolution from a German perspective and for more on Goethe during the period of 1790-1793 see the first two chapters of Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age: Volume II: Revolution and Renunciation, 1790-1803*, vol. 2 (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1–170.

fought those sorts of wars for generations. The Brissotins promised that Revolutionary France would not dispense with the vow the National Assembly had made on May 22, 1790 to never fight a war for territorial gain. Instead, the war would have two aims. First, defend the Revolution from its enemies. Second, inspire peoples still living under monarchies to follow France's lead, throw off the chains of despotism, and found enlightened republics. The war would be "a new crusade," Brissot promised, one with "a far nobler, and holier object. It is a crusade for universal liberty." Such a crusade would need to use new symbols and Brissot knew just what symbol to use. "Our troops, invading the territory of tyrants from all corners," Brissot said, "will plant the liberty tree everywhere! France is going to surround itself with republics." Given the context, the liberty tree was quite valuable as a symbol of Brissot's new crusade. It was, after all, a symbol of popular revolution, not an emblem of national conquest. If neighboring peoples raised their own liberty trees or at least accepted those planted by French armies, they would confirm the universality of French Revolutionary principles and weaken the forces of despotism.[15]

As Brissot suggested, the war spurred a new round of liberty tree plantings. Yet liberty trees planted during the war years differed from the modified maypoles utilized by French communities prior to 1792. Before the declaration of war liberty trees had been planted by members of communities who wished to celebrate the downfall of the Old Regime and the onset of a new era of liberty. Local administrators did, at times, help direct liberty tree planting

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[15] For an overview of the events that put France on the war path in 1792 see, David Avrom Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007), 126–36. The quote about the crusade for liberty is on p. 115. Brissot's quote about planting the liberty tree everywhere is from, Armand Guy Kersaint, François-Xavier Lanthenas, and Jacques-Pierre Brissot, *De la Constitution et du gouvernement qui pourroient convenir à la République françoise. Par A. Guy Kersaint, depute à la convention nationale.—Des élections et du mode d'élire par listes épuratoires. Par Fr. Lanthenas, depute à la convention nationale.—A tous les républicains de France; sur la Société des Jacobins de Paris. Par J.-P. Brissot, depute à la convention nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie du Cercle Social, 1792), 75–76, accessed March 15, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

festivals, but the impact of administrators increased markedly after France decided to go to war. In support of the war effort, Revolutionary officials and administrators organized ritual planting ceremonies to stoke patriotic fervor, justify the war, and gauge support for the Revolution. In doing so they strengthened connections between liberty trees and the Revolutionary state. Officials used liberty trees as both pedagogical and epistemological objects. The trees could convey patriotic ideas to the masses and officials could, by observing or readings about the enthusiasm displayed at particular ceremonies, learn where the patriotic fire burned brightest and where it might need stoking.[16]

On April 20, 1792, France declared war on Austria. Prussia joined with Austria in June and the War of the First Coalition was underway. Initially the war went terribly for France. French armies struggled against the better trained armies led by many of Europe's most established commanders, some of whom were French *émigrés*. Beginning in May, revolutionaries planned public festivals to stimulate patriotism in an effort to turn the tide. Public expressions of patriotism encouraged the populace to defend the Revolution and displayed the power of the French nation in order to inspire other peoples to revolt. Since planting liberty trees, like planting maypoles, had been communal activities that illustrated local support for the Revolution, officials encouraged communities to plant liberty trees and then cited the wide diffusion of liberty trees to argue that allegiance to the state was widespread.

During one such festival, on May 13, 1792, Jean-Nicolas Laloy, assured his constituents that they would not be standing alone against the internal and external enemies who seemed to be gaining strength by the hour. While enemies worked to end the Revolution and roll back its gains, true French patriots would stand united against the machinations of the mal-intentioned.

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[16] Lynn Hunt and Mona Ozouf both detect this transition of liberty trees from popular icons to state symbols but neither links that shift in meaning to the war effort. Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution*, 59–60; Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 257.

He stood beneath a liberty tree while he boasted, "it is a great and magnificent sight to see, the entire nation raising everywhere into the air, with a pure and tranquil joy, the symbol of liberty and equality." Laloy went on to say that the trees and the festivals that accompanied their creations articulated the power and determination of the French people: "May these internal and external enemies learn that this national celebration is no longer a vain amusement; that these monuments erected on every surface of the Empire attest to the invariable will of the French people to stand by its strength and maintain by its consistency that which it conquered by courage."[17]

In 1794, when Abbé Henri Grégoire published the first history of liberty trees, *Essai historique et patriotique sur les arbres de la liberté*, he looked back fondly on the nation's response to the declaration of war and confirmed Laloy's rather rosy picture of the nation's patriotic spirit expressed in the widespread raising of liberty trees in May of 1792. "Among the French a patriotic sentiment always has the effect of an electric spark," he wrote, "it imparted a beneficial shock, especially in May 1792; at the time where our enemies redoubled their efforts, we saw in all the towns magnificent trees raise their majestic heads and challenge the tyrants." Grégoire argued that the adoption of liberty trees throughout France during the spring and

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[17] Jean-Nicolas Laloy, *Discours prononcé par Jean-Nicolas Laloy, maire de Chaumont, en attachant le bonnet de la liberté au sommet de l'arbre planté devant l'Hôtel-commun par les amis de la constitution de cette ville le 13 mai 1792* (Chaumont: Bouchard, 1792), 1–2. The liberty tree planting festival in Chaumont was by no means unique. Many towns raised their first liberty trees sometime between May and August, 1792. A few examples include, "Adresse à l'Assemblée nationale par le bataillon de S.-André-des-Arcs, lue le 19 juin 1792, l'an 4 de la liberté.," in *[Recueil des pièces relatives à la garde nationale pendant la Révolution]: [28 juin 1789-19 juillet 1793]* (N.p., 1792), accessed February 10, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Chanson pour la fête civique de la plantation de l'arbre de la liberté, dans la ville de Loches, le dimanche 24 juin 1792, l'an 4 de la liberté*, (N.p., 1792), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Procès-verbal de la fête civique qui a eu lieu relativement à l'inauguration de l'arbre de la liberté sur la place publique de la commune de Villers-Cotterêts, le 29 juin 1792*, (N.p.,1792); *Procès-verbal de la fête célébrée à Metz*. Bernard Richard and Charles Hiégel also show that peoples throughout both the Yonne and Moselle departments planted liberty trees during the period in question: Bernard Richard, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de l'Yonne sous la Révolution et l'Empire"; Charles Hiégel, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de la Moselle," 421–25.

summer of 1792 spoke to an equally pervasive allegiance to the Revolution. He claimed that in 1792 there were over 60,000 liberty trees in France.[18]

However, the patriotic sentiments expressed beneath liberty trees throughout the country during those challenging first months of the war had no discernible effect on the war effort. In June, as the war continued to trend downward, Brissotin ministers were ousted. Concern grew both in the centers of political power and in the streets that some French people were insufficiently patriotic and thus a threat to the nation. The king, whose loyalty to the Revolution had been questioned from the start, showed his true colors when he refused to endorse a measure that would bring twenty thousand provincial National Guard troops (called *fédérés*) to Paris to protect the capital. In response to the king's lack of action, the radical *sans-culottes* (common workers who were defined by their lack of breeches) demonstrated their power by invading the Tuileries on June 20. They forced the king to wear a Phrygian cap and sit quietly in a window well while they educated him about his problematic views and decisions. They demanded he support the Revolution, but the king repeatedly refused to acquiesce to requests that he rescind his vetoes on several progressive measures. The Jacobin Mayor of Paris, Jérôme Pétion de Villeneuve (generally just "Pétion") turned up conveniently late to reassure his majesty that the crowd only wished to plant a liberty tree.[19]

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[18] Henri Grégoire, *Essai historique et patriotique sur les arbres de la liberté* (Paris: F. Didot, 1793), 22–23, accessed April 14, 2014, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[19] For a summary of the fiascos and victories that defined the first phase of the Wars of the French Revolution see, Bell, *The First Total War*, 126–36; Charles J. Esdaile, *The French Wars, 1792-1815*, Lancaster Pamphlets (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 7–10; Owen Connelly, *The Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, 1792-1815*, Warfare and History (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 18–39; Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution*, 2003, 197–206. One of the better narrative accounts of the Revolution's radical turn in 1791 and 1792 comes from the early chapters of Andress, *The Terror*, 9–115. Andress describes the events of June 20, 1792 on pp. 74-76. American newspapers also reported on the events of June 20. See, for an example, "Alarming Riot in Paris," *The Essex Journal and New-Hampshire Packet*, September 12, 1792.

The war continued to go badly, so the Legislative Assembly issued a decree declaring the country to be in danger in July. With the war still spiraling downward for France, the *sans-culottes* again took matters into their own hands. They stormed the Tuileries palace on August 10 and this time they took the king into custody. The message was clear. Those who did not support the Revolution had to be removed if the country was to be saved. When Verdun fell on September 2, panic gripped Paris and spread to other French cities. Seeking to eradicate anyone who might be assisting or motivating the invaders, revolutionaries in Paris, Lyon, Rheims, Orléans, and elsewhere broke into prisons, hastily tried prisoners, and condemned to death those who seemed like a threat to the Revolution in a bloody episode known as the September Massacres.

The war turned around on September 20 when the French Army of the North under the command of Charles-François Dumouriez, assisted by the dysentery ravaging the Duke of Brunswick's Prussian forces, won a victory at Valmy and turned the invaders away from Paris. France declared a republic on September 22 while French forces in the East and South occupied Nice and the Rhineland. As French forces took control of surrounding areas they identified local supporters and did what Brissot had predicted, they planted liberty trees. Doing so was a way of justifying the war effort to both occupied peoples and French citizens. By planting liberty trees French forces claimed to be spreading the Revolution. This was the war of liberation Brissot had sought. By the eighth of October, news from Nice, which General Jacques Bernard Modeste Anselme ("Anselm" or "Anselme" for short) had occupied, reflected the notion that planting a liberty tree signaled both French power and Nice's supposed liberation. In typically ostentatious rhetoric, a report bragged that "the liberty tree is planted in the middle of Nice, and soon its

vivifying branches will shade a land which has been desiccated by the ravenous breath of despotism."[20]

After the rousing victory at Valmy, General Dumouriez crossed into Belgium ready to take command of the Austrian territory once and for all. He followed the rhetoric of Brissot and the example of commanders further south in deploying liberty tree symbolism to justify the invasion. Appealing to figurative liberty trees and raising physical ones perpetuated the narrative that Belgians welcomed the French as liberators. Upon entering Belgium, Dumouriez issued a proclamation that garnered attention on both sides of the Atlantic as Europeans and Americans considered their responses to French military actions. The French, Dumouriez said, had entered Belgium "in order to plant the liberty tree there without interfering with the constitution which you wish to adopt." Dumouriez was speaking of a metaphorical liberty tree in his proclamation, but he and his subordinates helped raise physical ones in short order. Liberty trees went up in Mons, Charleroi, and Lillo in November 1792 and in Liège in December.[21]

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[20] Anselm, "Letter from Gen. Anselm. September 29th, &c.," *American Apollo*, December 28, 1792; "Lettre des juges composant le tribunal civil et criminel de la ville et ci-devant comté de Nice, le 8 octobre, l'an 1er. de la République," *Gazette nationale de France*, October 24, 1792, accessed December 2, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[21] For Dumouriez's proclamation in French see, "France. Armée du Nord. Manifeste du général Dumouriez au peuple belgique," *Gazette nationale de France*, November 2, 1792, accessed December 2, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For Dumouriez's proclamation in English see, Charles François Dumouriez, "France. Paris, October 26. Proclamation, Addressed to the Belgick Nation, by General Dumourier," *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy or, The Worcester Gazette*, January 24, 1793. For the liberty tree raised in Charleroi see, Lespomarede, "Au quarter général à Charles-sur-Sambre, le 12 novembre 1792, l'an premier de la République," *Gazette nationale de France*, November 16, 1792, accessed December 2, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For the liberty tree planted in Mons see, "Mons, ville libre, 8 novembre," *Gazette nationale de France*, November 16, 1792, accessed December 2, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For the Lillo ceremony see, "De Lillo, le 22 novembre," *Gazette nationale de France*, December 3, 1792, accessed December 3, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For the liberty tree planted in Liège see, "De la Meuse, le 2 décembre," *Gazette nationale de France*, December 12, 1792, accessed December 3, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; "Liege, pays libre, 1er. décembre," *Gazette nationale de France*, December 8, 1792, accessed December 3, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For an analysis of French "ceremonies of possession" in the Americas see, Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492-1640* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 40–45.

Liberty tree planting festivals in Belgium intentionally mimicked French planting festivals and "ceremonies of possession," which the French had used for over two centuries to claim new territories. Dating back to the earliest European conquest of the Americas, French explorers, soldiers, and Catholic missionaries had used carefully staged ceremonies to legitimate conquest by implying popular support. Native peoples in the Americas were asked to participate in ritual processions and assist Catholic monks in planting crosses. During the French occupation of Belgium, French armies organized similar processions, but replaced crosses with liberty trees. French newspapers said that the ceremonial planting in Liège was noteworthy for the huge "concourse of people that appeared and by the joy that they exhibited." Such celebrations seemingly illustrated that the French crusade garnered what the *Gazette nationale de France* called the "acclamations of a numerous multitude." A similar ceremony took place in Lillo, just outside Antwerp, and reports from other parts of Belgium assured the French reading public that locals participated in the necessary rituals and reacted joyously to liberty tree plantings.[22]

In addition, some reports suggested that foreign peoples, inspired by the French Revolution and spurred to action by the success of France's citizen armies, were raising their own liberty trees even before French armies arrived. While French armies moved through the Rhineland, the *Gazette nationale de France* included an account of citizens in Cologne raising a liberty tree. They began dancing around its base in advance of the French arrival, only to have their celebration halted by a "scandalous magistrate." Nevertheless, the dancers would not be dissuaded. The report assured readers that Cologne's liberated citizenry would simply be patient as they awaited "French music." Similarly, the Jacobins printed a letter from "the oppressed Batavians to the French liberators," dated December 1792. The anonymous author claimed that

[22] These quotes are drawn from, "De la Meuse, le 2 décembre," *Gazette nationale de France*, December 12, 1792; "Liege, pays libre, 1er. décembre," *Gazette nationale de France*, December 8, 1792.

citizens in Groningen had raised a liberty tree, but a recalcitrant local official ordered the tree removed.[23]

Yet French sources alone do not convincingly resolve the question of reception. What did foreigners think of liberty trees? Did they accept French claims that liberty trees represented the spread of liberating revolutionary movements? French reports can be taken at face value in some instances, since liberals and radicals throughout Europe certainly appreciated French support. But French newspaper publishers and pamphleteers had a vested interest in portraying military successes as benevolent interventions because they felt compelled to justify the war effort both to Revolutionary politicians committed to upholding the National Assembly's pledge to avoid wars of conquest and to the French populace who would presumably be less willing to support wars for territorial expansion.

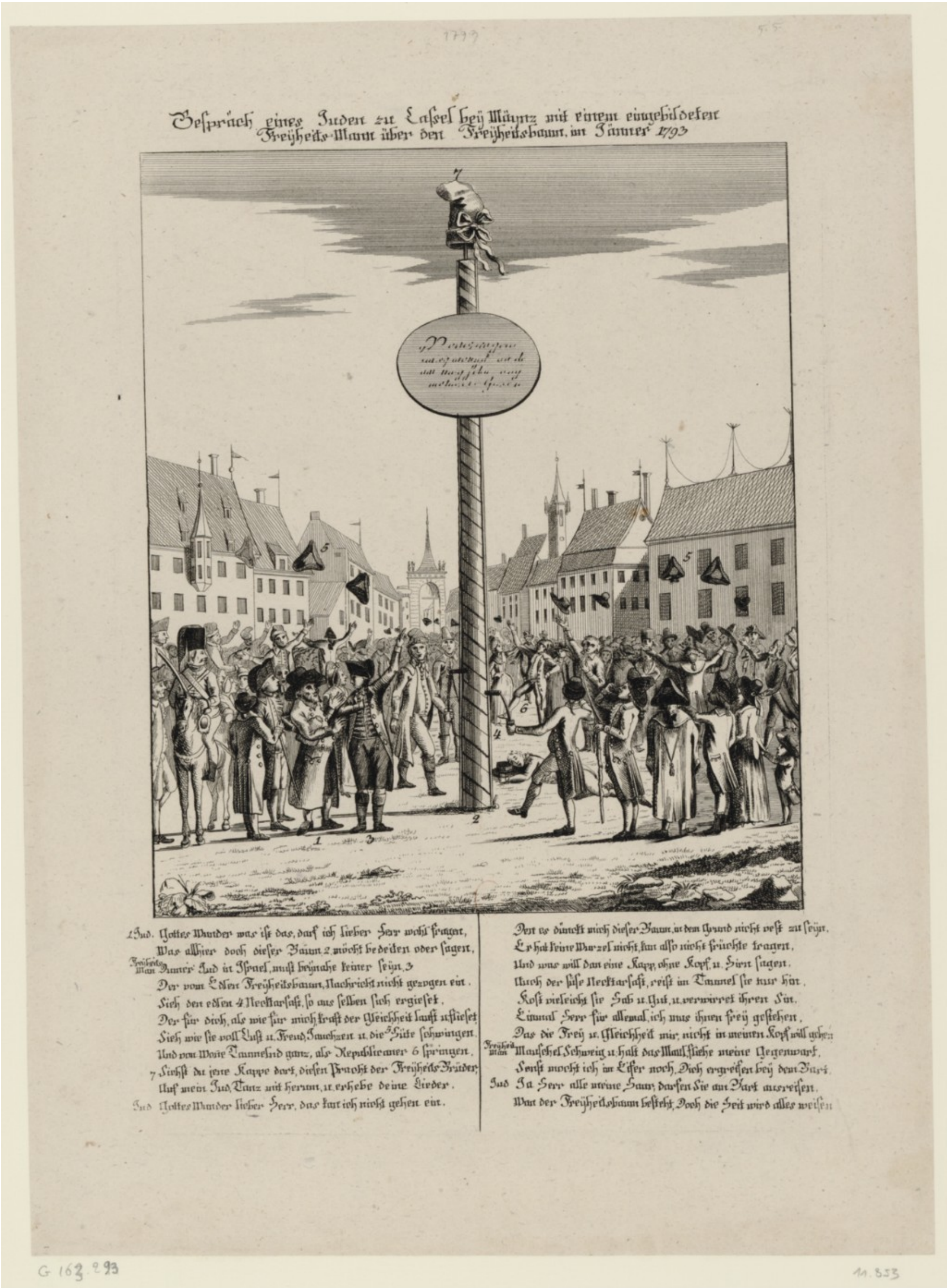
Sources from both the Rhineland and the United States indicate that the ritual raisings of standardized liberty trees upset some Europeans who saw the trees not as symbols of voluntary inclusion, but as standards of conquest raised by an invading power. Indeed the symbolism had been pioneered within France and was, thanks to the usual inclusion of tricolor streamers or flags, in effect a symbol of French nationalism. In addition to the French origins of liberty trees and French decorative scheme that defined them as decidedly French, the fact that French military forces often took charge of planting liberty trees in conquered lands signaled forcible integration, not voluntary incorporation. Despite efforts by French officials and sympathetic newspaper publishers to suggest that foreigners were demonstrating their support for the French Revolution by participating in liberty tree planting rituals, French propaganda became

[23] "Allemagne. Cologne, le 18 octobre," *Gazette nationale de France*, October 28, 1792, accessed December 2, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. *Société des Amis de la liberté et de l'égalité, séante aux ci-devant Jacobins Saint-Honoré à Paris. Les Bataves opprimés aux Français libérateurs. De la Hollande, décembre 1792. Anacharsis Cloots aux habitants des Bouches-Du-Rhin*, 1792, accessed January 1, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

increasingly ineffective when the war effort turned against the French once more and foreign peoples began showing hostility toward the symbols of French power in 1793.

In the Rhineland, liberty trees received responses that ranged from tepid to hostile. In Mainz, the populace remained quite loyal to the city's archbishop-elector, though there was a strong but tiny group of Jacobins around the city. The city also contained a rather sizeable Jewish population for the time. Jews were, some assumed, predisposed to support the Revolution since France had voted (after two years of heated debate) to "emancipate" Jewish peoples in French territory. Nevertheless, the civic ceremony held on January 13, 1793 received an apathetic response from the rather large assembly. Soon after, a satirical broadside depicted a conversation between a Jacobin "Freedom Man" and a Jewish man gazing at the town's liberty tree (Figure 2.6). In the print, the Jewish man wonders why so many people are celebrating around a post topped with a liberty cap. The republican explains that the post represents freedom for everyone, including Jews, and points to the people drinking nectar flowing from the pole. The Jewish man responds with skepticism, pointing out that the "tree" has no roots and is not alive enough to bear fruit. He wonders if this version of liberty is but a temporary fad. Insulted, the republican responds with a threat to shut the Jewish man up. In response, the Jewish man simply states that time will tell whether or not this liberty pole is a good idea.[24]

[24] *Besprãch eines Juden zu Cassel beÿ Mäynz mit einem eingebildeten Freÿheits Mann über den Freÿheitsbaum, im Jänner 1793,* 1793, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8412225g. Dr. David Ciarlo and my friend David Brennan provided this translation, but any errors of interpretation are mine alone. Also see, Jonathan Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 182–83, 319–21.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 2.6: *Bespräch eines Juden zu Cassel beÿ Mäynz mit einem eingebildeten Freÿheits Mann über den Freÿheitsbaum, im Jänner 1793* (1793). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

An undated image that includes writing in both French and German similarly suggests that the liberty trees were received as symbols of French Revolutionary orthodoxy and French domination (Figure 2.7). The text that accompanies the image of a liberty tree sporting the required Phrygian cap reads "Look stupid people!/ at this which dominates you—/ A tree without roots,/ a Bonnet without a head."[25]

Figure 2.7: *Schau, was beherrschet dich, Franzos, du dum[m]Er Tropf? der Baumhat Keine Wurze; die Kappe Keinen Kopf: Vois, peuple bête ! ce, qui te domine - Un arbre sans racine, Un Bonnet sans tête* (c. 1792-1795). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[25] *Schau, was beherrschet dich, Franzos, du dum[m]Er Tropf? der Baumhat Keine Wurze; die Kappe Keinen Kopf: Vois, peuple bête ! ce, qui te domine - Un arbre sans racine, Un Bonnet sans tête*, ca. 1792-1795, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6948854r.

Furthermore, when the wars turned against the French in 1793, liberty trees bore the brunt of the anti-French turn. French impositions combined with the execution of Louis XVI in January 1793 galvanized anti-French forces throughout Europe. In 1793, rebellions erupted in conquered territories. In addition, Britain, Holland, and Spain joined the coalition fighting the French Republic. The renewed offensive put the French on their heels and forced them out of foreign territories. When the French retreated from Belgium in 1793, American newspapers carried multiple reports of local Belgians hacking down liberty trees, indicating that popular support for the French presence was never as widespread as French newspapers and pamphlets suggested. Having never adopted the trees or the ideology tied to them, dissenters had no problem targeting the trees and casting them as emblems of an invasive state rather than symbols of a spreading revolution dedicated to the principles of universal liberty and international brotherhood.[26]

The decision to go to war turned out badly for all involved in the end. Blame for the early debacles did not help the king's cause as he had hoped, but instead contributed to his arrest in 1792 and eventual beheading in January 1793. The Gironde fell from power as the patriotic sentiment they hoped would bind and elevate the nation waned in the face of military setbacks and a growing sense that the violent foreign campaign would be interminable. Many Girondins met the same fate as the king they had worked to discredit. In the context of war the very nature of the French Revolution changed along with the symbols and rituals that had come to represent

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[26] "Huy, March 11," *Massachusetts Mercury*, May 1, 1793; "Extract of a Letter from Geneva, Dec. 30," *The Diary or Loudon's Register*, February 22, 1793; "Extract of a Letter from Mechlin, March 24," *The Diary or Loudon's Register*, May 20, 1793; "London, April 1," *Dunlap's American Daily Advertiser*, May 22, 1793; S. J. Lafontaine, *Proclamation des "Maire et officiers municipaux de la ville libre de Namur à leurs concitoyens" les invitant à assister à la plantation d'un arbre de la liberté sur la grand'place de la ville le jeudi 7 vers le 11 heures du matin et à illuminer à partir de 7 heures du soir*, (Namur: Hinne, 1793), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; "Brussels, July 31," *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser*, October 18, 1794.

a revolution that professed to bring liberty to the world. Liberty trees, once used by common French people to demonstrate their voluntary inclusion in the Revolution, became symbols of conquest and state power. Despite the efforts of patriotic politicians and generals, liberty trees failed to effectively elicit widespread popular acceptance of republican values in neighboring countries. Instead the stifling rituals and symbolic trees combined with the constant presence of French military forces illuminated a paradox at the heart of France's foreign wars: liberty imposed by force was not liberty at all.

Defending the Revolution: Liberty Trees and the Reign of Terror

Bannalec, Morbihan, France. October 31, 1793.

Pierre-Louis Prieur, the National Convention's representative on mission to the Morbihan department in Brittany, received notice from local administrators in Quimperlé that a liberty tree had been vandalized in Bannalec. At the time, Brittany was a hotbed for counterrevolution, so Prieur took the information seriously. He wrote back on October 31 to express his appreciation for having been notified of the transgression. Rather than intervene directly, he suggested that the concerned citizens summon representatives from the department's criminal tribunal, the court system tasked with adjudicating felonies. Prieur, an appointee of the National Convention, was hoping that the elected criminal tribunal justices and the juries impaneled to hear criminal cases would provide legitimacy to any proceedings against the vandals. Summoning members of the criminal tribunal to Bannalec was "essential in these circumstances," wrote Prieur, since "this attack must be promptly punished" to ensure that no one would "ever again place with impunity a sacrilegious hand on that revered symbol of our liberty."[27]

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[27] "Le Représentat du peuple aux administrateurs du district de quimperlé," Archives nationale de France (hereafter "A.N.") AF/II/126, Pièce 5. For an explanation of criminal procedures during the Revolution see, Isser

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The suspension of the king after August 10, 1792 invalidated the Constitution of 1791 and spurred the creation of the National Convention to construct a new republican constitution. On September 22 the National Convention abolished the monarchy and declared France a republic. Though news of the victory at Valmy excited the Convention's deputies, the new body met under a cloud of uncertainty. The need to protect the Revolution and build a new republic required popular support. Raising liberty trees en masse illuminated a nascent national consciousness, at least in the eyes of some revolutionaries, but that nationalism had to be harnessed if a kingless republic was going to succeed. They needed French people to be truly devoted to the Revolutionary nation. If the Revolution was going to survive, leftist deputies believed, the nation would have to be strengthened through a combination of proselytization and physical repression.

Even as revolutionaries undermined Catholicism, they recognized that Catholic practices had been particularly effective at inspiring devotion to the Church, and thus they mimicked Catholic rituals in the Revolutionary festivals. After May 1792, altars to the *patrie* were constructed beneath liberty trees, which acted as substitute crosses. Sometimes, revolutionaries went so far as to replace crosses with liberty trees. During the festivals, Revolutionary officials took the place of priests by giving speeches that resembled homilies. Speakers described liberty trees as "sacred" or "blessed" and talked about "devotion" to the *patrie*. In one particularly evocative example, Julien Minée, a bishop who had taken the Civil Oath of the Clergy,

Woloch, *The New Regime: Transformations of the French Civic Order, 1789-1820s* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 356–64. For a biography of Prieur see, Adolphe Robert, Edgar Bourloton, and Gaston Cougny, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français comprenant tous les Membres des Assemblées françaises et tous les Ministres français depuis le 1er mai 1789 jusqu'au 1er mai 1889 avec leurs noms, état civil, états de services, actes politiques, votes parlementaires, etc. V. Pla-Zuy*, vol. 5 (Paris: Bourloton, 1889), 48–49, accessed January 26, 2018, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

inaugurated a liberty tree in Nantes in August 1792. He expressed hope that the liberty tree, "a pure child of nature, blessed sign of liberty and equality," would form "a pleasant shade beneath which all our citizens mix indistinctly, coming to celebrate their civic festivals and hold their venerable fairs." He concluded with a hope that "renewed tributes without end be made there to sacred LEGALITY, cherished idol of a truly free nation."[28]

By melding Revolutionary festivals and Catholic rituals, revolutionaries turned liberty trees into sacred objects that represented communal devotion to the state. However, given their strong ties to the state, the symbolic trees also proved useful for dissidents who took to attacking the trees to display their displeasure with the increasingly radical course of the Revolution. Pockets of resistance had formed at the outset of the Revolution, but the tipping points came in 1793. The National Convention voted to execute the king in January, a move that raised the hackles of royalists and conservative Catholics. Furthermore, the decision motivated the Convention's delegates to stamp out counterrevolution and win the war because as regicides

[28] Julien Minée, *Inauguration de l'arbre de la liberté au champ de l'Égalité: ci-devant place Louis-XVI, à Nantes* (Nantes: A.-J. Malassis, 1792), 4. For an example of revolutionaries replacing a cross with a liberty tree during a festival see, Pierre-Louis Prieur, *Rapport des opérations faites à Vanes, par Prieur (de la Marne), représentant du peuple avec Marc-Antoine Jullien, commissaire du Comité de Salut public* (Vannes: L. Bizette, [1793?]), accessed December 1, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Other examples of revolutionaries describing liberty trees as sacred include, Robinaux, *Discours prononcé par Robinaux, substitut du procureur de la commune d'Avignon, à l'installation du Tribunal du district de Vaucluse, le 7 Octobre 1792, l'an premier de la République française* (Avignon, 1792); Robinaux, *Discours prononcé par Robinaux, substitut du procureur de la commune d'Avignon, lors de la plantation de l'arbre de la liberté, à la rue de la bonneterie, devant la maison de la poste aux lettres, le dimanche 28 Octobre 1792, l'an premier de la République française* (Avignon, 1792); Chatelain, *Discours prononcé aux enfants de la patrie, en plantant l'arbre de la liberté*, 1793, accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Discours prononcé par le secrétaire du district de Versailles, à l'inauguration de l'arbre de la liberté, planté devant la porte du local qu'il occupe, le décadi, 20 pluviôse, l'an deux de la République une et indivisible.* (Versailles: Imprimerie des Beaux-Arts, 1794), accessed April 14, 2014, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; N.-J.-B.-G. Guibourt, *Le culte des arbres, ou, idée de l'état heureux des premiers hommes, guidés par les seules lumières de la raison: Origine du despotisme féodal et superstitieux: Avantage du culte de la raison sur le culte catholique: Discours prononcé le quartidi 4 ventôse, à la société populaire de la section de la République, à l'occasion de la plantation de l'arbre de la liberté* (Paris: G.-F. Galletti, 1794). Mona Ozouf briefly discusses the connections between liberty trees and crosses in, Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 260–61. Lynn Hunt explores Revolutionary civil religion more broadly in, Lynn Hunt, "The Sacred and the French Revolution," in *Emile Durkheim: Critical Assessments of Leading Sociologists*, ed. W. S. F. Pickering, vol. 2 (London; New York: Routledge, 2001), 74–91.

their fates were tied to the Revolution's. The king's death brought Britain, Holland, and Spain, and several smaller states into the war against Revolutionary France, increasing the need for troops. The Convention passed conscription laws in March.

The conscription laws along with the continued growth of anti-clericalism pushed conservative Catholics in western France to the breaking point. Vendéeans and Bretons in western France rose up in armed revolt in March. Rebels raided towns and targeted Revolutionary supporters. They also repudiated the Revolution by rejecting its symbols. Breton *chouans* (guerilla fighters) were known to march beneath the Bourbon white flag, stomp on tricolor cockades, and cut down liberty trees as they rebelled against the Revolutionary nation that had stripped them of autonomy, sent their men to the front, and offered nothing but repression in return. Though organized rebellions broke out in western France and the southeast, counterrevolutionary sentiment was by no means restricted to those regions.[29]

Attacks against liberty trees provoked amazing and ill-advised reprisals from radical Jacobins who seized control of the National Convention in June and committed themselves to a policy of state-sponsored terror from September 1793 until July 1794 in an effort to deal with the mounting crises. Violence against liberty trees showed representatives on mission—Convention deputies sent to the departments to maintain law and order—where to target repressive measures. Upon learning of an attack against a liberty tree in a department, the relevant representative on mission reported the attack to the National Convention and either pursued vandals themselves or, as Prieur did in October 1793, encouraged local authorities to arrest and try the individuals responsible for assaulting the nation. Guilty verdicts could result in stunningly disproportionate punishments. In September 1793 a group accused of cutting down a liberty tree in Samois-sur-

[29] Andress, *The Terror*, 161.

Seine was arrested and put on trial. The ultimate fates of that group were not recorded, but when a tribunal rendered a guilty verdict against five individuals who cut down a liberty tree in Bresles in early 1794 two of the five were sentenced to death.[30]

Representatives on mission tended to blame criminal acts of vandalism on priests, royalists, or other individuals or groups known to be hostile to the Revolution. In April 1794, Monestier de la Lozère, a representative on mission in the southwestern departments of Lot-et-Garonne and Landes, put out a notice alleging that criminals had destroyed a liberty tree in Montesquieu. Monestier promised a full investigation into the crime and promised to bring the full weight of the law down on the heads of the perpetrators. That case was still unsolved the following month when Monestier expressed grave concern about another "horrible crime…committed in the commune of Lamonjoye (Lamontjoie), against the Liberty tree, which was peeled to a height of three to four feet and split." Monestier blamed a man named Druilhet, a former curate in the area who had not given up his post. Monestier informed the National Convention that the accused remained at large despite the warrant out for his arrest.[31]

In the southeast, the representative on mission in the Bouches-du-Rhône and Vaucluse departments reported a similar act of vandalism in the town of Bédoin in May. The representative, Étienne-Cristophe Maignet, demanded the community members help authorities identify the person or persons responsible. When no one stepped forward with information, Maignet assumed that the entire community was insufficiently yoked to the Revolution. He

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[30] A letter pertaining to the destruction of the liberty tree in Samois-sur-Seine can be found in, A.N. F/7/4571. Documents related to the cutting of the Bresles tree are contained in A.N. AF/II/162, Pièces 1 to 3. For a subsequent recounting of the incident in Bresles see, C. L. Doyen and Edouard de Lafontaine, *Histoire de la ville de Beauvais: depuis le 14e siècle*, vol. 1 (Beauvais: Moisand, 1842), 434–35.

[31] Monestier de la Lozère, "Searching for the perpetrators of the attack on Montesquieu's liberty tree," A.N. AF/II/113, Pièces 19, 20; "Letter from Monestier (liberty tree ripped up in Montesquieu)," A.N. AF/II/178, Pièces 11 to 14; "Copies of orders from Monestier (de la Lozère) ordering the arrest of the citizen Drouilhet, curé of La Montjoie [sic]," A.N. AF/II/113; Pièces 7 to 13.

brought in a battalion of troops and convened a court that found sixty-three people guilty. All sixty-three were executed. The guillotine dispatched thirty-five and the remaining twenty-eight were shot. Still no one offered information about the culprits, so the troops torched five hundred houses and eight chapels.[32]

Maignet's completely disproportionate response caught the attention of Helen Maria Williams. Williams knew that Bédoin had a reputation as a hotbed of counterrevolutionary sentiment. She concluded that members of the local Société Populaire had cynically destroyed the town's liberty tree knowing full well that "this incident would furnish a pretext for pillage and devastation." These "wretches" then "sounded a general alarm, and accused the guiltless inhabitants of Bedouin of the sacrilege committed against the hallowed symbol of freedom." Williams charged Maignet with engineering a brutal campaign of murder and destruction in response to the contrived allegations. Whether her claims were accurate or not, Maignet's brutality was beyond question and his response to the destruction of the Bédoin liberty tree would have far-reaching implications as news of the event travelled across the Atlantic to the United States.[33]

Maignet's decision to put an entire town to the torch because of its citizens' perceived lack of support for the Revolution shows that radical revolutionaries had turned a symbol of voluntary inclusion in the Revolutionary community into a symbol of a state-controlled,

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[32] Peter McPhee describes this incident in detail in McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 260–61. I have drawn the statistics regarding the number of people executed and the number of structures burned from his account. Several documents related to the burning of Bédoin are located in the Archives nationales. Maignet's letters and orders related to the incident can be found in, A.N. "D/§1/29; Dossier 1 and A.N. "AF/II/145; Pièces 1 to 18. American newspapers also carried accounts of the destruction of Bédoin: "Translated for the Minerva. Brussels, Nov. 29," *The American Minerva*, February 11, 1795; "[No Headline]," *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser*, February 17, 1795; "[No Headline]," *City Gazette & Daily Advertiser*, March 3, 1795; "[No Headline]," *Columbian Herald or The Southern Star*, March 18, 1795.

[33] Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Scenes Which Passed in Various Departments of France during the Tyranny of Robespierre: And of the Events Which Took Place in Paris on the 28th of July 1794*, vol. 3 (London, 1795), 86–89, accessed October 31, 2016, Eighteenth Century Collections Online.

hegemonic Revolutionary culture. Although Maignet's actions and those of the republican troops that supported him seem illogical, to Maignet his response made perfect sense. In 1794, the state had taken control of the symbols and connected them to a national civil religion, but liberty trees still derived their power from each community's willingness to raise, celebrate, protect, and maintain the trees. Therefore, Maignet reasoned, if Bédoin's inhabitants would not identify the specific persons responsible for destroying the town's liberty tree, then the whole town must have condoned the counterrevolutionary act. At a time when the Revolution was under siege on multiple fronts, those who were not devoted to the Revolution were threats to the Revolution and therefore had to be eliminated.

Conclusion

When Jacques-Louis David—the famed artist who was firmly aligned with Robespierre's contingent of radical Jacobins in 1794—planned the Festival of the Supreme Being, his decision to place the liberty tree atop the man-made mountain on the Champ de Mars visually conveyed the Mountain's control over the Revolution and its symbols. The early Revolution had gained strength from the communities who celebrated it, but by 1794 Jacobin revolutionaries believed it was their duty to impose their values on the nation and remove by force any who would not give their full devotion to the Revolution.

Just a few weeks after the Festival of the Supreme Being, on July 27, 1794 (9 Thermidor II on the French Republican Calendar) Robespierre and the Montagnards fell from power. The revolutionaries who overthrew the Montagnards wanted to turn back the clock to the recent past, when communities throughout France had raised liberty trees and worn tricolor cockades with pride to express their appreciation for a revolution that promised a new era of liberty. Moderate

republicans would try to recalibrate Revolutionary symbolism to elicit memories of the early promise of the French Revolution, but they would discover that overcoming the trauma of war and terror was no easy task. Even though it preserved some of its meanings, by 1794 the French *arbre de la liberté* had become so disconnected from its origins that there was no way to turn them back into symbols that resembled peasant *mais* and American liberty trees.

Beyond France, the relationship between *arbres de la liberté*, the Terror, and France's European crusade sullied the reputation of the previously revered symbols even in places like the United States, where the French Revolution had at first been met with acclaim. After 1794, when the full extent of the Terror became evident, even avowed republicans throughout the Atlantic world, who at first celebrated France's bold stroke against the Old Regime, began extricating liberty trees from their associations with a French Revolution that seemed to many to be little more than another imperial project dressed up as an epoch-altering revolution.

CHAPTER 3

A SYMBOL OF REVOLUTIONS PAST AND PRESENT: LIBERTY TREES AND LIBERTY POLES IN THE UNITED STATES FROM THE TREATY OF VERSAILLES TO THE REVOLUTION OF 1800

As the sun rose over Paterson, New Jersey on July 4, 1795, a cannon blast announced the beginning of a festive day. The cannon had been placed below a liberty pole that would serve as the centerpiece for the festival to follow. Like Americans throughout the United States, the people of Paterson were being called to celebrate "the emancipation" of the United States from Great Britain. "At ten o'clock several hundred citizens and occasional visitors assembled on the green" and, joined by the Paterson battalion and a visiting company of infantry, marched around the town. One "venerable citizen" in the procession held a staff topped by a Phrygian cap, or a "Cap of Liberty" as most Americans knew it. After walking through the streets of Paterson, the parading citizens returned to the liberty pole and listened to a reading of the Declaration of Independence and a suitably patriotic speech. The assembly dispersed only after a fifteen-gun salute—one shot for each state. The evening included a public meal where the diners drank fifteen toasts to America's victory, her future health, and the spread of liberty around the world. With harmony having prevailed for the day, "the sons of freedom formed a circle round the liberty pole" and struck the American flag that had flown from the pole during the day. The sun dipped below the horizon. After a bit of singing everyone went to bed.[1]

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Historians examining popular politics during America's early republic period have recognized that liberty poles, like American Revolutionary liberty trees, were integral parts of

[1] "By This Day's Mails. Newark, July 8. Paterson, July 4th, 1795," *Gazette of the United States*, July 10, 1795.

American political culture.[2] Although the Founders famously rejected party politics, historians have now shown that ordinary Americans laid the groundwork for the two-party system by politicizing the nation's festive culture. Democratic-Republicans began raising liberty poles in the 1790s to challenge the centralizing impulses of the Federalists who controlled the national government. They deployed liberty poles in both Fourth of July festivals and celebrations of the French Revolution to link their opposition to federal power with two revolutions that had rejected large, centralized governments.[3]

Yet liberty poles have an even more dynamic history in the early American republic than existing works suggest. The connection between liberty poles and Democratic-Republicans is clear, but Federalists and apolitical Americans used liberty poles for a variety of purposes during the 1780s. Furthermore, American democrats used the poles to show appreciation for the French Revolution until 1795, but by the end of the century, very few Americans used liberty poles to celebrate France or its Revolution. They instead reclaimed the symbols to connect them with a domestic opposition tradition. In short, liberty trees and poles did not have stable meanings during the seventeen-year period between the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and Thomas Jefferson's election in 1800. Liberty poles' histories illuminate a tension among Americans who wanted to

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[2] Young, *Liberty Tree*, 325–94; Schlesinger, Sr., "Liberty Tree: A Genealogy"; Fischer, *Liberty and Freedom: A Visual History of America's Founding Ideas*, 19–49.

[3] Simon Newman has studied street politics in the early Republic and has show that liberty poles were particularly useful for Democratic-Republicans during the era. Simon Peter Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*, Early American Studies (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997). In addition, there is no shortage of works that examine the development of a discernibly American popular political culture from 1783-1820. For just a couple of examples see, David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Jeffrey L. Pasley, "The Cheese and the Words: Popular Political Culture and Participatory Democracy in the Early American Republic," in *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic*, ed. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

commemorate their nation's revolutionary birth while also maintaining political and social stability.

Liberty trees and poles existed at the intersection of the crucial debate about the limits of American liberty. On the one hand, the symbols were perfect embodiments of the righteous cause that had propelled Americans to victory over Great Britain because they had been specifically created to oppose policies that threatened American liberties. They were, therefore, valuable as commemorative icons in the years after Independence when Americans used the memory of victory to support their own self-righteousness and develop a patriotic spirit that could overcome the persistent divisions that had always plagued the American populace. On the other hand, liberty poles linked American patriotism to an era defined by protests and rebellions against central authority. This anti-authoritarian legacy meant that the symbols could just as easily inspire new uprisings among disaffected people who felt that the United States government did not work for them or, worse, oppressed them.

The embrace of *arbres de la liberté* by French revolutionaries only further exacerbated the tension between commemoration and inspiration in American political culture. As Americans coped with the meaning of another revolution that seemed, in its origins, similar to their own, they had to decide whether they wanted to emulate the French and press for a more democratic society or declare their own revolution finished in the name of maintaining order. During the 1780s and 1790s, American liberty poles represented both a successful revolution that had assured stability and liberty and a revolution still in progress that would end only when American society embraced social equality.

The World Begun Anew: Liberty Poles in Post-Revolutionary America

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. April 30, 1785.

The Society of Saint Tammany's origins are a bit murky. The New York-based organization that would become the famed Tammany Hall was incorporated at the end of the 1780s, but before that there were several loosely related Tammany Societies operating in a variety of states. Urban men of European descent made up the membership of Tammany Societies. They demonstrated American patriotism by employing stereotypical Native American practices, dress, and modes of political organization. "Playing Indian" had been a practical way to illustrate American separateness from Great Britain during the imperial crisis. By the 1780s, though, Americans increasingly saw native peoples as a direct threat to American settlement and expansion. Tammany societies started to fracture and many began curtailing their use of Native American practices and symbols.[4]

By the time the Philadelphia Tammany Society planned a massive celebration for "St. Tammany's Day" on May 1, 1785, the organization was fracturing along class, ethnic, and ideological lines, but its members composed an ode to be sung during the festivities. The day was intended to be a celebration of Americanness in all its forms and so they hoped that the song might express the members' shared reverence for the American past. The day before the holiday, the *Independent Gazetteer,* published the poem in its "Poets Corner" section.

> Now, each Sachem join hands round the Liberty Pole,
> And briskly again, pass the heart-cheering bowl;
> To Washington's mem'ry,--the chief of our train,
> The full-flowing goblet, repeated we'll drain;
> Then, next, to each Chieftain, who fought and who bled,
> Let's sing a Requiem, and toast him, tho' dead.[5]

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[4] For more on Tammany Societies and the concept of "playing Indian" see, Philip Joseph Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 43–46.

[5] "Poet's Corner," *The Independent Gazetteer*, April 30, 1785.

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After the War of Independence, newly minted Americans used liberty trees or liberty poles to commemorate their victorious campaign. Americans turned some liberty trees and poles that survived the Revolution into memorials to the American protests that had sparked the movement for Independence. In cities or towns that had not had a liberty tree or where British troops or loyalists had felled liberty trees or poles, Americans put up new ones to commemorate the American victory.

Bostonians had been the first people who dedicated a tree to liberty and theirs was the first tree to fall to axes of loyalists and redcoats. They would also be the first to raise a commemorative liberty pole to replace their fallen symbol of the American cause. When the British evacuated Boston in 1776, Bostonians put up a liberty pole on the site of the destroyed Liberty Tree. The new pole, which was fittingly lifted into place on August 14, 1776, marked the spot where aggrieved Bostonians had first had the audacity to challenge Parliament. Raised in the midst of war, the new pole had a dual purpose. It both memorialized Boston's role in fomenting the American Revolution and inspired Americans to continue in their defiance of the empire. Indeed in addition to raising the Liberty Pole on August 14, the crowd "hoisted the Red Flag or Flag of Defiance" onto it. After the war the pole remained, though it was no longer an inspirational icon. It neither hosted large, raucous celebrations, nor reemerged as a beacon for protestors. Yet it remained an important memorial to the first people who had met beneath a tree to challenge one of the world's most powerful governments.[6]

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[6] The dedication of the Liberty Pole on the original Liberty Tree site is recounted in, "Boston, August 15," *The Continental Journal and Weekly Advertiser*, August 15, 1776, 15. Several local shopkeepers advertised their shops as being "near Liberty Pole." For a few examples see, "[Advertisement]," *The Continental Journal, and Weekly Advertiser*, July 3, 1783; "[Advertisement]," *The Boston Evening-Post and the General Advertiser*, August 16, 1783; "[Advertisement]," *The Boston Evening-Post and the General Advertiser*, October 4, 1783;

Most Americans waited until after the war to introduce commemorative liberty poles. Cornwallis's surrender to American forces at Yorktown, Virginia on October 19, 1781, had, for all intents and purposes, ended the war, but American, British, French, and Spanish negotiators needed two more years to finalize an agreement that officially concluded the conflict. As news trickled into America in 1783 that the peace treaty was nearing completion, Americans in numerous towns and cities took to the streets to celebrate their unlikely victory. They expressed pride in their new nation along with admiration for the commanders, common soldiers, and French allies who had helped secure American independence. Americans who wanted to celebrate the conclusion of hostilities found liberty poles useful because they evoked memories of the American Revolution's origins and represented the new nation as a beacon of republican liberty in a world where monarchies remained the dominant form of government.

The Confederation Congress ratified the preliminary articles of peace on April 15, 1783. Officials in Providence, Rhode Island declared April 21, 1783 a day for "celebrating…the auspicious Return of Peace and the final Establishment of American Independence." At sunrise on the stated day the town awoke to cannons firing and church bells ringing. As townspeople began filling the streets they noticed "the Flag of the United States, with that of France, displayed at the State-House, and on Liberty Pole." The festival featured a procession, speeches from local officials, and a large feast for the city's gentlemen. Elites treated the public to a hogshead of punch and a fireworks display. The liberty pole mentioned in the report was probably one raised or designated between 1781 and 1783 because this report is the first to reference a liberty pole in Providence. During the imperial crisis, colonists had met at the Liberty

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"[Advertisement]," *The Boston Gazette and Country Journal*, December 29, 1783; "[Advertisement]," *The Independent Ledger, and the American Advertiser*, March 29, 1784.

Tree on Joseph Olney's property, which was far from the center of town. Therefore, the festival organizers probably chose to create a liberty pole near the center of town along the parade route.[7]

However, after the initial surge in national pride that accompanied the official declaration of peace, Americans took a break from raising liberty poles. From 1783 until about 1792 American liberty trees and poles were scarcely mentioned in American newspapers. Apparently the symbols of America's Revolution were most useful as landmarks in places like Boston and Bergen County, New Jersey. Boston shopkeepers used the Liberty Pole to orient potential customers by advertising their shops as being near it. Land agents in Bergen Country similarly used a well-known liberty pole to help potential customers mentally map an available lot.[8]

Americans probably stopped designating new liberty trees and poles during the 1780s for the simple reason that the war was over. There was no external enemy threatening liberty after 1783 and there was nothing more to celebrate after the official acceptance of the Treaty of Paris. Yet during the 1780s, Americans started to wonder about the state of their new nation and reconsider the legacy of the American Revolution. The Articles of Confederation had governed the United States during the war years and remained in effect until 1787. The Articles established thirteen sovereign states loosely bound together by their shared history of revolution and nominally overseen by an impotent national government. Under the Articles, the country proved

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[7] "[No Headline]," *The Providence Gazette and Country Journal*, April 26, 1783. The citizens of two New York towns, Flatbush and Jamaica, erected liberty poles in December, 1783 to celebration the Treaty of Paris: "New-York, 3d Dec. 1783," *The Independent New-York Gazette*, December 6, 1783; "New-York. Dec. 13," *The Independent Gazette, or the New-York Journal Revived*, December 13, 1783; "New-York, December 6.," *The Connecticut Journal*, December 17, 1783. Flatbush and Jamaica were both incorporated into New York City at the end of the nineteenth century, but they were independent towns until then.

[8] One of the lots up for sale in New Jersey in 1794 was described as "A lot of meadow land, containing about four acres, situate[d] at Tenick, near the Liberty Pole": "New-Jersey Confiscated Lands. To Be Sold at Public Sale," *The Pennsylvania Packet or the General Advertiser*, May 27, 1784. Similarly, in 1796 lots of land in Charleston were put up for sale. They were described as being "situated and laid out on streets sixty-six feet wide, where the Liberty tree formerly stood, and adjoining Boundary street": "[Advertisement]," *The Columbian Herald or the Patriotic Courier of North-America*, April 10, 1786.

unable to solve post-war economic problems. Rural communities in western Massachusetts were particularly hard hit by an economic downturn and increased taxation. In 1786 and 1787, with the government's policies doing nothing to help the increasingly desperate farmers in the Massachusetts countryside, some followed the Revolutionary War veteran Daniel Shays in taking up arms. The national government lacked the ability to put down such a revolt, leaving elites in Massachusetts to form a militia that would eventually stop the rebellion when rebels tried to march on a federal armory. The incident proved that the country needed a new approach to republican government if it was going to survive.[9]

In May 1787, delegates from 12 states (Rhode Island was not present) met in Philadelphia, ostensibly to amend the Articles of Confederation. In the end they created an entirely new government. The United States Constitution, signed in September 1787, gave far more power to institutions of the national government. The Convention's delegates knew that the road to ratification by the required nine states would be bumpy. Thomas Jefferson was one of several prominent Americans who claimed that the Constitution was a gross overreaction to the country's revenue problems and Shays's Rebellion. In the view of "anti-Federalists," like Jefferson, the Constitution unnecessarily and unwisely placed power back in the hands of a central state. "Federalists," as supporters of the Constitution dubbed themselves, argued that a powerful central state was required to solve the nation's problems and ensure the sanctity of property and liberty. What good was liberty, they contended, if a nation proved incapable of protecting it?

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[9] For a recent, concise account of Shays' Rebellion and its impact on national politics see, Sean Condon, *Shays's Rebellion: Authority and Distress in Post-Revolutionary America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

The debate over the Constitution split Americans into two rival political factions who both claimed to be defending America's founding principles as expressed during the American Revolution. They both used Revolutionary rhetoric and symbolism to justify their respective positions. Jefferson reacted to the news of Shays's Rebellion and the Constitutional Convention with his now infamous claim that rebellions should be accepted, not feared: "the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." Four years after Jefferson's famous declaration, a far less famous anonymous scribe writing in the *New-York Journal and Patriotic Register* feared that the Constitution created a new American aristocracy that would become "the beaver which will eventually knaw [sic] down the tree of liberty, and dam up the waters of freedom."[10]

In contrast, Federalists deployed liberty trees to support their argument that the Constitution protected liberty by maintaining order. In 1787 an anonymous but presumably Federalist-aligned poet adjusted the end of Thomas Paine's "Liberty Tree" to make just such a point. Paine had concluded his poem with a call to arms against Great Britain: " From the East to the West blow the trumpet to arms,/ Thro' the land let the sound of it flee:/ Let the far and the near all unite with a cheer,/ In defence of our Liberty Tree." The Federalist poet finished the poem's story with a contemporary political message: "Then from east to the west let our Patriots convene,/ Determin'd their country to free,/ our Constitution confirm—it firmly shall fix,/ Its idol—our Liberty Tree."[11]

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[10] Thomas Jefferson to William S. Smith, November 13, 1787; "Copy of a Letter from a Farmer in This City, to His Friend," *New-York Journal and Patriotic Register*, March 21, 1792.

[11] "Castalian Fount. Original Poetry. Our Liberty Tree: A Federal Song," *The Massachusetts Centinel*, December 29, 1787. For varying interpretations of the contrasting ideologies and interests that drove the politics of the early republic see, Gordon S. Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*, The Oxford History of the United States (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Woody Holton, *Unruly Americans and the Origins of the Constitution*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007); Sean Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy: Jefferson to Lincoln* (New York: Norton, 2005); Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-*

Despite the partisan battles that accompanied the ratification of the Constitution, Americans recognized that they had achieved something monumental. Even as they debated the American Revolution's legacy, they employed liberty trees as metaphors for a republic that could serve as a beacon of hope for other people who still lived under the yoke of a monarch. An anonymous writer in the *New Hampshire Gazette* acknowledged in 1789 his concern that factionalism and individualism might undermine the whole American experiment, but "liberty with all its attendant evils of faction and sedition, is, upon the whole infinitely more conducive to the happiness and to the improvement of human nature, than the tranquil repose of established despotism." Therefore, he hoped "the tree of liberty, so well planted and watered in America, will…flourish more and more; and impart many a slip and sucker to grow in climates which now appear most ungenial to its cultivation."[12]

Throughout the 1780s, Americans referenced liberty trees to show both pride in their republic and concern about its future. Until 1792, though, no Americans called for a new revolution. Liberty trees and poles were commemorative emblems that Americans used to debate the meaning of their revolution. That changed when word arrived that the French had risen up in opposition to one of the world's most powerful monarchs. As the French started spreading liberty trees and challenging the very foundations of the social order, some Americans were inspired. They wondered if liberty trees should be more than just emblems of a past revolution. Perhaps, they thought, the American Revolution had not yet ended. Perhaps they should emulate their French counterparts and press for a more democratic polity. When France exploded into

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Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America, 1788-1828 (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

[12] "For the Gazette," *New-Hampshire Gazette*, February 25, 1789.

revolution, Americans would once again discover that liberty poles could be used to inspire action as well as commemorate the nation's unruly birth.

A Symbol of Two Revolutions: Liberty Poles and Transnational Democracy

Newport, Rhode Island. Thursday, July 4, 1793.

The sound of cannon fire pierced the morning. The Reveille played and bells rang from the steeples of Newport's many churches. American flags could be found on "The Tree of Liberty, and on the Cupola and other parts of the State-House." At 10 a.m., citizens looked on as military and militia units paraded through town. At noon fifteen more cannons sounded and the Artillery Company marched to Liberty Tree, where they fired a federal salute. The company moved to the Statehouse at three and dined in the Assembly Room. In the center of the room stood "a Tree in the freshest Verdure, the Top of which reached the Ceiling, and its Branches, widely extended, were decorated with the greatest Variety of Flowers; emblematical of the Tree of Liberty in its most flourishing State." This singular tree was flanked by "fifteen Colonnades of Evergreen, ornamented with the same Variety of Flowers;--emblematical of the Prosperity of the States."

After dinner, the company drank 15 toasts (one for each state), each of which expressed patriotic sentiments. A cannon discharge and bell ringing followed each one. Before the ninth cannon discharge, the assembly stood up in and raised their glasses to the tree whose top touched the ceiling. They proudly toasted "The Tree of Liberty;--May it flourish and extend its Branches over the whole World." The company left after dinner and made their way to the theatre, where they took in a bit of entertainment after dark.[13]

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[13] "Newport, July 9," *The United States Chronicle: Political, Commercial, and Historical*, July 18, 1793.

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Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Monday, August 11, 1794.

Once again, the sound of cannon fire pierced the morning. Two field pieces were responsible, "one worked by a company of Americans the other by Frenchmen." The ritual blasts signaled the beginning of a celebratory day in Philadelphia. Several thousand Americans and Frenchmen were to gather in Philadelphia's central square early in the morning to celebrate the second anniversary of King Louis XVI's dethronement by the *sans-culottes*, an event that signaled the end of monarchy and the rise of a democratic republic in France. From the central square, the attendees formed into a procession that marched to the Minister of the French Republic's house. The crowd gathered in the Minister's garden, sang the Marseillaise, listened to an "oration replete with patriotic sentiments…delivered before an altar erected to liberty," and concluded the festivities with a Carmagnole dance (a frenetic group dance made popular by the French Revolution). A few citizens remained to give "the oath of fidelity to the republic" to the minister who took it as they watched.

Several hundred revelers then relocated to Richardet's hotel "where a handsome dinner was prepared on the green." Pennsylvania's governor Thomas Mifflin and the Minister of France attended along with "about 400 citizens." Between two dining tables was "an obelisk…against which the Flags of the sister republics rested and were entwined." As usual, the large company engaged in patriotic toasts during the meal, which were in turn accompanied by cannon discharges. After dinner, the assembly concluded the evening "with dances round the tree of liberty."[14]

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[14] "[No Headline]," *General Advertiser*, August 19, 1794.

The 1790s were tumultuous years for the United States. The Constitution created a more stable government and helped the United States begin the long process of getting its debt under control. Yet the debate about whether or not that stability had been achieved at the expense of popular liberties continued. Much of the debate occurred in the press since rapidly expanding readership fueled an explosion of publications, giving Americans more access to news and more choices in editorial slants than ever before. Between 1790 and 1792 the ideological contests waged in the pages of American newspapers, in places of common sociability, and in President George Washington's first cabinet drove Americans into rival ideological camps.[15]

The outbreak of the French Revolution, at first a point of unity among Americans, quickly exacerbated partisan divides. At first, the French Revolution seemed to mirror American events. The French had risen up against a monarch who mismanaged the state. They demanded a constitution that would curtail the absolute power of the monarchy and give the people more say in national affairs. The Constitution of 1791 created a constitutional monarchy that resembled the American presidential system in some respects. After 1791, however, France's Revolution took a more radical course. The king's dethronement in 1792 and the declaration of a kingless, executive-less French Republic drew concern from some Americans who feared that the French were trading a stable mixed government for an anarchic republic that was doomed to collapse. Other Americans celebrated the more radical turn. They dubbed themselves "democrats" and began agitating for changes to American society. During this period, there were no organized

[15] For charts showing the expansion of the American newspaper trade and its increasing partisanship see Appendices 1 and 2 in Jeffrey L. Pasley, *"The Tyranny of Printers": Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic*, Jeffersonian America (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001). The raw data compiled by historians of the early American republic have led scholars to consistently claim that the free press in America was both reflective of the growing democratic leanings of American political culture and a binding agent for a nation where partisan politics was becoming a defining feature. As Gordon S. Wood points out in *Empire of Liberty*, 251, "With the number of newspapers more than doubling in the 1790s, Americans were rapidly becoming the largest newspaper-reading public in the world. When the great French observer of America Alexis de Tocqueville came to the United States in 1831 he marveled at the role newspapers had come to play in American culture."

political parties, so "democrat" is best understood as a self-identifier deployed by a diverse range of Americans who shared a commitment to social reform. They wanted a more equitable American society where access to political power and economic opportunity was more evenly distributed.[16]

The complicated political and social reality of the Atlantic world after 1789 brought liberty poles back to the forefront of American popular politics. During the 1780s they had been used sporadically to commemorate America's victory and to justify ideas about American governance by appealing to the legacy of the American Revolution. After 1792 they reemerged on America's streets as increasingly partisan symbols. Democrats used them to suggest that the American Revolution was not yet complete. Though democrats appreciated that the war had secured national independence, the social order they desired had not yet come into being. Settling for a constitutional order that used a strong central state apparatus to protect propertied interests and maintain political order seemed like a capitulation that could, ultimately, lead to a reinstatement of a regime similar to the despotic one Americans had thrown off a decade earlier. Democrats, or "true republicans" as they sometimes labeled themselves, deployed the erstwhile symbols of the American Revolution to simultaneously display their patriotism and press for reform. They were not interested in a bloody uprising against the government; they just wanted to see the United States fulfill the promises that they felt had been articulated by the people who met beneath liberty trees and poles in the 1760s and 1770s.

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[16] Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 120–51. For a more recent appraisal of the rise in American democratic culture and its connections to the French Revolution see, Matthew Rainbow Hale, "Regenerating the World: The French Revolution, Civic Festivals, and the Forging of Modern American Democracy, 1793–1795," *Journal of American History* 103, no. 4 (March 1, 2017): 891–920. I use a definition of "democrat" that is very similar to Hale's. For other works that discuss the evolution of a democratic tradition in America see, Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*.

Democrats looked across the ocean at France—which had embarked on a course of complete social reorganization that only accelerated after the king's dethronement on August 10, 1792—for inspiration. Beginning in late 1789, they read about the French raising liberty trees, undercutting the power of established religion, and eliminating aristocracy. In American democrats' eyes, the French Revolution was a new phase of the movement that Americans had started in 1765. Democrats embraced the French Revolution and used symbolism to illustrate the connections between that revolution and their own. By the early 1790s, democrats had turned liberty poles into complex symbols of transnational republican fraternity as well as emblems of American patriotism.[17]

Democrats throughout the United States used festivals and celebrations to recruit supporters and express their desire to see a more democratic society take hold in America. Sometimes they celebrated French events and holidays in order to demonstrate their support for the French Revolution and their belief that the American and French Revolutions were one and the same. A prime example was a raucous public party organized in Boston in honor of the French victory at Valmy. News of the victory took awhile to reach America, but when it did Boston's Francophiles planned a party that rivaled any victory celebration in the world. In January 1793, Boston democrats (and anyone else just looking for a good time) participated in a festival that included the erection of the city's second liberty pole amidst cannon firing, multiple processions, and animal sacrifice in the form of a roasted ox that was explicitly labeled as a "PEACE OFFERING TO LIBERTY AND EQUALITY." Although the older commemorative liberty pole still stood on the Liberty Tree stump, the revelers erected a new liberty pole for this

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[17] For overviews of the impact of the French Revolution on American politics and culture see, Israel, *The Expanding Blaze*, 321–60; Wilentz, *The Rise of American Democracy*, 53–61; Wood, *Empire of Liberty*, 174–208; Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 123–72.

occasion. They placed it on what was once Andrew Oliver's dock. The liberty pole's presence on the dock effectively converted the infamous stamp man's former property into a new ceremonial space called "Liberty Square." By creating Liberty Square, democrats showed that the festival actually celebrated two victories, one by the French over the forces of the First Coalition and an older one over Andrew Oliver and the other cronies of Parliament who had unsuccessfully tried to strip away American liberties.[18]

At other times, democrats strategically deployed liberty poles and liberty trees to reorient existing American holidays, particularly the Fourth of July, to reflect the belief that French and American revolutionaries were pursuing the same course. Sometimes, organizers of Fourth of July celebrations used relatively subtle means to suggest this connection. In one instance, citizens of Springfield, Massachusetts gathered beneath an 89-foot liberty tree that had been previously designated by the festival's organizers. The height clearly referenced the year that Parisians stormed the Bastille. At the beginning of the Independence Day festivities, the tree "was decorated with a flag presented by a patriotic individual." The flag was, in all likelihood the stars and stripes, since reports generally made a point of describing flags that were not the American flag.[19]

Other towns were more overt in using symbolism and signage to connect American Independence Day with the ongoing French Revolution. In Fayetteville, Pennsylvania the townspeople constructed a liberty pole to anchor the 1793 Independence Day celebration. "On the evening of the 3d, an eminence, near the centre of the town was consecrated to liberty, by the erection of a liberty pole, and at sunrise, on the morning preceding, an elegant flag, ornamented

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[18] "Boston, Saturday, January 26, 1793. CIVIC FESTIVAL!," *Columbian Centinel*, January 26, 1793; Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street*, 1–2, 122–25.

[19] "Springfield, July 5, 1794," *The New-Jersey Journal*, July 9, 1794.

with the cap of liberty encircled with the motto "where liberty dwells, there is our country." American revolutionaries of the 1760s and 1770s had never paired liberty caps with liberty trees or liberty poles. Including the flag with Phrygian cap was an effective way to embrace the French Revolution and connect it with America's erstwhile campaign for liberation from Britain. The following year, the attendees of an Independence Day celebration in Lancaster went a step further. During an evening procession, "Gentlemen from Swenk's bridge marched into town in regular order, bearing the CAP of LIBERTY, upon a Liberty Pole, beautifully illuminated; with the words 'LIBERTY & EQUALITY,' in Letters of Gold." Anyone with even a passing knowledge of French festive culture—given the details of French festivals that regularly appeared in American publications, most people would have had such knowledge by 1794—could not have failed to notice the striking similarities between French celebrations and the Lancaster fete.[20]

Whether American democrats planned separate festivals or adjusted existing celebratory gatherings, they proved themselves adept manipulators of symbols, practices, and rhetoric. From 1792 until the middle of 1795, democratic festivals expressed support for the French Revolution, celebrated America's revolutionary founding, and articulated desires for an American future where equality and meritocracy determined individual opportunities rather than kin networks or socioeconomic standing. Expressing national pride while also pressing for reform was a key part of democratic festivals because urban democrats were not calling for armed insurrection. Early democrats were not a unified party, but the festive culture they developed suggests that liberty poles were not intended to inspire people to take up arms, attack property, or physically intimidate particular individuals. These were not the liberty trees and poles of the 1760s and

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[20] "Fayetville, July 9," *General Advertiser*, July 20, 1793; "Lancaster, July 9," *Dunlap and Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, August 2, 1794.

1770s. Instead, democrats used the symbols to challenge the architects of American governance to live up to the nation's republican promise. The French seemed to American democrats to be doing exactly that as they reorganized their society between 1789 and 1794.

Democratic festive culture attracted a diverse array of Americans who felt that American society had failed to live up to the promises of the American Revolution. The French Revolution, for a time, offered a model that many of them wished to emulate. However, American democrats did not coalesce around a unified ideological position. Like the Anti-Federalists who challenged the Constitution, the loose confederation of democrats in American streets between 1787 and 1794 were bound only by a shared belief that American society needed to be reformed. They would come to disagree about what America should be and how change should be achieved. Liberty poles were valuable symbols in the early 1790s precisely because they were fundamentally unstable. They appealed to people who wanted to express their patriotism. They appealed to people who wanted to commemorate America's revolutionary birth. They appealed to Francophiles who saw in France a model society taking shape. They appealed to Americans who saw the new United States government as a thinly veiled replica of the oppressive British system. In short, they held a variety of meanings, which made them attractive to a variety of people.

After 1794 American Francophilia declined, though American democrats did not completely reject the French Revolution. The dream of a trans-Atlantic brotherhood of revolutionary republics continued to inspire some peoples throughout the Atlantic world for years to come, but after 1794 fewer Americans self-identified as "democrats" and there was a discernible decline in festivals that celebrated the French Revolution. The decline can be attributed to the fact that democrats were still patriots who wanted reform, not revolution. When

events in the trans-Appalachian American West and in France associated liberty poles with both armed rebellion and state power, democrats found themselves temporarily unable to use liberty poles to symbolize their demands.

American Jacobins, American Rebels: Liberty Poles, Terror, and Rebellion

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. February 28, 1795. The Gazette of the United States.

> "When Zeal is too warm even in Liberty's Cause,
> It singes fair Freedom and burns up the laws.
> Hot Zeal like new whiskey ascends to the brain;
> The sense becomes drunk and the mind is insane.
> Then the wise grumbletonian, a knave or a feel,
> Sees tyrants rise up to bear absolute rule:
> Sharp-sighted and keen he can plainly foresee
> The congress destroying our liberty tree.
> Great nobles, hobgoblins, proud lords, and base kings,
> All haunt his poor mind with the dreadfullest things.
> The democrat rages, he hardly knows why,
> And the aristocrat is near ready to die:
> While good honest republicans know they are free
> And would strike off the arm that dares strike at the tree.
> The Zeal of each grumbler transports him so far,
> He fain would rush headlong and plunge into war:
> Yet, if government shakes o'er the guilty its rod,
> To protect the good man in his peaceful abode;
> If the arm when uplifted be nervous and strong,
> They cry 'See the tyrant! our Freedom is gone!'
> Their cries, sympathetic, work wonderful pain,
> Huge mountains they see where there is but a grain."[21]

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Carlisle, Pennsylvania. September 11-13, 1794.

Talk of rebellion was common in western Pennsylvania during the summer and fall of 1794. In Carlisle, townspeople were upset by the federal government's assumption of state debts, a new tax on whiskey, and their relative lack of a voice in the new federal government. The town

[21] "For The Gazette of the United States," *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser*, February 28, 1795.

had rioted against federal power before. One of the most famous anti-Federalist riots occurred the day after Christmas in Carlisle in 1787, during arguments over the ratification of the Constitution. That incident had resulted in several arrests, including the detainment of the local radical William Petrikin. On September 11, 1794 the aggrieved citizens of Carlisle put up a liberty pole to illustrate their continued opposition to federal taxation and the centralization of political power in the federal government. It was a raucous gathering. After getting the pole in the ground, a few protestors nailed a sign to the pole that read "Liberty and Equality." They hung and burned effigies of prominent Federalist politicians, including one of the state's Chief Justice Thomas McKean, who had issued the arrest warrants for the 1787 rioters. Armed guards stood watch at the pole and managed to briefly detain two suspicious, but ultimately harmless individuals.[22]

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In 1794, fissure lines among American democrats began to show. One key issue was whether violence should be used to push for democratic reform. While plenty of democrats felt the American Revolution was not yet complete, few desired a return to the days of war and bloodshed. When rebels in the western Pennsylvania started aligning liberty poles with an armed insurrection against federal power, democrats curtailed their use of the symbols in eastern towns and cities. At the same time the country coped with another rebellion, democrats started reconsidering their connections with their counterparts in France. In 1794 news trickled into the United States that the Jacobins who rose to power in 1792 claimed to be representatives of the people, but replaced an absolute king with a repressive republic that centralized power in Paris

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[22] Thomas P. Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion: Frontier Epilogue to the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 207–9; "Philadelphia, September 14," *The United States Chronicle: Political, Commercial and Historical*, September 25, 1794. For more on the 1787 Carlisle riot and William Petrikin see, Cornell, *The Other Founders*, 109–19. Cornell also addresses the Whiskey Rebellion within the larger context of American Anti-Federalism on pp. 200-213.

and smashed dissent. Since the majority of American dissenters rejected armed insurrection and the centralization of political power, they also rejected the liberty trees and poles that represented both in 1794 and 1795.

The trouble in Appalachia started with Alexander Hamilton. Alexander Hamilton had always had big ideas. He had been, from the beginning, a proponent of a stronger central government. As the first Secretary of the Treasury, he set to work fixing the nation's financial woes. His multipoint plan, introduced in 1791, was meant to fix the persistent revenue and debt problems that had nearly destroyed the nascent nation in 1786. The plan divided opinion. Some loved what it could do for the country. Others felt that the whole thing sounded strikingly similar to British fiscal and political policies circa 1765. One particularly troubling part of the plan for Americans who lived in and beyond the Appalachians was an excise tax placed on whiskey. Whiskey was more than just a drink to westerners, particularly those in Pennsylvania. It was a form of currency in a region severely lacking in specie. From the perspective of those on the western frontier the tax on whiskey—which was levied on distillers, not retailers, and had to be paid in specie—was double trouble. They had no specie to pay the tax and no ability to produce the product that would help them raise the money, because it was taxed at the point of production.

For westerners, the whiskey tax seemed like just one more indication that the federal government was ignoring of westerners' needs. Aside from a lack of cash, settlers in what early Americans routinely called the "backcountry" were constantly fearful of Indian attacks, given that they had entered a region controlled by Native Americans. Though westerners valued their autonomy and scoffed at Federalist attempts to centralize political power in a national government, they hoped that the federal government might at least be willing to deploy a military

force capable of pushing back the native peoples harassing western settlements. No army arrived. Instead, easterners who filled the seats of power not only ignored the concerns of the backcountry settlers, but actually looked down their noses at western Americans, seeing them as ignorant, uncivilized, and of no consequence. By 1794 westerners understood that they had no money, no protection, and no voice in national politics. They were being asked to pay for a government that did not serve them.[23]

Resistance to the excise began immediately upon the law's application in 1792. Western Pennsylvanians turned to the trusted methods of defiance Americans used during the American Revolution. They wrote petitions and formed committees of correspondence. Leaders held meetings and wrote polemics that they disseminated through the popular press and the pamphlet trade. They wanted to show their fellow backcountry folk and their eastern American brethren that they were following the script as written during the American Revolution. From their point of view, the excise was unjust, just as the Stamp Act had been unjust. The government was becoming too powerful; it was a threat to liberty, just like Parliament. Westerners hoped that any attempt by the Washington Administration to enforce the law with soldiers would only further justify the westerners' contention that the government ruled by coercion. If public opinion turned against the administration, there would be an opening for democratic ideas to gain ascendency in the United States.

The problem was that some radicals in western Pennsylvania eschewed letter writing and dialogue in favor of violent tactics inspired by the American Revolution. They threatened judges and officials who tried to suppress dissent and collect the tax. On occasion, they even tarred and

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[23] For narrative accounts of the Whiskey Rebellion, its causes, and effects see, Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*; William Hogeland, *The Whiskey Rebellion: George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and the Frontier Rebels Who Challenged America's Newfound Sovereignty* (New York: Scribner, 2006).

feathered officials. There were even some, including the Carlisle, Pennsylvania based radical William Petrikin, who argued that western Pennsylvanians should declare independence and fight another revolution if necessary. They saw liberty poles as inspirational icons that signaled resistance to power by any means necessary.

While western radicals embraced threats and violence, further east Americans were locked in a debate about how to deal with Edmund Genêt, the new French Ambassador to the United States. When he arrived in 1793, news of the Terror had not reached large segments of the American population. The Washington Administration grew aggravated by Genêt's attempts to rally Americans to the French cause without the administration's blessing. In addition to Genêt's actions, sixteen Democratic-Republican Societies formed throughout the United States and tried to direct popular passions expressed at democratic festivals against Federalist policies. The administration grew concerned that French Revolutionary ideas had infected Americans who now pushed for more liberty and cared little about the need to maintain order.[24]

While Federalists grew increasingly concerned about the American dissenters and the Jacobin Ambassador, Tammany and Democratic-Republican societies used shared symbolism to show their alliance with the Jacobins. In 1793, some of the first and most powerful Democratic-Republican societies formed in and around Philadelphia. Citizen Edmund Genêt played a part in the societies' formations, particularly in Philadelphia where the first leaders of the Democratic Society of Pennsylvania greeted Genêt with a feast at Oeller's hotel on June 4. During the meal, "the cap and tree of Liberty, the American and French National Flags ornamented the table." A little over a week later, the New York Tammany Society hosted French officials and the Grand Sachem expressed Tammany's respect for the French Revolution over dinner. The French

[24] Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 135–57.

Consul to New York, Alexandre-Maurice Blanc de Lanautte, comte d'Hauterive, replied with thanks and a reminder that Americans had destroyed despotism, but were "charged to prevent its resurrection." So long as America remained "the cradle of freedom" the French wished to "join our laurels with yours, and under the shadow of the Tree of Liberty, the whole universe will enjoy permanent happiness."[25]

Thanks to Genêt's machinations and the rise of Democratic-Republican societies, the Washington administration was on alert for any sign of insurrection in 1794. They no longer ignored people who raised liberty trees or poles. They did not try to claim the symbols either given their associations with democrats and Jacobins. When armed western rebels attacked tax collector John Neville's home in 1794, Washington, Hamilton, and the Federalists wanted to send a firm message: rebellion was not acceptable. When rebels put up liberty poles as representations of their protest, most Americans no longer looked at them as symbols that commemorated the American Revolution. They were signs of an active, violent rebellion against a constitutional government.

Whiskey rebels nevertheless did try to connect liberty poles with the American Revolution. Western frontiersmen took pride in their distance from the eastern centers of power, but they shared with their eastern brethren a belief in just causes. When western radicals armed themselves and took to the streets, they tried to frame their opposition to the whiskey excise in terms of liberties threatened rather than mere dislike of taxation. The rebels' quest for legitimacy seemingly made liberty poles ideal representations of their movement because they drew clear connections between the westerners' stance and the one colonial Americans had taken nearly two decades prior. Justification was more important than ever during the summer and fall of 1794,

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[25] "Civic Feast," *General Advertiser*, June 4, 1793; "[No Headline]," *The Daily Advertiser*, June 20, 1793.

when the federal government began conscripting an army to enforce the rule of law. In response to federal militarization, western radicals challenged both conscription drafts and the government's stance by constructing liberty poles throughout western Pennsylvania and Maryland. Westerners hoped that by drawing such strong parallels to the American Revolution they could successfully communicate the validity of their grievances, illuminate the tyrannical practices of the federal government, and convince undecided locals to side with the rebels and resist conscription.[26]

Yet radical whiskey rebels also signaled that their liberty poles were more than just symbols meant to draw American minds back to the American Revolution. Radicals incorporated new practices and rhetoric from the French Revolution into their theatrical performances of opposition. There was, for example, the incident in Carlisle where the workers who built and planted the town's liberty pole affixed a sign to it stating "Liberty and Equality." The language suggested a relationship between the whiskey rebels' liberty poles, the social reforms favored by American democrats, and the ideals of the French Revolution. Other poles and signs demonstrated even clearer connections between the Whiskey Rebellion and the French Revolution. Slogans attached to liberty poles in western Pennsylvania sometimes sported the full

[26] "George-Town, September 5," *The Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*, September 8, 1794; "Philadelphia, September 5. Extract of a Letter from Bedford, Dated 31st August, 1794," *The Baltimore Daily Intelligencer*, September 10, 1794; "Martinsburg, September 8," *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, September 13, 1794; "[No Headline]," *The Independent Gazetteer*, September 17, 1794; "September 9. Extract of a Letter from Bedford, Dated 31st August, 1794," *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy or, The Worcester Gazette*, September 17, 1794; "Philadelphia, September 16," *The Daily Advertiser*, September 18, 1794; "New-York, September 19. Extract of a Letter from Lancaster, Dated September, 11th," *The Daily Advertiser*, September 19, 1794; "From a Georgetown, Maryland Paper, of September 5," *The Oracle of the Day*, September 20, 1794; "Georgetown, Sept. 5," *Supplement to the Connecticut Courant*, September 22, 1794; "Philadelphia, Sept 17. Extract of a Letter from Lancaster, Dated September 11," *Hartford Gazette and The Universal Advertiser*, September 25, 1794; "Philadelphia, September 14," *The United States Chronicle: Political, Commercial and Historical,* September 25, 1794; "Liberty Poles," *Massachusetts Mercury*, September 30, 1794; "Carlisle, Sept. 24. Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Hagerstown, Dated 21st Instant, to a Gentleman in This Town," *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser*, October 4, 1794; "Extract of a Letter from Union-Town, Dated September 4," *The City Gazette & Daily Advertiser*, October 15, 1794; "Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, October 11. From a Correspondent in the Blues. Head-Quarters Carlisle, October 4," *Spooner's Vermont Journal*, October 27, 1794; Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 188, 197, 203, 205–10, 217, 227.

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" phrase associated with the French Revolution. Some rebels also listened to speeches given from the base of the poles while men in disguise threated to guillotine opponents.[27]

Given the Washington administration's increased sensitivity to threats of rebellion against the federal government, the use of liberty poles and the employment of the rhetoric of the French Revolution structured Federalists' responses to the rebels' symbolism. They did not accept claims that liberty trees and poles aligned whiskey rebels with American revolutionaries, but rather saw them as emblematic of dangerous, unjustified insurgencies that were probably influenced by nefarious foreign ideas. Much like their British counterparts a decade earlier, Federalist newspapers published reports that delegitimized the western uprising by casting the rebels as a misguided, self-interested mob of uneducated, spineless country peoples violently opposed to the forces of order.

The Federalist press assured readers that backcountry dissenters were not the revolutionaries of the American past. The *Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser* reported that during the first week of September "a number of deluded persons intended meeting at Sleepy Creek…for the purpose of erecting a liberty pole in opposition to the excise act." When a small military detachment arrived to disperse the "posse," "those *brave* opposers of the laws of their country, panic struck at their personal danger, and destitute of courage to proceed in their undertaking, took to the woods, and savage like, only made a scattered appearance upon the hills, sculking behind trees and bushes." A few were captured by the forces of order and appeared so ignorant that "they could not be apprized of the dangerous part they were acting." Erecting a liberty pole had become, in the eyes of Federalists, a dangerous, foolish, and illegal act.

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[27] "Philadelphia, September 16," *The Daily Advertiser*, September 18, 1794; Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 188.

Although moderate democrats disavowed the radicals who engaged in or supported popular violence, opponents of the rebellion successfully connected liberty poles with illegitimate violence against the constitutional government of the United States.[28]

Despite the best efforts of the whiskey rebels to legitimize their movement by drawing parallels to Atlantic revolutions, in the end their actions provided the Federalists in command of the government with precisely the justification they needed to make their point about the need for a strong central government. Stating a responsibility to protect the United States, President Washington assembled a large American military expedition. The force of nearly 13,000 men, many of whom had been conscripted from states where the rebellion took place, successfully quelled the Whiskey Rebellion in October 1794. No doubt cognizant of the odds against them, most rebels melted back into the countryside. Facing little resistance, federal forces destroyed any liberty poles they found. The whiskey rebels had successfully placed the federal government in the role that British forces had played two decades prior, but an altered political context and the highly regional nature of the Whiskey Rebellion meant that the federal government appeared to many Americans to be justified in destroying the rebellion to maintain social order and national cohesion.[29]

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[28] "Martinsburg, September 8," *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, September 13, 1794. Other publications produced similarly negative portrayals of rebels and liberty poles during the Whiskey Rebellion. For a few examples see, "[No Headline]," *The Independent Gazetteer*, September 17, 1794; "[No Headline]," *General Advertiser*, September 17, 1794; "From a Georgetown, Maryland Paper, of September 5," *The Oracle of the Day*, September 20, 1794; "Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, October 11. From a Correspondent in the Blues. Head-Quarters Carlisle, October 4," *Spooner's Vermont Journal*, October 27, 1794.

[29] "Carlisle, Sept. 24. Extract of a Letter from a Gentleman in Hagerstown, Dated 21st Instant, to a Gentleman in This Town," *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser*, October 4, 1794; "Extract of a Letter from Union-Town, Dated September 4," *The City Gazette & Daily Advertiser*, October 15, 1794; "Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, October 11. From a Correspondent in the Blues. Head-Quarters Carlisle, October 4," *Spooner's Vermont Journal*, October 27, 1794; Slaughter, *The Whiskey Rebellion*, 217–21; "Whiskey poles" and the Whiskey Rebellion remained prominent in both American popular and political culture throughout the decade as evidenced by, "[Advertisement]," *The Weekly Museum*, June 17, 1797; Simple Truth, "From the Farmer's Weekly Museum," *Columbian Centinel*, February 10, 1798; "Albany, Sept. 7," *Alexandria Advertiser*, September 18, 1798; "Postscript. From the Pitsburgh Gazette," *The Herald of Liberty*, February 25, 1799.

After the Whiskey Rebellion generated mental associations between illegitimate insurgencies and liberty poles, news from France imbued liberty poles with another series of negative connotations that forced American democrats to reconsider their rhetoric and symbolic politics. In early 1795, just as the tumult over the Whiskey Rebellion died down, American newspapers disseminated accounts of Étienne Maignet's atrocities in Bédoin. *The American Minerva*, based in New York, produced one of the first reports on February 11, 1795. *The Minerva's* report said that the "liberty pole" in Bédoin "during the reign of the Jacobins…was taken down." When the populace failed to follow Maignet's order and identify the perpetrators, "the despotic commissary, in a rage, ordered the whole commune, consisting of 500 houses, to be laid in ashes, and the order was literally executed." The report listed valuable buildings that had been destroyed and said that when a young girl later applied for the release of her father from state custody, the official in charge asked what her father had done. When the girl responded that he was from Bédoin, they were both arrested and executed two days later. The report concluded with an observation: "By reading the Paris papers, we are led to consider France, under the late Jacobins, as one Den of thieves and cut throats."[30]

Newspapers spread similar accounts throughout the United States. In addition to these accounts, several printers around the Atlantic published the Englishwoman Helen Maria Williams's letters from France describing atrocities committed during the Terror. She described the Bédoin incident in detail and said that the whole thing had been a Jacobin plot. No one denied, not even Maignet, that he had ordered a stringent, violent response to the destruction of Bédoin's liberty tree in 1794. Even when American newspapers reported that the Terror was over and tyrannical Jacobins like Maignet had been brought to justice, many American

[30] "Translated for the Minerva. Brussels, Nov. 29," *The American Minerva*, February 11, 1795.

democrats could not deny that they had proudly deployed liberty trees and poles to celebrate the Jacobin regime in 1793 and 1794. American democrats raised liberty poles to challenge the centralization of power in a national government, but the French Republic under the Jacobins that they idolized had used liberty trees to assert state power and had brutalized any citizens who dared challenge the National Convention's stranglehold over France.[31]

Unsurprisingly, Francophilia declined in the United States beginning 1795. Americans raised far fewer liberty poles from 1795 to 1797 than they did from 1792 to 1794. Not only were liberty poles now seen as emblematic of violent insurgency, by 1795 they also represented Jacobinism and state-sponsored terrorism. Though reverence for the French Revolution never fully dissipated, Americans were less willing to align themselves with the French Revolution after 1795. That is not to say, however, that liberty poles disappeared from the United States. On the Fourth of July, 1795, nearly seven months after the end of the Whiskey Rebellion and five months after Americans learned of Jacobin depravity at Bédoin, revelers in Paterson, New Jersey, and Dumfries, Virginia raised liberty poles to celebrate America's birthday. During the latter ceremony, "the American flag was hoisted on a very lofty liberty pole, and a discharge of artillery directed the eyes of our citizens to the delightful spot appointed for the scene of their festivity." Although Americans recoiled from using liberty poles to align themselves with the

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[31] Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Scenes Which Passed in Various Departments of France during the Tyranny of Robespierre*, 3:86–90; Williams' various collections of letters were published throughout the Atlantic world. For a version published in the United States see, Helen Maria Williams, *Letters Containing a Sketch of the Scenes Which Passed in Various Departments of France during the Tyranny of Robespierre; and of the Events Which Took Place in Paris on the 28th of July, 1794.* (Philadelphia: John M. Snowden, 1796). For a few examples of American newspapers carrying accounts of the burning of Bédoin see, "Translated for the Minerva. Brussels, Nov. 29." *The American Minerva*, February 11, 1795; "[No Headline]," *Gazette of the United States and Daily Evening Advertiser*, February 17, 1795; "[No Headline]," *Columbian Herald or The Southern Star*, March 18, 1795.

French, and despite the undertones of violence associated with the symbols, they could still, with proper preparation, be effective reminders of America's revolutionary past.[32]

Liberty Poles and the First Party System, 1794-1799

Thomas Jefferson's Parlor. Monticello, Charlottesville, Virginia. Sometime After 1797.

Thomas Jefferson hung some of his favorite works of art in the pentagonal parlor in the main house at Monticello. In the late 1790s, included among the portraits of great Enlightenment thinkers and the religious and allegorical paintings Jefferson appreciated was a print of a painting executed by the Philadelphia artist Edward Savage, *Liberty: In the Form of the Goddess of Youth, Giving Support to the Bald Eagle* (Figure 3.1).

Savage's painting was very popular in the years after he produced it in 1796. The reason for its popularity, particularly for a man like Jefferson whose dedication to liberty was legendary by that point, was that it contained many familiar national symbols. Liberty, as the title states, is represented as a young woman. She offers a chalice to a bald eagle, which had been selected as an emblem of the United States during the War of Independence. Behind her, clouds fill the frame, parting only slightly above her head to reveal a flagpole with the stars and stripes flapping in the wind. Atop the flagpole is the unmistakable Phrygian cap, making the flagpole a proper liberty pole.[33]

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[32] "Dumfries, July 10," *Aurora General Advertiser*, July 20, 1795; "By This Day's Mails. Newark, July 8. Paterson, July 4th, 1795," *Gazette of the United States*, July 10, 1795. For a brief exploration of changes in American democratic culture and the turn away from pro-French utopianism see, Hale, "Regenerating the World," 916-918.

[33] Edward Savage, *Liberty. In the Form of the Goddess of Youth, Giving Support to the Bald Eagle*, 1796, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., accessed May 4, 2017, http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003689261/.

Figure 3.1: Edward Savage, *Liberty. In the Form of the Goddess of Youth, Giving Support to the Bald Eagle* (1796). Source: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

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The realization that French liberty trees had come to represent state brutality, not democratic liberty, put American democrats on the defensive and led them to curtail their use of liberty trees and poles after 1795. In addition to reports about the Terror, Americans also received plenty of news about Napoleon's romp through Italy in 1796 and 1797. Napoleon's

order to shoot armed rebels and burn down the homes of any who did not disperse may have conjured up Maignet's brutal response to the destruction of Bédoin's liberty tree. American dissenters who used liberty poles to challenge federal power did not wish to align themselves with the authoritarian aspects of Jacobinism and the conquests of Napoleon Bonaparte.

The diplomatic situation with France also complicated matters for American democrats. In 1794 and 1795 the treaty John Jay negotiated with Great Britain drew the ire of American democrats. The Jay Treaty improved American trade relations with Great Britain, but since Britain was at war with France, it enraged the French who regarded it as a betrayal of American neutrality. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison agreed with the French. They whipped up public sentiment against the treaty and helped unify the opposition into a proto-political party, the Democratic-Republicans. In the end their protests were not enough to sway the Senate, which ratified the treaty after George Washington threw his considerable political weight behind the measure.

When the Directory reacted to the treaty by attacking American shipping, Democratic-Republicans were in a bind. The aggressive French response led to what has been called the Quasi-War. Though Democratic-Republicans did not have any love for Great Britain or for the Federalists who had started the crisis, when forced to choose sides, national loyalties won out. Democratic-Republicans recognized that raising liberty trees aligned with a French government sanctioning attacks against American sailors was decidedly unpatriotic. Liberty trees and poles thus became increasingly rare, even at Fourth of July festivals. In 1797 Concord, New Hampshire was one of the few towns to include a liberty pole in their Fourth of July celebration,

but they notably did not issue any calls for closer connections with France or a global crusade for liberty.[34]

Some anti-democratic writers took advantage of the temporary weakening of the trans-Atlantic democratic coalition to assail democrats and their beloved symbols of liberty. Newspaper commentators associated liberty poles with social anarchy. An anonymous writer in a New York paper wrote, "the mob always love change, noise and confusion. These are the base amusements of the herd of mankind, who will leave their honest employments, and crowd round a buffoon, a boxing match, or a town meeting—who delight to see a great man beheaded and to dance around a liberty tree." The following year, a writer identifying himself only as "Simple Truth" described democrats as lawless heathens: "it is certainly true that the democrats are image worshippers; papists in politicks; a liberty cap, a dry pole called a liberty tree, and a harlequin flag command that homage, which they refuse to the laws and magistrates."[35]

Diplomatic and political affairs may have embarrassed Democratic-Republicans and ruptured the connection with the French, yet a series of blunders by the Adams Administration from 1798 to 1799 allowed them once again to use liberty poles to challenge the federal government. The ways in which they employed those poles, however, differed from earlier practices. They no longer associated the poles with the French and mentioned only in passing their vision of a worldwide revolution against tyranny.

The Adams Administration's blunders stemmed from its inability to manage the complex diplomatic and political situation linked to the ongoing French Revolution and outbreak of the

[34] "Concord, July 11. Festival of Liberty," *The New Star*, July 11, 1797. While I found multiple Fourth of July festivals that used liberty poles every year between 1790-1796 and 1798-1800, 1797 was an exception. Only this single report turned up in the Readex/Newsbank *America's Historical Newspapers* database.

[35] "[No Headline]," *The Minerva and Mercantile Evening Advertiser*, August 18, 1797; Simple Truth, "From the Farmer's Weekly Museum," *Columbian Centinel*, February 10, 1798.

War of the Second Coalition in 1798. President Adams sent a delegation to France to negotiate an end to the Quasi War in late 1797. Three French middlemen known only by the letters X, Y, and Z in official correspondence greeted the commissioners. The three Frenchmen demanded bribes before engaging in negotiations. The American delegation balked and left France. When word of the French insult reached the United States, Adams and the Federalists used the news to embarrass pro-French Democratic-Republicans who reluctantly agreed that the French were out of line.

The Federalists, however, overplayed their hand when a warmongering coalition of them started building up the American military in preparations for an open war against France. The military buildup, the fact that the new army would be commanded by the glory-seeking Alexander Hamilton, and the Federalists' decision to expand their already controversial tax policies to fund the military buildup helped Democratic-Republicans regain their footing. Americans generally opposed standing armies and they definitely opposed tax increases. The army the Federalists were mustering seemed just as likely to undermine the American Republic as counter the French threat and the taxes the Federalists were collecting to support it definitely threatened Americans' property.

As if the military buildup and increased taxes were not enough, the Adams Administration passed a series of laws in 1798 that gave further credence to the belief that the Federalists planned to build a proto-monarchy in post-Revolutionary America. A series of three Alien Laws restricted the rights of foreigners because Federalists assumed that many immigrants supported Democratic-Republicans. They also offered a legal framework for prosecuting anyone who openly criticized the President or the federal government. An additional Sedition Act made Democratic-Republican newspaper publishers as well as German and French immigrants

susceptible to government harassment. The whole situation started to feel strikingly familiar to those who had lived through the imperial crisis of the 1760s and 1770s. Those wishing to challenge the federal government's policies of taxing its citizens indiscriminately, building a potentially tyrannical standing army, and harassing citizens for speaking freely knew exactly how to protest.[36]

As the Alien and Sedition Acts moved through Congress in June and July, Democratic-Republicans once again used liberty trees and poles to oppose federal policy. In Patterson, New Jersey, citizens gathered around a tree of liberty on the Fourth of July. During the procession through town to the liberty tree, "a venerable Republican Citizen" proudly bore "the Cap of Liberty." In Hackensack, New Jersey, Democratic-Republicans raised a liberty pole and placed a cap on it. Federalists fought back by suggesting that Democratic-Republicans were insufficiently patriotic. They claimed the use of liberty caps on liberty poles showed that Democratic-Republicans sympathized with the French enemy. The local Federalists in Hackensack labeled the cap on the town's liberty pole "an *obsolete* and *offensive* symbol of our *late connexion* [sic] with France, and of the *exploded Jacobinism* of '93.'" They took the cap down and buried it, replacing it soon after with an "*elegant* EAGLE," which they claimed was "America's favorite bird, which now stands in a firm, erect attitude, and with a countenance expressive of determination to defend herself against the sacrilegious talons of every foe."[37]

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[36] For a brief summary of Federalist tax policies see, W. Elliot Brownlee, *Federal Taxation in America: A Short History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 17–19. For a detailed examination of the impact of those tax policies on American political culture see, Paul Douglas Newman, *Fries's Rebellion: The Enduring Struggle for the American Revolution* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 72–78; Paul Douglas Newman, "Fries's Rebellion and American Political Culture, 1798-1800," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 119, no. 1/2 (1995): 42–45.

[37] "Patterson, July 6, 1798," *The Centinel of Freedom*, July 10, 1798; "Communicated from Jersey," *The New-York Gazette and General Advertiser*, July 11, 1798.

Federalist arguments generally failed to hit home. While Democratic-Republicans occasionally used French aesthetic touches—like liberty caps—in their ceremonies, they were no longer interested in tying themselves to France's fortunes. In 1798 and 1799, Democratic-Republicans deployed liberty poles as emblems of domestic protest, not symbols of transnational revolution. They carefully managed the poles' meanings through signage and rhetoric that overtly attacked Adams, the Federalists, and the Alien and Sedition Acts while drawing connections to America's revolutionary origins rather than the French Revolution's values. Just after the Alien and Sedition Acts and new tax bills earned congressional approval in 1798, western New Yorkers used signage to state their patriotic position and define liberty as a status threatened by the Adams administration. A liberty pole in Newburgh included an inscription: "1776/ LIBERTY. JUSTICE./ THE CONSTITUTION INVIOLATE./ NO BRITISH ALLIANCE./ NO SEDITION BILL." A pole in Dedham, Massachusetts carried a similar inscription: "No Stamp Act, no Sedition, no Alien Bills, no Land Tax: downfall [sic] to the Tyrants of America, peace and retirement to the President, long live the Vice President and the Minority; may moral virtue be the basis of civil government."[38]

The ways in which Americans used liberty poles from July 1798 until the end of 1799 demonstrates the malleability of both the concept of liberty and the symbolism used to represent it. Critics of government policy found themselves both able and empowered to take aspects of the French Revolution and apply them to domestic issues without relying on explicit bonds between themselves and the troubled French Directory.

Federalists challenged Democratic-Republicans and their liberty poles. They accused Democratic-Republicans of fomenting a new violent revolution against the constitutional

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[38] "Newburgh, July 8," *Aurora General Advertiser*, July 18, 1798; "Boston, Nov. 12.," *The Bee*, November 21, 1798.

government. That was the strategy they had used during the Whiskey Rebellion. When discussing the Newburgh pole, one commentator lamented, "it is painful to see even in remote and obscure villages any opposition to the measures of government expressed in this manner." Other reports blamed Democratic-Republicans for violence, claiming "that a number of people in and about Newburgh, Ulster county, assembled the other day to take down the Liberty-pole— This having excited the resentment of those who had erected it, they assembled with arms, and killed several of the opposite party."[39]

In Dedham, Federalist authorities demolished the liberty pole and arrested two locals, Benjamin Fairbanks and David Brown, charging both with sedition. The resulting trial dominated the region's newspapers and resulted in a rather harsh prison sentence for Brown and a lighter sentence for Fairbanks. The trial put the raging partisanship afflicting the nation on display and illuminated the Federalist position that liberty poles represented a "rallying point of insurrection and civil war." The liberty poles' associations with both the American and French Revolutions combined with the Democratic-Republican rhetoric challenging government policy convinced Federalists that a new revolutionary movement might be afoot and they reacted accordingly.[40]

Unlike during the Whiskey Rebellion, however, public opinion turned against the Federalists when they cut down liberty poles and threatened Democratic-Republicans. By rejecting connections to the French Revolution and incorporating the poles into the national

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[39] "[No Headline]," *The Gazette of the United States*, July 24, 1798.

[40] Phillip I. Blumberg, *Repressive Jurisprudence in the Early American Republic: The First Amendment and the Legacy of English Law* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 134–37. The quote is from, "The Liberty Tree," *Aurora General Advertiser*, November 15, 1798. Other sources include, "Fall of the Dedham Pole," *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy or, Worcester Gazette*, November 14, 1798; "[No Headline]," *The Centinel of Freedom*, November 20, 1798; "Boston, Nov. 12," *The Bee*, November 21, 1798. For an extended examination of the liberty pole controversy in Dedham from the Revolution to the 1790s see, Charles Warren, *Jacobin and Junto: Or, Early American Politics as Viewed in the Diary of Dr. Nathaniel Ames, 1758-1822* (New York: Blom, 1968).

symbolic lexicon, Democratic-Republicans successfully revived liberty poles as symbols of American liberty under assault. In Vassalboro, Massachusetts (today part of Maine) "on the 15th of November [1798] a large majority of the inhabitants of the South parish…assembled for the purpose of erecting a LIBERTY POLE; with a view to show the world the zeal that glows in their patriotic breasts." The Vassalboro Democratic-Republicans eschewed all visual and spoken references to the French Revolution, choosing to decorate their pole with only the American flag. The following month a large crowd in the Long Island settlement of Bridghampton, New York, cheered the construction of a liberty pole "seventy-six feet high, bearing on the top a vane, with Liberty inscribed upon one side, and upon the other side a spread eagle with the flag of the United States and a Liberty Cap." This pole contrasted sharply with the 89-foot pole raised on the Fourth of July 1793 in Springfield, New Jersey. The signage tacked to the New York pole focused on domestic affairs: "*Vox populi vox dei*./Amendment, but no infringements upon the constitution./ No unconstitutional act, no unequal taxes./ Liberty of the Press, speech and sentiment,/ December 19, 1798." The toasts given in the evening also lacked overt references to the French Revolution, just a general salute to "The Tree of Liberty; may it be watered by the streams of true Republicanism, take root and flourish, till kings are unknown and tyranny with despotism shall be obliterated."[41]

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[41] "[No Headline]," *The Independent Chronicle and the Universal Advertiser*, December 6, 1798. Vassalboro Democratic-Republicans also burned the Alien and Sedition Acts after putting up a liberty pole: "Worcester, December 12," *Thomas's Massachusetts Spy or, Worcester Gazette*, December 12, 1798. The Vassalboro pole was quickly cut down by Federalists: "[No Headline]," *The Universal Gazette*, December 20, 1798; "Bridghampton, (L.I.) Dec. 22," *The Bee*, January 16, 1799. There are numerous examples of Federalists claiming that Democratic-Republicans were Jacobins who supported French efforts to undermine the United States. A few examples of such accusations are, "Anecdote of the Pownal Liberty-Pole," *Northern Centinel*, October 16, 1798; "Communications," *Russell's Gazette. Commercial and Political*, September 13, 1798; "New-York, December 10," *South-Carolina State Gazette, and Timothy's Daily Advertiser*, January 9, 1799; "Maine. Portland, May 13," *The Salem Gazette*, June 4, 1799.

One particularly astute commentator suggested that the federal government, in attacking liberty poles, showed that they had become tyrants in the same vein as the British. "How changeable are the opinions of men! some twenty years ago a flag staff mounted with the American standard, was called a *Liberty-Pole*, and was approved and cherished by government--now they are called *Sedition-Poles*, and discountenanced and suppressed by government." He noted that the reversal of roles by the American government raised the specter of despotism once more. "It is true, in '75 the British government destroyed these poles as the rallying posts of sedition and rebellion; but they were tyrants for so doing. And it is true that in '98 the American federal government did the same; but they were *not* tyrants for doing it, for the Sedition-Law forbids our calling them so." Where the whiskey rebels had failed to draw connections between the federal government and the British tyrants of 1765-1783, the more organized Democratic-Republicans of 1798-1799 succeeded.[42]

By 1799 Democratic-Republicans had proven quite savvy in their cooptation of Revolutionary symbolism. They answered each Federalist attempt to connect liberty poles with Jacobinism or the French Revolution with assertions that the poles represented nothing more or less than American liberty won on the battlefields of the American Revolution. In Hackensack, New Jersey, a year after Federalists replaced the liberty cap with an eagle atop the town's liberty pole, Democratic-Republicans replaced the eagle with a cap once more. However, they called the liberty cap "that early emblem of our emancipation from despotic shackles" and stated that the eagle was "an emblem of power."[43]

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[42] "[No Headline]," *The Bee*, February 20, 1799.

[43] "More, More Sedition Poles! Communications," *The Centinel of Freedom*, March 12, 1799.

Federalists' fears of Jacobinism and what Alexander Hamilton called an "internal invasion" continued to structure their responses to Democratic-Republican symbolism in ways that played right into the hands of their opponents. Beginning in February 1799, Pennsylvanians, particularly German immigrants, refused to pay the new taxes levied to finance the Quasi-War. In response, the federal government charged them with sedition. Small bands throughout Pennsylvania took up arms or gathered together to intimidate tax assessors. President Adams ordered the army to quell the unrest. Under the cover of enforcing the law, government-supported troops targeted liberty poles throughout Pennsylvania, hacking them down and arresting anyone who seemed likely to raise a new one.[44]

The decision to use force proved disastrous for the Inspector General Alexander Hamilton, President John Adams, and the Federalists. The campaign in Pennsylvania smacked of despotism. Democratic-Republicans in the region took the offensive in April and May 1799 by writing a series of newspaper articles that depicted a band of federal dragoons who had destroyed liberty poles as simple goons. "A Friend to Truth" recounted the whole episode in a manner that made it seem like a decidedly terroristic action against innocent citizens. "[The Lancaster Dragoons] went very still and unnoticed (for this is their Sampson-like political art from fear of meeting resistance) to a citizen of this town who had erected a liberty tree upon his own ground and bottom, and cut it down." The troops "also *terrified the Man's family with pistols and drawn swords*, and took along with them at parting the owner's instruments, wherewith they had demolished the ensign of true liberty."[45]

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[44] Ron Chernow, *Alexander Hamilton* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 577–78; Paul Douglas Newman, "The Federalists' Cold War: The Fries Rebellion, National Security, and the State, 1787-1800," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 1 (2000): 89–92. In addition, Alexander Hamilton's "internal invasion" quote is on page 66 of Newman's article.

[45] A Friend to Truth, "For the Reading Eagle. April 9," *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, May 13, 1799.

The story was not unique. Others Democratic-Republicans claimed to have been accosted for the "crime" of raising liberty poles. Depositions published in Philadelphia newspapers a month after the event included claim after claim that the Lancaster Dragoons stole tools to take down the offending icons. Stealing private property, even tools, demonstrated that government forces claimed the power to deprive private citizens of both their property and their freedom to dissent. The most damning of all the depositions came from Jacob Gossin who claimed that the troops had "secured" his workmen "to prevent their assisting" him. They then threatened his property. "If I was desirous to keep or preserve my house," he wrote, "I should fell the pole erected in my yard, which was generally denominated a liberty pole; tho' destitute of the customary symbol, the cap and flag." They threatened him and his wife with death should they refuse while their two-year-old son looked on. The troops "kicked and spurned to the ground" another of the couple's children before they "took my axe," Gossin claims, "and cut down the pole, and afterwards departed carrying with them the axe, my property."[46]

When Federalists cut down liberty poles in 1799 they did not seem to be saving the nation from foreign radicalism or imminent rebellion, but instead appeared to be violently rejecting Americans' constitutionally protected tradition of peaceful dissent. To many who read about and witnessed Federalist destruction of liberty poles, the threat to American liberty did not come from rebels, but from a federal government that saw in every instance of valid protest a precursor to armed insurrection. By the time Americans went to the polls to elect a new President in 1800, the only threat to American liberty and the poles that represented it seemed to be the Federalists.

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[46] Jacob Gossin, "[No Headline]," *General Aurora Advertiser*, May 24, 1799. Jacob Epler, John Strohecker, and Rudolph Sample provided similar stories in their depositions in the same paper.

Federalists tried to reclaim or at least align themselves with liberty poles during the presidential campaign. They attempted to draw a distinction between "American" liberty trees and liberty trees and poles that promoted "foreign" (French) influence. At a Fourth of July celebration in Smithfield, North Carolina in 1799, a Federalist gathering toasted John Adams and American institutions before very consciously raising glasses to "The American Tree of Liberty--may our citizens be vigilant in pruning from its branches the scions of foreign influence." In Exeter, New Hampshire, a Fourth of July toast expressed hope that "Americans never mistake the Anarchy pole, erected by factious citizens, for the tree of liberty planted by the toil, and nurtured by the blood of their fathers."[47]

Claims that there was a discernible difference between liberty trees that represented American history and others that reflected foreign influence ultimately fell on deaf ears. Federalist attempts to align Democratic-Republicans with Jacobin despotism would not gain traction as Americans went to the polls in 1800. President Adams came a distant third in the Presidential election to the two Democratic-Republicans, Thomas Jefferson and Aaron Burr. Americans roundly rejected Federalists whose actions in 1798 and 1799 suggested that they had grown far too power hungry and strayed too far from the values at the heart of the American Revolution. Americans wanted to return to a time when trees of liberty from Maine to Georgia showed American determination to resist the attempts of a powerful government to reduce them to a state of political slavery. No wonder that the winner of that 1800 campaign would style his victory a "Revolution."

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[47] "Fourth of July," *Gazette of the United States and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, July 30, 1799; "Concord, Monday, Aug 5, 1799," *The Mirror*, August 5, 1799.

Conclusion

By the time Thomas Jefferson took office in what he styled the "Revolution of 1800," liberty poles were unquestionably aligned with the Democratic-Republican coalition that had put him in office. Democratic-Republicans had successfully resolved the tension between commemoration and inspiration in 1798 and 1799, but they did so by making the liberty poles symbolize an American Revolution that had not quite fulfilled its promise. While democrats in the United States largely opposed calls for violent insurrection, they did want to see a social and political revolution. When that came to pass in 1800, they subsequently left the symbols of revolution behind.

Unlike in France, where liberty trees became emblematic of a tyrannical state, in the United States liberty trees and poles remained symbols of political opposition. With Jefferson in office, Democratic-Republicans had achieved their goals. As one poet put it in a new poem called "The Liberty Tree," "This Tree again thrives in Columbia's free land;/ Republicans watch and close by it stand./ Be firm against despots who love tyranny,/ Be united and guard safe your Liberty Tree."[48]

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[48] "The Liberty Tree," *The Constitutional Telegraph*, August 12, 1801.

CHAPTER 4

THE FALL OF THE REVOLUTIONARY NATION: LIBERTY TREES IN FRANCE FROM ROBESPIERRE'S FALL TO NAPOLEON'S RISE

On November 9, 1799 a coup led by Napoleon Bonaparte and Abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès replaced the unpopular Directory with the Consulate, a government modeled on an old Roman form of administration. Bonaparte, Sieyès, and Pierre-Roger Ducos formed a three-man executive that promised to put France back on the right path.

Soon after the coup, an exasperated and anonymous pamphleteer wondered if the three leaders and beneficiaries of the coup would in fact right the wrongs of prior governments. The coup of 18 Brumaire was, for this author, just the most recent coup of many. He was used to vapid promises made by empty men. From his perspective, every group that took control of France during the Revolution promised to work for the good of the people. Yet every one of them fell, rejected by large segments of the French populace. So he spent the majority of his publication carefully examining the backgrounds of three men who had just taken power. After doing so, he was not hopeful. "Let's face it," he wrote with a sense of resignation that practically bled off the page, "the revolution of 19 Brumaire [sic] is just the repetition of all those that have preceded it." All of the various men who had tried to take power could never establish their legitimacy and thus, if Napoleon and Sieyès wanted to end the Revolution and avoid the fates of Danton and Robespierre and other republican revolutionaries in Europe who had seen their grand ideas fail, the coup's architects needed to give the country back to its only legitimate ruler: Louis XVIII.

The articulate royalist argued that the French did not want a republic, at least not one where individuals and oligarchs ruled under the name of a republic. He had proof that they

wanted better. Just look at the country, he urged, "confidence is destroyed, commerce is replaced by agiotage, manufacturing villages are in misery, your institutions are despised, your magistrates debased, the entire national spirit is annihilated." If there was hope that the country could experience a resurgence, that rebirth would only happen "under the antique tree of monarchy, the majestic stem of which will receive bathing dews from the sky, which will strengthen its roots; while your tree of liberty, soused with the blood with which you have never stopped watering it, has never been able to grow." If Napoleon Bonaparte read this pamphlet, he probably agreed with most of the author's arguments. He just did not much care for the author's choice of legitimate ruler.[1]

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Compared to the French Revolution's early phases, the Thermidorian Reaction and Directory periods have received less sustained attention from historians. Historians focused on politics have conceived of the period as the Revolution's denouement. Deputies in the National Convention overthrew Robespierre's radical faction on July 9, 1794 (9 Thermidor III). After a year of anti-Jacobin reaction, the remaining deputies unveiled the Constitution of the Year III, a document that inaugurated the Directory, a new, more conservative republic that aimed to keep both radicalism and royalism at bay. Some historians have cast the period as a bourgeois reaction against Jacobin radicalism since franchise restrictions left political power in professional and propertied men.[2] Other historians break from the bourgeois reaction narrative and instead focus on the regime's futile quest for legitimacy. They point out that the new government, liberal

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[1] *Seul parti à prendre. Avis aux consuls* (Paris: Chez tous les marchands de nouveautés, 1799), 17, 22–23, accessed September 9, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[2] Georges Lefebvre, *The Thermidorians & The Directory: Two Phases of the French Revolution*, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Random House, 1964).

though it might have been in theory, continued to follow the Jacobin model by using repression to maintain order and centralizing power in governing institutions based in Paris.[3]

Popular political culture under the Directory has yet to receive sustained attention from scholars.[4] The present study, therefore, contributes to the scholarly conversation by examining how moderate republicans in both Paris and the provinces tried to reform popular political culture during this period by redefining existing symbolism, particularly liberty trees, to fit a political ideology that embraced the Revolution's liberal early phase while rejecting its descent into Terror. To this point, scholars have suggested that liberty trees were rendered largely irrelevant by the fall of the Jacobins.[5] Certainly, for one reason or another, enthusiasm for liberty trees declined in France after the fall of the Jacobins as the period saw far fewer liberty tree plantings than the preceding five years.[6] The trees saw a bit of a revival in 1798 when the Directory passed a law mandating that communities replant liberty trees.

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[3] In Bronislaw Baczko, *Ending the Terror: The French Revolution after Robespierre*, trans. Michael Petheram (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Baczko identifies continuities between Jacobin and Thermidorian political cultures. Howard Brown builds from Baczko's foundation in his controversial examination, *Ending the French Revolution: Violence, Justice, and Repression from the Terror to Napoleon* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007). Brown explains that the regime's futile quest for legitimacy led them to privilege order over liberal principles, which in turn led them down a destructive path toward the formation of a veritable security state. Essays in Gwynne Lewis, Colin Lucas, and Richard Cobb, eds, *Beyond the Terror: Essays in French Regional and Social History, 1794-1815* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983) show that the Directory's centralizing impulses generated resentment in the provinces.

[4] Of course historians have not neglected popular political culture. For example, in Suzanne Desan, *Reclaiming the Sacred: Lay Religion and Popular Politicsin Revolutionary France*, Wilder House Series in Politics, History, and Culture (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1990), Desan focuses attention on Catholic revival in the Yonne department between 1794 and 1795, arguing that villagers availed themselves of the rhetoric, symbols, and tactics of the Revolution to argue for religious liberty.

[5] Mona Ozouf traces the trees' origins but then implies that once maypoles became fully functioning liberty trees, their meanings did not demonstrably change from one era of the Revolution to the next. She pays scant attention to republican efforts to redefine liberty trees so that they might become effective symbols of a moderate political program. Furthermore, she does not discuss the liberty trees that French armies planted during their expansive campaigns between 1794 and 1799. Ozouf, *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 217–61.

[6] For example, Charles Hiégel and Bernard Richard, studying liberty trees in the Moselle and Yonne deparments note that very few liberty trees were planted in either location from 1795 to 1798. See, Charles Hiégel, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de la Moselle"; Bernard Richard, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de l'Yonne sous la Révolution et l'Empire."

Yet even though enthusiasm for the symbol waned on a national level, sources show that in some places republicans did plant new liberty trees and tried to redefine old ones from 1795 to 1797. In addition, France's armies planted liberty trees throughout Europe as they conquered new territories during the 1790s. Why, then, did moderate republicans maintain the liberty tree tradition at all and, more to the point, why were they unable to redefine liberty trees to promote their moderate republican vision? Liberty trees appealed to moderate republicans because they believed in the liberal republicanism that the trees had represented from 1790 to 1792. So, although Jacobins had connected the trees with the Terror, republicans of the Directory believed they could use the trees to advertise their more moderate Republic as one that rejected Jacobin excess, but preserved the Revolution's initial successes. In speeches and writings, they described liberty trees as objects that signaled good French republicans' disdain for both monarchy and anarchy, the two forces that threatened republican stability. They had the armies carry that message abroad as the military conquered more and more territory between 1794 and 1798.

Yet, in the end, republicans discovered that they could neither convince royalists to see liberty trees as anything other than icons of a left-leaning republic, nor extricate the symbols from their associations with Jacobin terrorism. The attempt to preserve Revolutionary symbolism while returning the Revolution to a prior era illuminated the contradictions at the heart of their movement. They wanted to end the Revolution by dispensing with popular militancy and terror. Yet they also wanted to preserve some aspects of the Revolution, particularly the seemingly stable republicanism that defined the Revolution from 1789 until the Jacobin rise in 1792. That contradiction was one that republicans of the Directory never resolved. Instead, Napoleon Bonaparte realized that the only way to end the Revolution was to sweep away reminders of the Revolution's chaotic and violent course. He stopped using Revolutionary symbolism after 1799.

Thermidorian Destruction: Liberty Trees and the Reaction of 1794-1795

Marseille, Bouches-du-Rhone, France. August 4, 1794.

On July 28, 1794 (10 Thermidor III on the Revolutionary calendar) Maximilian Robespierre's head was severed from his body. His death inspired uprisings against the Jacobins who had held an entire nation in a state of perpetual terror. After the guillotine dispatched over one hundred Jacobins in just a few days time, surviving Jacobins tried to distance themselves from the Reign of Terror that ultimately consumed Robespierre. Étienne-Christophe Maignet was an exception, at least in the weeks after Robespierre's execution.

The man who had ordered Bédoin torched over a vandalized liberty tree issued a proclamation on August 4, 1794 assuring the citizens of the Bouches-du-Rhone, Vaucluse, and Ardèche departments that a plot against the government had been put down. He urged citizens to "unite around the Convention" and "get close to the two committees (the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security) that are [the peoples'] sentinels." He urged citizens to stay the course, because their moral compasses pointed toward a "Mountain that can neither be shaken nor destroyed. Waves break upon it, and it strikes with the national club all the monsters that would attack the tree of liberty that is planted there." Maignet's proclamation was wishful thinking from a Jacobin who was unable to see that the coup on 9 Thermidor (July 27) had not only ended Robespierre's life, but also arrested the Jacobin nation-building project that Maignet had defended with fire. The Mountain could no longer protect its trees from a vengeful populace. Maignet would soon go into hiding. Unlike many of the liberty trees planted during the Year II, he managed to survive the Thermidorian Reaction.[7]

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[7] The claim regarding the widespread uprooting of liberty trees is from McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 277. A copy of Maignet's proclaimation is currently held in the Archives nationale: Étienne-Christophe Maignet, "Proclamation de répresentant du peuple, aux citoyens des départements des Bouches du Rhone, Vaucluse, et L'Ardêche." (Marseilles: Rochebrun, 1794), A.N. D/XLII/6; Dossier 27; Piéces 6.

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Abbeville, Seine, France. May 10, 1795.

On May 10, the administrators of the district and city of Abbeville wrote to Nicholas-François Blaux, the National Convention's representative in the department, to report "an insult wherein counter-revolutionaries succeeded last night in sawing down the tree elevated to liberty on the place d'armes of Abbeville." The administrators assured Blaux that the police were busy seeking out the perpetrators, but the news was not all bad. The administrators told Blaux that they had just seen the citizens of the town plant a new tree. During the ceremony they saw "evidence of patriotism" and heard "repeated cries of 'Vive la République.'" This, the administrators said, was proof that the commune was "indignant at the outrage made to liberty and its emblems." [8]

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The Festival of the Supreme Being proved to be the peak of Robespierre's career. Robespierre's saunter from the summit of the false mountain on the Champ de Mars to the base provided an apt metaphor for what would be a rapid fall from power. The ostentatious festival convinced many of Robespierre's fellow deputies that the supposed defender of the people really aspired to be a dictator. When the Robespierre-led National Convention implemented the Law of 22 Prairial (June 10, 1794), which included an absurdly broad definition of "counter-revolutionary" and mandated the death penalty for any counter-revolutionary activity, it only lent further credence to the growing concerns about Robespierre's power. The law of 22 Prairial

[8] "Correspondence concerning the Abbeville liberty tree can be found in, A.N. D/§1/9, Dossier 7; A.N. AF/II/165, Pièces 1 to 5 and 55 to 58. For more on Blaux see, Adolphe Robert, Edgar Bourloton, and Gaston Cougny, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français comprenant tous les Membres des Assemblées françaises et tous les Ministres français depuis le 1er mai 1789 jusqu'au 1er mai 1889 avec leurs noms, état civil, états de services, actes politiques, votes parlementaires, etc. I. A-Cay*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1889), 346, accessed January 26, 2018, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

guaranteed the Terror's continuation at the very moment when the Terror seemed to have accomplished its goals. French armies had beaten back invaders and claimed new territory. Government forces had also managed, albeit with tremendous bloodshed, to suppress Federalists and Vendéean rebels. Yet over the course of six weeks after the law's passage, 1,376 people went to the guillotine.

Robespierre gave a rousing speech on 8 Thermidor (July 26) 1794 calling for more proscriptions of counter-revolutionaries and subtly suggested that some of his colleagues in the National Convention might be counter-revolutionaries. When Robespierre finished, some of his sufficiently terrified associates sprang into action. The next day a coalition of Montagnards and more moderate deputies in the National Convention refused to allow Robespierre to speak. They placed Robespierre and his closest followers under arrest, but the disgraced Jacobins managed to escape custody. The outlaws fled to Paris's Hôtel de Ville, hoping that the radical *sans-culottes* would rescue them. The *sans-culottes* did nothing. When authorities stormed the Hôtel de Ville, they discovered that Robespierre had tried and failed to take his own life by chewing on a loaded pistol. His run of failures that day concluded with his successfully separating his jaw from his face but failing to end his life. He spent the last hours of his life in agonizing pain.

A screaming Robespierre and twenty-one of his followers lost their heads on July 28, 1794 amidst the cheers of the crowd surrounding the guillotine in specially returned to the Place de la Revolution. Seventy-one more Robespierrists died the next day. In what was perhaps a fitting end for a man who spoke regularly of equality and fancied himself the embodiment of the popular will, Robespierre's body was thrown into a common grave.[9]

[9] David Andress provides a very detailed account of the arrest and execution of the Robespierrists in, Andress, *The Terror*, 336–44. The guillotine had been moved from the Place de la Republique (Place de la Concorde) to the Place de la Nation during the peak of the Terror, but in an effort to make the execution of the Terror's architects as public as possible, a guillotine was installed in the more central Place de la Republique.

During the Thermidorian Reaction, as the period after Robespierre's death is called, French people who had endured the yearlong Reign of Terror took their revenge on the Jacobins. The moderate deputies who took control of the National Convention closed the Jacobin club, wound down the legislative and institutional underpinnings of the Terror, and released most of the suspects held on charges of counter-revolutionary activity. They also purged the Terror's architects from the National Convention. Some terrorists managed to hang the blame for the Terror around Robespierre's severed neck and survived. Many could not and wound up sharing his fate either by succumbing to the guillotine or by suffering transport to Guiana, a place so deadly to French colonists that it was dubbed "the dry guillotine."[10]

Throughout France, Jacobins and *sans-culottes* faced angry crowds. During some particularly brutal periods of the Thermidorian Reaction those angry crowds murdered accused leftists en masse. Thermidorians who dominated the National Convention after the Jacobin purge did little or nothing to halt the violent reaction. They also stood down when reactionary crowds turned their ire on the symbols of a revolution that had become a nightmare. Throughout the country, citizens tore liberty trees out of the ground, sawed them down, or left them to rot. Of all the symbols of the Revolution, liberty trees bore the brunt of the reactionary destruction because Jacobins had incorporated them into Revolutionary festivals and passed laws mandating their planting and preservation.[11]

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[10] Colin Jones, *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon 1715-99* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 494–506; William Doyle, *The Oxford History of the French Revolution* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1989), 272–81; McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 262–73.

[11] McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 277. McPhee does not cite evidence for his contention that liberty trees around France were torn up, but the general trend he mentions makes perfect sense because Jacobins had connected liberty trees with their nationalizing project. They passed two laws regarding liberty trees. The first, passed on March 27, 1793 confirmed an order from the Tarn department requiring liberty tree vandals to pay for the construction of an altar to be built around the liberty tree. The second, passed on January 22, 1794 required communities to replace any dead liberty trees. See, *Table générale par ordre alphabétique de matières, des lois, sénatus-consultes, décrets, arrêtés, avis du conseil d'état, &c. Publiés dans le Bulletin des Lois et le Collections Officielles, depuis l'ouverture des États généraux, au 5 mai 1789, jusqu'à la restauration de la Monarchie*

Anti-revolutionaries in the conservative west and south of France had been cutting down or vandalizing liberty trees to voice rejection of the Revolution since the movement's anti-clerical turn in 1792. After the Thermidor coup such actions seemingly drew far more moderated responses from French officials both in the provinces and in the National Convention, if they earned a response at all. Whereas Jacobin representatives-on-mission had sent numerous reports of liberty tree vandalism to the National Convention and had responded to acts of vandalism with force, the National Convention received comparatively few reports about liberty trees being defaced or destroyed between the Thermidorian coup on July 27, 1794 and the end of the National Convention on November 2, 1795.[12]

The lack of reports suggests that the Jacobin representatives-on-mission who had ranted hysterically about damaged liberty trees and meted out harsh punishments for liberty tree vandalism went into hiding, shifted to the political right, or died at the hands of reactionaries. Thermidorian representatives in the provinces and in the National Convention probably did not want to mimic the actions of the terrorists they were busy purging. Punishing people for attacking the liberty trees that Jacobins had ordered planted would certainly have been the Jacobin thing to do. Some Thermidorians probably sympathized with the reactionaries who destroyed liberty trees, but others simply turned a blind eye to the destruction, having decided that doing nothing was better than acting like a Jacobin.

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française, au 1.er avril 1814, vol. 1 (Paris: Imprimerie Royale, 1816), 129, accessed February 7, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[12] I found only five reports of liberty tree vandalism in the Archives nationales for the period in question. One of those was the report from Blaux, who also reported the replacement of the destroyed tree with a new liberty tree. The other four were, a letter from regarding the destruction of liberty trees around Caen from 20 Thermidor II (August 7, 1794), A.N. AF/II/269, Dossier 2267; a report about liberty trees cut down near Valognes dated 22 Thermidor II (August 9, 1794), A.N. AF/II/269, Dossier 2267; a report regarding a liberty tree cut down in Cany(-Barville) from 20 Floréal III (May 9, 1795), A.N. AF/II/165, Pièces 38 to 42; and a report about a liberty tree vandalized in the Allier department dated 30 Messidor III (July 13, 1795), A.N. AF/II/181, Pièces 35 to 37.

Yet once the initial wave of reaction dissipated, republicans faced the question of whether or not to preserve the liberty tree tradition in France. Though royalism enjoyed a resurgence in 1794 and 1795, the anti-Jacobin reaction did not suddenly turn revolutionaries into royalists. Republicans continued to embrace Revolutionary symbolism to position themselves in opposition to royalism. In Rouen, the National Convention's representative, Bernard-Jean-Maurice Duport, a man who had initially sat with the Montagnards in the National Convention before taking a more moderate stance during the Terror, issued a decree on April 9, 1795 that told the people of the Seine-Inferieur that royalism only had hope in places "where the emblems of liberty" had been "proscribed." Duport thus called for all the communities in the department to replace liberty trees that had been destroyed or damaged. The National Guard would oversee the plantings and Duport charged the citizens with decorating the trees' branches.[13]

Duport's decree indicated that, after the Jacobins' downfall, republicans felt more secure adopting liberty trees as representations of their own moderate republican vision. However, they recognized the need to rework the symbols' meanings in light of their view that a resurgent Jacobinism was as likely to threaten the nation as royalism. As the bloody campaign against accused Jacobins in Marseilles and Lyon came to a close, the reactionary Paul Cadroy ominously expressed the Thermidorian belief that "fanaticism, royalism, and terrorism conspire against justice, and their monstrous coalition menaces the Republic." He asked French citizens who supported a republic that rejected extreme positions to "gather around the tree of liberty; protect

[13] Duport, Bernard-Jean-Maurice, *Duport, représentant du peuple, aux autorités constituées, et aux citoyens du département de la Seine Inférieure* (Rouen: Jacques Ferrand, 1795), A.N. AF/II/141/A, Pièce 59.

the rights of man and citizen, promote the surveillance of your Magistrates; report the major culprits; respect and execute the laws."[14]

After dispatching Robespierre and the Jacobins, Thermidorians could have rejected all of the political symbolism of the preceding years, but they did not. Instead, they rebranded Revolutionary festivals and liberty trees to represent their position against royalism and to insist that the republican achievements of the Revolution were worth preserving, so long as bloody turmoil could be brought to an end. The Thermidorians wanted to legitimate their rule by brandishing the Revolutionary symbols, but they also envisioned a republican future that rejected extreme political positions and embraced diverse opinions. Beginning in November 1795 when the Constitution of the Year III went into effect and created a republican government called "the Directory," republicans would find out if they could use existing Revolutionary symbolism in this way to encourage the development of a political culture capable of supporting their regime.

Symbols of the Center: Liberty Trees and the Directory, 1795-1797

Besançon, Doubs, France. August 10, 1796.

The Directory had reigned in France for a little under a year when the administrators of the Doubs department assembled in formal attire in the departmental capital of Besançon to celebrate the fourth anniversary of the King Louis XVI's dethronement on August 10, 1796. The moderate republicans who controlled the Directory had issued a decree on July 31 (13 Thermidor), 1796, calling on all departments to celebrate the king's dethronement because they wanted all of France to show unified opposition to royalism and acceptance of republican governance. Members of the Doubs departmental administration, local military officials, and two

[14] Paul Cadroy, *Proclamation. Le représentant du peuple Cadroy aux habitants de Lyon* (Lyon: Maillet, 1795), 1–2, accessed January 30, 2018, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

units of National Guard troops formed a procession that marched to Besançon's Place de la Loi in compliance with the Directory's decree.

Upon arrival, the cortege gathered around a liberty tree planted on the square and listened as the president of the departmental administration gave a rather lengthy speech. The president argued that the National Constituent Assembly, the body that had crafted the Constitution of 1791, had had good intentions and good ideas, but had failed to understand the extent of Louis XVI's perfidiousness. The Constitution gave the king too much power, which he subsequently used to undermine the Legislative Assembly and precipitate a war between his old subjects and the forces of European monarchies. Common citizens had heroically deposed the king and beaten back the invasion he had welcomed. However, the king's fall gave way to chaos and violence because a people so long oppressed by a monarch struggled to navigate their way from "the state of revolution to that of a constitutional government." That struggle was coming to an end, according to the president. He assured the crowd that "despotism is no more, therefore all the elements of revolution must be placed in harmony with the constitutional government; the law alone must become the motive of our wills and our actions, and individual liberty must stop at the point where it begins to degenerate into license." In other words, the Revolution was over, republicans had created a stable constitutional government, and all the citizens of France should welcome the new era of stability and liberty.

All the while the town's liberty tree loomed over the crowd.[15]

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[15] Rambour, *Fête du dix août. Extrait des registres des arrêtés et délibérations de l'administration centrale du département du Doubs* (Besançon: Couché, 1796), accessed January 30, 2018, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

In August 1795, Thermidorians unveiled the Constitution of the Year III. The document illustrated their belief in centrist republican principles and their fear of political corruption. It established a republic governed by a bicameral legislature (the Council of Five Hundred and the Council of Ancients) and headed by an executive comprised of five "Directors." The government is generally called "the Directory" after its executive branch. They built a complex series of checks and balances into the Constitution. Although the Constitution of 1791 clearly influenced the Thermidorians, they left no room for a king, thus disappointing royalist hopes for the return of the monarchy. They also discarded the democratic aspects of the Jacobin Constitution of 1793 (which had never been implemented) and restricted the franchise to men who met strict age, residency, and property requirements, thus curbing the power of street radicals and commoners.

Predictably, Jacobins, *sans-culottes*, and royalists all hated the plan. Parisian radicals rose up against the Constitution before it had even been completed. In April 1795, the National Convention appointed a "commission of eleven" to gather ideas and craft the new Constitution. They filled the commission with moderate republicans and a few members who were thought to be constitutional royalists. That slap in the face combined with rising bread prices inspired Jacobins and Parisian *sans-culottes* to invade the National Convention. They demanded bread and the Constitution of 1793. They received neither. The Thermidorians quickly crushed the insurgents and expelled the few *conventionnels* who had been foolish enough to make their Jacobin sympathies known in the midst of the uprisings. Royalists waited until after the Constitution was unveiled to take their turn assailing it. On October 5, Parisian royalists moved against the National Convention. Their uprising was also short-lived thanks to the efforts of a

young commander named Napoleon Bonaparte, who famously turned the royalist insurgents away from the Convention with a "whiff of grapeshot."[16]

After putting down the initial uprisings, republicans tried to dial back violent repression and instead used symbolism and festivals to sell the benefits of their new government in the hope that they could succeed where prior governments had failed. Post-Terror republicans were not afraid of violence—as evidenced by the repression of leftists and royalists during the eighteenth-month reaction period—but by the time the Directory took power they were more interested in building a supportive political culture using education and persuasion rather than terrorism. They used liberty trees to both clarify and peddle their centrist republican ideology.

Republicans appropriated liberty trees because they had always been symbols of a revolution that opposed monarchy. Republicans wanted to bring the Revolution to a conclusion, not overthrow it. Therefore, the Directory maintained January 21 (the anniversary of the king's death) and August 10 (the day the king had been dethroned) as national holidays and included liberty trees in the festivals as memorials to the days when the people of France replaced a monarchy with the republic. In a piece published on January 21, 1796, an author who identified himself only as "Emmanuel" wrote that good Frenchmen should "recall the memorable epoch where liberty was forever strengthened by the most brilliant act of justice." When the king's head fell, "the sacred tree of liberty extended its profound roots under the debris of the lilies [the symbol of the House of Bourbon] and suddenly, enviously, virtues, knowledge, happiness, and glory became shared in our happy country."[17]

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[16] Jones, *The Great Nation*, 503–5.

[17] Emmanuel, *Appel a l'honneur français, sur le jugement de Louis XVI et la fête du 21 janvier. Par M. E**** (Paris, 1796), 3, accessed January 19, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Republicans shared Emmanuel's sentiment as they raised new liberty trees in 1796 during celebrations of January 21 and August 10. The municipal administration in Hellimer, a small commune in the Moselle department, planted a new liberty tree to replace a dying one during the town's celebratory feast on January 21. In Rieux, Haute-Garonne, the town's citizens raised a "new liberty tree" to mark the occasion. Two republicans, Pierre Barrau and Joseph Darbas, offered speeches beneath a liberty tree demonstrating that liberty trees could represent both opposition to monarchy and tolerant republicanism. Barrau spoke in the local Occitan language, a significant decision given that Jacobins had tried to promote nationalism by banning regional languages like Occitan. Darbas then told the assembled crowd, that the tree represented unified opposition to monarchy but also acceptance of political diversity. "Whatever your opinions, and for your own interest and the interests of the *patrie*," he urged, "rally around this liberty tree, witness of our vows and oaths."[18]

In Toulouse on August 10, 1796, the citizenry of the reliably republican town formed a procession, attacked a mock throne, and unveiled a massive statue of liberty as part of the day's festivities. Beneath that statue they listened to Hugues Destrem, a member of the Council of Five Hundred, speak about the glorious day when the people of Paris removed the monarch and inaugurated the first French Republic. Then, citizens and officials reformed into their procession and moved to "the middle of the square near the liberty tree" where the president of the central administration offered some important words to the crowd: "Honor to the brave ones who

[18] For the replanting in Hellimer see, Charles Hiégel, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de la Moselle," 430–32. For the speeches from Rieux see, Pierre Barrau, *Discours prounouncat per Pierré Barrau, jutgé dé pax dé la coumuno de Rioux, départomen de la Hauto-Garonno, à l'ouccasiou dé la festo d'el 21 Janbié (estille buffec) lé 10 Niboso (estille sancer) al pé dé l'arbre de la libertat* (N.p., [1796?]) accessed January 21, 2016, Rosalis, Bibliothèque numérique de Toulouse; Joseph Darbas, *Discours sur l'anniversaire de la mort du dernier roi des Français et, par occasion, sur l'inauguration de l'arbre de la liberté, prononcé à Rieux, chef-lieu de canton, department de la Haute-Garonne, le 10 pluviôse, l'an 4 de la république française, une & indivisible* (N.p., 1795), 2, 6–7, accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

overthrew the throne! The French no longer recognize masters other than the laws." The words were "transcribed in a large font in a frame," which was then hung from one of the tree's branches. The following year, they repeated the ceremony, hanging the same words from the liberty tree.[19]

Festivals and writings that used liberty trees to celebrate the foundation of the First Republic and the execution of the last monarch allowed republicans to brandish their Revolutionary credentials, but they also took steps to portray liberty trees as symbols of moderation. Republicans incorporated liberty trees into new festivals that celebrated the Thermidorian coup. Toulouse once again provides a useful example because its residents took to the streets on July 27 (9 Thermidor), 1796 to praise the Thermidorian reaction against Jacobin democratic authoritarianism. The town's liberty tree once again played an important role in the day's festivities: each citizen "carried a branch of oak and, that symbol of our liberty in their hands, the cortege went around the tree of liberty, and placed itself around the altar to the fatherland." The tree was even more prominent in the following year's 9 Thermidor festival. Organizers crafted another false throne and set it up near the liberty tree, but they placed daggers, torches, masks, and a copy of the Constitution of 1793 on it. The president of the municipal administration gave a rousing speech near the tree denouncing popular violence in any form. The law, not popular passions, would maintain liberty in the new republic. At the end of the speech, the president set the throne on fire. The citizenry celebrated by throwing their hats in the air,

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[19] *Procès-verbal de la fête du 10 août, célébrée par l'administration municipal de la commune de Toulouse le 23 thermidor de l'an quartieme*, (N.p., 1796), accessed January 21, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Procès-verbal de la fête du 10 août, célébrée le 23 thermidor an V* (Toulouse: Besian et Tislet, 1797), accessed January 21, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. The August 10 festival in Besançon in the Doubs department, right on the Swiss border was almost identical to the festivals held in Toulouse, but the speaker stood beneath a liberty tree to give his full speech: Rambour, *Fête du dix août. Extrait des registres des arrêtés et délibérations de l'administration centrale du département du Doubs*.

shouting acclamation to the Republic, and singing a patriotic song as they marched around the liberty tree.[20]

Unfortunately for republicans, displays like the ones in Toulouse were less common than anticipated. Republicans wanted to see people throughout France show their acceptance of the centrist republic by voluntarily raising liberty trees during public holidays, just as French people had done between 1790 and 1793. Between 1796 and 1797 municipalities had leeway in determining whether or not they would plant new trees or replace dead ones during festivals. Some did and some did not, but it is fair to say that there was no mass replanting of liberty trees that Directorials hoped would signal widespread acceptance of their centrist political position.[21]

When citizens proved disinclined to plant the liberty trees that represented a new republican revolution, the Directory made a fateful decision that led them down the same unfortunate path as their Jacobin predecessors. The Directors decided to assume responsibility for disseminating and protecting the trees. Apparently, the Directory found that not only were few liberty trees being raised or replaced, some were also vandalized despite republicans' belief that their politics would attract everyone except the most ardent royalists and leftists. In February 1796, the Director Étienne-François Letourneur weighed in on a debate about the possibility of

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[20] *Procès-verbal de la célébration de la fête de la Liberté par les deux administrations municipales du canton de Toulouse, réunies à cet effet le 9 et le 10 thermidor de l'an IV, conforément à l'arrêté du directoire executive, du 17 Messidor*, (N.p., 1796), 2, accessed January 21, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Procès-verbal de la fête de la liberté, célébrée les 9 et 10 thermidor an V* (Toulouse: Besian et Tislet, 1797), accessed January 21, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[21] In the AN and BNF I only found documents from 1796 to 1797 relating to the civic festivals in Toulouse, Besançon, and Tours. Even allowing for the possibility that I missed a few or that departmental archives hold relevant documents, there can be little doubt that there were far fewer liberty tree plantations from 1796 and 1797 than during the period between 1792 and 1793. My conclusion is further supported by the secondary literature on the subject. Charles Hiégel notes that "the zeal shown by the communes [in Moselle] for liberty tree plantations slows down a bit after the Year II." Charles Hiégel, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de la Moselle," 430–31. Bernard Richard skips over the period entirely, indicating that he found no new liberty tree plantings in the Yonne department during the period in question. Bernard Richard, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de l'Yonne sous la Révolution et l'Empire."

reopening political clubs that had been shuttered during the Thermidorian Reaction. He described attacks against liberty trees as crimes against the state while reminding his colleagues that the Directory would have to determine the proper punishment for any clubs or members of said clubs who would, among other transgressions, promote "the reestablishment of Royalty or the return of the Constitution of 1793, the degradation of the National Colors, the destruction of trees of liberty, and similar attacks that are committed with impunity every day throughout the Republic." Just like the Jacobins before them, Directorials conceived of attacks against liberty trees as a rejection of the state's ideology and a challenge to its legitimacy.[22]

In response to the realization that French citizens were not eagerly adopting the political symbol republicans desired, the Directory generated laws that threatened retaliation against anyone who dared desecrate a liberty tree. On April 11, 1796 (22 Germinal IV)—two months after Letourneur delivered his message—the Directory passed a law that defined penalties "to be inflicted for crimes committed upon liberty trees." Less than a month later, on May 4 (15 Floréal IV) the Directory clarified who would be responsible for adjudicating cases and doling out sentences related to the destruction or vandalism of liberty trees. The Directory stipulated that low-level *tribunaux correctionnelles*, tasked with adjudicating misdemeanors and other minor crimes, would no longer have jurisdiction over offenses against liberty trees. Instead, anyone

[22] Étienne-François Letourneur, *Message du Directoire exécutif, du 9 ventôse, l'an 4 de la République française, une et indivisible* (Paris: Imprimerie du Directoire exécutif, 1796), 6, accessed January 19, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. In McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 280, 317, Peter McPhee says that republicans were repeatedly troubled by liberty tree vandalism during this period. In May 1796, administrators in Bourg blamed royalist youths for cutting down the city's liberty tree. In July 1797 an official reported that "fanatics and bandits are stronger than the law: the trees of liberty topple in this canton and are replaced with anti-civic crowns, symbolic of the worship of a couple of old saints of the town and the work of the apostolic mob."

accused of committing a crime against the trees would be tried before the more serious *tribunaux criminelles*.[23]

In 1797, republicans could not deny that their attempts to redefine liberty trees and reorient Revolutionary festivals to clarify and promote their centrist republican position proved unsuccessful. When they chose to adopt the trees as symbols of their vision and punish dissidents who harmed them, they effectively mimicked Jacobins and signaled their intention to impose their vision by force if French citizens would not accept it willingly. Republicans' anxieties only increased as they learned that liberty trees also failed to inspire loyalty in foreign peoples. Indeed military commanders who claimed new territory during the successful campaigns from 1796 to 1798 planted liberty trees in foreign lands, hoping that the symbols could convey both French power and benevolence. Just like at home, liberty trees generated resistance to the republicans' ideology.

The War and the General: Liberty Trees, Napoleon, and the French Wars, 1795-1799

Aachen, Germany. May 29, 1798.

According to Anton Joseph Dorsch, an administrator in the French-controlled city of Aachen (Aix-la-Chapelle), these new liberty trees were emblematic of a long tradition of European rebellions against tyranny that the French were now supporting. In 1798 he gave a speech to the people of Aachen where he told of French armies following in the footsteps of "Solon, Lycurgus, Brutus, and Tell, who first planted the tree of liberty in those lands where tyranny had desiccated it, one after the other!" Dorsch's choice of heroes, the semi-mythical

[23] *Table générale par ordre alphabétique de matières, des lois, sénatus-consultes, décrets, arrêtés, avis du conseil d'état, &c. publiés dans le bulletin des lois et le collections officielles, depuis l'ouverture des États généraux, au 5 mai 1789, jusqu'à la restauration de la Monarchie française, au 1.er avril 1814*, 1:129.

liberators of Athens, Sparta, Rome, and Helvetia respectively, demonstrated the attempts by French revolutionaries and their local supporters to use liberty trees as timeless icons of European efforts to eradicate despotism.[24]

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The Directory inherited a war that was going rather well for the French. The French victory at the Battle of Fleurus in July 1794 opened up Belgium and gave French armies access to the Rhineland and the Netherlands. In the midst of the Thermidorian Reaction, French armies pressed their advantage and by the end of 1794 retook the Rhineland, a move that extended France to what some felt were its "natural borders," the Rhine to the east and the Alps in the south.

Those successes, however, sparked debates among Thermidorians. They differed on what to do with the new territories. Brissot had justified the initial campaigns by arguing that France should fight a defensive war to protect itself from the machinations of monarchs and *émigrés* who fantasized about restoring the French monarchy. A successful defensive campaign, he assumed, would inspire surrounding peoples to rise up against despotic governments, ask for French support, and together the forces of revolution would eradicate despotism in Europe. Of course the war did not go quite as Brissot had planned. Foreigners, far from flocking to French armies, generally rejected French symbols and administrators. The Jacobins had continued the war out of necessity. So long as royalists inside and outside France threatened the Revolution, France would fight back with Terror and violence. With the Jacobin downfall and French borders

[24] Anton Joseph Dorsch, "Discours prononcé à la fête de la Reconnaissance à Aix-la-Chapelle le 10. praireal, An 6" in *Recueil de discours patriotiques [par Dorsch, commissaire du directoire exécutif de l'administration centrale du département de la Roer. 1er ventôse an VI-10 floréal an VII]* (Aix-la-Chapelle: Beaufort, 1798), 2-3.

secured, Thermidorians had to decide if they would continue to fight and, if they did, they had to figure out how to justify their conquests and organize new territories.

The most pressing issue facing Thermidorians at the end of 1794 was whether or not to annex Belgium. Pockets of Belgian Jacobins offered some support to the French, but the vast majority of the Belgian population was simply exhausted after years of warfare and rebellions. Belgium's economy was in shambles, its fields had been stripped of much needed food, and violence had left towns and cities in various states of ruin. French armies only exacerbated these problems by requisitioning what few supplies the Belgians possessed. By 1795, most Belgians did not support French domination, but some supported annexation in the hope that incorporation into France would force the French to alleviate Belgian suffering and shield Belgians from further requisitioning. Facing a tepid acceptance of French rule, French administrators and their few allies used liberty trees and Revolutionary festivals to disseminate republican ideology as they tried to drum up support for annexation among both Belgians and Thermidorian deputies.[25]

On April 4, 1795, the administration of East Flanders decreed that vibrant, perennial tree specimens should replace dead liberty trees throughout the province. Visual representations of liberty were particularly practical for French-aligned administrators in Flanders where linguistic and cultural differences complicated French efforts to spread their message. When administrators gathered to plant a new liberty tree in Ghent that month, they participated in a festival that was, in all significant ways, identical to the repurposed ceremonies of possession that French armies under Dumouriez had used during the first conquest of Belgium. French-aligned officials marched through the city's streets, brought the liberty tree to the Place d'Armes, and planted it there. An observer reported that joyous applause accompanied the planting. The orator on the

[25] Michael Rapport, "Belgium under French Occupation: Between Collaboration and Resistance, July 1794 to October 1795," *French History* 16, no. 1 (March 2002): 53–82.

occasion gave credit for replanting the tree to the people of Ghent who had, "hastened to replant this cherished tree, which the sacrilegious hand of your tyrants had dared to counter."[26]

Though the Thermidorians eventually approved Belgian annexation in October 1795, the debate over whether or not to do so was a heated one that forced Thermidorians to outline a new foreign policy. Lazare Carnot, the former Jacobin who had been leading the war effort since 1793, objected to Belgian annexation. He argued that European powers would not be able to accept massive territorial losses and would therefore have no choice but to prolong the war. Other Thermidorians objected to annexation on ideological grounds. They believed that expansion would introduce corruption into a polity that could hardly cope with any more negative influences. Faced with the choice of ending the war or forging ahead to capture new territory and force the powers of the First Coalition to sue for peace on French terms, Thermidorians decided to do exactly what they had always done, split the difference. France's massive armies would continue to conquer new territories to show the nation's strength, inspire patriotism at home, and weaken surrounding nations who threatened the Revolution. But rather than annexing territories and openly admitting that the whole campaign was about conquest rather than spreading Revolutionary ideals, French commanders would organize any conquered territories into a network of French-allied "sister republics." These were nominally independent governments, but in reality were French puppet states. French republicans could at least use the new arrangement to convince themselves that they were not imperialists.[27]

[26] *Précis de ce qui s'est passé à Gand le 14 germinal, l'an 3.me de la République française, une & indivisible, lors de la replantation de l'arbre de la liberté, & discours prononcé à cette occasion*, (N.p, 1795), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[27] Esdaile, *The French Wars, 1792-1815*, 11–12; Connelly, *The Wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon, 1792-1815*, 68–72; Edward James Kolla, *Sovereignty, International Law, and the French Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 241–44.

When republican commanders set about the task of actually organizing sister republics, they used liberty trees and republican festivals to disseminate republican ideals, show the extent of French military power, and justify the military campaigns. In areas where locals offered at least some support for the French presence, festivals and liberty tree plantings bolstered French claims that the ultimate goal of the war was the liberation of oppressed peoples. Wherever local support for the French project was thin or non-existent, liberty trees remained integral to the repurposed ceremonies of possession that French forces had used to justify territorial acquisitions since 1792. They represented French power, but they also communicated French benevolence. Or at least that was the idea.

In January 1795, French forces linked up with Dutch patriots to oust the deeply unpopular Stadtholder, creating the Batavian Republic, the first sister republic. Though Dutch patriots were a minority, a large enough segment of the greater Dutch population figured that the French could not be any worse than the Stadtholder. Some were at least willing to let the French and the patriots form a new, less corrupt government. In Amsterdam, locals greeted the French with some excitement. Soon after declaring the Batavian Republic, French forces and Dutch patriots erected a liberty tree in Amsterdam's main square. The liberty tree was, if the retrospective images of the celebration are accurate, slightly different from the French version. A wide-brimmed liberty cap topped the tree. Similar caps had represented liberty in the Netherlands for at least two centuries prior to the French adoption of the conical Phrygian cap (Figure 4.1). The Amsterdam tree thus visually conveyed a link between French republicanism and the rather lengthy Dutch republican tradition.[28]

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[28] Reinier Vinkeles, *Fête de la liberté: Cèlebrée, à l'occasion de l'inauguration de l'arbre de la liberté, à Amsterdam, à la Place de la Revolution le 4.ieme de Mars, 1795*, 1795, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed April 14, 2014, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6948531q. A gilded branch of the tree is still held in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam: "1795-1806 Batavian Republic - Timeline Dutch History - Rijksstudio,"

Figure 4.1: Reinier Vinkeles, *Fête de la liberté: Cèlebrée, à l'occasion de l'inauguration de l'arbre de la liberté, à Amsterdam, à la Place de La Revolution le 4.ieme de mars* (1795). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

French successes in Holland convinced the Directory to maintain the war effort despite the fact that there was no longer a real foreign threat to France or the Revolution. The French victories in 1794 and 1795 brought Prussia and Spain to the negotiating table. France concluded peace with Prussia in April and Spain in July 1795. In 1796 the Directory could focus on

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Rijksmuseum, accessed May 9, 2017, https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/en/rijksstudio/timeline-dutch-history/1795-1806-batavian-republic. For an overview of Dutch history during late eighteenth century see, Simon Schama, *Patriots and Liberators: Revolution in the Netherlands, 1780-1813* (New York: Knopf, 1977). J. David Harden describes the Dutch liberty cap tradition in, J. David Harden, "Liberty Caps and Liberty Trees," *Past & Present*, no. 146 (1995): 73–74. Peter McPhee argues that some Dutch people initially welcomed the French and even raised their own liberty trees in McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 291.

eliminating the remaining threat on the continent: Austria. The government placed Napoleon Bonaparte in command of an army tasked with invading Italy. The Directory did not necessarily want to control territory in Italy, where Austria possessed or held sway in many of the Italian states, but rather wanted to put pressure on Austria's Piedmontese allies and draw Austrian forces onto the Italian peninsula, away from Vienna. While Napoleon kept the Austrians busy in Italy, the main French force would advance straight through the German states to Vienna.

Bonaparte exceeded expectations in Italy, to say the least. His army stormed across the Alps, ran roughshod over numerically superior Austrian and Piedmontese forces, and took city after city throughout the peninsula. The campaign was all the more impressive considering that the main French force made very little progress in their advance toward Vienna in 1796 and 1797. Within three weeks of crossing the Alps, Napoleon had defeated the Piedmontese. On May 10, Napoleon's forces crushed the rear-guard of the retreating Austrians at Lodi and he entered Milan in triumph on May 15. Two days later, the president of the Milan Société Populaire, supported by French troops, put up a liberty tree and declared the first day of Lombardian liberty. Napoleon rode out of Milan on May 24 convinced by the cheering that accompanied his departure that Lombardians celebrated the French presence and the man who had liberated the city. He was wrong.

The day after Napoleon left, five to six thousand peasants rose up in Pavia, just outside Milan. They besieged the three hundred men Napoleon had left behind to keep the peace. In Milan, locals rose up, tried to cut down the city's liberty tree, and made a public display of trampling on tricolor cockades. When members of the Société Populaire confronted the insurgents, a fight broke out. A French officer rallied French troops in the city. Napoleon returned and issued an order to shoot any armed rebels on the spot. He told the Pavian peasants

to return home or risk seeing their homes torched. He chastised priests, monks, and nobles, whom he blamed for inciting the riots, but there is certainly reason to wonder if he really believed that they had led the peasants astray. Regardless, the rebellion showed Napoleon that the French presence was not as popular as he had initially believed.[29]

The incident in Milan was not the last time that rebels and criminals threatened liberty trees in Italy. Bonaparte and his allies had constantly to protect liberty trees from the depravations of locals. Anti-revolutionary sentiment increased throughout Italy in August 1796 after Austrians scored some victories against the French on the peninsula. In Cremona, anti-revolutionaries suggested the liberty tree be left intact "in order to hang there those who had planted and *solemnized* it." In Bologna on October 16, locals planted a liberty tree to celebrate the formation of a new government in the Papal States, which the French had recently captured. The evening apparently got out of hand when a string of crimes invited a harsh response from Napoleon. The criminals had not directly attacked the liberty tree, but either the threat of attacks or some unreported incidents of vandalism inspired the region's newly empowered senate to issue a decree about the proper way to treat the liberty tree. The symbol should be looked upon with enthusiasm, but was not meant to inspire licentiousness. Anyone who defiled it, by actions or speech would be declared a traitor and sentenced to death.[30]

Napoleon's conquest of Italy taught him many things, and one lesson he learned was that liberty trees served as convenient targets for dissidents. When dissenters attacked the trees, the

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[29] François-René-Jean de Pommereul, *Campagne du général Buonaparte en Italie, pendant les années IVe et Ve de la République française; par un officier général* (Paris: Plassan, 1797), 47–48, accessed February 3, 2018, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; "Paris, June 7. Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, August 26, 1796; "Piacenza, May 31," *The Philadelphia Gazette and Universal Daily Advertiser*, August 26, 1796; Napoleon Bonaparte, "Army of Italy. Head Quarters at Peschiera, 137th Prairial (June 1.). Letter from General Buonaparte to the Executive Directory," *The Independent Gazetteer*, August 27, 1796.

[30] Pommereul, *Campagne du général Buonaparte en Italie*, 117, 181, 183.

French and their allies had to act, muddling the symbols' message. When they responded with repression, anti-French rebels had made their point: the French were no liberators. While the trees did represent the French presence, they neither inspired the fear necessary to maintain order nor did they demonstrate French benevolence and the inherent superiority of republican governance. Meant to serve both as symbols of conquest and of a universal revolution, it became clear that those two goals were almost always in conflict. Napoleon's experiences in Italy showed him firsthand that one could not be both a conqueror and a revolutionary.

Napoleon's experiences in Italy were not unique. Belgians, who had always balked at French cultural impositions, were particularly aggressive toward liberty trees after annexation. Administrators reported that Belgian locals vandalized or destroyed liberty trees to voice discontent with French occupation and bait French forces into launching repression campaigns that would display the lie at the heart of the French expansion project. Letters from administrators in Belgium reported that liberty trees in Genappe and Hoegaarden had been attacked in 1796 and 1797 respectively. A decree issued in 1798 by the administration in Deux-Nethes, a department that spanned what is currently the Belgium-Holland border, called for citizens to replant liberty trees and rehang tricolor flags because "the wicked hands of brigands who desolate your communities, have taken the axes to the liberty tree." In October 1799 administrators in Sotteghem reported that they had tracked down and caught a criminal who had damaged the town's liberty tree.[31]

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[31] Documents relating to the problems in Genappe can be found in, A.N. BB/18/283, Dossiers 2879 (D) and 1965 (D). Documents relating to an attack on a liberty tree in Hoegaarden are in, A.N. BB/18/285; Dossier DD 8175. The printed decree from Deux-Nethes, Aubert, *L'Administration Centrale du Département des deux Nêthes, à tous les bons Citoyens des Communes de son ressort* (Anvers: Parys, 1798) is located in, A.N. AF/III/152/b, Dossier 715, Pièce 79. American papers continued to carry reports of attacks on liberty trees in Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Italy until the end of the decade. See, for examples, Belgium: "Hague, October 27," *Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser*, January 14, 1799; The Netherlands: "Paris, November 5," *The Gazette of the United States*, January 14, 1799; Switzerland: "England. London, April 29," *New-Hampshire Sentinel*, June 22, 1799; Italy: "Verona, May 8," *Gazette of the United States and Philadelphia Daily Advertiser*, July 30, 1799.

The attacks in Italy, Belgium, and elsewhere indicated that the Directory's foreign policy never succeeded in achieving its ends. Though France gained new territories and beat back the forces of European monarchs, foreigners rarely bought what the French were selling. Liberty trees could not simultaneously convey French power and benevolence. When the French responded to liberty tree vandalism with violent repression, peoples throughout Europe proclaimed that the French were conquerors, not liberators. Repression inspired waves of rebellions that cost France time, money, and men. Indeed, the French never quite lived up to the model that Anton Joseph Dorsch described in 1798. Napoleon Bonaparte realized by 1797 that liberty trees were ineffective as symbols to legitimate the Revolution or the wars. He would remember that when he found himself in a position to decide whether he should spread the Revolution or focus on conquest and order.

Imposing Republican Renewal: Liberty Trees From Fructidor to Brumaire, 1797-1799

Lyon, France. December 10, 1797.

On December 10, 1797 the citizens of Lyon participated in a festival that celebrated the planting of three new liberty trees in the city. Citizens marched from one tree to the next and listened as one speaker after another praised each liberty tree and expressed appreciation for the Republic. But the Republic was in a time of flux, and the final speaker, Michel Carret, knew it. "While the tree of liberty is planted by our victorious armies upon the earth where, in the past, the most oppressive tyranny reigned," he said, "the national colors are degraded and insulted in the interior of the Republic; liberty is disdained; its symbols, its cherished attributes are overthrown!!" Carret then called on the assembly to unite against the royalist rebels and their

English allies: "if the *patrie* is in danger, let us press ourselves around it, embrace the liberty tree with one hand, and with the other, avenge it from its enemies."[32]

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If French people would not willingly embrace liberty trees, then republicans would make them do it. Having decided to foist their vision on France, republicans asked an important question. Could liberal ideas be imposed upon the populace without resorting to the tactics and ideologies of the Jacobins?

Republicans decided to abandon their educational efforts on September 4, 1797, or 18 Fructidor V on the Revolutionary calendar. Four months prior, royalists had demonstrated the inadequacy of republican efforts to remake Revolutionary political culture through education and persuasion. As the Constitution mandated, one-third of the Directory's legislators had stood for election in the spring of 1797. When the government tallied the results in May, they discovered that royalists had won a majority of the seats. Since only one-third of the representatives had been up for election, royalists had not formed a complete majority in the government. But with another round of elections scheduled for the following spring, most people assumed that they would dominate the legislature after the next election cycle.

The royalist legislators took their seats in the councils and immediately showed their power by electing a former republican general turned royalist representative, Jean-Charles Pichegru, the president of the Council of Five Hundred. After a tense four-month standoff, republicans launched a coup on September 4, 1797 (18 Fructidor V). Backed by troops under the

[32] *Procès-verbal de la cérémonie civique et solennelle qui a eu lieu dans l'arrondissement respectif de chacune des trois administrations municipales du canton de Lyon, le 20 frimaire an VI, pour la replantation des arbres de liberté* (Lyon: Ballanche et Barret, 1797), accessed, April 14, 2014, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. The document identifies the speaker quoted here only as "Caret." I assume that it is the lawyer Michel Carret who would be elected to the Council of Five Hundred in the Year VII. For Carret's bio see, *Dictionnaire des parlementaires français*, vol. 1, 1889, 593–94.

command of the reliable republicans Lazare Hoche and Pierre Augereau (one of Napoleon's most trusted lieutenants), the Directory's republicans annulled the election results of the Year V, removed the two most right-leaning Directors, and deported dozens of royalist leaders to Cayenne to face certain death.

The coup created an immediate crisis of legitimacy for a government that had claimed it would always follow the Constitution and the law. Republicans justified their actions by claiming that they had taken the necessary steps to preserve the Republic. They claimed that 18 Fructidor had not been a coup so much as a day of republican renewal. After purging royalists, republicans decided they had to buttress their regime by spreading republican values throughout France. They once again made liberty trees integral to their new project because they could not imagine a future in which they did not defend the Revolution. Four days after the coup, Nicolas François de Neufchâteau issued a paper arguing that France needed to start replanting its woodlands. He used the opportunity to make a grand statement about the strength of the Republic in the wake of the Fructidor coup. "We have limited ourselves, until the present, to planting in each Commune, a liberty tree." That was simply not enough. "Let us instead have two in front of each house; let's sow entire woods, plant vast forests, raise natural temples to liberty under porticos of greenery; and may the Republic grow in strength with the trees that will compose them, transmitting to posterity the shade of those sacred trees."[33]

Benjamin Constant similarly suggested that it was time for republicans to stop dithering and start imposing their will on the nation. On September 16, twelve days after the Fructidor coup he gave a speech at the Cercle Constitutionnel—a group that generally believed in using

[33] Nicolas François de Neufchâteau, *Le ministre de l'Intérieur aux administrations centrales des départemens de la République* (Versailles: Jacob, 1797), 4, accessed January 18, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

more authoritarian measures to maintain order—in honor of the new liberty tree the club planted. He urged republicans to stop trying to include everyone. They were so fearful of being Jacobins that they had, for too long, forgotten to be republicans. Surely republicans could project their authority without becoming Jacobins. Constant believed that extraordinary measures like those taken on 18 Fructidor were defensible so long as the Directory returned to constitutional principles and avoided using the death penalty. Finally, he argued that republicans had spent too much time in fear of the military. If the Republic remained strong, Constant claimed, "we will not have to fear the military government, since the military brilliance will only enhance the civil government."[34]

Convinced that the time had come to stop persuading and start acting, the Directory took steps to plant the liberty tree more firmly at home. They abandoned their conciliatory policies and passed the Law of 24 Nivôse (January 13) VI. According to the Council of Five Hundred, "the respect of the signs of liberty is bound to the respect for liberty itself." Therefore the law made four demands that meant to ensure that French people would respect the symbols that represented liberty and the state that protected it. First, municipalities had to replant liberty trees that had died naturally or been destroyed and pay all the related costs. Second, every city that received notice of the law in time had to replace the trees on January 21, the anniversary of King Louis XVI's execution. Any other cities would have to plant them the next month. Third, communities had to replace any liberty tree that died or were cut down in the future within a month. If the season was not suitable for planting a live tree in accordance with the law of 3 Pluviôse II (passed during the height of the Terror), then the community had permission to

[34] Benjamin Constant, *Discours prononcé au Cercle constitutionnel, pour la plantation de l'arbre de la liberté, le 30 fructidor an 5.* (Paris: [Lemaire], 1797), 22, accessed April 14, 2014, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

replant the tree during the correct season. Fourth, "any individual that will be convicted of having mutilated, or cut down, or having tried to cut down or mutilate and liberty tree will be punished by four years of detention." While the punishment for attacking liberty trees was no longer death—or in the case of Bédoin, having an entire town was put to the torch—the law resembled the policies of Jacobin terrorists.[35]

The law had the desired effect by sparking a new round of liberty tree plantings. The Palace at Versailles had been converted to the "National Palace" after the king's dethronement and in 1798 it was an art museum. On January 21, 1798 the museum's administrators complied with the law of 24 Nivôse and planted a liberty tree in Versailles's gardens in order to "republicanize" the space. During the ceremony, the organizers swore to reject both monarchy and anarchy and reached out to the longstanding enemies of the Revolution. "Enemies of republican principles, placed by chance and prejudice in an estrangement where personal interest and obstinacy retain in you a fatal error," the museum's President said in his speech, "you will yourselves come to embrace the Tree of Liberty."[36]

In Paris, the Council of Five Hundred set an example by plating several liberty trees (as Neufchâteau had suggested) in the courtyard of the Tuileries Palace. Jacques-Charles Bailleul, the President of the Council of Five Hundred, dedicated the new trees to the armies who had won victory at Jemmapes and Fleurus and supported republicans during the Fructidor coup. The armies, Bailleul claimed, had always been "faithful to liberty." The speech showed how the Directory used liberty trees to link itself to the army's successes, but it also demonstrated a

[35] "Loi relative aux arbres de la liberté, du 24 Nivose an VI de la République française, une et indivisible," *Bulletin des Lois*, no. 176 (Paris: Imprimerie du Depot des lois, 1798).

[36] *Musée spécial de l'école française, établi dans le palais national de Versailles. Plantation de l'arbre de la liberté au centre de la cour principale*, *dans l'axe des rues résevoirs et de la réunion* (Versailles: Jacob, 1798), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

reality that Bailleul perhaps did not fully grasp. After 18 Fructidor, the Directory ruled only so long as the army allowed it to do so.[37]

If there was any hope that the new law and a new round of celebrations would illustrate the Republic's strength and finally bring about the unified political culture that a generation of revolutionaries had hoped to create, it dissipated quickly. The language of reunion did nothing to pacify the "enemies of republican principles" before or after the Fructidor coup. Anti-revolutionaries continued to take aim at liberty trees to express their ongoing discontent with the Revolution whether it be Jacobin, republican, or anything in between. In fact, the Directory found that the closer they aligned the liberty tree to their state, the more appealing the symbols became to rebels and malcontents. Cutting down the symbols of republican revolution demonstrated the inadequacy of the Directory. Each time anti-revolutionaries cut down a liberty tree that republicans hoped would inspire allegiance, they showed that the Revolution's universalist aims were unattainable. When the Directory responded with threats or force, they looked like authoritarians.

Indeed the Directory's attempt to impose its will on the country made them look more and more like the Jacobins and made the liberty trees they had tried to redefine increasingly divisive. In September 1798, the Directory needed soldiers to sustain the war effort and so they passed the Jourdan Law, which essentially mandated conscription of all French males between

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[37] Jacques-Charles Bailleul, *Corps législatif. Conseil des Cinq-Cents. Discours prononcé par J.-Ch. Bailleul, président du Conseil des Cinq-Cents, le 2 pluviôse répondant au 21 janvier (ancien style), avant la prestation de serment de haine à la royauté et à l'anarchie. Séance du 2 pluviôse an VI. - Corps législatif. Conseil des Cinq-Cents. Discours prononcé par J.-Ch. Bailleul, président du Conseil des Cinq-Cents, le 2 pluviôse répondant au 21 janvier, pour la plantation des arbres de liberté dans les cours du palais du Conseil des Cinq-Cents* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1798), accessed April 14, 2014, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. In addition to the two ceremonies ddescribed here, there was a replating in the 12th arrondissement of Paris in January: *Département de la Seine, canton de Paris, municipalité du deuxième arrondissement. Procès-verbal de la plantation de l'arbre de la liberté* (Paris: Comminges, 1798), accessed April 14, 2014, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

20 and 25. The law fragmented communities and engendered some disdain for the ongoing wars. In Chinon, the town "patriots" took to standing guard near the liberty tree, lest the counter-revolutionary bands in the area cut it down as they had in surrounding towns. The return of an anti-clerical stance in 1799 also energized rebels particularly in the conservative western and southwestern regions of France where revolutionary festivals and cults never even came close to superseding Catholicism as the binding religion. Bands of counter-revolutionaries even rose up in the towns around Toulouse, the city that had so diligently incorporated its liberty tree into Directorial festive culture.[38]

By the end of 1799, the Directory was caught in the same trap that had ensnared Jacobins in 1794. Attacks against the trees were interpreted as attacks against the Republic and therefore required a response. When the Directory imprisoned or threatened to imprison those who damaged liberty trees, they failed in their efforts to extricate the liberty tree from the authoritarian practices of the Jacobin National Convention.

Furthermore, republicans had tied themselves and their liberty trees to the military. That decision proved fatal to the Directory. As the speaker in Lyon said, the French populace generally believed that the army had successfully spread and protected liberty trees abroad. Therefore, the army appeared to be the true protector of liberty and the trees that represented it. In 1799 Napoleon Bonaparte made that arrangement clear when he decided to cut out the middleman. The Director and veteran revolutionary Abbé Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès decided during fall 1799 that the time to reform the Directory had come. He only needed a military commander to help him take control. That commander was Napoleon Bonaparte who provided

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[38] Peter McPhee cites both the Chinon and Toulouse examples in, McPhee, *Liberty or Death*, 331–36. Documents pertaining to liberty trees being attacked in the Haute-Garonne and Tarn-et-Garonne departments in 1799 can be found in, A.N. BB/18/331, Dossier D3 10.090 and Dossier D3 10.126.

the muscle behind the coup of 18 Brumaire VIII (November 18, 1799). If Sieyès had hoped he would be the primary political leader of the reformed France, he was disappointed when a politically adept Bonaparte and his allies deftly maneuvered the general to the head of the French state.

Bonaparte and his fellow conspirators wisely positioned themselves as guarantors of liberty and purveyors of order. Some French communities raised liberty trees to celebrate the coup and the Consulate that ruled France until 1802 by raising liberty trees. Napoleon, however, was done with the symbols of the Revolution. He did not make the mistake of ordering the trees destroyed since doing so would reveal him as a reactionary. He just did nothing to defend or encourage the dissemination of the symbols. By 1804, when Napoleon became Emperor, liberty trees were afterthoughts. Bonaparte wanted order and stability. He had no use for symbols that represented revolution.[39]

Conclusion

Constant had been right, but only to a point. Republicans were terrified of becoming Jacobins and that influenced their actions. But they were more terrified of abandoning the Revolution. They had risen to power because of the Revolution and, though they wanted to end it, they wanted to preserve it as well. Plus, many of them were regicides. A restoration would threaten their lives. They kept the symbols of the Revolution and made only minor alterations to Revolutionary festivals because they believed they could save the Revolution by turning back the

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[39] Bernard Richard claims that in the Yonne department the rate of liberty tree planting increased when the Consulate took power: Bernard Richard, "Les arbres de la liberté dans le département de l'Yonne sous la Révolution et l'Empire." In Paris, at least one liberty tree was paired with a ceremony that portrayed the consuls as the saviors of France: *Procès-verbal de la fête célébrée le 10 frimaire an VIII par l'administration municipale du 12e arrondissement du canton de Paris, département de la Seine, à l'occasion de la prestation de serment des fonctionnaires publics, et de la plantation de l'arbre de la liberté devant le nouveau local de ses séances, aux ci-devant Écoles de droit, place du Panthéon* (Paris: Ballard, 1800).

clock and freezing the movement at a point in time when it had been republican, but not democratic. Furthermore, an ever-increasing number of people both in France and around Europe were tired of the Revolution. They saw it as an endless cycle of coups and broken promises. They no longer wanted to gather around liberty trees and praise the Revolution because the Revolution had brought violence, uncertainty, and little else.

Thermidorians had wanted to set the French Revolution on a new path. They had wanted to end it and cement its legacies by creating a stable republic that rejected both monarchical and democratic authoritarianism. They adopted liberty trees as symbols of the regime, hoping that they could use the long-running symbols of revolution to disseminate their middling position and attract adherents to their republican vision. They made alterations to the Revolutionary calendar and described liberty trees as objects that welcomed all but the most ardent monarchists and Jacobins. Beyond France, they tried to use liberty trees in similar ways. Their policies initially tended toward education in contrast to the terrorism employed by Jacobins.

In 1797 they found out that their techniques did not work, but they still could not imagine abandoning the symbols of the Revolution. They wound up sending the Revolution down a path similar to the one it had followed from 1789-1794. By adopting liberty trees as symbols of their republican state and using authoritarian measures to perpetuate their vision and protect the symbols of their regime, the Directory only encouraged further attacks from dissidents who wanted to demonstrate their opposition to the Revolution and the Republic's weakness. When the Directory and its commanders throughout Europe used brutal tactics to repress dissent, they betrayed their authoritarian tendencies and demonstrated that they could not make symbols of revolution into emblems of stable political centrism.

Napoleon had learned in Italy that ending the Revolution meant discontinuing the use of Revolutionary symbols and practices. As he came to power, first as a consul and then as an Emperor, he did not repeat the errors of the revolutionaries who had preceded him. He did not take ownership of the trees. He did not order liberty trees torn down, but he did let their popularity slide. He preferred a symbolic lexicon that legitimated his power, not the Revolution. Napoleon accepted what the Jacobins and republicans did not. Liberty trees, because of their malleability and instability made fine symbols for revolutions, but they did not work well as national symbols. At least, not in France.

CHAPTER 5

ECHOES OF AFRICA IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION: LIBERTY TREES AS SYMBOLS OF EMANCIPATION, 1793-1820

In June 1802 Jean-Baptiste Brunet, a French general tasked with apprehending Toussaint L'Ouverture, executed a successful ruse that landed the typically alert Toussaint in the custody of France. We can only speculate about the thoughts that passed through Toussaint's mind as French soldiers escorted him aboard *La Créole* floating in the port of Gonaïves in French Saint-Domingue. Perhaps he reflected on his rapid rise to prominence as the most successful black general in the French Caribbean colony of Saint-Domingue where peoples of African descent had successfully thrown off white rule and asserted their collective right to liberty. He may have thought about his victory over his rival André Rigaud or smiled when he considered that he, a former slave and servant, had elevated himself briefly to the office of governor-general of Saint-Domingue. Maybe he regretted having precipitated a war with Napoleon Bonaparte that led his subordinates to abandon him to the miserable fate he now faced. Whatever his thoughts at the time, when he turned to face the captain of *La Créole* he chose to focus on the future. "In overthrowing me," he said, "one has felled in Saint-Domingue only the trunk of the tree of black liberty; it will grow back from the roots, because they are deep and numerous."[1]

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Toussaint may never have said those precise words. The origin of the reported exchange between Toussaint and *La Créole's* captain is the memoir of Pamphile de Lacroix, a former

[1] Pamphile de Lacroix, *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de la révolution de Saint-Domingue*, 2:202–4; Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 275–78; Philippe R. Girard, *Toussaint Louverture: A Revolutionary Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 242–44.

soldier with the French expedition charged with returning Saint-Domingue to France's imperial orbit after over ten years of rebellion and revolution left the colony independent in all but name. Lacroix was present at Toussaint's arrest in 1802, but he did not publish his account of Toussaint's words until 1819. When Toussaint put pen to paper on his own memoirs while freezing to death in a prison cell in Fort de Joux in France's Jura Mountains he made no mention of such an intriguing phrase. Nevertheless Lacroix would have known that Saint-Domingue's rebels had used liberty trees as symbols of emancipation beginning in 1793. In fact, by the time he published his memoirs, the first presidents of Haiti had adopted liberty trees as symbols of the new nation.[2]

Scholars have taken a renewed interest in Haiti's history in recent years. Though the historiography currently lacks a specific analysis of liberty trees in Haiti, historians have focused on Toussaint's reference to a liberty tree as a popular title for books, chapters, and documentaries exploring Haiti's past. A handful of them have included liberty trees, particularly the first one, raised by French civil commissioners in 1793, in their narrative histories of the Revolution.[3]

An examination of the symbols' evolution from French icons to symbols of Haitian nationalism offers insight into the African character of the Haitian Revolution. While the Haitian Revolution's African origins are subject to dispute, no one challenges the fact that the combatants who battled against white planters, foreign invaders, and eventually the French army

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[2] Toussaint Louverture and Philippe R. Girard, *The Memoir of Toussaint Louverture* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 135.

[3] Doris Garraway used the liberty tree Toussaint referenced for the title of the compilation, Doris Lorraine Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), but the volume contains only a few references to the actual liberty trees Haitian revolutionaries used. Garraway's introduction references Toussaint's quote and Ada Ferrer talks very briefly about liberty trees in her essay. Chapter 12 in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World* is titled "The Tree of Liberty" and Dubois discusses the 1793 incident on p. 162. Jeremy Popkin also describes the 1793 Bastille Day ceremony in Le Cap in Jeremy D. Popkin, *You Are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 264. A recent French-language documentary on Haitian history also used the liberty tree as a title, Maxence Denis, *L'arbre de la liberté*, Documentary, 2004.

were mostly Africans by birth and even those born in the colonies were rarely more than a single generation removed from Africa.[4] Toussaint L'Ouverture, for example, was a creole slave born in Saint-Domingue, but he still spoke the African tongue of his parents and retained enough knowledge of African languages and cultures to appeal to the majority of his followers who were born in Africa.[5] Furthermore, scholars have shown that the rebels drew on African fighting techniques, appealed to African notions of kingship, and drew inspiration from African religious ceremonies.[6]

There remains a question as to whether or not Haitian liberty trees were simply French symbols or if Saint-Domingue's rebels viewed them through African lenses. Haitians did co-opt French symbols after the colony gained its independence in 1804. The liberty tree at the center of the coat of arms on the Haitian flag wears a Phrygian cap, just like French *arbres de la liberté*. In fact, the Haitian coat of arms is more or less an amalgamation of French symbols. However, while only echoes of African influences survive in the limited evidence regarding Haiti's liberty trees, those tenuous connections offer a suggestive basis for exploring why peoples of African descent adopted the symbols in their fight against the depredations of race slavery in the Atlantic

[4] Laurent Dubois and Jeremy Popkin offer different takes on the Haitian Revolution's origins and the events that brought about the abolition of slavery in the colony. In *Avengers of the New World,* Dubois argues that the famous vodou ceremony at Boïs Caiman inspired the massive slave uprising in the North that forced France to abolish slavery. Jeremy Popkin argues in *You Are All Free* that an internal war among French conservatives, revolutionaries, white planters, and free people of color destabilized the colonial system to the point that emancipation became possible in 1793. By Popkin's logic, French colonial contests over the ideology of the French Revolution led to a series of unforeseen events that pushed France to declare Saint-Domingue's slaves free.

[5] For an oft-cited study of the ethnolinguistic composition of Saint-Domingue's slave population see, David Geggus, "Sex Ratio, Age and Ethnicity in the Atlantic Slave Trade: Data from French Shipping and Plantation Records," *The Journal of African History* 30, no. 1 (1989): 23–44. For information on Toussaint Louverture's background see, Girard, *Toussaint Louverture*, 7–104.

[6] John K. Thornton, "'I Am the Subject of the King of Congo': African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (1993): 181–214; John K Thornton, "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 25, no. 1 (January 1, 1991). Laurent Dubois uses the Boïs-Caïman ceremony to illuminate links between slave insurgents and west African religions in Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 97–102.

world. French revolutionaries may have been the first to introduce liberty trees to Haiti, but the peoples of African descent—both free and enslaved—who rose up against the colonial system incorporated the trees into shrines and used them in ways that reflected African ceremonies as well. By the turn of the nineteenth century, Haitians had claimed the symbols for themselves and deployed them as reminders of Haiti's national strength.[7]

The French Revolution and Saint-Domingue's First Liberty Tree

Cap Français, Saint-Domingue. July 14, 1793.

Cap Français, the jewel of the Caribbean lay in ruins. A battle among combatants struggling to make sense of the French Revolution had destroyed the most celebrated city in the Caribbean's most prosperous colony. Amidst the wreckage, two French commissioners who had clearly failed in their mandate to restore order to Saint-Domingue stood beneath a palm tree they had designated as a liberty tree. Although they were nominally celebrating the fourth anniversary of the storming of the Bastille, this ceremony signified much more than France's ongoing fight against despotism. One of the French commissioners, Léger Félicité Sonthonax, spoke to the assembly gathered around the tree about the meaning of freedom. When he looked out at the crowd he realized that he was doing something unprecedented. He was speaking to a gathering comprised mostly of freed peoples of African descent—people whom, three weeks earlier, he had freed by decree. Since his instructions had not given him the right to free slaves, he felt compelled to justify his actions to his superiors and ensure that the newly freed peoples would

[7] Recent work by Philippe R. Girard and Julia Gaffield on Haiti's flag and coat of arms shows how Haiti's first leaders continued to use and modify French symbolism after 1804. See, Girard, "Birth of a Nation"; Julia Gaffield, "The Haitian Coat of Arms."

understand their debt to France. Sonthonax spent years defending his actions, but after July 14, 1793, liberty trees began to represent liberty from slavery.[8]

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Sonthonax and his fellow commissioner Étienne Polverel had not set out for Saint-Domingue intending to abolish slavery. They had been sent to restore order to a valuable colony that was tearing itself apart. That they became the first men to link the French Revolution, its iconography, and emancipation was the result of contingent events that left them little choice in the matter.

Saint-Domingue, which occupied the western third of the island of Hispaniola, was the most profitable colony in the Americas by 1790. It was a relatively late addition to the French Empire and did not reach its full economic potential until after the conclusion of the Seven Years' War in 1763. As the sugar economy boomed and wartime disruptions faded, Saint-Domingue's planters bought and subjugated human beings from Africa in massive numbers in order to transform Saint-Domingue into the world's most lucrative sugar-producing colony.

The rapid increase in the enslaved population exacerbated social tensions stemming from racial animosities inherent in slave societies. On the eve of the French Revolution, three social groups vied for power in Saint-Domingue. White planters controlled the colony's politics, using

[8] The commissioners described the July 14 festival during the lengthy debates they had with angry colonists during the National Convention's investigation of events in Saint Domingue. Those debates were transcribed and in, Jean-Philippe Garran de Coulon, *Débats entre les accusateurs et les accusés, dans l'affaire des colonies*, vol. 6 (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1795), 108–9, accessed December 7, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. The nineteenth-century historian Beaubrun Ardouin briefly describes this ceremony in Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella*, vol. 2 (Paris: Dézobry et E. Magdeleine, 1853), 209–10, accessed July 12, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. His account generally lines up with the commissioners' accounts. Dubois and Popkin both describe this ceremony and place it within the larger context of the Haitian Revolution in Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 264–65 and Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 162–63. Though Robert Louis Stein does not describe the Bastille Day festival or the commissioners' use of a liberty tree in Saint-Domingue, his detailed biography of Sonthonax, *Léger Félicité Sonthonax: The Lost Sentinel of the Republic* (Rutherford; London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press; Associated University Presses, 1985), describes the events surrounding the emancipation decrees.

a combination of economic and military might to control an enslaved population that outnumbered them fourteen-to-one. Below them was a sizeable population of free people of color. While this group included some emancipated African and creole slaves, most were mixed race (mulatto) offspring of white planters and enslaved African peoples. Unlike the enslaved population, free people of color could own property. Some of them owned slaves, and they served in the colonial militia tasked with maintaining the slave system. They were, however, barred from participating in the colony's politics. At the bottom of the social ladder was the mass of enslaved African laborers, who were by far the most numerous but least politically powerful group in the colony before the Revolution.[9]

In 1789, when word of the French Revolution reached the colony, free people of color seized on its leveling rhetoric of the Revolution to argue for the political and social equality white planters denied them. In response, white planters rejected French Revolutionary ideology. They demanded more autonomy from Paris because the Revolution's mantra, "liberty, equality, fraternity," threatened white supremacy. Planter fears were not necessarily misplaced, but the path to racial equality in the French Empire was far from clear despite revolutionaries' acceptance of an ideology that supposedly sanctified the equality of all mankind. In fact, French revolutionaries initially waffled on the issue of free black equality in the colonies.

Frustrated by the lack of action in Paris, some free people of color in Saint-Domingue, led by a wealthy mulatto named Vincent Ogé, rebelled against the conservative white planters in 1790. Ogé's rebellion failed to overthrow the conservative colonial regime and in fact pushed terrified colonial whites to become even more conservative. They refused to make any concessions to free people of color, convinced that to give an inch on the matter would result in a

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[9] John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2–3.

total collapse of white supremacy in Saint-Domingue. In May 1791, however, France's National Constituent Assembly took a different course. In an attempt to head off further uprisings while also living up to the Revolution's ideals, the Assembly granted full citizenship rights to wealthy free people of color. White planters who controlled colonial political institutions refused to implement this policy.[10]

In August 1791, the crisis reached new heights when the slaves throughout the colony's prosperous northern region revolted. Bands of rebels slaughtered whites and destroyed plantations as they tore across the countryside. The origins of the slave uprising are still quite obscure. The timing certainly suggests that the enslaved population had at least some knowledge of the French Revolution. One famous story about a captured insurgent who was found in possession of both French Revolutionary pamphlets and items that vodou practitioners believed imparted protection seemingly supports that contention. However, other sources indicate that the insurgents were not necessarily mimicking French revolutionaries or trying to overturn the entire plantation system. Some insurgent slaves claimed to be fighting on behalf of the French king who they believed had granted them three free days and improved working conditions, but whose authority the white planters had denied. Indeed a belief in benevolent kingship played at least some role in the insurgents' ideology.[11]

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[10] For more on Ogé's rebellion and free people of color in Saint-Domingue see, John D. Garrigus, "Vincent Ogé Jeune (1757–91): Social Class and Free Colored Mobilization on the Eve of the Haitian Revolution," *The Americas* 68, no. 1 (June 24, 2011): 33–62, accessed February 24, 2018, https://doi.org/10.1353/tam.2011.0078.

[11] The story of the insurgent caught with French pamphlets and a vodou talisman is from "Mon Odyssée" a memoir recounting the rebellion by an anonymous author. The relevant story has been republished in Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Insurrection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 78–79. For an examination of royalism among insurgents in Saint-Domingue see, John K. Thornton, "'I Am the Subject of the King of Congo': African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History* 4, no. 2 (1993): 181–214.

In an effort to halt the violence while also fulfilling some of the early promises of the French Revolution, the French Legislative Assembly granted full citizenship to all free people of color in April 1792. The Legislative Assembly dispatched a civil commission comprised of three men (Sonthonax, Polverel, and Jean Antoine Ailhaud), a new governor general, and enough troops to guarantee the April 4 law would be implemented and the disruptive slave revolt repressed. Though Sonthonax tried to hide his abolitionist sentiments, white planters knew that both he and Polverel were proponents of free black rights. Feigning acceptance of the law of April 4, colonial whites plotted to undermine the commission as soon as the troops put down the slave revolt.

The commissioners followed their instructions and tried to gain the support of the white population in Saint-Domingue by ordering expeditions into the field to end the slave revolt. By early 1793, French forces had made significant headway. Despite their efforts, however, the commissioners, Sonthonax in particular, continued to lose support among planters, so they started deporting particularly intransigent white dissidents. Although colonial whites impeded their commissioner's efforts, the commissioners seemed to be making progress by February 1793. The slaves' insurgency had been pushed back, free men of color supported the commissioners, and the most problematic white dissidents had been deported. But the commission's authority was challenged in May when Thomas François Galbaud, the colony's new governor-general, arrived in Le Cap. Galbaud believed in white supremacy and considered the commissioners' actions despotic. White colonists ready to exact some revenge for the commission's embrace of free men of color scrambled to his side.[12]

[12] For more on Sonthonax and his abolitionist mores see, Stein, *Léger Félicité Sonthonax*, 81–85.

When Galbaud arrived, the commissioners were in the western region, dealing with sporadic outbreaks of counter-revolutionary activity. They returned to Cap Français on June 10 to discover they were more popular than ever among free people of color and more despised than ever by the remaining whites. Tensions quickly reached a breaking point and the commissioners put Galbaud on a ship back to France on June 13. The decision proved disastrous. The ships sitting in Cap Français harbor were packed both with French soldiers holding dubious loyalties to the commissioners and white dissidents awaiting transport back to France. Galbaud built a coalition from the disaffected whites and the soldiers and led them in an invasion of Cap Français on June 20. Free men of color rallied to the commissioners, but the commissioners were outgunned. On June 21 Galbaud's forces overran the town. During the fighting, a fire broke out and destroyed most of the city by day's end. In desperate need of allies, Polverel and Sonthonax issued a decree freeing any slaves who agreed to fight for the French Republic. The new coalition succeeded in pushing Galbaud's forces back onto the ships. The decree opened the door to something that had been unthinkable just days earlier: emancipation.[13]

The commissioners offered limited emancipation out of desperation, but they could not reverse their decision. Now they needed to justify their actions to the National Convention and find ways to cope with calls for general emancipation. Luckily for them, in 1793 the French Revolution had entered its most radical phase. Jacobins spoke of liberty in universal terms, arguing that freedom was the natural state of all mankind. Sonthonax and Polverel needed to show that emancipation was consistent with Jacobin ideology. To that end, the commissioners developed the July 14, 1793 ceremony with its liberty tree as a way to welcome the freedmen

[13] The general summary offered above relies primarily on three accounts of the Haitian Revolution: Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*; Popkin, *You Are All Free*; Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

into the French Republic. The celebration was intended to educate slaves about the parameters of their liberty (freedmen had to continue working on plantations) and align emancipation with the French Revolution.[14]

After the Bastille Day celebration, the enslaved people in Saint-Domingue and the commissioners' allies in the colony and in Paris recognized that the liberty tree was a potent symbol of the French Revolution's promise of universal freedom and equality. The commissioners at first freed only those slaves who had assisted in the fight against Galbaud's coalition, but now slaves and their allies demanded liberty for the entire enslaved population. On August 13 and again on August 15, 1793, Guillaume-Henri Vergniaud, a white municipal official who had been one of the commissioners' few white supporters since their initial landing, presented emancipation petitions on behalf of the enslaved population to Sonthonax. The petitions noted that "the liberty tree was planted in Paris the 14th of July 1789, and all the French were free. It was planted at Le Cap the 14th of July last, and we are still in slavery!" In just one month's time, the symbol of French liberation from absolute monarchy had become a symbol of general emancipation in Saint-Domingue. Sonthonax and Polverel must have at least partially agreed with the petition because they issued a series of emancipation decrees during the succeeding weeks. They eventually freed all of Saint-Domingue's slaves, but maintained the plantation system through work requirements.[15]

On February 4, 1794, the Jacobin-led National Convention decreed an end to slavery in the French Empire. The French artist François Bonneville created a visual representation of France's path from the days of monarchy and slavery to an era of republicanism and universal

[14] Garran de Coulon, *Débats entre les accusateurs et les accusés, dans l'affaire des colonies*, 6:108–9.

[15] Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella*, 2:238–39.

liberty. His image depicts a Frenchman in a coastal farming village fleeing from what is labeled "*Terre des Esclaves*" (The Land of Slaves), where a bonfire consumes symbols of the Old Regime as the land falls away. The excited Frenchman rushes toward the "*Terre de la Liberté*" (The Land of Freedom), where a multiracial band of celebrants dance beneath an *arbre de la liberté*, enjoying the dawn of a post-slavery age (see Figure 5.1).[16]

Figure 5.1: François Bonneville, *Terre des esclaves, Terre de la liberté: Arrivé là, on ne recule pas* (1794). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

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[16] François Bonneville, *Terre des esclaves, Terre de la liberté: Arrivé là, on ne recule pas*, 1794, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed April 14, 2014, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8411729j.

The Roots of the Tree of Black Liberty: Tree Symbolism and the African Slave Trade

Sonthonax and Polverel knew what they were trying to convey by planting the first liberty tree in Saint-Domingue on July 14, 1793. Their message clearly appealed to French revolutionaries and to the peoples of African descent who made up the majority of Saint-Domingue's populace. Yet liberty trees had a long life in Saint-Domingue and would eventually emerge as symbols used to celebrate liberation from the French not just allegiance to them. While some scholars have either suggested or directly argued that the liberty trees that became integral to Haiti's symbolic lexicon were merely holdovers from the French Revolution, there is some evidence that leaders of the Haitian Revolution took steps to make liberty trees more appealing to peoples of African descent by linking them to African pasts. Liberty trees were French symbols, but African peoples who were forcibly carried to Saint-Domingue also had their own ideas about trees and community.[17]

African peoples did not worship the same God or gods, utilize identical practices, or carry every aspect of their traditional faiths and rituals across the Atlantic during the African diaspora. But the ways in which they worshipped and the rituals they used to make sense of their various worlds informed their interpretations of objects and behaviors. A majority of the Haitian enslaved population came from two slaving regions: the Bight of Benin and West-Central Africa (Table 5.1). Wars in both regions during the eighteenth century generated a surge in war captives who were subsequently sold into slavery. The central African Kingdom of Kongo was riven by civil wars from 1665 until the turn of the nineteenth century with two particularly violent periods in the 1760s and 1780s. Along the Bight of Benin, a region often referred to as the "Slave Coast," wars were nearly constant beginning in 1727 when the Dahomey kingdom overran the

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[17] Philippe R. Girard argues that much of the iconography on the Haitian flag is simply reproduced from French symbols and images in Girard, "Birth of a Nation."

Hueda kingdom and several other countries along the coast. Despite the fact that Dahomey paid tribute to the neighboring Oyo for a century after their conquests, they remained the dominant force on the Slave Coast until the last decade of the nineteenth century.[18]

	Senegambia and offshore Atlantic	Sierra Leone	Windward Coast	Gold Coast	Bight of Benin	Bight of Biafra and Gulf of Guinea islands	West Central Africa and St. Helena	Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands	Other Africa	Totals
1701-1710	160	0	0	0	1,408	0	0	0	607	2,175
1711-1720	4,527	0	80	149	12,958	1,397	3,715	0	6,130	28,956
1721-1730	3,284	0	0	273	1,9547	0	3,586	386	3,460	30,536
1731-1740	8,973	177	922	6,456	21,602	320	13,981	386	9,537	62,354
1741-1750	5,603	220	2,559	9,815	13,036	484	22,649	0	9,258	63,624
1751-1760	3,964	1,564	772	1,236	22,020	2,302	23,554	0	7,716	63,128
1761-1770	3,427	6,395	789	1,486	18,300	6,351	62,017	0	12,697	111,462
1771-1780	4,267	1,953	437	1,741	36,647	6,444	70,952	2,522	14,880	139,843
1781-1790	9,707	10,759	2,583	10,174	38,519	16,154	112,541	21,986	28,923	251,346
1791-1800	678	1,438	206	324	2,350	3,859	9,083	3985	3602	2,5525
Totals	44,590	22,506	8348	31,654	186,387	37,311	322,078	29,265	9,6810	778,949

Table 5.1: Principal Regions of Departure for Slaves Arriving in Saint-Domingue, 1701-1800. Source: "The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database," http://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/qqdBor6N.

Slaveholder inventories in Saint-Domingue confirm that large segments of the colony's enslaved population originated among the ethno-linguistic groups affected by regional wars in

[18] For information on the rise of Dahomey and the eighteenth-century wars along the Bight of Benin see, I. A. Akinjogbin, *Dahomey and Its Neighbours 1708-1818.* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Robin Law, *Ouidah: The Social History of a West African Slaving "Port" 1727-1892* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), 18–122. Akinjogbin and Law disagree with regard to Agaja's motivations, with Akinjogbin suggesting that Agaja held abolitionist sympathies while Law argues that the Dahomian conquest was inspired in part by efforts to control the lucrative slave trade on the coast. For more on the historiographic debates about Dahomey, its origins, and its militant nature see, Robin Law, "Dahomey and the Slave Trade: Reflections on the Historiography of the Rise of Dahomey," *The Journal of African History* 27, no. 2 (1986): 237–67. For more on warfare and the slave trade in Kongo see, Thornton, "I Am the Subject of the King of Congo," 183–98; John K Thornton, "African Soldiers in the Haitian Revolution," *The Journal of Caribbean History* 25, no. 1 (January 1, 1991); Joseph Calder Miller, *Way of Death: Merchant Capitalism and the Angolan Slave Trade, 1730–1830* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 224–25. For a primer on the relationship between warfare and slaving in general see, John Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 98–125, 305–17.

both West-Central Africa and the Slave Coast. Slave owners showed particular interest in their slaves' ethnic backgrounds because they tended to assume that slaves from particular regions brought distinctive skills or traits to the plantations. Although planters' understandings of African ethnicities and cultures were far from perfect, their inventories roughly correlate to the shipping records from the same period. The majority of slaves on Saint-Domingue plantations during the eighteenth century hailed from the Slave Coast and West-Central Africa.[19]

Historians and anthropologists have noted that in both of these regions trees are particularly important parts of religious and community rituals, though their meanings are quite ambiguous. Two particular customs are relevant to this analysis because they relate to the ways in which Saint-Domingue's rebels and then Haitians used liberty trees during and after the Haitian Revolution. First, down to the present day, peoples of West-Central African descent in the Caribbean utilize trees as grave markers or memorial locations that ritually connect living members of communities with their ancestors or deceased leaders. Such practices parallel Central African rituals. Second, in both Africa and the Caribbean trees are deployed as shrines or used to mark sacred spaces. The use of trees as shrines was particularly prevalent along the Slave Coast and it is still common in Haitian vodou.

When used as grave markers, trees serve as critical links between living members of a kin group or community and their deceased ancestors. This relationship is an important aspect of community formation throughout West-Central Africa and the Caribbean. For example, among the Mbundu, the mulemba tree is particularly important as a symbol of a strong kin group. When planted, the tree represents the attachment of the community and all its constituent members to a particular place. Though not an exact correlation, Haitian vodouists link kin networks with trees

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[19] Geggus, "Sex Ratio, Age and Ethnicity in the Atlantic Slave Trade," 32.

by using them literally to represent the "family tree" from which members of particular families derive their strength.[20]

Along the Slave Coast, particularly in the slaving town of Ouidah and its immediate hinterlands, where many of the slaves transported to Haiti originated, trees were integral to religious life. Dahomians and the neighboring Yoruba practiced a form of vodou that is often considered to be the foundation for Haitian vodou and its other American forms. In Dahomey, trees were important as both memorials and shrines. Although some Dahomian traditions that incorporate trees probably originated during the nineteenth century, they nevertheless reflect an enduring relationship between Dahomians and trees. A legend in Ouidah holds that Agaja entered the city personally after driving out the rival Hueda and stopped to take his first drink of European gin beneath a tree. Two trees in the city are currently associated with his supposed stopping point. Another tree purportedly marks the location where the defeated leader of an invasion, Foli, shot himself in disgrace after seeing his army repelled by Dahomian forces in 1763. The trees are thus objects connected to high points in Dahomey's history and important for the construction of community identity.[21]

Trees were also used as shrines. Pires, a Portuguese missionary who lived in Dahomey in 1797, recounted a story chronicling the introduction of the Ogun cult—Ogun is the god of war and iron—to Dahomey. He said that during wars between Dahomey and the "Aionos" (Oyo) peoples, during the 1720s, a powerful "fetish" priest defected to Dahomey. At the time,

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[20] For an overview of tree symbolism in Central Africa see, Wyatt Macgaffey, *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 127–31. For a study that posits links between tree symbolism in Central Africa and its use in the modern Caribbean see, Maureen Warner Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean: Transcending Time, Transforming Cultures* (Kingston: University of West Indies Press, 2003), 129–35.

[21] Robin Law describes several trees in and around Ouidah that were used as memorials or shrines in Law, *Ouidah*, 21, 53, 64, 75, 93, 126. He does note that several (though not all) legends probably originated in the nineteenth century.

Dahomey was losing the war, and hoped to use the priest and his fetishes to turn the tide. The Oyo "War Chief" offered to halt the slaughter of Dahomians if Dahomey's king gave him half of the priest. The priest resigned himself to the grizzly sentence on the condition that "the half of his body belonging to Dahomé should be buried at the foot of a very large very leafy tree, which stood by the backdoor of the Palace of the King in Abomé, and that every year he should sacrifice a victim on the trunk of the tree." The Yoruba still build shrines to Ogun around living trees.[22]

Among the descendants of Dahomians, reverence for trees as shrines, spirit vessels, and ritual sites continued into the twentieth century. Farmers worked with diviners to identify trees near their field that might house the protector spirit *Dambada Hwedo*. Upon discovering such a tree, the field's owner converted it into a shrine. If the field connected to that spirit proved particularly fruitful for five or six years, the owner would again visit a priest of the relevant cult who would begin the process of turning the tree into communal property where any member of the community could come to worship the spirit. Palm trees were particularly prized as symbolically significant throughout Dahomey in the twentieth century. After birth, the umbilical cord of every Dahomian child was buried beneath a palm tree and that palm tree became the property of that person for life.[23]

Enslaved peoples who congregated in places like Saint-Domingue merged various traditions to form creole religions still practiced today. Tree symbolism remains important to

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[22] Robin Law, ed., "Contemporary Source Material for the History of the Old Oyo Empire, 1627-1824" (Harriet Tubman Institute, SHADD Collection, 2001), 25–26, accessed September 13, 2017, http://www.tubmaninstitute.ca/sites/default/files/file/LAW_Oyo_texts.pdf. For more on the cult of Ogun and tree shrines among the Yoruba see, Benjamin Ray, "African Shrines as Channels of Communication," in *African Spirituality: Forms, Meanings, and Expressions*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona (New York: Crossroad, 2000), 33.

[23] Melville Herskovits' work on the subject is dated, but his observations regarding palm trees and their importance to Dahomean religion illuminate the continued importance of trees to Dahomean society: Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomey: An Ancient West African Kingdom*, vol. 1 (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1938), 31–32, 38–39.

these faiths, particularly Haitian vodou. Vodou ceremonies differ by location, but tree symbolism is generally important. Vodou revolves around belief in *lwa*, families of spiritual entities that oversee all aspects of the physical world. In Haiti, they are often linked with Catholic saints. Like saints, *lwa* have particular areas of influence. For example, one of the most important *lwa* is *Gran bwa*, the *lwa* of trees, leaves, and forests. Additionally, Haitian vodouists consider the palm tree to be the tree of life. Palms represent the *lwa* Ayizan, a guardian figure who is known to ward off evil.[24]

Furthermore, vodou dances sometimes take place within a peristyle supported by a central post or a *poto-mitan*. The *poto-mitan* is imagined to be a tree that both provides dancers with protection and visually links the underworld, the physical realm, and the heavens. It is also symbolic of the diasporic connection between Africa and the Americas. The tree's roots are said to connect with Ginen (Guinea, a generic term for Africa) where the spirits reside. Such a geographical conception of interconnected realms articulates a belief that the spirits follow the same path as the celebrants' ancestors, who were similarly brought from Africa to the Caribbean.[25]

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[24] Mauro Peressini and Rachel Beauvoir-Dominique, *Vodou* (Gatineau, QC: Canadian Museum of History, 2013), 51; Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, "Spirit of the Thing: Religious Thought and Social/Historical Memory," in *Fragments of Bone: Neo-African Religions in a New World*, ed. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 64. For the ways in which Central African theology impacted vodou see, Terry Rey, "Kongolese Catholic Influences on Haitian Popular Catholicism: A Sociohistorical Exploration," in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, ed. Linda M. Heywood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002). For an understanding of vodou as a religion whose origins lie in an ongoing relationship between Dahomey, Kongo, and Haiti see, Toni Pressley-Sanon, *Istwa across the Water: Haitian History, Memory, and the Cultural Imagination* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2017). Laurent Dubois reports that a Haitian vodou practitioner, Erol Josué, called the cap on top of the palm tree on the Haitian flag "the bonnet of Aizan" and linked the palm tree with liberty in Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 434.

[25] Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 28–29; Bellegarde-Smith, "Spirit of the Thing: Religious Thought and Social/Historical Memory," 64.

The importance of trees throughout West-Central Africa, the Slave Coast, and the Caribbean speaks to the fact that trees have had a religious significance among peoples of African descent for centuries. Various forms of tree worship and the continued importance of tree symbolism to various faiths practiced throughout the Caribbean during and after the colonial period, particularly Haitian vodou, further illustrates a lasting connection between African peoples and trees as both shrines and spirit vessels. The next question to consider then is whether Africans, Haitian creoles, and mulattoes creolized liberty trees by tapping into some common traditions.

Feeding the Roots of Liberty Tree: Building a Haitian Nation

Cap-Haïtien, Haiti. November 24, 1820.

In 1820 the president of the Republic of Haiti availed himself of the opportunity to unify a country that had been divided since 1811. Personal and political rivalries had led Henri Christophe, a celebrated veteran of the movement for independence, to found the Kingdom of Haiti in the country's valuable North region while a republic headed initially by another celebrated veteran, Alexandre Pétion, took command of the southern and western regions. When Christophe's kingdom collapsed in 1820 Boyer, Pétion's successor, moved swiftly to reintegrate the North and its citizens into the Haitian Republic. He issued a decree on November 24. "The first of December next," it read, "at seven in the morning, the PALMIER, emblem of the Tree of Liberty, will be planted in each Commune of the North and West of Haiti."[26]

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[26] Jean-Pierre Boyer, *République d'Hayti. Arrêté. Jean-Pierre Boyer, président d'Hayti* (Cap-Haytien: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1820).

When peoples from the Slave Coast, Kongo, and other parts of Africa revolted against the slave regime in Saint-Domingue, they forced Sonthonax and Polverel to grant emancipation and, along with their brethren in other French Caribbean colonies, convinced France to bestow freedom on all peoples regardless of race.[27] Though that freedom came with some strict requirements, only the French could claim to have emancipated everyone in their empire during the Age of Revolution. The liberty tree in Saint-Domingue became emblematic of that most radical form of liberty. Yet by 1820 Haiti was a free nation that had won its independence by fighting against the French. Liberty trees, at some point during the Revolution, must have ceased to be French symbols and become instead emblems of Haiti. That transition point would seem to be somewhere around 1800 when, by pairing liberty trees with African burial practices, peoples of African descent in Saint-Domingue claimed liberty trees for themselves.

In 1793, the French commissioners had tied liberty trees to emancipation. After the decree of general emancipation in February 1794, the French claimed to be the great emancipators and used liberty trees to demonstrate their embrace of truly universal liberty. While some of the abolitionist sentiment sweeping France was the result of long-held beliefs, it was also a pragmatic position to take given the threats to Saint-Domingue. Turmoil in the valuable colony and France's decision to go to war with European rivals inspired the Spanish, who controlled the neighboring colony of Santo Domingo, to threaten Saint-Domingue from the east. Spain had offered assistance (but not freedom) to slave insurgents since 1791. The British invaded and took control of much of the south and west beginning in September 1793. The British found allies among Saint-Domingue's landowning classes (including some free people of

[27] For an examination of the ways in which slave revolts throughout the French Caribbean contributed to general emancipation see, Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens*.

color) who believed the French Revolution had gone too far and feared that freed slaves would threaten their property.

Facing invasions on multiple fronts, French administrators and commanders in Saint-Domingue knew they had to ally with the slave insurgents and their leaders to defend the colony. As the civil commissioners had hoped, declarations of emancipation weakened bonds between the Spanish and northern insurgents. The decree of general emancipation issued by the National Convention in February 1794 further convinced insurgents to fight on France's behalf and persuaded Toussaint L'Ouverture, the most adept tactician among the northern insurgents, to switch his allegiance from Spain to France. Nevertheless the coalition of *ancien libre*—previously free creoles and mulattoes—and freedmen who resisted British and Spanish impositions was a delicate one held together only by the desire to protect France, an empire that committed itself to universal freedom, from rival imperial powers that maintained slavery. Rivalries among regional commanders, French administrators, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic groups constantly threatened to turn the war against foreign empires into a civil war for control of Saint-Domingue.[28]

No wonder then that leaders of the French campaign against foreign invaders followed French conventions when they planted liberty trees from 1793 until the end of the century. In 1797, the British soldier Marcus Rainsford, a veteran of the American Revolution and the British invasions of Saint-Domingue in the 1790s, posed as an American while making his way through what was left of Cap Français. After witnessing a review of the colony's troops, Rainsford went to see a new monument erected in the northwest quarter of the city. Two sentinels guarded the

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[28] See David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery, War, and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1982) for information on the British invasion and occupation of Saint-Domingue. Also see, Popkin, *You Are All Free*, 279–87 for an analysis of the connection between the commissioners' emancipation efforts and the war against the British and Spanish.

monument. They allowed Rainsford to approach but "with a strict prohibition against touching the cap of liberty, which crowned it." The all-important liberty cap rested atop a pole flanked by palm leaves. Though Rainsford never referred to the emblem as a liberty tree, the palm-bedecked pole surmounted by a cap was certainly an *arbre de la liberté* in the French mold. The monument was "a tribute of respect to the memory of Sonthonax and Polverel" and apparently included an excerpt from one of their speeches in French: "My Friends,/ We came to make you free./ Frenchmen give Liberty to the World./ You are free./ Guard your Freedom." The monument also featured an excerpt from the proclamation abolishing slavery. The liberty tree at the shrine in Le Cap sported a liberty cap and was in all significant ways identical to the spruced up poles that had been ubiquitous in France during the early years of the French Revolution. [29]

Although relations between Toussaint and France were strained when Toussaint L'Ouverture negotiated the withdraw of British troops from their last stronghold, Môle-Saint-Nicolas, in September 1798, they were apparently still strong enough that he used a liberty tree to illustrate the link between the French and emancipation in Saint-Domingue. Upon entering the evacuated city, he marked the occasion by raising a liberty tree on October 5. He encouraged all those who supported French notions of liberty and equality or who repented their support for the British to rally around the tree and display their allegiance to universal liberty. Raising a liberty tree to mark conquered territory and incorporate it into the French Empire certainly mimicked French commanders who performed similar ceremonies throughout Europe.[30]

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[29] Marcus Rainsford, *An Historical Account of the Black Empire of Hayti* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2013), 135–36. Rainsford claims that his escapades in Cap Français happened in 1799, but his narrative is chronologically ambiguous. Paul Youngquist notes on p. 309 (n. 269) that the event recounted above probably happened in late 1797 or early 1798.

[30] Beaubrun Ardouin describes Toussaint's liberty tree ceremony in Môle in Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella* (Paris: Dézobry et E. Magdeleine, 1853), 3:495, accessed July 12, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Philippe R. Girard claims in "Birth of a

Yet perhaps Toussaint's decision to raise a liberty tree was not just meant to show loyalty to the French emancipators, but also to suggest that he was an emancipator. Indeed by the time the British left in 1798, Toussaint L'Ouverture had managed to centralize power in himself and almost completely remove Saint-Domingue from France's orbit. Beginning in 1796, Toussaint had moved up the political ladder by carefully removing French officials who outranked him one at a time. On April 1, 1796, the French governor-general Étienne Laveaux named Toussaint lieutenant governor-general after Toussaint put down a revolt by mulatto fighters trying to overthrow the French administration. In September, when elections for the Directory were held, Toussaint encouraged both Laveaux and Sonthonax, who had returned to Saint-Domingue at the head of another civil commission, to stand for election. Both won seats in the Directory. Laveaux took his and departed Saint-Domingue. Sonthonax elected to stay, but Toussaint engineered his recall to Paris in 1797. In an effort to reassert control, the Directory dispatched Gabriel Marie Theodore Joseph d'Hédouville, who had already gained fame for his brutal pacification campaign in the Vendée. Toussaint ignored Hédouville's directives and, two weeks after the ceremony in Môle, forced the obviously racist Hédouville from the colony. Hédouville's replacement, Philippe Roume, chose not to challenge Toussaint.[31]

With Toussaint ascendant and French administration non-existent, only André Rigaud, the powerful mulatto commander who controlled Saint-Domingue's South region, stood in Toussaint's path to complete control. The two men faced off in a civil war that lasted from June 1799 until August 1800. In the context of the civil war, neither Toussaint nor Rigaud had much interest in linking themselves with French ideology, but they both wanted to cast themselves as

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Nation," 140 that "in France and Saint-Domingue the liberty tree was yet another symbol frequently used in Revolutionary festivals to denote freedom." He makes a similar claim in Girard, *Toussaint Louverture*, 154.

[31] Girard, *Toussaint Louverture*, 163–76.

defenders of liberty. During the war Rigaud's men used a liberty tree in a way that indicated the trees were no longer tied to French policies. In 1800 the war had turned against Rigaud and his outnumbered army trying to beat back Toussaint's invasion of Saint-Domingue's southern region. Beaubrun Ardouin recounted years later that while fighting near Grand–Goâve "in a mountain battle where he displayed his usual bravery, Colonel R. Desruisseaux received a mortal wound to the head: carried by his soldiers, he died at Petit-Goâve where he was buried at the foot of the liberty tree."[32]

The practice of burying a martyr beneath a tree derived from African traditions and so would have been familiar to peoples of African descent in both armies. The act also literally turned Desruisseaux into fertilizer for the liberty tree. It would grow stronger because of his sacrifice. When Rigaud's followers became the leaders of an independent Haiti, they continued to use burials beneath liberty trees to build reverence for the founding generation and link liberty trees with emancipation.[33]

The Haitian Revolution, however, did not become a war of independence until 1802. Toussaint won the war against Rigaud and sent Rigaud and his officers, including the adept commander Alexandre Pétion, into exile in France. Fearful of provoking Napoleon Bonaparte, who had taken control of France around the same time Toussaint started his rise to power in Saint-Domingue, Toussaint did not declare independence. Instead, he ruled as a military dictator. He expanded the restrictive work codes that French administrators had put in place back in 1793, wrote a new constitution governing the entirety of Hispaniola after the governor of neighboring

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[32] Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella* (Paris: Dézobry et E. Magdeleine, 1853), 4:179, accessed July 12, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 199–203; Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 231–38.

[33] Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella*, 4:179. Mona Ozouf notes that a few French republicans were interred beneath liberty trees in *Festivals and the French Revolution*, 258. However, this tradition seems to owe far more to African antecedents given that few, if any, peoples of African descent in Saint-Domingue would have known about the funerals of a few French republicans.

Santo Domingo ceded the Spanish colony to Toussaint, and he declared himself governor-general for life. When Bonaparte received a copy of the new Constitution of Saint-Domingue, he did not care that Toussaint had demurred from declaring independence. He dispatched an expeditionary force commanded by his brother-in-law Charles Victoire Emmanuel Leclerc to Saint-Domingue in 1801 to counter Toussaint's assertion of power.

Leclerc's expedition arrived in February 1802 and carried back to Saint-Domingue some familiar faces, including André Rigaud and Alexandre Pétion who accompanied Leclerc's forces. Facing long odds against the superior expeditionary force and short on allies given his reestablishment of a work regime that closely resembled slavery, Toussaint and his followers took to the hills. They held out only a short while before Toussaint's officers abandoned their leader and accepted commissions in the French army. Toussaint surrendered and was granted permission to retire, though Leclerc's promise to leave him alone turned out to be an empty one. Fearing that the celebrated commander was too popular to remain in the colony, the French general Jean-Baptiste Brunt lured Toussaint away from his stronghold by stationing troops near one of his plantations. When Toussaint complained, Brunet invited him to discuss the matter in person. Escorted by just a small honor guard, Toussaint arrived at the meeting, entered the house where discussions were to take place, and handed over his sword as soon as French troops burst in to arrest him. He was deported in June 1802. Whether or not Toussaint actually told his French captors that the "tree of black liberty" would "grow back from the roots, because they are deep and numerous," by the time of his arrest, Saint-Domingue's liberty trees belonged to peoples of African descent.[34]

[34] Girard, *Toussaint Louverture*, 235–44.

Leclerc had assured both the mulattos who accompanied his expedition and Toussaint's former officers that he would not attempt to recreate a slave regime in Saint-Domingue. However, as France regained control of other Caribbean colonies, French forces rebuilt slave regimes in each one. Fearful of Leclerc's intentions, appalled by the growing violence of his pacification campaign, and sensing an opportunity to increase their own standings, black and mulatto commanders in his regiments who had served under both Toussaint and Rigaud flipped sides, joined forces, and fought a bloody war for independence from 1802 until late 1803. Under the command of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the unified forces of Saint-Domingue, with help from a yellow fever epidemic that decimated Leclerc's expedition, won the war by the end of 1803. Dessalines declared Saint-Domingue independent on January 1, 1804, officially renaming the country "Haiti."[35]

With all political connections with France severed, Haiti's new leaders set about building a national culture. A council of generals named Dessalines Emperor in 1804, but he and the generals struggled to unite former rebels. Dessalines began crafting a civil religion comprised of symbols, ceremonies, and rhetoric that could promote unity but would not live to see the completion of his nation-building efforts. In 1806, after two years of trying to bolster his rule and manage Haitian social and economic development through force, some of the commanders who had cleared his path to power assassinated Haiti's first emperor just outside of Port-au-Prince. After his death, an angry crowd is said to have gathered and dismembered his bullet-ridden

[35] Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 280–301.

corpse. Like Dessalines' body, Haiti was dismembered at the very moment it was supposed to be coalescing around a shared vision of the future.[36]

After Dessalines' death, the country tore itself apart. Alexandre Pétion, whose allegiances had shifted quite frequently over the years—from Rigaud, to Leclerc, to Dessalines—led the plot to assassinate Dessalines. Yet Henri Christophe emerged as the favorite to succeed Dessalines, thanks to his beloved status among his troops and his command of Haiti's economically valuable northern regions. Pétion and his supporters, who knew that Christophe would almost certainly be the preferred successor to Dessalines, created a political system where an elected senate would appoint and thus check the power of the executive. As expected, the senate elected Christophe to the position. Christophe balked at accepting what he perceived to be a powerless position and instead marched on Port-au-Prince, the country's new capital. Pétion gathered forces to oppose him. The clash resulted in yet another bloody civil war. Christophe ultimately took control of the country's northern region, declaring himself King Henri Christophe. Pétion assumed the role of President of the Haitian Republic, which was now comprised of the country's western and southern regions.[37]

Pétion inherited the problems of his predecessor and turned to symbolism to help promote unity among a divided populace. He made a key addition to the bicolor flag Dessalines had adopted at the onset of the nationalists' war against Bonaparte's French Empire. Pétion designed a national coat of arms packed with symbols of Haitian strength and unity. The image borrowed heavily from French antecedents, but included a number of decidedly Haitian flourishes to show Haiti's military and ideological power. The coat of arms featured broken

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[36] Dubois, 251–306; Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (Basingstoke ; New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006), 7–40. Copies of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution can be found on pp. 188-196.

[37] Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2012), 54–57.

chains (a symbol of emancipation), cannons (a symbol of military might), and, in the center, a palm tree surmounted by a Phrygian cap (a symbol of general liberty). At the bottom appeared the phrase: *Union Fait La Force*: "Unity Creates Strength" (Figure 5.2).[38]

Figure 5.2: Haitian Coat of Arms

The need to create a unified nation-state led Pétion and his followers to accomplish what neither of the other two revolutionary republics had done: make the liberty tree an official, accepted symbol of a post-revolutionary nation. The prominence of the liberty tree on the Haitian coat of arms, which was subsequently placed in the center of Haiti's bicolor flag where it still remains to this day, speaks to the importance of the symbol in Haiti's national symbolic lexicon. The tree was an inspired choice. It at once represented the country's unique history, its link to the

[38] In Girard, "Birth of a Nation," Girard shows clear correlations between French symbolism and the Haitian coat-of-arms. He generally discounts any vodou or African influences. I tend to agree with Patrick Bellegarde-Smith's argument that the coat-of-arms "brought together esoteric African traditions, freemasonry, French esotericism, and the *bonnet phrygien* of Revolutionary France atop the Royal Palm." See, Bellegarde-Smith, "Spirit of the Thing: Religious Thought and Social/Historical Memory," 64. Julia Gaffield has written a brief, but informative blog post on the history of the coat of arms in which she points out that the first depiction of the coat of arms dates to 1816, though the image's constituent parts certainly predated 1816 even if there is no printed example of it before then. See, Julia Gaffield, "The Haitian Coat of Arms."

Age of Revolution, and the unifying power of the Haiti's African roots. The symbol had emerged during both the campaign for universal emancipation in 1793 and 1794 and the war for autonomy and independence from 1799 to 1804. Africans, creoles, and mulattos had all adopted the symbolism of the revolutionary era to argue for emancipation and then for national independence and unity.[39]

Pétion also recognized, like Rigaud before him, that pairing liberty trees with burials of prominent leaders and martyrs connected the symbols with the nation's founders. Rigaud and Pétion were buried beneath liberty trees in 1811 and 1816 respectively. The trees became shrines similar to the trees that linked African and Afro-Caribbean peoples with their ancestors. During Pétion's funeral one of the eulogizers stated to the assembled Haitian observers, "it is under this revered tree that *Alexandre Pétion* received the assurances of our attachment to his person, and our respect for the Constitution and for the Laws of the Republic!" Pétion would have been proud of such a remembrance, which ignored some less popular aspects of his rule and recognized the liberty tree as a central symbolic site in a nation where liberty supposedly informed every decision, drove every action, and motivated every citizen.[40]

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[39] Dubois, *Haiti*, 58. The coat of arms has been taken off the Haitian flag a few times and Haiti has used other flags throughout the years for a variety of purposes, though the version with the coat of arms is the most well known. A detailed history of the flag can be found on the Haitian Embassy's website: "Flag and Coat of Arms – Embassy of Haiti,"Embassy of Haiti, accessed March 6, 2018, http://haiti.org/flag-and-coat-of-arms/.

[40] For Rigaud's interment beneath a liberty tree in his native Les Cayes see, Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella* (Paris: Dézobry et E. Magdeleine, 1853), 7:448–49, accessed July 14, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For French language accounts of Pétion's funeral in Port-au-Prince see, Marion, *Procès-verbal du convoi funèbre fait aux Cayes à la mort de l'illustre Alexandre Pétion, président d'Haïti, avec les éloges offerts à ses obsèques* (Cayes: Imprimerie du Gouvernement, 1818). The quote from the eulogy recounted by Marion is on p. 3. Also see, Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella* (Paris: Dézobry et E. Magdeleine, 1853), 8:329–32, accessed July 14, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. For English language accounts of Pétion's death and funeral see, "Death of Petion," *Baltimore Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser*, May 2, 1818; "Baltimore, May 2. From Cape Henry (Hayti)," *The American Beacon and Commercial Diary*, May 7, 1818; "[No Headline]," *National Messenger*, May 13, 1818.

Liberty trees became a particularly useful Haitian national symbol for Jean-Pierre Boyer, Pétion's successor and the man tasked with reuniting the divided country. In 1820, Henri Christophe's regime collapsed and Boyer moved quickly to reunify the broken country. His effort was as much a propaganda campaign as a military one. On October 16 he issued a proclamation to the "people of the Artibonite and the North" asking the former subjects of Henri Christophe to "hasten, my friends, to raise in your communities the sacred tree of liberty overthrown by your tyrants; surround it and deliver yourselves to joy." Ten days later he published the Constitution of the Republic and issued another proclamation in which he stated that all Haitians were "children of the same family…joined together in the shade of the sacred tree of Liberty; the Constitution of the State is recognized throughout all of Haiti." Finally, on November 24, Boyer issued that final decree stating that the reunification would be celebrated on the first of December, when "the Palmier, emblem of the Tree of Liberty" was to be raised in each commune of the North and West that declared its allegiance to the Republic.[41]

Two years after deploying liberty trees to help reassemble a divided Haitian nation, Boyer utilized the trees once again as he moved to bring the entire island of Hispaniola under Haitian control. In late 1821 Spain held very little actual control over Haiti's neighbor, Santo Domingo. In November 1821 a brief insurgency ended official Spanish control. Boyer, discerning an opportunity, moved quickly to secure control of the eastern two-thirds of Hispaniola. By February 1822 Boyer and the Haitians entered the capital city of Santo Domingo and on February 17, Boyer attended a triumphal ceremony. In the square just outside the town's

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[41] Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti*, 8:470, 488; Jean-Pierre Boyer, "Translated for the Philadelphia Gazette. LIBERTY--EQUALITY. Republic of Hayti. Proclamation. To the People of the Army of the Artibonite and the North," *Baltimore Patriot and Mercantile Advertiser*, November 17, 1820; Jean-Pierre Boyer, "[Translated for the Register.] Liberty--Equality. Republic of Hayti. John Pierre Boyer, President of Hayti. To the Haytians," *American Mercury*, November 28, 1820; Jean-Pierre Boyer, *République d'Hayti. Arrêté*; Laurent Dubois, *Haiti*, 84–88.

cathedral an *arbre de la liberté* greeted Boyer, his troops, and a variety of officials and witnesses from the surrounding area. The ceremonial incorporation of Santo Domingo into the nation of Haiti included a speech from Boyer that has not survived and a blessing of the liberty tree by Jose Aybar, the vicar general. Boyer concluded the day by issuing a decree ordering military commanders in all other communes to plant trees of liberty to signal the unity of Hispaniola.[42]

By 1825, six years after Pamphile de Lacroix published his memoir, eighteen years after Pétion placed a liberty tree at the center of Haiti's coat-of-arms, and thirty-two years after Sonthonax and Polverel used a liberty tree to welcome emancipated slaves into the community of free people, the tree of liberty was an unquestioned symbol of Haiti, a nation that was a beacon of hope for enslaved peoples throughout the Atlantic, and a feared emblem of black power to those dedicated to maintaining white supremacy. In 1825 France finally agreed to recognize Haiti's independence in return for an indemnity to compensate planters who had lost their lands in the Revolution. The compensation agreement would hamstring Haiti's economy for decades, but it assured the country's independence by finally putting to rest fears of a French invasion.

Americans sympathetic to the Haitians rejoiced at the confirmation of nation's independence. At a celebration in Boston attended by African Americans, the gathering toasted "*The Tree of Liberty and Independence*—It was planted on the Mountains of Hayti by Tousaint [sic], nurtured by Petion, it buds and blossoms under the eye of the Illustrious Boyer, and may its growth aspire to the summit of the Andes." The newspaper that described the celebration subsequently printed a poem dedicated "To the Free and Independent Haytiens" that offered Haitians some advice as to how to make the most of their new status. Haitians, the author

[42] Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti; suivies de la vie du général J.-M. Borgella* (Paris: Dézobry et E. Magdeleine, 1853), 9:132–33, accessed July 14, 2017, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

suggested, should celebrate their freedom, both diplomatic and physical. "Thus blessed of Heav'n—independent and free," he says," Give thanks in the shade of your liberty tree."[43]

Conclusion: Liberty Trees and the Black Atlantic

In Saint-Domingue, peoples of African descent turned symbols of the French Revolution into icons of the Americas' first nation comprised almost entirely of free peoples of African descent. Although the French introduced the liberty tree to Saint-Domingue in 1793, those symbols remained important in the colony even as relations with France became strained at the end of the eighteenth century. By pairing the trees with African and Afro-Caribbean burial customs, Haiti's early leaders successfully extricated the trees from their links to Revolutionary France and turned them into national symbols that promoted unity and projected national strength. They were, in short, representative of "black liberty."

Liberty trees also evolved into abolitionist symbols beyond Haiti. The toast of celebrating African-Americans in Boston and the words of a poet who commended Haiti's successes are perhaps the best evidence available that Toussaint's "tree of black liberty" had roots that were deeper and more numerous than he could have imagined in 1802. Though evidence is somewhat sparse, peoples of African descent in Jamaica and the United States would adopt liberty trees as symbols of emancipation during the nineteenth century. By connecting an international symbol of revolution with the fight for emancipation, peoples of African descent in Haiti and beyond argued that all people, regardless of race, had a right to liberty. That was a truly revolutionary

[43] "Celebration of Haytian Independence," *Columbian Centinel American Federalist*, August 31, 1825; J. Kenrick, "A Poem. To the Free and Independent Haytiens.," *Columbian Centinel American Federalist*, December 21, 1825.

idea, one that drove debates, rebellions, and violent confrontations throughout the Atlantic world for decades to come.[44]

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[44] For examples of Americans linking physical or metaphorical liberty trees with emancipation see, "Communication," *The Vermont Gazette*, November 16, 1798; Jarvis Brewster, *An Exposition of the Treatment of Slaves in the Southern States, Particularly in the States of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia: Together with a System of Reformation Recommended* (New Brunswick, NJ: D. & J. Fitz Randolph, 1815); G. Rusha, "A Negro Pic Nic. Chicago, August 2d, 1859," *The Weekly Wisconsin Patriot*, August 13, 1859; "Black-Republican (Negro) Equality," *The Constitution*, June 30, 1860. For the liberty tree plantings that accompanied emancipation in Jamaica see, "The First Fortnight of Freedom in Jamaica," *The Emancipator*, September 6, 1838; Mimi Sheller, *Democracy after Slavery: Black Publics and Peasant Radicalism in Haiti and Jamaica* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000), 145.

EPILOGUE

LEGACIES: LIBERTY TREES IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

When Alexandre Pétion created the Haitian coat-of-arms, liberty trees clearly represented very different ideas than they had back in 1765 when Boston artisans first linked a tree with liberty. The fact that liberty trees represented freedom from slavery in Saint-Domingue speaks to the changes the symbol underwent as various revolutionary peoples worked out increasingly expansive definitions of liberty. Liberty trees and poles were valuable symbols for over forty years and in three different revolutionary settings because they were so malleable. Meanings changed as the debates about what constituted liberty and who could claim to be liberated changed over time and place. American colonists had had no interest in forming a democratic polity in the 1760s and 1770s, but the radical turn of the French Revolution led some Americans seeking a more inclusive political culture to adopt liberty poles as signifiers of democracy. However, when French Jacobins converted them into representations of a state demanding complete allegiance, American Democratic-Republicans erased the symbol's connections with France and linked it solely to their partisan interpretation of the American Revolution's promises. In doing so, Americans preserved liberty trees as symbols of a domestic opposition tradition, even as liberty trees in France continued to represent an unpopular bond between Revolutionary principles and state power. In Saint-Domingue, symbols that had at first connected emancipation with French benevolence were turned into Haitian national symbols when the preservation of liberty required a break with Napoleon's French Empire.

The story of liberty trees in the Atlantic world typically ends here. With the exception of Arthur Schlesinger, who briefly discussed American liberty trees in the nineteenth century,

historians of the "big three" revolutions usually conclude the narrative around 1804 and only gesture in passing, if at all, to the life liberty trees had after Haiti declared independence from France. The implication is that revolutionary symbolism declined in importance once Americans, French people, and Haitians started building nation-states rather than opposing despots. Yet liberty trees and poles persisted as important symbols in all three countries. Haitians use liberty trees to promote Haitian nationalism to the present day. American and French historians have generally glossed over the symbol's post-revolutionary life, even though it appeared in their own nations well into the nineteenth century. The brief sketch that follows explores some of the ways that Americans and French people used liberty trees both to commemorate their revolutionary pasts and to inspire new rebellions against problematic regimes.

Negotiating American Identity: Liberty Trees in the Nineteenth-Century United States

In March 1805 citizens of Newport "from Liberty Tree…suspended seventeen lanterns" to celebrate Thomas Jefferson's reelection. Ten years later, when Robert Curtis of New York died his funeral was held at "his house, opposite the Liberty Pole." The citizens of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, celebrated Lafayette's birthday in 1830 when "the NATIONAL FLAG was displayed on the LIBERTY POLE at LIBERTY BRIDGE." In 1840, Brutus North, a fervent supporter of William Henry Harrison's presidential campaign wrote a poem, "Tippecanoe Liberty Pole," which was "sung by him with great effect at the raising of the Liberty Pole on the Lower Dock" in Ossining, New York. When Nativist "Know-Nothings" increased in popularity in 1850s, one opponent accused them of engaging in bizarre initiation rituals that supposedly included a moment when an initiate, "is compelled to run a splinter—previously taken from a liberty pole—into the index finger of his left hand, and with the splinter and his own blood he

signs the Constitution and By Laws of the Order." A June 1860 edition of New York's *Evening Post* included the headline "Erection of a Lincoln Liberty Tree by Colored Men."[1]

At various times during the nineteenth century, liberty trees or poles were used by or connected to Democrats, Whigs, Republicans, Secessionists, Unionists, African Americans, Nativists, Irishmen, Frenchmen, and firemen. As in earlier decades, the symbol's continued vitality owed much to its malleability. In some cases, liberty poles helped Anglo-Americans craft an identity rooted in shared memories of the American Revolution. At the same time, America's symbolic landscape provided an arena where Americans of varying backgrounds fought over exactly who and what constituted "American." These seemingly contrasting uses of liberty poles illuminate two legacies of the American Revolution. First, the Revolution created a dominant Anglo-Protestant culture where liberty was narrowly defined and restricted to people of particular racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Second, the American Revolution laid the groundwork for excluded groups to challenge the Anglo-Protestant ascendency by laying claim to the Revolution's rhetoric and symbolism.

From Jefferson's election until the outbreak of the Civil War, liberty trees were incorporated into Anglo-American popular culture. They served as reminders of the nation's revolutionary origins for Americans whose shared history offered one of the nation's key binding agents. For example, in 1817, organizers of a Fourth of July fireworks display at Vauxhall Gardens in New York named the sixteenth explosion "Liberty Tree" and followed it with one called "THE UNION." Americans could also find references to liberty trees at the theater. In

[1] The Newport commemoration: "Rhode-Island. Newport, March 7, 1805," *The Albany Register*, March 29, 1805; Robert Curtis obituary: "[Obituary]," *The National Advocate*, September 30, 1815; Portsmouth, New Hampshire celebration of Lafayette: "[No Headline]," *New-Hampshire Gazette*, September 7, 1830; The "Tippecanoe Liberty Pole:" Brutus North, "Tippecanoe Liberty Pole.," *The Hudson River Chronicle*, September 22, 1840; The critique of Know-Nothings: "The Know Nothings," *Wisconsin Patriot*, March 31, 1855. The "Lincoln Liberty Pole:" "Black-Republican (Negro) Equality," *The Constitution*, June 30, 1860.

1832, the playwright and actor Joseph Steven Jones penned a comedy titled *The Liberty Tree; or Boston Boys in '76*. The play apparently remained popular into the 1850s. The "Amusements" section in a February 1855 edition of the *Boston Daily Atlas* announced that a popular actress would be performing in "Liberty Tree, or Boston Boys"[2]

Americans also encountered liberty trees and poles when advertisers used the prominent trees and poles as geographic landmarks and associated their businesses with patriotic memories of the American Revolution. A July, 1819 edition of the *Daily National Intelligencer* included an advertisement placed by Robert Bailey of Bath, Berkeley Springs, Virginia (now part of West Virginia) announcing the location of his new boarding house. He explained that "the Liberty Pole stands near to it, on the same side of the street, with the American flag on it." Boston's George Washington Briggs kept the memory of Boston's felled tree alive during the 1850s by naming his bookstore, which stood on the same corner as Boston's eponymous tree, "Liberty Tree Bookstore."[3]

Popular literature of the day, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Grandfather's Chair*, a three-volume history of the United States written for children, likewise invoked the popular connection between liberty trees and American memory quite clearly. Hawthorne depicts an elderly American recounting the long history of his rocking chair to his captivated grandchildren. The final volume of the series, titled *Liberty Tree*, describes the events of the American Revolution. Boston's famed tree makes a number of appearances in the text, including Grandfather's recounting of Andrew Oliver's public resignation beneath the Liberty Tree's

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[2] The Vauxhall display was described in "The Vauxhall Gazette," *The National Advocate*, July 2, 1817. For a bit of background on Jones see, James Fisher, *Historical Dictionary of American Theater: Beginnings* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 245. The advertisement for the 1855 show is in "Affairs in and about the City," *The Boston Daily Atlas*, February 3, 1855.

[3] Robert Bailey, "Bath, Berkeley Springs, Virginia," *Daily National Intelligencer*, July 14, 1819; "[Advertisement]," *The Semi-Weekly Eagle*, May 2, 1850.

branches. As Grandfather narrates this episode, his grandson Lawrence interjects with a rather patriotic interpretation of events: "There is something grand in this," said Lawrence. "I like it, because the people seem to have acted with thoughtfulness and dignity."[4]

With the shared memory of past glories driving the development of Anglo-American exceptionalism, liberty poles became beacons of Anglo-American continental conquest. During a Fourth of July celebration in Alton, Illinois, in 1819, "the American Flag waved triumphantly from the top of a lofty liberty pole, and served as a rallying point for those who were met to commemorate the patriotic virtue, wisdom, and valor of the illustrious fathers of American liberty." The various parades and toasts made no mention of the native peoples displaced by the westward movement of Anglo-Americans that gave rise to places like Alton or to the unfulfilled promises contained in the words of America's "illustrious fathers." Similarly, this festival showed no signs of the political infighting that had marked many Fourth of July events during the preceding two decades, only a belief in the greatness of American liberty enjoyed by Anglo-Americans.[5]

Fourth of July festivals would continue to include liberty poles while their participants and planners deployed the rhetoric of American unity. In 1850, when gold had lured people to California in droves, Anglo-Americans turned to a liberty pole to declare California part of the great expanding transcontinental Republic. During San Francisco's Fourth of July celebration in 1850 "one of the principal events of the day was the rearing of the liberty pole presented by the Oregonians to San Francisco." The members of the new fire department marched around the liberty pole, which was touted as the first planted on the Pacific coast. When news of these

[4] Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Liberty Tree: With the Last Words of Grandfather's Chair* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842), 45, Internet Archive, accessed August 11, 2015, http://archive.org/details/libertytreewithl00hawt.

[5] "American Independence," *Edwardsville Spectator*, July 10, 1819.

events reached the East in August and September, easterners must have felt that Anglo-Americans were bringing liberty to the previously wild parts of the American continent.[6]

However, even as their ceremonial use emphasized an American unity rooted in shared memories of the Revolutionary past, within the political realm liberty poles were commonly deployed to challenge established authority. By the 1830s, the new Whig Party, intent on ending Jacksonian Democrats' political hegemony, rejuvenated the liberty pole as an anti-establishment symbol. Taking a page out of the Democrats' playbook, Whigs portrayed William Henry Harrison as the everyman's candidate by aligning him with the log cabin, a symbol of his common upbringing. When Harrison's supporters built log cabins, they often added a liberty pole. In 1840, for instance, when the North Castle, New York Tippecanoe Club declared, "Previous to the meeting of the Club, a splendid liberty pole will be erected in front of the Log Cabin." Some took to calling these "Tippecanoe Liberty Poles" in reference to Harrison's celebrated victory over Tecumseh's coalition of native tribes at Tippecanoe. In this instance, liberty poles signaled both opposition to the Democrats and Anglo dominance over native peoples.[7]

The use of these symbols to challenge established authority, however, spread in unexpected directions as disenfranchised and oppressed groups used liberty poles to oppose the Anglo vision of Americanness. By the eve of the Civil War, the connection between Anglo-American exceptionalism and liberty poles came under threat from ethnic and religious groups who either attacked liberty poles to protest Anglo dominance or co-opted them to highlight the contradictions inherent in Anglo-American ideology. Irish men felled San Francisco's liberty

[6] "The Fire Department," *The Alta California*, July 13, 1850.

[7] "North Castle Tippecanoe Club," *The Hudson River Chronicle*, September 8, 1840; A Republican Democrat, "For the Macon Telegraph," *The Macon Georgia Telegraph*, September 15, 1840; Brutus North, "Tippecanoe Liberty Pole," *The Hudson River Chronicle*, September 22, 1840.

pole in 1860 when American nativists too obviously connected the symbol to Anglo-Protestant culture. As San Francisco's Irish awoke on St. Patrick's Day prepared to celebrate their heritage, they discovered that someone had hanged an effigy of St. Patrick on the city's liberty pole. Irate Irishmen reacted by hacking down what *The Alta California* termed "the unoffending tree." The Irish would, however, order a replacement as a way of showing their solidarity with their adopted nation.[8]

That same year, African Americans showed that they could co-opt liberty poles to challenge American racism. In 1860, after reading about African Americans in Brooklyn raising a "Lincoln Liberty Tree," at least one reader of Washington D.C.'s *The Constitution* took the opportunity to scold both black and white Republicans. "Negro equality," he wrote, "is something which free-born white men other than they cannot yet accustom themselves to think of with satisfaction or to look on with approval." White Americans seemed none too pleased that black men long denied the promises of American liberty claimed their symbol of American unity, American conquest, and American politics.[9]

Lincoln's political ascent led to a new round of liberty pole construction throughout the South, which highlights the ways in which the poles became emblematic of growing sectional strife. Five months after *The Constitution* published the letter challenging African-American use of the liberty pole in Brooklyn, the same paper reported that "a number of the citizens of Gonzales [Texas] assembled on the public square and raised a lofty 'liberty pole,' from which the Texas banner of independence…soon floated in the breeze." Liberty poles also appeared in Georgia and South Carolina as those states prepared to challenge the authority of the Federal

[8] "St. Patrick's Day--The Liberty Pole on the Plaza Cut Down," *The New York Herald*, April 11, 1860.

[9] "Black-Republican (Negro) Equality," *The Constitution*, June 30, 1860.

Government. Even as African Americans adopted liberty poles to symbolize their demand for equality, intransigent Southerners intent on defending the right of states to preserve a system of human bondage drew on the very same symbol to invoke memories of their forefathers and claims the Revolution for themselves.[10]

A Revolution in Retrospect: Liberty Trees and France's 1830 Revolution

Today, the three days in July 1830 that led to Charles X's downfall and the rise to power of Louis-Phillippe are described as a revolution. Such a conception, however, had to be constructed and then sold to the French nation. By nineteenth-century standards, a transition from an absolutist king to a less-absolutist monarch was not a terribly revolutionary event. Some of Louis-Philippe's supporters wanted to depict his ascension as a progressive change from the status quo that would maintain sociopolitical stability—a transition on the order of England's Glorious Revolution of 1688. To encourage this interpretation of events, constitutional monarchists turned to liberty trees to elicit memories of positive change without inspiring further upheaval.

Their identification of a useful symbol of stable revolutionary transformation drew upon a rehabilitation of the French Revolution and its symbolism in popular memory. A lengthy allegorical pamphlet from 1825 that included a discussion between a tree of liberty and the tree of wisdom nicely illustrates this historical and cultural revisionism. The pamphlet depicted the liberty tree as an emblem of the moderate Revolution of 1789. By no fault of its own, "bloodthirsty monsters" preyed upon the tree after 1793, turning it into a symbol of violence and

[10] "The 'Lone Star' Flag in Texas," *The Constitution*, November 17, 1860; "The Savannah Money Market. All Quiet at Augusta, GA," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 20, 1860; "Progress of Secession," *The Deseret News*, December 19, 1860; "The Latest News by Telegraph to the Inquirer News from the South," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 15, 1860.

anarchy. The two trees discuss how Napoleon saved the liberty tree by hiding it until he could effectively unite it with the tree of wisdom. The Emperor's downfall interrupted this endeavor, leaving the two "sister" trees pining for a future day when they would be united at last. This pamphlet skillfully pruned the liberty tree of its violent associations with the Terror and the dysfunction of the Directory while drawing readers back to the successes of the initial upheaval of 1789.[11]

Once Louis-Philippe took the throne, constitutional monarchists put this sanitized version of the liberty tree to use as an icon of a new, liberal regime by highlighting the contrast between the tree of liberty and Bourbon absolutism. A song, published in a collection from 1831, celebrated the fall of the Bourbons—represented by the lily—and the rise of a new, progressive constitutional monarchy represented by the liberty tree and the tricolor:

> Beneath the debris of the lily, that we despise,
> We replant the tree of liberty,
> And, raising our brows with pride,
> We take back the tricolor.

The same volume contained a funeral oration celebrating the brave dead of the July Revolution whose sacrifices gave rise to a new order symbolized by the liberty tree: "from the soil bathed in your blood we spring to life the tree of a new liberty, an immense tree which, pushing its vigorous branches up to heaven, will soon cover the entire world." This call for the liberty tree to spread across the entire world subtly hinted at nationalist desires for renewed wars of liberation.[12]

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[11] *Dialogue entre l'arbre de la liberté et l'arbre de la sagesse, ou tableau allégorique de ce qui s'est passé en France depuis la révolution jusqu'à ce jour; par un habitant de l'île de Rhé. Au bénéfice de deux jeunes Grecs esclaves pour n'avoir pas voulu abjurer la foi de leurs pères* (Paris: Mme. Goulet, 1825), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[12] Paul-Émile Debraux, *L'arc-en-ciel de la liberté, ou Couronne lyrique offerte à ses séfenseurs. Recueil complet de chansons, hymnes, ddes et cantates patriotiques et nationales, inspirées à nos meilleurs poètes par nos*

Liberty trees that stood for general tolerance and an orderly society defined by stability, wisdom, and liberty motivated progressive Catholics and lay thinkers to consider a previously impossible alliance between progressives and the Church. The increasingly democratic priest Hugues-Félicité Robert de Lamennais suggested in 1831 that Catholicism and liberal government could coexist. "If [the cross] harmonizes itself with justice," he wrote, "in our public squares it would feature well opposite from the tree of liberty."[13] A Saint-Simonian writing to the citizens of Lyon similarly believed that true, stable liberty was in fact upheld and defended by God. He said that the restored Bourbons had attacked the metaphorical liberty tree, but God defended it from their blows.[14]

While some liberal thinkers agreed that liberty trees could embody a constitutional nation-state similar to the British and American models, Orléanist authorities felt differently, particularly about physical liberty trees that began appearing in France's more patriotic southern regions. Rather than incorporate these trees and the festivals they inspired into the symbolic lexicon of the July Monarchy, administrators repressed the emblems and those who employed them. This repression bothered politically astute, left-leaning commoners like a veteran of 1789 who wrote the king in 1831 in order to explain that everywhere the authorities supported celebrations that featured liberty trees, calm prevailed; but everywhere they opposed these "eminently French" symbols and practices, people rebelled. The veteran, who signed his letters "A. Masson," suggested that the king accept the tricolor and the liberty tree or risk another

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révolutions et notamment par celle des 27, 28 et 29 juillet 1830 (Paris: Terry jeune, 1831), 8–9, 302, accessed January 21, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[13] Félicité de La Mennais, *Procès de l'Avenir* (Paris: Agence générale pour la défense de la religion catholique, 1831), 59–60, accessed January 21, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

[14] Terson, *Un Saint-Simonien au peuple de Lyon à l'occasion des évènements d'avril 1834* (Lyon: Mme. Durval, 1834), 7, accessed January 21, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

revolution. Masson's observations are indicative of a belief, particularly in the south of France, that the *arbre de la liberté* was an icon of a united and liberated, strong, post-Revolutionary France that political authorities should embrace, not reject.[15]

Despite such hopes and warnings, Orléanist authorities linked liberty trees to a persistent radicalism they neither wanted nor welcomed under the new regime. A propagandistic pamphlet from the Orléanist Lambert Devère—posing as a common laborer named Pierre Ledru—begins with Ledru sitting in a café with friends. He notices a "modern" man enter and drop off a pile of newspapers from the proto-Jacobin Société des Amis du Peuple. A liberty tree topped with a *bonnet rouge* graced papers' covers. Below the image was the word "July" with three exclamation points. Ledru wonders what the symbol means as this hat is "not the *coiffeur* of the revolution of 1830." He admits that he wore such a cap during the uprising but for him it "had been a beautiful Greek crown," not to be confused with the bonnet that his father had purportedly worn during the Terror. He urges his fellow working men to reject calls for new risings and instead allow Louis-Philippe the time needed to rectify the wrongs of previous regimes. This pamphlet described Orléanist anxieties in a nutshell: Louis-Philippe's ascendance ended the Revolution, removing the need for Revolutionary culture and symbolism.[16]

Fears of a return to the radical revolutions of old motivated Orléanist authorities to spurn the advice of men like Masson and suppress or problematize rituals that employed liberty trees. Authorities in Issoire challenged a small band of young men in 1832 when they tried to celebrate the second anniversary of the July Revolution with a liberty tree. A couple of months later, authorities in Seyne reported on "troubles" relating to peasant anxieties about grain hoarding, the

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[15] Masson's letters are in A.N. 271AP/4; Dossier C/11.

[16] Lambert Devère, *Le Faubourien ou le vrai patriote*, 1831, accessed October 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

peasants' subsequent decision to plant a liberty tree in front of the town's hôtel de ville, and a rapidly developing fear that the symbolic emblem would be destroyed in the night. In all likelihood, offcials under Louis-Phillipe came to see the trees as symbols associations with radicalism. Rather than embrace liberty trees, Orléanists ignored the symbolism of revolution for fear that the same forces that brought them to power might ultimately bring down the regime.[17]

A Nation Reborn: Liberty Trees, Visual Culture, and the French Revolution of 1848

Attempts by important political actors selectively to invoke parts of the revolutionary tradition while suppressing others backfired when the republican revolution the citizen king so feared finally arrived in 1848. Eighteen years' worth of government attempts to impose a version of French national pride rooted in sociopolitical stability led to disorder when economic decline and social tensions found no outlet other than opposition to the administration. Liberty trees returned along with festive gatherings similar to those the eighteenth-century French Revolution as moderate and radical republicans attempted to cast their coup as beneficent, orderly, and progressive.

Broadsides, cartoons, stamps, and pamphlets indicate that the Revolution in 1848 was, to an even greater extent than in 1789, publicized through images. These were politically useful as propaganda in a nation where literacy was on the rise, but far from complete, and linguistic unity was still on the horizon. Images depicted liberty trees in a number of important ways that illustrated how republicans perceived their movement. Unlike previous republican regimes,

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[17] *Procès des citoyens A. Bravard et A. Devergèses, à l'occasion de la plantation d'un arbre de la liberté: extrait des minutes du greffe du tribunal de première instance de l'arrondissement d'Issoire, département du Puy-de-Dôme* (Issoire: Fabre, 1832), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; Maurice Onslow, *Plantation de l'arbre de la liberté à Issoire en juillet 1832: Quelques réflexions sur cette affaire.* (Riom: E. Thibaud, 1832), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France. Documents related to the problems in Seyne can be found in A.N. BB/24/116-BB/24/135.

which had devolved into tyrannical or ineffective governments, new republicans fused memories of past glory with a new and expansive liberal nationalism.

In 1848, revolutionaries mocked the constitutional monarchy's fear of republican rituals by crafting images that contrasted the citizen king with the liberty tree and the republican culture it embodied. This was most evident in a print depicting Louis-Philippe, the trappings of bourgeois style heaped next to him, defecating on a post labeled "Tree of Liberty. 1848." When approached by a uniformed national guardsman, the king notes a snake slithering out from under him at the base of the *arbre de la liberté*. The king expounds on the irony of his having fed the snake that would ultimately bite him (Figure 6.1). In demonizing republicanism and suppressing the tree of liberty while simultaneously claiming to embody a liberal nation-state, Louis-Philippe had done more than actual republicans to give rise to renewed republican revolution.[18]

[18] *Louis-Philippe surpris par un garde le jour de sa grande courante*, 1849, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530135816.

Figure 6.1: *Louis-Philippe surpris par un garde le jour de sa grande courante* (1849). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

In addition to mocking failed Orléanist policies, engravers and printers placed liberty trees at the center of a new vision of French nationalism that promoted territorial gains, broke down regional and class boundaries between citizens, reincorporated religion, and celebrated

universal emancipation abroad and universal suffrage at home.[19] The ideal new republican was a man who dressed simply, understood the value of urban work or country labor, and was always armed and ready to defend the *patrie*, which was frequently represented by a liberty tree (see Figure 6.2). These republicans would celebrate French liberty from east to west and north to south by erecting new liberty trees. A number of engravings portray a festival in Strasbourg where military men and republicans gather en masse around new trees of liberty (see Figure 6.3).[20]

[19] Frédéric-Emile Simon and L. Poquet, *Fête du 16 avril 1848; A Strasbourg. Plantation des arbres de la liberté*, 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10225451k; *Bénédiction d'un arbre de la liberté, près d'une fontaine, dans une rue étroite*, 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53014069d; *L'arbre de la liberté*, 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530142589; C. Mondor de l'Aigle, *Abolition de l'esclavage. Celui dont le présent plaira davantage aura en échange la possession de cette belle esclave qui ne demande pas mieux que sa position change le plutôt possible*, 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53017094f; Frédéric Sorrieu and Marie-Cécile Goldsmid, *Le suffrage universel. Avec lui la liberté, sans lui l'esclavage. Dédié à Ledru-Rollin*, 1850, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530191129.

[20] Eugène Baillet and Gustave Leroy, *Le vrai républicain. Paroles d'Eugène Baillet*, ca. 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53015191s; Alexis Dalès, *La nouvelle Soeur Anne ou ma République, ne vois-tu rien venir*, [1848?], gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530143308; Vayron, *Plantation de l'arbre de la liberté à l'Hôtel de Ville*, ca. 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53014290c. For depictions of the Strasbourg festival see, Charles Fassoli and Ohlman, *Souvenir de la fête Républicaine du 16 avril. Plantation de 5 arbres de la liberté à Strasbourg et de la fraternisation de la garde nationale avec l'armée à laquelle prenaient part les Polonais, Suisses, Allemands, Italiens*, 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed November 18, 2015, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b102145392; Simon and Poquet, *Fête du 16 avril 1848; A Strasbourg. Plantation des arbres de la liberté*.

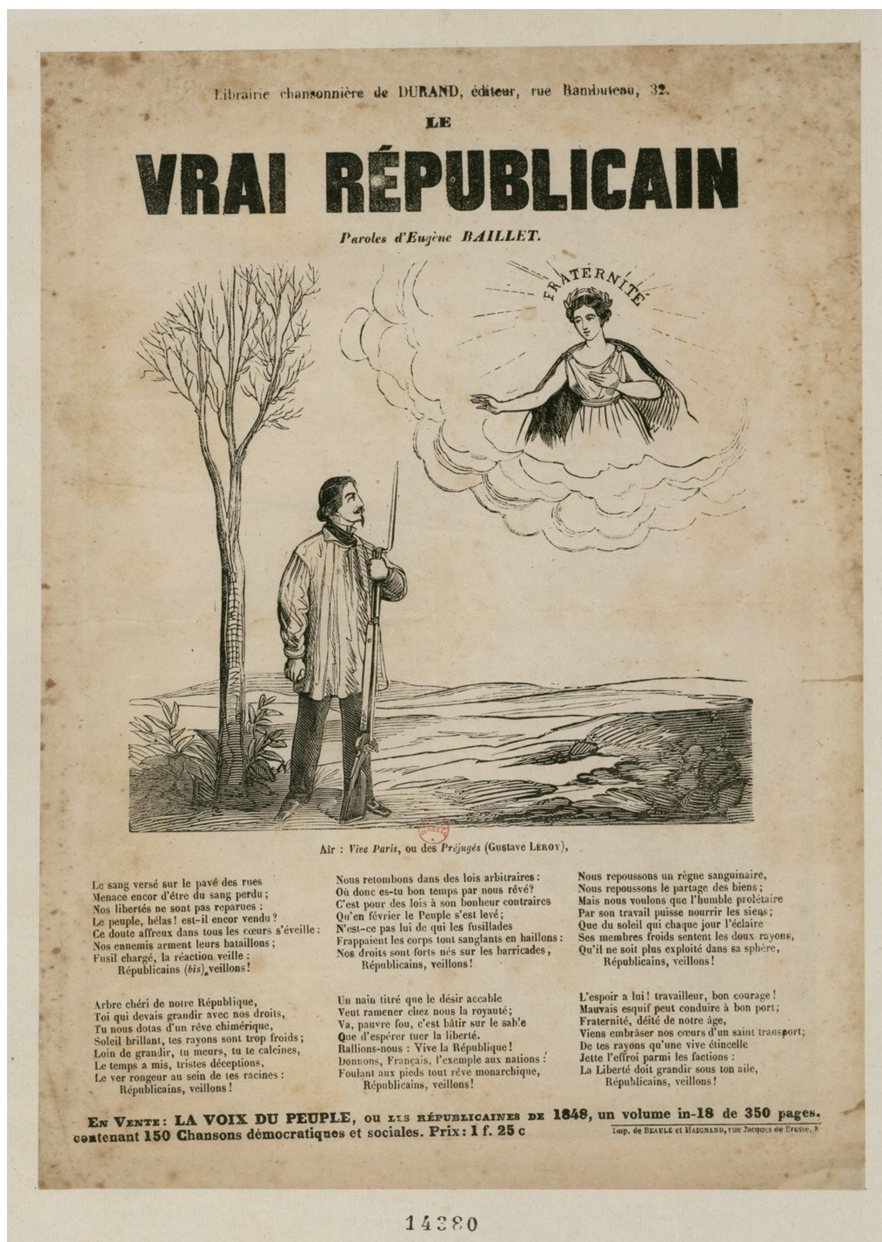

Figure 6.2: Eugène Baillet and Gustave Leroy, *Le vrai républicain. Paroles d'Eugène Baillet* (ca. 1848). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale et universitaire de Strasbourg

Figure 6.3: Charles Fassoli and Ohlman, *Souvenir de la fête Républicaine du 16 avril. Plantation de 5 arbres de la liberté à Strasbourg et de la fraternisation de la garde nationale avec l'armée à laquelle prenaient part les Polonais, Suisses, Allemands, Italiens* (1848). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

As signs of just how inclusive the ideal new republic would be, some of the most striking images to come from the period, along with some of the most intriguing speeches, united liberty trees with religious practices. In all of its many forms from 1789 to 1799, the French Revolution had largely rejected established religion. While the regime change in 1830 generated the first stirrings from liberal priests of a relationship between the Catholic Church and the forces of republicanism, the 1848 coup ushered in hopes for more cooperation. Images from the period show priests blessing liberty trees as military men and republican commoners look on with approval. The sheer volume of speeches and blessings given by priests was meant to demonstrate

the extent to which French clergymen would accept the symbol as a national icon of toleration (see Figure 6.4).[21]

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[21] Relevant images include, Vayron, *Plantation de l'arbre de la liberté à l'Hôtel de Ville*; *Bénédiction d'un arbre de la liberté, près d'une fontaine, dans une rue étroite*; *L'arbre de la liberté*; *L'arbre de liberté emblème de la vraie république*, 1848, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France, accessed January 19, 2016, http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b530140126. For some examples of speeches given by religious leaders see, Gaspard Deguerry, *Discours prononcé par M. l'abbé Deguerry curé de Saint-Eustache à la bénédiction de l'arbre de la liberté planté sur les marchés des Halles* (Paris: Sirou, 1848); Foye, *Allocution prononcée par le citoyen Foye fils, cultivateur, après la bénédiction d'un nouvel arbre de la liberté, planté en présence des conseillers municipaux, gardes nationaux et habitants de Cheptainville, le 16 Avril 1848* (Belleville: Galban, 1848), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; Seligmann Goudchaux, *Discours prononcé, le 30 avril 1848, par M. Le Grand-Rabbin Goudschaud, à l'occasion de la plantation de l'arbre de la liberté à Colmar*, (Colmar: C.-M. Hoffman,1848), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; Georges-Jean-François-Louis Maimbourg, *Discours prononcé le 30 avril 1848, par M. le curé Maimbourg, à l'occasion de la bénédiction de l'arbre de la liberté* (Colmar: C. M. Hoffmann, 1848); *Discours prononcés à l'occasion de la plantation et de la bénédiction de l'arbre de la liberté à Sainte-Marie-Aux-Mines, le 9 avril 1848* (Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines: A Jardel, 1848), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France; *Bénédiction de l'arbre de la liberté* (Belleville: Galban, ca. 1848), accessed January 19, 2016, gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 6.4: *L'arbre de liberté emblème de la vraie république* (1848). Source: gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France.

These images reveal a critical cultural perception operating within the French nation-state during the 1848 uprisings. The Revolutionary culture of 1789 had promoted change through the unilateral imposition of new practices and the eradication of old forms. The Revolutionary republicanism of 1848 was advertised as integrating the gains of the past with the expectations and necessities of the present. Cultural and religious syncretism signaled an inclusive rather than exclusive French nation, which revolved around mutual admiration for liberty. However, this

inclusive republic remained out of reach for the French nation even in 1848. Social, religious, and regional fault lines quickly reappeared, leading to constant infighting among republicans. Yet by the middle of the nineteenth century, liberty trees had evolved from symbols of Jacobin authoritarianism to icons of an inclusive republican vision that could serve as the foundation for a progressive nation-state.

The New Liberty Trees

Today, liberty trees survive in much diminished form. In Paris, the site of several revolutionary movements, the only apparent reference to a liberty tree is an obscure sign in the Parc de Choisy. In several American cities residents and visitors regularly pass the few commemorative plaques and signs without so much as a glance. The final surviving liberty tree, which stood on the campus of St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland, fell to the axe after being critically damaged by Hurricane Floyd in 1999. Seedlings from the tree have been replanted throughout the United States and Taylor Guitars even incorporated wood from the tree into a series of limited edition guitars. Even still, most Americans likely give little thought to the iconic trees' histories when they shop at Liberty Tree Mall in Danvers, Massachusetts, stroll through Rae Carole Armstrong Liberty Tree Park in Plantation, Florida, or enjoy a pint at Liberty Tree Tavern in Elgin, Texas.[22]

There are, however, two places where tourists confront replicas of Boston's famed Liberty Tree. One replica can be found at Disney World, in the Magic Kingdom's Liberty Square

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[22] "St. John's College | Liberty Tree Project Grows," St. John's College, accessed March 11, 2018, https://www.sjc.edu/news/liberty-tree-project-grows; TaylorGuitarsNews, "Taylor Readies Release of Liberty Tree T5," *Taylor Guitars* (blog), June 26, 2008, accessed March 11, 2018, https://blog.taylorguitars.com/taylor-readies-release-of-liberty-tree-t5; "Welcome To Liberty Tree Mall - A Shopping Center In Danvers, MA - A Simon Property," accessed October 28, 2016, http://www.simon.com/mall/liberty-tree-mall; "Rae Carole Armstrong Liberty Tree Park," *City of Plantation* (blog), accessed October 28, 2016, http://www.plantation.org/Parks-Recreation/City-Parks/liberty-tree-park.html; "Liberty Tree Tavern," *Explore Bastrop County*, accessed March 11, 2018, https://explorebastropcounty.com/listings/liberty-tree-tavern/.

neighborhood. The other is in the new Museum of the American Revolution, which opened to much fanfare in 2017. Whatever patriotic messages visitors derive from these replicas is linked only to the very beginnings of America's Revolutionary movement, not to its messy progress or contentious legacy. Furthermore, neither replica presses visitors to wrestle with the fact that this supposedly quintessential American symbol had a life that extended in surprising ways beyond the bounds of the nation and across the Atlantic.[23]

Perhaps the malleability of the symbol—the feature that made it so useful to people in the past—is the key to understanding its virtual disappearance today. Americans never tried to make it a national emblem; the French were unsuccessful in their repeated attempts to do so. The trees and poles simply meant too many things to different groups of people over time. Only in Haiti does the liberty tree live on, emblazoned on the national flag. That tree, in many ways the last of its kind, serves as a constant reminder of an era when people fought for freedom while debating what it meant to be free.

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[23] "The Liberty Tree - A Magic Kingdom Landmark Since Opening Day," *Only WDWorld* (blog), accessed October 28, 2016, http://www.onlywdworld.com/2011/01/liberty-tree-magic-kingdom-landmark.html; Jennifer Schuessler, "A New Museum of the American Revolution, Warts and All," *The New York Times*, April 13, 2017, sec. Art & Design, accessed October 31, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/arts/design/a-new-museum-of-the-american-revolution-warts-and-all.html.

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